

GLADSTONE AND LIBERALISM

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The Political Development

of

W. E. GLADSTONE,

1845 - 59

Thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D.

of the University of Leicester

by M. J. Lynch

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# ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Aberdeen</u>	Conacher, J.B., <u>The Aberdeen Coalition, 1852-55,</u> Cambridge, 1968.
Add. Ms.	British Museum Additional Manuscripts
<u>A.R.</u>	<u>Annual Register</u>
Argyll	Argyll, Dowager Duchess of, (Ed.), <u>George Douglas Eighth Duke of Argyll, Autobiography</u> <u>and Memoirs,</u> 2 vols., London, 1906.
<u>Autobiographica,</u>	Brooke, J. & Sorensen, M., (Eds), <u>The Prime Ministers</u> <u>Papers. W.E. Gladstone: I Autobiographica;</u> <u>II &amp; III Autobiographical Memoranda, 1832-66</u> London, 1971-78.
Bassett	Bassett, A.T., <u>Gladstone to his Wife</u> London, 1936
<u>Bright's Diary</u>	Walling, R.A.J., (Ed.), <u>The Diaries of John Bright,</u> New York, 1931.
C.G.	Catherine Gladstone
Checkland	Checkland, S.G., <u>The Gladstones, A Family Biography</u> <u>1764-1851,</u> Cambridge, 1971.
<u>C.E.Q.R.</u>	<u>Church of England Quarterly Review</u>
<u>C.R.</u>	<u>Contemporary Review</u>
<u>Diaries</u>	Foot, M.R.D. & Matthew, H.C.G., (Eds.) <u>The Gladstone Diaries,</u> vols. 1-6, Oxford, 1968-78.
<u>D.N.B.</u>	<u>Dictionary of National Biography</u>
<u>Disraeli</u>	Blake, Robert, <u>Disraeli,</u> London, 1966.

<u>E.H.R.</u>	<u>English Historical Review</u>
Feuchtwanger	Feuchtwanger, E.J., <u>Gladstone</u> , London, 1975,
<u>Gleanings</u>	Gladstone, W.E., <u>Gleanings of Past Years, 1843-78</u> , 7 vols., London, 1879.
<u>Graham</u>	Parker, C.S., <u>The Life and Letters of Sir James Graham, 1792-1861</u> , 2 vols, London, 1907
<u>Greville Memoirs</u>	Strachey, Lytton & Fulford, Roger, (eds.), <u>The Greville Memoirs, 1814-60</u> , 7 vols. London, 1938,
Guedella	G <sup>u</sup> della, Philip, (Ed.), <u>The Palmerston Papers: Gladstone and Palmerston</u> , London, 1928.
<u>H.</u>	<u>Hansard's Parliamentary Debates</u> 3rd Series
<u>H.J.</u>	<u>Historical Journal</u>
H.M.	Henry Manning
<u>J.E.H.</u>	<u>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</u>
J.H.	James Hope-Scott
J.H.N.	John Henry Newman
<u>J.M.H.</u>	<u>Journal of Modern History</u>
<u>J.R.H.</u>	<u>Journal of Religious History</u>
Lathbury	Lathbury, D.C., (Ed.) <u>Correspondence on Church and Religion of W.E. Gladstone</u> , 2 vols. London, 1910.
Magnus	<u>Gladstone</u> , London, 1954
Martineau	Martineau, John, <u>The Life of Henry Pelham, Fifth Duke of Newcastle</u> , London, 1908,

- M.& B. Monypenny, W.F. & Buckle, G.E., The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, 6 vols, London, 1910-20.
- Morley Morley, John, The Life of William Ewart Gladstone, 2 vols., London, 1908.
- N.R. National Review
- Peelites Conacher, J.B., The Peelites and the Party System, 1846-52, London, 1972.
- Q.R. Quarterly Review
- Stanley Memoirs Vincent, John, (Ed.), Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party, Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-69, Hassocks, 1978.
- Stanmore Stanmore, Lord, Sidney Herbert: Lord Herbert of Lea - a Memoir, 2 vols., London, 1906.
- T.R.H.S. Transactions of the Royal Historical Society
- Ward Ward, W.R., Victorian Oxford, London, 1965.
- W.E.G. William Ewart Gladstone

## INTRODUCTION

Among historians there has recently been a considerable re-awakening of interest in Gladstonian Liberalism both as a party organisation and as a set of politico-philosophical ideas. This study is concerned with what Liberalism meant to Gladstone at the time he made the formal commitment to join Palmerston's Liberal Government in 1859. As a young M.P. in the early 'thirties he had equated liberalism with anti-Christ; twenty five years later he became a Liberal. Such a remarkable change of mind demands attention. An analysis is made, therefore, of Gladstone's transference from Peelite Conservatism to Liberalism by examining in detail what he said and did in the crucial years 1845 to 1859. Gladstone wrote often and voluminously on current politics during these years; his articles and memoranda together with his private correspondence are a rich and largely untapped source of information. His skeletal Diaries, now fleshed out in their published form, may not always provide answers but they do offer a host of clues.

Gladstone's Liberalism is a curious affair. Having entered politics with the express purpose of serving God and His Church, he stayed to observe, and not infrequently take part in, the process by which the link between Church and State was weakened and the concept of England as a confessional state abandoned. The question presents itself: how was it that Gladstone was able to adopt himself to the demands of this process and what was the nature of the compromise he was obliged to make? Ever since Morley's biography, confirmed now by the revelations in the Diaries, we have been aware of the great mental struggle Gladstone underwent in making his choice of career.

We know how open he was to the stimulus of the moment and what a bearing this had on the shaping of his ideas. That Gladstone in his private thoughts was a deeply committed believer is undeniable; all the evidence bears this out. Largely because of what he said about himself we have come to accept that, thwarted in his original desire to become a churchman, Gladstone resolved to devote his public life ~~to~~ the furtherance of Christian ideals in politics.

The record, however, does not match up. While it is relatively easy to appreciate Gladstone as a moral force of the nineteenth century it has never been easy to give an exact definition of his Liberal principles. To speak of his expanding his ideas along Liberal lines as if in accordance with some basic political ethic is to clothe him with a sophistication which does not fit. Why from being a Peelite he should become a Liberal is still an unanswered question. It was by no means a natural choice; he had other options. Here a difficulty arises: Gladstone wrote so much and in such an opaque style about his numerous changes of attitude and policy that it is very easy to slip into a way of thinking about him that accepts all his various shifts of position as the result of deeply pondered and scrupulous self-criticism. His progress towards Liberalism, according to this interpretation, becomes a natural, political development. This is a myth but one with a long and respectable lineage. Since Morley's volumes first appeared all major studies of Gladstone have started from the premise that his Liberalism was a matter of evolution. While by no means leaving Morley's description unqualified subsequent writers, including his latest biographers Matthew and Feuchtwanger, have, nonetheless, accepted in essence the evolutionary thesis. They have tended to see Gladstone's movement from stern, unbending toryism to membership of the Liberal party as a positive and logical progression.

The contention in this study is that a detailed examination of the period 1845 - 59, the crucial years marking his change,

does much to undermine this view. Gladstone's Liberalism is not a single or simple affair. Indeed it is best thought of as having a number of different definitions, the suitability of each depending on time and circumstance. With him Liberalism was never a fixed political philosophy. In a very real sense he became a Liberal by accident. Had the personalities and politics of these middle years been more stable there are good grounds for thinking that he would not have joined the Liberal party in 1859 at all. What becomes increasingly apparent is that Gladstone in the 'forties and 'fifties, having had his original politico - religious expectations largely destroyed, was striving after a fixed moral position which in a shifting, changing, world was to prove impossible to attain. Manifestly he was endeavouring to imbue the current political situation with an ethical integrity which would provide him with a frame of reference. The growing spirit of secularism in English politics made this a goal steadily more difficult to pursue, let alone achieve. As a consequence Gladstone's own political approach became correspondingly more fragmented and confused. It is significant how often in these years the colleagues and close friends of Gladstone expressed incomprehension regarding his true motives and stance.

In old age Gladstone sought in a series of autobiographical memoranda to define the distinguishing characteristics of his politics. He concluded that providence had endowed him with a "striking gift" for determining "at certain political junctures what may be termed appreciation of the general situation and its result". This was not merely a sense of timing but was "an insight into the facts of particular eras which generates in the mind a conviction that the materials exist for forming a public opinion and for directing it to a particular end".<sup>1</sup> Such post hoc justifications are unconvincing.

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1. Jan'96, Autobiographica, i.p.136

Far from being confident of shaping the opinions of others Gladstone was at critical points in his career uncertain as to his own attitudes and this is especially true of the period under consideration. In 1857, only two years before he became a Liberal, he voiced in public grave doubts concerning the future of parliament and its ability to mould public opinion. The pessimism which so characterised him as a young man survived much longer into his life than many writers have appreciated and conditioned his thinking far more than they have allowed. Examples of his sense of foreboding are legion in his private writings and need to be set against the apparent optimism of his public utterances. It is arguable that after the debacle of the Oxford Movement and his realisation that his religious purposes could not be fulfilled Gladstone moved in a world which, in his judgement, was no longer possessed of political principle. He was often in this period in a state of bewilderment. Whatever it was that led him into the Liberal camp it was not a blinding sense of vocation. There is little evidence from these supposedly formative years to suggest that he saw the Liberal party as the vehicle to be adapted for the pursuit of the great moral crusades of his later years. His politics at this time was more often than not a series of hedging qualifications.

It is, then, difficult to give definition to Gladstone's Liberalism. It remains so individualistic in its expression yet so derivative in its aims. All of which serves to re-emphasise the importance of the period 1845-59 during which Gladstone having lost his politico-religious moorings drifted towards the Liberal camp. The drift was not consistent; had the tides run other than they did, Gladstone's course would have been significantly different. That he became a Liberal at all was as much a matter of circumstance as of conscious decision. We need, therefore, to examine his responses during these crucial years paying particular attention to the manner in which individuals and events modified his thinking and helped to give shape to his outlook.



During the fourteen years after the Corn Law crisis it remained an open question for which of the two major parties Gladstone would finally settle. His attitude towards Palmerston was a curious mixture of admiration and detestation. Peel and Aberdeen were his political mentors and the men with whom he had the greatest sympathy: indeed, with the exception of one month in 1855 he did not serve under a Whig leader until he was fifty. Having resigned from the Exchequer in February 1855 he turned on Palmerston and worked for the downfall of the Government.

As M.P. for Oxford and as a member of the Carlton Club until 1859 Gladstone, at least to outside observers, continued to present a strong tory image. He was still a declared free-trader but it is doubtful whether by the late 'fifties protection was any longer a really divisive issue. Moreover, there is some evidence to suggest that despite his being mistrusted by many Conservatives he was still considered to be a contender for the leadership of the Conservative party. A number of contemporaries judged that the real obstacle to his making a full commitment to that party was his belief that the leadership was not in fact vacant but was in the hands of Disraeli who by the mid-fifties was too strong to be ousted. This may partially explain Gladstone's refusal to join the Government of Lord Derby, a man to whom he was in no way averse; his dislike of Disraeli was so marked by 1858 that even the lure of high office could not overcome it. The question still presents itself as to why Gladstone was prepared to take the step in 1859 of joining Palmerston, the man he equally loathed. The answer was largely tactical. Gladstone could now be selective in his distaste. Palmerston was now an old man; Lord John Russell was approaching seventy. No one else in the Liberal party could match the potential of Gladstone.

## Chapter I

The years from 1845 to the death of Robert Peel in 1850 have a significant place in early Victorian politics. In Gladstone's own words: "The Session of 1845 was the last of those that witnessed party connection in its normal state. .... Since then we have had properly speaking no parties".<sup>1</sup> Down to 1845 Gladstone had been a loyal lieutenant in Peel's Government, playing his part in the progressive economic and social reforms of that highly successful administration. Undoubtedly his admiration for Peel during this period was profound. He described the achievements of his mentor as having

initiated a series of legislative changes so great, so beneficial and so calculated to impart a similar movement to the policy of all other civilised nations that they may be said to have a world wide importance. They have given immortal frame to the Times.<sup>2</sup>

The very depth of Gladstone's respect for Peel at this time has contributed to the development of a particular misinterpretation regarding Gladstone's subsequent behaviour. The error begins with Morley but has not been seriously modified by any major writer since.<sup>3</sup> In the first volume of his biography Morley devoted the bulk of his work to a description of his subject's journey from Peelism to Liberalism. The word description is used advisedly for despite its

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- I. An unpublished essay of 1855, "Party as it was and as it is", Add. Ms. 44745 f.173.
2. Ibid., f.182.
3. Examples of the acceptance of the natural growth thesis are W.E.Williams, The Rise of Gladstone to the Leadership of the Liberal Party 1859-68, Cambridge, 1934; G.I.T.Machin "Gladstone and Nonconformity in the 1860's: The Formation of an Alliance", H.J. June, 1974; J.B.Cónacher, "Party Politics in the Age of Palmerston", in Appleman, P., Madden, W.A., & Wolff, M. (Eds.), 1859: Entering an Age of Crisis, Bloomington, 1959; Agatha Ramm, "The Gladstone Diaries, v & vi," E.H.R. Oct.'79  
These writers all use a variant of the word, "inevitable", to describe W.E.G.'s movement towards Liberalism.

length and frequent use of valuable first sources Morley's treatment in no way amounts to an analysis. Often explicit and always implicit in his writing is his concept of Gladstone's natural political transition from Peelite to Liberal. This study challenges the notion that Gladstone's career was such an ordered and logical political progression and this present chapter begins the task of re-assessment by examining the nature of Gladstone's allegiance to Peel in the crucial years following the break-up of the Conservative party over the Corn Law issue. It is contended that at this juncture in his career Gladstone did not hold to any abiding or consistent political principles. Rather than imposing his own ideals on the situation he drew his principles, such as they were, from the situation. In one obvious sense his reverence for Peel made him a Peelite. But apart from the matter of personal loyalty the term has little meaning as a definition of Gladstone's political attitudes.

The most appropriate issue with which to start an analysis of Gladstone in these years must surely be Protection, the question "that for years was to form the hinge of British politics"<sup>1</sup>. According to his own testimony Gladstone took no initiative in the debate over the Corn Laws.

So far as relates to the final change in the corn law, you will see that no influence proceeded from me, but rather that events over which I had no control, and steps taken while I was out of the government, had an influence upon me in inducing me to take office.<sup>2</sup>

Gladstone wrote thus endeavouring to explain his willingness in December, 1845, to re-enter Peel's Cabinet, from which he had resigned over Maynooth in February of that year, at a vital stage in the onset of the Corn Law crisis. Up to then, he declared, he had never

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1. Autobiographica, i p.44

2. W.E.G. to John Gladstone, 30th June 1849, in Morley, i, p.284.

approached free trade as a matter of principle or as an intrinsically desirable end; it was a question "to be dealt with tenderly and cautiously as might be according to circumstances".<sup>1</sup> But events, particularly those in Ireland, had changed all that; the luxury of caution could no longer be indulged.

A great struggle was imminent, in which it was plain that two parties only could really find place, on the one side for repeal, on the other side for permanent maintenance of a corn law and a protective system generally and on principle.<sup>2</sup>

So, accepting Peel's argument that affairs in Ireland had placed his Government "in a position that requires provision to be made for the final abolition of the corn law"<sup>3</sup>, Gladstone took office "with a clear conscience but a heavy heart"<sup>4</sup>. This last comment relates to the agonising he had undergone before finally agreeing to rejoin Peel. He had spent considerable time over a number of days in discussion with Peel himself and with Peel's emissary, Lord Lincoln, considering the rights and wrongs of the case. His fear was that for the Conservative Party to contemplate repeal would put it in a false position, a position that "could not be justified in conjunction with our former conduct".<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as the nominee of Lincoln's Protectionist father, the Duke of Newcastle, Gladstone was worried lest his support for repeal should be construed as a betrayal of his Newark constituency.

His disquiet here was very similar to the concern he had shown over the Maynooth issue; insofar as sense could be made of his tangled reasoning he had resigned over Maynooth on a matter of principle, viz., the obligation to be loyal to his own previous utterances on the issue. Indeed, at the time he had declared to Lincoln his willingness to resign Newark if "it should be distinctly alleged by the Duke or by

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1. Ibid In old age Gladstone reflected that he had entered political life "totally ignorant of trade and political economy" but that under the tutelage of James Graham and of Peel himself he had by the middle 'forties come "to know something about the matter and my faith in Protection except as a system of transition crumbled rapidly away". Autobiographica i, pp.44 & 74

2. W.E.G. To John Gladstone, June 1849, in Morley i, p.284.

3. W.E.G. to Catherine Gladstone, 22nd Dec. 1845, ibid. i, p.285.

4. Ibid., Also in Bassett, p.68

5. Memo, 20th Dec. 1845, Add. Ms. 44777 f.237 in Diaries, iii, p.504

my constituents that they had been misled by me".<sup>1</sup> Now, seven months later, he had come, after prolonged analysis, to accept Lincoln's view that "it was a mistake to treat the Corn Law as a question of principle".<sup>2</sup> He could, therefore support repeal without compromising his conscience. He explained it in terms containing a typically Gladstonian escape clause.

Although I thought the law of 1815 a gross error I did not feel myself at liberty under the terms of my election (so to speak) in 1841 to unsettle the new one upon grounds of general improvement. On the other hand if in a period of deficiency it were found to work like the old one, i.e. to keep out the corn instead of bringing it in, I held myself at liberty to vote for its abolition and could justify the vote to my constituents and contend it was the same which they in my place must as fair and honest men have given.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, notwithstanding the propriety of his own position, Gladstone declared himself disturbed by the possibility of damage being done to his party. He asked rhetorically:

Upon what were we to rally as a party? Were we to be a party separate from the Whigs? I dreaded beyond all things that these processes should run into series - I could not bear to look forward twenty years and conceive that at the end of that time we should have to look back upon a list of subjects used with effect against the Whigs and then successively abandoned when they had done their work in raising us to popularity and power. Everyone would cry shame on our factious baseness in setting ourselves against opponents of larger and longer view than ourselves whose verdict of acquittal we should afterwards pronounce.<sup>4</sup>

What pre-occupied Gladstone was the question as to what the Conservative Party could possibly represent once it had abandoned protection. Would it not be indistinguishable from its opponents? Prompting his thinking here was the now open advocacy of repeal by Lord Russell and the Whig leader's recent abortive attempt to form a ministry.<sup>5</sup> Since both party leaders and a majority of their followers

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1. Memo 3rd May 1845, Add. Ms. 44777 f. 225. In this same document Gladstone urged the duty upon men in public life of honouring their former statements.
  2. Diaries, iii, p. 504.
  3. Memo. 6th Dec. 1845, Add. Ms. 44777 f. 233; Diaries, iii, p. 500.
  4. Memo. 20th Dec. 1845: Add. Ms. 44777 f. 237. Diaries, iii, p. 504.
  5. On the 18th Dec. 1845 Russell undertook to head a new administration, only to abandon the attempt two days later. See Diaries, iii, p. 204; also Morley, i, pp. 282-3; Feuchtwanger, p. 54.

now accepted the need for repeal it might well be argued that it did not really matter which party was responsible for introducing it. In rejecting this line of argument Gladstone was adamant because he saw involved more than simply the question of repeal. "Suppose the Whigs in - the Corn Law repealed - they must proceed to the Irish Church ... This must not be."<sup>1</sup> Gladstone had always judged the Whigs against the background of the cry of "the Church in Danger" and while, as has been argued elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> he had by 1845 abandoned most of his original politico-religious expectations he still clung to the belief that had animated his early politics, that the Tory party was an alliance to defend the beleaguered Church. It is true that the strength of this belief was on the wane for, as he later admitted, it was Peel's Government of 1841-46 that revealed to him "how important and barren was the conservative office for the Church".<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, of all the issues that had arisen it was that relating to the Church which continued to excite his greatest anxiety. Throughout 1845 and '46 his journal is replete with such entries as "the Irish Church yet weighs heavily upon me".<sup>4</sup> He was clearly troubled, as over Maynooth, lest he be guilty, and be seen to be guilty, of an act of betrayal. His correspondence with Lincoln reveals the same pre-occupation:

The change of opinion or of course, on the question of the Irish Church will be trying to anyone; but to me it will be rendered, I think more so, or at least its consequences will be more grave: first, because of the way in which I have declared my own preference for the system which we are abandoning; secondly because there will be those who will assail it, and conscientiously ascribe it to a predilection on my own part for the Romish religion. 5

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1. Diaries, iii, p. 504
  2. See M.J.Lynch, "Gladstone and the Oxford Movement, 1833-45", (unpublished M.A. thesis, Leicester University, 1972)
  3. "My Earlier Political Opinions", July 1892, Autobiographica, i.p.41
  4. Diaries, iii, p.452
  5. W.E.G. to Lincoln, 28th Mar. '46. Add. Ms. 44262, f.75.

A generation later when Gladstone as Prime Minister, far from defending the Irish Church, actually undertook its disestablishment he sought to justify his volte-face in a published essay, A Chapter of Autobiography. He referred to the nature of the times as the key to his actions. Admitting to "a great and glaring change" in his behaviour he explained "it is not the mere eccentricity or even perversion of an individual mind, but connects itself with silent changes, which are advancing in the very bed and basis of modern society".<sup>1</sup> The transfer of political power from groups and limited classes to the community had produced conditions of action "in which it is evident that the statesman, in order to preserve the same amount of consistency as his antecessors in other times, must be gifted with a far longer range of insight". Since in the very nature of things such foresight is impossible the only alternative is "to regulate the changes which we cannot forbid".<sup>2</sup> In the light of this appeal to political expediency it is appropriate to regard Gladstone's concern for the Irish Church in 1845 as marking an important stage in the shedding of what he chose to call his "political ecclesiasticism". In old age he made light of the objectives which had so passionately informed his early politics and, indeed, argued that he had been providentially diverted along his secular path:

It was well for me that the unfolding destiny carried me off in a considerable degree from political ecclesiasticism of which I should [at] that time have made a sad mess. Providence directed that my mind should find its food in other pastures than those in which my youthfulness would have loved to seek it.<sup>3</sup>

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1. "A Chapter of Autobiography", 1868, in Gleanings, vii, p.98.
  2. Ibid., pp. 102-03.
  3. Autobiographica, i, p.41.

Morley accepted uncritically such post hoc justifications with the result that his biography becomes severely distorted at this point. True to his basic intention of presenting his subject's career as a consistent and discernible Liberal evolution Morley treats the Protection issue as if it were a simple stepping-stone along Gladstone's path. Little weight is given to the doubts which assailed Gladstone at the time. This is illustrated by the way in which Morley uses the two letters relating to the Corn Laws which were quoted earlier in this chapter.<sup>1</sup> Morley refers to them as if they were complementary. In fact their tenor is markedly different. The letter to his wife written on the day he re-entered Peel's Cabinet and containing the "heavy heart" reference<sup>2</sup> indicates that Gladstone was far from convinced that a matter of principle was not involved. He pleaded pressure of events as the justification for his acceptance of such a significant change of course: "I had to decide what was best to be done now. I arrived speedily at the conviction that now, at any rate, it is best that the question should be finally settled".<sup>3</sup>

The second letter, the one to his father, was written some four years later in response to John Gladstone's charge that his son was guilty of "having made Peel a free trader". No "heavy heart" is apparent in this letter; Gladstone writes with apparent confidence and conviction to assure his father that from the start no issue of principle had been involved, that the whole matter had been one of logical progression.<sup>4</sup> This is not the picture presented by his journal entries and memoranda; they indicate that in the late weeks of 1845 Gladstone was greatly exercised over the whole question.

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1. See above p. 10

2. In Morley, i, p. 285. As if to emphasise his reluctance to become a minister again Gladstone repeats the phrase later in the same letter.

3. Ibid.

4. John Gladstone was unconvinced by this argument and to his death remained a staunch protectionist. In his dotage he continued to wrangle with his son on this issue. See Diaries, iv, p. 3



There is an uncertainty and lack of conviction about his approach. He accepted the view put to him by Evelyn Denison that the crisis was "more serious than the launch of the Reform Bill".<sup>1</sup> He had now come to see the Irish Church issue and the Corn Law question as interlocking. To Lincoln he confessed, "when I took office in December I had not the smallest idea ~~that~~ the Irish question would press so closely on the heels of the Corn Law."<sup>2</sup> In his journal he observed: "If there was clearly a surrender of principle on that, [ the Irish Church ] as an admitted fact, that would almost prejudice the question on the Corn Law."<sup>3</sup> On the day he agreed to take office as Colonial Secretary he confided:

For my own part I am utterly poor and helpless: I see my way as to the principle, in case I have a decision to take - but may God of His mercy help me in a faithful application of it to facts, if He do not avert the trial altogether: and may he exclude the pest ambition from my soul.<sup>4</sup>

Writing to Henry Manning, his regular confidant in times of doubt, Gladstone declared that were he to have followed his instincts he would not have taken office; but his acceptance had been determined by something higher than human judgement. "I believe I have obeyed the call of what is for the present at least my profession, and if so it is the call of God."<sup>5</sup> Gladstone had by now convinced himself that to stay in politics and concern himself with such matters as the Corn Laws was as much a response to the will of the Almighty as had been his earlier attempts to employ politics in the service of His Church.

The argument he advanced to Manning was the culmination of a traceable line of thought. From the time of the first intimations of the Maynooth question there is detectable a new development in that chronic inner struggle which afflicted him. So frequent are the

1. Diaries., iii, p.505
2. W.E.G. to Lincoln, 28th Mar.'46. Pelham p.77.
3. Ibid., iii, p.504.
4. Ibid., iii, p. 506.
5. W.E.G. to H.M., 23rd.Dec. 1845., Add.Ms. 44247, f.278.

references in his writings to compromise that there is little doubt that he was much troubled by the readjustment that the development of his career was obliging him to make. From the autumn of 1844 his correspondence on the theme of Church and State betrays a sensitivity indicative of the need he felt to assure others, and indeed himself, of the rectitude and consistency of his position. His letters to his wife offer a particularly good illustration of this. When writing to Catherine he wasted little time on superfluous endearments, preferring to make her the confidante of his political and spiritual difficulties.<sup>1</sup> Following Maynooth Gladstone had sought to justify his remaining in politics by arguing that the State was progressively detaching itself from God. The evident paradox of a godly man devoting himself to an institution which by his own definition was becoming increasingly ungodly he never satisfactorily explained. Repeating to Manning a point he had often made concerning the difficulty of addressing Parliament on religious matters he complained that such was the detachment of members towards the Anglican Church that he doubted the capacity of Protestantism any longer to provide "a religious ground of legislative action".<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, he would not yet abandon his parliamentary role but would wait upon events; in particular he wished to remain until he had decided what policy should be followed in regard to the Irish Church.<sup>3</sup> Upon the same theme he wrote to James Hope of the imminence of "a great crisis in the destinies of the Church as it is related to the State" and urged "the duty of us who are in public affairs to remain where we are .... for the sake of the Church of God".<sup>4</sup>

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1. A selection of such letters is in Bassett, pp. 63-69; also in Morley, i. pp. 202-04.
  2. W.E.G. to H.M., 16th April 1845, Add. Ms. 44247, f. 263.
  3. W.E.G. to H.M., 26th April 1845, *ibid.*, f. 267.
  4. W.E.G. to J.H., 15th May 1845, Add. Ms. 44214, f. 268.

Comments such as these provide interesting examples of the dialectical difficulty in which Gladstone had placed himself in trying to accommodate his original political views to the new political trends. He did not admit as much but he could hardly have been unaware that the very crisis in Church-State relations of which he wrote was at least in part a direct consequence of the reforms in which he had recently acquiesced and which he had defended on the grounds that the erstwhile principles which had governed the harmony of Church and State no longer applied.<sup>1</sup> He confided to his wife:

I see too plainly the process which is separating the work of the State from the work of Christian faith. Even now as a consenting party, in a certain sense... to that process of separation, I am upon the very outside verge ... of the domain which conscience marks to me as an open one ... I have a growing belief that I shall never be able to do much good for the Church in Parliament (if at all) except after having seemed first a traitor to it and been reviled as such. 2

It was in this same context that he made his prophetic utterance about "Ireland, Ireland! that cloud in the West, that coming storm", claiming that but for the Irish question he would retire from politics.<sup>3</sup>

Superficially this offers a reasonable explanation for his continuance in public life. There are, however, two weaknesses in the argument. For one thing, his appeal to Ireland is very much in the nature of an afterthought; there is no evidence that over the issue of the Maynooth grant his interest in Ireland had been other than an ecclesiastical one. The second consideration is that although his involvement with Ireland remains the most outstanding feature of his career it did not become so until well after the period currently ~~under~~ consideration. As Magnus observes, between Maynooth and the dramatic events that began a quarter of a century later Gladstone regarded Ireland "in a mood of consistent and dispassionate detachment".

1. See the illuminating correspondence on this theme between Gladstone and Newman in April 1845, in Lathbury, i.pp. 70-74.
2. W.E.G. to C.G., 12th Oct. 1845, Bassett, p.64.
3. Ibid.

Magnus interprets Gladstone's espousal of such causes as Ireland not as part of an ordered political programme but as a means of relieving his permanent mental tension. "The cause of the oppressed was the medicine of Gladstone's mind; it was not his daily bread." <sup>1</sup>

Since Manning had been so intimately involved in the late 'thirties and early 'forties in the formulation of Gladstone's theories on Church and State it is not surprising that Gladstone should have been anxious at this stage that Manning should understand his new political stance. In a series of prolix letters in the spring of 1846 he sought to explain to Manning why he had so seriously modified his former views and why he was willing to continue in politics despite his original expectations being now incapable of realisation. Manning's side of the correspondence has not survived but it is clear from Gladstone's comments that Manning remained unconvinced by the arguments with which he was presented. Gladstone continued to assert what his actions belied, that his burning desire was to withdraw from public life. "I profess to remain there (to myself) for the service of the Church", he declared, but was obliged to admit that in the current atmosphere the chances of serving her in Parliament were becoming "wholly unavailable".<sup>2</sup> What must have particularly depressed Manning was that Gladstone had by now fully accepted the right of Parliament through such institutions as the Ecclesiastical Commission to control the finances and property of the Church. Parliament, Gladstone asserted, could hardly take a sympathetic view of the Church's material difficulties until the latter had:

1. Magnus, pp. 75-6

2. W.E.G. to H.M., 8th March 1846. Add. Ms. 44247 f. 292

"thoroughly husbanded her own pecuniary means and applied them to the best advantage".<sup>1</sup> Evidently Gladstone the economist had superseded Gladstone the anti-Erastian. He told Manning that in the popular view the Church had become a hybrid. So widespread were the suspicions aroused by the development of Romish elements among her members that she could no longer be reckoned "an unity for the purposes of political combat". Unwittingly contradicting his declared reasons for staying in politics he gave it as his view that it was not from the top that the Church would regain her vitality. "In some way or other the Church must descend into the ranks of the people and find her strength there."<sup>2</sup>

That Manning declined to accept this line of thought is suggested by Gladstone's next letter: "I am contending against being driven from my original choice and you to drive me from it." Clearly a breach was developing between the two men and Gladstone, sensing that he could not hide the true nature of his compromise from Manning, was becoming increasingly edgy. He dismissed Manning's belief that the work of serving the Church was "one always to be done in Parliament", arguing that the power of such service was "rapidly evanescent". Against all logic he went on to maintain that his contention that the Church could no longer be served through Parliament was perfectly consistent with the "original and never shaken conviction" which had led him to enter politics. There might be, he admitted, those who, viewing his position from a distance, would draw the conclusion that he had either written rashly when first formulating his ideas on Church and State or else had subsequently abandoned what he had once solemnly professed. However, the error would be theirs not his; they lacked the knowledge and appreciation of the subtleties of his position.<sup>3</sup>

1. W.E.G. to H.M., 10th March, 1846, ibid., fos. 294-5. In her study of Church reorganisation in this period Olive Brose traces Gladstone's notable change of front over the question of Church rates. Church and Parliament, 1828-69, Stanford, 1959, pp. 161-2
2. Add. Ms. 44247, f.296.
3. 5th April, 1846, ibid., f. 298-9

Rejecting the charge that the Government would not help the Church nor allow her to help herself, he asserted that he could conceive of no policy that could do "more in quantity for the Church than Sir Robert Peels" [sic]. He defended the Government's record in regard to ecclesiastical reforms and suggested that it was very much in the interests of the Church to make these "wise concessions" for they would have the desirable effect of "allaying jealousies".<sup>1</sup>

It was the essential change taking place in the nature of the State, the "progress from the Catholic to the infidel idea of the State", that Manning had yet to grasp, Gladstone informed him. Once this transition had been completed it would never be possible to restore the State to her original position by working from within her. Given that it was in any sense possible such a reconversion would have to come from without. Thus for him to remain and bear witness for the truth as many had urged would, he felt, be a fruitless exercise.

"There is a place where witness is ever to be borne for truth ... but it is not here."<sup>2</sup>

Gladstone claimed that his experience as a politician had provided him with opportunities for "steady and seasonal observation and reflection" and that this was the justification for his change of outlook. He was, nonetheless, standing upon his "original intention never altered", but qualified the statement by adding that his intention was "always as now subject to the issue of certain suppositions". Indeed, when one of these suppositions, that relating to the Irish Church, was put to the test it might prove fatal to his capacity "for doing any good in political life". Not that his change of opinion over the Irish Church would of itself cause his "political death." but it would be misinterpreted by the mischievous as sure proof of "his sinister alliance with that suspicion of leaning to the Roman Church".<sup>3</sup>

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1. Ibid., fos. 300-01.

2. Ibid., fos. 301-03.

3. Ibid., fos. 303-04.

In reality he was engaged, he told Manning, in a process of "lowering the religious tone of the State, stripping it of its ethical character, and assisting its transition into one which is mechanical".<sup>1</sup> This was why he could not conceive of his future in Parliament as being connected with the service of the Church. The time for that had passed. He did not dispute that in all probability the Church would continue to "hold her nationality in substance" and that as long as this was so she would need political and parliamentary defence. For him, however, the crucial question was what form this defence should take. Citing the examples of the Repeal movement in Ireland and of Dissent he maintained that despite their lack of parliamentary representation these causes were growing in strength and organisation. Might it not be better, he wondered, for the Church similarly to seek her regeneration among the people.

My belief is that strength with the people will, for our day at least, be the only effectual defence of the Church, as the want of it is now her weakness there. 2

In a direct dismissal of the hopes of those who had anticipated that he might stay to become a leader of a Church party in the Commons Gladstone declared that he had no intention of becoming spokesman of a "knot of men professing and claiming everything, engaged in constant resistance and protest like Montalembert and [Dupanloup] in France".<sup>3</sup> He admired the work of these men but drew a clear distinction between English and French practice; such methods might well be suited to a country like France where there was "acute hostility between Church and State" but they were inappropriate in England where a different relationship obtained.<sup>4</sup>

Gladstone's reference to Montalembert, the French Liberal Catholic, has its own irony. Seven years before having read

1. 19th April, 1845, ibid., fos. 306-7

2. Ibid., fos. 308-9

3. In the Ms. Dupanloup's name is written in Greek.

4. Ibid., f. 308

Gladstone's first book, The State in its Relations with the Church, Montalembert had saluted him as a fellow labourer in the vineyard:

Although you pass generally in this country for an enemy to my faith and my church, there is a link between us.... we stand on the same ground in public life - that of the inalienable rights of the spiritual power.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever truth Montalembert's analysis may have had in 1839 it no longer applied to the Gladstone of 1846. In rejection of his original political motives Gladstone had now come to accept that in a fundamentally secular state he must play an essentially secular role.

This trend in Gladstone is well illustrated by an association largely left untouched by historians; namely, his relationship with John Manners, one of the leading quartet of Young Englanders and the man with whom he shared the representation of Newark from 1841 to 1846. On a prima facie judgement Young England ought to have appealed to young Gladstone for it was that movement that most closely approximated to his original religious, social and constitutional beliefs. With its romanticism, its harking back to a golden age, its hatred of Benthamism, utilitarianism, and all the accompanying evils of an increasingly secular state it shared the same basic response as the younger Gladstone. It has been known for some time that there was a link between Tractarianism and Young England. As early as 1925 Charles Whibley observed that Young England "was intimately related, through Faber and Newman, to the Oxford Movement".<sup>2</sup> More recently Robert Blake has described Young England as "the Oxford Movement translated by Cambridge from religion into politics" explaining that "there is undoubtedly a sense in which the two movements had a common origin - a romantic revolt against Erastianism in Church affairs and against liberal utilitarianism in the secular field".<sup>3</sup>

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1. Montalembert to W.E.G. 4th July 1839 in Morley, ii, pp.152-3.
  2. C. Whibley, Lord John Manners and His Friends, London, 1925, i, p.131.
  3. Robert Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, London, 1972 p.55. For W.E.G.'s close relationship with the Oxford Movement see M.J. Lynch, "Was Gladstone a Tractarian?", J.R.H., Dec. 1975



Manners, whom Gladstone described as "a guileless, gentle, sunny spirit as walks the earth",<sup>1</sup> urged that he and George Smythe should regard themselves as "Gladstonites"; this after the publication of The State in its Relations with the Church, the book which "enrolled the Young Tories of Cambridge under the first of Mr. Gladstone's innumerable banners".<sup>2</sup> On the success of Manners's Newark candidature in 1841 Gladstone wrote "Lord John Manners is excellent ... Nothing can be more satisfactory than to have such a partner".<sup>3</sup> For a time at least the views of the two men on the crucial issue of Church and State exactly coincided. Manners, believing as he did that national salvation and regeneration lay not in politics but in the Church, was greatly encouraged by what in 1842 he learned at first hand of Gladstone's views:

Gladstone said he had no faith at all in political remedies; that it all depended on the Church, and on this hope he seemed sanguine: how strange it was to hear the man, who had been gallantly and earnestly battling for his new political creeds, quietly admitting them to be nauci, nihili, pili. Does Peel think the same? <sup>4</sup>

E.J. Feuchtwanger in his recent study of Gladstone, touching on Young England, observes that "Gladstone never acquired any sympathy for the group of romantic dilettantes".<sup>5</sup> Even if this were wholly true the interesting question is still - why not? Why was it that Gladstone, possessed of Young England's emotional and temperamental attitudes and being at one with it on so many theological points, was unattracted to it politically? The answer lies in personalities not principles. By 1845 Gladstone was well aware of the consistent attacks being mounted on Peel by the movement. He had also learned that the Duke of Newcastle, angered by his nominee's loyalty to Peel on the repeal of the Corn Laws, intended withdrawing his support for

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1. 1st Jan '42, Diaries, iii.p.169.

2. Whibley, op.cit., i.p.63

3. Morley, i.p. 238.

4. Manner's journal, 7th July '42, Whibley, op.cit. i.p.139

5. Feuchtwanger, p.40.

Gladstone in Newark. Newcastle told Gladstone:

You are quite right in thinking that I disapprove of Sir Robert Peel's return to office. I was in hopes that we were clear of him for ever, and that he who has already done such unpardonable mischief and is prepared to do so much more, so that ruin and revolution shall be our fated country's terrible future would not again be permitted to convulse the nation.<sup>1</sup>

At this time Manners wrote a sympathetic letter to Gladstone, phrased very much in the language of Young England, urging him to think again:

There appears to be a general impression in the Borough that something is wrong, somewhere; if so, according to my gloomy view, Newark is but a fair epitome of England at large, handed over to be fought by two furious factions in a struggle that must be fatal, whichever side gains the victory. I see but one mode of ultimate safety, that is the Queen resuming her crown,<sup>2</sup>

Gladstone's reply is a measure of the change that experience has wrought in him:

You, I have no doubt, are disappointed as to the working of a conservative government. And so should I be if I were to estimate its results by a comparison with the anticipations which I had once entertained of political life. But now my expectations not only from this but from any government are very small.... And I do entertain the strongest impression that ... if you thus had been accustomed to look into public questions at close quarters, your expectations from an administration... would be materially changed.<sup>3</sup>

Gladstone added that "the efforts of Young England to re-vitalise politics by undermining the Prime Minister" formed a set of "mournful delusions". Shortly after the fall of Peel's government Gladstone recorded the following:

I am afraid that with Lord J. Manners ... antipathy to Peel is a cardinal principle, or rather perhaps I should say the ruling impulse of politics. He seems to me to carry that antipathy further than even according to his own abstract and general disposition he ought in consistency to do. For he is by no means heady and precipitate... Out of politics which have relation direct or indirect to Peel he is delightful.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Newcastle to Gladstone, 24th Dec.'45. Add.Ms.44261 f.103.
  2. Manners to W.E.G. 15th Jan.'46. Add. Ms. 44363 fos. 143-49.
  3. W.E.G. to Manners, 30th Jan.'46. Morley, i.p. 303.
  4. 5th Aug. '46. Diaries, iii p.564.

In a later reflection Gladstone described the unprecedented unity in both cabinet and party during Peel's Administration of 1841-46. He admitted that there was on the horizon "a cloud, though one no bigger than a man's hand"; the reference was to Disraeli who, together with "some two or three members of the party who had emerged with just enough notoriety to attract to themselves the nickname of Young England", had set about the task of undermining Peel. But in Gladstone's view "they aimed their puny weapons at Sir R. Peel as Lilliputians might at Gulliver". At the end of the 1845 session "the numerical and ... the moral strength of the party was still entire".<sup>1</sup>

Gladstone's acceptance of the Colonial Secretaryship under Peel in December 1845 marks the beginning of what he acknowledged to have been a strange period in his life. Obligated by the conventions of the day to relinquish his Newark seat on taking ministerial office he was to be out of Parliament for the next eighteen months. "A Peelite, unless with a Government to support him, had little chance of an opening at a bye-election; and I remained without a seat until the dissolution in June 1847."<sup>2</sup> Thus he missed the whole of the parliamentary battle over the Corn Laws and was in no position tactically to take any initiative in the confused period of Conservative splintering and re-grouping. Had he been in the House it must surely have been of great consequence; he would have been able to defend Peel against the onslaught of Bentinck and Disraeli and in doing so would have purged his contempt over Maynooth with the not unlikely result that he would have inherited Peel's mantle. In short there are strong grounds for arguing that Gladstone would have become the leader of the Peelite Conservative party in the late 'forties.

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1. 1855, Add. Ms. 44745, fos. 181-82.

2. Add. Ms. 44791, Autobiographica, p.64.

He was, after all, the only match for Disraeli as orator and spokesman. The philippics which broke the exhausted Peel might well have been answered in kind and bettered by the Colonial Secretary who languished out of Parliament.

But this was not to be. The bitterness of the ultras in the Conservative party and of the country gentlemen over the repeal of the Corn Laws was played upon by Bentinck and Disraeli to build up a protectionist party in the session of 1846; Gladstone, vainly searching for a constituency<sup>1</sup>, was powerless to aid his chief and the initiative passed to his opponents. His frustration at not being able to represent his department in the Commons was acute and he seriously considered resigning from the Government. It was only on Lincoln's advice not to do anything so precipitate that he held back.<sup>2</sup> The state of Gladstone's mind is not unimportant here. His fears for the Irish Church, his considerable family difficulties, and his still unresolved doubts concerning the fitness of a political career combined to weaken his resolve at a time when the current political crises offered a golden opportunity to claim a leadership within the party which many thought him destined for and were urging him to seize. Aberdeen and Goulburn told Gladstone that a swift return to the Commons might well be the prelude to his assuming the leadership.<sup>3</sup> Stanley, who had earlier wanted to take Gladstone under his wing,<sup>4</sup> had already discussed with him "the dearth of young men of decided political promise on our side of the House, and on the other"; he had impressed upon him, "you are as certain to be prime minister as any man can be, if you live - the way is clear before you".<sup>5</sup> George Hudson, the railway king and a staunch protectionist at this time, looked,

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1. See J.B. Conacher, "Mr. Gladstone Seeks a Seat" in Canadian Historical Association Report, 1962
  2. W.E.G. to Lincoln, 4th & 29th June '46, Add.Ms. 44262, fos. 72-76.
  3. See Feuchtwanger, p. 57.
  4. 4th March 1844, Diaries, ii, pp. 356-8
  5. 1st June, 1844, Diaries, ii, p. 378.

indeed, to Gladstone to lead the protectionist cause. Gladstone recorded their conversation.

He said I wish you had been in Parliament and out of the Government: then you must have been ready to lead us. I said, had I been in Parliament and out of Government I must still have been more actively implicated in these measures than I now am: for from my former concern with such subjects I must have been constantly engaged in the debate and partaken of the feelings that attended them.<sup>1</sup>

Further evidence of Gladstone's being viewed as heir apparent comes from a particularly interesting quarter. Writing from Paris shortly after the Corn Laws debacle, Disraeli informed John Manners that Louis Philippe had asked "whether Gladstone who is not compromised in 'the four Cabinet councils in one week', could not lead the personnel of the Commons, with the Duke in the Lords". In a post-script Disraeli added

The King inquired a great deal about Gladstone of me. It was evident that his name had recently been suggested to his Majesty by some high quarter. I told the King that he was quite equal to Peel, with the advantage of youth.<sup>2</sup>

When Peel did finally resign office in July 1846 there were those who were ready to turn directly to Gladstone. Aberdeen detailing to him the events in the Commons told him of the hopes of the protectionists, "it is stated that Lord Bentinck is to resign - and they are to have you". Gladstone protested that this was news to him:

The (late) Chancellor had simply said when I pointed out that the difficulties lay in the House of Commons, that it was true and that my being there would make the way more open. I confess I am very doubtful of that and much disposed to believe that I am regretted as things and persons absent often are in comparison with the present.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding this disclaimer, it is evident that certainly down to Peel's death in 1850 significant members of the Conservative party retained their hopes in Gladstone as a protectionist. In 1848 Lord Granby, a leading figure among the protectionists invited Goulburn,

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1. 9th July, 1846, Diaries, ii.p.552.
2. Disraeli to Manners, May 1846 in Whibley, op.cit., i.pp.195-96.
3. 10th July 1846, Diaries, ii, p.555

Graham, Lincoln and Gladstone to meet his faction with a view to a possible merger. Graham and Lincoln declined "being determined to do nothing but with Peel". Goulb\_urn and Gladstone, however, gave it serious consideration on the grounds that "we could not properly decline to meet our old colleagues from whom we had never been separated". In the end Gladstone chose not to join Granby since he felt it would be wrong "to retrace our steps... as to our commercial policy".<sup>1</sup>

Undeterred, the protectionist lobby approached him again as late as 1850. Sir J. Tyrrell asked Gladstone whether, given that he would be left free to follow his own course on protection and on any other issue involving his personal honour, he would be willing "to act with the protectionists as a party". Should he agree Gladstone was promised "the throne was vacant" and there was nothing to prevent me from leading them".

The terms of Gladstone's refusal show how relatively unde<sup>2</sup>veloped his concept of party still was and how free he regarded his choice of action.

I told him...it did not appear to me that up to the present time the Protectionists had been properly an opposition... my votes since leaving office had been given independently i.e. upon the merits of each case, and not with a view to keeping the government in office... it was the duty of public men to unite and co-operate with those in whom they could confide, according to the exigencies of the country.<sup>2</sup>

Gladstone's reluctance to act merely "with a view to keeping the government in office" points to a fundamental difference between him and Peel. Whereas Peel saw party as a political instrument for ensuring a strong Executive<sup>3</sup> Gladstone believed that governments should stand or fall by virtue of their achievements and should not be maintained in office by a quiescent opposition. He attacked Peel's position in 1849 as "false and in the abstract almost immoral".

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1. 12th December 1848, Diaries, iv, p.84
  2. 27th February, 1850, Diaries, iv, pp.188-89.
  3. In Norman Gash's words Conservatism for Peel was "a governmental ethic and not a party interest", in "Peel and the Party System", T.R.H.S. 1951

He and still more Graham, sit on the opposition side of the House professing thereby to be independent members of Parliament but in every critical vote are governed by the intention to keep ministers in office and sacrifice everything to that intention. <sup>1</sup>

Gladstone's natural deference to Peel should not be allowed to blind us to points like this nor to the fact that on a range of important questions that arose after 1846 the two men were considerably at variance. The Navigation Laws, the West Indies, the colonial churches, the position of Richard Cobden; issues such as these saw Gladstone and Peel taking opposed stands.<sup>2</sup> There are, therefore, serious grounds for challenging the received notion of Gladstone as a Peelite at this stage of his career.

What may strike us as odd, that Gladstone for some time after 1846 should be looked upon as a possible protectionist, certainly did not appear so strange to contemporaries. Here, perhaps, he was his own worst enemy. His devious manoeuvres over Maynooth, resigning from the Government when it proposed the increase in the grant and then subsequently voting in its favour; such behaviour coupled with his opaque method of self-expression was hardly calculated to encourage his fellows to see him as a model either of consistency or of principle. Walter Bagehot wrote of him in 1852,

His first principles are rarely ours, we may often think them obscure - sometimes incomplete - occasionally quite false. It is necessary that England should comprehend Mr. Gladstone. If the country have not a true conception of a great statesman, his popularity will be capricious, his power irregular and his usefulness insecure.<sup>3</sup>

Lord Aberdeen viewed Gladstone in a similar light: "When he has convinced himself, perhaps by abstract reasoning of some view, he thinks that every one else ought to see it as he does and can make no allowance for difference of opinion".<sup>4</sup> Looking back on Gladstone's record since the

1. 19th Oct. 1849, Diaries, iv, p. 161.

2. Diaries, iii, pp. 552-57; iv, pp. 35, 44, 105, 109.

3. W. Bagehot, Essay on Oxford, 1852, in W. E. Williams, The Rise of Gladstone to the Leadership of the Liberal Party 1859-68, Cambridge, 1934, pp. 9-11.

4. In Morley, i, p. 602.

'forties Fraser's Magazine offered this estimate.

He combines the extreme of impressionableness with the extreme want of intuition. Mr. Gladstone's education renders him capable of diving into the depths of every problem, but it has not bestowed on him the faculty of judging the relative values of his discoveries. No politician can or does feel sure of Mr. Gladstone. As an auxiliary he is incomparable. The necessities of his nature demand that he shall be guided by a will and character stronger than his own.<sup>1</sup>

The role of personalities in English politics has always been important; in the immediate period after 1846 this was especially so. With the break-up of the Tory party in 1846 politics could have taken many forms. The subsequent orientation into Liberal and Conservative parties was by no means inevitable. The polarisation of politics, the hardening of party lines and the advent of great causes like Ireland and the Bulgarian atrocities; these lay in the future by some twenty years. In the absence of divisive issues a politician's taste or distaste for his fellows and theirs for him took on a greater significance. Gladstone's dislike of Disraeli<sup>2</sup>, his feud with Bentinck<sup>3</sup>, his reservations about Stanley<sup>4</sup>, and his antipathy to Palmerston<sup>5</sup> were all of them materially important in relation to his approach to party, politics and office. He would not join the Protectionists, he felt estranged from the Whigs. His political uncertainty was the product of a set of complex personal interactions, and was compounded by being part of what has been called "the mid-century Conservative dilemma".<sup>6</sup> In the aftermath of the Corn Law

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1. "The Political Temper of the Nation", in Fraser's Magazine, Feb. 1864.
  2. Even before their legendary hostility had developed Gladstone's treatment at Disraeli's hands over Maynooth, equally withering as that suffered by Peel over the Corn Laws, had, as far as Gladstone was concerned, created an unbridgeable gap between them. See Hansard, lxxix, 520, 556; R.Blake, Disraeli, pp.188-89.
  3. In Morley's words "the only personal quarrel into which he allowed himself to be drawn" (Morley i, p. 302), it occupied much of 1846. See Hansard, lxxxviii, 849, 936, 942 and Diaries, iii, pp.567-9.
  4. Diaries, iv. pp. 188-89.
  5. Hansard, cxii, 225; Diaries iv, p. 221
  6. R.Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, London, 1970, p.80.



crisis the Conservative party was faced with a problem of identity. If there had been a logic attaching to the concept of natural party growth prior to 1846 it had been destroyed by Peel's actions over the Corn Laws. Faithful to his own order of priorities Peel had put executive needs before political considerations and his party had been riven. Thereafter it was to remain an open question as to which of the splintered elements could justly claim the title "Conservative". The party which had triumphed in 1841 was now divided into three. A minority in the Commons stood loyal to Peel, a majority looked to Bentinck to head the reaction against the abandonment of Protection, while in the Lords Derby represented the Protectionist cause. It lay within Peel's power, Gladstone wrote later, to heal the wounds and continue to lead the party but he declined to do so.

Although that party was the great work of so many years of his matured life his thoughts seemed simply to be "it has fallen; there let it be". The position of Sir Robert Peel in the last four years of his life was a thoroughly false position. 1

Given Peel's disinclination to attempt to restore unity the mutual hostility between the three factions deepened and the Whigs under John Russell came to power by default. There followed a period of political imbalance, considerable cross-voting in the Commons, and a lack of strength in both party and Government.

A further consideration stressing the importance of individuals in all this is that even when the issues appear identifiable they are not always what they seem. One example was touched on earlier; viz., Tyrrell's approach to Gladstone regarding his becoming leader of the protectionists. The offer made to Gladstone promising him complete freedom of action on all matters including economics indicates that Protection was not necessarily about protection, that it was not

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1. 1855, Add.Ms.44745 f.190. It has recently been argued that Peel's claim to be remembered lies not in his record as a party leader "but rather that, by his final gesture and political death, he persuaded the toiling masses that there was a moral energy at the centre of the State ... The lame conclusion must be that Peel was not the founder of the Conservative party but the progenitor of Gladstonian liberalism". Boyd Hilton, "Peel: a Reappraisal", H.J. Oct. 1979, p.614

essentially a cause involving the defence of the agricultural interest against free trade. It lends further weight to Professor Aydelotte's computer-based claim that there was no substantial difference between the proportion of landed and non-landed Conservatives who rebelled against Peel in 1846.<sup>1</sup> Protection was to Tyrrell a means of organising a party opposed equally to Peel for his betrayal as it was to the Whigs. This strengthens the idea that the importance of the Corn Laws lay not in their economic aspect; rather they had by 1846 become a symbol, a shibboleth determining how men would respond. It was not so much that Peel had challenged tory economic assumptions that led to the excoriating attacks upon him. He had affronted ideas more fundamental, those relating to the constitution and the legitimacy of privilege. This explains the otherwise irrational bitterness of Smythe, Bentinck and the rest of Young England.

It also helps to explain Gladstone's irresolution as to what to do next. Despite his involvement in the free trade measures of Peel's administration and notwithstanding his great sense of personal loyalty to Peel the Corn Law imbroglio came as a shock to his basic toryism. Gladstone's less than absolute acceptance of Peel's behaviour thereafter may be seen as an expression of his inability to come to terms with the new political situation. When it is remembered that at the height of the Corn Law crisis in 1846 Gladstone by his absence from Parliament was prevented from making any contribution to the debate his sense of isolation becomes readily understandable. Interestingly enough, Gladstone's failure to regain his seat at this critical time was not simply a matter of bad luck. There was a concerted protectionist move to prevent his re-election:

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1. W.O.Aydelotte, "Country Gentleman and the Repeal of the Corn Laws", E.H.R., January, 1967

Shortly after the opening of the session of 1846, it became known that the Protectionist petition against the Peelite or Liberal sitting member for Wigan was likely to succeed in unseating him. Proposals were [made] to me to succeed him, which were held to be eligible. I even wrote my address: and on a certain day I was going down my the mail train. But it was an object to our opponents to keep a Secretary of State out of Parliament during the Corn Law crisis: and their petition was suddenly withdrawn. The consequence was that I remained until the resignation of the Government in July a Minister of the Crown without a seat in Parliament. <sup>1</sup>

This enforced detachment from the centre of politics is evidenced by Gladstone's contemporary memoranda. It was not, he recorded, until three days before the division on the Coercion Bill of July 1846, the measure which technically brought down the Administration, that he learned of Peel's intention to resign.<sup>2</sup> However, when Peel did resign it was more the manner than the matter of his going that worried Gladstone. In particular he was angered by Peel's farewell speech, containing what Gladstone termed "the Cobden panegyric", in which Peel had praised beyond its proper measure the contribution of Cobden to the free trade debate.<sup>3</sup> Stanley and Aberdeen discussed the matter with Gladstone and voiced a similar disapproval of Peel's unbalanced utterances. Aberdeen believed that Peel in making his statement was endeavouring to make it "impossible that he should ever again be placed in connection with the Conservative party as a party". Gladstone felt that even if this were the case such was Peel's stature that the intention would be one "absolutely impossible to fulfil". Ironically what Gladstone deemed to be impossible was in the event precisely the position that Peel was to hold during the next four years. Referring Aberdeen to Peel's unparalleled influence in the House of Commons Gladstone observed:

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1. Autobiographica, i, p.63.

2. 10th July 1846, Add. Ms. 44777 f.245 in Diaries, iii, p.552.

3. Ibid., p.553.

With his greatness he could not remain there overshadowing and eclipsing all Governments and yet have to do with no government: that acts cannot for such a man be isolated, they must be in series, and his view of public affairs must coincide with one body of men rather than another, and that the attraction must place him in relations with them.<sup>1</sup>

Such a serious miscalculation regarding Peel's future role clearly has relevance in any consideration of Gladstone's attitude towards party at this time. He declined to join the Whigs, although Russell did approach him with this in mind, but he felt unhappy with Peel. So in the summer of 1846 he found himself without a seat, a ministry or indeed a party. John Russell's invitation Gladstone found "singular" on the grounds that the Whig leader in seeking to form a cabinet had been primarily concerned with personnel not with policy;<sup>2</sup> at this juncture such pragmatism in others was unacceptable to Gladstone. He did, however, consider that Russell's new administration should be given a fair trial and that Peel's supporters should not immediately "assume beforehand an air of opposition".<sup>3</sup> What continued to rankle with Gladstone was that Peel's declared reluctance to contemplate a resumption of office in some way represented a dereliction of duty. He told Graham that statesmen of the stature of Peel "who have swayed the great moving forces of the State" were to be judged by the most exacting standards; in effect it was not open to them to decline "to fulfil what must fall to them in some contingency of public affairs - the country will demand that they who are the ablest shall not stand by inactive".<sup>4</sup> Graham answered by saying that Gladstone could have no conception of the virulence existing against Peel. In response to this Gladstone made a significant admission:

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 554

4. Ibid., p. 556

I said no that from having been out of Parliament during these debates my sense of these things was less lively & my position in some respects different - he replied "your position is quite different - you are free to take any course you please with perfect honour".<sup>1</sup>

Three days later Gladstone had the opportunity to take up these matters with Peel himself. Since in previous meetings Peel had proved uncommunicative he determined to take the initiative in the conversation.<sup>2</sup>

I led on from subject to subject - for I thought it my duty not to quit town at the end possibly of my political connection with Sir R. Peel - that is if he be determined to individualise himself - without giving the opportunity at least for free communication.<sup>3</sup>

He refused to accept Peel's statement that he was now hors de combat; his was too high and noble a reputation for that to be possible. Peel responded by spelling out in detail the immense physical and mental labours involved in holding the highest office over such a long period. Gladstone granted that Peel's efforts had indeed been prodigious but this was not the issue.

The question is <sup>not</sup> whether you are entitled to retire but whether after all you have done & in the position you occupy before the country you can remain in the H. of Commons as an isolated person & hold yourself aloof from the great movements of political forces which sway to & fro there.<sup>4</sup>

Peel maintained his resolution, nonetheless, remarking that if necessary he would "go out of Parliament", and the two men parted amicably but still at variance on this basic point.<sup>5</sup> Gladstone's disagreement with Peel was to cast a shadow over the next four years. His ambivalent attitude towards his leader he well expressed in a comment of 1855:

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.554

3. 13th July, 1846 Ibid., p.558

4. Ibid., p.559

5. Ibid., p.560

The spirit of wrath presided over the debates of 1846 - a time of deep and dark turmoil. The Minister well knew that he was saving the aristocracy by the very act for which he was reproached and vilified as its betrayer. Bentinck, Stanley, and Disraeli, 'tho very different combined to attack Peel. When in the midst of the struggle he came to feel its real intensity, he seems in his own mind to have substituted indifference about the destruction of the party which was so eminently HIS, for his previous excess of confidence in its being preserved. And it seems as if at the last when he hurled his eulogy upon Mr. Cobden in the teeth of his former friends and combined with this panegyric ... sharp expressions against the hypocrisy of monopolists his actions were unworthy of him. <sup>1</sup>

In Gladstone's view Peel had given as well as received provocation; it was a pity, he reflected, that Peel had not shown a "loftier self-command". <sup>2</sup>

Concerned as he was by all this Gladstone was not in a position to alter the situation as he might have liked. Even after his return to the Commons in 1847 as member for Oxford he felt unable to give himself entirely to politics. "The whole life time of the Parliament of 1847-52 was one, during which my political life was in partial abeyance." <sup>3</sup> This he later explained by reference to the distraction of family concerns. In November 1847 came the crash in the fortunes of his wife's family, the Glynnnes, and for a number of years he was committed to the task of saving the Hawarden and Oak Farm estates. The effort "constituted my daily and continuing care, while parliamentary action was only occasional". He added, however, that "in this continuing activity there was of necessity many interstices caused by public exigencies, not to speak of the anxious and at times absorbing demands of Church affairs, which never were more critical or less hopeful". <sup>4</sup>

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1. Add. Ms. 44745 f. 184

2. Ibid.

3. Autobiographica, i. p.65.

4. Ibid. Gladstone's family troubles at this time are described in Checkland, pp. 359. ff.

During the years down to Peel's death, therefore, Gladstone was in something of a political wasteland. In old age he reflected upon this:

The relations between Sir. R. Peel and his colleagues were never broken off under the Government of Lord J. Russell, but they were paralysed for general purposes by the exclusiveness of his regard to preventing the Protectionists from obtaining office. Hence all the effect of his high character, power and position was negative as regarded Lincoln, Herbert and myself who were not similarly tied to merely negative purposes. <sup>1</sup>

It was indeed at the time Gladstone's stated aim not to be negative on this issue. He told Lord Lyndhurst, who had made himself responsible for recreating Conservative unity in the House of Lords, that men of good will ought to give a fair hearing to the new Government and not take up an entrenched position in opposing. He added that "if so much of confidence is due to them, much more is it due towards friends from whom we have differed on the single question of free trade". Nonetheless, before considering the question of Conservative re-union what had first to be determined, he argued, was "our future course particularly with reference to the Irish questions and the Church".<sup>2</sup> Still influencing if not complicating his outlook was his constant thought for the Irish Church.

Yet however much he may have wished to have ordered the priorities of political debate so that the Irish Church question came first the realities of the situation after the fall of Peel determined that economic considerations took pride of place. Gladstone later admitted this and indeed recorded the stages by which he came to accept it. In a fragment entitled "Protectionism 1840-60" he observed that "from the mid-'forties" down to 1860 or

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1. Autobiographica, i. p. 72.

2. 18th July '46 Diaries iii, p.555

thereabouts the question of Protection mainly determined the parliamentary history of the country and it became my fate to bear a very active part in it".<sup>1</sup> This involved Gladstone in undergoing a conversion. It was noted earlier how he came to accept the repeal of the Corn Laws by convincing himself that Protection did not involve a matter of principle. A lifetime's acquaintance with economics changed his views: "For my part I am a Free Trader on moral no less than on economic grounds: for I think human greed and selfishness are interwoven with every thread of the Protective system".<sup>2</sup> He also proffered some interesting thoughts on the leading figures involved in the Protection issue. "There were some excellent points in the political creed of Lord Palmerston: but he was no genuine Free Trader... he pursued a course I think of latent hostility."<sup>3</sup> Indeed at the time of the formation of Russell's Government in 1846 Gladstone had referred to Palmerston as "the anti-progress minister".<sup>4</sup> Russell himself he regarded as remaining "as always loyal" to free trade. Gladstone believed the opposition to repeal to have depended principally on three men: George Bentinck, "a man of iron will, whose whole soul was in the matter and whose convictions were profoundly engaged": Lord Derby, "a man brilliantly endowed but not a man to fight doggedly for a losing cause"; the third "and not least remarkable" was Disraeli. "From first to last he simply played with the subject". It was Bentinck who down to his death in 1848 remained the "animating principle" of the movement. After his demise "the Protectionists were from thenceforth a house built upon the sand".<sup>5</sup>

Nearer the events it was Gladstone's considered view that it was not the Protectionists but Peel himself who by his actions after 1846 "postponed the extinction of Protection as a party symbol".<sup>6</sup>

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1. Autobiographica, i.p.74 (July 1894)
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.
  4. 10th July 1846, Diaries iii, p. 555
  5. Autobiographica, i. p. 75.
  6. 1855, Add. Ms. 44745 f. 193



Despite the brilliance of Disraeli's attacks upon Peel from 1843 onwards their ruthlessness sprang not from principle but from political disappointment and in any case "his oratory drew no recruits: the numerical, and on the whole the moral strength of the party was still entire".<sup>1</sup> As for Stanley, in Gladstone's estimation, he had taken no great part in the defence of the Corn Laws. Indeed, Gladstone likened Stanley's position to his own over Maynooth; he would resign as a minister because of his previous statements on the Corn Laws but he would support the Government as a private member. That Stanley then changed his mind and undertook to lead the protectionist lobby Gladstone ascribed to the pressure exerted on him by Bentinck. After the death of Bentinck, who had striven to the last to make protection a party principle, it ceased in reality to be one.

The actual opposition in both Houses was founded on the basis of Protection and at that time, it had no other distinctive sign or badge whatever. Protection was with some individuals in, and many out of Parliament, a principle:<sup>2</sup> but for the mass of its adherents it was no more than a cry.

Given this it became the duty of Free Traders not to oppose Derby but to bring him in. It was Peel who kept the Protectionists out of office until the end of his life. He prolonged "Protectionism by keeping the door of office shut upon Lord Derby". In this, Gladstone felt, "Peel so far misjudged the public interests, and in some small degree deducted from the immeasurable services which he had rendered to his country". Peel, over<sup>e</sup>estimating the strength of Protectionism, "Believed he was defending the aristocracy and gentry"; he anticipated a "deadly struggle" with Protection in which "the pillars of the Constitution would be shaken". Gladstone acknowledged Peel's "perfect honesty and inflexible courage" but criticised his lack of foresight.<sup>3</sup> In the period 1846-50 Peel had made it his main

1. Ibid. f. 182

2. Ibid. fos. 183, 193

3. Ibid. fos. 193-4

principle of parliamentary action "to support the Whigs (without becoming himself a Whig or Liberal) and to keep out the Protectionists". Gladstone held this to be "an hallucination" and added a comment which goes some way to explain his own attitude towards the Whigs at this stage:

In my estimation Protection was certain to thrive and flourish so long as it continued irresponsible and could only be brought to its deserved extinction by being subjected to the touch of office, of governing the country, when as by the wand of a magician it would at once dissolve. <sup>1</sup>

As Gladstone saw it Protection in the late 'forties had ceased to be a real issue in an economic or social sense. It had become a token but, since tokens in English politics were often invested with a significance beyond their intrinsic value, it would continue to be instrumental in determining party alignment. Gladstone's attitude to party was in the strict sense reactionary. He believed that down to 1845 parties had existed in their "normal" or their "natural and usual" state. Then came the Corn Laws and the destruction of that balance. From that point on "we have had properly speaking no parties; that is none in the best sense of the term: none compact and organised after the ancient manner".<sup>2</sup> The blame for the failure of the parties to return to their traditional forms Gladstone again attributed directly to Peel's behaviour after 1846.

The question may fairly be raised whether he would not have set as a greater luminary if he had been taken from us in 1846.. The course taken by him both postponed the extinction of Protection as a Party creed and symbol; and moreover has even to this day been probably the means of preventing Parliament from resuming its natural and usual organisation in the form of two political parties. Did he contemplate the dying out of party connection altogether and the substitution of philosophical for Parliamentary Government? <sup>3</sup>

Gladstone recorded this in 1855 seemingly unaware that the ambiguity of his own position during the 'forties had itself contributed to the state

1. Autobiographica, i.pp.75-6

2. "Party as it was and as it is", Add. Ms. 44745 f. 173

3. Ibid., fos. 190-92

of party politics which he claimed now distressed him. He might wish to see the parties return to their "natural" state in organised opposition to each other but, notwithstanding his censures of Peel, the manner of his own conversion to free trade was hardly calculated to impress shrewd contemporaries as other than a compromise.

What in practice Gladstone seemed willing to accept was an accommodation between groups and parties. Indeed the word accommodation was a favourite term of his to express his political approach.

Augustus Stafford wrote in 1848:

Gladstone tells me he is going to make a great speech in favour of Free Trade. "Don't you ever look back with regret upon your old principles?" I said, "They were never principles", he answered, "they were only accommodations".<sup>1</sup>

Reflecting on this period in his later years, Gladstone wrote, "I held by Protection during the Peel government as an accommodation to temporary circumstances".<sup>2</sup>

Just what Gladstone hoped to gain from such an approach is unclear. Whatever his political theorising in relation to party he does not appear to have held any exact view as to his own position in English politics at this time. He had chosen to remain in parliamentary life but beyond this central fact little else was certain. With the dramatic fracturing of the party over the Corn Laws the harmony and cohesion of Conservatism had disappeared. Peel's leadership during the next four years had deeply disappointed Gladstone and the question which posed itself in 1850 was where did Gladstone now stand in relation to party. His tentative answer was to declare an attachment to the Peelites as long as they continued "liberal in the sense of Peel, working out a liberal policy through the medium of the conservative party".<sup>3</sup>

1. In Whibley, op.cit., p.298. Stafford was M.P. for Northamptonshire N.

2. 1892, Autobiographica, i.pp. 48-9

3. Add, Ms. 44778 f.5.

In reality what this amounted to was no more than a cautious but vague pragmatism. "I cannot form to myself any other conception of my duty in Parliament except the simple one of acting independently, without faction, .... on all questions as they arise".<sup>1</sup> He saw too many obstacles in his path for him to make a firm commitment to one party or even "nucleus of a party". Still less, despite the various overtures he had received since 1846, did he feel able to contemplate leadership: "it is better that I should not be the head or leader even of my own contemporaries," he argued, claiming that there were others better fitted by reason of wealth or birth for such a role.<sup>2</sup>

Gladstone's attempt to disqualify himself from leadership on these grounds has very much the appearance of an afterthought for he admitted that three or four years before, "while we still felt as if Peel were our actual chief in politics," he had anticipated that in time because of his own performance "in office and in parliament, the first place might naturally fall to me". However, Peel's ineffectual leadership of the Conservatives in the late 'forties and the consequent party disruption had seriously altered his own outlook:

Since we have become more disorganised and I have had little sense of union except with the men of my own standing, and I have felt more of the actual state of things and how this or that would work in the House of Commons I have come to be satisfied in my own mind that, if there was a question whether there should be a leader and who it should be, it would be much better that either Lincoln or Herbert should assume that post: whatever share of the ~~more~~ work should fall to me.<sup>3</sup>

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1. W.E.G. to C.G., 22nd Feb.'50, Bassett, p. 80.
  2. Ibid., p. 80.
  3. Ibid., p. 81.

## Chapter II

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These two terrible years have really displaced and uprooted my heart from the Anglican Church, seen as a personal and living Church in the body of its priests and members, these misfortunes have almost come upon me, or else if they have not, may it be God's grace that prevents them. They may yet succeed in bringing about my ruin, body and soul. 1.

The depths of bitter feeling which the events of 1850-51 created in Gladstone demand attention. These eighteen months had for him been black indeed. Peel's death, the fatal illness of his favourite daughter, the scandal attaching to his sister Helen, the Lincoln divorce proceedings, the Gorham controversy, and the defection to Rome of his closest friends, Manning and Hope, combined to unnerve him, at least temporarily. When it is remembered that this was also the period in which he made his momentous visits to the prisons of Naples there is good reason for seeing the public and private tragedies that afflicted him as instrumental in giving another shift to his political development. With hindsight there is a temptation to concentrate on a politician's career as if politics was necessarily the central strand, the major dynamic in his growth. With a personality as complex as Gladstone's it is surely an error to speak of specifically political issues.<sup>2</sup> The intensity with which Gladstone worked was often directly related to the degree of strain experienced in his private life. Work was a means of lessening tension. Gladstone came close to being overborne by the death from

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1. 19th Aug.'51, Diaries iv.p.353. (Editor's translation of WEG's original Italian)

2. A serious weakness in Morley is that in undertaking the Life he agreed not to treat in detail of Gladstone's spiritual and religious values. It may be observed also that Feuchtwanger limits himself to writing " a political biography ". Preface, p.x.

meningitis of his daughter, Jessy.<sup>1</sup> He preserved his stability by a process of what would now be called sublimation. His already prodigious work-rate increases markedly in the months immediately following her death. It is noticeable, too, that his rescue work among London prostitutes reaches a new level of dedication during this same period.<sup>2</sup> At such times the strength of his own spiritual beliefs becomes apparent. Everything is suffused with his religious outlook. Ironically, even though he had abandoned his hopes of employing a parliamentary career in the service of the Church and had, thereby, disappointed the hopes of those who had looked to him to become the leader of a combative Church party in the Commons, it was Church issues that remained the greatest stimulant to him and which, when unresolved, gave him the greatest anxiety. This is especially apparent in the years immediately following Peel's passing.

No matter how unhappy many of the followers of Peel had been with their leader's reluctance to seize the political initiative in the years 1846-50 so long as he led them there was at least outwardly, an identifiable Peelite party. With Peel's death in the summer of 1850 the very real question arose as to whether his supporters still constituted a party. What did they now represent? Lord Lincoln believed they were destined to be a lasting and growing party that would "attract the best men from all sides, and after a time govern the country".<sup>3</sup> Gladstone, although he considered that the Peelites were certainly not prepared to be absorbed into either the Whigs or the Protectionists, had no such hope or expectation. Aberdeen appeared to share Gladstone's views while Sir James Graham looked forward to a renewal of the original alliance with the Whigs or Liberals.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Gladstone's detailed account of her illness and death and their harrowing effect upon him is in the Diaries (April and May 1850, vol. iv. pp. 196-215) and in Add. Ms. 44738 ff. 122-48.  
See also J. Marlow, Mr. & Mrs. Gladstone, London, 1977, c. 5
  2. See the journal entries, May to Aug. 1850, Diaries, iv. pp. 207-34.
  3. Autobiographica i, p. 71
  4. Ibid.

As to Gladstone's own position in all this, Cornwall Lewis observed:

Upon Gladstone the death of Peel will have the effect of removing a weight from a spring - he will forward more and take more part in discussion. The general opinion is that Gladstone will renounce his free trade opinions, and become leader of the protectionists. <sup>1</sup>

Lewis's error in this regard is easily understood for his view derived from an over-estimate of the significance of Gladstone's loyalty to Peel after 1846. As was observed in the preceding chapter, Gladstone's allegiance to Peel was far from absolute after that date. "I did not think that the death of Sir R. Peel at the time when it occurred was a great calamity so far as the chief question of our internal politics was concerned."<sup>2</sup> When taxed by his father immediately after Peel's death on the rumours concerning his becoming "the leader in parliament of the conservative party" Gladstone replied that the rumours were "mere speculation". He agreed with the general supposition that "Sir Robert Peel's life and continuance in parliament were of themselves powerful obstacles to the general reorganisation of the conservative party" but even with Peel removed he still saw great difficulties in the way of reunion.<sup>3</sup> Significantly, Gladstone viewed the recent parliamentary debate on the Don Pacifico affair as indicating how small were the chances for the present of the conservative factions forgetting their differences. In his first major parliamentary speech on foreign policy <sup>4</sup> Gladstone had roundly attacked Palmerston's chauvinistic handling of the issue but had been appalled at the substantial vote for Palmerston in the division.<sup>5</sup> He recorded in his journal:

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1. First quoted in Sir G. F. Lewis, Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir George Cornwall Lewis, London, 1870. p. 226
  2. Memo of Nov. 1876, Add. Ms. 44778 f. 76. It should be noted that this statement does not tally with a remark he made to Manning shortly after Peel's death. "The melancholy end of Sir R. Peel's life will produce of necessity great effects in public affairs, which it is not easy at this moment to forecast." 8th July, '50. Add. Ms. 44248 f. 78.
  3. WEG to John Gladstone, 9th July 1850, in Morley i. pp. 373-4.
  4. H, cxii, 543-90. First, that is, if we accept Gladstone's own testimony. "It was in the Greek debate of 1850 that I first meddled in speech with foreign affairs, to which I had heretofore paid the slightest possible attention." Sept. 1897, Autobiographica, i. p. 67 see Diaries iii, pp. 29, 130-36, 276; Add. Ms. 44734 f. 13.
  5. The motion in support of Palmerston was carried, 310-264, H. cxii 739.

Sir R. Peel made a sound and good speech ... Disraeli was below his mark though he seemed in earnest. Lord John about par. The division was disgusting, not on account of the numbers simply but considering where they came from. 1.

The last part of the remark referred to those Peelites who had either voted for Palmerston or had abstained:

The majority of the government was made up out of our ranks, partly by people staying away and partly by some twenty who actually voted with the government. By far the greater portion, I am sorry to say, of both sets of persons were what are called Peelites, and not protectionists ....

The House of Commons is almost equally divided, indeed, between those professing liberal and those professing conservative politics: but the late division showed how ill the latter could hang together, even when all those who had any prominent station among them in any sense were united. 2

Writing to Guizot, then resident in England, Gladstone observed:

The majority of the House of Commons, I am convinced, was with us in heart and in conviction: but fear of inconveniences attending the removal of a ministry which there is no regularly organised Opposition ready to succeed, carried the day, beyond all substantial doubt, against the merits of the particular question.

It remains to hope that the demonstration which has been made may not be without its effect upon the tone of Lord Palmerston's future proceedings. 3

Gladstone's opposition to Palmerston in the Don Pacifico debate is customarily looked upon as the first open breach between the two men. What is often overlooked is the nature of Gladstone's antipathy to Palmerston which may have as much to do with style as with substance. Just as Gladstone's objections to Newman in the theological disputes of the day were concerned with the manner rather than the matter of Newman's case <sup>4</sup>, so Gladstone reserved his

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1. 28th June, 1850, Diaries, iv, p. 222. See also 23rd Nov. 1850, p. 276.
  2. WEG to John Gladstone, July 1850, in Morley, i, pp. 372, 374.
  3. 13th July 1850, in "Seven Letters from Gladstone to Guizot", J.M.H. xi, 1939 pp. 188-89. An inaccurate form of part of this letter is in Morley i, p. 371.
  4. See, e.g., WEG to Manning, Oct. 1843, Add. Ms. 44247, ff. 172-73.



strongest criticism of Palmerston for the poor tone of his proceedings. At the same time Gladstone could not deny to himself his deep respect for Palmerston's abilities as a politician which he described in such terms as "extraordinary" and "masterful".<sup>1</sup> This ambiguity in Gladstone's attitude, a compound of revulsion and admiration, is useful to bear in mind in endeavouring to understand his vacillating behaviour in the 'fifties when he was invited on a number of occasions to serve with or under Palmerston. The question of style is of real significance. In an age lacking clear political lineaments manner and tone take on a special importance. It is not inappropriate that the 'fifties and 'sixties should be commonly remembered as the age of Palmerston. As Blake has it:

A parliament to which successive general elections failed to return a party with an absolute majority required as Prime Minister an adept at the politics of consensus. This was just what Palmerston was ... he had all the attributes required by the age; except, perhaps, one - high moral tone.<sup>2</sup>

Palmerston's deficiency in this respect coincided with Gladstone's strength. Throughout his career Gladstone possessed an unerring talent for investing all that he did with high moral tone. He had an instinct for such things. It was this which rendered him so different from Palmerston (and, of course, from Disraeli) and helps to explain why he felt unable to work with them even when there was no apparent political issue dividing them. When examining the intricacies of Gladstone's thought it may well be that matters of tone are as important to consider as matters of principle.

In a recent major study of the Peelite party it has been observed that in the months immediately after Peel's death it was the trio of Gladstone, Lincoln, and Herbert who were to do most to keep the Peelites together.<sup>3</sup> This is true up to a point but overstates

1. See, e.g., WEG to Manning. 26th June 1850, Add.Ms.44248, f.76 and Diaries, 25th June 1850, iv. p.221.

2. R.Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, p.92

3. Conacher, Peelites, p. 71.

the position for, even had they desired it, the leading Peelites were not always capable of concerted action. As Gladstone later recorded:

In the autumn of 1850, the few leading Peelites were rather widely dispersed: I had repaired to Naples on account of a question of health in our family. It was certainly remarkable that when Lord J. Russell produced his most unhappy scheme of legislation against ecclesiastical titles ... all those Peelites with either little or absolutely no communication determined against it. There were Lord Aberdeen, Sir James Graham, Lord Lincoln now Duke of Newcastle, Sidney Herbert, and Mr. Cardwell: perhaps one or two more, and I think the opposition made by the minority in the House of Commons ... was a creditable opposition and though it was not successful at the moment ... it crippled and paralysed the new law morally. 1.

The high quality of Gladstone's speeches against the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill <sup>2</sup> has led historians to allocate him a central role in the affair which he did not in fact play. He was in Italy when Wiseman issued his pastoral letter in October, 1850, and when John Russell made public his notorious Durham letter in November.<sup>3</sup> Gladstone did, indeed, follow the crisis with great interest from afar<sup>4</sup> but it was not until his return to England in February 1851 that he was able to take up the cudgels and by then the campaign against Russell's bill, unsuccessful as it turned out, was well advanced. The Ecclesiastical Titles Bill was introduced on 7th February, 1851, and had been before the Commons for some three weeks before Gladstone's

1. Sept. 1897, Autobiographica i, pp. 71-2
2. H. cxiv, 1144, 1312; cxv, 565-68. The peroration of Gladstone's two and a quarter hour speech of 26th Mar. is given in Morley, i, 411-14. Both Morley and Magnus rank this speech as among Gladstone's greatest; see Morley i, p. 411, and Magnus p. 101.
3. Gladstone was out of England from the middle of Oct. 1850 to late Feb. 1851. See Diaries iv, pp. 245-310. A Papal Brief of 29th Sept. '50 recreated the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England. Cardinal Wiseman's indiscreetly worded pastoral letter, "Out of the Flaminian Gate", lauding the event, was published on 17th Oct. '50. Russell's letter to the Bishop of Durham appeared in The Times on 7th Nov. '50. For illuminating studies of different aspects of the affair see Fr. Gordon Albion, "The Restoration of the Hierarchy", in The English Catholics, 1850-1950, (ed. G.A. Beck), London, 1950; E.R. Norman, Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England, London 1968; pp. 52-79; J.B. Conacher, "The Politics of the 'Papal Aggression' Crisis 1850-51", in The Canadian Historical Association Report, 1959, pp. 13-27. The letters of Wiseman and Russell appear in English Historical Documents, vol. xii (i), pp. 366, 368.
4. See Diaries, iv, pp. 278, 282, 285, 292 and Lathbury i, pp. 119-24.

re-appearance in the House enabled him to undertake his brilliant but belated defence of what he termed "the principle of religious Freedom".<sup>1</sup>

What gives special significance to the "papal aggression" crisis and to Gladstone's role in it is not simply the public and parliamentary reaction to the resumption of certain Roman Catholic episcopal titles but its place in the larger Tractarian debate which still prevailed in England. It is interesting how men frequently lined up for or against Russell's bill largely in accordance with their attitudes towards the Tractarian issue. In this respect, Gladstone's involvement, real or supposed, with the Tractarians is peculiarly important. James Graham writing to Sidney Berbert made this remarkable observation:

Lord John's letter was hasty, intemperate and ill-advised. He sought to catch some fleeting popularity at the expense of the principles of his political life; and in his eagerness to strike a blow at "Gladstonianism" he forgot that the "superstitious mummeries" which he enumerates are part of the creed of one-half of the British Army, and of eight millions of his fellow subjects. 2

That Gladstone himself suspected Russell of some such motive is suggested by his own comment of this time.

I suspect he has more rocks and breakers ahead than he reckoned upon when he dipped his pen in gall to smite first the Pope, but most those, who not being Papists, are such traitors and fools as really to mean something when they say "I believe in one Holy Catholic Church". 3

There spoke not the Peelite but the High Churchman, the Puseyite as others were wont to call him, who saw the papal aggression issue as a campaign in the war which the Church was still waging against Erastianism, a war, moreover, which had gone so badly recently as a result of the decision in the Gorham case. Gladstone's response to the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill was thus not primarily political but it held a political

1. II. cxv, 566.

2. In Stanmore, i. p. 133.

3. WEG to W.C. James, Dec., 1850, in Lathbury, i.p. 122.

significance. The venom with which Russell and the Whigs avowed their basic anti-Catholicism and reaffirmed their essentially Erastian view of the English Church<sup>1</sup> made it impossible, at least for the present, for someone like Gladstone to contemplate joining them.

To appreciate more fully the nature of Gladstone's response in all this it is necessary to understand his thinking in regard to the whole Church and State question, that abiding issue which never ceased to consume him and which had such a bearing on his political orientation. The most striking feature of his journal and of his correspondence at this period is the preponderant place held by religious and Church considerations; it has to be observed that his concept of the scope and validity of political action as it related both to his own behaviour and to that of Parliament was in a state of constant adjustment. The problem which had confronted him in the early thirties when he first entered politics, namely; how to modify his religious expectations in order to relate to secular realities, continued to beset him. To Gladstone the great religious issues of the day, Tractarianism, "the Church in danger", Erastianism, were no mere theological abstractions. The propriety of his own career, indeed the purposefulness of his own life, he regarded as being integrally bound up with them. Something of the intellectual, not to say spiritual, difficulty in which he found himself may be gauged by the following reflections from the late 'forties.

The State will adhere longer . . . to religion in a vague than in a defined form: but I for one am not favourable to tearing up the seamless garment of the Christian Faith in order to patch the ragged cloak of the State.

Keep religion entire and you secure at least to the individual man his refuge. Ask therefore on every occasion not what best maintains the religious repute of the State but what is least menacing to the integrity of Catholic belief. 2

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1. There is an illuminating treatment of the Whig attitude towards religion in D. Southgate, The Passing of the Whigs, 1832-86, London, 1962, pp. 218-27.
  2. 19th June '45, Diaries, iii, p. 462.

At the time of his first Oxford candidacy in 1847 he confided to

Manning:

I feel that I am in great peril viz, the peril of either defeat or success (& I should not care which it was) as the reputed representative of mere party. They may succeed in fastening that character upon me: and if they do it will incapacitate me, I fear, for serving the Church at any time in Parliament. Not that this is done yet, and I am on the whole hopeful about it.... but it all stands as it were upon the fineness of a razor's edge. 1

What is particularly notable about this election campaign is that it was fought out over primarily religious issues. Despite Gladstone's wish "not to be the instrument or symbol of a religious war" 2

his relations with the Pusey camp were made much of by his opponents and his concern over the interaction of religion and politics becomes easier to understand.<sup>3</sup>

It was a serious campaign. The constituency, much to its honour, did not stoop to fight the battle on the ground of Protection. But it was fought and that fiercely, on religious grounds. There was an incessant discussion, and I may say dissection, of my character and position in reference to the Oxford Movement. This cut very deep, for it was a discussion which each member of the constituency was entitled to carry on for himself. The upshot was favourable. The Liberals supported me gallantly, so did many zealous Churchmen apart from politics, and a good number of moderate men 4.

The fundamental divergence between his liberalising tendencies in politics and his conservatism in Church matters he hinted at when he added, "my continuing parliamentary lines kept the Tories eagerly in

1. WEG to Manning, 24th May '47. Add. Ms. 44247 f.338.

2. 12th May '47, Diaries, iii, p. 619

3. On 24th May '47 the Manning Herald suggested that the recent conversion to Rome of his sister, Helen, was directly attributable to Gladstone's influence. He wrote to the paper stoutly rejecting the charge, Add. Ms. 44365. fos. 208-10. See Diaries, (28th May '47) iii, p. 623.

4. Autobiographica, i, p. 64

In June 1847 Gladstone made a public, albeit anonymous, statement of his attitude towards the Roman Church in his review article of "From Oxford to Rome", a book obviously relating to Newman. In his review Gladstone firmly defended the English Church; while acknowledging "the moral grandeur" of the seceders to Rome "in their readiness to abandon all for conscience' sake" he saw them as woefully misguided. The "secessions or perversions" were "a sign of the times" generally; "they are not a just index of the tendencies of the Church". Q.R. June 1847, pp.132,144,147. These observations did not prevent him from being attacked as a Puseyite throughout the election campaign. WEG had cause to feel aggrieved at this since in Mar. '47 he had condemned Pusey's "neutral policy with regard to Rome". See Diaries iii, p.604. See W.R.Ward, Victorian Oxford. London. 1965 pp.141 ff.

arms against me".<sup>1</sup> Gladstone had been the only prominent lay parliamentary figure of the period to have had as his primary political objective the service of the Church. From 1845 on he appeared to be forsaking this ideal as being incapable of realization. In doing so he deeply disappointed the hopes of those who had begun to look upon him as the spokesman of a genuine Church party in the Commons, one who would lead the rearguard action against the growing forces of secularism. A representative figure in this respect was Christopher Wordsworth, the first principal of Trinity College, Glenalmond.<sup>2</sup> At the time of Gladstone's volte face over the Maynooth question in 1845 Wordsworth had discussed Church and State matters with him and had reported dismally on their outcome:

I fear he is quite stunned with the din of the popular cry of the day in the House of Commons. He is much to be pitied. If he had one or two to work with him, the country might yet be saved. 3

He sent Gladstone a copy of one of his sermons whose title, Individual and National Duties, was a broad enough hint to the erring politician. In his acknowledgement Gladstone accepted that his own recent actions must have excited his correspondent's disapproval. He did not deny that his behaviour had involved a departure from what he himself had previously defined as "the true policy of a State in its best condition" but he asked Wordsworth to bear in mind the developments within society generally and parliament particularly which had necessitated the change.

1. Autobiographica, i. p. 64.
2. The college for training Scottish Episcopal clergy which Tractarians greatly admired and of which W.E.G. was a co-founder. See W.E.G.'s correspondence with James Hope in E. Ornsby (ed.), Memoirs of J. Hope-Scott, London, 1884, i. pp. 206-82.
3. C. Wordsworth to Mrs. Wordsworth, April, 1846, in J.H. Overton and E. Wordsworth, Christopher Wordsworth, London, 1888 p. 115. Also, Add. Ms. 44361 f.71.

Such departure can be avoided until the national life, in its relation to religion, has sunk to a certain point but no longer. From a nation so divided as we are, and so little faithful to the capabilities of our own institutions, we cannot, I fear, at least I cannot, longer ask or expect the return to a standard' so much higher than our moral state. 1.

How little this justification satisfied Wordsworth was revealed in 1847 when, during the Oxford election campaign, he spelled out his reasons for declining to support Gladstone's candidature. While he held great admiration for Gladstone's abilities and looked back with pleasure to their acquaintance as undergraduates he could not, he declared, give his vote to Gladstone without being unfaithful to his family motto, "Veritas". Gladstone had chosen a course "utterly inconsistent with the true principles of the Constitution" and had thereby forfeited Wordsworth's support.<sup>2</sup>

In response to an attempt by James Hope to convince him that he could vote for Gladstone with a clear conscience Wordsworth submitted an analysis of Gladstone's development which indicates how high had been the expectations of him and how profound the disappointment at his failure. For many years, Wordsworth told Hope, he had thought and spoken of Gladstone "as the man to save the country". Indeed he had believed that it was Gladstone's "mission from God" to save it in the only way that it could be saved - "upon the principles of the Constitution in Church and State". But in the evil hour Gladstone's faith had failed him; "Fascinated by the practical ability and power of Sir Robert Peel", he lost sight of his own position. Had Gladstone remained true to his own beliefs instead of adopting the "no-principles" of Peel and the Commons "how different would have been his position, and the position of Parties at the present time".<sup>3</sup>

1. WEG to C. Wordsworth, Dec. 1845, Lathbury, i. p.74.
2. C.Wordsworth to S.T.Coleridge, 31st May, 1847, Add. Ms.44214, fos. 312-13
3. C.Wordsworth to J. Hope, 6th July 1847, ibid. f. 315. Hope forwarded Wordsworth's letters to Gladstone with the comment that they were "movements of a state of mind now nearly unknown".  
26th Aug. 1847, ibid., f. 310.

Wordsworth noted with sorrow that Gladstone claimed that, "moving in the turmoil of politics", he could see the need for "political expediences or necessities", the understanding of which was denied to those not directly concerned in parliamentary affairs. Rejecting this and referring to the principles which Gladstone had originally formulated in his books, Wordsworth appealed "from Gladstone, the member of an ungodly House of Commons and colleague of Sir Robert Peel, to the same Gladstone beneath the shades of Hagley, the wise philosopher and pious divine".<sup>1</sup> Less than a year before Gladstone had told him that he had abandoned his original principles because they now commanded so little support, especially among the clergy. Wordsworth had found this an unreasonable assumption and had informed him that "the support was there, and only wanting to be called forth".<sup>2</sup> If only Gladstone would return to principles Wordsworth would, with greater joy than he could express, cast his vote for him. During the past fifteen years a great change had come over the spirit of the Church, "a change still going forward, and which, if we have but one man of power and principle to fight the battle as Gladstone might fight it in the House of Commons, may bring about still more astonishing results in the next fifteen years". Since, however, Gladstone showed little sign of a willingness to put principle before expediency Wordsworth was not prepared to give his support to one so "faithless".<sup>3</sup>

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1. A reference to Gladstone's Church Principles Considered in their Results, published in 1840, in which the author in his dedication described the book as having been written beneath the shades of Hagley.
  2. Add. Ms. 44214 f. 316. This raises an important point. Gladstone frequently bemoaned the lack of leadership of the English bishops in vital matters; if he could convince himself that a divinely appointed episcopate was prepared to accept the encroachment of the State it would greatly ease his conscience regarding his own compromises.
  3. Ibid.



Not all Churchmen took this harsh view of Gladstone. The Bishop of Salisbury when asked whether he would support him described Gladstone as "the deepest, truest, most attached, most effective advocate for the Church".<sup>1</sup> F.D.Maurice in response to the same query declared him to be "an honest man, no disciple of expediency".<sup>2</sup> These men, of course, had not shared Wordsworth's expectations of Gladstone nor, moreover, did they judge him by Wordsworth's exacting standards, such standards, it may be noted, as earlier in his career Gladstone himself had no less rigorously applied. Another figure of note approached the matter of the Oxford election from a somewhat different angle. John Keble, worried lest Gladstone's association with Tractarianism should count against him in the campaign, felt it his "unquestionable duty" to do all he could for him. "I should think it a regular blessing to the University if he is elected," wrote Keble.

He is Pusey in a blue coat, and what more can be said for any layman ... I am so sure of him that I don't mind here and there a speech or vote that I can't explain. I only wish I could do more for him, but, of course, the more I interfere the more harm I should do. 3

In later years Keble found it difficult to sustain his confidence in Gladstone. Troubled by Gladstone's apparent willingness over the years to subordinate Church to secular interests, Keble, who had once thought of him as the man "raised up to help and guide us in the crisis when a new Concordat will have to be framed",<sup>4</sup> had by the middle sixties developed grave doubts concerning Gladstone's orientation.

1. 8th July 1847, in G.W.E.Russell, The Rt. Hon. W.E.Gladstone, London, 1891, p. 85. The Bishop, nonetheless, thought it inadvisable for W.E.G. to stand for Oxford at this juncture. Diaries, iii, p. 619.
2. F.D.Maurice to Cowley Powles, July 1847, in F. Maurice, The Life of F.D.Maurice, London, 1884, i. p.439
3. Keble to Thomas Keble, Aug. 1847, in G. Battiscombe, John Keble, A Study in Limitations, London, 1963, p.288.
4. J. Keble to WEG, 26th Mar. 1864, Add. Ms. 44402, f. 217.

What he regarded as Gladstone's betrayal of the Church over such issues as the revival of Convocation, the abolition of Church rate, concessions to Nonconformity, and, in particular, the reform of Oxford University, led him not to doubt Gladstone's personal virtues but to "suspect him on the grounds of his connection with the party called Liberal".<sup>1</sup>

When, despite the difficulties of the campaign and the reservations among certain of the influential Oxford electors, Gladstone was duly returned to Parliament as second member in August 1847 one of the first issues he faced in the Commons raised in an acute form the very question of Church and State relations which had pre-occupied so much of his current thinking. In December John Russell, in an attempt to allow Baron de Rothschild to take his seat for the city of London to which he had been elected, introduced a motion allowing Jews to swear an amended parliamentary oath, excluding the phrase "on the faith of a Christian". Notwithstanding strong opposition the motion was carried in the Commons, only to be rejected by the Lords.<sup>2</sup> Gladstone spoke at some length in favour of Russell's proposal but in his journal he recorded the ambiguity which he clearly felt. For the author of The State in its Relations with the Church it was a strange stand to have made.

Spoke under an hour for Id. J. Russell's motion. It is a painful decision to come to. But the only substantive doubt it raises is about remaining in Parliament. And it is truly & only the Church that holds me in there though she may seem to some to draw me from it. 3

In supporting Russell Gladstone ran quite counter to the prevailing mood of his new constituents. Indeed, shortly after the

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1. J. Keble to A.C. Wilson, 3rd. Dec. 1864, Add. Ms. 44410 f. 17.
  2. H, xcv, 1282, 1397; xcvi, 653.
  3. 16th Dec. '47. Diaries, iii, p. 676.

introduction of the motion Convocation, represented by the University's senior M.P., Sir Robert Inglis, had presented a petition to Parliament against the admission of Jews.<sup>1</sup> It was feared that Russell's bill with its direct challenge to the essentially Protestant Christian nature of the constitution implied a real threat to Oxford's own Anglican monopoly. Gladstone was well aware of the University's fears in this regard and that he could persist in lines of action inimical to her interests helps to explain the love-hate relationship that existed between him and his constituents during the eighteen years that he represented Oxford.<sup>2</sup> What made his behaviour appear even more blatant was that six years earlier he had first spoken against, and then moved a rejection of, a declaration in favour of admitting Jews to corporate offices.<sup>3</sup> He had written at the time: "The greatest object in opposing this Bill is to lay a ground for opposing a Parlt'y Bill".<sup>4</sup> That Robert Inglis had acted as teller with him at the subsequent division threw his betrayal into greater relief.<sup>5</sup>

Gladstone, however, with some justice, could claim that in the prelude to his election he had given forewarning of his altered attitude and likely behaviour on such issues.

It is now impossible to regulate the connection between Church and State in this country by reference to an abstract principle. I have stood for that abstract principle as long as I could... but when the principle as such is gone I will be no party to applying it occasionally, by dint of the aid of circumstances, against particular bodies. 6

1. See W.R. Ward, op. cit., p. 146.
2. In his introduction to the Diaries Matthew remarks that WEG's association with his constituency was "from the first acerbic". (p.xxxiii)
3. H. lvii, 754.
4. 31st. Mar. '41. Diaries, iii, p. 94.
5. H. lvii, 766
6. WEG to R.J. Phillimore, 15th Feb. 1847, Lathbury, ii.p.7.

It is absurd to suppose there is no relation between a man's private views and the character he proposes to fill in Parliament. But though there is a connection there is also a distinction. Some things, which we may hold and even cherish dearly for ourselves, we may yet feel ought to stand apart from our representative capacity. 1

The members for the Universities are in an imperfect sense, but still a true one, representatives of the Church in the House of Commons ...

We have come upon a time when a merely or mainly obstructive policy will be fatal to the Church .....

Whatever good can be done for her in Parliament must be done by influence and moral strength ... to adopt a merely negative and obstructive policy is the abandonment of her function, which requires her indeed to check and control, but also to teach and guide the country, to join herself, for the better pursuit of her spiritual work, with the course of external events, and so direct it as to obtain from it the greatest good.

This is not political expediency as opposed to religious principle. 2

After his election but before the issue was presented to Parliament Gladstone stated his views on the specific, Jewish question.

I do not value much the theoretical distinction between Christian and no Christian, so thoroughly has that name as a constitutional designation been reduced to shadow. And the whole question of the secularization of the State must in my opinion be considered in connection with the organisation of the Church. If the Church is to be petrified and the Grahamic view established as normal, I think we cannot but oppose the Jews; but if directly or indirectly we can add weight to the claim of the Church to have what is essential to her development done for her, by consenting to the admission of the Jews, I for one am ready. 3.

Gladstone's reference to "the Grahamic view" is of special interest. Down to this time firm political allies, he and Graham had become estranged over Church matters. Gladstone complained of Graham's "destructive" and "conservative" principles in regard to the English Episcopate, the reform of the Church, and the concessions to be granted to Non-Conformity and other groups.<sup>4</sup> As Gladstone saw it the role

1. WEG to J.S.Wortley, 17th June 1847, ibid., ii, p.11.

2. WEG to R.J.Phillimore, 24th June 1847, ibid., ii, pp. 12-13

3. WEG to Lord Lyttelton, 10 th. Sept. 1847, ibid., i.pp.79-80

4. See Diaries, 10th May 1850, p.209.

of the Church in an age of reform lay in "bringing back to Christianity the millions who have lost all but its name, not by means drawn from the State, not by encroachment upon the civil rights of Dissenters" but by reshaping Church forms to meet the new needs. As to the Jewish problem Gladstone declared himself willing to take a cautious, pragmatic view of the question of "the abandonment of religious tests for parliamentary duty".<sup>1</sup>

The caution with which he approached the question is revealing. As late as September 1847 he had not made up his mind how he would vote.<sup>2</sup> At no time did he embrace the issue with enthusiasm, eagerly asserting a principle; indeed, it was his opinion that the whole matter of "whether Jews, and other non-Christian religionists ought to sit in Parliament" should be left to the detailed deliberation of the Lords rather than receive summary treatment in the Commons. Since, however, Russell's bill could not be prevented from coming before the House Gladstone drew towards a reluctant acceptance of it.

If we are to have for the Church a Grahamic or petrified policy, sorry as I am to use such words, then I am tooth and nail against the Jews: but I should much prefer on the whole, though not without compunctions, finding myself in a condition to support them and others with them since I conclude we shall not make two bites of the cherry. 3

Ironically, in view of the anti-Puseyite smear campaign which had been conducted against Gladstone during the election, it was Pusey himself who appeared most deeply offended by his support of the restoration of Jewish rights. Pusey wrote angrily to Gladstone suggesting he had betrayed a cause; had he known or suspected that Gladstone would make such a gesture towards the Jews he would not have voted for him.

1. WEG to Sir James Graham, 21st July 1847, ibid., i.pp.75-79
2. WEG to Lincoln, 13th Sept. '47. Add. Ms.44262 f. 105
3. Ibid., f. 106

Gladstone might do well, he was told, to consider whether he ought not to vacate his seat; Parliamentary life was not good for his soul.<sup>1</sup>

Moved by criticism from such a revered source Gladstone had his speech in the Commons reproduced in pamphlet form and added a long preface in which he sought to clarify his position further. The essence of his argument was in keeping with the new position on Church and State questions which his journals and private correspondence indicate he was adopting:

"The application of the immutable principles of justice to the shifting relations of society must be determined by successive generations for themselves". Without abandoning first principles those members of society in any way involved in public life must in their dealings have close regard to "the political temper of the age"<sup>2</sup>. A point of considerable interest emerges here. In writing his first book, The State in its Relations with the Church, Gladstone had relied considerably on the advice of his friends, Manning and Hope. Similarly in reaching his declared attitude on the Jewish issue he owed much to his discussions with Hope. In an extraordinary passage in his journal Gladstone wrote of Hope as the medium through whom he learned the will of God.

At the time of the Oxford election campaign he recorded:

I therefore acceded to Hope's advice .... I think that the way to find the Divine guidance is not always to consult ones [sic] own impulse, but to follow that judgement wh offers the best guarantees of soundness. 3.

It was Hope who had spelled out the argument that Gladstone was now to use:

To symbolise the Christianity of the House of Commons in its present form is to substitute a new Church and Creed for the old Catholic one, and as this is a delusion I would do nothing to countenance it. Better have the legislature declared what it really is - not professedly Christian - and then let the Church claim those rights and that independence which nothing but the pretence of Christianity can entitle the legislature to withhold from it. In this view the emancipation of the Jews must tend to that of the Church. 4

1. E.B. Pusey to WEG, 13th Dec. 1847, Add. Ms. 44281 f. 53.

2. Substance of a Speech on the Motion of Lord John Russell, 1843, pp. 5-22. How little Gladstone's apologia had lessened the opposition to him at Oxford was indicated by the outburst against him when he went there to receive an honorary degree in July '40. See, Diaries, iv, p. 47.

3. 19th May '47, Diaries, iii. p. 621

4. J.R. Hope to WEG Dec. 1847, Add. Ms. 44214 f. 19.

In short what Hope was urging was acceptance of a progressive measure for conservative not to say reactionary ends. Indeed, he made that very claim; "On the Jewish question my bigotry makes me Liberal".<sup>1</sup> It is this principle, the acceptance of reform in order to conserve, that is the most marked and consistent feature of Gladstone's own thinking. What emerges from his actions and statements regarding the Church and State question in this period is not idealism, at least not in the sense in which that term is usually employed. Although he specifically denied the change of expediency he was engaged in an act of religious retrenchment, giving up those Church claims which in the prevailing climate could no longer be defended without entailing greater mischiefs. He accepted the technique of allowing change in lesser things as a means of conserving the greater. Thus he could argue that in regard to his support for the Jewish Disabilities bill: "I am deeply and energetically convinced that I have acted for the Church, and that any other vote from me would have been decidedly injurious to her".<sup>2</sup> His attitude is very much in the tradition of those Tories of the 'thirties who had accepted the Reform Bill as a way of assuaging the demand for reform on a much wider front. It was this outlook that had led him to complain of Graham's "destructive conservative principles". It has been argued elsewhere that Gladstone's involvement with Italy at this stage in his career served to confirm his "firm, yet reasoning and flexible conservatism - a belief in tradition, but also in reform".<sup>3</sup> This is a fertile observation but, while not disputing the claim, it should be observed that it was not his Italian experiences that were primarily responsible for shaping his attitude towards the reforming principle. His cautious but real acceptance of the need for social and political change predates by a number of years his visits to Naples

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1. Ibid.

2. WEG to Manning, 12th Mar.'48. Add. Ms. 44247 f. 344.

3. D.M.Schreuder, "Gladstone and Italian Unification 1848-70: the Making of a Liberal?" EHR. July. 1970, p.499

and his celebrated letters to Lord Aberdeen and derives essentially from his transmuted aim of defending the Church.

In considering Gladstone's development as a Liberal sight should never be lost of the impact that the crisis in the affairs of the Church had upon him. After 1845 he stood committed to a public career which must needs be secular despite his avowals that politics was nothing if it was not the service of God. This helps to explain the paradoxes and inconsistencies in his subsequent behaviour. Italy, the morality of foreign affairs, free trade; these indeed have a significant place in Gladstone's thinking<sup>1</sup>, but they were subordinate to a more demanding consideration, something much closer to his heart - the fate of the Church. In that lies the key to the understanding of so much that he said and did. It puts into proper perspective the effect of the Gorham decision and of the secession of Manning and Hope. Particularly distressing to him was the departure of Manning, the confidant in whom he had placed so much trust and of Hope the friend who kept him in touch with the Almighty. Yet in a sense these disasters cleared the way; he was now free to go forward on his strange, secular path while still professing that public life was the pursuit of morality and righteousness.

This is apparent in certain significant passages in Gladstone's journals and correspondence. As he adjusted himself to the demands of secular politics so he began to develop an organic view of the Church, a view certainly not in keeping with the pronouncements contained in his earlier books but one which made it easier for him to reconcile what would otherwise have been conflicting tendencies in the changing relations between Church and State.

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1. H.C.G. Matthew sees these three considerations as the keys to Gladstone's emergent Liberalism. See Diaries, iii, pp.xxxiv - xliii.



Fix steadily in the mind this idea, that what you have first to realise and determine in yourself is not the relation of laymen to the clergy or of rulers to the ruled in the Church, but it is the conception of the Church at large as a visible corporation spiritually endowed.

Next compare this conception with the antagonist theory of the Church as a sum total of living and believing minds and you will come to learn that the organic idea destroys nothing of all that is positive true and good in the gratuitous one, but superadds to it. 1.

Just as the Church could adapt to current realities without betraying her mission so, too, could the State without compromising its role.

There is a point at which it becomes not politic only, but obligatory, to let down the theory of civil institutions - namely, when the discrepancy between them and their actual operation has become a hopeless falsehood and a mischievous and virulent imposture. 2

Gladstone's argument here was not the result of pure theorising.

Like many High Churchmen he had been angered by Russell's somewhat cavalier appointment late in 1847 of the controversial Dr. Hampden to a bishopric. Hampden had for over a decade been a bête noire of the Tractarians and Russell's nomination of him seemed to be deliberately calculated <sup>as</sup> a slight to them.<sup>3</sup> Antipathetic to Hampden's theological heterodoxies, Gladstone thought Russell's behaviour irresponsible.

"The case of Lord John and the Church is now, I fear, fixed for ever.

To the Church .... he will conscientiously do the very utmost of evil that he dare."<sup>4</sup> To the Bishop of London Gladstone complained:

I suppose it, then, to be the now declared and established law of this country that the choice of Bishops for the Church shall depend henceforward without legal control on the will of one single man, the Prime Minister of the day. 5

1. 20th Feb. 1848 Diaries, iv.p.12. It is noteworthy that in his theological reflections Gladstone shows a confidence and control which stands in marked contrast to the near-hysterical outpourings to which he was given when animadverting on what he regarded as his besetting sins of the flesh. (For a particularly good example of his impassioned self-scrutiny see entries for July '48, Diaries iv.pp. 51-55.) It is a characteristic of him that once he had come to a decision in his political and public life he thereafter rarely doubted its propriety, whereas throughout his life he never overcame his abiding sense of spiritual unworthiness.
2. WEG to Manning 12th Mar. '48. Add. Ms. 44247 f.344.
3. For the Hampden affair see O.Chadwick, The Victorian Church, London, 1966. i, pp. 232-50; D.L.Edwards, Leaders of the Church of England, London, 1971, pp. 96. ff.
4. WEG to Manning, 12th Mar. '48. Add. Ms. 44247 f. 344.
5. WEG to Bishop Blomfield, 31st. Jan. '48, Lathbury, i. p.81

In the same context Gladstone made a prognostication which, if he truly believed it, shows how far his decision to remain in active politics had detached him from his original objectives.

I look upon the progressive secularization of Parliament as not less certain than if it were a result subject to mathematical laws and there must be ... as years proceed, a greater and greater distance, if not estrangement, between the civil and the spiritual power. <sup>1</sup>

The nature of this estrangement was at the heart of the matter in the dispute arising out of the Gorham case. If the Hampden affair could be explained in large part by reference to Russell's mischievousness the same could not be said of this issue which, as well as being another campaign in the war between Tractarians and their opponents, raised in a very direct way the fundamental question of the day, namely; what were to be the rights and limitations of the English State in its relations with the Church. Involving protracted legal hearings, the Gorham affair spread itself over a number of years but its bare bones may be set out fairly briefly. <sup>2</sup> In 1847 Henry Phillpotts, Bishop of Exeter and a Tractarian sympathiser refused to institute G.C. Gorham, a Low Church cleric with Calvinist leanings, to a living in his diocese on the grounds of Gorham's unsound doctrine in regard to the sacrament of baptism. Gorham appealed to the Court of Arches of Canterbury which duly considered the case and eventually found for Phillpotts in August 1849. Gorham appealed again, this time to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, by definition a secular court and one composed of seven lay judges and only four ecclesiastical representatives. In March 1850 after four months of deliberation the Judicial Committee gave its decision, over-ruling the Court of Arches and pronouncing that Gorham's views were not "contrary or repugnant to the declared doctrine of the Church of England as by law established". <sup>3</sup>

1. Ibid., p. 82

2. See the account in Chadwick, op. cit., i. pp.250-71

3. In H.P.Liddon, Life of E.B.Pusey, London 1893-97, iii. p.229.

Gladstone had little doubt of the significance of these proceedings. To him the Gorham case was "a stupendous issue".<sup>1</sup> What was at stake was nothing less than the right of the English Church to determine her own doctrine. Whether it was Gorham or Phillpotts who was at fault was not the essential issue, he argued; what mattered was that, notwithstanding the correctness or otherwise of the verdict it might deliver, the Judicial Committee, a secular body, had arrogated unto itself an authority to pronounce and define in an area solely the province of the spiritual power.<sup>2</sup> It was this that put to the test the views that Gladstone had begun to entertain regarding the altered status of Church and State. He began to wonder whether questions regarding clerical authority could any longer be raised in parliament "without damage to the idea of such power and a diminished disposition to recognise it as the result". All such debates must now be regarded, he felt, "as preludes to the severance of Church and State, remote perhaps but yet true and substantial preludes". What then remained of his original purpose in entering parliament? Gladstone sought to answer the question by a redefinition of terms:

To obtain liberty for the Church is the object for which I should think it the highest, almost the only honour and delight to spend and be spent. But by this I understand liberty in the English sense, liberty under rule, and the whole question is what rule is admissible or desirable, what freedom will tend to or is required for the real development of your religious system. 3

For the present, as long as the alliance between Church and State obtained, such liberty would have to be "bought with gold" but he doubted that the Church was "prepared for the temporal sacrifices that are indispensable to a prosperous issue"<sup>4</sup>.

1. WEG to Manning, 30th Dec. '49. Add. Ms. 44248, f.33
2. The anomaly arose out of certain legal reforms of the early thirties when the old Court of Delegates, an entirely ecclesiastical body, had been abolished and its jurisdiction transferred to the privy council whose judicial functions, as here, were not necessarily exercised by Churchmen. (see Chadwick, op.cit., i, p.257) As early as 1843 Gladstone had been warned of the potential danger in such an arrangement. Add. Ms. 44360.
3. WEG to Manning, 6th July '49, Add. Ms. 44248 fos. 6-7.
4. WEG to Manning, 30th Dec. '49. Add. Ms. 44248 f.34.

On the purely theological aspect Gladstone was clear-minded remarking while the Privy Council's decision was still pending that "if Mr. Gorham be carried through, and that upon the merits, I say not only is there no doctrine at all, [but ] Arians or anybody else may abide in it with equal propriety".<sup>1</sup>

Significantly, beneath the doctrinal clash between Gorham and his bishop Gladstone espied something much deeper. The true origins of the conflict were to him only too apparent.

O Newman! without thee we never should have had a Gorham case showing its face among us. But such is the antipapal feeling of the country that, if a man would vent enough of that, he might wellnigh preach the Koran. 2

More years must elapse from the secession of Newman and the group which, following or preceding, belonged to it. A more composed and settled state of the public mind in our relations with the Church of Rome must supervene. 3

Having indentified the real culprits Gladstone widened his attack on so broad a front as to condemn all the major tendencies of the age. That by denouncing both the reactionary and the progressive elements in one sweep he was weakening his essential argument seems not to have occurred to him.

I have seen, and men of all kinds are beginning to see, the results of our former systems in the deadly straits to which we are reduced as a Church at this moment. What has caused us to come to them? Not Roman Catholic Relief: not the repeal of the Test Act: but the miserable policy of mere resistance to change, and of tenacious adherence to civil privilege, combined with the stealthy progress of latitudinarian opinion. 4

Although the Judicial Committee did not formally give its verdict until March 1850 it had become widely anticipated for some months that it would find for Gorham. During these months Gladstone devoted himself to a study of the issue, reading the many pamphlets that issued forth, writing frequent and copious letters to a range of interested parties,

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1. Ibid. f. 35.

2. WEG to R. Phillimore, 3rd Dec. '49, Lathbury, i. p.95.

3. WEG to Manning, 30th Dec. '49. Add. Ms. 44248, f.33.

4. WEG to R. Phillimore, 26th Feb. 1850, Lathbury, i.p.100.

and holding long discussions with the likes of Hope, Manning and Bishop Wilberforce.<sup>1</sup> He expressed the hope that the Committee would give a decision one way or the other. If they gave no verdict or a non-committal one "this would be still more distasteful than a decision of the State against the Catholic doctrine". He did add that this was taking the issue "on abstract grounds".<sup>2</sup> As far as his feelings were concerned he contemplated "the image of the secular power deciding doctrine... with horror".<sup>3</sup> Underlying his deep concern was the ever-present pre-occupation with the propriety of his own politico-religious stand. The result of his previous activity was that when the official pro-Gorham decision was given Gladstone was ready with a paper he had already prepared. His "Draft for Consideration" he presented on 10th March 1850. The aim of this memorandum was to deter men from precipitate action. He averred that it was the duty of members of the Church "peaceably to request liberty of conscience for the Church, and cheerfully to pay the price which the State, acting within its own sphere, may think fit to affix to that liberty".<sup>4</sup> It is easy to see why churchmen like Pusey and Keble should detect dangerous signs of Erastianism in Gladstone.<sup>5</sup> Yet in a sense Gladstone sought to pre-empt such a charge by the next stage in his argument in which he suggested that, having given an interim obedience to the State, the Church must then come to a firm resolution as to whether or not she was prepared to accept the recent judgement. This could be determined by recourse to a plan of action which he had originally proposed in 1841 in regard to the dispute over the Jerusalem Bishopric.<sup>6</sup> He urged that the English episcopate and the leading

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1. See Diaries iv, pp. 178-90. Gladstone had followed the case closely since it first became a public matter in 1848, ibid., iv.p.50.

2. WEG to Manning, 30th Dec. '49, Add. Ms. 44248, f.33.

3. WEG to M.Hallam, 15th June '50, Lathbury, i.p.111.

4. "Draft for Consideration" Add. Ms.44566 fos.94 ff. Part reproduced in Lathbury i, pp. 86-7.

5. See Liddon, op. cit., iii, 204.

6. See M.J.Lynch, "Was Gladstone a Tractarian: W.E.Gladstone and the Oxford Movement, 1833-45", JRH, Dec.1975.pp.377-31.

theologians of the day should be convened and asked for a collective verdict on the acceptability of the Judicial Committee's proceedings, this to be construed as a decision of the whole English Church. United in this way, her bishops having given the lead, the Church could then, if she saw fit, challenge the usurpation by the temporal power. In the unthinkable event of the State proving obdurate solemn consideration would have to be given to the prospect of the Church breaking her hitherto insoluble link with it. But all this must await the decision by the Church as to "her ay or no upon the Judgement".<sup>1</sup>

As well as being his reasoned analysis of how things stood on the morrow of the judgement the "Draft" was also designed as an answer to those who had complained that despite Gladstone's intense interest in the case he had taken no public step to help the situation. To his regular correspondent on Church matters, R.J.Phillimore, he had written:

Having on no occasion wilfully ... omitted to do in the House of Commons anything that was for the benefit of the Church, and that was in my power, I know not how to alter anything in my conduct from being told that I do not do enough. This is not mere fancy or caprice or constitutional bias towards avoiding notoriety. I am convinced that if the Church is to be served in Parliament in any positive manner it must be done quietly; and that the appeals to Church feeling out of doors...in almost every instance provoke a reaction tenfold stronger than any sympathy they draw forth. 2

Dr. Matthew in his introduction to the Diaries has in effect repeated Phillimore's contention, arguing that despite his initial interest Gladstone "declined to take a public stance".<sup>3</sup> This is not strictly accurate. It is true that Gladstone refused to make certain moves that others pressed upon him but it appears from his correspondence that he certainly wanted the world at large to know his views on the Gorham matter.

1. Lathbury, i. p.87.

2. WEG to Phillimore, 26th Feb. 1850, Lathbury, i. p.99.

3. Diaries, p. xxxiv.

His Draft, his letter of June 1850 to the Bishop of London<sup>1</sup>, his article "The Functions of Laymen in the Church" of 1851,<sup>2</sup> and his Memorandum to the Bishop of Oxford<sup>3</sup>, presented in January 1852, were all intended for public consumption.

In the weeks immediately following the Gorham decision Gladstone read as many as he could of the pamphlets that poured forth and debated what to do.<sup>4</sup> The main question as it appeared to him was "should we try to act for the Church in the State or on the State".<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding his reluctance to sign the original Declaration he resolved to draw up his own statement of principle and submit it for signature to a range of eminent names. The response disappointed him; his friends, Sidney Herbert and Lincoln, were not enthusiastic which led him to harden his own attitude: "the reluctance of other men in politics to commit themselves in any degree of course must tend to drive me forward".<sup>6</sup> His immediate aim was "to promote such measures as may avert disruption" for he foresaw, rightly as it proved, grave danger of large-scale secession from the Anglican fold.<sup>7</sup> He looked to the bishops to begin the work of healing and he seriously urged the need for Convocation to gather.<sup>8</sup> He took up the idea first suggested to him by Robert Wilberforce that the bishops should enter into an "engagement" to meet and to consult before taking any decisive steps or making any pronouncement.<sup>9</sup>

1. Add.Ms.44369 f. 335, also in Lathbury, i.pp.105-08. See also Diaries,

2. Add.Ms.44684 f. 275, republished in Gleanings, vi, pp.1-47. <sup>iv, p.226</sup>  
See also Diaries, iv.p.367

3. Add.Ms.44740 f.1, in Lathbury, i.pp.88-90. See Diaries, iv.p.309.

4. Diaries, iv. pp. 193-97

5. WEG to Manning 4th April '50, Add. 44243 f. 37.

6. Ibid. Lincoln had more pressing problems to contend with at this juncture. His private bill of divorce against his wife was heard in April & May of this year. Gladstone, following his quixotic pursuit of Lady Lincoln across much of Europe the previous year, was a star witness. See Diaries, July and Aug. '49, iv.pp.136-47; 1<sup>st</sup> April and 25th May '50 pp.197, 214.

7. WEG to Herbert, 19th Mar.'50 in Stanmore, i.p. 123.

8. WEG to Manning, 4th April '50. Add. Ms. 44248 f. 38.

9. WEG to Manning, 29th April '50, ibid. f. 42.

His letter to the Bishop of London became well known as a statement of his views because it was published in July 1850 but he had before then held long and frequent discussions with a considerable number of the bishops as well as corresponding with them regularly.<sup>1</sup> That he should have devoted such energies to the matter at "a time of more than ordinary cases" in his private life<sup>2</sup> indicates how seriously he took the Gorham issue. Having in May drafted the new "engagement" appealing for a delay of two months in order to give the bishops time to ponder the matter he submitted it to many leading figures. His dread of secessions from the Church particularly from the Tractarian ranks was uppermost in his mind. His hope was that those who subscribed to the engagement would thereby give a pledge to do nothing precipitate until the episcopate had spoken.<sup>3</sup>

Gladstone's belief in the bishops was amply illustrated by his activities in parliament during this period. For a number of years he had acted as an unofficial consultant to the Ecclesiastical Commission and had attended its meetings on many occasions.<sup>4</sup> Using the experience he had gained he moved at this crucial time to increase the number of English bishops by means of an amendment to an Ecclesiastical Commissioners Bill that was being prepared for presentation to Parliament. His proposal was that these "little bishops", as he referred to them, should draw at least part of their income from an Ecclesiastical Commission grant and should rely for the remainder upon private contributions.

1. See e.g. Diaries 26th April '50, iv, p.205.
2. After a distressing illness his daughter, Jessy, died on 8th April '50. See Diaries, iv. pp.197-202 and Ms.44738 fos.123-41
3. See WEG to Manning, 20th May '50. Add. Ms.44248 f.46 and Diaries, 19th May '50, iv.p. 211.
4. See Diaries, June and July '48, June '49, iv. pp.45-51, 58, 126, 131  
Cp. G.F.A. Best, Temporal Pillars, Cambridge, 1964 p. 357.



To lessen antiepiscopal reaction it was proposed that the new bishops should not be entitled to sit in the House of Lords. There was little positive response to his amendment and following a single discussion Gladstone withdrew it.<sup>1</sup> He admitted later that the clauses had been ill-prepared; in the prevailing climate they were viewed as a "danger to Church and State and [there] was no support from the Tory quarter".<sup>2</sup> Even at the time he held out little hope for the success of his amendment. His journal reads: "Gave notice of Bps Clauses in Eccl Common Bill. Whether the thing will be done this way I do not feel sure: but I think it will be done in no other".<sup>3</sup> Disappointed over the failure of his own parliamentary initiative Gladstone put his trust in a bill of Blomfield's, the Bishop of London.<sup>4</sup> This was introduced into the House of Lords by the Bishop himself and was basically an attempt to amend the law governing appeals to the Privy Council on doctrinal questions. But as with his own measure it became apparent even before Blomfield's bill was put to the test that it stood small chance of success.

The Bishops Bill [sic] stands for next Tuesday and I suppose we must prepare to see it rejected by the Lords. The question is really what will the Bishops then do. But I have a fear lest men should scatter under that defeat. 5.

It was this latter fear that prompted Gladstone to circulate his engagement for signature:

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1. Gladstone gave notice of his intention to introduce the bill on 17th May '50, moved and withdrew it on 15th July '50. See Diaries iv. pp.211, 226; H. cxi, 1406; cxii, 1402-13.
  2. Spet. '97, Autobiographica, i. pp.68-9
  3. 17th May '50, Diaries, iv. p. 211.
  4. See WEG to Manning, 29th April '50. Add. Ms.44248 fos. 38, 42.
  5. WEG to Manning, 20th May '50, ibid. f. 46.

I want now to see whether it is not possible to insure deliberate action, and cooperation within the limits of their convictions, among those who are agreed fundamentally about the Gorham case. 1.

Gladstone's expectations regarding Blomfield's bill were duly realised, the measure being defeated on its second reading:

Heard the disastrous news of the division in the Lords  
84:51. I heard the most important parts of the debate:  
greatly pleased and not less shocked. 2

Parliament's evident reluctance to assist the English Church in its current hour of need led Gladstone to serious thoughts of disestablishment. With most of his correspondents and in all his public utterances he was careful to make no overt reference to this but with associates as close as Manning and Lincoln he felt freer to indulge in such considerations. 3 In this regard his attitude to the colonial churches becomes particularly important. By 1850 he had certainly come to accept the principle of freedom from the State for the churches in the colonies. Towards the end of his life he gave clear definition as to what his approach had been.

The condition of the colonial church was [at] this time hampered and perplexed by the conflicting evils of arbitrary rule, impotence, and ambiguity. The colonial legislatures did not regulate or concern themselves with it. I had consulted Archbishop Howley during his life time and found him desirous to give up what was for them a pure fiction of establishment... I was very desirous to obtain a liberating measure which should place these churches in a condition legally to make resolutions for the government of their own affairs on the same footing as other religious bodies, that is by pure compact or consent. 4.

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1. Ibid.
  2. 3rd June '50, Diaries, iv, p. 216; H cxi, 598.
  3. See Lincoln to WEG, 19th May '50 in Graham, pp. 91-2
  4. Autobiographica i, p.70

Since May of 1849 Gladstone had been joint treasurer of the Colonial Bishops Fund<sup>1</sup> and throughout that year during the discussions on the Canada Act he had, in the House, pressed the principle of colonial church freedom.<sup>2</sup> 1850 saw the same parliamentary attention given to Australia and again Gladstone was among the foremost in arguing the case for the autonomy of the local church there.<sup>3</sup> Taxed by Manning as to why as a politician he should devote such endeavours to what might well be a lost cause, the defence of Church interests in an ungodly parliament, Gladstone strove to define the position in which he now saw himself both as secular politician and as lieutenant of the Lord.

I have two characters to fulfil - that of a lay member of the Church, and that of a member of a sort of wreck of a political party. I must not break my understood compact with the last, and foreswear my profession unless and until the necessity has arisen. That necessity will plainly arise for me when it shall have become evident that justice cannot - i.e., will not - be done by the State to the Church ... if there be a hope of justice from the State, my continuance in political life is necessarily right in order to do what I can towards improving that prospect ... political life is simply a means to an end. <sup>4</sup>

It was in pursuance of his hope of obtaining justice from the State that Gladstone published his letter to the Bishop of London in June 1850. Entitled "Remarks on the Royal Supremacy"<sup>5</sup> the letter sought to prove

1. 14th May '49. Diaries iv, p. 122

2. Diaries iv, pp. 128-32, 149. H. cvi, 53, 782.

3. Diaries iv, pp. 184, 195, 208, 210, 230; H. cx, 1195, 1207, 1384; cxiii, 126.

The following year he was to extend his advocacy to the churches of Ceylon and New Zealand.

Diaries iv, pp. 333, 345-48, 380, 396; H. cxvii, 6, 204.

4. WEG to Manning, 29th April '50, Add. Ms. 44248 fos. 40-41.

5. "Remarks on the Royal Supremacy; As it is Defined by Reason, History, and the Constitution. A Letter to the Lord Bishop of London," June 1850. Republished in Gleanings, v, pp. 172-89.

that "the legislation, then recent, which had substituted a new machinery of appeal for the old one, was an injurious, and even dangerous departure from the Reformation - settlement".<sup>1</sup> Acknowledging that one of the evil fruits of the Gorham decision had been the growth of secession from the English Church Gladstone set out to defend the English Protestant Constitution by proving that the Royal Supremacy established by the Reformation statutes of the sixteenth century in no manner involved "the surrender of the birthright of the Church".<sup>2</sup> By appealing to logic, history, and law he hoped to confound those false friends of the Church who had seized upon the Gorham decision to declare that unless the Church and State link be severed the Church would not be saved. He struck at Erastians in general and the Whigs in particular when he declared his aim to be the refutation of such Church and State concepts as

have always found a good deal of favour with a particular political party; and which, it must be added, are eminently acceptable to the spirit of the world, and the spirit of the age, in so far as these are in conflict with the spirit of Faith, and of the great institution which was appointed for the propagation and support of that spirit. 3

His distaste for "the spirit of the age" showed clearly that Gladstone had not yet lost that deep pessimism which had so characterised him as a younger man. He confided to Manning that the Gorham issue should best be viewed as part of "the great battle field of modern infidelity".<sup>4</sup> There is indeed a marked difference between the confidence of his public "Letter" to Blomfield and the misgivings that his private correspondence reveals. He expressed himself

1. Ibid., p. 172

2. Ibid., p. 179.

3. Ibid., pp. 179-80.

4. W.E.G. to Manning 1st June '50, Add. Ms. 44248 f. 53.

disappointed at the ineffective contribution Pusey had made to the current debate <sup>1</sup> and when he wrote again to the Bishop of London in July his growing sense of frustration with the episcopate began to show itself. He told Blomfield of the dread that he could sense developing among true sons of the Church that her vital interests were on the verge of being left to the whim of Parliament. The episcopate, Gladstone contended, ought to fulfil their role as shepherds of the faithful by pronouncing not merely on the Gorham decision but "upon the larger question whether the Church of England is to be henceforth governed and administered according to the true doctrine or not" <sup>2</sup>. The growth of licence among the clergy, the pusillanimous behaviour of some of the bishops in parliament, the uncertainty of many in the face of the encroachments of Rome; these tendencies were not merely regrettable in a spiritual sense. They also gravely undermined the Church's parliamentary defences. Unless Gladstone's own plea for episcopal leadership were heeded,

many will grow more and more afraid of seeing the life and faith of the Church crushed under its outer framework and will be very unwilling to rally in defence of its civil Establishment, especially on occasions when it is a favourite point of attack. I have in view particularly the Irish Church. <sup>3</sup>

In the prevailing atmosphere of doubt and irresolution vipers would breed within the nest.

Many more who with avowed estrangement of affection from the Church of England would more and more freely indulge whatever tendencies they might have acquired towards the Church of Rome, and working effectively for her, would nevertheless at the least plausibly maintain their position by pleading in their own behalf the principles of construction involved in the Gorham Judgement. <sup>4</sup>

1. W.E.G. To Manning 9th May '50, ibid., f.44.
2. W.E.G. to Blomfield, 16th July '50, Lathbury, i. p.106-07.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 108.

For Gladstone this was not simply a pious observation.

His anxieties regarding his own friends were uppermost in his mind.

"Of all these forms of evil, and perhaps of others yet more formidable, I see the germs even within the circle of my own personal knowledge." <sup>1</sup>

The only effective way to lessen the danger of secession was for the Bishops as a body to affirm that "they hold the doctrine of Baptism to be authoritative in the Church of England".<sup>2</sup> While not regarding the Bishops as infallible he saw them as the true guardians of doctrine within the Church. In his strongest condemnation of the Privy Council's verdict he declared that he could find no words powerful enough to express his feelings regarding the issue.

"Such exercise of authority in that solemn subject matter, by a secular Court is contrary to the very first principles of the Gospel, and must be fatal, wherever it is permitted to grow into a system, to all fixed dogmatic teachings." <sup>3</sup>

Just as the issue of the Jerusalem Bishopric in 1841 had been the final push that had separated Newman from the Anglican fold so now there were strong intimations that the Gorham case might well issue in the same result for Manning. Ever since Newman's departure in 1845 there had been clear signs that Manning's allegiance to his native Church was far from absolute. Disturbed over this Gladstone tried repeatedly to draw from him declarations of loyalty to the Anglican communion.

A journal entry of 1848 reads:

Yesterday I visited Manning & had conversation about my own political course and the course of his mind with respect to religion. He described to me the searching trial he had undergone in an effort to test his position in the Ch. of England for the sake of others who hung upon him. This trial produced or aggravated illness & illness bringing death into view made the probation more effectual. The result was his full confirmation in allegiance to the Church ..... I expressed a strong hope that his tone of language would not alter from what it has heretofore been.

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1. Ibid., p. 107

2. Ibid., p. 108

3. W.E.G. to George Finch, 14th June '50, ibid. p. 109

4. 10th July '48, Diaries, iv, p. 49

It was Manning's decreasing usefulness that worried Gladstone as the Gorham controversy wore on. He complained of Manning's reluctance to speak out or give a lead in critical times. "Your place and gifts endow us with a strong and valid title to call upon you for public council and guidance."<sup>1</sup> In the long and frequent letters that passed between them Gladstone was concerned to impress upon his correspondent that silence or inactivity in such weighty matters would lead to dangerous misconstructions. Manning acknowledged this and admitted to being already deeply compromised "by rumours of Rome, by relation to some who are gone, & some who are going".<sup>2</sup> Unity, he declared, had always been his deepest wish but events were dissolving those relations which had bound him hitherto. Keeping him within the Anglican fold in these perilous times was the direct influence upon him of Gladstone himself, James Hope, and Robert Wilberforce.<sup>3</sup> Just as Gladstone, five years earlier had been unwilling to acknowledge Newman's inexorable progress towards Rome<sup>4</sup> so too, at the time of Manning's crisis he appeared incapable of accepting the inevitable. He endeavoured constantly in their analyses of theology and history to minimise the problems of conscience and belief that beset Manning.<sup>5</sup> The patronising tone of Gladstone's observations turned to exasperation as Manning found himself unable to go along with him. Gladstone became "filled with amazement" at Manning's turn of mind and declared his developing views "quite beyond my power to follow".<sup>6</sup> He warned Manning against the example of Newman; "the destiny of that man has been to do comparatively little for the Church of Rome, much against the whole

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1. 18th June, '50 Add. Ms. 44248 f. 55

2. 19th June '50, ibid. f. 59.

3. Ibid., f. 60

4. See M.J.Lynch, "Was Gladstone a Tractarian?" J.R.H. Dec. '75. pp.396-7

5. See their correspondence, July to August '50. Add. Ms. 44248, fos. 62-98

6. 22nd Sept. '50, ibid. fos. 100-01

ethical grounds and structures of belief in Divine Revelation".<sup>1</sup>

In seeking, however, to lecture Manning on his inconsistencies Gladstone was obliged to make reference to his own:

My life has, I know and feel, had this tendency, to lay a heavy weight upon the movement of the understanding when solicited to depart from the main practical principles by which it has been anchored, and to make the movements of all such processes exceeding slow: I mean the common discipline of my life: that which has come upon my understanding only, and affects only its habits - and which comes in through common acts, apart from distressing causes such as those that join themselves to all questions deeply piercing into our moral being. <sup>2</sup>

By the end of 1850 it was clear even to Gladstone that his laborious and persistent efforts to keep his friend from the brink had failed; Manning's course was irrevocably set. In October their conversations revealed to Gladstone "a still darkening prospect. Alas for what lies before us: for my deserts it cannot be gloomy enough: But for the sleep and lambs of Christ!"<sup>3</sup> While in Italy, from November on, Gladstone continued his desperate correspondence with Manning but in late December he noted: "before another year closes my two dearest friends with whom I had but one heart for the Church of England will have ceased to be hers".<sup>4</sup> This followed his receipt of the news that Manning had finally resigned his living at Lavington. When informing Gladstone of this act of severance Manning in the letter which marks the climax of this phase of their relationship chose to define the dilemma facing Gladstone as a public figure.

You have by some 18 years of public life attained a commanding position in Parliament. You represent Oxford; and are the only man into whose hands the affection of one side of the House of Commons, under certain contingencies, can pass ... Parties will from this time form round two centres, the one will be the Protestantism of England and protecting or trying to protect, itself and the Church of England by legislation, the other Political Government, maintaining a powerful neutrality and arbitration among all religious Communions.

1. 6th Nov.'50, ibid., f.112

2. 22nd Sept.'50, ibid., f.104

3. 3rd Oct. '50. Diaries, iv. p. 242

4. 29th Dec. '50, ibid., iv. p. 296.



If you retain your seat for Oxford, and accept the leadership which is approaching you through the Conservative and Country parties you must take the former centre as your standing point. Which God forbid.

If you take the latter centre to which all our late conference would lead me without hesitation, you know the cost. 1

Gladstone declined to accept the analysis but clearly he had been shaken by the astuteness of Manning's observations. He claimed that the options defined by Manning did not present themselves in that form to him; to his mind the Anglican Church had not yet abandoned its authority. Yet in apportioning blame for the parlous state of the Church he went a long way towards admitting the validity of Manning's basic argument:

If the abandonment takes place I have the painful conviction that it will be owing not to the defective law or theology of the English Church, not to the strength or craft of the foes of our principle, but to the errors of its friends from Newman onwards. 2

He, nonetheless, castigated Manning for deserting Lavington; in the currently confused atmosphere "no resolution involving a great and sharp change of position can be right". Manning was in effect taking part in a lottery. Citing his experience of Italy, Gladstone maintained that the power of the Papacy was steadily weakening and that within a generation there would no longer be any religious institution "witnessing for fixed dogmatic truth".<sup>3</sup> Manning was unshaken by such assertions and even when Gladstone, on his return from Italy, subjected him to continual written and verbal argument he remained resolute.<sup>4</sup> Gladstone was driven to declare, "my dear friend I must tell you that I for one at this time fundamentally mistrust the processes of your mind".<sup>5</sup> The day after penning this he heard James Hope's

1. 6th Dec. 50. Add. Ms. 44248. fos. 113-14.

2. 20th Dec. '50, ibid., f. 115

3. 26th Jan. '51. ibid., fos. 118-19

4. Diaries, (Jan-Mar. '51) iv. pp. 301-19.

5. 5th Mar. '51. Add. Ms. 44248, f. 123.

"Piercing" declaration, "Manning's mind I think is made up: I am not far from the same".<sup>1</sup> When, a week later, Gladstone learned from the Bishop of Exeter that the English episcopacy had determined not to appeal against the Privy Council's verdict in the Gorham matter his cup runneth over.<sup>2</sup> Feeling that after their years of mutual prayer and spiritual fellowship his two revered confidants had betrayed him personally Gladstone took the loss of Manning and Hope with bitterness, as his journal testifies.

30th Mar '51 [Manning] smote me to the ground by answering with suppressed emotion that he is now upon the brink: and Hope too. Such terrible blows not only upset & oppress but I fear also demoralise me<sup>3</sup>

6th April '51 A day of pain! Manning & Hope!<sup>4</sup>

7th April '51 Hope too is gone. They were my two props. Their going may be a sign that my work is gone with them<sup>5</sup>

8th April '51 Executed a codicil to my will striking out Hope as Executor.<sup>6</sup>

To Robert Wilberforce, who was himself to go over to Rome three years later,<sup>7</sup> Gladstone revealed his sense of resentment:

I do indeed feel the loss of Manning, if and as far as I am capable of feeling anything. It comes to me cumulated, and doubled, with that of James Hope. Nothing like it can ever happen to me again. Arrived now at middle life I never can form I suppose with any other two men the habits of communication, counsel, and dependence, in which I have now from fifteen

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1. 6th Mar. '51. Diaries, iv.p.313
  2. 11th Mar '51. ibid., iv.p. 314.
  3. Ibid., iv p.319
  4. Ibid., iv. p. 322. Manning and Hope were received together into the Roman Church on this day. See David Newsome, The Parting of Friends, London, 1966, p. 366.
  5. Diaries, iv. p. 322.
  6. Ibid., In June at Manning's suggestion, Gladstone returned all Manning's letters of the last fifteen years to him, an action which, since Manning then destroyed them, he subsequently much regretted. Describing the exchange on his part as giving "gold in return for bronze", Gladstone wrote of Manning's Anglican letters as being of incalculable value. Autobiographica i, p.156.
  7. In 1854 Gladstone put much effort into an unavailing attempt to hold Wilberforce himself back from Rome. See his letters to him in Newsome, op.cit., pp. 381-83, 390-91, 402.

to eighteen years lived with them both <sup>1</sup>

In his journal Gladstone gave full rein to his sense of bereavement:

"the two friends whom I might call the only supports for my intellect have been wrenched away from me, leaving me lacerated, and I may say barely conscious morally."<sup>2</sup> A later comment gave exact definition to his reaction at this time; describing his parting from Manning, he wrote, "it was not a quarrel: it was a death".<sup>3</sup>

The significance of Gladstone's response to these events is profound. The "shameful hesitation" of the leaders of the Church in regard to Gorham led him, he wrote, to "a great and rapid change" in his feelings towards its rulers and representatives.<sup>4</sup> His earlier belief in the collective spiritual wisdom of the bishops no longer held. It was now a question of "what sentiments are due to this or that priest or bishop according as he had shown his intention to cast his lot this way or that in the great agony that has begun".<sup>5</sup> Here the interplay for him of religion and politics was crucial. The secession of Manning and Hope left him bereft in both a personal and political sense. His original aim of employing a parliamentary career in the service of the Church had been rendered null by the recent disasters. He told Hope:

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1. In ibid., p.367. Towards the end of his life Gladstone set down an estimate of Manning. He acknowledged his achievements in the management of men but argued that Manning's mind was too unsubtle, too lacking in self-criticism, and never really of a philosophical turn. Autobiographica, i.pp.153-58
  2. 19th Aug.'51. Diaries, iv.p. 353
  3. Autobiographica, i. p. 157
  4. W.E.G. to C.G., 5th Sept.'50, Lathbury, i.p.117
  5. W.E.G. to Manning, 25th Aug. '50. Add. Ms. 44248. f. 93.

I have too good reason to know what this year has cost me, and so little hope have I that the places now vacant ever can be filled for me, that the marked character of these events in reference to myself rather teaches me this lesson: the work to which I had aspired is reserved for other and better men. And if that be the Divine will, I entirely recognize its fitness. 1

In Gladstone's journal there is a fascinating glimpse of the impact of all this upon his moral sense. Reviewing his missionary endeavours among the London prostitutes, which reached one of its periodic peaks during these distressing months,<sup>2</sup> he wrote:

I must here record the saddest effect wrought on me by the disasters crowned by his [Hope's] & M's secession: the loss of all resolution to carry forward the little self-discipline I ever had. 3

With his moral and intellectual props having been razed so violently it becomes easier to appreciate why questions of pure principle seldom thereafter appealed to him with the same force. Thrown, in a sense, into a political void at this juncture in his career by the shattering of his former ideals he sought henceforward a way out of his confusion by judging all major issues in terms of the personalities rather than the principles involved. This goes far towards explaining his desire or reluctance to serve in particular ministries or with particular colleagues. His drift towards Liberalism thus becomes more a matter of personal whim than of political philosophy.

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1. W.E.G. to Hope, 22nd June '51. Add. Ms. 44214, f.353.

2. See entries for Mar. to Aug. '51. Diaries iv, pp. 310-353

3. 11th May '51, ibid., ii, p. 329.

### CHAPTER III

Contemporaneous with these traumas was one of the great earthquakes in Gladstone's career - Naples and its prisons.<sup>1</sup> While the personal disasters of 1851 were still pending Gladstone returned to England from Italy bent on exposing the evils of the Neapolitan Government which he had recently witnessed at first hand.<sup>2</sup> What is interesting is that none of these events in themselves propelled him towards the Liberal camp; here it is important to draw the distinction between the Liberal party that was forming and the Liberalism that came later to characterise Gladstone. It has now become standard practice to regard Gladstone's Italian experiences as if in some way they were the cause of his becoming a Liberal.<sup>3</sup> Implicit in such a view is the concept of a logical and consistent political development but an examination of the negotiations into which Gladstone entered in the 'fifties suggests that rather than being guided by a basic political principle he was, in effect, engaged in a process of political bargaining, looking for advancement and office but on his terms. It is true that he continued to argue in terms of principle but the religious crises of 1850 and 1851 had weakened the old ties and had lessened the power of his earlier convictions. What remained of his Church ideals had been transmuted. In the light of this it is difficult to see Gladstone's reaction to Italian affairs in the 'fifties as expressing

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1. See Morley, i, pp. 289-300; Feuchtwanger, pp. 72-4; Magnus, pp. 98-101. The "seismic" aspect of Gladstone's responses is a basic theme in Magnus's biography. See particularly pp. 49-50.
  2. Feb. '51. Diaries, iv, pp. 304-308. Add. Ms. 44739.f.1.
  3. E.G., see Magnus, p. 100; Conacher, Peelites, p. 87.

anything more positive than a general disposition of mind. His Italian sympathies at this stage lack a deep party political significance.<sup>1</sup>

This is well illustrated by Gladstone's own account of his meeting in Naples with Poerio and Pironte, the imprisoned Italian Liberals. His approach may be described as bi-partisan or, more accurately, non-partisan. Indeed, although it was to be Lord Aberdeen to whom he would finally make his public appeal it is clear that at first he seriously contemplated approaching Palmerston in his official capacity as Foreign Secretary. It was only Palmerston's isolated position "relatively to the other Cabinets" that prevented this.<sup>2</sup> In his conversations with Poerio Gladstone was at pains to determine from him the value and expediency of starting a campaign in England to draw general attention to the injustice and horrors of the imprisonment and to "dissociate the Conservative party from all suppositions of winking at them".<sup>3</sup> Gladstone was disturbed by Poerio's comment that, "The present Govt. of Naples rely on the English Conservative party", and he quoted with warm approval Poerio's injunction, "Let there be a voice from that party showing that whatever Govt. be in England, no support will be given to such proceedings as these".<sup>4</sup> The sequel to this, Gladstone's one-man campaign to make known to the world the horrors of Naples, formalised in his two published Letters to Lord Aberdeen, is well enough known to need

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1. Gladstone, indeed, affirmed that his concern for Italy was not "primarily or mainly political", that it was better "Kept apart from parliamentary discussion" since it had "no connection whatever with any peculiar idea or separate object or interest of England" but related rather "to the sphere of humanity at large". This appears in his "Examination of the Official Reply of the Neapolitan Govnt." Jan.'52. in Gleanings, iv.p.113.
  2. Diaries, iv.p.306. Gladstone did in fact seek Palmerston's aid when trying to obtain a copy of the original Italian version of the Neapolitan Government's reply to his Letters. See W.E.G. to Palmerston 25th Oct.'51. Guedella, p. 83.
  3. Diaries, iv.p.306.
  4. Ibid., p. 307. Owen Chadwick has recently shown that W.E.G.'s passion for Italy first developed from his early reading, especially of Dante. "Young Gladstone and Italy", J.E.H., April 1979

recounting here.<sup>1</sup> What needs to be observed is that throughout his agitation Gladstone followed a decidedly individualistic line. While he earnestly sought the support of others he did not attempt to make the affair a specifically party issue. Nor, moreover, did he exhibit any great affection for nationalism as a cause. He wrote to the Italian émigré, Panizzi "The purely abstract idea of Italian nationality makes little impression and finds limited sympathy among ourselves".<sup>2</sup> He was concerned with denouncing a particular regime in order to alleviate the suffering of a particular set of men.

To interpret this as incipient Liberalism is to be anachronistic. "I cannot claim one jot or tittle of credit with liberalism or Republicanism", he wrote, "so neither can I accept any portion of whatever censures may be awarded to me as an offender against the principles called conservative".<sup>3</sup> It is indeed his toryism that is the distinctive feature of his attitude. He was fearful that if the Naples tyranny went unchecked it would excite the destructive forces of society: "the hydra of revolution is not really to be crushed by the attempt to crush".<sup>4</sup> For Gladstone Naples presented the problem of "how to harmonise the old with the new conditions of society, and to mitigate the increasing stress of time and change upon... the traditional civilisation of Europe".<sup>5</sup>

1. Gladstone expressed himself in three major statements: "Letter to the Earl of Aberdeen, on the State Prosecutions of the Neapolitan Government", April 1851; "Second Letter to the Earl of Aberdeen", July 1851, and "An examination of the Official Reply of the Neapolitan Government", Jan.'52. All three were published by John Murray and reappeared in Gleanings, iv, pp.1-137. At the time of their re-publication Gladstone noted that, while the "Letters" had circulated widely and had been translated into various languages, the "Examination" had attracted little attention and had incurred a loss for Murray. Gleanings, iv.p.71. See also Diaries iv. pp. 322,342,383, 391.
2. 21st June'51. See Diaries, iv.p.338 and Morley i.p.299.
3. "Examination", Gleanings iv., p. 166.
4. Ibid., p. 124
5. Ibid., p. 113

He believed that the conservative and progressive principles were not mutually inimical: "they have ever existed and must ever exist together in European society".<sup>1</sup> Gladstone claimed that his argument was not simply a piece of humanitarianism; "it is surely rather the practical rule of government, which common sense dictates". Unthinking resistance to change on the part of government so dams up the waters that "when the day of their bursting comes, they are absolutely ungovernable".<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere he wrote,

I say that if Freedom were nothing but a mischievous chimera,  
& if humanity had no place in the circle of Christian ideals,  
I should still cry out, in the interests of order and  
conservation alone. <sup>3</sup>

The Neapolitan Government by its inhumanity was creating a basis for "the foundation of republicanism, or of anarchy, with a breadth & solidity that mocks the labours of Mazzini & his tribe". Not that Gladstone had any sympathy for Mazzini whom he regarded as a "destroyer" and an "apostle" of disorder and irreligion;<sup>4</sup> to Lord Aberdeen, the original recipient of his public statements, he wrote, "You need not be afraid, I think, of Mazzinism from me, still less of Kossuth-ism, which means the other plus Lord Palmerston and his nationalities".<sup>5</sup> This response was occasioned by Aberdeen's misinterpretation of Gladstone's two Letters to him as an encouragement "to the promotion of revolution throughout Europe".<sup>6</sup>

1. Ibid., p. 116

2. Ibid., p. 124-5

3. W.E.G. to Guizot, 19th Sept. 1851. Add. Ms. 44370 f. 311. See also, E. Parnham Brush, "Seven Letters from Gladstone to Guizot" J.M.H., xi, 1939. and Schreuder, op. cit. E.H.R., July 1970, p. 481

4. Add. Ms. 44370 f. 311. In an earlier letter to Guizot Gladstone had strongly denied that his "Letters" were in any way an encouragement to republicanism. 27th Aug. '51, ibid., f. 294. Also in J.M.H. xi, 1939, pp. 189-90.

5. 1st Dec. 1851. Add. Ms. 44088. f. 121.

6. Aberdeen to W.E.G. 9th Oct. 1851, ibid., f. 116



That such an apparently formative experience as Italy had little direct bearing on his party orientation suggests strongly that Gladstone's drawing towards the amorphous Liberal party in the 'fifties was very much an ad hoc affair. This can be determined by examining in detail his attitude towards political developments after 1851; his journal entries and copious memoranda for the period are a rich vein of information. When Gladstone returned to England in Feb. 1851, it was not Naples but Protection that was forced upon him as an immediate concern. Lord Stanley, looking to form a government, had written to Gladstone asking him to consider taking a cabinet post under him;<sup>1</sup> Stanley had, indeed, delayed his appointments until Gladstone could meet him personally;

He told me his object was that I should take office with him - any office (his own being by implication out of the question), subject to the reservation that the Foreign Department was offered to Canning but if he declined it open to me, along with others of which he named the Colonial Office & the Board of Trade. Nothing was said of the leadership of the H. of Commons but his anxiety was evident to have any occupant but one for the Foreign Office. 2

Gladstone replied that none of these points presented a difficulty for him provided no preliminary obstacle was found to intervene. In answering thus Gladstone was replying on the intelligence he had received from Newcastle to the effect that Stanley intended a return to Protection.<sup>3</sup> The forewarning Gladstone had been given proved accurate for Stanley went on to tell Gladstone that while he intended to maintain the free trade system in general he contemplated modifying it in regard to sugar and corn. Gladstone listened to this in silence and surprise "but with an intense sense of relief; feeling that if he had put Protection in abeyance I might have had a most difficult question to

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1. Memo., Feb. to April '51. Add. Ms. 44777, fos. 322-29, in Diaries, iv, pp. 310-11

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. On his father's death Lincoln had become the Fifth Duke of Newcastle. See Martineau, p. 104

decide, whereas now I had no question at all - his announcement decided everything".<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, Gladstone did not give a direct answer.

Pleased though he was that they were at one in their dislike of the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill he informed Stanley that the corn issue constituted "an enormous difficulty" and asked for time to consult Lord Aberdeen. Stanley then made it plain that whether he persevered in his endeavour to form a government hung upon Gladstone's decision. Having attended a levee during which he consulted Aberdeen, Canning and some others, Gladstone returned to Stanley to reject his offer: "I told him that either my convictions or my pledges, were enough singly to bring me to the conclusion which I announced to him in equal conformity with both".<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding his own cat and mouse game Gladstone in his memorandum expressed irritation with Stanley for wasting time in asking him to join a cabinet determined to reintroduce corn duty. He felt that Stanley ought to have understood his position: "My vote against local burdens in 1849 was accompanied with the strongest declaration against anything of the kind".<sup>3</sup> Further reflection led Gladstone to the conclusion that it was probably the case that when Stanley had first written to him he had intended forming a government leaving the question of Protection in abeyance but that pressure on Stanley from a faction among his supporters had then obliged him to make a firm commitment to the corn duty.<sup>4</sup> A more convincing explanation of Gladstone's own conduct emerges from what he recorded of his discussion with Newcastle. Intercepting Gladstone before his first visit to Stanley, Newcastle had tried to dissuade him from accepting office. He believed

1. Diaries, iv.p. 311

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. Apparently, Gladstone had in mind here his opposition in Mar.1849 to Disraeli's petition on local taxation. H. ciii,702,858, Diaries, iv, p. 107

4. Diaries, iv,p.311

that though Stanley himself might genuinely desire the abandonment of protection his inability to dis-associate himself from it would so damage him "that alliance with him would not be safe". Newcastle further argued, "if we held off now the crisis must end shortly in placing the summa rerum in our hands".<sup>1</sup> The soundness of these observations impressed Gladstone and he added a rider of his own in which he made another of those subtle justifications for his own behaviour so characteristic of him at this period. His comment to Newcastle was that he must give careful consideration to his response to Stanley's offer for "it was a different thing to take office with him individually, and to join him as one of a body ... the former might be improper even if the latter were practicable". Such fineness of distinction, such mixing of considerations of propriety and practicability was in keeping with Newcastle's earlier advice to Gladstone:

I am sure our rule of conduct at this juncture must be a prudent waiting on events, and perfect readiness for any self-sacrifice which those events may prove to be a duty. I think a coalition at this moment would be fatal to character, and most mischievous to the Queen and the Country.<sup>2</sup>

In the event Stanley, unable to gain the cooperation he had sought, gave up the task and Russell continued as Premier. It is difficult at this distance removed not to detect a degree of pettiness and more than a hint of hypocrisy in the attitude of those involved. Newcastle, as Gladstone later admitted, was as much concerned with the prospect of becoming leader himself as he was with questions of right procedure.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, James Graham, for whose political acumen Gladstone had such a high regard<sup>4</sup>, played a waiting game in the hope of gaining

1. Diaries, iv, p. 310. Morley omits this part of the memorandum.
2. Newcastle to W.E.G. 23rd Feb. '51 in Martineau, op.cit., p.112
3. 9th Sept.1897, Autobiographica, p. 72.
4. "On administrative questions, for the last twenty years and more, I had more spontaneous recourse to him for advice than to all other colleagues together. So wrote Gladstone in 1861, In Morley, i.p.303.

advancement for himself.<sup>1</sup> Sidney Herbert, who at the onset of the ministerial crisis had written urgently to Gladstone and whom Gladstone regularly consulted about this time<sup>2</sup>, was as taken up with detail and as incapable of giving advice as the rest.<sup>3</sup> Nor did the small-mindedness go unobserved by contemporaries. The Times ran a series of articles bitterly critical of the personnel involved in the current political scene.<sup>4</sup> Greville in one of the most trenchant of his analyses observed:

There is an universal feeling of doubt, disquiet and insecurity. Parties are dislocated; there is no respect for, or confidence in, any public men or man. Notwithstanding the creditable manner in which every actor in the late crisis is said to have played his part, the fairness, unselfishness public spirit, and mutual urbanity and politeness displayed by all, there lurks under this smooth surface no little jealousy, dislike and ill-will; in truth, in all that passed, nobody was in earnest.<sup>5</sup>

As to Gladstone himself his mixture of confusion and procrastination is a little easier to understand. He had been thrown straight into the political imbroglio after nearly five months away from England and was pre-occupied with advancing his Neapolitan campaign as well as being borne down by Gorham and the imminent departure of Manning and Hope.<sup>6</sup> He certainly would not have admitted to there being anything

1. Greville recorded this of Graham: "while disapproving of much that they have done, he is now desirous of reconciling himself with his old friends, looks hereafter to coming into power with them, and is excessively pleased at having put himself on amicable terms with J. Russell". 21st. Feb.'51, Memoirs, vi.p.272.
2. Gladstone and Herbert breakfasted and conversed together frequently. Diaries, late Feb. and early March '51. iv.pp.310-14
3. See Herbert's letters to Gladstone, 18th & 21st.Feb.'51. in Stanmore, i.pp. 139-41.
4. The Times, 8th Mar.'51.
5. Memoirs, vi.pp.280-81. The reliability of Greville as an observer is enhanced when it is remembered that Gladstone held him in esteem in this respect. In a review of the third part of the Memoirs Gladstone paid tribute to Greville's "power of drawing characters with ease, with life... and with a fairness hardly ever at fault, and sometimes conspicuous". E.H.R., April.1887.p.283.
6. Significantly, he had resumed his mighty vigils among the London street walkers. His rescue work is a useful barometer recording the pressure to which he felt himself subjected. See Diaries iv. pp.312-3, 318-19.

other than firm conviction in his approach. His endeavour was all to the opposite effect, seeking moral guidelines in the most secular matters. This was clearly apparent in his treatment of the budget of April 1851. Sir Charles Wood, the Chancellor, introduced a scheme proposing the cutting of income tax and its replacement by a house tax. A group of Peelites, including Graham and Gladstone met at Aberdeen's to consider their attitude.<sup>1</sup> The general feeling among them was that, while Wood's house tax was too narrow and unproductive a proposal, opposing it involved the risk of bringing down the Government, a disproportionately punitive step. For Gladstone, however, the question was "a grave one".<sup>2</sup> The mere consideration of the threat to the Government was not sufficient to prevent him from attacking the house tax. He was, indeed, prepared to go much further. Consistent with a view he had originally put forward when criticising Peel's attempt to debar the Protectionists at all costs<sup>3</sup> Gladstone argued that only by being subjected to the responsibilities of holding office could the Protectionists be shown up for what they were:

I looked upon the accession of the Protectionists to power as an event attended with some inconveniences but yet to be encountered as absolutely necessary in order to purge the great aristocratic party of this country from its connection with a cause which is false and grows more and more false every day. <sup>4</sup>

A real difference of opinion occurred between him and Graham over this. Graham urged that it was a matter of "State necessity" that Stanley come into power for only by this process could the "needful constitution and equilibrium of parties be restored". He was further

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1. Memo. 23rd. April '51. Add. Ms. 44777 f. 327. Diaries. iv, p.321.
  2. Ibid.
  3. See above p. 27.
  4. Diaries iv. p. 321.

of the opinion that "there could be no permanent junction on Conservative grounds" between the Peelites and the Whig ministry. Yet, in Gladstone's account, when it was put to Graham that by voting against the Government in order "to save a financial principle" they as a group might have the effect of bringing Stanley to power, Graham shrank back from such a course.<sup>1</sup> Gladstone thought Graham's fears of Stanley were exaggerated; he re-iterated his belief in the impossibility of restoring Protection and declared that in any case, since "no principle of politics was ever to carry us against the Ministry", they were free to examine the Government's plans on merit. Gladstone claimed that he had himself always voted "according to the merits of questions & never in order to put out the Govt. or to keep them in ". He was still sufficiently a tory, however, to warn his colleagues that if Russell's Government continued in its fiscal incompetence it might well have the result of increasing the demand for Reform.<sup>2</sup> Divided though their counsels may have been Graham and Gladstone were in the group of Liberal Conservatives who helped defeat the Protectionist motions against the Government.<sup>3</sup> Gladstone's support of Russell in this makes nonsense of the view Graham expressed to Greville that "Gladstone was disgusted with the Government and determined to turn them out if he could".<sup>4</sup> While Gladstone was willing to attack the Government on specific issues he had no great desire at this stage to see it irrevocably defeated.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, as 1851 wore on it became apparent that Gladstone was becoming increasingly irritated with the unresolved political

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1. Diaries, iv.p.321

2. Diaries, iv, pp. 321- 22

3. H. cxv, 1198; cxvl, 464. See Conacher, Peelites, pp. 87-88

4. Greville Memoirs vi, p. 292.

5. In May and June Gladstone spoke and voted in support of a motion of Disraeli's strongly critical of the Government's financial record. H. cxvii, 1416-40, Diaries iv.p.340. On a number of occasions in June and July he supported censures of the Government's colonial dealings. H. cxvii, 204-30, 250-3. See Diaries iv, pp.333,343, cxviii, 484

political situation and was concerned that the Peelites still lacked a head. As he recorded: "It had in the meantime become essential for the Peelites, if we were to have even for the shortest time a separate existence to be under a leader".<sup>1</sup> In this latter-day observation Gladstone suggested that the question was settled in a straight-forward, harmonious manner:

I found that the Duke of Newcastle coveted this post. It appeared to me that Lord Aberdeen was on every ground the person intitled to hold it. I made my views distinctly known to the Duke. He took no offence. I do not know what communications he may have held with others. But the upshot was that Lord Aberdeen became our leader. And this result was obtained without any shock or conflict. 2

At the time the matter did not prove capable of such a simple resolution; Gladstone's recollections disguised the fact that in 1851 he showed considerable annoyance with Aberdeen's reluctance to assume his proper responsibilities. Newcastle, himself hopeful of becoming leader, approached Gladstone in October to sound out his views on "our disorganised condition".<sup>3</sup> In his response Gladstone set out a full analysis of the Peelites' current position. Commenting on Newcastle's suggestion that they themselves, together with Herbert and Young, should form some kind of pressure group Gladstone pointed out that such an isolated move would hardly provide the necessary degree of organisation that the situation demanded. They were not like a body of independent members; rather they were "the wreck or relics of a Government having more or less of definite relation to one another from the offices in which we have served and the subjects on which we have been thrown".<sup>4</sup>

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1. Sept. 1897, Autobiographica, i.p. 72.
  2. Ibid., part in Morley, i. 303. Morley gives no hint that the leadership question was a contentious issue.
  3. 22nd Oct. '51. Add. Ms. 44262, f. 111.
  4. W.E.G. to Newcastle, 22nd Oct. '51, ibid.

In addition the position of Graham, "more than ever awkward and embarrassing", rendered action as a clique even less suited to the times.<sup>1</sup> The public interest, Gladstone argued, demanded that the Peelites, if they were to continue as a recognisable body, must settle the leadership question. He told Newcastle frankly that there were only two real candidates, Aberdeen and Newcastle himself, and that in point of public position, reputation and experience Aberdeen was the ideal choice. If, however, Aberdeen continued to decline the formal leadership, which in effect he had exercised informally since shortly after Peel's death, the principal Peelites in both Lords and Commons should act together in the cause of unity and press the leadership upon Newcastle.<sup>2</sup> Responding to his own question by what right or authority he exercised such an initiative Gladstone replied that he did so on demanding negative grounds, viz., that if he did not make a move nobody else would, adding that he himself was free of "all invidious tinge" in the matter since he had never sought any place or standing for himself. At this point he pronounced another of those disclaimers regarding personal political ambition which he was wont regularly to make:

My own strong personal desire (is) to make my escape from political life, a goal which looks to the time when in the course of nature (even as that course is affected by Parliamentary habits) I might expect to feel my strength exhausted and my years drawing to a close. Absolute freedom in this matter I know I cannot have: but I do not mean to do anything, of my own motion, which might tighten my fetters. 3

As with all Gladstone's references to his wish to withdraw from politics his claim here has a very hollow ring to it. Had this been his

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., fos. 111-12. Gladstone listed the chief Peelites in the Lords as Buccleuch, Harding, Canning, and St. Germans; in the Commons as Herbert, Young, Goulburn, Clark and Cardwell. He added some other names, "out of respect for the past if not with much view to the future" but these, including Wellington, were of nominal significance only. See Conacher, Peelites, p. 196.

3. Add. Ms. 44262. f. 113.



genuine desire the opportunity was to hand; his concerns outside parliament were considerable and afforded him every chance of honourable retirement from public life.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the fetters of which he wrote were of his own forging and that in the chains that restricted his freedom there were as many links fashioned from ambition as there were from duty. Gladstone's approach to politics was rarely a simple one and any analysis of his career which starts from the presupposition that the key to his Liberalism is to be found in a set of emergent Liberal concepts is condemned to inaccuracy.

Gladstone's letter on the leadership question was passed on to Sidney Herbert by Newcastle who described the suggestion of electing a leader as being "impossible".<sup>2</sup> In his reply to Gladstone Newcastle rejected the idea as "a dangerous experiment".<sup>3</sup> Concurring with Gladstone in his wish to prevent the absorption or dissipation of the Peelites, Newcastle, nonetheless, argued that there was no figure in the party sufficiently outstanding to merit such a constitutional novelty as an election of this kind. In Newcastle's view there were too many flaws in Aberdeen's political make-up for him to be regarded as the true heir to Peel. Graham was dismissed by Newcastle as being "unfit to lead" and as to his own prospects he declared himself to be unworthy although he was prompt to add that he would be willing to become chief if by doing so he could "help ward off mischief, and stand in the gap".<sup>4</sup> Significantly, neither in his correspondence with Herbert nor in his response to Gladstone did Newcastle raise the possibility of Gladstone's

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- 1 . In the autumn of 1851 Gladstone was much taken up with attending on his father in his fatal illness and seeing to family business matters. Diaries iv. pp.366-79. See also Checkland, pp.371-74.
  2. 27th October '51, in Stanmore i. p.145.
  3. 8th Dec. '51, in Martineau, p. 105.
  4. In ibid., pp. 105-6.

being considered as possible leader. When in December 1851 Russell, his Government weakened by the departure of Palmerston,<sup>1</sup> approached Newcastle to enquire whether he and his colleagues, Herbert and Gladstone, would be willing to take office under him Newcastle replied on behalf of all three that the Prime Minister's policies in relation to Church patronage and the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill rendered acceptance highly unlikely.<sup>2</sup> How slight the differences were dividing men and parties Russell hinted at in his observation: "my wish was to unite in office with us those of Sir Robert Peel's friends who supported him in 1846, and who agreed in a Free Trade policy".<sup>3</sup> That Russell was not being wholly unrealistic in this is borne out by the following comment of Gladstone which, while it confirms Newcastle's interpretation of the barrier that the Titles Bill had placed between Russell and the Peelites, does suggest that apart from this measure Gladstone had some sympathy for Russell:

Lord John is now I think about sixty or thereabouts, and it would not surprise me if he were to play when he goes out the part of Peel so far as to refrain from systematic opposition. I wish he had never stained his escutcheon with the Papal Aggression Bill and Durham letter. <sup>4</sup>

The year 1851 closed with the Peelite leadership question unresolved and Russell thwarted in his attempts to bring prominent Peelites into his Cabinet. In the uncertainty that prevailed there was one aspect of the political confusion that does provide a light in the darkness; namely the Church question. The Erastian attitude of the

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1. Russell had dismissed Palmerston following the Foreign Secretary's unilateral recognition of Louis Napoleon's coup d'etat.
  2. Russell's memorandum, 31st Dec.'51, in Martineau, pp. 108-110
  3. Ibid., p. 108
  4. W.E.G. to C.G., 9th Jan.'52, in Bassett, p. 85.

Whigs remained for some years a stumbling block along the path to Gladstone's joining them. In time, as he came, in effect, to acquiesce in the growing secularisation of the state his objection to the Whigs lessened. But in the early 'fifties he still retained some vestiges of his earlier ecclesiastical policy and his attitude towards Church questions remained the key consideration in his political make-up. In March, 1852, a Whig peer expressed the same idea from a different angle when defining those aspects of Gladstone that made so many of the Whigs uneasy about him:

We are talking much of an infusion of Peelites, but it seems to me that the best of them as Newcastle Sidney Herbert and Gladstone must be quite impracticable on Church matters. The very name of the last would scamp any Cabinet. They are I take it, too much in earnest to throw overboard their High Churchmanship; and as they are, of course, you could not work with them. <sup>1</sup>

Elsewhere the same peer observed, "Gladstone is a Jesuit, and more Peelite than I believe was Peel himself".<sup>2</sup> Greville saw religious differences as being so decisive as to "create enormous difficulties" in the way of any merger of groups. He wrote

The Whigs generally hate the Peelites, and Graham especially, The Peelites hate the Whigs. Mutual dislike exists between G[raham] on one side, and Newcastle, Gladstone, and S. Herbert on the other. The three latter are High Churchmen of a deep colour, which makes it difficult to mix them up with any other party, so that the Peelite leaders are extremely divided, and the party is so scattered that it can hardly be called a party. <sup>3</sup>

Whatever the differences dividing Peelites and Whigs the breach within the Conservative party itself ought not to have been irreparable. By 1852, the year in which Derby formed his ministry, two of the main

1. Lord Wriothsley Russell to Lord John Russell, 16th Mar. '52, in Conacher, Peelites, p. 96.
2. In Morley, i. p. 309
3. Memoirs, vi, 328-9

protagonists, Peel and Bentinck, were dead and Disraeli, never in any case a sincere supporter of Protection, had now openly abandoned it. There appear to be two main reasons why there was, nonetheless, no re-union. The first is simply the time element; after seven years at variance with one another the individuals concerned had become sufficiently hardened in their attitudes as to be unable to forgive and forget.<sup>1</sup> The other reason relates to the interesting observation made by Robert Blake. He argues that although by the early 'fifties the Protectionists had dropped protection they had not yet given up the principle which lay beneath it, namely; that the landed interest in return for bearing its special burdens and responsibilities was entitled to special relief from taxation. This gives to Disraeli's budget of 1852 a particular significance: "His attempt to halve the malt tax while raising the House tax was palpably designed to compensate the agricultural industry as a whole, including the landowners, for the potential damage done to it by free trade".<sup>2</sup> Such preferential treatment, however, offended Cobden and the rest of the free trade school and they were joined in their attack upon the budget by a combination of Whigs and Peelites whose most vociferous protests were voiced by Gladstone. In a speech, imbued according to The Times "with a high tone of moral feeling",<sup>3</sup> Gladstone castigated Disraeli for the slipshod preparation of his taxation proposals arguing that these, while creating a basic injustice, would not effectively compensate the landed interests.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Blake lists some interesting examples from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of parties failing to re-unite even though the original causes of disruption had disappeared. The Conservative Party, pp. 82-3
  2. Ibid., p.83.
  3. The Times, 18th December 1852
  4. H, cxxiii, 1523.

Gladstone's main objection to Disraeli and the Government was that they had acted with cowardice and expediency.<sup>1</sup> Taking office as declared Protectionists Lord Derby and his colleagues had in practice "run away from Protection". Gladstone did not impute base motives to Derby personally but considered he had acted "expediently" in a way that compared unfavourably with Sir Robert Peel as Prime Minister.<sup>2</sup> The Government had reaped where Peel had sown but at no cost to themselves since while acting upon the new policy they did not openly avow or adopt it. Gladstone set his complaint in the context of a wider criticism of current political trends; he bemoaned the decline of the tradition "that moral obligation is applicable to political conduct".<sup>3</sup> His explanation for the continuance in office for ten months of such an infirm Government was that the Peelites by their inaction at certain crucial stages had allowed Derby to retain power.<sup>4</sup>

Gladstone justified his own conduct during this period by declaring that Derby's Administration had received from him "all the support that my known opinions could present me to give a Government which was bound to use every fair means to compass the restoration of Protection".<sup>5</sup> So improper were the terms of Disraeli's budget, however,

1. The remarkable feature of Gladstone's attack on Disraeli's budget was the degree of passionate involvement he exhibited. He confided to his wife that he had never before in his parliamentary life gone through so exciting a time. (W.E.G. to C.G., 18th Dec. '52, Bassett, pp. 94-5) His usually terse journal comments on his Commons' performances became enlivened: "I had but two hours sleep. My nervous system was too powerfully acted upon by the scenes of last night". (17th Dec. '52, Diaries, iv.p. 477.)
2. "Party as it was and is", April '55, Add. Ms. 44745, f. 202
3. Ibid., f. 203
4. Ibid., f. 218
5. Ibid., f. 219

that Gladstone felt entirely justified in launching his attack upon it;<sup>1</sup>  
 in asserting this he was endeavouring to answer the charge that the  
 Derby Government had been the victims of a pre-arranged plot in which  
 he himself had been implicated. Gladstone claimed that he had judged  
 the question wholly on its merits. Had the budget been sound he would  
 have accepted it; "but it was decidedly bad" and therefore his course  
 had been clear.<sup>2</sup>

Complementing Gladstone's strictures on the financial details  
 of the budget was his charge that Disraeli was irresponsible in his  
 approach. He accused him of being "vulgar" and of engaging in "legerdemain".<sup>3</sup>  
 Having asserted what, given the straitened circumstances of the time, was  
 not unacceptable, namely; "the principle if not of compensation yet  
 of adjustment between class and class", Disraeli had singularly failed  
 to make any effort to achieve this. His budget would indeed deepen  
 class antagonisms:

the flagrantly vicious element in Disraeli's Budget was his  
 proposal to reduce the income tax on Schedule D to fivepence in  
 the pound, leaving Schedule A at sevenpence. This was no  
 compensation to the land; but, inasmuch as to exempt one is to  
 tax another, it was a distinct addition to the burdens borne by  
 the holders of visible property. <sup>4</sup>

In doing this Disraeli was both deceiving his own supporters and making  
 an outrageous bid for the support of the Liberals who, in the face of  
 expert advice to the contrary, were in favour of such a shift in  
 taxation. Compounding the offence was Disraeli's failure to give the  
 matter the attention which its gravity demanded; "What angered me was  
 that Disraeli never had examined the question".<sup>5</sup> Gladstone took his

1. Ibid., f. 219

2. Ibid. It was the suspicion that W.E.G. had acted in a devious way  
 over the budget that led to his being threatened with violence  
 at the Carlton Club. See Stanley Memoirs, p.92 and Greville  
Memoirs, vi, p.383. W.E.G. wrote of having been "in a lion's den",  
 20th Dec.'52 (Diaries, iv, p.479) but made light of the occurrence  
 when relating it to his wife, 23rd Dec.'52 (Bassett, p.97) and to the  
 Duke of Buckingham, 23rd Dec. (Add.Ms. 44373, f. 129)

3. Add. Ms. 44745, f.219

4. Autobiographica, i. p.77. A slightly altered version of this is in  
Morley, i. p. 324.

5. Autobiographica, i. p.77

stand as a Peelite; pledged to the traditions of Pitt and Peel he felt it his bounden duty to make known and to denounce Disraeli's wiles. It was Gladstone's belief that "this promise to reconstruct the Income Tax was in effect an engagement to destroy it, and that the certain consequence ... would be financial confusion".<sup>1</sup>

The importance of Gladstone's personal distaste for Disraeli in determining his political approach is emphasised when it is realised that it was the expectation in high quarters that Gladstone would, despite his initial refusal to join Derby, go back to the Tory camp. Russell believed that at base Gladstone was "anxious to unite with the Tories".<sup>2</sup> Before Derby's Government fell Aberdeen anticipated that in the near future the Tories would openly embrace the policies of Peel and that this would be the occasion for Gladstone to rejoin them.<sup>3</sup> Graham, in 1852 still a political intimate of Gladstone, recorded that his colleague sat uneasily below the gangway. "So nice is the equipoise of his balanced opinions that he wishes to be he says 'on the Liberal side of the Conservative party than on the Conservative side of the Liberal party'".<sup>4</sup> At the time of Gladstone's support for the Government in November over the Villiers free trade motion,<sup>5</sup> Derby in conversation with Gladstone expressed the hope that this augured even closer relations between them in the near future. "He much desired to see whether there was a possibility of any rapprochement and seemed to glance at personal considerations as

1. "Party as it was and is", Add. Ms. 44745, f.219
2. Russell to Graham, 18th Aug.'52, Parker, ii.p.174
3. Graham to Russell, 30th Oct.'52, ibid, ii.p. 176
4. Graham to Aberdeen, 15th Sept.'52, ibid, ii.p.178
5. 23rd Nov.'52, H, cxxiii, 351. W.E.G. wrote of the defeat of this motion, "So ends the great controversy of Free Trade". 26th Nov.'52 Diaries, iv. p. 471

likely perhaps to stand in the way."<sup>1</sup> Gladstone told Derby that the awaited budget would determine whether he could draw further towards the Government.<sup>2</sup>

According to Gladstone's account Derby accepted this. However, a month later when his Government was defeated on the budget Derby angrily claimed that he had been the victim of an improper parliamentary combination. Gladstone was surprised by the vehemence of Derby's resignation speech which he described as "petulant and intemperate" and as going "beyond all usage and propriety".<sup>3</sup> It was Disraeli and the budget, as he had warned Derby that it might be, that had obliged him to act as he had. Gladstone's intervention at an unusual stage in the debate may well have been predetermined but there is no hard evidence that it was part of a scheme to destroy the Government even though in the event his speech was singly the most instrumental factor in achieving this.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, such was the bitterness of Derby and his supporters that Gladstone was moved to present a "justification of the friends of Aberdeen against the followers of Ld. Derby who argue that the Government of '52 was overthrown by a factious opposition".<sup>5</sup>

1. Add. Ms. 44778, 28th Nov.'52; ibid., iv.p.472. Two days before this conversation Derby had informed the Queen that Gladstone's reluctance to join the Cabinet was due to his unwillingness "to serve under Mr.Disraeli". Letters of Queen Victoria,ii,p.488
2. Diaries, iv.p. 472
3. W.E.G. to C.G., 20th & 21st Dec.'52, Bassett, pp.95-6.Stanley admitted that his father may have used "lanuage stronger than he intended". Stanley Memoirs,p.91.
4. His letters to his wife (in Morley,i.pp.325-26 and in Bassett,pp.91-5) and his journal entries for December (Diaries, iv,pp.476-77) indicate that he had been preparing his speech for over a week. What was unexpected was not the speech but the timing of it which appeared to run counter to parliamentary convention. See H.cxxiii, 1523, 1666. There is an interesting analysis of the speech in Peelites, pp.166-7.
5. Add. Ms. 44745 f. 220-21



The question of honourable conduct was of vital moment to Gladstone; he could hardly castigate Disraeli for his impropriety and the previous Government for its inconsistency if his own conduct revealed the same failing. Aware that his earlier refusal to join Derby and his present willingness to serve with Aberdeen might well be interpreted as mere whim he sought to furnish a justification for what he had done which would leave his integrity unblemished. His treatment of party issues in his memoranda was more than a political analysis; it was, as with so much of his political writing, an extended set of self-justifications. However, he made things difficult for himself by his inability to distinguish in politics between the important and the peripheral. It is certainly an invariable feature of his writing that he gave to every issue which he treated the same weight and attention; in short, and here contemporary criticism and modern research agree, Gladstone lacked a sense of proportion.<sup>1</sup> This realisation may not unravel the complexity of the writer but it does help to explain the prolixity of the writing.

Turning again to that writing it is clear that Gladstone was conscious that his acceptance of office as Chancellor of the Exchequer under Aberdeen in December 1852 ended that period during which his political career had been "in abeyance"; entry into the Cabinet "lifted me more into the public view than the preceding years had done".<sup>2</sup> He set out to explain the position by putting himself, by his

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1. J.R.Vincent observes how few of W.E.G's contemporaries could understand him at this time. Stanley Memoirs, Introduction, p.xv Stanley himself relates numerous accounts of people believing W.E.G. to be actually insane; e.g., pp.215-16, 228-9, 252, 346

2. Autobiographica, i. p.76

own definition still a Peelite, in the context of the party political scene. His premise was that the seriousness of the impasse attendant on the fall of Derby could not be met by the formation of a government from either the Conservative or Liberal parties considered separately. The Conservatives would not be able to find sufficient men of ministerial capacity prepared to follow a different course from Derby while the Liberals would not be willing to take office without the Peelites who in their turn were not yet ready to take office as members of the Liberal party. The only alternative, therefore, was "a mixed Government".<sup>1</sup> Only "a great and palpable exigency of State" could justify this course and such an exigency there now was in the form of a financial crisis portending a class war:

An Executive Government has promulgated the principle that a distinction is to be drawn between realised and precarious incomes .... This amounts to a proclamation to all classes that their relative position is to be changed: an invitation to them to enter into conflict upon the terms of that change. 2

Gladstone stressed that by a mixed Government he did not mean a fusion of parties.<sup>3</sup> He did not view the Aberdeen Government as a coalition in the usual sense, although that would be the term he would use to describe it. In the new Administration individuals would retain "an entire freedom" and a "reserve upon political questions more remotely impending, such as that upon Parliamentary reform".<sup>4</sup>

Gladstone's fear of a class struggle in England raises most interesting considerations. The detestation which as a younger man he had shown for liberalism and democracy had not yet fully subsided.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Add. Ms. 44778 f.66, 18th Dec.'52, Diaries, iv, p.478

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. For a description of W.E.G.'s fearful reaction to the Reform Bill and his anti-democratic views in his earlier career see M.J.Lynch, "Gladstone and the Oxford Movement", unpublished M.A. dissertation, Leicester, 1972 c.i.

Although in later years he would come to be celebrated for championing the masses against the classes,<sup>1</sup> at this stage in his career he was still deeply suspicious of giving rein to the dark forces of society.<sup>2</sup> In 1852 Aberdeen wrote of Gladstone's still being "essentially Conservative" and being "scared by the bugbear of Democracy".<sup>3</sup> To grasp the full significance of Gladstone's attitude we need to place it in the wider perspective of English party growth in this period. What divided Whig and Liberal from Tory and Conservative was of less importance than what united them. Despite its label, "the age of reform", the era after 1832 saw both major parties and their offshoots sharing a common aim, namely; the preservation of the traditional structure of politics and society. With this aim went an essential flexibility. Most Conservatives accepted that features of the constitution had to be changed in order to avoid revolt if not revolution. The majority of the Whigs believed that rather than allow revolt to develop unchecked they should lead it and in doing so deprive it of its revolutionary dangers. The parties may have differed as to means; they were in basic agreement as to ends.

Of marked relevance here are the observations of J.R.Vincent in regard to Protection. For him the question is not why Free Trade was accepted in 1846 but why <sup>Protection</sup> was not restored in 1849. He notes how the Stanley journals give a picture of Protectionist optimism in the late 'forties and indicate a general sense "that Free Trade had collapsed in the face of events". Parliament, Vincent observes, talked Protection

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1. This view has been relegated to a myth. As Richard Shannon has shown, Gladstone was always determined that the masses should know their place and keep it. While appearing to be bridging the gap between the traditional ruling class and the lower orders Gladstone was in practice from the 'sixties on "leaving the optimates largely in control of the political process and at the same time leaving the populares more or less reconciled to that fact"., The Crisis of Imperialism, 1865-1915, London, 1974, pp. 54-7
  2. In 1848 at the time of the presentation of the Charter to Parliament he had enrolled as a special constable, (12th June '48, Diaries, iv. p. 49) had written an anti-Chartist sheet (21st April '48. Add. Ms. 44737, fos. 27-9.) and had travelled to Oxford to sign Convocation's "Address of Loyalty to the Crown". (17th June '48, Diaries, iv, p. 43.)
  3. Aberdeen to Graham, Aug. '52, in Peelites, p. 141

but when it came to divisions voted Free Trade. His explanation for this is a fascinating one.

It did so because it believed there was a possibility of revolution. Predictions of a republic indicated this fear. British reactionaries, without any effort or merit on their part, were on the crest of a wave in 1849; but for good reactionary reasons, they dared not show themselves master of the situation. The irony of the Anti-Corn Law League was that it made Cobden the true father of Derbyite Conservatism, and the irony of Chartism was that it made the world safe for free trade.<sup>1</sup>

This interpretation can be extended at significant points to Gladstone; in terms of his disposition of mind and his basic reactionary attitude it well accords with what we know of him. He frequently spoke of economic reforms as a way of pre-empting social unrest. In 1842 at the time of the "Plug Plot" he had been worried by the scale of the Chartist agitation:

This is the time when we may reflect on the thorough rottenness, socially speaking, of the system which gathers together huge masses of population having no other tie to the classes above them than that of employment, of high money payments constituting a great moral temptation in times of prosperity, and then reductions in adversity which seem like robberies, and which the people have no discipline or training to endure.<sup>2</sup>

It was on this ground that he endeavoured to appeal to the dictates of morality. "For my part I am a Free Trader on moral no less than on economic grounds: for I think human greed and selfishness are interwoven with every thread of the Protective system."<sup>3</sup> It gives added importance to his disagreements with his ageing father over free trade<sup>4</sup> and makes Peel's words to him of particular pertinence: "I foresee that there will

1. Stanley Memoirs, Introduction, p. xiv. An important work cited by Vincent in support of his argument is R. Stewart, The Politics of Protection, Cambridge, 1971.
2. W.E.G. to C.G. 18th Aug. 1842, Bassett, p. 44. At the Board of Trade in Peel's Government Gladstone had shown a genuine, if patronising, interest in the plight of the labouring class. His concern was for their moral rather than their social or physical welfare. See his correspondence on the Northumberland miners' strike of 1844, Add Ms. 44361 fos. 142-45. The same moralising tone is evident in his letters to Manning regarding the scheme which they jointly supported for the subsidising of apprenticeships, for the indigent and delinquent young; Add. Ms. 44247. fos. 102-60. In a similar vein Gladstone acted as unofficial patron to the London Coalwhippers, frequently attending their committee meetings and delivering religious homilies; May to July '51, Diaries, iv. pp. 330-42.
3. Autobiographica, i. p. 74
4. Diaries, iv, pp. 167, 172, 377.

be a desperate struggle made for the restoration of Protection. I think it will convulse the country".<sup>1</sup> Earlier it was noted in regard to Italy that beneath Gladstone's anger at the barbarous treatment of the Italian liberals in Naples there lay a deeper fear that such severity rather than stifling reform would encourage the emergence of a fiercer form of revolutionary enterprise.

The identity of interests at base between the political parties implies that transference from one to another was of less significance than if the parties had represented fundamentally divergent principles. The period under examination, 1845-59, is a confusing one; political parties were in state of flux. With hindsight it is possible to impose a pattern, discriminating between the significant and the inessential. No such luxury was available to men of the time; hence their squabbling over what seem minor issues and their scruples over fine points as witnessed in the executive crises of 1852 and 1855. The parties but for the accident of history might well have developed very different characters. Although men usually spoke in terms of principles it is often difficult for us to grasp fully what those principles were. Personal taste or distaste seems far more often to have been the determinant of political and party alignment. Viewed against this background Gladstone's development into a Liberal takes on a different aspect; despite the solemnity of the language in which it was invariably expressed it appears as much a matter of predilection as of a deeply pondered commitment to a cause.

Nevertheless, his entry into the Aberdeen Government was a decision which he felt compelled to explain as a matter of propriety and consistency. He thought that the resolution of the Peelites to remain a separate, indentifiable group needed particular justification. The kernel of his argument was that the Whigs, although they were to be

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1. Autobiographica, i.p.76

the main support of the Government, were at this juncture "an used up and discredited party"; one of the main reasons for this was "their ill-conceived and mischievous Ecclesiastical Titles Act".<sup>1</sup> Reverting to his erstwhile role as guardian of the Church he expressed disappointment in the record of the Derby Government in religious matters and said that he saw no reason why a government led by the Presbyterian, Lord Aberdeen, should be inimical to Church interests.<sup>2</sup> What offended him was that the previous Government by its "financial dishonesty" had brought about "the demoralization of government at large".<sup>3</sup> By casting doubts on the Whig record in religion and by castigating the Derbyite Tories for their lack of integrity Gladstone could thus stand four-square as the political moralist, the new position he was developing as a public figure.

Claiming that he and his colleagues, having been out of office for seven years, had upon them "the gloss of freshness",<sup>4</sup> Gladstone explained why the Peelites declined "to fuse and amalgamate themselves with the rest of the ministerial party".<sup>5</sup> Their reverence for their mentor's memory and their belief that in the future they would have a distinct part to play as a separate body obliged them to remain independent. In the matter of nomenclature Gladstone had firm views. He was not willing to go to the lengths of one Peelite who had said at a recent election, "I have been a Liberal-Conservative: but I think the time has arrived when we should dispense with the latter of those two epithets".<sup>6</sup> Such words were all very well, he argued, for those who had never held ministerial office but when a man had attained to "that truly enviable rank" he was from then on subject to close public scrutiny and must

1. Autobiographica, i.p.76
2. W.E.G. to William Heathcote, 28th Dec.'52. Add. Ms. 44208 fos. 34-6
3. Ibid., f. 36. Conacher, like most observers, tends to be over-impressed by the weight of Gladstone's self-justifications and interprets his behaviour as logical and progressive: see Peelites, p. 177
4. Autobiographica, i.p.76
5. "Party as it was and is", April '55. Add. Ms. 44745 f. 221
6. Ibid.

for the sake of showing integrity be prepared "to forego much of his personal freedom".<sup>1</sup> Understandably Gladstone showed himself to be very sensitive in the matter of the consistency of public men. This attribute he wrote, was essential in public life: its disregard destroyed the confidence that the community customarily felt in its leaders; when politicians changed their line of conduct or their opinions, even from wrong to right public confidence was shaken.<sup>2</sup> Conscious that this line of reasoning had to be squared with his own behaviour, Gladstone developed an argument which, while it lauded the virtues of party loyalty, still allowed public men the right of individual choice in determining their allegiance.

Silent changes in opinion are always at work within certain limits in every mind .... But transition from one of two distinct camps to its rival are another matter and cannot take place with credit except they be founded on some broad and intelligible principle which will account both for leaving those who are left, & for joining those who are joined. 3

It was with approval that Gladstone noted how jealous the nation was touching the probity of its public men. He argued, however, that such stringent demands as related to individuals did not apply to mere combinations of politicians "without complete fusion"; they were on a different footing. It was this dispensation he invoked to explain his entry into the Aberdeen Government. The financial crisis at the end of 1852 demanded an administration capable of dealing effectively with it; the absence of any other outstanding current political issue to divide Whig from Peelite rendered the forming of the necessary combination a relatively easy operation. Gladstone admitted that in the nature of things this raised the likelihood of a more permanent relationship but pointed out that this was no part of

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., fos.221-2

3. Ibid.

the initial understanding between the parties concerned. Looking back from 1855 he observed that the failure of the co-operation between Whigs and Peelites to develop into union was "the fault of one man only and that not at any rate a Peelite".<sup>1</sup> Although Gladstone did not name him directly there are strong grounds for thinking that the person he had in mind was Russell. Elsewhere Gladstone expressed considerable annoyance with the vacillation shown by Russell at the time of the forming of the coalition:

J. Russell as weak water, a puppet pulled by strings from without. He does not know his own mind for 12 hours together: and it is solely owing to his incessant shifting that we lose day after day and threaten to become ridiculous. <sup>2</sup>

The annoyance which Gladstone showed over incidents of this kind is a reminder that the restraint of his retrospective reasonings may be misleading, if accepted uncritically, as an indicator of his attitude at the time of the event. It also stresses the importance of individuals as opposed to abstract principles as determinants of his political thinking.

That Gladstone became Chancellor of the Exchequer in Aberdeen's Government surprised no one. His particular contribution to the defeat of Derby made it logical to the point of inevitability. He told his wife that "at headquarters" the current saw was "' Mr.G. destroyed the Budget so he ought to make a new one'".<sup>3</sup> Gladstone, somewhat in the manner of Caesar putting away the crown, suggested that Graham might be better fitted for the office but after such preliminary courtesies accepted the position readily enough.<sup>4</sup>

1. Ibid.
2. W.E.G. to C.G., 24th Dec.'52, Bassett, p.99. The question at issue was whether Russell could lead the Commons without being in the Cabinet. W.E.G. submitted a memorandum in which he argued that such a course was constitutionally improper. 22nd Dec.'52. Add. Ms.44777 f. 341.
3. 22nd Dec.'52, Bassett, pp.96-7
4. Ibid., and Diaries, iv.p.480



Graham would not take the financial department and after the share I had in bringing about the crisis I had no choice but to accept it: although as it plainly appeared my first duty would be the conversion of our party on the most crying financial question of the day. 1

Before he could turn fully to this task, however, he was much distracted by the by-election at Oxford occasioned by his taking up ministerial office. As was customary he played little part personally in the campaign itself but the manner in which his name was attacked by opponents merits attention. Notwithstanding Gladstone's efforts to define the current political situation in such a way as to quieten religious fears, he was attacked, as at every Oxford election in which he was a candidate, on the grounds of his implication in anti-Church measures. There is real irony in the fact that Gladstone, who sought to present himself as the defender of Church interests in an increasingly hostile world, should have been viewed by so many of his constituents as someone who, if not himself a threat to those interests, acquiesced in the threats of others.<sup>2</sup> The ease with which people misunderstood Gladstone in this regard serves as a useful corrective to the received view of him as the exemplar of the Christian statesman. For many Gladstone was a sinister enigma. His decision now to enter a Cabinet which included radicals and secularists and which was led by a Presbyterian whereas earlier for no profound reason he had baulked at joining Derby's Government was interpreted by the ill-disposed as mere perversity. Archdeacon Denison believed that the Coalition represented a political latitudinarianism which must inevitably lead to latitudinarianism in Church affairs. Russell was seen as a

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1. Autobiographica, i.p.77

2. Oxford was in considerable turmoil following the appointment, by the Russell Government, of a royal commission in 1850 to examine the structure of the ancient universities. Gladstone, ambiguously, had attacked the commission as being a challenge to the autonomy of Oxford while at the same time declaring that its enquiries would be beneficial to the University. H. cxii, 1455. See Ward, c. vii, passim

particular danger in this regard because of his willingness to extend state intervention in Church matters.<sup>1</sup> A serious campaign to unseat Gladstone was mounted;<sup>2</sup> but in the event, after protracted polling, he won by over a hundred votes.<sup>3</sup>

There is, perhaps, a temptation to dismiss this squabble as a parochial affair not greatly impinging on Gladstone in his national role as Chancellor. To do so, however, would be to miss an essential point; namely, that despite Gladstone's attempts to prove to the world the logic and integrity of his political growth there remained a sizeable group of his contemporaries, drawn from those who should have been his natural allies, who saw him as a trimmer, a man willing to forego principle in pursuit of political power. James Graham, whose own increasingly liberal tendencies had alarmed Gladstone earlier, considered that it was the Oxford tie that prevented Gladstone from throwing off the old Toryism and openly declaring his political hand:

I suppose that Gladstone is now safe at Oxford. I hope for his own sake that he may never be returned again for that learned body. With a little Cabinet training he would be moulded into a good Liberal, if it were not for that Oxford alloy.<sup>4</sup>

At this stage Gladstone was not prepared to go as far as dissolving the alloy and he would continue to represent the University for another thirteen years. Nonetheless, the campaign against him had shaken him and he suggested to a number of persons that perhaps the time had come for him to look elsewhere for a seat.<sup>5</sup>

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1. G.A.Denison, The Coalition of 1852, London, 1853, p.18

2. Described in Ward, pp.176-79

3. 20th Jan.'53, Diaries, iv.p.490

4. Graham's journal, 9th & 20th Jan.'53, Graham, p.206

5. W.E.G.to Rev.A.W.Haddon,  
Jan.'53.Add.Ms.44183 fos.31-2; W.E.G. to William Heathcote,  
Jan.'53,Add.Ms. 44208 fos.21-4; W.E.G. to R.Greswell, Jan.'53  
Lathbury, ii.pp. 18-20

# CHAPTER IV

Showing himself very much his father's son Gladstone approached the preparation of his first budget from the standpoint of the need to stabilise the national economy which Disraeli by his rashness had placed in jeopardy. Claiming that Disraeli, his predecessor, had by his taxation proposals made class war a distinct possibility Gladstone set himself the lofty task of answering the nation's "resistless call for a vigorous and united effort to settle and secure the finances of the country".<sup>1</sup> In four months of phenomenal effort<sup>2</sup> he devised a scheme, unprecedented in scope, for the lowering of tariffs and the phasing out of income tax over a period of seven years.<sup>3</sup> To undo the harm of Disraeli's divisive budget Gladstone made it a key-note of his own proposals that for as long as income tax remained differentiation should be avoided; that is to say, in the drafting of the taxation schedules, the different forms and sources of income should as a principle not be taxed at different and therefore possibly punitive rates.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Diaries, iv.p. 478

2. Between Dec.'52 and April '53 he seldom worked less than fifteen hours a day; he recorded that during this period his usual time for going to bed was 2.30 a.m., Diaries, iv.pp. 490-519. He digested vast amounts of financial detail, one set of his budget memoranda alone running to 267 folios. (Add. Ms. 44741 fos. 1-267.) He, nevertheless found the time to continue his rescue work on a nightly basis.

3. The essential proposals were a) the progressive reduction of income tax from 7d. in the £ to total abolition by 1860; b) income tax to be extended to Ireland in order to pay off the debt of 1847; c) a legacy duty on inherited land; d) the reduction of duties on 143 articles, and their abolition on 123 others. See Greville Memoirs, vi., p.418 Stanley gave an incisive summary of the Budget's main features and and the reason for their wide acceptance: "Every party except that of the landed interest took away something in the shape of a boon: Manchester had the succession tax: Ireland a remission of debt: the working classes cheaper tea and soap: the press, the advertisement duty taken off". Stanley Memoirs, p.106. Later analyses of the Budget are in F.W.Hirst, Gladstone as Financier and Economist, and in Aberdeen, c.3. Matthew treats of it in his introduction to the Diaries, iii, p.xl, and in "Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Politics of Mid-Victorian Budgets", H.J., Sept. 1979

4. H., cxxv, 1360

This budget has long been regarded as one of the great achievements of Gladstone's public career and modern commentators see it as marking his advent as a truly national figure.<sup>1</sup> From the viewpoint of this study the Budget's main significance lies not in its financial aspects but in Gladstone's endeavour to use the budget as a piece of moral persuasion. His approach to the budget was a peculiarly personal one; indeed he saw the nation's finances as a macrocosm of the Oak Farm estate. He declared openly that "the arduous labour" which the collapse of the Oak Farm Company involved him in was the first and severest stage in his financial training, "the only training of that kind which I had before becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer".<sup>2</sup> His brother-in-law's Company had been brought down by a mixture of recklessness and indulgence; Gladstone was determined that the nation should be better served.

What he learned on becoming Chancellor was that "the State held in the face of the Bank and the City an essentially false position as to finance".<sup>3</sup> Saved from bankruptcy by the Glorious Revolution the State had ever since been in "a position of subserviency" which it was in the interests of the Bank and the City to prolong.

This was done by the adoption of amicable and accommodating measures towards the Government, whose position was thus cushioned and made easy in order that it might be willing to give it a continued acquiescence. The hinge of the whole situation was this; the Government itself was not to be a substantive power in matters of finance but was to leave the money power supreme and unquestioned.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Greville Memoirs, vi, p. 419; Stafford H. Northcote, Twenty Years of Financial Policy, London, 1862, pp. 188-89; Morley, i, pp. 339-52; Magnus, pp. xl, 113; Feuchtwanger, pp. 84-5; Matthew, Diaries, iii, p. xl.
  2. Autobiographica, i, p. 128.
  3. Ibid. In 1854 Gladstone became personally embroiled in a legal battle between the Treasury and the Bank of England over their respective rights. See the correspondence of W.E.G. and Sir Richard Bethell, Solicitor General, Sept. 1854. Add. Ms. 44337 fos. 103-05. Cf. Morley, i. pp. 385-87.
  4. Autobiographica, i, pp. 128-29.

Such a situation Gladstone found morally affronting and he determined to fight against it by "financial self-assertion". This however, would be a long haul for he was from the first to be obstructed by the governors of the Bank of England and by the City, all of whom were represented in Parliament. "It was", he admitted, "only by the establishment of the Post Office savings Banks, and their great progressive development, that the Finance Minister has been provided with an instrument sufficiently powerful to make himself independent of the Bank and City power".<sup>1</sup> We are presented here with an interesting example of Gladstone's acceptance of the extension of executive power at the expense of a sectional interest where that interest ran counter to the nation's good. It further illustrates how experience of executive office acted as a solvent upon such of his politico-religious ideas as had survived the failure of Tractarianism and the traumas of 1851. In the 'thirties and 'forties he had fought a vigorous campaign against the extension of State authority; his first book had sought to define the limitations of the State. Now, in the 'fifties, having followed Peel in abandoning Protection, <sup>and</sup> having had his theocratic dreams shown to be illusory, he stood committed to Parliament and the legislative process as the guardians of public morality.<sup>2</sup>

By a similar process of assimilation Gladstone was able to translate questions of finance and trade into his own theological forms. In the following passage written during his first Chancellorship he does nothing less than re-state the traditional English Protestant ethic, extolling the virtues of industry and thrift and lauding the honest and successful merchant as the exemplar of the true Christian. For Gladstone

1. Ibid.

2. It is in this connection that Matthew speaks of Gladstone's work as Chancellor as representing "the politicization of Peelism", explaining that for Gladstone "big bills and big budgets represented a means of regular renewal of the legitimacy of Parliament and the political system". Diaries, v.p. xxxiii. See also his article, "Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Politics of Mid-Victorian Budgets" H.J., 22, 1979, p.637

money becomes a form of santifying grace, the proper exercise of which leads men to their closest approximation to God's design for them.

Our Lord loves to represent the gifts accorded to the Christian under the figure of commodities in the hands of a trader. And why .... ? Because where there is a real interest and desire, as there certainly is in the pursuit of money, men proceed with earnestness, with precision: they apply all their powers ....; they thrust aside out of their path everything that is frivolous and trivial....: their whole life falls into order and discipline .... And further it is in money and merchandise that we best appreciate the manners of great and small, and the application of means to ends without waste .... Now what is all this but the framework of a Christian discipline ready to be applied to the Christian end? Hence it is conversely that we hear a worldly man talk of money, it has become a common phrase, as the one thing needful. And our work what is it but to study with his earnestness the science of spiritual exchanges, of the exchange of time, thought, money, health, influence, against the inward gifts of god and the likeness of Christ? 1

This apologia for capitalism he had laid the ground work for in an earlier memorandum:

The question arises .... whether the system of modern industry is not merely liable to abuse but fundamentally and essentially at variance with the principles of the gospels.

It appears to me that this question must be deliberately answered in the negative.

The principle of the accumulation of stock or capital arises out of the division of labour. But the division of labour economises labour & multiplies its power. It seems therefore to be a beneficial & laudable use of the faculties which God has given us - and one that honours the Giver.

The division of labour prevents each man from supplying his own wants as is the case among mere savages: it thus requires him to purchase, and to live upon stock while he is preparing what he is to sell. On the accumulation of stock hangs all the rest. 2

It was as a moralist, therefore, that Gladstone presented his proposals to the Cabinet and then to Parliament. As he had anticipated when taking office his first difficulty would be in convincing his Government colleagues of the correctness of his financial judgements.<sup>3</sup>

1. 1st Jan. 1855, Add. Ms. 44745 f.1. Diaries, v.p.1.
2. 31st. Aug. 1846, Diaries, iii, p. 569
3. Autobiographica, i, p.77

Gladstone kept a detailed account of the Cabinet discussions of his budget. The first objection came from Sir Charles Wood who criticised the extension of the Income Tax to Ireland. Gladstone replied by pointing out that it was intended as a temporary measure only and that should the burden prove too heavy the interest on the original debt could be adjusted.<sup>1</sup> To Palmerston the budget was "a great plan and admirably put together"; however, while he did not openly side with Wood he did declare that the proposals presented too many points for attack.

Disraeli was on the watch, all the Irish would join him & so would the Radicals: the Legacy Duty, to which he (Palmerston) had individually great objections ... would estrange many of the Conservatives. 2

Russell, oddly perhaps in view of their earlier strained relations, gave full support to Gladstone, suggesting helpfully that the Consolidated Annuities should be remitted to the amount expected to be raised by the extension of income tax to Ireland.<sup>3</sup> Gladstone accepted this but had to contend with objections from Lansdowne who agreed with Wood that the remission of the Irish debt would be regarded in Ireland as a matter of right and not as a concession against income tax. Graham was of a similar mind, adding the argument that the proposal to extend the area of income tax and to lower the level of exemption from £150 to £100 was incompatible with the long-term intention to abolish it completely.<sup>4</sup>

This aspect Argyll and Aberdeen himself found the most doubtful part of the whole plan; Aberdeen warned that if the budget proved

1. 11th Feb. 1853, Add.Ms. 44778 f.84, Diaries, iv, p.513. Greville hinted that Wood's opposition may well have sprung from jealousy since "he must have compared Gladstone's triumph with his own failures". Greville Memoirs, vi, p.419
2. Ibid. In March Palmerston had enquired of Gladstone whether in his budget planning he could help "the Paddies", adding that if he could "Irish Gratitude would no doubt last at least a Fortnight". Palmerston to W.E.G., 14th Mar. '53. Guedella, p. 88
3. Diaries, iv, p.513. The Irish debt was expressed in the form of Consolidated Annuities.
4. Ibid.

unpopular at too many points the difficulty of getting it through Parliament might prove insuperable.<sup>1</sup>

Gladstone's response to this line of criticism was to argue that the budget's passage through Parliament would be an "enormous" problem no matter how the proposals were presented but that this would be in no way lessened by dropping the idea of the extension of income tax to Ireland and the lowering of the exemption figure. He did, indeed, anticipate trouble from the Irish members generally but this was an added reason for not alienating the natural support of those who would favour the large reduction in tariffs and indirect taxation. "These proposals to make Ireland and a lower class share the tax would facilitate its re-enactment with those who had hitherto been its sole bearers: the sentiment of the House of Commons was decidedly against exemptions."<sup>2</sup> Gladstone expressed himself willing to accept any qualifications of the budget which his colleagues might press upon him - except on one thing, and on this he took a moral stand; "the breaking up of the basis of the Income Tax: that I could not be a party to and I should regard it as a high political offence".<sup>3</sup>

In subsequent Cabinet discussions Gladstone maintained his position in this regard. He quoted figures supplied by the President of the Poor Law Board to show that not to lower the tax exemption threshold would be to perpetuate a situation in which one class which could afford to contribute its due proportion of tax would continue to be subsidised at the expense of other classes. Wood and Lansdowne repeated their earlier objections, while Graham "portended certain failure". While still full of praise for Gladstone's proposals Palmerston drew a distinction between their quality and the practicability of their

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.



being carried through; he said that in many respects he had found Disraeli's budget to have been a sound one but it could not be carried through. Palmerston's reluctance to take the whole question of budgets too seriously was evident in his statement that he would accept Gladstone's proposals provided that the Cabinet did not feel itself bound to dissolve or resign should it be defeated on either the extension of income tax to Ireland or the reduction of the £150 exemption.<sup>1</sup> Russell agreed with Gladstone that this should be left open for the Government to decide in the course of things; however, both men asserted that a defeat on the question of differentiating the tax would be a matter of dissolution. Finding that the suggested amendments to Gladstone's proposals tended to cancel each other out the Cabinet in the end adopted the budget in its entirety: "the only dissentients being Mr. Lansdowne, Graham, Wood, S. Herbert. Graham was full of ill auguries but said he would assent and assist. Wood looked grave and said he must take time".<sup>2</sup>

The acceptance by the majority of his colleagues still did not give Gladstone complete certainty and when he heard the views of his confidant, Edward Cardwell, President of the Board of Trade but not in the Cabinet, he entertained serious thought of modifying his proposals to incorporate Cardwell's suggestions. That Gladstone, having spent four laborious months in preparing his budget and having stood on principle in his battle to obtain the acquiescence of a far from co-operative Cabinet, should then consider abandoning his plans after a single conversation with a non-Cabinet member of the Government suggests something approaching perversity. However, as Gladstone would have it, the attraction of Cardwell's plan was its simplicity and its likelihood

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1. Ibid., p.515

2. Ibid., Wood, who had been at the Exchequer in Russell's Government, had genuine cause for unease since during the debate on Disraeli's Budget he had given a pledge that he would oppose the extension of the income tax to Ireland. See Peelites, pp. 67-8

of obviating all serious opposition in the Commons which the new taxes and extensions proposed in his own budget would provoke. Basically what Cardwell had suggested was the reduction of income tax to 5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d, the imposition of legacy duties, but, apart from a reduction of tea duties, no remission of indirect taxation for two years. What appealed to Gladstone in this was that it would offer inducement to pass

the Income Tax unaltered in the shape of an immediate reduction of the rate for all to the point at which Mr. Disraeli put it for his favoured classes: a boon in itself, and valuable also as an earnest of the intention to put Parliament in a position to part with the tax altogether . 1

In comparison with his own plan Gladstone found the scheme in several respects disappointing and inferior in terms of "public justice", but in a comment in which he showed signs of the struggle within himself between matters of principle and his growing awareness of political realities he added "its comparative safety will be determined by the question how far other elements than the simple consideration of public justice in a large sense sway the House of Commons".<sup>2</sup>

Learning from Graham, whom he had urged Cardwell to consult, that he much preferred this scheme of Cardwell's to the one the Cabinet had already agreed upon Gladstone went back to Aberdeen, telling him of the attractions of the new plan and adding that he was "revolted from the idea of being the person to inveigle the Government or to drag it blindfold into needless dangers" which might be the case if adherence to the original plan was maintained.<sup>3</sup> Aberdeen declined to be panicked; Newcastle and Argyll were brought in for consultation and both declared against Cardwell's scheme as being even more dangerous than the original and without the compensatory elements. Appealing to the Peelite tradition Aberdeen then asked Gladstone and the others to remember that in its

1. Diaries, iv, p. 515

2. Ibid., p. 516

3. Ibid., p. 517

formation the present Government had pledged itself "to extend the commercial policy of Sir R. Peel: whereas Cardwell's plan was founded on foregoing indefinitely such extension".<sup>1</sup> Even this reminder did not convince Gladstone and the three defeats which the Government suffered in the week of these Cabinet discussions inclined him to agree with Herbert and Cardwell that dissolution might be the only proper course.<sup>2</sup> In a further Cabinet conference Russell spoke warningly of the hostile attitude of the radicals in the Commons and suggested that the budget might be trimmed along lines suggested by Wood. By now Gladstone appeared to be losing heart and he wrote that he considered it "very doubtful whether the Budget could live in this House of Commons, whatever form it might assume".<sup>3</sup> Would it not be better, he asked his colleagues, to accept dissolution now rather than press ahead and be beaten more humiliatingly "at an advanced stage of our financial measure". In the main, however, the senior members of the Cabinet were against this move on the grounds that in going to the country after only four months in office the Government would have little positive achievement beyond its "mere abstract merits" on which to base an appeal.<sup>4</sup>

The rest of the Cabinet accepted this reasoning and agreed that Gladstone should present the Budget on the scheduled day. Ireland was still the greatest difficulty and Palmerston and Herbert led the call for a lightening of the proposed tax burden to be imposed there. It was suggested that the Irish debt should be remitted entirely in return for an immediate imposition of income tax at sevenpence. Gladstone was inclined to accept this since, while it would involve some loss of

1. Ibid.,
2. Ibid. Aberdeen's Government was beaten in three Commons' divisions: on the Clitheroe election petition, 11th April (H. cxxxv, 1032); on the Kilmainham Hospital resolution, 12th April (H. cxxxv, 1074); on the Milner-Gibson motion to repeal advertisement duty, 14th April (H. cxxxv, 1147)
3. Diaries, iv. p. 517
4. Ibid., pp. 517-18

revenue to the Exchequer this would be of "no great matter compared with the advantage of so great an approximation to equal Taxation".<sup>1</sup> Graham was not convinced by such reasoning and argued strongly that the House, having shown itself to be unfavourably disposed towards the abandonment of differentiated tax, could not be induced to accept the Budget in its entirety. In response Gladstone pointed out that all his proposals had been adjusted for the very purpose of meeting the great difficulty of differentiation; moreover, he added:

I thought the entire Budget safer than a reduced one for the House or the country and I felt that if we proposed it the name and fame of the Government at any rate would stand well. 2.

With the exception of Wood the whole Cabinet agreed that this should be the final word and they terminated their deliberations "well satisfied and ... well resolved ... to stand or fall by the Budget as a whole".<sup>3</sup>

The protracted Cabinet discussions had in a sense fulfilled Gladstone's prophecy that his most difficult task would be the conversion of his own party "on the most crying financial question of the day". In relative terms the passage of the Budget through the Commons proved the easier task particularly in view of the doubts expressed in Cabinet that the thing could be done at all. One of Gladstone's main fears had been that there would be some sort of alliance of Derbyites, Radicals, and Irish which would outnumber the Government's supporters in the crucial division.<sup>4</sup> In the event this fear proved exaggerated; the opposition was never sufficiently of one mind and Gladstone's anticipation that Disraeli's intrigues would seriously undermine the

1. Ibid., p. 518

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. He calculated that the opposition, numbering 250, would be augmented by the 40 Irish members and by some 50 Conservatives; against this he reckoned that the Government could rely with certainty on only 310 votes. Add. Ms. 44778 f. 118.

position was unrealised. The personal antipathy the two men felt towards each other was, indeed, the most notable single aspect of the budget debates, but there was never any real danger that Disraeli could thwart his rival. Gladstone's touchiness was revealed on the eve of his introduction of the Budget when he singled out Disraeli as a "malignant" opponent, who in opposing the Budget would employ tactics which went beyond normal usage: "unlike all other leaders of Opposition [Disraeli] stimulates and spurs faction instead of endeavouring to keep it within bounds".<sup>1</sup>

Bearing in mind the ferocity of his attack upon Disraeli's budget four months earlier there is something unreasonable about Gladstone's sensitivity to criticism of his own proposals. What underlay it was something deeper than the political rivalry of two ambitious men who happened to find themselves on opposite sides. Gladstone had chosen to present himself as a moral influence, to act as the conscience of Parliament, but he had been aware from the time of his Maynooth resignation speech that Disraeli had an unerring eye for the fallacies of his moral stances.<sup>2</sup> Disraeli had the knack of making Gladstone appear ridiculous not by exaggeration or misrepresentation but by highlighting the inconsistencies within Gladstone himself. In his main speech opposing the Budget Disraeli pointed out that in general principles Gladstone's proposals were little different from his own budget which the present Chancellor had previously seen fit to savage on the grounds of morality. Disraeli found the retention of income tax for a further

1. Ibid. On Gladstone's moving into 11, Downing St. there had been an acrimonious exchange of letters between him and his predecessor regarding the disposal of some furniture and the Chancellor's robes. See Morley, i. pp. 339-40; Disraeli, pp. 350-51.
2. These Budget clashes are usually treated by Gladstone's biographers as if they were the first significant parliamentary duel between him and Disraeli, (e.g., Magnus, p.103) It is, however, arguable that the proverbial antipathy between the two men had its origins in the Maynooth debates of 1845 when Disraeli concluded that Gladstone for all his pomposity and high-mindedness was essentially an opportunist. See M.J.Lynch, "Gladstone and the Oxford Movement", (unpublished M.A. Dissertation, Leicester University) 1972.

seven years together with the abandonment of differentials highly objectionable. He prophesied that Gladstone, were he still to find himself Chancellor in 1860, would be no more in a position to end income tax than he was now and he asked scathingly whether in that event Gladstone "would resign his office sooner than propose the continuance of the tax for a further period".<sup>1</sup>

There had been a preliminary skirmish between them early in March, 1853, when Gladstone claimed that Disraeli had deliberately used trickery to embarrass the Government. A free trade motion introduced by Joseph Hume had been opposed by Gladstone as a "sham" and he had spoken against it in the House not as a matter involving principle but because the motion, he asserted, was unnecessarily framed "in the nature of a promise" to which the Government ought not to be committed.<sup>2</sup> Disraeli, acting with impropriety, according to Gladstone, then transformed it into a question of confidence by allying the Tories with the radicals and forcing a division on what had been initially an innocuous motion: "Hume's sham motion: turned into a real one by Mr. Disraeli's trick". Gladstone recorded with pleasure that this ruse had been defeated by 159 votes to 101.<sup>3</sup>

His clashes with Disraeli aside, Gladstone's steerage of the Budget through Parliament was an undoubted personal success. Few of his contemporaries were unimpressed; the Annual Register eulogised him,<sup>4</sup> while his colleagues, Aberdeen, Russell and Clarendon, declared that not

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1. H. cxxvi, 976. Cf., Aberdeen, pp. 71-2

2. H. cxxiv, 1014.

3. 3rd Mar. 1853, Diaries, iv, pp. 502-03. Stanley was highly critical of Disraeli's attempt "to steal a division", believing that by such tactics the leader of the Opposition had damaged his position with members of his own party. Stanley Memoirs, p. 101. Later in the year Disraeli successfully opposed a scheme of Gladstone's proposing the creation of a special stock open to public investment as a means of off-setting part of the national debt. Gladstone judged Disraeli's interference to be particularly offensive in that it contravened the traditional parliamentary courtesies. Autobiographica, i. pp. 77-8

4. Annual Register, 1853, p. 50

even Pitt or Peel could have bettered his performances.<sup>1</sup> It was this very success that has tended to obscure an important feature of his attitude at the time. His difficulties in Cabinet and his readiness when opposed by colleagues, to abandon Peel's tradition and seek refuge in safety measures have too often been overlooked. The growing diffidence with which he responded to criticism during the Cabinet discussions of his proposals reflects the problems attendant upon his decision to conduct politics as an exercise in morality. The buoyancy and confidence of his parliamentary performances often stand in marked contrast to the uncertainty of his private utterances. The familiar image of a triumphant Gladstone piloting his way through an admiring Parliament is undeniably a true one<sup>2</sup> but it is not the picture that emerges from his journals and much of his correspondence. There it is the unquiet spirit that prevails. Seldom in the pages of the diaries is there any hint of his great parliamentary successes. Self-criticism and feelings of unworthiness predominate. It is as if the more recognition and esteem he gained in his public life the deeper became his doubts about himself as a private individual. In August 1853 at the end of the most exciting and successful session yet in his parliamentary career he wrote to Manning that he still wondered whether he had betrayed his trust in foregoing an ecclesiastical role for a political one.<sup>3</sup>

Even in that area of his private activity in which he played a directly pastoral role, his crusade among London street-walkers, misgivings about its rectitude assailed him. Despite the onerous tasks under which he laboured during his years as Chancellor in Aberdeen's

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1. Russell to the Queen, April 1853, Letters of Queen Victoria, ii. p. 542; Aberdeen to the King of the Belgians, May 1853, in Aberdeen, p. 70; "The most perfect financial statement ever heard", Clarendon to W.E.G., 19th April 1853. Add. Ms. 44133, f. 5.
  2. W.E.G.'s contributions to the Commons' debates between April and August 1853 fill four hundred columns of Hansard. The Government survived twelve divisions on the Budget and in each of them W.E.G. was the chief Government spokesman. H. cxxviii, 1174, 1383, 1389, 1391, 1397 1497; cxxix, 222, 398, 416, 409, 417.
  3. W.E.G. to H.M., 7th Aug. 1853, Add. Ms. 44248 f. 144.

Government there was rarely an evening when he was in London that he failed to keep his vigil. Yet the picture as it emerges from the diaries is of a depressed Gladstone, frequently doubting the purity of his own motives.<sup>1</sup>

This morning I lay awake till four with a sad and perplexing subject: it was reflecting on and counting up the number of those unhappy beings, now present to my memory with whom during now so many years I have conversed indoors or out. I reckoned from 80 to 90. Among these there is but one of whom I know that the miserable life has been abandoned and that I can fairly join that fact with influence of mine. Yet this was much more than enough for all the labour and the time, had it been purely spent on my part. But the case is far otherwise: and tho' probably in none of these instances have I not spoken good words, yet so bewildered have I been that they constitute the chief burden of my soul. 2

Modesty and self-effacement were a convention in letter writing of that day and Gladstone's avowals of unworthiness to his close correspondents need not in the normal course of things be taken too seriously. But since it is reasonable to assume that in his private journals, "his account book with God",<sup>3</sup> he wrote with perfect honesty any expressions of a troubled mind, and these are legion, are revelations of a particularly illuminating kind. Gladstone's private doubts and public achievements appear to run in parallel but opposite directions; dangerous as it is to speculate about so enigmatic a personality as Gladstone's this does support the view that the moral element that informs so much of his political activity derives in large part from a desire to make public success a compensation for personal agony. If this is so it reinforces the interpretation of Gladstone's emergent Liberalism as an attempt to give party politics a moral bias which they had once held but currently lacked. His frequent lamentations in the 'fifties in both his published

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1. E.g., 29th Dec. '52 and 29th Dec. '53, Diaries, iv, pp. 483, 579. He listed his besetting sins as "wrath, impurity, & spiritual sloth", 29th Dec. '54, Diaries, iv, p. 670
  2. 20th Jan. '54, Diaries, iv, p. 586
  3. Diaries, i, p. xxxix The phrase is Matthew's.



and unpublished articles about the decline in political virtue are an illustration of this. Not surprisingly it was Disraeli whom Gladstone often singled out as a subject for criticism in this regard. He asserted that from 1853 onwards Disraeli used his leadership of the Opposition in the Commons in such a way that politics was debased. "Now there is a morality lacking, a want of firmness: there is no confidence of men in men, and above all of parties in leaders."<sup>1</sup> The reputation of Parliament had been diminished: "The country will not respect that which does not respect itself".<sup>2</sup> Gladstone held up the days of Melbourne and Peel, both in Government and opposition, as examples of political virtue in action. Since then there had entered into public life "personal selfishness and vanity, levity and idle crotchets, sectional bickering and intrigue".<sup>3</sup> The strength of party discipline and loyalty in those earlier decades had "afforded a security against that constantly besetting danger of mistaking caprice for conscience".<sup>4</sup> Gladstone selected Pitt the Younger and Peel as the highest examples of moral authority in recent governmental history; with men of this stature even "the most impassioned admirer of Lord Derby or the fondest idolator of Mr. Disraeli" would hesitate to make comparison.<sup>5</sup>

The importance Gladstone's moral distaste for Disraeli had in affecting his attitude to party alignment was shrewdly assessed by Graham. He confided to Greville that the unity brought to the Government by the success of Gladstone's Budget had also served to

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1. "Party as it was and is", Add. Ms. 44745 f. 215

2. Ibid., f. 216

3. Ibid., f. 199

4. Ibid., f. 200

5. Ibid., f. 205

widen the gap between the Peelites and the Conservative Party. Now, closely tied, Derby and Disraeli could hardly look favourably upon the sight of Gladstone advancing himself under the Coalition banner, particularly since his undeniable successes were showing what a loss the Conservatives had incurred in not retaining him. Moreover, there were serious suggestions abroad that Gladstone might well be in line of succession should Aberdeen retire as Prime Minister.<sup>1</sup> It was Graham's view that Disraeli exerted a hold over Derby which stopped his breaking with him even though it would have been to his political advantage to have done so. Certainly it would have eased the path to a reconciliation between Derby and Gladstone.

Gladstone's object certainly was for a long time to be at the head of the Conservative party in the H. of C., and to join with Derby, who might in fact have had all the Peelites if he would have chosen to ally himself with them instead of with Disraeli; the latter had been the cause of the ruin of the party, and Derby had now the mortification of seeing his Son devoted to him. Graham thought that Derby had committed himself to Disraeli (in G. Bentinck's lifetime) in some way that prevented his shaking him off, as it would have been in his interest to do. The Peelites would have united with Derby, but would have nothing to do with Disraeli. 2

The reference to Derby's son is interesting for Stanley's own comment at this time does tend to support Graham's analysis:

It is clear that the Whigs are now the Conservative element in the cabinet. Gladstone is the least popular of the ministry on our benches: his financial scheme is reported a failure. Disraeli exults over him. 3

The exultation was premature for throughout the session Gladstone steadily built upon the reputation he had begun to establish as a finance minister. Nor was it only in economic matters that he made his mark. He contributed to the Cabinet's deliberations regarding

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1. 22nd May '53, Greville Memoirs, vi. p. 423

2. Ibid., vi, p. 424

3. 3rd June. '53, Stanley Memoirs, p. 108

the preparation of a new India Act, counselling caution and keeping a detailed record of the many and differing viewpoints expressed.<sup>1</sup> In accordance with his newly adopted stance relating to the freedom of colonial churches he supported the Canadian Clergy Resources Bill, the measure which gave the Canadian Legislature autonomy in the handling of its own Church finances.<sup>2</sup> No longer terrified by the hydra of concurrent endowment Gladstone argued that the Bill could not harm the interests of the English Church and that justice and logic required that the Canadians be given control over their own local affairs.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the sincerity of Gladstone's views they were hardly calculated to appeal to his old allies, the High Churchmen, and he cannot have been too surprised to receive a "confidential" protestation from his Oxford constituency. This bore ten names, including those of John Keble and Stafford Northcote. The burden of the letter was that the signatories feared the Bill would lead to the subordination of Church interests to the Canadian Parliament: "recent signs suggest exclusion of prelates from the Convocation of their province". While not doubting that Gladstone personally aimed at the best interests of the Church, the writers pointed out that it was "notorious" that many sincere Churchmen were made apprehensive by "some elements of the present administration".<sup>4</sup> In what amounted to a veiled threat Keble et al suggested that the Government "whose continuance in office is at present necessarily dependent on the union of parties recently opposed" would do well to consider taking measures "which may obviously justify the adhesions of such persons as we have indicated". Although the writers added that they wished to

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1. The India Act of 1833 was due to expire and a new measure regulating the relations between the government and the East India Company was necessary. While taking note of developments in India, particularly the demand of the native population for a greater say in their own affairs, the Coalition Cabinet settled in the end for an unadventurous bill leaving Anglo-Indian relations largely unchanged. W.E.G.'s memo describing the Cabinet deliberations, Add. Ms. 44778 fos. 137-42 See Aberdeen, c.4. Autobiographica, iii, p. 145-47
  2. H. cxxiv. 133-46
  3. H. cxxiv, 1142
  4. Add. Ms. 44208 f. 45

encourage Gladstone "by the expression of moral sympathy" with him it was evident that it was his own attitude that they found disturbing.<sup>1</sup> With a view, perhaps, to making some amends Gladstone later in the session spoke in favour of the ~~new~~ Colonial Church Regulation Bill. Referring to the criticism that the Canadian Bill had gone too far in promoting local independence, he hoped that the present Bill which aimed at strengthening the legal ties between the Anglican and local churches would be seen as a redressing of the balance rather than as a straying from principle.<sup>2</sup>

The Oxford protestation and Gladstone's response to it illustrate the problem that was increasingly to confront him. His wish was to present a moral not an expedient front. Yet the abandonment of his earlier uncompromising position on Church and State issues meant that whatever his motives might be his actions were bound to be interpreted by Keble and the Oxford school as a betrayal. Gladstone's uneasy relationship with his constituency has a number of causes; among them was the feeling shared by many of his constituents that the man of whom they had had such high hopes when first elected in 1847 was becoming decreasingly representative of their expectations.<sup>3</sup> His support during the session for Russell's second attempt to remove Jewish disabilities<sup>4</sup> and his voting against the proposal to end the annual grant to Maynooth College<sup>5</sup> seemed to provide further evidence of Gladstone's increasing willingness to accept encroachments on Anglican monopoly. It was, however, over the question of university reform that his attitude excited the

1. Ibid.

2. H. cxxix, 1207-14. He recorded in his journal that the whole question was "sorely complicated", 18th July '53, Diaries, iv, p. 543

3. The deep sense of disappointment can be clearly discerned in Keble's correspondence with W.E.G. in the 'fifties and 'sixties. Add. Ms. 44319 f. 168; 44385 fos. 22-3; 44402 fos. 217-18; 44277 f. 216.

4. H. cxxv, 128; 15th April '53; Diaries, iv, p. 517. W.E.G.'s acceptance of Russell's first bill to relieve parliamentary restrictions on Jews had occasioned much bitterness at Oxford. See above, pp. 57 - 60.

5. H. cxxv, 1002; 23rd Feb. '53, Diaries, iv, p. 500

greatest anxiety. Not unreasonably, it had been anticipated at Oxford that Gladstone would be the earnest defender of the University's position, and indeed his earlier statements at the time of the establishing of the commission of enquiry appeared to justify this hope. In January, 1852, he had declared that legislative interference in the affairs of the University was unwarranted, arguing that the "only safe and satisfactory" course was one "which shall avert Parliamentary interposition altogether".<sup>1</sup> Even after the commission had presented its report in the form of a blue book Gladstone continued to speak in June, 1852, of "legislative interference of a compulsory character" as being "so great an evil" that until Oxford had exhausted all other means of self-directed improvements he could never allow himself "to conclude in favour of the necessity of such interference".<sup>2</sup>

By April 1853, however, Gladstone, no doubt soured by the opposition shown to him during the Oxford election campaign four months earlier, expressed himself in favour of reform: "I hold that Parliament must, in the last resort, interfere to control, to regulate, and to manage the revenues of any public body".<sup>3</sup> By December of the same year he had reached the opinion that it was no longer possible to maintain the University's complete independence and that changes directed from both without and within were essential to her well-being.<sup>4</sup> So convinced was he of this that it was he who now undertook the preparation of the Government's Bill for the reforming of the Universities. His argument was that if Oxford were willing to consider modifications of her internal structure the need for outside interference would be considerably lessened.

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1. Oriel College Ms., in Ward, op.cit., p.189

2. Add. Ms. 44236 f. 261

3. H. cxxv, 577. In this debate W.E.G. supported Russell's Education Bill, a measure which the Government subsequently dropped, and opposed his fellow Oxford member, Robert Inglis, who had declared totally against parliamentary reform of Oxford. Ibid., 559-61

4. Add. Ms. 44206, f. 103.

Parliamentary reluctance may be softened-more careful adjustment of details secured - a more complete and yet a somewhat milder measure accomplished - and the question thus rescued from the risk of the serious evils attending repeated parliamentary interpositions.

I am, however, convinced that the question is one of necessity rather than of policy. 1

Judged dispassionately Gladstone's attitude appeared not unreasonable but to men like Pusey and Keble it was a retreat from principle, made all the more lamentable by their reflecting on the hopes they had once entertained of him. Gladstone's acceptance of the right of the executive and parliament to intervene in Church and University concerns ran counter to all that he had said and done in his previous career. Far from being the eager lieutenant of the Church Gladstone, as Pusey and Keble judged, had by the eighteen fifties become positively inimical to her true interests. The extension of the executive principle, for Gladstone a matter of political logic and justice, was viewed by them as treachery. The arguments he advanced regarding the need for public men to be ready to adjust opinion and modify policy when political necessity demanded it they found wholly unacceptable.<sup>2</sup> It is against this background of disappointed hopes that Gladstone's difficulties with his constituents need to be set. He had once regarded liberalism as being synonymous with ungodliness; there were those at Oxford who would never forget this and who would assess his political evolution in the terms of his own definition.

Gladstone's difficulties with Oxford, a recurrent problem for as long as he was its M.P., were overtaken by bigger issues as 1853 wore on. Essential in his estimation to the success of his Budget was the maintenance of peace; by the close of the year war with Russia had

1. Add. Ms. 44743 f. 119-20

2. Add. Ms. 44402 fos. 217-18, 220

emerged as a distinct possibility. In his memoranda Gladstone reflected that the Crimean War had proved in the end "fatal" to the Aberdeen Cabinet; but for that War the Government might well have survived. Indeed, out of all the administrations in which he had served, "I hardly ever saw a Cabinet with greater promise of endurance". When the collapse of Aberdeen's Coalition came it was the result, Gladstone insisted, not of internal dissensions but of two years' pressure of war. His wish to play down the significance of the undeniable divisions within the Government can best be regarded as being of a piece with his frequently stated claims that his own acceptance of office in it was free of all hint of factiousness:

I must say of this Cabinet of Lord Aberdeen's that in its deliberations it never exhibited the marks of its dual origin. Sir W. Molesworth, its Radical member, seemed to be practically rather nearer in colour to the Peelites than to the Whigs. There were some few idiosyncracies without doubt. Lord Palmerston, who was Home Secretary, had in him some tendencies which might have been troublesome but for a long time were not so. It is for instance a complete error to suppose that he asked the Cabinet to treat the occupation of the Principalities as a casus belli. Lord Russell shook the position of Lord Aberdeen by action most capricious and unhappy. But with the general course of affairs this had no connection; and even in the complex and tortuous movements of the Eastern negotiations, the Cabinet never fell into two camps. That question and the war were fatal to it. In itself I hardly ever saw a Cabinet with greater promise of endurance. 1

It is difficult not to see this as special pleading on Gladstone's part; as his own records show there was considerable disagreement, not to say disunity, in the deliberations of the Cabinet. An important consideration here is that for a vital period during the build-up of war tension Gladstone was unwell and out of London and as a consequence was unable to contribute significantly to Government policy.<sup>2</sup> Had he not been absent the signs are that he would have endeavoured to play

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1. Autobiographica, i.p.78. In a later review article Gladstone re-asserted that the Aberdeen Coalition had been one of the least disputations he had known. E.H.R., April 1887
  2. At the end of the parliamentary session, August 1853, W.E.G. went to Scotland where he remained until October. During this period he suffered intermittently from erysipelas, being often physically incapacitated by it. Diaries, iv, pp. 550-59

a full part in shaping Cabinet attitudes. Before he left London he wrote to the Prime Minister urging him not to contemplate resignation at such a troubled time in international relations; if Aberdeen were to abandon the leadership Gladstone foresaw only "embarrassments and dangers" and a break-down of the "cordial ... internal relations of the government".<sup>1</sup> In the same letter Gladstone expressed fears that "another Papal Aggression was contemplated" and appealed to Aberdeen to exercise his moderating influence against such a development.<sup>2</sup> What led Gladstone to add this plea was the intelligence he had received from Graham to the effect that Aberdeen was considering resigning the premiership in favour of Russell but was worried lest this should prompt Gladstone's own resignation thereby gravely weakening the Coalition's chances of survival.<sup>3</sup> It had been Aberdeen's intention to meet Gladstone in Scotland to discuss this very question but the latter's illness prevented this and it was not until Gladstone returned to London in October that the two men were able to get together.<sup>4</sup> By then the international situation had greatly deteriorated and Russia and Turkey were on the brink of war. This rendered a change of premier inopportune and Russell informed Aberdeen that he had abandoned, at least for the time being, the idea of taking over as Prime Minister.<sup>5</sup> Gladstone was thus spared from making a decision as to his own course of action should Russell have succeeded. Contemporary opinion as voiced by such as Clarendon and Greville suggested that Gladstone would have resigned in the event of Russell's becoming Premier.<sup>6</sup> However, in the light of Gladstone's unpredictable decisions not to join Derby

1. 12<sup>th</sup> Aug. '53. Add. Ms. 43070 f. 373.

2. Ibid., f. 374. Gladstone added that the Eastern Question currently demanded that the British diplomatic approach ought to be conciliatory to both the Church of Rome and the Orthodox Church.  
Ibid., f. 375

3. 6th Aug. '53, Add. Ms. 44163, f. 161. Graham was Aberdeen's political confidant at this time. See Aberdeen, pp. 127-28

4. 4th Sept. and 4th Oct. '53, Diaries, iv, pp. 555, 560

5. Aberdeen, p. 191

6. Greville Memoirs, vi, pp. 454-56



in 1852, or Lansdowne in 1855, but to serve with Palmerston in both 1855 and 1859 there can be no certainty about what he would have done. The degree to which personal whim and pique could determine such decisions in politicians of that day is well illustrated in a memorandum of Prince Albert's in which he recorded the Queen's being told by Aberdeen that should there be a Cabinet reshuffle Graham had indicated that "he himself could not sit well in the House of Commons under so much younger a man as Mr. Gladstone as leader [of the Commons]".<sup>1</sup>

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1. Memo of Prince Albert, 16th Oct. '53, in Aberdeen, p.191

## CHAPTER V

In March, 1854, in a speech in the Commons Gladstone declared that war was a moral check on the extravagance of nations.<sup>1</sup> To his wife he lamented that the Crimean War would destroy his achievements as Chancellor of the Exchequer: "war, war, war; that is the excitement and turmoil of the moment and I fear it will swallow everything good and useful".<sup>2</sup> As noted earlier, Gladstone entered late into the Government's deliberations on the crisis and even then his contribution was something less than commanding. His first public statement on the war issue was in a speech at Manchester in October, 1853, which even Morley found ambiguous.<sup>3</sup> Aberdeen, nonetheless, thought that this speech had "promoted the cause of peace".<sup>4</sup> Of particular interest to Gladstone was the reaction of the audience from which he deduced "the existence of a peace and a war party" in the country at large.<sup>5</sup> Despite Gladstone's assertions to the contrary it is now clear that the Cabinet was similarly divided over the war issue and that Gladstone as Chancellor not unexpectedly tended to side with the peace party.<sup>6</sup> Even after Turkey had declared war on Russia Gladstone declined to accept that Britain's active involvement was inevitable; he composed a private memo setting down a number of "propositions on the Eastern question"<sup>7</sup>

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1. H. cxxx, 918

2. W.E.G. to C.G. 28th Mar. '54, in Bassett, p.104. His plans for the phasing out of income tax he regarded as the main casualty of the Crimean War. Autobiographica, iii.p.273

3. Morley, i. 359.

4. Aberdeen to W.E.G. 17th Oct. '53, Add. Ms. 44088, fos. 201-02

5. W.E.G. to Aberdeen, 12th Oct. '53, in Morley, i.p.358.

6. The considerable disagreements within the Cabinet have been described by Conacher in Aberdeen, cc.9 & 10.

7. 11th Nov. '53, Diaries, iv.p.569.

in which he declared it to be "intolerable ... that we should become parties to the operations of a war which we disapprove", especially if that meant England's giving aid to the Turks in oppressing their Christian subjects.<sup>1</sup> Whether Gladstone made these views clearly known to his Prime Minister is not certain but Aberdeen appears to have grasped the essentials of Gladstone's attitude for early in December he wrote to him with some urgency intimating that Cabinet difficulties were "daily becoming such as to render personal communication more and more desirable".<sup>2</sup> Touching directly on the point in the Eastern crisis which Gladstone found so distasteful, possible British support for the oppressive Turks, Aberdeen observed, "afterall it is the exclusion of Russia, rather than the preservation of the Turks, that we ought to have in view".<sup>3</sup> What further prompted Aberdeen's urgency to discuss Cabinet unity with Gladstone was that some two days before he wrote to him Palmerston had informed the Prime Minister that he was considering resigning over the parliamentary reform bill.<sup>4</sup> Aberdeen was not unhappy at the prospect since he considered this would lessen the strength of the pro-war faction and would ease Russell's conduct of foreign policy. He also believed that the Government would be able to survive the loss without too much difficulty.<sup>5</sup> Gladstone, who up to

1. Add. Ms. 44742, fos. 186-90.
2. Aberdeen to W.E.G. 5th Dec. '53. Add. Ms. 44088, fos. 215-18  
Between Oct. and Dec. '53 W.E.G. was frequently out of London  
(see Diaries iv, p. 675); hence Aberdeen's anxiety to meet him when  
there was opportunity.
3. Add. Ms. 44088 f. 218
4. In November Russell's proposals for a reform bill had begun to be  
considered by a Cabinet committee. Palmerston objected on the  
grounds that there was no public demand to justify contemplating  
the reform of parliament at this time. As Morley has it: "Lord  
Palmerston was suspected by some of his colleagues of raising  
the war-cry in hopes of drowning the demand for reform", Morley,  
i.p. 364.
5. Aberdeen to the Queen, 6th Dec. '53, in Aberdeen, p. 219

this point, had shown limited interest in the reform issue saw matters differently; he was moved to action by the threat to the continuance of the Coalition. On 16th Dec, having learned by letter from Arthur Gordon, Aberdeen's son, of Palmerston's resignation Gladstone entered into immediate discussion with Gordon, Aberdeen, Newcastle and Graham as to the course of action to be taken.<sup>1</sup> Gladstone was unhappy at the prospect of a Cabinet without Palmerston and he asked Aberdeen not to fill Palmerston's vacant position since as the resignation had yet to be formally accepted there was still time for a reconciliation.<sup>2</sup> This formula worked for in the succeeding five days Gladstone and Newcastle had personal meetings with Palmerston and acted as intermediaries between him and Aberdeen;<sup>3</sup> the outcome was that on 23rd Dec. Palmerston wrote to the Prime Minister via Newcastle withdrawing his resignation.<sup>4</sup> So Gladstone's hope, expressed the day before during a five hour Cabinet session, was fulfilled:<sup>5</sup>

I was rather stunned by yesterday's cabinet. I have scarcely got my breath again. I told Lord Aberdeen that I had had wishes that Palmerston were back again on account of the Eastern question.<sup>6</sup>

Gladstone's considerable efforts to repair the breach in the Cabinet and prevent Palmerston's departure suggest again how important the maintenance of Coalition was to him in relation to his original decision to enter a Government free of all faction. Equally significantly, it shows that particular esteem in which Gladstone continued to hold Palmerston in spite of the unacceptability of much of his behaviour.

1. Diaries, iv, p.576.
2. W.E.G. to Aberdeen, Dec.'53. Add. Ms. 44088, f.219
3. 18th to 23rd Dec.'53, Diaries, iv. pp.577-8
4. Palmerston to Newcastle, 23rd Dec.'53, in Aberdeen, p.228
5. Diaries, iv. p.578
6. W.E.G. to Sidney Herbert, in Morley, i. p.364.

Stanley's journal entry in this regard is of tantalising interest:

P[almerston] though reconciled remained strongly of the opinion that his expulsion, had been planned by Graham, the Prince, Russell, and Aberdeen;.... Gladstone on the other hand adopting a conciliatory line .....P[almerston] had calculated on detaching Gladstone together with himself and failing in that had consented to give up the attempt. 1

The Cabinet meeting of 22nd Dec. which, so Gladstone told Herbert, had "rather stunned" him and which he described in his journal as "a day of no small matter for reflection"<sup>2</sup> marked Gladstone's first major contribution to the Coalition's discussion of the Russo-Turkish crisis. It was on this day that the decision was taken to send the British fleet into the Black Sea to invest Sebastopol.<sup>3</sup> Beyond noting that the Cabinet had concerned itself with "Eastern question - Palmerston - & Reform"<sup>4</sup> Gladstone does not appear to have kept a record of the deliberations but Charles Wood wrote a paper listing the major differences of opinion expressed. Gladstone's consistent line was based on his reluctance to give succour to Turkey without first obliging her to conform to certain enforceable limitations. Newcastle and Wood argued that Britain should cut through the diplomatic confusions surrounding the issue and accept the French proposal for British occupation of the Black Sea. Gladstone's alternative suggestion was that Britain should take no such initiative until Turkey formally bound herself to abide by

1. 27th Dec.'53. Stanley Memoirs, p.115. Prince Albert had been accused by the Daily News of treason over the Eastern Question and of plotting to bring about Palmerston's resignation. This moved Gladstone to write a spirited defence of the Prince published as an anonymous leader in the Morning Chronicle; Aberdeen told Gladstone that the Queen had been highly delighted by his article. 15th & 16th Jan'54, Diaries iv.pp.584-5. The draft article is in Add. Ms.44743, fos. 121-6; Cf. Aberdeen, p. 271
2. Diaries, iv. p.578
3. The key dates in the onset of the Crimean War were: 2nd July '53 - Russian occupation of the Principalities; 23rd Oct.'53 - Russo - Turkish hostilities begin; 30th Nov.'53, destruction of Turkish fleet at Sinope; 22nd Dec.'53, British fleet dispatched to Sebastopol; 27th Feb.'54, Anglo-French ultimatum to Russia; 27th Mar.'54, Britain and France declare war on Russia.
4. Diaries, iv. p. 578

any peace settlement that the British and French Governments might choose to make. Such an undertaking, Wood and Newcastle argued, would limit Britain's freedom of action since any engagement she entered into with the Porte would give the Turks a claim on British assistance whereas unilateral action by Britain would avoid such a tie. Unconvinced by this reasoning Gladstone declared himself wholly opposed to what he regarded as unconditional occupation. Eventually a compromise was reached by the Cabinet; France was to be told that Britain would occupy the Black Sea to the extent that she would prevent the passage of Russian warships through it. It was Britain's express hope that France would join her in imposing conditions on the Porte; if France agreed there would be full and joint occupation, if not the question would have to be reconsidered. Clarendon, the Foreign Secretary, subsequently conveyed this proposal to Walewski, his French counterpart, who appeared quite satisfied.<sup>1</sup>

The Coalition's precarious unity had been preserved but the opposition forces in Parliament could take heart from the evident lack of any real consistency of purpose in the Government. Derby addressing his Conservative followers spoke of the ministry being "founded on a fusion, or rather a confusion of all principles".<sup>2</sup> Derby's son expressed the more complete truth when he admitted that at the end of the 1853 session "each parliamentary party was split in two" which was why, weak though Aberdeen's leadership was, the Government was able to continue.<sup>3</sup> Listing the possible alternatives to Aberdeen Stanley suggested that Palmerston was regarded generally "as the most popular candidate for government". All the others had disabling political weaknesses.

1. Wood's account is in Morley, i.pp.364-5.

2. 31st Jan.'54. Stanley Memoirs, p.118

3. 25th Jan.'54. Ibid., p. 117

My father's followers were distrusted, nor was protection forgotten: Russell was regarded, justly or not, as worn out in body and mind: Newcastle had not sufficient standing ... Lord Clarendon wanted debating aptitude: Granham's talents were, and are, neutralised by his reputation for inconsistency: Lord Grey's health and temper put him out of the question: Gladstone, though at the height of his financial fame, lost, as he still does, by his junction with an unpopular ecclesiastical party, and by his vacillating habit of mind. Bright and Cobden have never aspired to be more than sectional leaders. 1

It is interesting that Stanley in his survey should have regarded Gladstone's church views as still being of considerable political significance. His High Churchmanship for his contemporaries remained a definitive feature of his politics. What Stanley's description further illustrates is just how indefinite party lines and principles were at this phase of English politics.<sup>2</sup> In this sense his analysis complements the impression, drawn from such episodes as the Palmerston resignation, that the larger issues in current politics were determined more by personal considerations than by deeply held convictions. In such an atmosphere it is not surprising that Gladstone's over-subtle refinements of thought should have been interpreted as "vacillating".

Although the growing international crisis tended naturally to dominate governmental business Gladstone's preoccupations in the first part of 1854 were of a personal and administrative order. His wife's confinement and labour took up much of his time at the beginning of the year and the illness of his second son brought him considerable anxiety.<sup>3</sup> Such problems did not prevent his working determinedly to persuade his Cabinet colleagues to accept the proposals for the reorganising of the civil service contained in the Northcote-Trevelyan report.<sup>4</sup>

1. Ibid.

2. Stanley quoted Disraeli in June '53 prophesying "the relapse of the old Whigs into Conservatism, and the progress of the Peelite section until they united with Manchester". Ibid.

3. Jan & Feb. '54, Diaries, iv. pp. 581-4, 596-7

4. The treatment of the report by Aberdeen's Government is described in Aberdeen. c.13

The actual report was the work of the authors whose names it bore but from the first Gladstone took an intense interest in their proposal made himself responsible for selling the idea of reform, and in particular of open competitive examinations, to Government, Parliament and Queen.<sup>1</sup> He supervised the drafting of a bill incorporating the main proposals in the report. In their immediate objective his efforts failed since the War intervened and the Coalition broke up before any real legislative progress could be made; implementation of the proposals had to wait until the time of Gladstone's own Ministry sixteen years later.<sup>2</sup>

Given the nature of the subject the greater part of Gladstone's work was technical and administrative but there are points of political interest. For example, it would be wrong to see Gladstone's espousal of civil service reorganisation as being part of a liberal evolution to be coupled with the extension of the representative principle currently being pressed by Russell. Indeed, at this stage Gladstone was still far from enthusiastic about parliamentary reform. He gave a clear indication of how relatively insignificant he held Russell's bill to be by referring to his own civil service reforms as being his "contribution to the picnic of Parliamentary Reform".<sup>3</sup> Gladstone took pains to deny specifically that his administrative reform proposals were in any sense a concession to egalitarianism or democracy. He argued that on the contrary reform would "strengthen and multiply the ties between the higher classes and the possession of administrative power".

1. Russell proved to be the most difficult colleague to convince and it was to overcome his obduracy that Gladstone penned him a twenty-two page letter setting out a detailed case for reform. 20th Jan '54 Add, Ms. 44291 fos. 93-103. Gladstone's memo to the Queen summarised the basic points. Add. Ms. 44743. fos. 132-5.
2. As Prime Minister Gladstone in 1870 oversaw the introduction of open competition into the Civil Service along the Northcote-Trevelyan lines. See R.Shannon, op.cit. pp. 81-2
3. W.E.G. to Graham, 3rd Jan. '54. Graham Papers, in Aberdeen, p.312.



As a member for Oxford I look forward eagerly to its operation... I have a strong impression that the aristocracy of this country are even superior in natural gifts, on the average, to the mass; but it is plain that with their acquired advantages, their insensible education, irrespective of book learning, they have an immense superiority. 1

As in the case of his support for the Italian liberals Gladstone's belief in the efficacy of reform derived not from a liberal but from a conservative instinct.

When Aberdeen informed him apropos Russell's Bill that Palmerston now believed that circumstances dictated the shelving of it until at least the following year Gladstone showed his coolness towards Reform by the readiness with which he supported Palmerston's view that "we could not go with the bill in a state of war". To risk defeat on such a measure with the consequent collapse of the Government itself would, Gladstone argued, be a grave irresponsibility.<sup>2</sup> Stanley recorded the Opposition expectation that Russell's bill would split the Government irrecoverably.<sup>3</sup> When the bill was introduced into the Lords Derby while protesting against it declined to oppose the first reading since "he wished his opponents to fight it out among themselves".<sup>4</sup>

Allowing for his obvious partiality Stanley is an excellent witness to the intrigue and thoughts of self-advancement which underlay the ostensibly solemn issues of the day and which Gladstone had elsewhere bemoaned when he wrote of the decline of standards among public men.<sup>5</sup> Whatever Palmerston's Cabinet colleagues may have thought lay behind his conduct this was how it looked from the other side:

1. W.E.G. to Russell, 20th Jan. '54, in Morley, ii.p.607

2. Memo of conversation with Aberdeen, 22nd Feb. '54, Autobiographica, iii, p. 147

3. 9th Feb. '54, Stanley Memoirs pp.119-20

4. 10th Feb. '54, ibid., p. 120

5. See above p. 110.

Palmerston is intriguing busily against the bill: secure to win in either event, disliking his actual post in the cabinet, yet resolved not to sacrifice it till he sees his way to something better. He has friends on all sides, spies in every camp, even age tells in his favour, since statesmen are willing to accept terms from him which they would otherwise decline, thinking the arrangement must of necessity prove purely temporary. <sup>1</sup>

Fear that the conjunction of the war threat and the Reform issue might lead to the fall of the Government and a consequent re-grouping of parties may have motivated Gladstone to approach Stanley with "overtures of a personal kind". By this Stanley meant that Gladstone was thinking of some form of Tory-Peelite alliance. Pleading loyalty to his father Stanley declined the offer but hinted that he knew of no other obstacle. <sup>2</sup> Certainly there was enough manoeuvring going on for anything to happen on the party front. Disraeli was in communication with most of the leading Whigs with a view to a possible junction; it all depended on Palmerston.

Palmerston once gained, he [Disraeli] felt sure of the rest: as to the lead, he was willing to give it up, P. being an old man, not capable of sustained exertion; the real power would always remain with himself, Disraeli. He exulted in the notion of revenge on Gladstone and the Peelites, who would be driven to Manchester, and must act under Bright. <sup>3</sup>

Such exultation makes the following comment of Disraeli even more remarkable as a measure of the lengths to which he was prepared to go in political dealing:

I found my father confident of victory, planning future measures and framing his cabinet. Disraeli has been talking to him of the possibility of securing Gladstone - his bitterest enemy. "Politicians neither love nor hate". <sup>4</sup>

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1. Stanley Memoirs, p. 120

2. 22nd Feb. '54. ibid., p.121. Gladstone did not record this conversation though his journal shows that he entertained Stanley to dinner on this date. Diaries, iv.p.595. The two men had first met five years earlier; "much conversation" with young Stanley & was struck with his ability"; 30th June '49. Diaries, iv.p.133

3. 23rd Feb. '54. Stanley Memoirs. p. 121

4. 28th Feb. '54, ibid., p. 122

So expectant of office was Disraeli that he hoped the Reform bill would not be withdrawn by the Government: "Disraeli dreads the escape of its authors, and wishes to force them into going on with it".<sup>1</sup>

The question of whether to proceed had still to be decided by the Government. Gladstone recorded how the crucial decision to postpone the Reform bill was arrived at in Cabinet. Russell, opening the discussion, declared his willingness, in view of their likely defeat on an opposition amendment to the bill, to delay it for another two months. Palmerston was for a complete postponement. Aberdeen and Graham were against any delay, Graham maintaining that since the measure had been in the Queen's Speech mere adverse circumstances should not be allowed to dictate a change of policy. Gladstone and Molesworth argued that the short postponement proposed by Russell would do little either to take the existing pressure off the Government or to improve the bill's chances when it was eventually introduced. Gladstone proposed instead that the bill should be withdrawn for the duration of the parliamentary session and not re-introduced until the following year. This did not carry the Cabinet though Gladstone claimed that many of his colleagues shared his view. The Cabinet compromised and agreed that Russell should proceed with his bill at the end of April.<sup>2</sup>

Piqued, Russell would not let the matter drop and for the next three weeks he canvassed various members of the Cabinet, including Palmerston, with the hope of carrying on with his Bill. Aberdeen allowed himself to be blackmailed by Russell's threats of resignation since he feared that if Russell did go Palmerston would expect to take over as leader of the Commons. There was even talk of avoiding this calamity by asking Palmerston whether he would consider serving under Gladstone

1. 25th Feb. '54, ibid., p.121

2. 1st. Mar.'54, Autobiographica, iii, pp. 149-50

as leader.<sup>1</sup> Gladstone himself does not appear to have learned of this suggestion until very late in the proceedings.<sup>2</sup> By that time Russell, realising that he would not be able to carry a sufficient number of his Cabinet colleagues with him, announced to the Commons that he was dropping his Reform bill indefinitely.<sup>3</sup> Throughout it is notable that Gladstone's concern was not with the intrinsic merit of Reform but with the effect its being proceeded with would have on the stability of the Coalition itself. By late February 1854 it was generally considered that Britain's declaration of war on Russia would not be long delayed. Aberdeen asked Gladstone whether in that event he ought not to resign his leadership of the Government; since all along his own feelings had been decidedly against war Aberdeen did not believe he could in conscience continue to lead a government engaged in active hostilities.<sup>4</sup> In response Gladstone recorded a piece of moral philosophising not unlike some of his efforts to justify his own political behaviour:

I said that a defensive war might involve offensive operations and that a declaration of war placed the case on no new ground of principle, did not create the quarrel but merely announced it, verifying to the world (if itself justifiable) a certain state of facts which would have arrived. 5

To Aberdeen's riposte that all wars pretended to be defensive Gladstone maintained his subtlety of distinction by arguing that Britain's role in the war would be no less a defensive one even if she were to make the initial declaration; nor would her essentially defensive attitude be compromised by "our entering upon offensive operations".<sup>6</sup>

1. See Spencer Walpole, The Life of Lord John Russell, London 1891, ii, p.208-12; Aberdeen, pp.303-09
2. He expressed "amazement" over it. 10th April '54, Diaries, iv.p.610
3. 11th April '54, H. cxxxii, 836-44. Stanley describes how Russell "burst into a hysterical fit of crying: a painful scene". Stanley Memoirs, p.124. Greville thought Russell's behaviour "ridiculous", 15th April '54, Greville Memoirs, vii,p.31
4. 22nd Feb. '54, Autobiographica, iii,p.147
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., iii,p.148

That being so for Aberdeen to resign over the declaration of war would be unwarrantable and unreasonable, no issue of principle being involved. Aberdeen then touched on the aspect that previously had most worried Gladstone: "how could he bring himself to fight for the Turks?". Gladstone's reply was that if indeed Britain were to aid the Turks in putting down their Christian subjects this would be totally objectionable and he no more than Aberdeen could be a party to it. But Gladstone had convinced himself that this was not so: "we were not fighting for the Turks, but we were warning Russia of the forbidden ground". At this point Aberdeen begged Gladstone to tell him whether there was any honourable way out of the impasse. In answer Gladstone declared that his own views of war very much coincided with Aberdeen's; he, too, had such "a horror of bloodshed", that he had thought the matter over "incessantly" before arriving at the following view:

We stand ... upon the ground that the Emperor has invaded countries not his own, inflicted wrong on Turkey and what I feel much more most cruel wrong on the wretched inhabitants of the Principalities: that war had ensued and was raging with all its horrors: that we had procured for the Emperor an offer of honourable terms for peace which he had refused... I for one however could not shoulder the musket against the Christian subjects of the Sultan: and must then take my stand 1.

Gladstone's wish to make his stand on the matter of Greek Christians a basic moral issue put him at considerable variance with Newcastle. Up to this time Gladstone had always held his friends' political skills in high esteem and had urged Aberdeen to take him into the Government. As the war approached, however, Gladstone became worried by Newcastle's attitude; what had particularly shocked Gladstone was that in private conversation with him Newcastle "had declared openly for putting down by force the Christians of European Turkey".<sup>2</sup> In a later reflection Gladstone observed that at the time of the Crimean War Newcastle had been guilty of "self-deception". Gladstone was referring here to the decision by Newcastle in June 1854 to become Secretary of State for War rather than

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1. Ibid. When the war was over W.E.G. still maintained that "the original and essential cause of the war lies with Russia only"; "The War and the Peace", Gentleman's Magazine, Aug. 1856, p. 141.
  2. This talk had taken place at Gladstone's home the week previous. Diaries, iv. p. 596; Autobiographica, iii, p. 149

remain as Colonial Secretary.<sup>1</sup> Having made his choice Newcastle then announced publicly that he had done this in response to the unanimous wishes of his colleagues. Tetchily Gladstone complained that in the nature of things it was impossible to contradict him:

We could only "grin and bear" I cannot pretend to know the sentiments of each and every Minister on the matter. But I myself, and every one with whom I happened to communicate were very strongly of an opposite opinion. " 2

With hindsight Gladstone was able to justify his opposition. "The Duke was well qualified for the colonial seals, for he was a statesman: ill for the War Office, as he was no administrator."<sup>3</sup>

As Gladstone lamented to his wife, the onset of war in 1854 ruined the financial schemes which he had so painstakingly prepared in his budget of the previous year. Nevertheless, just as he had invested that first budget with his own special brand of morality so he was prompt to use the occasion of his two war budgets of 1854 as further opportunities for preaching to parliament and the nation.<sup>4</sup> His words are well known<sup>5</sup> but deserve to be quoted again for they are a remarkable example of that facility, so marked a feature of his political style, for making virtue out of necessity. Reading the following passage for the first time one might be tempted to think that the change in financial policy was a much sought after objective rather than a severe adjustment enforced by the war:

1. It had been the practice for the offices of Colonial Secretary and War Minister to be combined in peace time and separated in war time with the holder being free to choose which office to retain. Autobiographica, i. p. 78.
2. Ibid., i. pp. 78-9
3. Ibid. It is now generally accepted that Newcastle was a less than competent war administrator. See Aberdeen, pp. 487-8, 551. It was Gladstone's view that Sidney Herbert, Secretary at War in the Coalition, unfairly bore the blame for the consequences of Newcastle's maladministration. See Autobiographica, i. pp. 79-80
4. W.E.G's first budget of 1854 was introduced on 4th Mar. (H.cxxxi, 357; Diaries, iv. p. 509) followed by a supplementary war budget on 8th May (H.cxxxii, 1413; Diaries, iv. p. 617) The details of the revenue and expenditure relating to these budgets are given in Stafford H. Northcote, Twenty Years of Financial Policy, London 1862, reproduced in Aberdeen. pp. 562-63
5. They appear in part in Morley, i. p. 382; Magnus, p. 115, Aberdeen, p. 389

The expenses of war are the moral check which it has pleased the Almighty to impose upon the ambition and lust of conquest, that are inherent in so many nations. There is pomp and circumstance, there is glory and excitement about war, which, notwithstanding the miseries it entails, invests it with charms in the eyes of the community, and tends to blind men to those evils to a fearful and dangerous degree. The necessity of meeting from year to year the expenditure which it entails is a salutary and wholesome check, making them feel what they are about, and making them measure the cost of the benefit upon which they may calculate. 1

This trumpet call served as the introduction to the main proposals of his 1854 budgets; income tax was to be doubled, the duty on spirits, sugar, and malt was to be raised, and a firm commitment against borrowing to pay for the war was made. This last feature was an essential if the moral line was to be maintained; if the expense of war was to act as a safeguard against present over-indulgence it would not be proper for debts to be incurred for future generations to repay. It was this moralistic aspect of the budgets that even Morley found difficult to take. Believing that Gladstone's financial proposals of this time required "no genius, only courage"<sup>2</sup>, he remained troubled by what he implicitly accepted as inconsistencies on Gladstone's part. He paid tribute to the manner in which Gladstone in his budgets had raised great moral and political issues thus illustrating "that characteristic of his mind which always made some broad general principle a necessity of action". Morley saw, nonetheless, that in advancing the proposition that the cost of the war should be met by taxation and not by loans Gladstone was storing up trouble for himself. This was for two reasons which as put by Morley represent the only significant modification he ever made in relating his subject's march towards liberal enlightenment. On the one hand, said Morley,

1. H. cxxxix, 376

2. Morley, i. p. 384

He did not advance his abstract doctrine without qualification. This, in truth, Mr. Gladstone hardly ever did, and it was one of the reasons why he acquired a bad name for sophistry and worse. Men fastened on the general principle set out in all its breadth and with much emphasis; they overlooked the lurking qualification; and then were furiously provoked at having been taken in. 1

To compound the difficulty, Gladstone let his qualifications be known privately rather than publicly; so it was that when the pressures of war forced him to resort to raising loans he appeared to be betraying his own recently enunciated economic and moral principles. Morley quotes a disingenuous letter of Gladstone's to Northcote in which he suggested that he had never laid down "any general maxim that all war supplies were to be raised by taxes ... I said in my speech of May 8 [1854] revised for Hansard, it was the duty and policy of the country to make in the first instance a great effort from its own resources".<sup>2</sup>

Hansard does bear out that this was the phrase he used but it makes equally clear that the whole weight and tenor of Gladstone's impassioned speech was unequivocally against the idea of loans. As Morley admitted, "His condemnation of loans, absolutely if not relatively, was emphatic."<sup>3</sup>

Complicating the matter still further was the lack of agreement between Gladstone and the City as to what actually constituted a loan. The scheme he had included in his 1853 budget for the conversion of the National Debt by means of public subscription had not realised the anticipated income with the result that Gladstone tried to bridge the gap by the sale of Exchequer Bonds. Financiers declined to co-operate and the scheme foundered; Gladstone listed this later as one of his "recorded errors".<sup>4</sup>

1. Ibid.
2. W.E.G. to Stafford Northcote, May '62, in ibid. Gladstone was commenting on the publication of Northcote's, Twenty Years of Financial Policy, op. cit., in which the author had been critical of his handling of loans and taxes. It is noteworthy that Gladstone found the job of correcting the proofs of his 8th May speech for Hansard a "most odious task", (Diaries iv, p. 641) testifying, perhaps, to his consciousness of the contradictions it revealed.
3. Morley, i. p. 384.
4. Autobiographica, i. p. 129



Gladstone's success in gaining parliamentary acceptance of his 1854 budgets while not as spectacular as that attending his budget of the previous year added to his stature as a parliamentarian;<sup>1</sup> yet in general terms the adjustments he had been obliged to make weakened his reputation as a Chancellor of the Exchequer. The failure of his Exchequer bonds scheme was particularly damaging. Greville noted:

It is scarcely a year ago that I was writing enthusiastic panegyrics on Gladstone, and describing him as the great ornament and support of the Government, and as the future Prime Minister. This was after the prodigious success of his Budget and his able speeches, but a few months seem to have overturned all his favor and authority. I hear nothing but complaints of his rashness and passion for experiments; and on all sides. 2

Much taken up though he was with financial matters and his continuing work on the Oxford bill Gladstone could not avoid being involved in the Cabinet's internal difficulties in the summer of 1854. The jockeying for position and the personal vendettas associated with the names of Palmerston and Russell provided an interesting counterpoint to the supposedly great issues of the day. It was a constant lament of Greville's during this time that current politics had reached a very low ebb:

There never was such a state of things as that which now exists between the Government, the party, and the House of Commons ...nothing but the war, and the impossibility which everybody feels there is of making any change of Government in the midst of it, prevents the immediate downfall of this Administration. 3

1. Although Disraeli opposed the budgets vigorously Gladstone met little difficulty in pushing them through parliament, actually gaining his "first victory over his rival in finance", according to Stanley. (Memoirs, 22nd Mar. '54.p.123). There were fewer divisions and less discussion than compared with the 1853 budget. See Northcote,op.cit., pp. 237-9 and Aberdeen, pp.385-89.
2. Greville Memoirs, vii,pp. 35-6. Gladstone's reputation outside parliament was not improved by another of the many quarrels with the Bank of England whose officials accused him of illegality in his issuing of deficiency bills. Both sides took legal advice in this complex and technical dispute which dragged on for most of 1854, and was still unresolved when the Coalition fell the following year. See Morley,i.pp.385-7 and Aberdeen. p.382. Gladstone noted all this as a time of "very sharp pressure or trial" through which he sustained himself by dwelling upon Psalm 81. 9th May'54, Diaries,iv.pp.617-18
3. 25th June '54, Greville Memoirs, vii,p.43.

As Greville saw it there was "a total dissolution of party ties and obligations" with various factions "acting towards each other in independent and often antagonistic capacities".<sup>1</sup> Gladstone's own considered reflections on this period, written shortly after the collapse of the Coalition in 1855,<sup>2</sup> would largely bear out Greville's observations but while Gladstone was still a member of the Government he not unnaturally had to be a participant in the less than edifying politics of the day. Even so he found it difficult to remain calm in the face of what he regarded as deliberate trouble-making by Russell, so often a culprit in Gladstone's eyes.<sup>3</sup> Baulked in his attempt to proceed with his Reform bill Russell had turned his attention to the Government's conduct of the war. He complained to Aberdeen that its administration was being mishandled and that the Cabinet deliberations were so indecisive that he was considering resignation. He did not carry out the threat but by pressuring Aberdeen and his colleagues he was largely responsible for the decision taken by the Cabinet in June to separate the offices of Secretary for War and Colonial Secretary though he did not himself take the latter post for which he had perhaps been hoping. Gladstone unburdened himself about such goings-on to Canning, a non-Cabinet colleague, in one of the most remarkable letters he ever penned; in it he poured scorn not only on the Cabinet and Russell but also on Russell's wife:

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1. 14th Aug. '54, ibid., vii, p. 56

2. "Party as it was and as it is" (unpublished article) Add.Ms.44745. fos. 173-222 ; "The Declining Efficiency of Parliament", Q.R. Sept. '56. Greville maintained correctly that Gladstone shared his pessimism in regard to the state of current politics. Memoirs, vii. p.38

3. Mrs. Gladstone had a profound mistrust of both Russell and his wife. E.g. see her comments to W.E.G. in a letter of 24th Dec. '54, in Bassett p.107. See also, Marlow, op.cit., p.81, for an extract from a letter of Dec. '54. in which Catherine Gladstone hoped "that the troublesome little man (Russell) will cut his own throat". One assumes she was speaking figuratively.

I have obtained Lord Aberdeen's permission to make known to you certain changes that are in contemplation - changes much more worthy in my opinion of a set of clowns at Astley's or mountebanks on a village stage than of an English Cabinet; but which, bad & discreditable as I think them in every way, distress me particularly with reference to you ... when I remember what passed between us at the time of the formation of the Government.

I shall be most ready to see you and indeed happy to see you for I feel very keenly my position in regard to you: & my only excuse is that I had at the time not sounded the depths of a certain woman's restlessness & folly, or the amount of influence it might exercise on the man who for the country's misfortune is her husband, in bringing him both to a pitch of wilfulness & to an abyss of vacillation & infirmity of purpose, which are in themselves a chapter in the history of human nature. <sup>1</sup>

Writing to the Prime Minister's son, Gladstone paid his father a somewhat ambiguous compliment: "I doubt if there is any many in England, except Lord Aberdeen, who could have borne what he has had to bear during the last seventeen months from Lady John". <sup>2</sup> There were others, notably Russell himself and Edward Strutt, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who considered that Palmerston was the obvious man for the war office. Gladstone said and did little at the time to support such a move although he claimed later:

I believe we all desired that Lord Palmerston should have been War Minister. It might have made a difference as to the tolerance of the feeble and incapable administration of our army before Sebastopol. <sup>3</sup>

As the parliamentary session drew to its close there were few aspects of his involvement in government that he could review with any great satisfaction save perhaps for the Oxford Reform Bill. His labours in regard to it were prodigious even by his standards and it was a labour of love. "My whole heart is in the Oxford bill, it is my consolation under the pain with which I view the character of my office is assuming under the circumstances of war." <sup>4</sup> Dr. Jowett wrote of Gladstone's

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1. W.E.G. to Charles Canning, 8th June '54, Add. Ms. 44778 fos. 183-4. Partly reproduced in Aberdeen pp. 407-08
  2. W.E.G. to Arthur Gordon 6th June '54, in ibid., p. 408
  3. Autobiographica, i. p. 79
  4. W.E.G. to Henry Harris, tutor of Magdalen College, 29th Mar. '54. Add. Ms. 44379 f. 69

staggering everyone in Oxford "by the ubiquity of his correspondence"

Three-fourths of the colleges have been in communication with him, on various parts of the bill more or less affecting themselves. He answers everybody by return of post, fully and at length, quite entering into their case, and showing the greatest acquaintance with it. 1

Since it seemed that the bill of 1854 marked the end of the absolute hold of Anglicanism upon Oxford by allowing for the admission of Dissenters on limited terms Gladstone's measure has often been interpreted as another example of his progressive, not to say liberal, thinking. This is largely because that is how the High Church party of Keble and Pusey saw it. But what needs to be understood is that what lay behind the changes in organisation and administration introduced in the bill was Gladstone's deep-seated wish to preserve the institution for which he expressed so much veneration. Whatever his Oxford opponents may have accused him of there was no hint of radicalism or change for its own sake in his approach. Again the paradox noted before in his basic politics presents itself; he advocated change in order to conserve.

Parliament having now unhappily determined to legislate upon the subject, it seems to me ... best for the interests of the university that we should now make some endeavour to settle the whole question and so preclude, if we can, any pretext for renewed agitation. 2

He was well aware of the compromise he was initiating in order to retain for Oxford its essential traditions and character:

The basis of that settlement should be that the whole teaching and governing function in the university and in the colleges ... should be retained, as now, in the church of England, but that every thing outside the governing and teaching functions, whether in the way of degrees, honours, or emoluments, should be left open. 3

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1. In Morley, i.p. 372. In the twelve months Dec.'53 to Dec.'54 Gladstone received nearly 600 letters relating to the Oxford reforms; he wrote 350 of his own.
  2. W.E.G. to E.Hawkins Provost of Oriel, 21st June '54. in ibid., i.p.377
  3. Ibid., See also W.E.G. to Hawkins. Dec. '53 in Ward, op.cit., p.190

It is worth remembering in this context that such concessions to Dissent as were made in the Bill were not part of Gladstone's original plan but were forced on him in the later stages of its progress through Parliament. Bright was well aware how far Gladstone was from intending a genuinely liberal measure. He scorned it as a "pusillanimous and tinkering affair" declaring that he had little interest in whether it passed or not.<sup>1</sup> Other Nonconformists showed greater concern. Armed with the information, drawn from the recently published Census of Religious Worship of 1851, that they now formed half the nation's church-going population Dissenters began in the winter of 1853-4 to exert powerful pressure on parliament. Through organisations such as the Protestant Dissenting Deputies and the Liberation Society they mounted a vigorous campaign which achieved a considerable measure of success with the passing of the Heywood Clause in June.<sup>2</sup> This amendment to the Oxford Bill removed the requirement to assent to the 39 Articles at matriculation.<sup>3</sup> Far from welcoming this as a liberalising step Gladstone viewed it with dismay but felt that as a decision of the legislature it could not be challenged.<sup>4</sup>

Rounded on by the followers of Keble and Pusey at Oxford Gladstone sought to explain and justify his own attitude.

The vote ...on Mr. Heywood's first clause took everyone by surprise. It was one among the consequences, many of them yet to come, which may in a certain degree be ascribed to the remarkable facts disclosed in the recent volume of the religious census. Not only the numerical amount, but the composition of the majority made it eminently significant ...

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1. 17th July '54. H. cxxxii, 978. See. also John Bright Diaries, p. 175
  2. For a description of the Nonconformist campaign see Ward, op.cit. c. ix, passim. Ward makes this interesting observation: "In the early months of 1854 half the divisions in the Commons were on ecclesiastical questions, and under government leadership they went consistently against the dissenting interest. The Irish Ministers' Money Bill, the Candian Clergy Reserves Bill, the Church Building Acts Continuance Bill, Lord Blandford's Episcopal and Capitular Estates Bill, all pointed to parliamentary support for Anglican privilege", ibid., p. 197. Gladstone's acquiescence in all this shows how isolated his supposed progressiveness over the Oxford Bill really was.
  3. 22nd June '54, H. cxxxiv, 543. See Diaries, iv.p.628
  4. W.E.G. to Francis Jeune, Master of Pembroke, 22nd June '54.  
Add. Ms. 44221, f.108

We thought it better to acquiesce in Heywood's motion ... than to divide against it, with the prospect, most probably, of being defeated, but even if we won, of leaving the question still open to prolonged and angry agitation. 1

Responding to a pamphlet in which Keble bewailed all that had recently happened as perfidy and spoke of departing from Oxford,<sup>2</sup> Gladstone gave his considered view of the current relationship between Church and State and of where he stood in regard to it personally:

I think there are three facts to which Mr. Keble gives less than their due weight in considering the question what ground is tenable for Oxford in the face of the State, and what is not. The first is the belief now (since the census) commonly entertained respecting the relative numbers of Church and Dissenters. The second is the difficulty imported into the argument from religious unity, by the grievous state of things in the Church as [regards] differences of faith and the organs for dealing with them. The third and most important is that, although he and a few more may be ready to retire from Oxford to liberate a holier city they are as one in a hundred or a thousand. At every turn it meets a man in my position that nothing is resigned, everything is wrung; the enlightened persons who are disposed to traffic wisely are a small minority; by the time there is readiness to give for an equivalent there is power to take without one. It is a sad and weary but an overtrue tale. 3

Gladstone had need to explain himself to the High Church party for in the preparation of the Oxford Bill he had consistently reassured them that their fears were exaggerated if not groundless. In a regular and voluminous correspondence with Pusey he had endeavoured to convince his erstwhile mentor that Oxford would not suffer;<sup>4</sup> the threat from Dissent Gladstone expressly discounted.

As to Dissenters - The Government I apprehend will resist (at least I anticipate it though it has not been made a matter for discussion) any attempt to force the admission of Dissenters on the University through the medium of the present Bill. 5.

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1. W.E.G. to Rev. A.W.Haddan, 28th June '54, Lathbury, i.pp. 217-8  
Among those who supported the Dissenting Deputies on this issue were Cobden, Hume, O'Connell, Russell, Derby and Stanley. See Ward.op.cit. p.198.
  2. J.Keble, A Few Very Plain Thoughts on the Admission of Dissenters to the University of Oxford, Oxford, 1854.
  3. W.E.G. to Rev.C.Marriott, 12th July '54 in Lathbury, i.pp.218-9.  
Rather than being a concession reluctantly wrung from him, Morley presents Gladstone's acceptance of the Heywood clause as if it were an early stage in a long-term Liberal plan, such religious tests as still remained after 1854 being an "obnoxious fetter" that Gladstone would finally strike off during his Administration of 1868-74. Morley, i.p.377
  4. Their letters for the period June to July '54 fill 75 folios. Add.Ms.44281 fos.97172
  5. W.E.G. to Pusey, 15th Feb. '54. ibid., f.121

He asked Pusey to accept his piloting of the Bill as a guarantee against harm being done. It would indeed be an aberration "if Oxford received 'it's blow' [sic] from me; and I should hold myself personally and individually responsible for that blow if it came from a Government to which I belonged".<sup>1</sup> He sought to convince Pusey of the essential conservatism of his own approach:

I quite admit that Parliamentary interference with the University is in itself an inconvenience. I submit myself to it, for the avoidance of greater evil, and for the attainment of great benefits. 2

Claiming that his parliamentary experience gave him a wider perspective from which to judge, Gladstone asserted that his work in regard to the Oxford Bill was in strict conformity with his mission of using politics for the service of the Church.

I may be deceived, but I fully grant that if I am, it had been much better for me never to enter public life, for no good I could even hope to do in it would compensate England for but a small fraction of the mischief for which if your mournful prognostications be correct I must be responsible in respect to Oxford. But in truth I seem to myself to see in the displeasure which this Bill excites that old disposition to rely on legal exclusiveness which has long been so unhappily characteristic of the Church of England. 3

He quoted to the words of Henry Liddell, Dean of Christ Church, that the Bill "would leave Oxford more Conservative and Ecclesiastical than ever".<sup>4</sup> Gladstone did admit, however, that this was before the addition of the Dissenter clauses. In regard to these Gladstone asked Pusey to remember that the Government had opposed them but had been

1. W.E.G. to Pusey, 13th Mar.'54, *ibid.* fos. 148-9

2. *Ibid.*, f. 149

3. *Ibid.*, f. 151

4. W.E.G. to Pusey, 10th July '54 *ibid.*, f.167. Liddell was one of a small but vociferous group of anticlericals at Oxford; he ascribed the current Oxford troubles as being in large part due to Gladstone's "culpable weakness". See Ward, *op.cit.* p.195

defeated by a weighty and well organised lobby which had included no less a person than Lord Derby, Chancellor of the University.<sup>1</sup> Even so Pusey should not, Gladstone believed, overestimate the effect of the Heywood amendment; at Oxford the principle would still obtain "that the teaching and governing power in it's [sic] integrity is to remain with the Church of England".<sup>2</sup> In thanking Pusey for the support he had given him politically since he had become M.P. for Oxford Gladstone could not hide the ambiguity he felt now attached to its representation:

All along since 1847 I have had to feel that great efforts were made to keep me in my seat, out of generosity and indulgence - for I could myself give no sufficient reason, apart from those feelings, for my so being kept. Now I trust this state of things has come to an end. I look at the Bill as it now stands after the Committee in the House of Lords, and such as I trust it will become law. My earnest and single desire is to stand or fall by it with the Oxford Constituency... I have no other wish in regard to it except one which is yours too, that it may be dealt with as may be most for the peace and welfare of Oxford. <sup>3</sup>

No such argument could mollify Pusey who considered that Oxford now lay open to "Jews, Turks, infidels & heretics". Mournfully he informed Gladstone he could no longer support him.

It would be an extreme case which would make me offend you. But, believing, as I do, that Oxford has received its death-blow from the Administration of which you are a member & from you I could not, as far as I now see, again take any part in supporting you. <sup>4</sup>

From contemplation of his Oxford difficulties Gladstone was brought back to the growing dissensions within the Government by what he described as "another J.R.[ussell] crisis".<sup>5</sup> Russell, having been worsted in debate by Disraeli,<sup>6</sup> threatened another of his resignations

1. W.E.G. to Pusey, 10th July '54, Add.Ms. 44281 fos. 167-8

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. The amended Bill passed the Commons on 29th June, (H.cxxxiv, 909), went to the House of Lords who, despite opposition "made a beautiful piece of Parliamentary work of it" (Diaries, iv, p. 631) and became law on 7th Aug. (H. cxxxv, 1361)

4. Pusey to W.E.G., 20th July '54. Add.Ms. 44281 f. 172.

5. 14th July '54. Diaries, iv, p. 633.

6. 13th July, '54. H. cxxxv, 230



on the grounds of his inability as Leader of the Commons to carry the Government's measures.<sup>1</sup> Fearing the fracturing of his Administration Aberdeen appealed to Russell to stay. This Russell agreed to do but only after summoning a Downing Street meeting of the Government's parliamentary supporters to determine whether there was sufficient general will and confidence to continue.<sup>2</sup> The meeting was a confused one; according to Gladstone:

No two speakers agreed; & I sh[oul]d have said the whole was very chaotic; but the whips are satisfied. The meeting was not in favour of any party or section of Govt. in particular. No two persons quite agreed.<sup>3</sup>

The Government survived but the signs of the final collapse which would occur six months later were clearly visible. Merging with the Russell crisis there came a new attack in Parliament upon Aberdeen personally for his less than energetic prosecution of the war.<sup>4</sup> The Prime Minister, wearied by his months of unhappy leadership and by what he felt to be a lack of sympathy from his colleagues, gave serious thought to withdrawing from the fray. Gordon wrote anxiously to Gladstone urging him to return to London and speak in defence of his father.<sup>5</sup> Oddly, Gladstone refused the appeal claiming somewhat lamely that since Aberdeen and he were commonly thought to be "tarred with the same stick" any speech he might make would be thought too partial to have a significant effect.<sup>6</sup> When Gladstone did meet Aberdeen the following day he found his leader "deeply wounded" by his disinclination to help.<sup>7</sup>

1. Arthur Gordon to W.E.G. 14th July '54. Add. Ms. 44319, fos 56-7.  
In the high summer of 1854 Gladstone spent a number of days with his family on the Kent coast; Gordon acted as his informant regarding the parliamentary scene
2. See Walpole, op. cit., ii, p. 229; Aberdeen, p. 359
3. 17th July '54, Diaries, iv, p. 634. Both Greville's and Bright's account of this meeting agree substantially with Gladstone's. Greville Memoirs, July 19th '54, p. 47; Diaries of John Bright, 17th July '54 p. 175.
4. 21st to 25th July '54, H cxxxv, 613-766
5. Gordon to W.E.G. 24th July, '54. Add. Ms. 44319 f. 58
6. W.E.G. to Gordon, 24th July '54, ibid., f. 60
7. 25th June '54, Diaries, iv, p. 636

Gladstone's explanation was that a speech of Sidney Herbert's had "put all right".<sup>1</sup> Aberdeen was obviously unconvinced for, shortly after, Gordon again wrote to Gladstone to say that his father was "restless" about Gladstone's failure to speak;

a defence from you coming from the heart as it would do, would go much further to set him right with the public than a few conventional proprieties from Lord John about the whole govt being responsible etc. 2

In answer Gladstone again claimed that Herbert's powerful speech had appeared to him to say all that was necessary. It had been Gladstone's original intention to follow Disraeli but since the latter had not spoken he had not felt the need to contribute. Furthermore, Gladstone added, not having fully mastered the intricacies of the Eastern Question he had felt himself at something of a disadvantage in the debate. As to Aberdeen's reputation, this Gladstone judged, was "unscathed"; indeed, by virtue of his leadership of the Coalition Aberdeen had now become "a great historical figure in domestic politics".<sup>3</sup>

How far, if at all, Gordon and his father were convinced by such strange reasoning is unclear but Gordon gave an interesting hint as to why Gladstone had been so diffident about defending his father. Writing from Beverly where he was fighting a by-election, Gordon described how bitterly opposed the local Tories were to Aberdeen. To counter-balance this Gordon may have gone too far in the opposite direction, he told Gladstone. "I am much afraid of your deeming me too liberal ... for I wish to take you for my guide, & had I been prudent I would not have said so much".<sup>4</sup> Comments such as these, complementing as they do the impression given by Gladstone's own words and actions, point the fallacy of assessing his politics at this stage in terms of the steady adoption of liberal

1. Ibid.

2. Gordon to W.E.G. 27th July '54. Add.Ms.44319 fos 62-3

3. W.E.G. to Gordon, 28th July '54, ibid., fos. 66-69

4. Gordon to W.E.G. 29th July '54, ibid., fos. 70-1

causes following the abandonment of the remnants of his toryism.

Gladstone's behaviour in 1854 in no way presaged his formal acceptance of Liberalism five years later.

The end of the parliamentary session in August brought little real relief from strain for Gladstone. The second half of the year saw him involved in the unpleasantness of first the Lawley and then the Kennedy case;<sup>1</sup> then the departure of Robert Wilberforce from the English Church occasioned him much sorrow. While nothing could match the misery he had experienced three years earlier at the loss to Rome of Manning and Hope, Wilberforce's defection, which he laboured hard to prevent,<sup>2</sup> served as a melancholy reminder that religion could be as much a barb as a balm and that ecclesiastical issues still provided one of the major sources of division in English public life and politics.

Against the background the Oxford Bill and of the Denison case, which raised once more the question of the limits of the State's judicial powers in theological matters, Gladstone gave considered opinion as to the relationship of Church and State as it had developed by 1854.<sup>3</sup> He observed "the ultimate tendencing of nearly all opinions " to be " 'towards' the separation of Church and State".<sup>4</sup> This he regretted but accepted as an undeniable feature of current thought; this led him to adopt a new defence of Church interests behind the maxim "Faith without State Alliance is better than State Alliance without a faith". This, he claimed, did not conflict with his principle of action which was "to maintain the State Alliance, subject to the higher obligation not to

1. Lawley, W.E.G.'s private secretary, disgraced himself by improper dealings on the stock exchange. See Diaries, 2nd - 4th Aug. '54. iv, pp. 639-40. In May '54 W.E.G. dismissed T.F. Kennedy from a Government post; Kennedy appealed to Russell who took up his cause. The matter became protracted and was still unresolved when the Coalition fell. See Aberdeen, pp. 377-82.

2. See 2nd & 3rd Sept. '54, Diaries, iv. p. 645; D. Newsome, The Parting of Friends, London, 1966. pp. 382-3

3. The Denison case, another development in the chronic eucharistic dispute, seriously divided church opinion in the years 1854-5. See Chadwick, The Victorian Church, i. pp. 491-95

4. W.E.G. to Rev. E. Stokes, 17th Aug. '54, Lathbury, i. p. 127

endanger Faith" but was a realistic reappraisal of the Church of England's actual position.<sup>1</sup> Not to acknowledge that acceptance of Church and State separation was a predominant attitude in national thinking would be as blind as denying that there was growing pressure in political affairs towards democracy and equality. Gladstone's conservative instinct which in politics had led him to regard concession as the necessary price to be paid for the preservation of essentials was equally formative in shaping his Church views:

But what I think has not yet come into view is, that the Church of England as an Establishment is now paying the penalty of the mistakes ... of her children; that liberty is not to be had without paying for it; that the bulk of her members ... are not willing to pay, and it is vain for the minority to say, Give us liberty, while the majority refuse to pay the price. I mean they always refuse to pay the price that would obtain the object ... Such is the blind and losing game that they have now for so long a time been playing against themselves; and the upshot of it has been not to secure the State privileges of the Church of England at the expense of her religious liberty, but to place the latter at the utmost hazard for a short and dubious prolongation of the lease of the former. 2

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., i.pp.127-8. He defined religious liberty as being "constitutional i.e., qualified and restrained liberty".

## CHAPTER VI

The fissures in the Government which Gladstone had been reluctant to admit existed could, by the autumn of 1854, no longer be hidden. The dismal news from the Crimea recreated tensions in the Cabinet concerning the handling of the war and a serious political crisis ensued, culminating in the Roebuck motion. This crisis has been variously and widely studied but usually from the point of view of its constitutional and parliamentary significance.<sup>1</sup> Given the aim of this present study it is important to examine Gladstone's approach and behaviour in regard to an issue which for him raised in an acute form questions of party alignment and personal responsibility. The detailed memoranda which he kept of the crisis, though in a obvious sense partial, provide an insight into the current state of his political thought.

Both at the time and in subsequent reflection it was Russell whom Gladstone held responsible for initiating the ministerial crisis. At a Cabinet discussion early in December 1854 Russell, raising what he described as a "rather important and not very agreeable" matter, criticised the Government's poor conduct of the war; in particular he blamed Aberdeen for not being willing to entertain his suggestion that Palmerston should replace Newcastle in the War department.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Morley described it as "one of the turning points in Gladstone's career" but in spite of providing copious documentation never attempted to explain why; Morley, *i*, pp. 388-404
  2. Autobiographica, iii, pp. 150-51

Aberdeen defended himself by circulating his recent correspondence with Russell over this.<sup>1</sup> Gladstone who had been forewarned by Aberdeen of the trouble brewing found Russell's move reprehensible.<sup>2</sup> At the next meeting of the Cabinet, two days later, Russell repeated his earlier charge, and offered to resign either immediately or at the Christmas recess.<sup>3</sup> In the ensuing debate Gladstone sided with Molesworth who argued that for Russell to continue representing the Government but with the idea of resigning at a fixed time would be constitutionally improper. With the question of the resignation still unsettled the Cabinet accepted Palmerston's proposal for an adjournment. Aberdeen's reluctance to accept Russell's offer to resign seems to have derived not so much from a desire to retain his services as from the fear that if Russell went "he would have been followed by some six of his colleagues."<sup>4</sup> The matter still "rankled" in Gladstone's mind sufficiently to lead him to draft a letter to Aberdeen expressing his views more clearly than he had made known in Cabinet. His major worry was that since the Cabinet had not arrived at a resolution "a point of great importance was settled only by being left in abeyance". Given that Russell's threat to resign arose from dissatisfaction with Aberdeen's leadership and with the Government's handling of the war it would be a dangerous nonsense for him to continue representing the Government in parliament.<sup>5</sup> In the event Gladstone did not send this letter<sup>6</sup> but since he met Aberdeen on the three successive

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1. The main letters in the Russell-Aberdeen exchange of Nov. and Dec. '54 are in Walpole, op. cit. pp. 228-31. Russell had already forwarded this correspondence to Palmerston who, however, declined at this stage to commit himself. Ibid., p. 231.
  2. 25th Nov. '54, Diaries, iv. p. 662. In an audience at Windsor W.E.G. relayed the news of the Cabinet difficulties to Prince Albert. "The Prince said of the last J.R. Letter as described by me it was 'shameful'." 30th Nov. ibid., iv. p. 664
  3. 4th Dec. '54, Autobiographica, iii, pp. 150-51
  4. Ibid.
  5. W.E.G. to Aberdeen, 7th Dec. '54. Autobiographica, iii, p. 152.
  6. 7th Dec. '54, Diaries, iv. p. 665

days after the Cabinet meeting it is probable that he conveyed his ideas directly.<sup>1</sup> Informing the Queen of developments Aberdeen told her that Gladstone was one of the Cabinet members who were strongly in favour of his accepting Russell's resignation.<sup>2</sup> Russell seems to have got wind of this for, when the Cabinet met again to consider the presentation of the Queen's Speech, despite no direct reference being made to the matter of resignation he, nonetheless, saw fit to attack Gladstone. As Aberdeen recorded it:

Towards the end of the Cabinet a very unpleasant discussion took place, raised by Id. J. Russell on the subject of the dismissal of Mr. Kennedy ... in which he reflected very severely on Mr. Gladstone. 3

Gladstone's own description of Russell's outburst was that it was "strange" and "childish".<sup>4</sup> A week later, Russell, having gained no strong support within the Cabinet, withdrew his threat of resignation; Gladstone saw this as proof of Russell's basic irresponsibility; his threats, resolutions, and convictions had been "mere moonshine".<sup>5</sup>

[Russell] has formally retracted: and such is his insensibility to what honour and decency require that he meant to do this in silence - and that even now he makes no apology to those whom he has wounded. To my great satisfaction [the Queen] says that his retraction only lowers him more in her opinion: this is most secret. He has however taken up the Kennedy affair with a high hand: still having Lord Aberdeen for his final aim. 6

Gladstone sought to vent his "overflowing disgust at the conduct of Id. J." by penning a memorandum on the Kennedy affair.<sup>7</sup> His sense of grievance over recent happenings in the Cabinet went so deep that he

1. 6th - 8th Dec. '54, ibid., iv, pp. 665-6

2. Aberdeen to the Queen, 9th Dec. '54, in Aberdeen, p.500

3. Ibid., p. 501

4. 9th Dec. '54, Diaries, iv.p.666

5. W.E.G. to C.G, 16th Dec.'54. Bassett, p.107

6. W.E.G. to C.G., 18th Dec.'54, ibid.

7. 17th Dec. '54, Diaries iv,p. 668. Unfortunately, this memo has not survived.

confessed to facing the possibility of Government defeat in the Commons with equanimity. After a narrow victory in one division he noted "I never before heard the announcement of a majority in wh[ich] I had myself voted with such doubtful (if indeed doubtful) feelings."<sup>1</sup>

To his wife he confided:

... it makes life eminently revolting to have a series of these proceedings continually going on .... to me personally, and I think to some others of us, it will be a relief to be beaten, after the state to which our internal relations have come<sup>2</sup>

Even on Christmas day his anger still burned.

I was troubled during the morning about my feud in the Cabinet: brute passions were in my mind with the thought of the new-born Christ, even as the animals in the stable where He lay: but at the Altar the Son of God came to me and bid them be still. 3

It should be pointed out that there were those who regarded Gladstone as being as perverse as Russell, and therefore equally responsible for the Cabinet's current difficulties. Arthur Gordon, by no means unfriendly to Gladstone, wrote:

Gladstone, eager and impulsive, is really anxious for a rupture with Lord John, be the consequences what they may. He is wrong. As [Aberdeen] often says, there is no perspective in his views. All objects, great and small, are on one plane with him; and consequently the tiniest sometimes assume the largest dimensions. 4

The Christmas parliamentary recess brought small relief to the Government. Aberdeen and his colleagues were subjected to growing criticism in the country; the Times which had been generally tolerant of the Government's war record began from late December onwards to adopt an increasingly hostile line. Its new year's editorial declared, "It can no longer be doubted, or even denied that the expedition to the Crimea is

1. 19th Dec.'54, ibid. iv, p.668
2. W.E.G. to C.G. 19th Dec.'54, Bassett, p.109. A clue as to why Russell seemed so gratuitously bent on making trouble may lie in the following statement of his: "Lord Aberdeen always told me that, after being Prime Minister for a short time, he meant to make way for me, and give up the post. But somehow the moment never came for executing his intentions." J.E.Russell, Recollections and Suggestions, London 1875 p.272
3. 25th Dec.'54, Diaries, iv, p.669. Four days later in his birthday reflections he singled out "wrath" as one his abiding sins of the year. ibid., p.670
4. Gordon's journal, 22nd Jun.'55, in Aberdeen p. 530



in a state of entire disorganization".<sup>1</sup> Against such a background it was to be expected that when parliament re-assembled the Government would come under immediate pressure. This was duly realised; on 23rd January, the first day of the new term, Roebuck gave notice of his intention to petition the Commons to set up a select committee to inquire into the condition of the army before Sebastopol.<sup>2</sup> This inspired Russell to tender his resignation yet again, and this prior to the Cabinet meeting called to discuss what the Government's response should be. Indeed, Aberdeen made Russell's letter of resignation the starting point of the Cabinet's deliberations. Russell's grounds were that since the motion involved a censure upon the War Department, with which some of his colleagues were associated, his only course was to withdraw.<sup>3</sup> On receiving this letter, Aberdeen informed the Cabinet, his first reaction had been that it must mean the break up of the Government but he had since concluded that they should continue in office if this could be done with dignity and propriety.<sup>4</sup> Newcastle, declaring that the nation wanted a victim, offered himself as the obvious choice; his resignation and the succession of Palmerston to the War ministry would enable the Government to continue with strength and credit.<sup>5</sup> "Lord Palmerston agreed that the feeling of the country whether rightly or wrongly was favourable to his having the department of war." If this was what the Cabinet also wished, said Palmerston, he would so place himself at their disposal.<sup>6</sup> The Whig element, however, led by Sir George Grey, thought that Russell's resignation did unhappily commit the whole Cabinet to a similar step. Gladstone himself confessed to "the greatest difficulty in forming a judgment" on the resignation question; he was

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1. The Times, 31st Dec.'54. Cf. Aberdeen, pp.518-20

2. See A.Briggs."John Arthur Roebuck and the Crimean War", in Victorian People, London, 1954.

3. Russell to Aberdeen, 23rd Jan. '55, in Walpole, op. cit.ii, p.237

4. 24th Jan.'55. Autobiographica iii, p.153. "Dissolution of the Aberdeen and Separation from the Palmerston Government" (Add, Ms.44745 fos 20-160) was how W.E.G. entitled his memos dealing with these events; reproduced in Autobiographica, iii. pp.153-92 & Diaries.v. pp.6-29

5. Autobiographica, iii. p.153.

6. Ibid., iii. p.154

unhappy about admitting that Russell's action could so force the issue but accepted that if the majority of his colleagues thought that it did then there was no alternative to collective resignation.<sup>1</sup> It was eventually determined that Aberdeen should convey the resignation of the whole Cabinet to the Queen. In order not to give satisfaction to Russell Gladstone persuaded his colleagues to accept a hair-splitting qualification:

Charles Wood was commissioned to let Lord John know. I objected to his being informed that we had resigned on account of his resignation - we resigned as a body because some of us thought it necessary to resign on account of his resignation and the rest of the Cabinet could not remain with-out this portion of their colleagues.

It was agreed that C.Wood should simply state the fact and no more.     2

Such refinements of attitude were rendered irrelevant by the refusal of the Queen to accept the resignations;<sup>3</sup> being given the chance for a reconsideration of the position Grey and those others who the day before had seen no other course open to them but resignation now agreed to the Government's continuing. Thus "the government as a body were saved from the very questionable position ... of flying from Roebuck's motion".<sup>4</sup> It was then determined that on the announcement in the Commons of Russell's resignation Palmerston should move for a twenty-four hour adjournment with the promise that the Government would stand or fall by the outcome of the Roebuck motion.<sup>5</sup> Palmerston immediately wrote to Gladstone asking him to be prepared to speak in the House should Russell in his resignation address refer to the correspondence that had passed between Aberdeen and Russell in December regarding changes in the

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. 25th Jan. '55, ibid., iii.p.155. The Queen had already told Russell that his behaviour left something to be desired. The Queen to Russell, 25th Jan. '55, Letters of Queen Victoria, iii.p.93

4. Autobiographica, iii,p.155

5. 25th Jan. '55, ibid.

War department; as Palmerston had been the major subject of that correspondence he did not feel he could properly take part in any ensuing discussion.<sup>1</sup> Gladstone replied that this request was a difficult one for him particularly in the light of "Lord John's broil with me about Kennedy". He agreed, however, to do it if Palmerston still wished and asked to see a copy of the "admirable letter" which Palmerston had recently written to Russell.<sup>2</sup> As it happened, although Gladstone spoke in the debate following Russell's formal announcement, he was not called upon to do so in the manner envisaged by Palmerston; the Cabinet had in any case advised against it.<sup>3</sup> It was Palmerston himself who directly followed Russell's Commons' statement.<sup>4</sup> Palmerston's speech, according to Gladstone, was "wretched", producing "a flatness and deadness of spirit towards the government which was indescribable".<sup>5</sup>

Towards the speech that had preceded it Gladstone was more complimentary believing that Russell "had carried the House with him". Gladstone, nonetheless, found the statement "very untrue in its general effect" and considered, that Russell had delivered the speech "in contemplation of another possible premiership".<sup>6</sup>

This was very much the view on the Opposition side. Stanley considered that basic to Russell's decision to resign was his

1. Palmerston to W.E.G. 25th Jan.&'55, Guedella, p.100
2. W.E.G. to Palmerston, 26th Jan.'55, ibid., p.101. The letter in which Palmerston criticised Russell strongly for putting personal before national interests. (24th Jan. '55) is in Ashley, Life & Correspondence of Palmerston, ii. 301-2
3. 26th Jan.'55. Autobiographica, iii.p.156.
4. H. cxxxvi. 960-74, 1039
5. Autobiographica, iii.pp.155-6
6. Ibid., Greville also considered Russell guilty of "suppressio veri" in his speech. Greville Memoirs, vii,p.106. The Times was positively hostile towards Russell attributing his actions to "personal resentment or party intrigue". The Times 26th Jan.'55

"conviction that the Liberal party, if set free from Peelite supremacy, might be reunited under his guidance". Stanley added the interesting gloss that Russell's move was

a dexterous leap out of a sinking boat; and perhaps many persons felt that the Peelite party had not itself been so scrupulous in its relations with other sections as to be entitled to complain. Nevertheless, the feud between Whig and Peelite has by this move been so embittered as to make an early reunion impossible. 1

Nor was the Whig viewpoint wholly dissimilar. Seeking to dissuade Russell from his earlier resignation threat in December Charles Wood had argued:

Party in the old sense of Pitt & Fox, Whig & Tory, does not exist, & never will again ....

But will what you are now doing render your leading a Government with the Peelites more easy? How do you propose to construct a Government if this one is broken up by your going out on such ground? If a Whig Government cannot stand with the Peelites it certainly cannot stand without them. You could not expect Newcastle - Herbert or Graham to serve under you, or Gladstone, when you had broken up the present Government on the alleged conduct of some of them. 2

Following discussions with Aberdeen, Herbert, and Graham during the intervening week-end<sup>3</sup>, Gladstone incorporated his formal reply to Russell into his speech against the Roebuck motion on 29th January.<sup>4</sup> In a ninety-minute speech, which he found "hard and heavy work",<sup>5</sup> Gladstone first drew attention to Russell's misleading the House in claiming to have urged consistently since the previous November that the war departments should be reorganised and that Palmerston should replace Newcastle; Russell had in fact dropped this demand in December when he had withdrawn his original resignation and had agreed to continue serving with his colleagues.<sup>6</sup>

1. 22nd- 30th Jan.'55, Stanley Memoirs, pp.127-8

2. Wood to Russell, 7th Dec.'54, Aberdeen, pp.499-500. See also Walpole, op.cit. ii. pp.231-2

3. 27th and 28th Jan.'55, Diaries, v. pp.8-9

4. Roebuck had introduced his motion on Fri. 26th Jan '55, H. cxxxvi, 979; The major debate on it occupied Mon. 29th Jan. H. cxxxvi, 1059-1233.

5. 29th Jan.'55. Diaries, v. p.9.

6. 29th Jan.'55. H. cxxxvi, 1179-83

Gladstone was thus strongly implying that Russell's resignation rather than being an act of principle was a desertion of the ship before the storm broke.<sup>1</sup> The main body of his speech was devoted to a defence of Newcastle personally and of the Government's war effort generally.<sup>2</sup> Gladstone ended with a rhetorical flourish in which he scornfully rejected the idea of a commission of enquiry. He rejoiced that his last words as a member of Aberdeen's Government should form a

Solemn and earnest protest against a proceeding which has no foundation either in the constitution or in the practice of preceding Parliaments, which is useless and mischievous for the purpose which it appears to contemplate, and which in my judgement is full of danger to the power, dignity and usefulness of the Commons of England. 3

There was general agreement that Gladstone had given a powerful performance. Greville described it as "a very fine speech"<sup>4</sup> while Palmerston considered it "would have convinced hearers who had not made up their minds beforehand".<sup>5</sup> Characteristically Morley finds the speech a matter for eulogy; he pays tribute to Gladstone's restraint and lack of "vehemence of manner" and describes how Gladstone "sat down amid immense applause",<sup>6</sup> an account which ill accords with Stanley's contemporary description of "a very powerful, ingenious harangue, which considering its rhetorical merit was but coldly received".<sup>7</sup> Gladstone's own comment to Aberdeen that he had never experienced so distasteful a task and that wherever he turned he felt animosity suggests strongly

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1. W.E.G. told Aberdeen that he had intended likening Russell to Achilles sulking in his tent but that Wood had urged him not to; Gordon's journal, 30th Jan.'55, in Aberdeen, p.539. In a much later reflection Gladstone still maintained that Russell's resignation was a ploy in order to avoid being involved with a beaten Administration. "Recorded Errors", 7 th Nov.'96, Autobiographica i.p. 130.
  2. H. cxxxvi, 1178 - 1202
  3. H. cxxxvi, 1205.
  4. Greville Memoirs, vii, pp. 105-6
  5. Palmerston to the Queen, 30th Jan.'55, Letters of Queen Victoria, iii, pp. 99-100
  6. Morley, i. p. 391
  7. 30th Jan. '55. Stanley Memoirs, p. 129

that Stanley's account comes closer to the truth.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the success or otherwise of Gladstone's speech it made little impact on the outcome of the debate; in the division that followed the Government was defeated by 305 to 148.<sup>2</sup> The following day the Government formally resigned, an event at which Gladstone privately expressed relief. "This was a day of personal light heartedness: but the problem for the nation is no small one."<sup>3</sup> That problem the Queen endeavoured to resolve by asking Derby to form a government. As Stanley's record shows, Derby was prepared for this; he had accepted Disraeli's analysis of the situation; namely,

that Palmerston would be deterred by age, infirmity and the consciousness of an overrated reputation, from undertaking the Government: and that after a little hesitation he might be induced to lead the Commons under Lord Derby, bringing with him Gladstone and Herbert.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly Derby approached Palmerston with this offer. In Stanley's version Palmerston "readily accepted on his own account" but asked to be allowed to consult the two colleagues named.<sup>5</sup> As Greville and Gladstone have it, Palmerston did not give a definite reply to Derby before consulting the other two.<sup>6</sup> One of the difficulties here is that since

1. W.E.G. to Aberdeen, in Aberdeen, p.545. In regard to discrepancies of interpretation it might be observed that Conacher shows an oddity of approach here. He writes of Gladstone as "this remarkable man ... in a quiet and patient manner ... [talking] of affairs of war with as much authority as on happier occasions he dilated on the niceties of public finance"; (ibid. p.546). This is misleading insofar as it overlooks the anger and bitterness which Gladstone experienced and the rhetoric which he employed in all this.
2. H. cxxxvi, 1205. Gladstone remarked to Aberdeen that the size of the majority "not only knocked us down but sent us down with such a whack, that one heard one's head thump as it struck the ground". Gordon's journal, 30th Jan.'55, in Aberdeen, p.548.
3. 30th Jan.'55, Diaries, v.p.9
4. 30th Jan. '55. Stanley Memoirs, p. 130
5. Ibid.
6. 1st Feb. '55, Greville, vii, p.107; 31st Jan.'55, Autobiographica, iii, p. 156

the greater part of the discussions was necessarily verbal it is not possible for us to check the accuracy of the accounts in their nicest points. For example, according to Stanley, Gladstone had already stated firmly that he must retain the Exchequer in any new Government in which he might be invited to serve;<sup>1</sup> there is however, no reference to this pre-condition in any of Gladstone's memoranda.

What Gladstone did record was that Palmerston came to him with Derby's proposal after already having seen Herbert who seemed to be disinclined.<sup>2</sup> Gladstone asked Palmerston whether he was prepared to accept office, to which the latter replied that he had no great desire to serve under Derby but feared refusal would be interpreted as part of a move to promote himself as premier, a result, he did not doubt, the nation greatly wished.<sup>3</sup> Gladstone agreed that a Palmerston government would be highly popular but pointed to the difficulties that would confront it in the form of the Derby "phalanx" and the Russell "nucleus of discontent".<sup>4</sup> The two then consulted their other colleagues, Gladstone conversing chiefly with Aberdeen, Herbert, and Gordon.<sup>5</sup> When they met again Palmerston told Gladstone and Herbert that he had decided to decline Derby's offer. After further consultation Gladstone and Herbert determined to refuse also, believing that Derby had never intended to offer them office independently of Palmerston.<sup>6</sup> Gladstone then wrote to Derby giving this as the basic reason for his declining. He added that he thought a Government drawn from Derby's own supporters would stand a

1. Stanley, p. 131

2. 31st Jan.'55, Autobiographica, iii.p.156

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p.157

5. 31st Jan.'55, Diaries, v,p.9

6. Autobiographica, iii,p. 157

strong chance of survival and he evinced his "since desire to offer an administration so constructed ... an independent parliamentary support".<sup>1</sup> Whether Gladstone was wholly sincere in this is open to question for he remained particularly anxious to impress upon his recent chief that in the current uncertainty regarding leadership, and with the Whigs and Derbyites by no means wholly in control of themselves, it was still "quite practicable for Lord Aberdeen's government to continue in Office".<sup>2</sup>

Derby decided that without Palmerston there was no point in continuing with his attempt to form an administration and informed the Queen of the same. This greatly annoyed Disraeli; also Gladstone, who in later comments described Derby's withdrawal as a "palpable and even gross error", suggesting that Derby should have tried harder to win over the Peelites. Now that Protection had been dropped there was no insuperable barrier to union, "for old ties were with me more operatively stronger than new opinions".<sup>3</sup> In view of the volatile nature of current political decision-making, including Gladstone's own, this appears a harsh verdict; it also overlooks the obvious fact that Gladstone had just turned down Derby's offer. There was also a consideration which Gladstone would have been unaware of at the time but which comes out of Disraeli's complaint about his leader:

1. W.E.G. to Derby, 31st Jan.'55 Autobiographica, iii, p.158  
This letter was modelled on that already sent by Palmerston, who had shown W.E.G. a copy, (W.E.G. to Palmerston 1st Feb'55, Guedella, p.101) and was submitted to Aberdeen for approval. When W.E.G. read the letter to him Palmerston enthused "Nothing can be better". 2nd.Feb.'55, Autobiographica, iii, p.159
2. Ibid. That Derby would have been wholly delighted had Gladstone agreed to join him is made doubtful by Stanley's reference to a letter received from the Tory M.P. for Dublin, T.E.Taylor, containing "a strong remonstrance against the admission of Gladstone to our cabinet. He said the 'protestant party' would leave us to a man, especially the Irish part of it". Stanley. p. 132 (30th Jan.'55)
3. Sept. '97. Add. Ms. 44791, Autobiographica, i. p. 82.



[As] regarded our party. He said many were annoyed on two grounds - first, they thought our giving up the trial was a slur upon them as incompetent to form ... a cabinet - second, they disliked Gladstone, and were indignant that overtures should have been made to him. 1

Morley speaks of Gladstone's involvement in this executive crisis as making his "severance from the conservative party definitive".<sup>2</sup> This is to be wise after the event and to accept uncritically Gladstone's later clarified version of his position. In 1897 Gladstone wrote that the Roebuck issue produced in him

a political reaction favourable to Conservative reunion, provided that reunion were of a body with a body; for I never at any time contemplated replacing myself as an individual in the Conservative ranks. Strong sympathy with Lord Aberdeen and resentment at the treatment he had received lay at the root of this tendency. A strong sentiment of revulsion from Disraeli personally, a sentiment quite distinct from that of dislike, was alone sufficient to deter me absolutely from a merely personal and separate reunion; besides which there would have been no power, unless in company, to give to Conservatism a liberal bias in conformity with the traditions of Peel. 3

The clearness of vision and the certainty of political attitude that Gladstone suggests in that passage are by no means as evident in his memoranda contemporary with the events.

The next stage in that chain of events was Lansdowne's attempt to fulfil the Queen's commission to form a government following Derby's failure.<sup>4</sup> Lansdowne, uncertain of himself, invited Gladstone to discuss the various possibilities open. Gladstone was willing to speak freely to Lansdowne but on the understanding "that in so crude and dark a state

1. 5th Feb.'55. Stanley, p.133. Such tensions behind the scenes gives a touch of irony to the civilities which passed between W.E.G. and Disraeli. "Saw Mr. Disraeli in H. of L. & put out my hand wh was very kindly accepted". 1st Feb.'55, Diaries, v.p.11

2. Morley, i.p. 391

3. Sept. 1897. Add. Ms. 44791, Autobiographica, i, p.81

4. In old age Gladstone confused the order of events placing Lansdowne's attempt to construct a cabinet before Derby's. ibid. His own journals, quite apart from the many other independent sources available, would have shown him he was wrong.

of facts it was impossible to go beyond first impressions".<sup>1</sup>

Lansdowne listed four names he considered to be in the running for premier; Russell, Palmerston, Clarendon and Lansdowne himself. Gladstone dismissed Russell's chances, doubting whether in the current circumstances "he could get a ministry on its legs".<sup>2</sup> Palmerston, he considered, would not be able to command a parliamentary majority, opposed, as he would be, by Derby on the one hand and Russell on the other. On the idea of Clarendon's becoming Prime Minister while retaining the Foreign office Gladstone declined to comment until he could consult Aberdeen and Graham.<sup>3</sup> As to Lansdowne's heading an administration formed from the "disjecta membra of the Aberdeen administration" Gladstone was less than sanguine. Ideally what was needed, he argued, was either a Derby government formed of genuine Derbyites or "a homogenous Whig government"; this latter he defined as a "government formed from among those with whom he [Lansdowne] had acted during his political life" with Lansdowne at its head.<sup>4</sup> Political homogeneity, Gladstone insisted, must be the criterion. Another coalition in the prevailing circumstances would stand little chance of success; if recourse had eventually to be made to one Gladstone would prefer the resurrection of the old Aberdeen Coalition under a different leader rather than an entirely new one.<sup>5</sup> Whether Lansdowne followed the intricacies of this line of reasoning Gladstone did not record but Gladstone's reluctance to contemplate continuing at the Exchequer under him contributed largely to Lansdowne's abandonment of his endeavours to create an Administration.

1. 2nd Feb. '55. Autobiographica, iii, p. 159. It is important to stress just how confused contemporaries were by the current state of things. Stanley wrote of how "vague rumours ... and uncertainty prevailed". 2nd and 5th Feb. '55. Stanley, p. 132-33. Greville described "such confusion, such excitement, such curiosity ... and rumour with her hundred tongues scattering every variety of statement and conjecture". 4th Feb. '55. Greville, vii, p. 108
2. 2nd Feb. '55, Autobiographica, iii, p. 159
3. Ibid., p. 160
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

Much later in life it became Gladstone's considered opinion that his rejection of Lansdowne's offer constituted "one of the most important as well as least pardonable errors" of his political life, "perhaps the greatest, error I ever committed".<sup>1</sup> His reason for this extravagant confession reads: "It was I think injurious to the public if it contributed to the substitution as Prime Minister of Lord Palmerston for Lord Lansdowne: a person of greater dignity and I think a higher level of political principle".<sup>2</sup> Lansdowne "had a greater regard for principle as against expedients".<sup>3</sup> Gladstone's attempt to explain his odd behaviour merely serves to reinforce the impression that in 1855 for all his apparent political sophistication he was a confused man in a confused situation.

I ask myself what was my motive in this vexacious refusal? It was not any dislike or any dread of Lord Lansdowne himself and I confess it appears to me inconsistent with my consent, and almost immediately afterwards, to continue to hold office under Lord Palmerston. The best account I can give of it is this. Although in point of opinion I departed far from the Conservative and Protectionist party, and entertained no idea of coalescing with it unless as one of a body, yet my sympathies lagged much behind my opinions: my wish on the whole was that Lord Derby should form a government, and I was unwilling to do anything that would block him out of the field. 4

One can readily understand Gladstone's belated attempts to apologise for his unco-operative reactions in February 1855. The refusal of such prominent figures as himself to respond to the overtures of Derby, Clarendon and Lansdowne had more the look of intrigue than of principle. Sidney Herbert told Gladstone as much:

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1. Gladstone's mea culpa appears with slight variations in three separate sets of memoranda. Sept. '97. Add. Ms. 44791, f.119; "Recorded Errors, Add Ms. 44791, f.34; "Recorded Errors" (Alternative version) Add. Ms. 44790, July 1894, f.136. Printed in Autobiographica, i, pp.81,131,248.
  2. July '94, ibid., i. p. 249
  3. Sept. '97, ibid. o.p. 131
  4. Sept. '97, ibid. i. pp. 131-32.

[Those] who now hold aloof on a great public emergency, and who, unable to form a Government themselves, refuse their aid to any of those who with their assistance could do it, will be held to be intriguing for their own ends. 1

What led Herbert to make the observation was the news that Russell, after Lansdowne's failure, had been charged to form a government.<sup>2</sup> Herbert firmly believed that Russell's recent behaviour put him beyond the pale; for him to head an administration at a time "when the public feeling justly condemned him to a purgation for his late offences" would be "an indecent contempt of a just public opinion".<sup>3</sup> Herbert similarly dismissed the idea of a Derby government, particularly since "in Disraeli, the moving spirit of the whole, we know of no principle but that of seizing and making capital of the popular feeling of the moment".<sup>4</sup> Herbert wrote that if Palmerston were to give "satisfactory assurances" regarding the war question then it would be hard to gainsay his right to form a government and to expect co-operation.

If he do, what reason can we give to the country or to our friends for refusing assistance in such an emergency? Our friends, some few of whom I have seen cannot even understand our doubts. They think we shall, if we do not mind, find ourselves classed with Lord John, and be thought to be trying to hold the balance with a view of becoming what the French call 'masters of the situation'. 5

When Russell himself approached Gladstone to ask whether he would be willing to serve under him Gladstone repeated what he had said to Lansdowne, namely; that "what is called a homogenous Govt. would be

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1. Herbert to W.E.G. 4th Feb.'55, Stanmore, i.p.251
  2. Russell told Graham that the Queen had approached him with the task not with any real desire to see him as premier but in the belief that as he more than anyone had contributed to the collapse of the Coalition it was his duty to try to restore stability. 3rd Feb.'55, Add. Ms. 44745, f. 97. Autobiographica, iii, p. 160
  3. Herbert to W.E.G. 4th Feb.'55, Stanmore, i.p. 252.
  4. Ibid., i, p. 253
  5. Ibid., pp.254-5. Gladstone dismissed as "altogether visionary" the idea that a Palmerston Cabinet without Aberdeen and Russell would, in regard to the war, be anything other than a vehicle for Palmerston's own policies. W.E.G. to Herbert, 4th Feb. '55. ibid., i, p. 256.

best for the public & most likely to command approval". If, however, the country was to continue under a coalition Gladstone thought it best that the Aberdeen Coalition should be retained.<sup>1</sup> In Gladstone's account Russell had little confidence that he could shape a cabinet; "his tone was low and doubtful".<sup>2</sup> Gladstone admitted in his memorandum that he was something less than forthright in rejecting Russell.

I told him that my doctrine that the old coalition was preferable to a new one did not refer to any one person as Prime Minister in particular; at the same time I did not enter on the question whether particular objections applied to him when I described our position as a false one in the event of our joining him as minister. 3

Gladstone kept Aberdeen closely informed of these proceedings and it would seem to be his sense of loyalty to his former chief that led him to continue to press Aberdeen's claims when his more realistic colleagues argued that their erstwhile leader was a spent political force.<sup>4</sup>

In the confusion only one thing was clear; Palmerston's claims could not long be denied and the Peelites would have to make a decision where they stood in regard to him. When the news came through that Palmerston had at last been commissioned to construct a Cabinet Gladstone met Herbert and Graham to plan their line of action. Gladstone's first observation was that should Palmerston approach them they must refuse. Indeed, at this stage Gladstone considered that the only question to be decided was what they would do after they had rejected Palmerston.<sup>5</sup> Graham was determined not to separate from Aberdeen, believing it still possible for the premiership to return to him. Herbert, however, was

1. 3rd. Feb.'55. Add. Ms. 44745, Autobiographica, iii,p.162

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.,p.163

4. Ibid., pp. 163-4; Diaries, 3rd. Feb' 55, iii,ppp.10-11

5. 4th Feb'55. Add. Ms. 44745, Autobiographica, iii,p. 164

disposed to join Palmerston; that the latter would be able to form an administration Herbert regarded as highly probable and reckoned that if the leading Peelites were to decline to serve they would earn the *scorn* of the country in being "too nice" in their political approach.<sup>1</sup> As Herbert saw it the Coalition's recent defeat in Parliament had been so decisive that it rendered it impossible for Aberdeen seriously to consider returning. To Herbert Gladstone repeated his reluctance to join a new coalition, explaining that that was precisely what a Palmerston Cabinet would necessarily be. Notwithstanding Herbert's declared willingness to serve under Palmerston Gladstone hoped that the three Peelites would "all act together".<sup>2</sup> When Herbert pointed out that a Derby government, one of Gladstone suggested alternatives, would also constitute a new coalition Gladstone countered by arguing that if the Peelites were to assist Derby this would form a reunion not a coalition. In a coalition a separate existence was retained. He referred to "the great instances of change of party in our time", citing Palmerston, Stanley and Graham as examples.<sup>3</sup> But, Gladstone claimed,

these took place when parties were divided by great questions of principle - there were none such now, and no one could say that the two sides of the House were divided by anything more than this, that one was rather more stationary, the other rather more moveable. <sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.165. Writing to Gladstone on this theme Herbert enclosed a note from the editor of the Morning Chronicle suggesting that were the Peelites to refuse to entertain Palmerston's offer that would divert the public opprobrium for Russell onto themselves. Herbert to W.E.G. 5th Feb '55, Stanmore, i.p.258. Gladstone dismissed the note as the product of someone not privy to the secrets of government. W.E.G. to Herbert, 5th Feb. '55, ibid., i.p.259
  2. This hope, which Gladstone had restated in his letter to Herbert of 5th Feb. was realised; Herbert changed his mind and told Aberdeen that he would not accept office with Palmerston. Herbert to Aberdeen, 5th Feb. '55, ibid., i.pp. 259-64.
  3. 4th Feb. '55, Autobiographica, iii.p.166. He developed this point in his article "Party as it was and as it is", Add. Ms. 44745, f.221
  4. 4th Feb. '55, Autobiographica, iii,p.166

To this admission that principle was hardly involved in the current ministerial crisis he added an interesting corollary relating to his own party alignment.

I had now for two years been holding my mind in suspense upon the question I used to debate with Newcastle who used to argue that we should grow into the natural leaders of the Liberal party .... it is now plain this will not be: we get on very well with the independent Liberals, but the Whigs stand as an opaque body between us and them. 1

Whether Palmerston belonged to this opaque group Gladstone did not specify but he did draw up a number of memoranda in which he itemised his objections to Palmerston's forming a Cabinet.<sup>2</sup> To Sir John Young he spelt out the following:

1. That a Palmerston government would have no parliamentary majority
2. That it wd cause alarm abroad ...
3. That Palmerston is not fit for the duties of the office of Prime Minister.
4. That Lord Aberdeen has not been condemned and may, others having failed, go on. 3

Gladstone's persistence in clinging to the notion that Aberdeen, despite the overwhelming vote against him in parliament, remained undefeated indicates either a perversity or blindness which goes beyond simple loyalty to Aberdeen. Considered together with his earlier rejection of Derby and Lansdowne and his later acceptance of Palmerston it suggests a significant lack of clarity and understanding on his part.

When Palmerston made his anticipated personal appeal to him to remain in office as Chancellor under him he did so on the grounds "that there was now no other government in view". Gladstone's response was "adverse";<sup>4</sup> he referred back to their earlier discussion in which he

1. Ibid.

2. There are three main lists containing largely similar points: a set of reasons given to Sir John Young, 4th Feb.'55, Add. Ms.44745, f.115; memorandum A, 4th Feb.'55, 44745, fos. 118-19; memorandum B, 44745, f. 33.

3. Add. Ms.44745, f. 115, Autobiographica, iii,p.166

4. Ibid., p.167

had sought to impress upon Palmerston the need for a "homogeneous government" and he raised a number of points set down in his memorandum A. These included the assertion that Aberdeen was still undefeated and, therefore, the fittest man to be premier, that a Palmerston Government lacking Derby and Russell would prove unstable, and that, as was the case with Derby's attempt at Government-making, the Peelites must act in unison. He could not, he said, "act as an individual".<sup>1</sup> Gladstone took care not to mention any of the points in the memorandum touching on Palmerston's personal unfitness for the highest office.

In his formal letter of refusal to Palmerston he added little of substance except to make his rejection more positive. He did not doubt that a Palmerston Government would prosecute the war with the greatest vigour but his loyalty to Aberdeen prevented his joining; Aberdeen, Gladstone argued, had been defeated in the recent parliamentary vote because of his "leanings and sympathies with respect to peace". Since he himself shared those feelings he doubted that he would be able to give unreserved support to a premier and Cabinet determined to wage an offensive rather than a defensive war.<sup>2</sup>

Palmerston replied to this at some length in a letter containing a gentle mockery of Gladstone's position which, he argued, was founded "upon some misconceptions". Gladstone was wrong to anticipate difficulties:

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1. Ibid. pp. 167-8

2. W.E.G. to Palmerston 5th Feb.'55, Guedella, pp.101-03.

"I believe that if not content with repelling Russian aggression we attempted to maintain the pre-dominance of Mahometan institutions in Europe we shall undertake both a mischievous & a hopeless task."

4th & 5th Feb'55, Add. Ms. 44745, f. 37



If the Time should come when you should differ from a majority of the Cabinet then would be the Time for you ... to act upon the difference of opinion which would then have arisen; but can you really reconcile it to the high sense of public Duty which has invariably guided your Conduct to refuse to afford the Crown & the Country the justly valued advantage of your public services merely because you imagine that on some future occasion ... you might find yourself differing in opinion from some Portion of your Colleagues in the Government. 1

As to the future, Palmerston strenuously denied the implication that his would be a war-mongering government. Gladstone gravely misjudged him if he thought that. It would be, he wrote, "Common Sense" and a realistic comparison of "Ends with Means" that would determine his policy.<sup>2</sup>

During this exchange of letters Gladstone had again consulted Aberdeen and had been taken aback to learn that his former chief was, on balance, in favour of Gladstone's and his colleagues' agreeing to serve with Palmerston. Aberdeen restated the concern expressed by Herbert that the Peelites' refusal would create a poor image in the public eye.<sup>3</sup> Newcastle was of exactly the same opinion:

The refusal of all the Peelites to continue in the Government (for this almost the right word) would be painfully misunderstood by the public .... It gives colour to the rumour, false as it is, that we have been always luke-warm in the war, whilst the Russell section of the Government has been anxious to show more pluck and vigour. In short, it looks too like a cabal. 4

The urgings of Aberdeen and Newcastle obliged Gladstone to reconsider his position. The 5th February, "the most irksome and painful of these days", involved him in "many hours of anxious consultation" which he summarised in a memo and in a letter to Newcastle.<sup>5</sup> He told Graham that he was now ready to sacrifice his personal feelings and serve under Palmerston,

1. Palmerston to W.E.G. 6th Feb.'55, Guedella, pp. 104-5
2. Ibid. pp. 105-6
3. 4th Feb.'55, Autobiographica, iii.p.167
4. Newcastle to W.E.G. 5th Feb'55, Add.Ms.44262 fos.177-78. It was still Newcastle's hope at this point that Aberdeen would ease Gladstone's path into a Palmerston government by agreeing to join it himself, ibid., fos. 179-80
5. Memo of 5th Feb.'55. Add.Ms.44745, fos.39-46, in Autobiographica, iii.pp 170-72; W.E.G. to Newcastle 5th Feb'55, Add.Ms.44262, fos.181-84. Among those with whom Gladstone held discussions were Newcastle, Graham, Herbert, Young, Argyll and Aberdeen, Diaries, v,p.18

despite the latter's "manifest unfitness for that office", but only upon "the one sole and all embracing ground that the prosecution of the war with vigour and the prosecution of it to and for peace was now the question of the day to which every other must give way".<sup>1</sup> To this Gladstone added another essential pre-condition; if Aberdeen could bring himself to enter a Palmerston cabinet so could he, but if not, not.<sup>2</sup> Graham was of the same mind, as was Herbert who joined the discussion; Argyll, too, agreed and suggested the drawing up of a "concordat" binding the future government to the introduction of definite peace-terms; this proposal was eventually dropped as being an impossible condition to enforce no matter how desirable in itself.<sup>3</sup>

Aberdeen, whom Gladstone had begged to attend the discussion, provided the climax both by declaring that his own serving in a Palmerston government was out of the question and by urging his former colleagues that they should, nonetheless, do so. Gladstone then asked:

Lord Aberdeen, if we join the Palmerston Cabinet and you do not will you stand up in your place in the House of Lords and there say you give it your confidence with reference to foreign policy, the war, and the peace? 4

Aberdeen replied that he would express his hope but not his confidence. This answer provided the justification Gladstone was seeking. "He recommended us to join, but after this his recommendation was, for me, stillborn."<sup>5</sup> The parties to the discussion then agreed, although, as in Herbert's case with no great certainty, to refuse Palmerston's appeal. This resulted in "a storm of disapproval almost unanimous not only from the generality but from [our] own immediate political friends".<sup>6</sup>

1. 5th Feb.'55, Autobiographica, iii.p.170

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. W.E.G. to Newcastle, 5th Feb.'55, Add.Ms.44262, f.183. Gladstone's account in this letter is almost identical in wording and substance with his memo.

5. Ibid.

6. 5th Feb.'55, Autobiographica, iii,p. 170

Gladstone described "letters streaming in, all portending condemnation and disaster".<sup>1</sup> The anger he had helped to arouse led him to conclude:

The truth is the world is drunk about a Palmerston government: and if we humour it in its drunkenness it will rightly refuse to admit the excuse when, restored to soberness, it condemns what we have done. 2

Gladstone claimed to see the reason for the stand he had taken lying "clear and broad" before him but in less than a day he had changed his mind.<sup>3</sup> Arthur Gordon called early the following morning with a copy of a letter his father had written to the wavering Herbert, once more urging the Peelites to accept Palmerston.<sup>4</sup> Another discussion followed in which Herbert and Graham, who had become ill with the strain of it all, hinted that perhaps in the face of such criticism they ought to reconsider their decision. Gladstone tried to raise their former connection with Aberdeen to the level of a "moral union and association", thereby giving it a binding quality.<sup>5</sup> However, Aberdeen, in reply to Gladstone's repeated question as to whether he would publicly express his confidence in a Palmerston cabinet, stated that the assurances he had now received enabled him to say that he would. This change in Aberdeen's answer from that of the previous night was, Gladstone declared, the turning point: "Lord Aberdeen's declaration of confidence enabled me to see my way to joining". It was then that he penned his letter of acceptance to Palmerston.<sup>6</sup> He did so, according to his memo, with less than enthusiasm:

1. Ibid., p. 172

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. 6th Feb. '55. Add. Ms. 44745 f. 47, Autobiographica, iii, p. 172.

5. Ibid., pp. 172-3

6. Ibid., p. 174

The last day I hope of these tangled records: in which we have seen, to say nothing of the lesser sacrifice, one noble victim struck down, and are set to feast over the remains. The thing is bad and the mode worse. 1

It was, he informed his new chief, the position of Aberdeen that had determined both his earlier refusal and his present acceptance.

In my letter of yesterday I said that I regarded Lord Aberdeen's presence in the Cabinet as having been all along a vital element with respect of the question of war and peace. I am now, as I was then, willing to recognise his confidence in the Cabinet as equivalent to his presence. 2

Thus was removed "any bar to my entrance into your Cabinet".

Gladstone stated that his acceptance was unconditional; he understood that he was to continue his financial policy along the same lines as before. He did, however, remind Palmerston of the peculiarity of his Oxford constituency; those whom he represented would expect him as a matter of honour to refuse to remain a member of any Government "not marked by a friendly and kindly spirit towards the Church of England".<sup>3</sup>

Gladstone showed a copy of his letter of acceptance to Aberdeen, Herbert and Argyll, who all approved of it highly.<sup>4</sup> He found the experience of parting from his former leader a painful one but he assured Aberdeen that despite his not being in the Cabinet he would remain its "tutelary deity".<sup>5</sup> Gladstone then made a personal call on Palmerston. They discussed the composition of the new Cabinet, Gladstone pressing the claims of Cardwell and Canning and suggesting Herbert for the Colonial office. With regard to Gladstone's latest letter Palmerston assured him "that he knew what an university constituency was" and promised that he would leave him untroubled" with reference to the Established Church.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Ibid. p.175

2. W.E.G. to Palmerston, 6th Feb.'55, Guedella, p.106

3. Ibid., p.107

4. 6th Feb.'55, Autobiographica, iii, p. 174

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

Significantly, in the original draft of the memorandum of 6th February containing these details there was no mention of the Roebuck motion.<sup>1</sup>

It was not until 21st February that Gladstone added in the margin:

"I inquired his intentions as to Mr. Roebuck's motion and found he was of opinion that it should be resisted".<sup>2</sup> In view of all that happened in those intervening fifteen days the earlier omission and the later addition may well represent Gladstone's retrospective attempt to suggest that the Commission of Enquiry, the ostensible reason for his resigning on 22nd Feb., had been a condition of his accepting office on 6th February. One cannot, of course, be certain as to the contents of verbal discussions but what is clear is the lack of any reference to the Commission in Gladstone's letters to Palmerston at the time of his acceptance.<sup>3</sup>

Just as the initial reluctance of Gladstone and his colleagues to serve with Palmerston had been looked on by many as Peelite factiousness so now their willingness was interpreted as trafficking. Russell complained bitterly to Graham of the Peelites' "having selfishly sought too many offices"; he believed they had made a great mistake in joining Palmerston and was particularly "sore" with Gladstone over this.<sup>4</sup> Russell quoted the words of the Conservative M.P., Robert Christopher, to the effect that if Gladstone had seriously entertained Derby's recent offer of cabinet office under him one hundred Derbyites would have withdrawn their allegiance.<sup>5</sup>

1. 6th Feb.'55, Add. Ms. 44745, fos. 47-55

2. Ibid. f.55

3. There is no mention of it in Palmerston's diary, 23rd Jan-7th Feb.'55 Autobiographica, iii, Appendix 6, pp. 274-77

4. 8th and 9th Feb.'55, Add. Ms. 44745, fos. 61-2. ibid., iii, p. 176

5. Ibid. Greville noted: "Already the Derbyites are sulky and angry to the greatest degree, and the Whigs not a little indignant that so much anxiety has been shown to get Gladstone and Co., and such a high price paid for them". 7th Feb'55, Greville Memoirs, vii, p. 112

This did not, however, prevent Russell from urging his Whig colleagues to support the new Government.<sup>1</sup> Disraeli was irritated by what he regarded as dancing attendance on the Peelites and he took a dismal view of the Conservatives' failure to exploit the crisis. He complained to Stanley that "he saw no prospect for the future: this failure was final".<sup>2</sup>

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1. 7th Feb.'55, ibid.

2. 6th Feb.'55, Stanley Memoirs, p.133. Gladstone later recorded that he and Disraeli had shared, albeit unknowingly, the same initial opinion of Derby's failure to form a government at this time. "Recorded Errors," 7th Nov.'96, Autobiographica, i.p.132

## CHAPTER VII

Gladstone's acceptance of office did little to increase his optimism. His heart was not in it from the beginning; his first day in the Commons as a member of the new government led him to remark that he "did not think appearances over favourable".<sup>1</sup> With Peelite colleagues he discussed the threat of the Roebuck committee which, he felt, constituted "a most formidable" challenge. The first meeting of the Cabinet deepened his gloom. It was, he wrote, "more acephalous than ever: less order, less unity of purpose".<sup>2</sup> Palmerston, though he appeared elated by his new office, declined to give a strong lead. He introduced three subjects for Cabinet deliberation:

one the recall of Lord Raglan, which he tossed among us, without clear, broad, or strong views of his own, as if for what chance might being: another the Roebuck committee, on which he said he thought the House would give it up, if we undertook or promised an investigation under the authority of the Crown ... the other subject astonished me: it was a question whether 25,000 rifles should or should not ... be had from America: such a subject to be brought before a Cabinet by a Prime Minister I never knew: ... it was purely administrative and as little fit to be brought to Cabinet as any question I ever remember. <sup>3</sup>

Palmerston's "feeble argument" for a delay in negotiating with Russia lowered him even further in Gladstone's estimation. Gladstone challenged him in cabinet, asserting that he himself could conceive of nothing more fearful than to delay; the army's condition and the

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1. 7th Feb. '55, Add. Ms. 44745 f. 57, ibid., iii, p. 175

2. 8th & 9th Feb. '55, Add. Ms. 44745, f. 63. ibid., iii, p. 176

3. Ibid., pp. 176-77

"possibility of our losing it" before Sebastopol rendered negotiation not a choice but a necessity.<sup>1</sup> Gladstone, indeed, seemed determined to remain unimpressed by his leader. He found cause for complaint in Palmerston's failure to take sufficient interest in the current deliberations of Convocation at Canterbury.<sup>2</sup> Close as such ecclesiastical matters were to Gladstone's heart it was the Roebuck committee that brought matters to a head. When Palmerston made his first appearance as Prime Minister in the House of Commons he sought to bypass the issue by offering a fresh Government inquiry into the condition of the British army.<sup>3</sup> The House, however, was not to be so easily diverted; many speakers, including Roebuck and Disraeli, demanded that the Commons keep to its original resolution.<sup>4</sup> In his journal Gladstone wrote:

Ld Ps statement was in many respects a good one: but there was not in it the stuff to confront the difficulties in immediate view: & our throw off was worse than even I had anticipated. 5

It was now clear that the issue could not be avoided and a special meeting of the Cabinet was convened. Palmerston admitted to his colleagues that the Commons was unshakeable in its resolve to form a committee of inquiry; in the light of this he declared himself willing to allow the inquiry to proceed provided only that the committee was "fairly composed".<sup>6</sup> Wood, who claimed to have tested the temper of a large number of M.P.'s, suggested that the committee of inquiry should itself be appointed by a selection committee and should be confined initially to reviewing the conduct of the government departments at home.

1. Ibid.

2. Memo. 14th & 17th Feb.'55, Add. Ms. 44745 f.71, Autobiographica, iii, p. 177.

3. 16th Feb.'55, H. cxxxvi, 1425

4. H. cxxxvi, 1431, 1439; Greville Memoirs, vii, p. 114

5. 16th Feb. '55. Diaries, v, p. 24

6. Memo. 18th Feb.'55, Add. Ms. 44745 f. 73, Autobiographica, iii, p. 178



This proposal was supported by Grey, the Home Secretary, who added that it would in logic be difficult for the Cabinet to resign over this as the committee had "stood affirmed by a large majority" when the Cabinet had taken office.<sup>1</sup> Graham saw the force of this argument and added that if the committee were to be set up it would prove very difficult to predetermine the limit of its enquiries. Molesworth was of the same opinion but Herbert and Argyll spoke strongly against the committee's formation. Panmure, the Secretary at War, prophesied that if such a committee were established there would be mutiny in the army within a month. Granville, too, was opposed to giving way and thought that it might indeed be made a matter for dissolution, although he would not press this point if his colleagues were unwilling.<sup>2</sup>

Gladstone contended that if the limitation suggested by Wood could be practically enforced then he would accept the enquiry; if it could not then he must reject the notion of a committee entirely. "I thought it impossible to agree to an inquiry by committee into the state of the army in the Crimea while the expedition is in progress." The Cabinet was on the verge of agreeing to a committee with limited powers of inquiry,

but Lord Palmerston whose mind seemed made up to giving way (after what he had said the night before!) obstructed this and it was agreed that we should take till Tuesday to consider. <sup>3</sup>

Gladstone's final comment to the meeting was that if the Government were to accede to an inquiry into the state of the army it would not be able, nor would it be entitled, to command authority in the Commons.<sup>4</sup>

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. iii, p. 179

4. Ibid.

That evening he repeated to the Queen and Prince Albert his views on the constitutional impropriety of an enquiry by select committee. Without committing himself to "any positive and final declaration " he intimated to the royal pair that he would oppose the motion.<sup>1</sup>

The Roebuck Committee was now "the constant subject" of his thoughts.<sup>2</sup> He conversed and corresponded over the next five days with all the leading Cabinet figures.<sup>3</sup> He was particularly worried by a rumour that, contrary to his promise, Palmerston intended announcing to Parliament, before the scheduled Cabinet meeting, that the Government had agreed to the Roebuck Committee.<sup>4</sup> Palmerston tried to soothe his fears but Gladstone appeared unconvinced.<sup>5</sup> He formalised his objections to the enquiry seriatim in two memoranda.<sup>6</sup> If set up the committee would, he believed, adversely affect relations with France and perpetrate an injustice on the army commanders in the Crimea, thereby undermining the loyalty and discipline of the entire British force.<sup>7</sup> His strongest reservations were, however, constitutional:

a committee is an instrument conflicting with but altogether inferior to the immediate organs of the government itself. 8

the appointment of a committee for remedy in fact places in the hands of a small number of Members of Parliament duties which appertain essentially to the executive government. 9

[There are] dangers inherent in a precedent which so transfers under critical circumstances the authority vested in the Crown. 10

1. Ibid. The Prince likened the idea "to the proceedings of the Convention of France", while the Queen "trusted that she should not be given over into the hands of those 'who are least fit to govern'". ibid.
2. 19th Feb.'55, Diaries, v,p.26
3. 18th to 23rd Feb.'55, ibid., v,pp.26-30
4. W.E.G. to Palmerston, 19th Feb.'55, Guedella,p.108
5. Palmerston to W.E.G. 21st Feb.'55, ibid., pp.108-09
6. 19th Feb.'55, Add. Ms.44745, fos.69-70; 20th Feb.'55, ibid., f.120  
The two lists are essentially the same.
7. Ibid., fos. 69, 120
8. Ibid., f.69
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., f.120. Gladstone developed these points in conversation with Aberdeen, Herbert and Graham. Aberdeen's opinion was that if the committee were proceeded with the whole government should resign; he was less certain that the Peelites should do this separately if their Cabinet colleagues refused. 20th Feb.'55, Diaries, v,p. 26

At the scheduled Cabinet meeting Palmerston announced that the Commons had become so "unruly" in regard to the Roebuck Committee that if the Government opposed it they would be defeated by an overwhelming majority. Nor, in his view, were they free to dissolve on it as a matter of principle: "to resign a fortnight after taking office would make [them] the laughing stock of the country".<sup>1</sup> Graham pointed out that the committee had been the precise reason for the resignation of the former government; despite the absence of Aberdeen and Newcastle from the present Administration it remained "a censured government".<sup>2</sup>

Gladstone's contribution at this juncture was to read out the main points of his memorandum,<sup>3</sup> emphasising that "the proposed transfer of the functions of the executive to a select committee of the House of Commons ... was an evil greater than any that could arise from a total or partial resignation."<sup>4</sup> He claimed that it had always been his understanding, drawn from the Prime Minister himself on 6th February when entering the Cabinet and maintained in subsequent conversations with such as Lansdowne, that the Government was pledged to opposing the committee.<sup>5</sup> Gladstone regretted that his earlier proposal for keeping the inquiry "in the hands of the Crown" had been ignored, particularly as the Cabinet had favoured it; he presumed that Palmerston and Parnmure were responsible for the change of plan.<sup>6</sup> In response to the argument that not to grant the committee would let in Derby, who would then dissolve and "obtain an immense majority", both Gladstone and Graham asserted that

1. Memo 20th Feb.'55, Add. Ms. 44745, f.121. Autobiographica, iii,p.180
2. Ibid.
3. Memo. A., Add. Ms. 44745, f. 120
4. Memo 20th Feb.'55, Add. Ms. 44745 fos. 121-28, Autobiographica, iii.p.181
5. Ibid. Gladstone added in the margin, "Upon this recital we were agreed"; the "we" presumably referring to Palmerston and himself. Since there is no extant comment of Palmerston's on this there is no way of checking except to repeat that Gladstone's original letter of acceptance did not specifically mention the Roebuck issue.
6. Autobiographica, iii.p.181

the Government's principles of action should rise above the expedient; moreover, said Gladstone, it was unlikely that Derby would behave in the manner suggested since he, too, would doubtless wish to keep the enquiry under the control of the executive.<sup>1</sup> Gladstone added somewhat ambiguously that the history of the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill had shown him "how the determined resistances of a few could cripple a serious measure". The meeting ended with Graham and Gladstone strongly intimating their resignation but not formally declaring it.<sup>2</sup>

The following day Gladstone was summoned to Buckingham Palace to discuss the situation. He told Prince Albert, who had conveyed the Queen's concern that the Peelites should not leave the Cabinet, that speaking for Graham and Herbert as well as himself he could offer the assurance that their actions were motivated solely with a view to the honour of the Crown; neither personal nor party interests entered into it.<sup>3</sup> The assault upon the executive principle, implicit in the Roebuck motion, was a far greater evil "than any that could arise from political dislocation and disruption".<sup>4</sup> This evil was no mere abstraction since it would have, if tolerated, a practical and harmful effect on the operations of the British army in the field and on relations with the French. There would be "little peace until Parliament had again resolved itself into the old form of two parties".<sup>5</sup> He added, however, that he regarded Palmerston's conduct while serving under Aberdeen and since the disruption as having been perfectly honourable.<sup>6</sup>

1. Ibid., iii, pp. 181-2

2. Ibid.

3. Memo 21st Feb '55. Add. Ms. 44745 f. 129. Autobiographica, iii, p. 183

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid. iii, p. 184. Albert observed that much of the trouble "resulted from having one party overcharged with Right Honourables, i.e. candidates for ministerial offices". ibid.

6. Ibid. The Prince informed Gladstone that Palmerston had written to the Queen of the likely Peelite resignations and of his hope that he could fill the vacant places without endangering the Government. Ibid.

From his meeting with the Prince Gladstone went directly to another Cabinet session. Palmerston again proposed that the Government should accept the committee nominated by the Commons but should intimate that it did so in the expectation that nothing would be done that might impinge on the French alliance. Graham announced that he could not be a party to this but that out of respect for the Prime Minister he would delay his withdrawal until a time that caused the least inconvenience to the Government.<sup>1</sup>

Gladstone supported Graham's sentiments except that he reserved for himself the right to move an amendment in the Commons as a means of clarifying his position regarding the threat to executive power. He did not consider it possible for the Government to prevent the inquiry dealing with the French alliance since "every question of difficulty turned upon those relations".<sup>2</sup> At this point Grey asked him bluntly whether he did not admit that the committee was inevitable.

I answered perhaps it now had become so with this government; that last Friday it certainly was not so: that it would not now be so were Derby in power and we supporting him properly in the matter. <sup>3</sup>

The discussion became heated when Wood compared the three Peelites with Russell: "Lord J. Russell had struck one frightful blow at parliamentary government and we were going to strike another". Granville fanned the flames by making the same comparison, suggesting that both Russell and Peelites had been motivated by "certain reserves of a private nature".<sup>4</sup> Gladstone's protest at this did not stop Clarendon saying that in leaving the Cabinet the three would be clearly censuring their colleagues who remained. Palmerston suggested (with deliberate mischief, one feels) that the Peelites might well be assailed on the grounds of inconsistency

1. Ibid., iii, pp. 184-5.

2. Ibid., iii, p. 185

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., iii, p. 186. Argyll noted that this was "the only occasion in my public life with Gladstone when he did for a moment show some considerable irritation". Argyll, ii, p. 537

"for having taken office with this vote on the books and the recorded intention of the mover to press it".<sup>1</sup> Both Gladstone and Graham challenged this, asserting that they had joined the Government in the expectation that the Commons would develop sufficient confidence in Lord Palmerston as to be willing to abandon the original motion. Gladstone referred to the fact that "the measures announced last Friday had not been before the Cabinet"; what they had put to them was the idea of a commission by the Crown.<sup>2</sup> In any case, he added, whether he and his two colleagues had been inconsistent was simply an argument "ad homines"; it had no bearing on "the great question of public advantage or mischief".<sup>3</sup>

Allowing for Palmerston's own lack of consistency it is still not possible to absolve Gladstone from the charge that he had acted ambiguously. In a letter of 21st February, the day of the Peelites' resignation, Herbert wrote to him regarding the awkward position that they were placed in by the Cabinet's decision to accept the committee of enquiry:

On the one side of the question stands the Committee, full of practical danger ... On the other side stands the fact that the Committee had been voted and stood for nomination before we joined the Government, and that therefore we did it with our eyes open to the improbability of the House of Commons rescinding its vote to please anybody. <sup>4</sup>

It had been Gladstone's original intention to present a set of resolutions to the Commons prior to his resignation but Herbert and Graham dissuaded from doing so by arguing that they were likely to gain so little support in a discussion that they would make their cause ridiculous.<sup>5</sup>

11. Autobiographica, iii, p. 186

2. Ibid., iii, p. 186-7

3. Ibid., iii, p. 186

4. Herbert to W.E.G. 21st Feb. '55, Add. Ms. 44210, f. 284

5. 22nd. Feb. '55, Diaries, v, p. 30. Memo. Add. Ms. 44745, fos. 143-6. Autobiographica, iii, p. 187. The draft resolutions of 21st & 22nd Feb. (Add. Ms. 44745, fos. 141-2) were an appeal for an enquiry into the reasons for the distress in the Crimea coupled with the assertion that such enquiry should remain the prerogative of the Crown. Autobiographica, iii, pp. 188-9

Instead he incorporated the substance of his draft resolutions into his resignation speech to the House.<sup>1</sup> In his address of one and a half hours, he stated his acceptance of the principle of an enquiry into the condition and organisation of the British army; indeed, he declared, he sought "expeditions remedies" to such military defeats as might be discovered. What, however, he could not acquiesce in was the extension of parliamentary initiative in an area properly the preserve of the executive.<sup>2</sup> The speech was given a sympathetic hearing<sup>3</sup> but it is doubtful whether Gladstone had satisfactorily explained his behaviour to his listeners. The ambiguity of the Peelites stand was described by Greville:

Graham, Gladstone, and S. Herbert have resigned, greatly to the disgust and indignation of their colleagues, to the surprise of the world at large, and the uproarious delight of the Whigs and Brooks's Club, to whom the Peelites have always been odious ...

If they had accepted office under Pam with the condition that he should try and get rid of the Committee and that they should retire in case he failed, there would have been nothing to say... but the whole course of proceeding is so anomalous and the exigencies of the time are so great and peculiar, that on the whole I think they ought to have staid in. <sup>4</sup>

In the course of reconstructing his Cabinet following the three resignations Palmerston made decisions and appointments which Gladstone lighted upon as "Evidences of his unfitness for his post".<sup>5</sup>

1. 23rd Feb.'55, H. cxxxvi, 1820. Of the three Peelites Graham spoke first and according to Greville said all that there was to say. Herbert and Gladstone merely repeating him. Greville Memoirs, vii, p. 118. H. cxxxvi, 1743, 1762
2. H. cxxxvi, 1838-46
3. Gladstone expressed himself "much satisfied with the feeling of the House". 23rd Feb.'55. Diaries, v. p. 30
4. 23rd & 24th Feb.'55, Greville Memoirs, vii, pp. 117-18
5. Memo, 22nd Feb.'55, Autobiographica, iii, p. 188. Gladstone's mocking of Palmerston's "singular" method of reorganising the Cabinet was contained in two memos, 22nd Feb.'55, Add. Ms. 44745 f. 144; 28th Feb.'55, ibid., f. 147

In regard to his own recently vacated office Gladstone was approached separately by Cardwell and Sir George Lewis to whom Palmerston had offered the Exchequer. Cardwell informed Gladstone that he had refused on the grounds of disinclination to take Cabinet office "over the bodies of his friends".<sup>1</sup> Lewis sought Gladstone's advice as to whether to accept; this Gladstone declined to give beyond declaring a readiness to provide formal assistance in the event of Lewis's deciding to become his successor.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after quitting the Government Gladstone penned a brief description of what he regarded as the fundamental weakness of Palmerston as premier:

Nothing can be more extraordinary than the mode in which various influences work within the present Cabinet. It is a Cabinet without a head. Lord Palmerston is an eminent member of it, superior to all others in knowledge and authority on one great class of question, feeling and acting energetically on several classes, and on all others decisively disposed to fall in with the majority: but no where has he that peculiar guiding influence which my experience of Sir.R. Peel taught me to associate with the idea of premiership and which was not wholly wanting in Lord Aberdeen. <sup>3</sup>

Elsewhere Gladstone set this criticism against a broader background; in his resignation audience of the Queen he delivered a disquisition on the constitution very much along the lines of the argument in his article of April 1855 on the party system.<sup>4</sup> He told the Queen that there could be no certain end to the current crisis "until Parliament should have returned to its old organisation in two political parties".<sup>5</sup> The present position was a false one and both sides of the House were demoralised. On the Government side there was "an excess of official men"

1. 22nd Feb.'55

2. 28th Feb.'55, ibid., f. 148. W.E.G. fulfilled this promise of assistance, Memos of Feb., Mar. and April '55, Add. Ms. 44778 fos. 196-9, 200-204. Diaries, v.pp.33-4,38,43-4

3. Feb.'55, Add. Ms. 44745, f. 159.

4. "Party as it was and is", Add. Ms. 44745, fos. 173-222

5. 28th Feb.'55, ibid f. 150; Autobiographica, iii, p. 190



which effectively blocked promotion and encouraged intrigue. The opposition suffered from the reverse problem; it was so lacking in persons of experience that recklessness and irresponsibility were its main feature. And yet, he believed, party must continue to exist since "it embodied one of the great fundamental elements of English society"<sup>1</sup>. Had, indeed, the Commons been better balanced there would have been no crisis:

if Mr. Roebuck's motion had come on in a state of parties such as that which existed from 1835 to 1841, it would have been rejected by a large majority. <sup>2</sup>

He considered that his resignation and that of his colleagues had dealt "a heavy blow" to the committee of enquiry and that now they were free agents they would soon be able to deal another. Asked by Prince Albert how long the present Government could last Gladstone replied that it was unlikely to survive for more than a year.<sup>3</sup>

According to Gladstone's account his views were "graciously appreciated" by the Queen;<sup>4</sup> in the political world generally, however, the Peelites' resignation found little favour. Gladstone was upset by what he regarded as the unjustifiably hostile reaction: "We were severely and generally censured for thus deserting Palmerston who had in fact by precipitate and rude handling stranded us".<sup>5</sup> At this distance removed it is difficult to regard Gladstone as deserving of sympathy. Even Morley found it hard to ignore Gladstone's inconsistency and his defence of his hero's behaviour at this stage is among the least convincing parts of his biography.<sup>6</sup> From the beginning of the crisis Gladstone

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., iii, p. 191

3. Ibid., iii, p. 192. Gladstone was two years out; Palmerston lasted from Feb. '55 to Feb. '58

4. Ibid.

5. Sept. '57, ibid., i. p. 83

6. See Morley, i. pp. 403-4

was well aware that Palmerston's line was likely to be a highly individual one and the promises that Gladstone extracted from him were neither sharply defined nor binding; there seems, indeed, to be little logic in his agreement to work under him. It had been a reluctant consent and it was clear that his membership of the new Government would be short lived. His harping upon the injustice done to Aberdeen gave this an air of inevitability. One can understand those contemporaries who regarded the original decision of the three Peelites to join Palmerston as perverse and their subsequent departure from him scarcely two weeks later as mischievous. It is worth recalling what Gladstone had done since the collapse of Aberdeen's Administration. Out of loyalty to Aberdeen, a loyalty which he later admitted to have been grossly misguided, Gladstone had rejected the approaches of both Lansdowne and Derby. He had then described Derby's refusal to persevere with government-making as a palpable error, a more than harsh verdict in the light of his own failure to co-operate. Everybody, including Gladstone, was playing the personalities game; principles were difficult to find. As he later acknowledged, Gladstone had problems in forming, let alone maintaining, a consistent attitude and this adds to the impression that the political crisis of early 1855 was in many respects a manufactured affair. Gladstone's exhaustive memoranda on these events reveal unwittingly a tale of pettiness masquerading<sup>a</sup> as principle. Who would or would not serve with whom; who should be first informed or should first convey the latest developments: such were the questions over which Gladstone and his associates agonised. What most often seems to have exercised politicians at this time was the manner rather than the substance of what they were doing. The scruples and the nice arguments in which Gladstone chose to indulge complicated rather than clarified his position. This should not be thought surprising; in politics Gladstone had lost his bearings. His attempts to define party and to balance executive and parliamentary notions were not works of political sophistication.

Rather than being contributions to objective analysis they represent the philosophical struggles of a puzzled man.

Having left office Gladstone gave expression to his disappointment and bitterness in his draft article "Party as it was and as it is. A sketch of the Political History of 'Twenty Years'".<sup>1</sup> The burden of his argument was that the quality of both government and opposition had sunk since the days of Melbourne and Peel.

The present Government represents a barrier to fair promotion because of the plethora of official men. The head is overweighted-Peelites are debarred. Interlopers have carried off the prizes.<sup>2</sup>

... to estimate the decline of quality in the present Opposition, the eye had only [to] run over the bench on which Lord Derby sits in the Lords, or the parallelogram of members who sit behind Mr. Disraeli in the House of Commons.<sup>3</sup>

Gladstone was particularly severe on Derby and Disraeli; the former by his weakness and the latter by his factiousness had disturbed the natural political order with the result that the Opposition could no longer fulfil its prime duty, that of being able to form an alternative Government in a time of political crisis. Instead "they cannot resist the temptation ... to avail themselves of indirect means and chance combination for the purpose of embarrassing the Administration".<sup>4</sup>

Gladstone dilated on the many crossed lines and blurred divisions in current politics "intersecting the old lines of party, and substituting new forms of combination upon the merits of isolated questions". All this had culminated in the Roebuck motion going through, a result unthinkable in Peel's day. "But now there is morality lacking, a want of firmness, there is no confidence of men in men,

1. April 1855, Add. Ms. 44745 fos. 173-222. The article never went beyond the draft stage, Gladstone seeming to show little interest in having it published. See 31st.Mar.'55, Diaries, v. p. 41

2. Add. Ms. 44745 fos. 205-06

3. Ibid., f. 208

4. Ibid. f. 211

and above all of parties in leaders".<sup>1</sup> One party in the House was too weak for the work it had to do while the other had its strength so diffused that it was neutralised by internal disorder. The absence of genuine differences between parties led to the emphasis on differences within parties, further dissolving the traditional political balance. "The moral tone of politics on the whole is lowered: the general action of the legislative organ is feebler from the mast outwards".<sup>2</sup>

In a curiously detached passage Gladstone, answering his own question as to whether any effort should be made to restore the old standards in English politics, wrote that his object was "rather to present the case than to solve it: rather to supply others with the means of judging it than to judge".<sup>3</sup> In an even greater effort at objectivity he referred to the Peelites in the third person and spoke wryly of their poor showing in the recent political crises: the "Aberdeanite", he reflected, had proved "troublesome to his neighbours without doing much good to himself".<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it was his considered opinion that the Peelites as a separate group had outlived their political usefulness.

It is desirable for the public good, whether it be feasible or not and whether the old and tough consistency of political party can be restored or not, that at any rate there should not again exist any third party in the House of Commons going between the other two.

This seems to be an intelligible hint to our friends the Peelites as it ostensibly aims at nothing rerum natura less than their disappearance or their banishment to some spot.<sup>5</sup>

In the final flourish in his article Gladstone again mockingly rejected the idea of a third party and challenged the Peelites' raison d'etre.

1. Ibid., f. 215

2. Ibid., f. 216

3. Ibid., fos. 216-17

4. Ibid., f. 217

5. Ibid.

Granted that [he] could not mend the situation in 1846-50; nor in 1852; and that the formation of the Aberdeen Government without a complete political fusion was justifiable the Peelite still has the difficult task of demonstrating that he has still a title to exist. 1

The implications of this for his own future position Gladstone did not discuss but earlier in the article he had given some clues as to a possible progression:

On some subjects the opinions supposed to be pre-eminently Tory have deeply penetrated the Liberal ranks ... The parties no longer divide on the issues in strict party terms ....

The great characteristic of this singular state of things is that political differences no longer lie between parties but within parties. The most Conservative Liberal and the most Liberal Conservative not only are near one another but probably he ... who retains the Conservative designation is for any practical purpose, though his traditions & association are the other way, the more Liberal of the two. Indeed on some great questions, such for instance as Public Economy and Colonial Policy, the Peelites, who have never parted with the name of Conservative are much more in harmony with the stronger and broad Liberal party than the Whigs. 2

Drawing what logic we can from his contemporary and retrospective analyses we may infer that by the middle of 1855 Gladstone was relatively clear on only two points; that the Peelites were a spent force and that English politics would be better served by a realignment of forces rather than a continued fragmentation. Where precisely he stood in relation to all this he was far from certain. He later observed:

"During the period of my life from 1855 to 1858, I was again to some extent in a false position. On the one hand my opinions became progressively more liberal, while the ties that had bound me even to my original party retained force". 3

He was disposed "to cooperate with each party in each case according to the merits". 4 His initial reaction to the Roebuck motion and the

1. Ibid., f. 222. Over twenty years later in another article Gladstone likened the Peelites in the period 1846 to 1859 to "roving icebergs, on which men could not land with safety, but with which ships might come into perilous collision", "Life of the Prince Consort," vol. III, Church of England Quarterly Review, Jan. 1878, reprinted in Gleanings, i.p. 127

2. Add. Ms. 44745 fos. 198-99

3. Add. Ms. 44791 f. 120; Autobiographica, i.p. 80

4. Ibid., p. 81

behaviour of Palmerston and Russell had been to look towards a Conservative reunion "provided that reunion were a reunion of a body with a body"; he never at any time, he claimed, contemplated replacing himself as an individual in the Conservative ranks. His explanation of this provides one of his more illuminating passages:

Strong sympathy with Lord Aberdeen and resentment at the treatment he had received lay at the root of this tendency. A strong sentiment of revulsion from Disraeli personally, a sentiment quite distinct from that of dislike, was alone sufficient to deter me absolutely from a merely personal and separate reunion. 1

His suspicion of, if not his revulsion from, Disraeli he had expressed in his recent article. He had criticised him for attempting "to appropriate the so-called Protestant 'cry'" as a means of furthering his political ambitions. Gladstone doubted, however, that the cry could be made "co-terminous with or peculiar to any party". Anti-popery was too valuable a slogan "to be tamely surrendered by any political party to its opponents: and least of all ... to such a man as Mr. Disraeli". 2

Gladstone's comment concerning the falsity of his position during the years 1855-58 does indicate that behind the uncertainties he stood committed to the continuance of a political career. Given this resolution and bearing in mind his rejection of the notion of a third party, his acceptance of the demise of Peelism, and the great potential in him that even his opponents acknowledged, the only question was which party he would eventually join. Although he was to be out of office for over four years Gladstone made no serious attempt to quit politics; the period was to be but a lull in his career as an executive figure. This time of relative detachment gave him the opportunity to engage in political analysis and historico-religious speculation.

1. Ibid.

2. Add. Ms. 44745 f. 216

His attempt in these years to endow his beloved Greeks with their rightful place in the providential order of things is well known.<sup>1</sup> What is less often appreciated is that in the period 1855 to 1859 Gladstone produced seven long articles on current politics which taken together represent a significant attempt to formulate a working theory of politics. Gladstone's formal writings on politics have been largely ignored by historians who tend to concentrate on him as a practitioner rather than a theorist.<sup>2</sup> This is a surprising neglect since with someone as complex as Gladstone the manner in which he formulated his political ideas is surely as important as his execution of them. This is by no means to suggest that his political actions were all a product of his political theories. Indeed, we should guard against seeing his final decision to join the Liberals in 1859 as the logical conclusion to a deeply pondered intellectual progression. His mind seldom worked that way. Undoubtedly he did ponder deeply and this may have had the effect of clarifying his thoughts on certain matters, but, as the bewilderment of his contemporaries so frequently testified, his major decisions in politics were often taken with a Hamlet-like impulsiveness that defied easy analysis.

This highlights the basic fallacy in those many studies from Morley onwards which treat of Gladstone's political development as a Liberal evolution. Modern scholars such as Matthew and Feuchtwanger first define what they regard as the basic attitudes that make-up English Liberalism and then describe Gladstone's adoption of them at various points in his career; according to this interpretation when he

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1. In 1855 W.E.G. began a detailed study of Greek culture and literature; this bore fruit, after three years intense labour, in the publication of his, Studies in Homer and the Homeric Age, a work intended to demonstrate that the Greeks of antiquity were as much a part of the divine plan as the Jews of the Revelation. Cf. Magnus, pp. 123-4
  2. E.G. in a recent study of Liberalism as an ideology, (D.J.Manning, Liberalism, London, 1976) Gladstone does not merit a single mention.

has assumed enough of them he then qualifies as a Liberal.<sup>1</sup>

The weakness of such analyses is that they pre-suppose an ordered progression of thought and attitude which is not a characteristic of Gladstone. So often it was a matter of personalities rather than principles that determined his stance. As he admitted in 1855 Disraeli remained the biggest barrier to his rejoining the Tories while his ambivalent attitude towards Derby did little to help. His view of Palmerston on the other side was no less confused. In no sense could Gladstone in the eighteen fifties be properly described as a natural Liberal. Had the personalities of the day and their alignments been different there is every reason to believe that his political development would have been different. Furthermore, if optimism be reckoned one of the essentials of a Liberal then Gladstone hardly qualifies; a fundamental pessimism is the abiding feature of his personal journals and memoranda and his more intimate correspondence. Bradley, in claiming that,

the single characteristic which most clearly united all those who espoused Gladstonian Liberalism was their all-pervasive optimism. It was certainly a feature of Gladstone himself,

is taking Gladstone at face value and judging him wholly by his public utterances.<sup>2</sup> In this regard it may be observed that Matthew is somewhat premature in suggesting that by this time Gladstone had "largely resolved" the tensions that afflicted him in his private thoughts.<sup>3</sup> The journal entries of the late 'fifties are no less replete with agonisings of the spirit and avowals of unworthiness than those of previous years.

1. See H.C.G. Matthew, Diaries, introductions to vols. III and V, passim; E.G. Feuchtwanger, p. 98

2. Ian Bradley, The Optimists: Themes and Personalities in Victorian Liberalism, London, 1980. p. 14.

3. Diaries, v. Introduction, p. xxiv



## CHAPTER VIII

Thought Gladstone was destined for more than he had yet done, and hoped that now he "would take a new start" in a liberal and useful public career. A new constituency would be well for him. 1

By common consent Gladstone in 1855 was one of the outstanding figures in current politics. Yet he was in no-man's land and this was not entirely his own fault; English parties were in a strange state. The only clearly discernible feature was the division between supporters and opponents of the war. Gladstone's fierce opposition to the war which he maintained after his resignation was seen by some observers as a proof that he belonged to the peace party but in fact he was never a member of anything approaching a formal anti-war alliance. Bright, indeed, complained that "the Peelites were either alarmed at the position they had taken with us, or did not like to seem to act under our leadership".<sup>2</sup> Bright had reason for disappointment at Gladstone's not drawing closer to him since, at the time of Gladstone's resignation from Palmerston's Government, it had been Aberdeen's recommendation that Gladstone together with Graham and Herbert should now begin "to act along with the 'Manchester School'".<sup>3</sup> But in truth mere dislike of the war and Palmerston's handling of it created only an apparent unity among the so-called peace party. Stanley showed

1. 22nd Feb.'55, Bright's Diary, p.187

2. 21st May '55, ibid., p.197

3. Ibid., p.187. Gladstone, however, did on occasion discuss parliamentary tactics regarding the war issue with Cobden and his Manchester colleagues. E.g., see, W.E.G.'s journal entry, 14th May '55, Diaries, v.p. 51.

insight in observing,

the friends of Gladstone, and the Manchester party, agree in nothing more cordially than a dislike to the present premier: Disraeli, Gladstone, Bright, are the three strongest men now in the H[ouse of] C[ommons] and all in energetic opposition. 1

It was very much as an individual that Gladstone attacked Palmerston and his Government on the war issue and it was precisely this individualism that underlay his disagreement with Herbert. From their voluminous correspondence in 1855 it is clear that the two men were agreed on essentials but Herbert was worried by what he regarded as his colleague's free-wheeling style in regard to tactics.<sup>2</sup> Gladstone's willingness to side with anyone in the House who opposed the war Herbert viewed as reckless and likely, indeed, to damage the cause of peace. He felt that Gladstone had allowed himself and his friends to be wrongly committed to supporting Bright and his colleagues.

I have no liking for the Manchester school or the men of whom it is composed ....

It was our interest, if we are to advocate peace, to keep clear of these men. We want an honourable peace. They want peace honourable or not. They can vote for anything we wish. We cannot vote for everything they wish. 3

Gladstone made light of Herbert's anxieties:

I do not altogether adopt your view of our relations to the Manchester men as regards the question of peace and war. They have certain rights of priority which we cannot wholly overlook. Is it not something that they concur in measures which express our opinions rather than theirs, and while that is the case are we not bound to recognise them as persons entitled to be consulted? 4

It was Morley's view that Gladstone and the Manchester school showed in their attitude to the war an understanding of current realities

1. Memo on Public Affairs, Nov.'55, Stanley Memoirs, p.139.
2. Add. Ms. 44210 fos. 191-216. A large selection is reproduced in Stanmore, i. pp. 430-59
3. 27th May '55, ibid., i. pp. 430-31
4. 30th May '55, ibid., i. p. 434. At the time of the Peelites' resignation Gladstone had wondered what position physically they should occupy in the Commons: "After considering various sites, we determined to ask the Manchester School to yield us ... the old place devoted to Ex ministers." Add. Ms. 44745 f. 21. 22nd Feb.'55, Diaries, v, p. 30. The request appears to have been granted; see Bright's Diary, 23rd Feb.'55 p. 189

that was lacking in their less subtle contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly true that, for whatever reason, many at the time found Gladstone's tactics baffling:

I very much regret Gladstone's perverseness ... He has ... too subtle a mind. He weighs questions by themselves, without references to consequences .... I confess myself, equally with Gladstone, anxious for the restoration of peace; but strongly to press that opinion when the opinion of the House of Commons and the public are just now in favour of war ... is only to commit many to the support of a war policy who would, if unpledged, be brought earlier to acquiesce in reasonable pacification. But though this appears to me to be common sense, Gladstone will not view it in the same light. 2

Greville, while accepting that it was laudable to try to induce in parliament and public a less bellicose attitude, did not believe that the Peelites remnant under Gladstone possessed the necessary tact and judgement:

It is very difficult to make out what Gladstone and his friends (for it would be ridiculous to call them a party) are at, and what they expect or desire in reference to their political futurity. 3

For Greville the irony was that the more Gladstone used his undoubted oratorical skills the more support he lost: "Gladstone made a fine speech, but gave great offence to all who are not for peace, and exposed himself to much unpopularity". 4

1. Morley, i. p.407
2. Henry Goulburn to Mrs. S.Herbert, 29th June. '55, Stanmore, i.pp.459-60
3. 24th May '55, Greville Memoirs, vii,p.131
4. 30th May '55, ibid.,p.132. In one of the war debates the Peelites were accused of treason, a charge which the Speaker ruled out of order. 14th June '55, H. cxxxviii. 2036. Gladstone felt that much of his own unpopularity was created by the pro-war press. He complained bitterly that The Times sought to vilify him as unpatriotic. W.E.G. to Herbert, 1st Oct.'55 and Herbert to W.E.G. 7th Oct.'55. Stanmore, ii.pp.3-7. Bright, too, considered that he had good cause for condemning the partiality of the press. See Bright's Diaries, 22nd Mar.'55.p.165

Stanley was of much the same opinion, believing that the result of Gladstone's viriferous attack upon the Government had been to lessen his own esteem in the country and at the same time increase Palmerston's.

The debate on Laing's motion, early in August, and especially Gladstone's part in that debate, injured the peace<sup>party</sup> in general opinion. They spoke with great force, had the best of the argument, but went further than the country was prepared to follow: and the failure of this attack strengthened the government. 1

Gladstone's willingness to make common cause with those who opposed the Government's war policy led to rumours that he was prepared even to contemplate association not only with the Manchester school, but also with Disraeli. Greville was told by Clarendon "that an alliance had been formed between Gladstone and Disraeli and that the former was to be admitted into the Derbyite ranks".<sup>2</sup> In hindsight with our knowledge of the deep distaste that Gladstone felt for Disraeli the suggestion of an alliance between them appears unrealistic. At the time, with parties in a state of flux and individuals far from settled in their allegiance, it seemed far less improbable. On two basic points, moreover, Gladstone and Disraeli were agreed; distrust of Palmerston and anger at Derby's failure earlier in the year to take the reins of government.<sup>3</sup> Disraeli, furthermore, by his own endeavours helped to give substance to the whispers of an alignment. Stanley recorded:

1. Memo. on Public Affairs, Nov.'55, Stanley Memoirs, p.134. W.E.G.'s speech on the Laing motion regarding peace negotiations with Russia, 3rd. Aug.'55 (H. cxxxix 1794; Diaries, v.p.68 ) together with his speech on the Heathcote Amendment 24th May '55 (H. cxxxviii, 1036; Diaries, v, p.54) marks the high point in his attack upon the continuance of the war. The speeches were published respectively in pamphlet form as 'Speech on the War and the Negotiations, London. 1855; 'War with Russia', London, 1855. Bright believed that Gladstone's speech of 3rd August presented an "irresistable" case against the war and proved "his superiority over all other men in the House" Bright's Diary, 3rd Aug. '55, p.201
2. 23rd Sept.'55. Greville Memoirs, vii, p.160
3. Robert Blake writes of "This consensus on the part of two men who seldom agreed on anything". Disraeli, p.362. Gladstone noted late in life that his view of Derby's "palpable error in not forming an administration" in 1855 had been shared by Disraeli. Autobiographica, i.p. 82.

Disraeli, meantime, had not been idle. In July he sounded me as to the feasibility of a triple combination, which should include the Peelites, the Manchester men, and ourselves ....

Disraeli did not keep his own counsel. The rumour of such a coalition as he had sketched to me, though at first discredited, spread far and wide. Even now though officially contradicted, it prevails, and has been largely discussed by the newspapers. <sup>1</sup>

Stanley, a person of growing political significance at this time and personally in sympathy with the peace party,<sup>2</sup> thought Disraeli's plan hopeless since neither Derby nor the great mass of the Conservatives would listen to such a proposition. The only possible basis for a union would be agreement on a peace policy but since Derby still strongly supported the war and the country gentlemen equated the war with high agricultural prices the Conservative Party would not entertain such a fundamental change of attitude.<sup>3</sup> Stanley's neat summary of the position in mid 1855 reads:

the Conservative party [are] disunited on this vital question, the ablest politicians inclining towards peace, but the numerical majority of M.P.'s the Cabinet, the Times and the general public, still bent on continued war. <sup>4</sup>

The analysis given by Stanley makes it clear that Disraeli's espousal of peace was a matter of opportunism rather than conviction; his aim was simply to bring down Palmerston.

In a word, as D. had written up the war in the Press during the summer of 1853 in order to turn out Aberdeen, so he now prepared to write it down, in order to turn out Palmerston. <sup>5</sup>

Gladstone, not surprisingly, seems to have been unaware of the true nature of the divisions within the opposition ranks. At the time of the parliamentary censure of Russell Gladstone's correspondence indicates that he interpreted the attack on Russell as a concerted Derbyite

1. Memo on Public Affairs, Nov.'55, Stanley Memoirs, p.135

2. In October Palmerston offered Stanley the post of Colonial Secretary which, however, he declined. ibid., pp.139-40.

3. Ibid., p. 135

4. Ibid., pp. 135-36

5. Ibid., p. 135

endeavour. Indeed, Aberdeen had informed him that it was "the fruit" of a "Derby and Dizzy" manoeuvre and Gladstone fully expected it to result in the fall of the Government and Derby's accession to power.<sup>1</sup>

This expectation was in part the product of what James Graham had said a few days earlier in regard to the Roebuck motion:

judging from the tone of the Press newspaper, which is D'Israeli's organ, I infer that every effort will be made to induce the Derbyites to support the motion, which will ... overthrow the existing Government.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the expectations Palmerston's Government weathered the storm and at the close of the parliamentary session of 1855 was, if anything, more strongly rooted. Certainly the Prime Minister's personal prestige in the country seemed higher than ever, a fact whose significance Gladstone never seemed able to grasp. Herbert lighted on this gap in Gladstone's understanding:

The strong national feeling excited has not yet cooled down ... The one error of Gladstone's masterly speech [24th May '55] was the over-statement of the argument against military success. It was philosophical and logical, but it ignored the deep-seated national military spirit. <sup>3</sup>

The most prominent aspect of Gladstone's campaign against the war was the consistent and deep bitterness which he expressed towards Palmerston as a person, a bitterness as profound as that he felt towards Disraeli. The puzzle is that his distaste for the latter endured while that for the former he overcame sufficiently to be able to take office under him for the second time, and as a Liberal, four years later. It is worth noting how low his estimation of Palmerston sank in 1855.

There is no leading statesman of whom I have so much distrust with respect to the war as Lord Palmerston. <sup>4</sup>

1. W.E.G. to C.G. 10th July '55, Bassett, p.110. Russell was attacked in the Commons for his supposed mishandling of the peace negotiations at the Vienna Conference whither he had gone as British plenipotentiary. H.cxxxviii, 559. See Walpole, op.cit.ii, pp.266-69
2. Graham to Herbert, 3rd July '55, Stanmore, i.p. 450
3. Herbert to Graham, 1st June '55, ibid., i.p. 441
4. W.E.G. to Herbert, 30th May '55, ibid., i.p. 436

I am grieved to feel that the House of Commons, and the representative system of the country will, after all, have been the most serious losers by the events of the present year. The Executive, which has for many years been too weak, is now much weaker than ever, and under a man of Lord Palmerston's ideas it cannot become strong. Every public man is more or less damaged. 1

Palmerston who represents the whole motive power of the Government has no clear sense of what duty or policy require of him, and cannot tell what are in his mind the objects of the war .... to the supporting of a man willing to carry on a war without defined objects, I have the greatest repugnance. 2

1855 ended with Gladstone a determined foe of Palmerston and the war policy but in little else was his political role clearly defined. It was still an open question towards which party he would gravitate; the sincerity of his opposition to the war did not necessarily presage a Liberal drift since the war was not a straight party issue. Of interest in this respect is Gladstone's relationship with Stanley. In the later months of 1855 the two men became well acquainted and it was from Stanley that Gladstone learned of the divisions among the Conservatives over the war. 3 There is, too, a marked similarity between Gladstone's views on the breakdown of political standards and Stanley's. In his Memorandum on Public Affairs, written in November, Stanley expressed a pessimism regarding current trends in public life which coincided in essentials with the laments to be found in Gladstone's letters and articles. 4 Stanley, like Gladstone, was undergoing a crisis of political identity and it is easy to understand why they should have developed a mutual sympathy. 5 Gladstone was impressed by Stanley's potential; "He will if spared write his name on the page of Engl.History." 6

1. W.E.G. to Herbert, 23rd June.'55, ibid., i.p. 447
2. W.E.G. to Herbert, 20th Nov.'55, ibid., ii.p.13
3. In Dec. Stanley spent a week at Hawarden as Gladstone's guest. They indulged in "much conversation". 8th-12th Dec.'55, Diaries, v.pp. 90-91
4. Memorandum on Public Affairs, November 1855, Stanley Memoirs, pp.134-40. The Memo contains the text of Stanley's letter to Palmerston (Nov.1st) declining to serve as Colonial Secretary.
5. In his Memorandum Stanley wrote that the Conservative Party, despite his father's eminence within it, had no claim upon him. "I may without suspicion, and with a good grace, stand aloof from all party moves and combinations". ibid., p.140
6. 12th Dec.'55. Diaries, v, p. 91

He told Aberdeen how struck he had been by the vigour and discernment of Stanley's mind.<sup>1</sup>

One of the reasons for Stanley's declining Palmerston's offer of a Cabinet post had been his belief that Palmerston could not long remain as premier if for no other reason than that of old age.<sup>2</sup> It was certainly widely held that the Government's days were numbered and Derby began to make plans.<sup>3</sup> Undeterred by Gladstone's failure to co-operate with him the previous year Derby made official approaches.<sup>4</sup> Evidently the Conservative leader saw Gladstone's lack of formal party attachment as temporary. Judging by his own recorded ideas Gladstone, whatever his public statements to the contrary, was preparing himself for a return to office at some point in the future. It is difficult for example to see his detailed "Memorandum of Finance" of February 1856 as an abstract exercise in financial theory; the substance of the detail suggests that it was intended as a working plan.<sup>5</sup> Similarly his long letter to Aberdeen of March 1856 presents itself as the analysis of an active politician intent on returning to office at some future stage.<sup>6</sup>

His express purpose in writing was, so he told Aberdeen, to give definition to the current political situation in order to avoid being "taken unawares" should there be a rapid or dramatic change. Gladstone's premise was that the times were extraordinary and demanded special analysis. The return from war to peace,<sup>7</sup> while obviously to be

1. 10th Dec.'55, Add. Ms. 43071, f. 275
2. Stanley Memoirs, p.139. Stanley, of course, omitted this point in his letter to Palmerston.
3. Stanley considered that at this stage his father had no definite policy and would have preferred simply "to watch events" but was by Disraeli pressurised into action, ibid., p.140.
4. Sir William Heathcote acted as intermediary. 3rd-6th Mar, 8th-17th April '56, Diaries, v. pp. 109-10, 121-23.
5. Gladstone's twenty-one point plan appears in Diaries (16th Feb.'56)v, pp.104-06. Matthew observes that these proposals were to form the basis of Gladstone's financial reforms as Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1859-66. ibid., v. pp.xxvi,xxix, 104 (footnote 13)
6. The arguments in this letter Gladstone expanded in his article "The Declining Efficiency of Parliament", Q.R., Sept. 1856
7. The Treaty of Paris, formally ending hostilities, was signed on 30th Mar.'56.



rejoiced over, created particular problems, the largest being the difficulty of restoring financial and economic stability. "The equilibrium of our finances has been of necessity entirely destroyed; and its re-establishment will involve many subjects of the utmost moment."<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, as Gladstone saw it, recent trends in politics had gravely weakened England's power to meet the challenge; the disorganisation of the party system during the previous decade had impaired executive strength.

This capital evil discredits government, encourages faction, retards legislation, diminishes the respect necessary for the efficiency of Parliament, and it is thus unfavourable by a sure though circuitous process, to the stability of our institutions. 2

The exigent need was, therefore, for a return to strong government but in the existing circumstances this was unlikely since an essential prerequisite was missing.

There is no practicable combination of men, which of itself would form a strong government. The truth of this negative is not dependent on the personal inclinations of those who might be invited or expected to enter into such a combination. If we suppose their willingness so far extended, as to pass beyond all limitations of party, yet the greater disposition on their part to forget former differences would be more than counteracted by less of compactness among their followers, more of feeble and half-hearted support, if they unite as men only  
 .... no government can at the moment be formed, that will even for the moment check the now chronic evil of Executive weakness, unless it be in a marked manner founded upon a policy. 3

It was Gladstone's belief that the existing Government would soon reveal its incapacity to handle England's peace-time problems. The question, therefore, which he and others like him had to face was how should they prepare for the imminent crisis. Looking at the men who would be generally regarded as likely to form a new administration Gladstone doubted that there would sufficient common ground for them to

1. Add, Ms. 43071 f. 285, 13th March, '56, Diaries, v.p.112
2. Ibid., pp. 112-13. Cf. "The Declining Efficiency of Parliament" Q.R. Sept. '56, pp. 526-7
3. Diaries, v.p.113. Cf. Q.R., Sept. '56, pp.529-33

agree upon a policy.<sup>1</sup> He criticised the Liberal Party for its failure when in office to live up to their claim to be "champions of public economy and administrative reforms". Indeed, he asserted that in this regard Palmerston's Cabinet showed up particularly badly since its members had shown themselves unwilling to challenge a leader who disregarded economy and moderation.<sup>2</sup>

Turning directly to his own position in all this he informed Aberdeen that he saw it as no part of his duty to take office merely because there was a governmental crisis: "I for one am inclined to resolve to enter no government, actual or possible, without an adequate assurance, that it will take its stand upon a policy".<sup>3</sup> It would be better, he felt, for him to decline any ministerial commitment for the present and instead to wait upon events. He hastened to assure Aberdeen that his decision to remain aloof owed nothing "to any mere antipathies" on his part but was basically a response to his own question - "What do the public interests require?".<sup>4</sup> Without undue cynicism this expression of selflessness may be as easily interpreted as the simple resolution not to be again associated with an unsuccessful and unpopular Administration. What Gladstone was saying, in effect, was that when the confusion had cleared and government and politics had returned to something approaching normality he would consider re-entering.

In replying Aberdeen gave general support to Gladstone's decision to remain detached. He encouraged him to make no specific political move "until the nature of the contingency shall be apparent under which you may be called upon to act".<sup>5</sup> In his letter of analysis Gladstone had not

1. Diaries, v, p. 113. Cf., Q.R. Sept. '56, pp. 533-4, 559-66.

2. Diaries, v, p. 114. Cf., Q.R. Sept. '56, pp. 535-46. W.E.G. entered into serious discussion as to whether a special Committee of Finance could be formed to oversee the whole question of government expenditure. He concluded that such a Committee, despite its desirability, would be unworkable in the current "fractional" nature of the Commons. W.E.G. to Edward Ellice, 4th April '56, Add. Ms. 44385, f. 285. Ellice had previously suggested that W.E.G. should be a leading member of the Committee. Ellice to W.E.G. 5th April '56. ibid., f. 286; also in Autobiographica, iii, pp. 204-6

3. Diaries, v, p. 114

4. ibid.

5. 15th Mar. '55, Add. Ms. 43071, f. 292. Cf. Diaries, v, p. 114, footnote 1.

mentioned any particular names but in subsequent conversations with Aberdeen and with Herbert and Graham he dismissed Russell and Palmerston as being incapable of bearing the administrative work that needed to be done.<sup>1</sup>

Gladstone recorded that he discussed with his Peelite colleagues whether there was a case for their continuing to act together as a group and whether they might contemplate undertaking the task of re-establishing national financial stability, given that Palmerston and Russell would resign and that Clarendon would become premier.<sup>2</sup> To Gladstone's annoyance Graham repeated the substance of this conversation to Greville who felt under no obligation to keep the matter secret despite Graham's warning against indiscreet repetition.<sup>3</sup> In a later interpolation in the margin of his memorandum Gladstone stated that Graham had "gone beyond the mark in stating to Greville his estimate of my opinions. My reference for instance to Clarendon as a possible Premier had been no more than negative and abstract".<sup>4</sup>

In Greville's account Graham spoke to him of the dismal state of English politics, there being "not one man in the H. of Commons who has ten followers, neither Gladstone, nor Disraeli, nor Palmerston".<sup>5</sup> Graham related Gladstone's belief that Palmerston had an over-weening love of office which made him totally indifferent to matters of principle. As Greville has it, Graham also expressed reservations about Gladstone's talents being equal "to such an emergency as the present".<sup>6</sup> It was not that Graham doubted Gladstone's administrative ability but:

1. 17th April '56. Add. Ms. 44778 f. 206. Diaries, v.p.123.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., pp.123-4

4. Ibid., Cf. Autobiographica, iii,p.200

5. 3rd. April '56. Greville Memoirs, vii,p.223

6. Ibid., vii,p.224

His religious opinions, in which he is zealous and sincere, enter so largely into his political conduct as to form a very serious obstacle to his success, for they are abhorrent to the majority of this Protestant country. 1

Graham, according to Greville's version, added the telling observation:

Gladstone would have nothing to do with any Government unless he were Leader in the H. of C., and when that Government was formed, there should be previously a clear and distinct understanding on what principles it was founded .... His tone is now that of disclaiming party connexions, and being ready to join with any men who are able and willing to combine in carrying out such measures as are indispensably necessary for the good government of the country. 2

It was also Graham's conviction that Gladstone bore considerable personal responsibility for the current political disarray. Hitherto the exercise of patronage had been the chief instrument in keeping parties together but now

Between the Press, the Public opinion which the Press has made, and the views of certain People in Parliament, of whom Gladstone is the most eminent and strenuous, Patronage was either destroyed or going rapidly to destruction. 3

At the time it is unlikely that Gladstone was aware of all the points that Graham made; nevertheless, Graham's views do suggest a divergence of attitude among Gladstone's colleagues that is not always evident from Gladstone's memoranda. It was this very question of Peelite unity that Derby was anxious to determine. Through Heathcote he enquired in April as to Gladstone's attitude towards the existing political uncertainty and to the nature of his relations with his fellow Peelites.<sup>4</sup> He wished to ask Gladstone's views, given the possible collapse of the present Administration, on the possible political co-operation with him in a new government. Further to this, he wanted to know whether the Peelites still considered themselves a party.<sup>5</sup> Derby's reason for

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 225

4. 17th April, '56. Add. Ms. 44778 f.206. Diaries, v.p.124

5. Ibid., pp. 124-5

this last query probably arose from his having observed the Peelites' acting on a united front on a number of issues in Parliament in the preceding weeks. In regard to education, army recruitment and diplomatic relations with the U.S.A., Gladstone and his colleagues had spoken and voted together.<sup>1</sup>

In his reply Gladstone quoted the "vagueness" of Derby's enquiries as absolving him from the requirement to be precise in his own answers.<sup>2</sup> He said that, nonetheless, as far as he could judge his views on the current situation largely coincided with Derby's own; certainly "there was nothing in them to prevent a further consideration of the subject".<sup>3</sup> On the question of Peelite unity Gladstone spoke of his being in confidential communications with Graham, Herbert, and Cardwell but described this as following naturally from their long political association; they "eschewed acting as a party", although they would probably continue to share a common attitude unless some vital issue should provide a "conscientious difference of opinion".<sup>4</sup> By way of further clarification he read to Heathcote his letter of 13th Mar. (to Aberdeen) and then went on to deplore the disorganised state of Parliament. At this point he repeated the criticism of the Peelites as a disruptive force which he had made in his article of the previous year, "Party as it was and is".<sup>5</sup>

we, the friends of Lord Aberdeen, were though I hoped not by own fault yet de facto a main cause of disunion & weakness in the Executive Govt. & must be so from whichever side of the Govt. were formed so long as we continued in a separate position or were not absolutely incorporated into one or the other of the two great parties .... I carried my feeling individually so far upon the subject as even to be ready, if I had to act alone, to surrender my seat in Parlt. rather than continue a course of disturbance to any Govt. to which I might generally wish well. 6

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1. W.E.G. described this as being "a spontaneous combination" ibid., 124. Cf. Diaries, 24th Mar. 3rd, 4th 11th & 14th April '56. pp.117,120,122. H. cxli, 475,941.
  2. 17th April '56, Add.Ms.44778 f.206. Diaries, v.p.125
  3. Ibid.
  4. Ibid.
  5. See above p.203.
  6. Diaries, v.p.125-6

This, it should be said, is another of those high-sounding promises of self-sacrifice in which Gladstone occasionally indulged. It should not be taken too seriously; despite his frequent attacks in his articles and correspondence on the current state of English politics there is no evidence of his ever taking any positive steps towards quitting the public stage, during these crucial years. Indeed, by his own special brand of logic he was able to translate the cares and difficulties of politics into a source of positive personal good.

Public life is full of snares and dangers, and I think it is a fearful thing for a Christian to look forward to closing his life in the midst of its (to me at least) essentially fevered activity. It has, however, some excellent characteristics in regard to mental and even spiritual discipline, and among these in particular it absolutely requires the habits of resisting temper and suppressing pain. 1

What Gladstone did try to insist on was that political activity should be a matter of pursuing policies; in this way he could justify both his staying in politics and his refusal to consider taking office except on specific terms. Unless the terms were right he was free to remain aloof. In essence it was this argument that he put forward when turning down Derby's offer. He told him that union was impossible for the present since the matter could not be treated by reference to "mere choice or will".<sup>2</sup> Decisions had to be founded in the public interest and that demanded a strong government possessed of a clearly defined policy: "no mere association of names would do".<sup>3</sup>

At a special gathering convened by Aberdeen Gladstone recounted these details to his Peelite colleagues. None of his friends expressed objection to the line he had taken with Heathcote. Graham believed that Derby's real intention had been to approach Gladstone as an individual rather than the Peelites as a group. Gladstone demurred but agreed

1. W.E.G. to Sir Walter James, 17th Sept. '56, Add.Ms.44264.f.89  
Cf. Morley, i.p.409

2. Diaries, v,p. 126

3. Ibid.

that the outstanding parliamentary question of the day was who should lead the House of Commons.<sup>1</sup> In Graham's judgement this position lay between Gladstone himself and Disraeli. Gladstone accepted this estimate but argued that it would be impossible "to bargain Disraeli out of the saddle", given the strength of his claim and his close ties with Derby. He added that he looked upon the prospect of his own leading the Commons "with doubt and dread".<sup>2</sup>

In another conversation with Heathcote shortly after Gladstone was informed that Derby, undeterred by what he had learned of Gladstone's attitude, wanted to know whether it would be possible for Gladstone to render him "friendly support" with a view to overturning Palmerston's Government.<sup>3</sup> Here Derby quoted the case of himself and Graham in 1835. Gladstone told Heathcote that for him to initiate such a move would appear "to be like a trap, after what had happened in 1852" but that he was pleased Derby had made the suggestion since Gladstone "could conceive circumstances in which it might be the best of alternatives before us".<sup>4</sup>

The apparent amicability between Derby and Gladstone did not at this stage lead to any closer union and in view of his frequently reiterated statement that he wished to see a Derby Government supersede Palmerston's it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Gladstone was deliberately dragging his heels, possibly in the hope of establishing his indispensability. With the close of the Crimean War there was no reason for the Peelites' remaining a separate cohesive group. With those ties gone but his disaffection towards Palmerston undiminished political logic argued that Gladstone should draw closer to Derby.

1. Memo. 26th April '56, Add. Ms. 44778 f. 223, Diaries, v, p. 128  
The meeting took place on 19th April '56, ibid., v, p. 127

2. Ibid. p. 128

3. Ibid., v, p. 129

4. Ibid.

It is worth recalling at this point just how poor Gladstone's estimate of Palmerston still remained. By late 1856 he was able to identify his own curious position in politics with his sense of distaste towards the Prime Minister.

I am a good deal pressed in mind by two considerations, the first that my own presence in Parliament is more than worthless under the present circumstances .... The second is that I have very strong feelings against Lord Palmerston as Prime Minister .... I have not the least doubt that the substitution of Derby would be the substitution of a better man ... a Government under him would be kept in order by the Liberal Party, which is at present disqualified for good. 1

Elsewhere Gladstone wrote that his two main objectives were a pacific foreign policy and economic retrenchment. He claimed to be bound to the latter by the pledges he had given as Chancellor in 1853. Since Palmerston was a foe to both these aims Gladstone claimed a moral

obligation to oppose him; given that the Liberal party were committed to Palmerston the only realistic hope lay with the friends of Lord Derby.<sup>2</sup>

It was small wonder, therefore, that Derby should renew his overtures, viewing Gladstone's rejoining the Conservatives merely as a matter of time. Nor was he alone in this; the general expectation by the end of 1856 was that Gladstone's return would not be long delayed. The Times intimated that his becoming leader of the Opposition in the Commons would occur during the current session of Parliament.<sup>3</sup> Morley cites the views of a number of Tory peers who had come to the conclusion by the end of the year that nothing short of Gladstone's return to its ranks as leader could save the Conservative Party. It was, thought the peers, Disraeli who was the biggest obstacle.<sup>4</sup>

1. W.E.G. to Herbert, 24th Oct.'56, Stanmore, ii, p.55

2. W.E.G. to Robertson Gladstone, 16th Dec.'56, Hawarden Papers. Cf., Morley, i, pp.411-12

3. The Times, Dec. 5th, '56.

4. Morley, i, p. 412.



What the peers, and indeed Morley, underestimated was the difficulty not of Gladstone's relations with Disraeli but that of persuading the Conservatives to accept the prodigal back into the fold. This was the burden of Greville's comments. He recorded the rumour then circulating that Gladstone rather than Disraeli was likely to become leader of the Opposition, but also added that in the view of certain influential Derbyites Gladstone would not be acceptable as leader until he had taken his turn "in the ranks". According to Greville's informants it was only the dire straits of the Conservatives that had modified "their extreme repugnance to Gladstone" to the point where they would consider him as leader; "two years ago they so peremptorily insisted on his entire exclusion from their political society".<sup>1</sup> A reading of Stanley's records of this period strongly supports the view that "the question was not so much how to secure Gladstone as how to force him on hostile back-bench opinion".<sup>2</sup>

This may well account for the caution Derby showed in his approaches. Again it was through an intermediary, Elwin, the Quarterly editor, that he contacted Gladstone.

The article of September, "The Declining Efficiency of Parliament", savagely attacking Palmerston, provided obvious encouragement for Derby to inquire again regarding Gladstone's position. Gladstone took counsel of Graham and Herbert before replying to Elwin in a series of letters.<sup>3</sup> Herbert did not share Gladstone's belief in the essential virtue of the old two-party system, as expressed in the article.<sup>4</sup> "I do not think it is possible, even if it were desirable, to restore the old state of things."<sup>5</sup> As to Palmerston, however, Herbert's views

1. 12th Dec.'56, Greville Memoirs, vii, pp.251-2

2. Stanley Memoirs, p. 147

3. W.E.G. described his correspondence at this time as "anxious letters which occupied most of my day in thought and writing".  
2nd Dec.'56. Diaries, v.p.176.

4. "The Declining Efficiency of Parliament", Q.R. Sept.'56.

5. Herbert to W.E.G. 26th Oct.'56, Stanmore, ii, p.56.

exactly coincided with Gladstone's. It was Gladstone's endeavour to convince Graham that he felt in no way bound to either party.

I have no prejudice against the Liberal party but ... I have never been a member of that party in the strict, or rather in any, sense; and I care for no party except as an instrument of good government. 1

He confided: "For all the purposes for which I value Liberalism, the Liberal party is dead".<sup>2</sup> In Gladstone's judgement the latter was held together by two bonds: one, Government patronage; "the other, votes for the ballot and other such trash, to which I am conscientiously opposed".<sup>3</sup> He added that he was aware that his lack of resolution in regard to party membership had kept people guessing during the previous decade but that was because of the absence of a policy which he could genuinely support. However, there was, he claimed, "a policy going a-begging". He defined this as the policy of the Administration of 1841-46.

of peace abroad, of economy, of financial equilibrium, of steady resistance to abuses, promotion and of practical improvements at home; with a disinclination to questions of organic change. 4

Unless Derby and his colleagues were to adopt a similar programme Gladstone declared himself unable to join their ranks.<sup>5</sup>

Graham accepted that since Gladstone had never really belonged to the Liberal Party it could have no claims on him but he was worried that Gladstone might be underestimating the difficulties involved in a readjustment of Conservatism. Peel's policy of the 'forties was, Graham agreed, the ideal.

1. W.E.G. to Graham, 29<sup>th</sup> Nov.'56, Graham p. 292

2. W.E.G. to Graham, 2nd Dec.'56, ibid., p. 295

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 296. Morley (i.p.412) and Feuchtwanger (p.101) attribute this passage to a letter of W.E.G.'s to Elwin. W.E.G. in fact inserted this identical passage in writing to Graham on the same day. Cf. Diaries, v.p. 176

5. W.E.G. to Graham, 2nd Dec.'56, Graham, ii.p.296

But this confession of faith is no security for practical conduct. Most of the members of Palmerston's Administration would make this same confession to-morrow, and Lord Derby, who did once make it, overthrew Peel's Government by his secession. <sup>1</sup>

For Graham there was little appreciable difference in creed between the followers of Derby and of Palmerston. He scorned the idea of Gladstone's "taking a place in the ranks" of a Derby Administration; "only leadership" properly befitted Gladstone. <sup>2</sup> Graham made the same point to Herbert and added that he feared that Gladstone's desire for office, his impatience "with the impotent lassitude of neutrality", might drive him into the Derbyite camp. <sup>3</sup> This tallied with what Graham had said earlier to Aberdeen:

Gladstone is over-active but he is sanguine. In the full vigour of youth, he is without sufficient occupation of that high order for which he pants and for which his abilities pre-eminently qualify him ... abating always matters in dispute on ecclesiastical questions. <sup>4</sup>

Graham's leanings at this time were anti- Palmerston but pro-Liberal in that he supported Russell. He tried to impress upon Gladstone that it was only Palmerston who was a barrier to the growth of the Liberal Party along the lines that they both approved. "Were it not for Palmerston, I believe that the Liberal party is the natural supporter of a financial scheme such as yours". <sup>5</sup>

Having pondered the advice of his friends Gladstone informed Elwin in guarded tones that he was willing to converse with Derby "in confidence and without reserve on the subject of public affairs". <sup>6</sup> Informing Graham and Herbert of this Gladstone wrote:

1. Graham to W.E.G. 1st & 3rd Dec.'56, ibid., ii, pp.292,297

2. Ibid., p. 297

3. Graham to Herbert, 16th Dec.'56, Stanmore, ii.p.66.

4. Graham to Aberdeen, 11th Nov.'56, Graham, ii.p.288

5. Graham to W.E.G., 6th Dec.'56, ibid., p.298

6. W.E.G. to Elwin, 13th Dec.'56, Add. Ms. 44152, f.23. Derby subsequently informed Gladstone that Elwin had acted entirely on his own initiative in making these initial approaches. 25th Jan.'57. Autobiographica, iii, p.210

Should Lord Derby desire to meet me, I think our conversation must be confined to public questions and the position of the Government, and must not enter upon any question of political approximation as a thing to be arranged in private. 1

His two friends were unhappy at this decision. Herbert thought that Gladstone was in danger of placing himself in a false position which would only prove an embarrassment if normal party politics were restored in the future.

2 Your opinions really are essentially progressive, and when all measures - I mean the measures of any Government- must be liberal and progressive, the country will prefer the men whose antecedents and mottoes are liberal, which the Conservatives will always prefer a leader whose prejudices are with themselves. 2

Graham added that Gladstone ought always to be aware of "the need of acting always in the public interest". 3

How far Gladstone was from knowing his own mind he confessed to both his friends. He told Herbert that he still harboured the greatest objection to Palmerston as premier: "were it in my power to sign the warrant for turning him out, I would do it with the ink that is now in my pen".

But beyond this, and as respects myself, I do not see one inch. The inch you speak of represents half my mind, but there is another half ... As I have admitted, a man cannot tell his own intentions. 4

Gladstone believed that Graham would be "amused" to learn that he and his three brothers in discussions at Hawarden had been of one mind in regard to the Government's foreign policy, "we standing thus -

1. A think-and-thin Protectionist,
2. A very stout Radical indeed,
3. A moderate Derbyite,
4. (Myself) nobody knows what. " 5

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1. W.E.G. to Herbert, 15th Dec.'56, Stanmore, ii.p.65. He wrote in similar vein to Graham on the same day, Graham, ii, pp.299-300.
  2. Herbert to W.E.G. 19th Dec.'56, Stanmore, ii.p.67
  3. Graham to W.E.G. 16th Dec.'56. '56, Graham ii.p.301
  4. W.E.G. to Herbert, 23rd Dec.'56, Stanmore, ii.p. 67.
  5. W.E.G. to Graham, 24th Dec.'56, Graham, ii.p.301. W.E.G. did not specify but the brothers were probably:  
1. Thomas, 2. Robertson, 3. John Neilson. See. 30th Dec.'56, Diaries, v.p. 182.

In his review of the year in his journal Gladstone noted:

"I am enclosed in the invisible net of pendent steel .... Into politics I am drawn deeper every year".<sup>1</sup>

By the end of the first month of the new year Gladstone had framed his response to Derby. With a deal of circumlocution he expressed a readiness to enter into verbal conversation with Derby on recent events and future policy.<sup>2</sup> Coincidentally his letter crossed Derby's own first direct written approach. Derby referred to Elwin's <sup>it</sup> initiatives and wrote that he understood that Gladstone was disposed to their discussing together the possibility of a common course to be followed in the coming session "which might not only lead to greater harmony ... but possibly tend hereafter to the reunion of the now discordant Conservative elements". Derby approached such a prospect with "unfeigned pleasure". He paid tribute to Gladstone's high qualities and declared that his sole reason for delaying his approach had been the difficulty of making sustained personal contact until they had both returned to London for the new session. He invited Gladstone to call upon him for "a frank interchange of opinions" binding on neither party.<sup>3</sup> Acknowledging each other's letters they agreed that there appeared to be much common ground for further discussion.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly Gladstone called on Derby and they held a "strictly confidential" three-hour discussion: Gladstone roundly attacked Palmerston, looking to his overthrow and declaring that he did not really care who followed him since whoever it might be he could hardly do more harm to the national interest. As to his own position

1. 31st Dec.'56, Diaries, v.p. 183

2. W.E.G. to Derby, 26th Jan.'57, Add. Ms. 44140, fos. 203-04

3. Derby to W.E.G. 25th Jan.'57, ibid., fos. 205-07. (drafted on 23rd Jan.'57 see Diaries, v.p. 190)

4. W.E.G. to Derby, 31st Jan.'57, Add. Ms. 44140, fos. 207-09; Derby to W.E.G. 31st Jan.'57, ibid., fos. 209-11

Gladstone admitted that "we who are called Peelites all stand to be a great evil as tending to prolong & aggravate that Parliamentary disorganisation which so much clogs and weakens the working of our government". Admitting himself to be a "public nuisance" in his isolation Gladstone declared himself eager to abandon his separate position; however, he could not do this simply as a matter of choice for it depended on the course of public affairs. He added that his opinions of Palmerston's Government were shared by Aberdeen, Graham and Herbert.<sup>1</sup>

Derby concurred in these general sentiments. For himself, although he believed his supporters were the single strongest group in the Commons they were still in a minority over all. He felt that after four years of exclusion from office his position was weaker than in 1852. Derby referred to the offers he had made to Gladstone in 1851 and 1855; the rejection by the Peelites of these overtures had caused much bitterness among Derby's supporters. Derby did not wish to apportion blame, merely to point out the actual state of things among a minority of the Conservatives. There was irritation that the Peelites still continued to act in concert apart from either party. However, the impression among the majority of Derby's supporters was that Graham, Herbert and Gladstone were divided in their attitude towards the reunion of the old Conservative Party. Derby understood that his followers believed Graham and Herbert to be opposed to the idea but Gladstone to be favourable.<sup>2</sup>

The accuracy of this last observation is witnessed in a letter of Gladstone's to Herbert. Gladstone believed that he and his correspondent were united in their disgust at the immorality of

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1. Memo. 4th Feb. '57. Autobiographica, iii, pp. 213-14

2. Ibid. p. 214. In reviewing the Diaries, (E.H.R., Oct. 1979), Agatha Ramm suggests that W.E.G. refused Derby's offer in 1857 because of the latter's lack of concern regarding party organisation outside parliament. This is a strange comment since there is no evidence of W.E.G. evincing a real interest in popular politics during the 'fifties.

Palmerston's management of public affairs and in their desire to see it brought to an end. But from that point on there were differences between them of some significance.

I seem to feel more keenly than you do that in our present position we are, or that beyond doubt I am, a public nuisance. I am more hopeful than you about seeing some nearer approximation than we now have to the old system of Government. I am more willing than you to see Derby and his people zealously embrace the right course. 1.

What Gladstone and his friends did not know at this time was that Derby in entering into the preliminary discussions had not been entirely honest. Indeed, it had been his intention deliberately to play Gladstone along:

Gladstone however is, I know, expecting to hear from me and v[ery] hungry though v[ery] cautious. I will write to him shortly, but only to express my readiness to talk with him confidentially on the state of public affairs. I am sure it is good policy not to seem too eager to effect an understanding. 2

Such lack of seriousness on Derby's part gives the lie to the idea, then current, that agreement between the Conservatives and Gladstone was imminent. Charles Greville, the diarist, wrote that Gladstone and Disraeli were "verging towards each other" and that "we may expect to see ... such a concurrence between Gladstone, Disraeli, and Lord Stanley as will prevent the possibility of an alternative Government".<sup>3</sup> Henry Greville alluded, indeed, to "coquetting" between Gladstone and Disraeli at this time.<sup>4</sup> Stanley's memoirs present a more reliable picture; he was aware that the supposed rapprochement between Gladstone and Disraeli was a very limited affair, based solely on their mutual dislike of Cornwell Lewis's work at the Exchequer

1. W.E.G. to Herbert, 28th Jan.'57. Stanmore, ii.p.71
2. Derby to William Jolliffe, 11th Jan.'57, in M.& B., iv, pp.63-4  
See. Stanley Memoirs, p.364
3. 8th & 14th Feb.'57, Greville Memoirs, vii, pp.266-67
4. 5th Feb.'57, Leaves from the Diary of Henry Greville, quoted in Stanley Memoirs, p. 363, (footnote 25)

under Palmerston.<sup>1</sup> The two erstwhile rivals were roused to a curiously passionate excitement by what they regarded as Lewis's gross financial mismangement.<sup>2</sup> However, as Robert Blake has observed, even this did not lead to any real understanding between them:

Derby acted as intermediary ... for direct dealings with Disraeli were insurmountably repugnant to Gladstone. Nevertheless a temporary pact was formed, and the two men fought together as champions of economy and the reduction of military establishments. They did not succeed. Gladstone was too violent, Disraeli too rhetorical. 3

Nonetheless, Gladstone's vehement opposition to Lewis's budget is of considerable significance on two counts; it exhibited again his facility for turning finance into a moral issue and it revealed the lengths to which he was prepared to go in opposing improper fiscal change. He summarised the reasons for his hostility to the February budget:

To maintain a steady surplus of income over expenditure - to lower indirect taxes when excessive in amount for the relief of the people and bearing in mind the reproductive power inherent in such operations - to simplify our fiscal systems by concentrating its pressure on a few well chosen articles of extended consumption - and to conciliate support to the income tax by marking its temporary character and by associating it with beneficial changes in the laws: these aims have been for fifteen years the labour of our life. By the Budget of last night they are in principle utterly reversed. 4

Stanley interpreted Gladstone's attack on Lewis's proposals as a conscious attempt to win over a particular section of the Conservative Party:

Conservatives still talk of the succession tax as a measure of confiscation, by which large landed properties are certain in the long run to be destroyed; indeed the recollection of this measure, next to differences of ecclesiastical policy, constitutes the most serious obstacle to Gladstone's rejoining the country gentleman. 5

1. 3rd & 13th Feb. '57, Stanley Memoirs, pp.148-49
2. Stanley referred to Disraeli's being in a state of "extraordinary excitement" about this time. Disraeli, it appears, expected to be able to topple Palmerston. 3rd Feb. '57, ibid, p.149
3. Disraeli, p. 374
4. Memo, 14th Feb. '57, Add. Ms.44747, f.8, Autobiographica, iii, p.215. Cornewell Lewis had presented his budget on 13th Feb. and W.E.G. had attacked it the same night, Diaries, v.p.197; H.cxliv.664. Before the Budget was presented W.E.G. had spent considerable time in preparing to attack the Government's financial policies, drawing up lists and resolutions which he discussed with Aberdeen and Derby, 6-13 Feb. '57, Diaries, v.pp.195-97
5. 13th Feb. '57. Stanley Memoirs.p.149



Unaware of the real attitudes among the Derbyites Gladstone discussed his political position with Newcastle. In a remarkable written outburst he denounced Palmerston as "the worst and most demoralising Prime Minister for this country that our day has known".<sup>1</sup> Gladstone condemned him for his vanity, his levity and his irresponsibility

I do not know any one who would probably succeed him that I should not prefer to see in his place. His opinions are less liberal than those of Lord John but I would rather see Lord John in his place; less conservative than those of Lord Derby, but I would rather see Lord Derby in his place also. <sup>2</sup>

Palmerston's performances in the Commons Gladstone described as a compound of blatant egotism and base deception. Bad as his parliamentary behaviour was his conduct of foreign policy during the last recess "made the cup overflow"; "My sincere desire is to see him out of power let who may succeed him". Unless and until Palmerston was removed the character of politics and parliamentary life would remain sullied.

I can see within myself little clearly beyond this, and beyond the mere fact that my own political position (to speak for myself) is bad and mischievous, I wish to see some person & some party do right, & then to do the best in my power however little it may be to support that person and party. <sup>3</sup>

In replying Newcastle disagreed quite sharply with Gladstone. He could not accept that Palmerston was the worst premier in memory; he referred to Palmerston's popularity in the country at large and he dismissed the claims of Russell and Derby.<sup>4</sup> Gladstone tried to explain away Newcastle's attitude by saying that were his correspondent in the Lower rather than the Upper House he would be able to witness daily the unedifying quality of Palmerston's Government.<sup>5</sup> That such a government could continue at all was the result of the disorganised and divided state of the Commons. Gladstone would "hail the day" when

1. W.E.G. to Newcastle, 30th Jan.'57. Add. Ms.44263, f.2.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., f.3.

4. Newcastle to W.E.G., 10th Feb.'57, ibid., fos.4-9

5. W.E.G. to Newcastle, 12th Feb.'57, ibid., f. 10

those still called Peelites would be able to play their part in ending this sad state of affairs but he did not see that day in the offing.<sup>1</sup>

He took some comfort, however, from the degree of success he had had in attacking the Government's proposals on public expenditure which had enabled him to keep faith with his financial commitments of 1853. He referred to the help given him in this regard by Disraeli's assault on the Government at the beginning of the current session.<sup>2</sup>

Continuing the argument, Newcastle suggested that the Whigs and Peelites ought to merge in a broad combination; there were, he added, more genuine Liberals among the latter than the former. It followed that there could be no honest or permanent junction of the Peelites with Derby's party. Reunion with the "sound portion" of the Liberal Party was the only logical Peelite future, Newcastle believed. That was why he had encouraged Gladstone to join Palmerston two years earlier and why he had deprecated the Peelite withdrawal from that Government. Had Gladstone stayed he would have been able to give that very character to the Administration whose lack he now bemoaned.<sup>3</sup>

Gladstone accepted that some years before it had seemed possible that Whiggism and Peelism might combine in some form but Palmerston had stopped that process by substituting a leadership "which has essentially all the faults of Derbyism and all the worst faults of Liberalism" and which survived only by a "series of shifts, fetches and tricks".<sup>4</sup>

1. Ibid., f. 11

2. Ibid., fos.11-12.

3. Newcastle to W.E.G. 15th Feb.'57, ibid., fos. 14-17

4. W.E.G. to Newcastle, 21st Feb.'57, ibid., fos.18-19. To his brother-in-law, Sir Stephen Glynne, Gladstone wrote that they were living in times "politically more disastrous to the honour of the country, than any we have formerly seen - For the first time is her government guided by a man without convictions of duty: by a man who systematically panders to what is questionable or bad in the public mind". 28th Feb. '57. Bassett, p.114. W.E.G.'s article, "Prospects Political and Financial", savaging Palmerston for his reckless policy abroad and irresponsible financial dealings at home was a direct development of what he wrote to Newcastle and Glynne. Q.R., Jan.'57, pp.243-84.

Publicly Gladstone gave expression to his disgust with Palmerston in a vehement attack on the recent budget. Just as he made his own budgets essays in morality so he chose to condemn Lewis's proposals as studies in turpitude. The scheme for lightening the burden of taxation by extending indirect taxes was denounced by Gladstone as an evil: "it was the worst proposition I had ever heard from a minister of finance".<sup>1</sup> He made this point directly to Derby, adding that he thought the scheme was a base attempt to win over those members of the opposition who might still retain a lingering faith in indirect taxation.<sup>2</sup> At a gathering of Peelites at Aberdeen's Gladstone induced his colleagues to accept two Common resolutions which he had drafted; these referred to the excess of expenditure over income implicit in the Budget and to the need to revise and reduce State spending as a means of giving relief from taxation.<sup>3</sup> In accepting these drafts his colleagues urged that Gladstone himself should be the one to introduce the motion in the House.<sup>4</sup> This suggestion Gladstone rejected on the strange grounds that he did not wish to appear to be competing with Disraeli who had led the pre-budget attack on the Government's financial programme:

I said that from motives which I could neither describe nor conquer I was quite unable to undertake to enter into any squabble or competition with him for the possession of a post of prominence.<sup>5</sup>

Graham wanted to see Gladstone as leader of the Commons under Russell or even Derby but admitted that the later possibility was remote as "Disraeli ... could not be thrown away like a sucked orange".<sup>6</sup>

1. Memo. 14th Feb. '57, Add. Ms. 44747, Autobiographica, iii. p. 215

2. Ibid.

3. Add. Ms. 44747, fos. 19-20. These were later expanded into four propositions covering the same ground, ibid., fos. 21-2

4. Autobiographica, iii, p. 215 They further argued that Russell and Derby should be forewarned of this move. ibid.

5. Ibid., iii, p. 216

6. Ibid.

From this meeting Gladstone again went directly to Derby's to report; there he learned that Derby had just chaired a gathering of his own followers who had resolved that Disraeli should indeed be the one to introduce the Budget censure motion. Derby showed the resolution to Gladstone who after suggesting some verbal improvements returned the compliment by reading out the Peelite proposition.<sup>1</sup> Morley in his account blurs the issue here by suggesting that this marked an agreement between Derby and Gladstone to which Disraeli then became a party.<sup>2</sup> However, the latter part of the memorandum, which Morley omits, shows that Gladstone had serious doubts as to whether the Derbyite resolution went far enough. In fact Gladstone ended his account with a description of an unresolved point of difference between them:

I stated that we should be glad if the Exchequer bond resolution were carried before any general motion should be made on the Budget. He replied that it would perhaps be hardly fair to do this as towards the government.<sup>3</sup>

They did, however, continue to discuss parliamentary tactics. Derby asked Gladstone to consider carefully before introducing his own resolutions on taxation. What Derby, in a complicated letter whose unintelligibility he apologised for, seemed to be suggesting was a quid pro quo between Gladstone and Disraeli on the issue of direct and indirect taxation which would enable them to support each other's resolutions even though it was not possible "to combine the two in one vote".<sup>4</sup> Derby later tried to broaden the ground of possible co-operation by suggesting that at the forthcoming election "Derbyites and Peelites, should not go knocking our heads against one another at every election as we did in 1852".<sup>5</sup> Gladstone declined to give a straight answer

1. Ibid.

2. Morley, i.p. 418

3. Autobiographica, iii. pp. 216-17

4. Derby to W.E.G. 23rd Feb. '57, ibid, pp. 218-20

5. Memo. 6th Mar. '57, Diaries, v. p. 203

on the question of co-operation; his interest, he said, in the election would be primarily concerned with campaigning in Flintshire against the pro-Palmerston candidate, Mostyn.<sup>1</sup> Gladstone's coolness towards Derby at this point is explained by the latter's declared inability to persuade his followers to support Gladstone's motion urging cuts in military expenditure; in effect, Gladstone accused the Derbyites of being an irresponsible opposition. He told Derby:

it seemed to me it was high time for them to consider whether they would or would not endeavour to attract towards themselves such a strength of public opinion as would really put them in a condition to undertake the government of the country: without which they could not be a real opposition according to the spirit of our parliamentary system. 2

None of this made Gladstone's own position any clearer. His Peelite attachments had steadily weakened; Herbert observed that "the Peelites - had, on almost every question lately submitted to Parliament, voted in different lobbies".<sup>3</sup> His relations with Derby and the Conservatives were still undefined. The continuing oddity of his position left him frustrated which may well account for the bitterness of his public utterances. It was frequently observed around this time that Gladstone was veering towards extremism in his statements on public policy. Herbert warned him:

I do not know what you decided about your retrenchment motion, but if you bring it on, I hope you will be guarded and moderate ... I suspect your views are extreme, and we have seen in the case of Cobden and the financial reform apostles, how little very extreme views can catch ... There is also a great alarm as to the extent you are ready to go. 4

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1. Ibid. W.E.G.'s brother-in-law, Sir Stephen Glynne, currently held the constituency but despite Gladstone's campaigning on his behalf he was to suffer "a smashing & woeful" defeat at the next election, 7 & 8th April '57, Diaries, v.p.213
  2. Memo. 6th Mar. '57, Diaries, v.p.203
  3. Herbert to W.E.G. 6th Mar. '57, Stanmore, ii.p.72. On the Locke King parliamentary reform motion Graham and Cardwell had voted in favour, Herbert and Gladstone against; 19th Feb. '57, H.cxliv, 861 W.E.G. described this division as "a bad night for Peelism", Diaries, v.p.200
  4. 8th Mar. '57, Stanmore, ii, pp.72-3

One of his attacks in the Commons on Lewis's Budget was described by Argyll as "very overstrained, and unfair in argument in the highest degree".<sup>1</sup> Greville wrote:

Gladstone seems to have been so inflamed by spite and ill-humour that all prudence and discretion forsook him; he appears ready to say and do anything and to act with anybody if he can only contribute to upset the Government, though it is not easy to discover the cause of his bitterness.<sup>2</sup>

Stanley recorded:

Gladstone moved reductions in the tea and sugar duties, speaking long, forcibly, and with that peculiar vehemence, like that of a man under personal provocation, which has marked his displays during this session.<sup>3</sup>

Gladstone's anger seemed more justifiably righteous when he joined the chorus of disapproval over the Government's high-handed China policy.<sup>4</sup> The attack on Palmerston was initiated by Cobden in a Commons' motion supported by Gladstone in one of his most celebrated parliamentary speeches.<sup>5</sup> In describing this Morley suggested that it marked a genuine alliance between Cobden and Gladstone.<sup>6</sup> However since Palmerston also came under fire in the debate from such as Derby, Russell and Disraeli it is misleading to attach special significance to the junction between Cobden and Gladstone. As Blake points out what the debate illustrates is no more than that "the moral consciences of Radicals, Peelites and Conservatives were alike outraged".<sup>7</sup>

1. 20th Feb.'57. Argyll, ii, p.73; Diaries, v, p.200. W.E.G.'s speech, in H.cxliv, 985. Three days later W.E.G. apologised for the personal nature of this attack; H.cxliv, 1146
2. 27th Feb.'57. Greville Memoirs, vii, p.273
3. 6th Mar.'57, Stanley Memoirs, pp.149-50. W.E.G. failed to get the necessary Commons' support for his motion (H.clxiv, 1974) which occasioned his remark: "Times are changed, & men!", Diaries, v.203
4. Palmerston had chosen to give his Government's full backing to the British Governor of Canton in his decision to bombard Canton following the "Arrow" incident. See D. Southgate, The Most English Minister, London, 1966, pp.421-22 and Jasper Ridley, Lord Palmerston London. 1970, pp.464-66
5. 3rd Mar.'57. H.cxliv, 1787. In his journal W.E.G. described the 16 vote defeat of the Government as "a division doing more honour to the H of C than any I ever remember". He also admitted that the whole affair had left him "excited wh is rare with me". Diaries, v, p.202
6. Morley, i, p.419
7. Disraeli, p.374. Greville dismissed the idea of the division's having a special significance in regard to party alignment. 4th Mar.'57, Greville Memoirs, vii, pp.276-77

It is interesting that Bright in recording his intense pleasure at the successful onslaught upon Palmerston should have made no mention of Gladstone.<sup>1</sup> As with his opposition to the Government's Crimean War conduct Gladstone's savaging of Palmerston's China policy did not mark any commitment to a formal peace party. The anger he exhibited happened to be shared by many others but in no way did it presage a development of political significance. His position vis a vis party remained unclarified.

The dissolution of parliament and the calling of a general election following the Government's defeat gave further opportunity for Gladstone to re-examine his position.<sup>2</sup> Although he canvassed on behalf of Stephen Glynne who stood as a Peelite he declared his own intention "to stand clear of political combination under the present circumstances".<sup>3</sup> When Elwin, the editor of the Quarterly, asked him to review Guizot's recently published biography of Robert Peel<sup>4</sup> Gladstone declined the request on these interesting grounds:

It leads me over tender ground, & naturally prompts a distribution of praise and blame in account for our present political evils. At the present moment looking upon dishonour as the great characteristic of Lord Palmerston's govt. I would not willingly run the risk of wounding Ld. Derby or any friend of his.<sup>5</sup>

There were those close to Gladstone who considered that he had long passed the stage when he could enjoy the luxury of choice. Herbert had become irritated by his lack of realism in regard to party membership:

1. 5th & 6th Mar.'57, Bright's Diary, p.223
2. Somewhat surprisingly, Gladstone was returned unopposed for Oxford in March; this was due not to his own popularity but to divisions among his opponents. See his correspondence with Richard Greswell, Chairman of his election committee. Add.Ms.44181, fos.193-205.
3. W.E.G. to Lord Malmesbury. 8th Mar.'57, Add. Ms. 44387, f.120. Cf. Diaries, v.p.204
4. F.P.G. Guizot, Sir Robert Peel: Etude d'histoire Contemporaine, 1856
5. W.E.G. to Elwin, 27th Mar.'57, Diaries, v.p.207

Gladstone's position is becoming every day more difficult .... I take it he is in frequent communication with Lord Derby, and I do not see how he can ever effect a reconciliation with the Liberal party .... You cannot confer with men on political matters and remain uncompromised ....

... I foresee political separation, and a great career marred by the false steps into which his impatience and his predilections have hurried him. 1

I wrote also to Gladstone ... expressing my fear that he was so committed as to be now bound in honour elsewhere. I fear he is a lost man, but he has no judgement, and does not seem to understand the purpose or value of his own acts. 2

In the letter to Gladstone Herbert informed him that having grown weary of the problems created by the existence of the Peelites as a third party he had decided to commit himself to "the Liberal side of the House". He accepted that this must result in division between him and his erstwhile colleagues since he understood that Gladstone had "cast in [his] lot with Lord Derby".<sup>3</sup>

Gladstone responded characteristically. Herbert's letter, he wrote, had touched on matters which he found "excessive and morbid". If Herbert and he were indeed to end their partnership no other attachment could replace it. He would certainly not cleave to Lord Derby. Separation from his former Peelite colleagues might well furnish the occasion for his abandoning politics altogether. He found himself unable to contemplate adhesion to a Liberal party which, as led by Palmerston, was totally unprincipled; on the other hand such hopes as he had entertained of reunion with the Conservatives had been wholly dependent on the continuation of his political ties with Graham and Herbert.<sup>4</sup> He denied the rumours suggesting collusion and imminent partnership with Derby and by way of proof he offered Herbert access to the whole correspondence between himself and the Conservative leader.<sup>5</sup>

1. Herbert to Graham, 15th Mar.'57. Stanmore, ii. p.80

2. Herbert to his wife, 18th Mar.'57. ibid., p.81

3. Herbert to W.E.G., 18th Mar.'57, ibid. p.82

4. W.E.G. to Herbert, 22nd Mar.'57, ibid., p.83

5. Ibid., p.84



Gladstone's reference to his quitting politics was, as always, the expression of an attitude not of an intention. Late in March as the election results came in, indicating a substantial victory for Palmerston, Gladstone wrote at length to Aberdeen on the current state of politics. His was the letter of a man fully committed to a political career. The main burden of his thought was the fate of Peelism. He feared not that it would die but that its demise should be misunderstood.<sup>1</sup> Gladstone, clearly, was still troubled by the ambiguity of the Peelites who had declined in 1852 to serve with Lord Derby but who had entered Aberdeen's Government in 1855. He told Aberdeen that the Peelites had opposed Derby in 1852 "only on Protection and its appendages"; whereas in 1855,

In forming your Government, the act was done, which would probably have led to a real & final amalgamation with the Liberal party; but which had not produced any such amalgamation at the time when, the mortar being still wet, Lord John Russell's powder magazine blew the whole fabric into the air. 2

Since that time, Gladstone argued, the bulk of the Liberal party by taking Palmerston as their leader had in point of principle so distanced themselves from the Peelites as to make union impossible. He strongly rejected the line now being advanced by Graham that the ex-Peelites should commit themselves to Russell on a programme of parliamentary reform. Given that Protection was now a dead issue Gladstone believed that logic suggested a Peelite merger with the Conservative rather than the Liberal party.<sup>3</sup> Yet even his own logic did not lead him to the point where he could declare for Derby and the Conservatives. Specifying eight "great subjects of public policy" Gladstone asserted that each of them must be judged on its own merits in accordance with "the guidance which events afford".<sup>4</sup> For the Peelites to do otherwise would be for them to abandon

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1. W.E.G. to Aberdeen, 31st Mar.'57, Add. Ms. 43071, f.358. Diaries, v, p.210

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.210-11

4. Ibid. The subjects listed were " 1. Foreign Policy, 2. Retrenchment,  
3. Taxation, 4. Reform,  
5. Education, 6. Church,  
7. Ecclesiastical questions in Ireland  
8. Law Reform.

principle and "artificially adopt certain opinions" merely for the sake of an apparent but unreal union.<sup>1</sup> He repeated what he had written to Herbert; namely, that if in the newly elected House of Commons he should find that he had "no reasonable expectation of doing good there" he would give serious thought to abandoning politics altogether.<sup>2</sup> Again, this avowal lacks conviction; it is in the nature of a post-script and is out of keeping with the rest of the letter.

There is, perhaps, a hint of irritation about Aberdeen's response. He dismissed as academic Gladstone's analysis of the future role of Peelism: "there is no such thing as a distinctive Peelite party ... in this age of progress the liberal party must ultimately govern the country".<sup>3</sup> The Peelites had combined with the Liberal party to bring down Derby in 1852; Aberdeen interpreted this and the service of the Peelites in his Coalition of 1852-55 as tantamount to a merger of the Peelites with the Liberals.

This is so true that, although frequently tormented by the personal waywardness of Lord John, the amalgamation was complete so long as the Government lasted.

As for the resignation of Gladstone, Graham and Herbert from Palmerston's Government in 1855 Aberdeen saw this as being wholly unrelated to Peelite principles. It did not leave the trio any closer to Derby or more distanced from the Liberals. Significantly, Aberdeen added, they had since their resignation continued to sit on the Government side of the House.<sup>4</sup>

Gladstone protested that no such union as Aberdeen described had taken place: "If that be true then I have been deceiving both the world and my constituents". He restated his bitter opposition to Palmerston's leadership and asked Aberdeen to circulate their recent correspondence among his Peelite colleagues.<sup>5</sup>

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Aberdeen to W.E.G. 3rd April '57. Add. Ms. 43071.f.364

4. Ibid.

5. W.E.G. to Aberdeen 4th April '57, ibid., f.366 W.E.G. in his article assessing Palmerston's recent election victory claimed that a gullible nation had been hoodwinked by a premier lacking all probity. "The New Parliament and its Work", Q.R., April '57, pp. 541-84

Aberdeen did so and received from Herbert a lengthy analysis of where he thought the Peelites stood. Herbert fully agreed with Aberdeen that "the fusion of the Peelites with the Liberal party took place in 1852 when your Government was formed".<sup>1</sup> He dwelt on the differences dividing Graham and himself from Gladstone, emphasising how bitterly opposed Gladstone was to any concession to parliamentary reform. Of the possibility of the Peelites' continuing to function as a separate body Herbert wrote: "We have now at any rate been spared the pain of suicide, for we no longer exist".<sup>2</sup> He concluded:

Gladstone's position is far more difficult than mine, especially if he thinks that no fusion has ever taken place between him and the Liberal party .... I am more and more perplexed at it, and torn opposite ways, by one's sensitiveness as to what his honour may require, and by one's anxiety to retain his great powers and high character for that moderate Liberal party which I think must govern this country. 3

To Gladstone himself Herbert wrote:

Graham, yourself, and me - we are rari nantes, and we are not only broken up as a party but the country intends us to be so broken up .... The fear of the cliques and sections is universal. 4

Herbert maintained that for the public good "the triumvirate" ought not to continue to sit together in the Commons: "with this Reform question ahead we should differ, but the difference would be far more éclatant if we were acting as a party together up to the moment of differing".<sup>5</sup>

Gladstone accepted Herbert's premise but not his conclusion:

I agree with you to the full in thinking that Peelism should be held extinct, and that we ought not to form a clique or party: but I do not agree, so far as I can ~~see~~ <sup>in any way</sup>, in thinking that the legitimate way to effect these ends is to divorce ourselves locally from one another. 6

1. Herbert to Aberdeen, 12th April '57, Stanmore, ii. p. 87

2. Ibid., p. 89

3. Ibid., p. 92

4. Herbert to W.E.G., 13th April '57, ibid., p. 93

5. Ibid. Herbert made the same point to Graham who agreed that "The Peelites as a party are gone" and who hoped that Palmerston's recent election triumph would give Gladstone pause before he contemplated "severance from the Liberal party, and a junction with the followers of Disraeli". Herbert to Graham, 14th April '57, ibid., ii. pp. 94-5; Graham to Herbert, 15th April '57, Graham, pp. 309-10

6. W.E.G. to Herbert, 17th April '57, Stanmore, ii. p. 96.

He sought to play down the differences between them and while accepting that he might be "backward" in regard to Reform he argued that Herbert and Graham had not taken sufficient measure of the opposition to it in the country at large. Significantly, Gladstone admitted that the recent election which had routed the Peelites and the opponents of Palmerston meant that it would amount to "a deception" for them to continue as if they represented a positive political group; nonetheless, he urged that they should not "separate corporally" but should retain their old Peelite place in the Commons just in case some future emergency should require their concerted action. <sup>1</sup>

As to how they could avoid seeming to act as a clique Gladstone considered the answer a simple one:

I know of but one way, nor do I pretend that it is entirely satisfactory - it is the way of silence and of absence. As far as I can forecast the coming session, it is not unlikely to allow us both these privileges in a high degree.

.... whatever happens, I shall be little, I hope, in any one's way; since, for myself, I can see no choice except between mischief and inaction. <sup>2</sup>

Gladstone's reference to his detachment from politics in the new parliament proved accurate. The parliamentary session of 1857 lacked excitement. Palmerston's considerable victory at the polls had effectively weakened opposition to the Government in the Commons. Greville noted how neither the Peelites nor the Manchester school had survived the elections as a political force.<sup>3</sup> For the rest of the year Palmerston's hold over Parliament was not seriously challenged. Disraeli, according to Stanley, despaired of success for the Conservatives in the near future beyond a vague hope that the scheduled Reform bill would provide some grounds for rallying. He had, furthermore, come to the conclusion that Derby did not really want office. <sup>4</sup>

1. Ibid., pp. 96-7

2. Ibid.

3. 4th April '57, Greville Memoirs, vii, pp. 283-84.

4. 18th May '57, Stanley Memoirs, p. 151

Gladstone perforce was himself away from London for much of this time, preoccupied with family concerns, his Greek studies, and his own illness.<sup>1</sup> His absence was in part to blame, thought Stanley, for the poor record of the Commons:

Nothing, or next to nothing, has been done this session: and but little will be ... Gladstone, either from ill-health, pique, or prudence, stays away, and there is no check on ministers Out of doors, entire apathy; within the House, party spirit is dead. 2

The big exception in Gladstone's case was his bitter campaign against the Divorce Bill.<sup>3</sup> Impressive though his dedication to this cause was it had little bearing upon his political progress.<sup>4</sup> It was an expression of the fervour which he could bring to bear on what he deemed moral issues but it has no place in his Liberalism. It was more the action of a political maverick roused to a passionate intensity by a particular scandal than of a burgeoning Liberal committed to a programme. It is best understood as the desperate throw of a politician seeking to maintain the vestiges of his former religious motivation in public life. He tried indeed to relate the Divorce Bill directly to Church defence; but the weakness here was that the Established Church did not see it that way. More of the leading Churchmen of the time were for the Bill than against it.<sup>5</sup> Another inconsistency presented itself

1. E.g., 15th-24th Aug.'57; 1st Sept. 21st Oct.'57; Diaries, v. pp. 245-9 250-59.
2. 23rd May'57, Stanley Memoirs, p. 151. Stanley interpreted the relatively low number of petitions received by the Commons in the 1857 session as a sign of the general apathy prevailing, ibid., p. 364. Greville wrote of "this dull and passive session", 19th July'57. Greville Memoirs, p. 293. W.E.G. wrote to Cobden declining "to take up or to assume any leading part in, any discussion that may seem aimed against the Government", believing that such action would be wholly ineffective. 16th June'57. Add. Ms. 44135, f. 9; Diaries, v. p. 231
3. July and August'57, ibid., v. pp. 240-45. In addition to his many speeches in the Commons against the Bill W.E.G. set out his argument for the indissolubility of Christian marriage in "The Bill For Divorce", Q.R. July'57, Gleanings, vi. pp. 47-106.
4. "Politically I think the question carries no venom in it. It is not one of party, nor one of which, so far as I know, blame is to be imputed to the Government" W.E.G. to Newcastle, 22nd June.'57. Add. Ms. 44263, f. 21
5. In his letters to his wife at this time W.E.G. complained bitterly of the blindness of so many bishops in not seeing the scandal and threat to the Church implicit in the Bill. W.E.G. to C.G. July and August '57, Bassett, pp. 115-118

when in the course of the debate it was pointed out that Gladstone had failed to react against a similar bill introduced in 1854.

The Divorce Bill was argued in the Commons .... Gladstone was learned and impassioned, but his harangue lost great part of its effect when Sir G. Grey published the fact of a similar Bill having been brought in by Lord Aberdeen's cabinet, of which Gladstone was a member, thus showing that his religious scruples dated from less than three years back. 1

The imputation of dishonesty is a little harsh, perhaps, but it does indicate that in the prevailing climate his major political decisions appeared to his contemporaries to border on the arbitrary.

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1. 31st July '57, Stanley Memoirs, p. 152. Grey had been Home Secretary in the Palmerston Government.

## CHAPTER IX

On this day I close my 48th year. How long a time for me to cumber the ground: and still not to know where to work out the purpose of my life.

I dismiss another year with a growing sentiment that my life must come to its crisis while I do not see in myself the inward preparation which would be the surest sign that God was going to make His way plain before my face. 1

So Gladstone wrote at the close of 1857, still maintaining that his political future was far from determined. Immersed in his Homeric studies and much taken up with family affairs he professed a reluctance to return to parliament in the new session.<sup>2</sup>

I have no fancy for making my appearance in the House of Commons on an early day. My heart sinks within me when I think of a return to the strife of political warfare. Yet I suppose that I must return.

The prospect is by no means alluring. The state of parties is odious. I have no faith in Palmerston; I think him a very dangerous Minister. But the Liberal party is bought and sold to him .... Derby and his crew cannot man the ship, and the waves are about to run high. Disraeli at the helm in the Commons would swamp the vessel in calm weather. 3

In this "lamentable" time for English politics it was his intention to continue "to remain quiet and in the shade".<sup>4</sup> The turn of events, however, ~~was not~~ to allow him this indulgence. He returned to parliament to a situation in which his views of men and parties was soon to become

1. 29th & 31st Dec.'57, Diaries, v.p.270

2. Catherine Gladstone was seriously unwell during the winter of 1857-58, see ibid., pp.271-2. W.E.G.'s, Studies in Homer and the Homeric Age, was published in March 1858; in the previous nine months there had been hardly a day when he had not worked on this, ibid., v, pp.250-85

3. W.E.G. to Graham, 26th Jan.'58, Graham, ii.p.333

4. W.E.G. to Graham, 30th Jan '58, ibid.

highly relevant. From an apparently impregnable position Palmerston was to be brought down within ten days of the start of the new session by the censure motion against the Government's Conspiracy to Murder Bill.<sup>1</sup> Gladstone's response to these events was singularly odd. Discussing the reaction of Palmerston to the Orsini bomb plot he agreed that the Prime Minister had shown uncharacteristic weakness in the face of official French demands and therefore did not deserve support:

Believing Lord Palmerston to be by far the worst Minister the country has had during our time ... I am not impelled or tempted to set aside great public pleas in order to keep him in office.<sup>2</sup>

Gladstone voted for the Milner Gibson amendment which defeated the Government, an event which he described as marking "a vote for English honour".<sup>3</sup> Yet having observed Palmerston's fall, the one development for which he had consistently longed, he wrote in his journal, "P. has resigned. He is down: I must now cease to denounce him".<sup>4</sup> This last remark, which has a strange quality to it when set against his bitter attacks during the previous three years on Palmerston's corrupt leadership, sprang not so much from an excess of charity as from a desire not to appear too politically committed in the ministerial reshuffling that must now ensue. Two days earlier Gladstone had declined to vote against a Government measure regarding India; the explanation in his journal reads: "I avoided this occasion wh. wd. again have exhibited me as attacking Govt.". <sup>5</sup>

1. The new session began on 11th Feb.'58; W.E.G. re-entered the Commons on 16th Feb., Diaries, v, p. 278
2. W.E.G. to Graham, 15th Feb.'58, Graham, ii, p. 338
3. W.E.G. to C.G. 21st Feb.'58, Bassett, p. 121
4. 20th Feb.'58, Diaries, v, p. 279. In his contribution to the Commons' debate W.E.G. was careful to distinguish between rejecting France's currently overbearing remonstrations and maintaining friendly relations with her over all. 19th Feb.'58, H. cxlviii, 1806. He took the same line in a review article, describing the Conspiracy to Murder Bill as repugnant to the spirit of English law and tradition and claiming that "Lord Palmerston has been overthrown in 1858 for Gallicanism carried to a pitch at which it involved total blindness to his English duties". "France and the Late Ministry", Q.R., April '58, pp. 560, 564 -7
5. 18th Feb.'58 Diaries, v, p. 279



As so often during this period of English politics it was uncertainty that prevailed. Even after Derby, the obvious choice, was commissioned to form a new Government there was no guarantee that, even if he accepted, he would be able to shape a lasting administration. Derby's son noted his father's state of bewilderment.<sup>1</sup> As to Gladstone's position, Stanley suggested that one of the pressing reasons why a Derby Government would not long survive was

Because, for obvious reasons, it would be necessary to form a junction with Mr. Gladstone and his friends: whose extreme unpopularity could only be a new source of weakness, and would alienate some of Lord D's habitual supporters. 2

Disraeli, eager for Derby to take up the reins, played down the danger that might arise from such a combination. He reckoned the Conservatives' prospect of success to be very high and argued that "Liberalism in the sense of the only really progressive party ... was impracticable for twenty years to come". In particular Disraeli was concerned to dismiss the current agitation over Reform as "a delusion".<sup>3</sup>

Subject to such advice Derby was still unsure. He believed at first that Palmerston's resignation was "a ruse" and, according to his son, "appeared rather depressed and anxious than sanguine of success".<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, he set about the task and approached Gladstone as one of his first choices. Gladstone anticipating the offer had asked Aberdeen, Herbert and Graham to meet him to consider what response should be made.<sup>5</sup> In his letter of invitation Derby wrote of his wish to gain the co-operation of men of eminence who were not "fettered by other ties" and who broadly shared his own principles. Derby added that he would willingly

1. Stanley Memoirs, 20th Feb. '58, p.154
2. 22nd Feb. '58, ibid., p.155. Among the other reasons Stanley listed were "Disraeli's character" and Derby's failure to make himself understood to the public. ibid.
3. Ibid. W.E.G. commented on the Government's fall: "Palmerston died with propriety, Disraeli with bad tact anticipated his leadership". Diaries, v, p. 280, 22nd Feb. '58
4. Stanley Memoirs, p. 154.
5. 20th & 21st Feb. '58, Diaries, v.p.279

extend this offer to Herbert but he understood that the latter was too closely tied to Russell to make acceptance possible.<sup>1</sup> Gladstone penned his reply after consultation with his colleagues. After the customary courtesies, thanking Derby for his confidence in him and declaring that he had nothing but the highest regard for Derby as premier, Gladstone declared that he must answer in the negative.<sup>2</sup> He gave as his grounds his isolation from his former colleagues and the fact that there was in Derby's party "a small but active section ... who avowedly regard me as the representative of the most dangerous ideas"; he would thus prove a source of weakness not strength to the new administration. Gladstone added that nevertheless he would give his support to the Government and that Aberdeen and Herbert were of a like disposition.<sup>3</sup>

Gladstone's reasons for rejecting Derby's offer are unconvincing. Recalling how concerned he had been on earlier occasions to impress upon Derby his duty to form a government Gladstone's refusal to join him now while at the same time promising him general support made little sense. Had he been of a Liberal disposition in anything approaching a party sense there would have been some logic to it but Gladstone specifically denied such sympathies. Bright, fearful that Gladstone, eager for executive office, might join the Derbyites, had written to him begging him not to ally himself.<sup>4</sup> Gladstone replied that the mere allurements of office could not tempt him and that he had made this decision before receiving Bright's letter; he added that a man ought

1. Derby to W.E.G., 21st Feb.'58, Morley, i.p.430

2. W.E.G. to Derby, 21st Feb. '58, ibid., pp. 430-31

3. Ibid.

4. Bright had written: "If you remain on our side of the House, you are with the majority, and no government can be formed without you". He had also hinted that Gladstone was destined for the premiership in the near future. Bright to W.E.G. 21st Feb.'58. Morley, i, pp. 431-32

to keep with the party with which he began unless he had "broad and definite grounds for quitting it" and these did not presently obtain.<sup>1</sup>

Contemporaries continued to remain puzzled by Gladstone's attitude. Aberdeen/spoke of Gladstone's political position as being "very peculiar" in that he lacked the sympathy of the Commons as a whole while being deeply disliked by a large number of the Derbyites.<sup>2</sup>

The Spectator described him as a "bedouin of parliament" and "the most signal example that the present time affords of the man of speculation misplaced and lost in the labyrinth of practical politics".<sup>3</sup>

The Press went further, seeing in Gladstone's approach not political philosophy but casuistry; his too refined individualism made him

"a Simeon Stylites among the statesmen of his time".<sup>4</sup> Given all this uncertainty about his orientation it was not surprising that certain liberals should have approached him with a view to forming a closer association. Influenced by Bright, Lady Waldegrave,

Liberal hostess at Strawberry Hill, invited Gladstone to one of her gatherings. He attended early in May over a period of three days in the company of, among others, Bright, Aberdeen, Herbert and Graham.

Discussion flourished but apart from a large measure of understanding between himself and Bright over India there is no evidence of anything more positive by way of agreement; certainly no political deals were struck.<sup>5</sup>

1. W.E.G. to Bright, 22nd Feb. '58, ibid., pp. 432-3

2. Aberdeen to W.E.G. Dec. '58.

3. Spectator, 8th May '58

4. Press 7th April '58.

5. 8th - 11th May, '58, Diaries v.p. 296. See O.W.Hewett, Strawberry Fair, London 1956, pp. 137-8. W.E.G. described the affinity between himself and Bright on the Indian question in a letter to Graham, 23rd April '58, Graham pp. 340-41. W.E.G. continued to be a frequent guest at Strawberry Hill; e.g., see Diaries, v.p. 390, 397

Such hopes as some Liberals entertained of Gladstone were not improved by his actions in the Commons during the early weeks of the new Administration. In May he and Graham made a number of speeches calculated to save the Government from embarrassment if not defeat.<sup>1</sup> This prompted Derby when a vacancy arose to renew his offer of a Cabinet post. As before, the approach to Gladstone was made through intermediaries, first Heathcote and then Spencer Walpole, the Home Secretary.<sup>2</sup> Derby offered him the choice of either the Board of Control or the Colonial Office. Gladstone informed Walpole that he could not contemplate accepting office if it meant "separation from those who have been my friends in public life", a direct reference to Graham.<sup>3</sup> Prepared for this response Walpole explained that Disraeli had declared himself willing to surrender the leadership of the House to Graham in order to induce the Peelites to join; however, he added, Graham's recent statements in the Commons to the effect that his sympathies were wholly with Russell and the Liberals appeared to nullify Disraeli's gesture.<sup>4</sup> Gladstone described Disraeli's offer as "handsome" but declared that it had no bearing on his own decision. He reciprocated Derby's expressions of good will, adding that there were no "palpable differences of opinion" separating him from the Government. On the two issues on which he had opposed the new Administration "those of legislating for India this year, and of the Principalities" he had differed at least as much with their opponents.<sup>5</sup>

In this context what he had to say of Palmerston is of particular interest:

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1. 11th, 20th, 21st, 22nd May '58 H. cl. 474, 1001, 1042; Diaries, v. pp. 296-99
  2. Walpole to W.E.G. 22nd May '58. Add. Ms. 44389 fos. 219-20. Memo. Add. Ms. 44747 f. 169. Autobiographica, iii, p. 221
  3. W.E.G. to Walpole, 22nd May '58, Add. Ms. 44389 f. 221.
  4. Walpole to W.E.G. 22nd May '58, ibid., f. 222
  5. W.E.G.'s memo, 22nd May '58, Autobiographica, pp. 222-23

I had no broad differences of principle from the party opposite - on the whole perhaps I differed more from Lord Palmerston than from almost any one - and this was more on account of his temper and views of public conduct, than of any political opinions. <sup>1</sup>

Looking ahead to Gladstone's entry into Palmerston's Cabinet in June, 1859, this suggests that in the intervening year Gladstone by some process had come to terms with his profound dislike of Palmerston's style and methods. It further implies that when Gladstone made his decision to join Palmerston it was not primarily a political one; his becoming a Liberal marks the overcoming of his distaste for a particular man not the commitment to a political cause.

Rejecting the offer of Cabinet office, Gladstone argued that for him to join the Government would "shock the public sentiment" and would bring no benefit to Derby and the Conservatives. In his judgement it did not lie "within the will of an individual to effect a reconstruction of party". <sup>2</sup> Gladstone repeated that he could not separate himself from colleagues with whom he had acted for so long and who had helped to shape his political attitudes; he was not disposed to join what he termed "a Cabinet of Strangers" containing as it did not one person (with the single exception of Derby some fourteen years before) with whom he had ever previously served. <sup>3</sup> Learning of Gladstone's response Derby wrote to him, asking that before he gave his final decision he should consult Graham and Aberdeen. <sup>4</sup> Gladstone duly did so sending them the memorandum of his discussions with Walpole. <sup>5</sup> Aberdeen, according

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. 23rd May '58, Diaries, v, pp. 299-300. Memo, Add. Ms. 44747 f. 177. W.E.G. also sent this memo and relevant letters to Newcastle and Herbert. W.E.G. to Newcastle, 30th May '58, Add. Ms. 44263, f. 30

to Gladstone's account, agreed that it was impossible for Gladstone, acting alone, to join the Government. In his deliberations with Aberdeen Gladstone again made the point that so far as his individual feelings were concerned he had at no time been opposed to a junction with Derby if this could have included his erstwhile Peelite colleagues.<sup>1</sup>

It should be remarked here what an odd light this throws upon Gladstone's attitude. In all his correspondence he had accepted that Peelism as a cohesive force was dead and had argued that his judgement of political problems would henceforth be strictly according to the merits of the particular issues. Yet when faced with the prospect of office he had resorted to Peelite loyalty as a justification for refusing Derby. Had he, as he so often claimed, been genuinely seeking a path out of politics altogether this would have made some sense but all the signs were that he was resolved to remain.

Graham in his reply reminded Gladstone that Peelite ties were no longer binding. Newcastle, Cardwell and Herbert had all gone their separate ways; it was Aberdeen, wrote Graham, who kept the link between them but then only as a common friend, "more as a bystander than as a confederate".<sup>2</sup> As for himself, Graham declared that he had no political objectives left; he wished to detach himself from worldly affairs and prepare himself for death and judgement. The result, he told Gladstone, "is that you stand alone".<sup>3</sup> It was Graham's opinion that Gladstone ought to accept the Board of Control under Derby; the office would provide the "ladder" by which he would once again be able to render great service to the State. Gladstone's "honest liberal tendencies" would elevate the quality of Derby's Government even though "it might not avert the early overthrow of this administration". Regarding the crucial

1. Diaries, v, pp.299-300

2. Graham to W.E.G. 25th May '58, Autobiographica, iii, p.225

3. Ibid.

question of the leadership in the Commons Graham felt that the march of events had now made it possible for Gladstone without compromising his honour to accept Disraeli as leader; in any case Gladstone "would soon virtually supersede him".<sup>1</sup>

It had been Graham's hope that the disbanded Peelites would enroll under Russell's Liberal banner but as early as March 1858 it was clear that Graham had given up any hope of Gladstone's making such a transition.<sup>2</sup> His advice to Gladstone to join Derby's Cabinet was not so much encouragement as acceptance of the inevitable. He hinted at this at the end of the letter when he wrote: "I should rejoice to see your honest virtue and your great abilities actively employed in the public service, not wasted in fruitless controversy".<sup>3</sup> In a second letter Graham reminded Gladstone, lest he had any lingering doubts, that "the reconstruction of the fossil remains of the old Peel party is a hopeless task".<sup>4</sup> To Aberdeen Graham wrote that he judged Gladstone to be genuinely desirous of taking office but to be held back by his inability "to carry with him Herbert and his most intimate friends".<sup>5</sup>

It was at this juncture that there occurred the well-known exchange of letters between Disraeli and Gladstone, the first and only time when they wrote to each on a personal as opposed to an official basis.<sup>6</sup>

1. Ibid., pp.225-6
2. Graham to Russell, 2nd Mar.'58, in Graham,ii.pp. 339-40
3. Graham to W.E.G. 25th May '58, Autobiographica,iii,pp.227
4. Graham to W.E.G. 27th May '58, in Graham,ii,p.352.
5. 28th May '58, ibid., p. 353. Two years earlier Graham had complained to Aberdeen of Gladstone: "He writes and says and does too much". Dec. '56, in Morley, i.p.433
6. Add. Ms. 44389 fos. 225-35. The letters appear in a number of works, e.g., Morley, i.pp. 437-39; M. & B. iv,pp. 157-9; Magnus,pp.133 -34.

Disraeli wrote that the public interest demanded that Gladstone should again assume a major position in the national life. Accepting that there had been a strained relationship in the past, Disraeli outlined his own actions since 1850 and asked Gladstone to believe that he had always been willing to make sacrifices for the public good "which I have ever thought identical with your accepting office in a conservative government".<sup>1</sup> He begged Gladstone to be "magnanimous" and quoted precedents from the recent past of men of superior political gifts being prepared to work in government with their inferiors.

If you join Lord Derby's cabinet, you will meet there some warm personal friends; all its members are your admirers. You may place me in neither category, but in that, I assure you, you have ever been sadly mistaken. 2

Polite though Gladstone's reply was it did not stop short of being dismissive; he was grateful for Disraeli's letter since it enabled him to disabuse his correspondent of certain fallacies. Whatever their relations may have been, he had never, he told Disraeli, "taken a decision which turned upon those relations".<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the difficulties confronting him in his decision were greater than Disraeli could have supposed. "Were I at this time to join any government I could not do it in virtue of party connections ... I find the limits of choice in public life to be very narrow."<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult at this stage removed to believe that Disraeli was entirely serious in his approach. Derby appears not to have been consulted beforehand and when informed of what had happened he expressed amusement at Disraeli's attempt to bring into the Government, "a half-regained Eurydice".<sup>5</sup> The matter is, however, of some moment for

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1. Disraeli to W.E.G. 25th May '58, Add. Ms. 44389 f. 228-29

2. Ibid., f. 230

3. W.E.G. to Disraeli, 25th May, ibid., fos. 233-4

4. Ibid., f. 235

5. Magnus, p. 134.



it raises again the question of how vital Gladstone's attitude towards particular persons was in shaping his decisions. Blake judges his mind to have been finely balanced between the two parties in May 1858.

He regards antipathy to Disraeli as the dominant influence in his decision; indeed, he considers that Gladstone was "half consciously searching for an issue which could justify a separation from Disraeli", particularly since Disraeli, only six years' Gladstone's senior, was likely to remain a rival for the foreseeable future whereas Palmerston, no matter how morally repugnant he might be, could scarcely last much longer in active politics. "The truth was that he [Gladstone] could never have co-operated with Disraeli."<sup>1</sup> The implication is that Gladstone, sincere in his dislike of both Palmerston and Disraeli, had, nonetheless, a choice as to which particular dislike he would play upon to further his own political ends. Matthew dilating on the balance between principles and individuals as determinants of Gladstone's attitude cites contemporary opinion to the effect that Gladstone could never contemplate union with Disraeli since this would involve an abandonment of principle.<sup>2</sup>

What this overlooks is that by 1858 Gladstone's criticism of Palmerston had been so bitter and so frequent that there was no doubting his detestation of the man. His censures of Palmerston in his correspondence, in his published articles and in his Commons' speeches were as powerful as anything he had ever uttered against Disraeli. Logic argued that if he could not serve with Disraeli then neither could he with Palmerston; yet within twelve months he was to accept the Exchequer office in Palmerston's Government. How confusing and contradictory his friends, let alone his opponents, found such behaviour

1. R.Blake, Disraeli, pp.384-85

2. Matthew quotes from correspondence between W.E.G. and Heathcote in 1856 and between W.E.G. and his brother Robertson in 1855. Diaries, v, Introduction, pp.xxvii-viii.

is well illustrated in the following passages.

While the question of Gladstone's joining the Derby Government was still in the balance Herbert wrote,

I am amazed at a man of Gladstone's high moral sense of feeling being able to bear with Dizzy. I can only account for it on the supposition, which I suppose to be the true one, that personal dislike and distrust of Palmerston is the one absorbing feeling with him. 1

On the occasion of Gladstone's becoming a member of Palmerston's Cabinet in June 1859 his niece wrote in her diary:

Uncle William has taken office under Lord Palmerston as Chancellor of the Exchequer, thereby raising an uproar in the midst of which we are simmering, view his well-known antipathy to the Premier. What seems clear is that he considers it right to swallow personal feelings for the sake of the country .... There is this question, however - why, if he can swallow Pam couldn't he swallow Dizzy, and, in spite of him, go in under Lord Derby? I don't pretend to be able to answer this. 2

In giving his formal reply to Derby on 26th May, 1858,<sup>3</sup> Gladstone told the premier that the advice offered by both Aberdeen and Graham had been "indecisive" and that he must, therefore, adhere to the initial answer he had made to Walpole; namely, that his joining the Government would serve no "public advantage" and would bring no "material accession" to Derby's strength.<sup>4</sup>

The reference to the indecisive nature of Aberdeen's and Graham's counsels had, as even Morley had to admit, little real bearing on Gladstone's decision to reject Derby's offer;<sup>5</sup> his mind was already made up. In any case Graham's advice, while qualified, was hardly indecisive his suggestion that Gladstone should join Derby was unambiguous.

1. Herbert to Aberdeen, May '58, in Morley, i. p. 433
2. Diary of Lucy Lyttleton, 21st June '59, in Magnus, pp. 139-40
3. The previous day Derby had written directly to W.E.G. asking for a speedy reply. Derby to W.E.G. 26th May '58, Add. Ms. 44140 f. 242.
4. W.E.G. to Derby, 26th May '58, Add. Ms. 44140 fos 245-46. When shown this letter the Queen expressed irritation at Gladstone's refusal. Derby to Disraeli, 27th May '58, M. & B. iv, p. 161
5. Morley, i, p. 439.

You are painfully alive to the inconvenience and evils of your present position. You say that you are at the bottom of a well, waiting for a ladder to be put down to you. Derby tenders this ladder. 1

Far more likely to have influenced Gladstone was the consideration, voiced by Graham, that the Government would be but short-lived.

Gladstone's own doubts as to the longevity of Derby's Government came through strongly in the article he wrote later that year.<sup>2</sup>

Reviewing the parliamentary session he selected two major developments, the fall of Palmerston and "the generally successful administration of public affairs by a Government which is ... politically opposed to the large majority of the House of Commons".<sup>3</sup> The two happenings were connected but Gladstone expressed surprise that the new Government had lasted so long.<sup>4</sup> Seeking to explain how, contrary to his own and general expectation, the Government had managed to survive the session Gladstone presented an insight into his own political thinking at this stage. He rejected the "dicta" emanating from certain political quarters that the Government still stood because it had merely continued the policies of the previous administration or because it had bought its continuance by concessions to Bright and the radicals. Derby's Government he declared not guilty of plagiarism; its India Bill was essentially different to the one introduced under Palmerston; in its finance and in its foreign policy it owed nothing to the previous Administration.<sup>5</sup> On the two matters on which it was accused of

1. Graham to W.E.G., 25th May '58, Autobiographica, iii, p.226
2. "The Past and Present Administration", Q.R., Oct. 1858.
3. Ibid., p. 515. Again in this article Gladstone expressed great bitterness against Palmerston, likening him to an oriental despot. ibid., pp.516.520.
4. Ibid., p.516
5. Ibid., pp.518-19. W.E.G. used his influence both in and out of Parliament to lessen attacks on the new Government's Indian policy; e.g., 11th, 14th, 20th May '58, Diaries, v, pp.296-99; H.cl., 686, 1001. He himself was, however, unhappy with Derby's Bill to transfer the government of India from the East India Co. to Westminster; W.E.G. to C.G. 27th Mar.'58, Bassett, p.122. In June he tried, unavailingly, to amend the India Bill in order to enable the directors of the Co. to maintain some form of control; H.cl. 1633 Diaries, 7th June '58. v.p. 303

complicity with the radicals, the abolition of the property qualification for M.P.'s and the removal of Jewish disabilities, Gladstone found that neither of these subjects had ever been of particular interest to "Mr. Bright and the politicians of his school". That Bright had denounced Palmerston's Administration as "the very worst ... that has been known in our day" had doubtless made him look with "comparative favour" on the succeeding Government but that was not a proof that Derby had become a prisoner of "the knot of politicians commonly called the Manchester School".<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Gladstone argued, political parties were not bound at every individual point to differ from their opponents.

On the contrary, there are a multitude of subjects upon which men will take their parts according to the bias of individual character, much more than according as they are divided into Tories, Whigs, and Radicals. 2

Gladstone then launched into a bitter attack upon Palmerston as a leader both in war time and peace time. Of domestic affairs Palmerston was "ignorant, in a degree hardly to be credited"; hence the woeful legislative and executive record of the previous Government.<sup>3</sup> Nor did Gladstone find any compensating achievements in foreign affairs. Despite Palmerston's much vaunted expertise in this area he had served Britain badly; a serious quarrel with America, unnecessary embroilment in Naples, humiliation at the hands of France, war with Persia, conflict in China: such was the legacy of the Palmerston Ministry.<sup>4</sup> In a passage rendered even more remarkable by the fact that the writer was less than nine months later to become Chancellor under the very man he now denounced Gladstone pronounced this verdict on "the ill-omened name of Lord Palmerston":

1. Q.R., Oct.'58, pp.519-20

2. Ibid., p.521

3. Ibid., p.522. W.E.G. selected the Roebuck Motion of 1855, the Divorce Bill of 1857, and the Ecclesiastical Courts modifications as the outstanding examples of the irresponsibility and ineptitude of the Palmerston Administration. ibid., pp.529-40

4. Ibid., pp. 523-27

Come what may, Lord Palmerston shall not again be minister ...  
 The proscription is no personal prescription .... It is the  
 proscription not of a person, but of a system of misgovernment at  
 home and abroad ... a system which at home was favourable neither  
 to permanence nor to progress, and which abroad united the dangers  
 of violence with those of poltroonery. 1

Small wonder then, Gladstone added, that many Liberals should  
 have acquiesced in Derby's coming to power; men of conscience and  
 judgement could not but repudiate his predecessor.<sup>2</sup>

This line of thought led Gladstone to attempt "a larger view"  
 of political developments since the Reform Bill.<sup>3</sup> His analysis showed  
 how essentially conservative he still was in late 1858. He believed  
 that the dangers attending the Reform Bill crisis had been neutralised  
 by "a strong conservative reaction in the body of the people" which had  
 still allowed the legislative and administrative processes to progress.  
 However, in two specific areas of controversy, Free Trade and religious  
 disabilities,

We incline to the belief that it [Reform] rather contributed to  
 aggravate those difficulties by the more definite representation  
 of class, by the greater direct weight of popular opinion and by the  
 suppression of intermediate, tempering, and independent elements. 4

Nonetheless, "the high condition of party organisation down to  
 the crisis of 1846 worked eminently well for the nation"; Government  
 and Opposition had worked responsibly for the national interest.  
 In regard to finance:

the result of the twenty years preceding the Russian war was  
 very remarkable. The population and wealth of the country had  
 increased largely: but the national debt was reduced, and the  
 expenditure remained on the whole nearly stationary. 5

1. Ibid., p. 528

2. Ibid., p. 540

3. Ibid., p. 546

4. Ibid., pp. 547-8

5. Ibid., p. 548

But then came the Crimean War and the irresponsible leadership of Palmerston to destroy all that. The customary element of moral fervour coloured Gladstone's denunciation of Palmerston's financial mismanagement. He described finance as "the stomach of the country, from which all other organs take their tone".<sup>1</sup>

The record in foreign affairs was similarly disappointing, Gladstone found. Down to 1848 the general pattern had been one of increasing freedom but the democratic convulsions of that year had resulted in every nation touched by revolution undergoing a loss of real liberty.<sup>2</sup>

Implicit in such observations, it may be noted, is Gladstone's view, progressive Tory rather than Liberal, that civil and national disorder could be avoided only by timely reform. In this context his comments on India, still in the throes of the Mutiny, are of special interest. Gladstone saw a direct connection between "Finance and India".

England ... so governs India, that its average annual expenditure exceeds its average annual revenue. It follows that she creates for India ... a National debt ...  
A war unsought and undersired is now upon us.  
... One of the consequences of its continuance for any considerable time would of course be, that the overladen credit of India would refuse to carry any further increase to its burden, and that, even while we might continue to call ourselves masters of India we should have to become in one paramount particular its slaves, by undertaking to defend it at the charge of the British people. <sup>3</sup>

Gladstone felt that what was ~~happening~~ happening in the sub-continent should act as a warning to Britain; if she did not modify her attitude worse consequences would follow:

We must learn the lesson, not only that India is to be governed as far as possible for India; but likewise, that it is to be governed as far as possible by India. <sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid. p.551. Matthew touches on this aspect in his article "Disraeli, Gladstone and the Politics of Mid-Victorian Budgets", H.J., 22, 1979
  2. Q.R., Oct. '58, pp.548-51 p.541
  3. Ibid., p.552
  4. Ibid., p.553

Returning to the domestic front, Gladstone regretted that public men from all parties had entangled themselves anew in Parliamentary Reform. Doubtless the electoral laws needed improvement but he did not believe this could be achieved without two essential pre-conditions, common agreement on what was currently at fault allied to a clear conception of what form the remedies should take. Given their absence he did not envy the men who would have to undertake the task of implementing Reform. He considered, however, that with time and wisdom England, as with all her current domestic difficulties, would find an answer.<sup>1</sup>

Such confidence he did not feel in relation to the last problem to which he turned, that of Turkey. Palmerston's policy towards the Ottoman question had been a "diplomatic chimera" based on the totally false premise that Turkey was capable of governing her territories. The only realistic policy was for Turkey to de-centralise but Palmerston had gone along with Austria in encouraging the Porte to think that it could exercise real power from Constantinople over its subject provinces. The promotion of such an idea ideally suited Vienna since "Absolute government does not like free institutions at its doors".<sup>2</sup> But, claimed Gladstone, to clear-sighted observers

there is a hopeless contradiction between the interests of Europe in the Turkish question, and the particular interests of Austria with regard to her methods of domestic and Italian government. <sup>3</sup>

Gladstone did not dispute that the shadow of Russia hung menacingly over Turkey but in a sentence that anticipates his Bulgarian atrocities crusade a generation later he sought to apportion the real blame for this. Under Palmerston's direction,

1. Ibid., p. 554

2. Ibid., p. 556

3. Ibid.

England ... has been the really powerful and effective foe, in recent diplomacy, of provincial freedom and of Christian progress in the Turkish Empire: and, incredible as it may seem, she has, by doing the work of Russia, given to that Power the double advantage, first of gaining the affections of the Christians of Turkey by supporting the union of the Principalities; and secondly, of having the ground made ready, through their discontent ... when the time comes to enter and to occupy. <sup>1</sup>

Gladstone's hope was that the new Government by departing from this policy would earn "the gratitude of the country and of Europe". But time was short and all the portents suggested the imminence of a volcanic upheaval in the Turkish Empire. <sup>2</sup> When that crisis came he trusted that England's restored credit and character under Derby's leadership would enable her to lead events to a favourable issue. <sup>3</sup> Much hung, Gladstone judged, on the conduct of Palmerston. Despite his diminished prestige Palmerston remained the undisputed leader of the Opposition and, therefore, still "at least negatively" a force with which to reckon. As long as this situation obtained Derby's tenure of office could not be wholly secure. <sup>4</sup>

Gladstone ended the 1858 session as he had begun it, a prominent but unattached member of the House. There was nothing in his article of October to indicate a rapprochement with the Liberals and much to suggest that his natural political home was with the Conservatives. This understanding seemed to underlie the offer made to him in the autumn of 1858 of the role of Lord High Commissioner Extraordinary to the Ionian Islands. <sup>5</sup> The approach to Gladstone originated with

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1. Ibid., pp. 559-60
  2. Ibid., p. 560. In this context it is interesting that in the Commons W.E.G. had supported the planned construction of the Suez Canal, arguing that it would not lead to the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire. 1st June '58, H. cl, 1388
  3. Q.R., Oct. '58, p. 546
  4. Ibid.
  5. Diaries, v, pp. 328-29 The Islands, a British protectorate since 1815, had seen the development of a strong nationalist movement demanding union with Greece.



Lord Carnarvon, under-secretary at the Colonial Office,<sup>1</sup> and was taken up by Bulwer-Lytton in the belief, as he told Disraeli, that it would prove a great coup for the Conservative Party if Gladstone could be persuaded to undertake this special mission on the Government's behalf.<sup>2</sup> Disraeli agreed<sup>3</sup> and accordingly Bulwer Lytton put the suggestion to Gladstone who showed immediate interest.<sup>4</sup> Before finally accepting he consulted Aberdeen, Herbert and Graham, none of whom expressed enthusiasm.<sup>5</sup> Graham thought it was beneath Gladstone's dignity while Aberdeen and Herbert suggested that if Gladstone wished to draw closer to the Tories he would serve his own interests better by choosing to do so on an issue more relevant to English politics.<sup>6</sup>

These answers were clearly not the ones for which Gladstone had been looking. His correspondence with Newcastle indicates that he had already made up his mind and that what he wanted from his colleagues was confirmation of the correctness of his decision.<sup>7</sup> Newcastle, whose first-hand experience of the Islands as a former Colonial Secretary Gladstone relied upon, was no more than lukewarm but on balance he

1. See H.E. Carlisle, A Selection from the Correspondence of Abraham Hayward, London, 1886, ii, p. 14. ff. A letter of Robert Phillimore's, 2nd Nov. '58 (in Morley, i. p. 442) indicates that the invitation to Gladstone had been discussed at the Colonial Office as far back as the summer of 1858.
2. Lytton promised Disraeli that he would frame the invitation in such a way "as to please and propitiate" Gladstone. 23 Sept. '58, M. & B., ix, p. 162
3. Disraeli to Stanley, 24th Oct. '58, ibid.
4. "To reconcile a race that speaks the Greek language to the science of practical liberty seemed to me a task that might be a noble episode in your career" Lytton to W.E.G. 1st Oct. '58, Add. Ms. 44241 f. 1. W.E.G. to Lytton, 3rd & 7th Oct. '58. ibid., fos. 3-6
5. Diaries, (7th - 28th Oct. '58) v. pp. 329-33. W.E.G. to Aberdeen, 7th, 11th, 19th Oct. '58, Add. Ms. 44089, fos. 189-94; W.E.G. to Herbert. 19th 27th Oct. '58. Add. Ms. 44211, fos. 23-26. W.E.G. to Graham, 20th Oct. '58, Add. Ms. 44164, f. 97.
6. Aberdeen to W.E.G. 8th Oct. '58, Add. Ms. 44089, f. 195; Herbert to W.E.G. 21st Oct. '58, Add. Ms. 44211, f. 28. Graham to W.E.G. 22nd Oct. '58, Add. Ms. 44164, f. 98.
7. "Made up my mind to go, if there be no personal obstacle ex parte". 27th Oct. '58. Diaries, v. p. 333. Lytton had already informed Disraeli, "All is settled", 30th Oct. '58, M. & B. iv, p. 162.

favoured Gladstone's acceptance. His main fear was that Gladstone might find the task an impediment to his Westminster career.<sup>1</sup>

As Gladstone conceived of it the mission was to be a purely temporary affair, to be completed before the beginning of the next parliamentary session; he remained blind to the political significance that Lytton and Disraeli espied:

I see no political objection to accepting; for it is quite understood that this affair has no connection with politics. I am anxious to accept on one ground namely that having declined many things on the plea of public duty I do not want to decline on any other plea. 2

After further correspondence and discussion with Lytton and other interested parties Gladstone announced his acceptance.<sup>3</sup> He left England on 8th November and was away for exactly ~~four~~ months, returning to London on 8th March, 1859.<sup>4</sup> During his absence he kept Newcastle informed as to the progress of his mission while relying upon him as his chief informant regarding parliamentary affairs at home.<sup>5</sup> It was Newcastle who warned him of the misconstruction that would be placed upon his being away from England:

the world has already decided that you wish to keep clear of any compromise of your opinions at the opening of the Session upon Reform and other subjects and any apparent confirmation of this uncandid attribution of motives would at the present conjuncture be very prejudicial to you. 6

Newcastle believed that Gladstone had been deliberately misled by Lytton and the Government in regard to the difficulty of Ionian politics and that in the matter of the Young Dispatch he had not been made privy to essential information. Newcastle hinted strongly that Gladstone unwittingly had become the scapegoat for the Government's mistakes.<sup>7</sup>

1. Newcastle to W.E.G. 24th, 25th, Oct. 3rd, Nov. '58, Add. Ms. 44263, fos. 38-50.

2. W.E.G. to Newcastle, 23rd Oct. '58, ibid., f. 36

3. Diaries, v. pp. 331-33; W.E.G. to Lytton, 27th Oct. '58, Add. Ms. 44241, f. 9.

4. Diaries, v. pp. 337, 378

5. Add. Ms. 44263, fos. 50-86.

6. Newcastle to W.E.G. 11th Dec. '58, ibid., f. 70

7. 20th Nov. '58, ibid., fos. 54-59. Gladstone's mission was seriously compromised by the publication of a secret dispatch by Sir George Young, the permanent High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands, recommending the annexation by Britain of Corfu and the return of the other islands to Greece. See Morley, i. c. x; Magnus, pp. 135-36

Gladstone did not challenge his correspondent's judgement but felt it his duty to persevere, even to the extent of assuming the full office of Lord High Commissioner.<sup>1</sup> This Newcastle described as "an act of self-immolation";<sup>2</sup> he regretted having given his encouragement to Gladstone to accept the mission in the first place. He warned that Gladstone's assumption of the office of Commissioner would necessitate his having to seek re-election at Oxford.<sup>3</sup> In this Newcastle was correct for Gladstone soon learned officially that his seat was forfeit;<sup>4</sup> however, after a series of complex legal moves he was returned unopposed early in February 1859.<sup>5</sup> Such goings-on were greatly to the annoyance of Gladstone's ex-Peelite colleagues. Graham and Herbert complained that having undertaken the Ionian commitment against their advice he had then failed to keep them informed of its progress. Their grievance, like Newcastle's, was that Gladstone would be better employed at home attending to the question of Reform which Bright was again beginning to press.<sup>6</sup>

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1. W.E.G. to Newcastle, 12th & 29th Dec.'58, Add. Ms. 44263, fos.73-5.
  2. Newcastle to W.E.G. 22nd Jan.'59, ibid., f. 79
  3. Ibid., f. 80
  4. 18th Jan.'59, Diaries, v.p.363
  5. W.E.G. took the position of Lord High Commissioner on 25th Jan. and resigned it on 1st Feb; this latter move entitled him to stand for Oxford again and he was re-elected on 12th Feb. ibid., v.pp. 365-60, 369. Robert Phillimore, his legal adviser at Oxford, protected Gladstone's interests at this juncture. W.E.G. to Phillimore 24th Jan. 15th Feb.'59, Add. Ms. 44277, fos.105-14. Cf, Ward, p.224
  6. Graham to Russell, 4th Jan.'59, Graham, ii.p.364; Graham to Herbert, 17th Jan.'59, Herbert to Graham, 19th Jan, Stanmore, ii, pp.166-68. It was Russell's opinion that Gladstone was deliberately staying out of England as long as he could to avoid having to face the Reform issue. See Morley, i.p.456.

Gladstone declared that sheer pressure of work had made it impossible for him to keep abreast of things in England and he was especially grateful to Newcastle for giving him details of Bright's new Reform proposals.<sup>1</sup> He certainly appeared oblivious to the public reaction, a mixture of hostility and ridicule, which his mission aroused in England:<sup>2</sup>

my time & thoughts are as closely occupied & absorbed in the affairs of these little Islands as they have been at almost any period in Parliamentary business. 3

There is much about Gladstone's three months in Ionia that is hard to take seriously; Magnus observes that there was "a touch of comic opera" about the whole affair<sup>4</sup> and Matthew doubts that it has any real significance in regard to Gladstone's place in English politics.<sup>5</sup> This is not to deny that Gladstone himself took it all seriously. He threw himself into the task with super-abundant energy, as his voluminous official report to the cabinet indicated.<sup>6</sup> He had, moreover, at a critical point in his career, been faced in a direct and practical way with issues of nationalism and liberty, the issues which were to dominate the second half of his public life.

1. Newcastle to W.E.G., 22nd Jan. '59; W.E.G. to Newcastle, 1st Feb. '59. Add. Ms. 44263, fos. 77-86. Earlier W.E.G. had told Newcastle that he would not have time to communicate with the other Peelites, 19th Nov. '59, ibid. f. 52
2. The Times was especially acerbic, asserting in one editorial (13th Jan. 1959) that Gladstone's naivety had led to his being fooled by Disraeli and the Conservatives into undertaking a wholly pointless task. This tallied with Newcastle's warning, although Newcastle had been careful to absolve Derby from any suggestion of complicity; Newcastle to W.E.G. 20th Nov. '58, Add. Ms. 44263, f. 57
3. 31st Dec. '58, Diaries, v, p. 359
4. Magnus, p. 135. Even Morley had to admit that the mission was "a mistake", Morley, i, p. 459.
5. Introduction, Diaries, v, p. xxvii
6. Reproduced in part in ibid., pp. 351-58

## CHAPTER X

Early in March 1859 Gladstone returned to an English Parliament dominated by two issues, Reform and Italy. With the aim of forestalling Bright and the radicals Disraeli had introduced in late February the Government's own mild measure of parliamentary reform. As the protracted discussions in Cabinet had indicated the Bill was framed out of expediency not conviction and many Conservatives were unhappy with it.<sup>1</sup> In his articles published during the previous two years Gladstone had made it clear that he regarded the question of Reform as inopportune and as noted earlier there had been suggestions that he had fled to Ionia to escape the issue. His reading of Bagehot's, Parliamentary Reform, and Mill's On Liberty, immediately on his return to England does not appear to have altered his decision to seek as swift and smooth an end to the Reform controversy as possible.<sup>2</sup> His initial response when he returned to the Commons was to give the Government his tacit support although in his journal he confessed himself "puzzled" by Disraeli's Bill now in its second reading.<sup>3</sup> He attended the sessions

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1. See M&B.iv,pp.178-231; Disraeli,pp.395-401. The details of the proposed extension of the franchise were relatively unimportant. There was an unreal air about the 1859 Reform debate. In Buckle's words: "the interest it excited was due almost wholly to its effect on party fortunes, and extremely little to the question nominally at issue ... Reform was merely a Parliamentary, and not a popular, question". M.&B.,iv.p.205.This was very much Greville's contemporary view of it.He reckoned that of all the leading figures involved in the issue Bright was the only one with an honest and genuine interest in parliamentary reform. Memoirs,vii.pp.403-4
  2. 8th,10th Mar.'59,Diaries,v.p.378.The two works were both published in Feb.1859. Mill's, Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform,W.E.G. read on 22nd Mar., ibid.v.p.381
  3. 21st & 24th Mar.'59,Diaries,v,pp.381-2.Disraeli's Bill had two main features; a lowering of the county franchise to £10 and the retention of the existing limited borough voting rights except for what became known, in Bright's phrase, as "the fancy franchises" It may have been these latter that perplexed W.E.G.

but did not contribute to the debates until the introduction of Russell's amendment obliged him to declare himself.<sup>1</sup>

Russell in collusion with Palmerston and others who considered the time ripe for a renewal of some form of Whig-Liberal alliance<sup>2</sup> attacked the Government's Bill in a resolution subtly couched as to win support both from those who thought the Bill went too far and those who thought it did not go far enough. Russell's essential argument was that it was unjust to interfere with the county freehold franchise and that no measure of reform was acceptable which did not provide for an extension of borough suffrage.<sup>3</sup>

In his speech Gladstone began by regretting that Reform was being treated as a party issue; he could see no real point of principle dividing Government from Opposition. If the House's acceptance of Russell's resolution could guarantee the creation of a stronger Government in place of the present one he would have voted for it but he saw no likelihood of this; the opposition forces would be even more divided after victory.<sup>4</sup> Noting that in every session since 1851 there had been unavailing attempts to promote Reform Gladstone urged that it was high time the matter was settled. The Government's present bill was a means of ending nearly a decade of controversy. On the particulars of Russell's amendment he declared that he would not be party to the concept of a uniform franchise. He was against the disfranchisement of the county freeholders in the boroughs and argued that unless there could be a lowering of borough suffrage it would be better not to waste time

1. Russell's amendment was introduced on 21st Mar.'59., H.cliii, 389. W.E.G. spoke against it on 29th Mar.'59, Diaries, v, p. 383
2. Greville Memoirs, Mar.'58. pp. 401, 405
3. H. cliii, 389-405
4. H.cliii, 1045. Disraeli held precisely the same view regarding the factious nature of the opposition. Disraeli to Derby, 3rd. April.'59, M & B. iv, pp. 212-3

considering the matter. He was not averse to some redistribution of seats but put in a strong plea for the preservation of small boroughs as the traditional breeding ground of English statesmen. In voting he would be governed by one simple consideration - what would tend most to the settlement of the issue. He declared that in opposing Russell's resolution he was voting for neither Government nor party but for peace.<sup>1</sup>

Gladstone's guarded support for the Government merely put him on the losing side: in the division the amendment was carried by thirty-nine votes.<sup>2</sup> Declining to interpret this as a verdict of no-confidence, Derby chose to dissolve parliament rather than resign and a general election was called.<sup>3</sup> This led to a significant shift in the political balance for although the Conservatives increased their representation by twenty-four they were still some fifty short of the Liberals.<sup>4</sup> Up to now Derby had governed on sufferance, tolerated rather than supported, largely because of Liberal dissatisfaction with Palmerston; by calling an election Derby had, in effect, asked that henceforward his Government should be judged on its own merits. This was the nub of Gladstone's complaint that Derby's recourse to dissolution rather than resignation was constitutionally improper and politically dangerous in that it gave a ground for the re-gathering of the otherwise disparate opposition forces. He observed that Derby's decision to dissolve had created

1. H . cliii, 1054-67
2. 31st Mar.'59, Diaries, v.p.384; H.cliii, 1257
3. 4th April '59, H.cliii, 1266
4. Parliament was dissolved on 22nd April.'59 and the main election results were known by 30th April, Diaries, v,p.390. The final figures were published in The Times on 21st May. W.E.G. was returned unopposed for Oxford although he did make preliminary moves lest their should be a challenge. W.E.G. to Stafford Northcote 7th April '59, Add. Ms.44217, f. 23.

"Universal dissatisfaction" among all but the Radicals and he anticipated that if the Government hoped to survive it would have to begin bargaining in order to broaden the basis of its support.<sup>1</sup>

Gladstone could hardly have been unaware that he would figure prominently in such bargaining. If, as he judged, there was to be a realignment in English politics his unattached position made his eligibility more pronounced. The burden of all his formal writings had been that the true dignity and efficiency of government and parliament could be restored only by a return to a system of clearly defined parties; that opportunity seemed now to be presenting itself. It was reasonable of the Conservative leaders to expect that in these circumstances Gladstone would want to commit himself to a party and that it should be theirs. He had accepted the Ionian commission, he had supported their Reform bill, and he had made no attempt to hide his distaste for Palmerston. True, he had rejected Derby's previous invitations but not in such a manner as to suggest his attitude was immutable. At no time did Gladstone ever show any hint of that animosity towards Derby that so often coloured his view of Palmerston, Russell and Disraeli. He always spoke highly of him and in a recent character sketch had applauded his integrity and political gifts;<sup>2</sup> all of which made his series of rejections of his offers even more illogical.

Just how flexible the political situation was, at least in Disraeli's eyes, was indicated by his approach to Palmerston offering him the leadership of the Conservative party should Derby decide to step down.<sup>3</sup> Behind this offer lay Disraeli's fear that the recent combination of Russell and Palmerston over Reform might be the prelude to a firm Whig-

1. 4th April '59, Diaries, v.p. 384. W.E.G. to T.D. Acland, 7th April. '59.  
Add. Ms. 44092, f. 211

2. 1857, Add. Ms. 44747, fos. 82-86

3. Derby, according to Disraeli, retained his position solely from a sense of duty. Disraeli to Palmerston, 3rd May '59, M.&B. iv, pp. 235-6



-Liberal alliance. Palmerston's dismissal of the offer as an impossibility does suggest that Disraeli had overestimated the freedom of manoeuvre open to individuals. Not all men shared his sense of <sup>the</sup> possible. Undeterred, Disraeli continued with his plans for enlisting groups and individuals in the service of the Government in the new session. He encouraged his chief to make yet another attempt to woo Gladstone, suggesting that he be offered the India Office, "the only post which would absorb his superfluous energies". He gave precise instructions as to how Derby should go about it:

When Gladstone was reconnoitred two months ago, it resulted that no personal feeling any longer existed which prevented him joining the Administration; that he could not act alone; and thirdly, that he wished all invitations should be direct from yourself. This latter point was also much insisted upon by Mr. Gladstone in private conversation with Sir Stafford Northcote, You would, of course, be careful that this direct communication, if you decide upon it, should not take place by letter; you would send for him, confer on the state of public affairs, and ask him really what he wanted. 2

Derby duly made overtures but was met by the firmest rejection yet;

Gladstone wrote:

It is fair I should say that I am not an approver of the dissolution, and that I am not able to flatter myself that in the present position of affairs I can make any useful suggestion.<sup>3</sup>

What neither Disraeli nor Derby was able to appreciate at this stage was that for all his insistence that his political decisions would be based on "measures not men" Gladstone, as so often before, was judging office in terms of the men with whom he would have to work as much as by reference to policies. He was much given, as his articles of the 'fifties showed, to analysing current politics but there was no

1. Palmerston to Disraeli, 3rd May '59, ibid., p.237
2. Disraeli to Derby, 8th May '59, ibid., p.240-41. There is no evidence in the Diaries that Derby made the recommended personal approach to Gladstone. Their contact appears to have been by letter only.
3. W.E.F. to Derby, May '59, M. & B., iv, p.241

guarantee that his own political acts would be correlative with that analysis. For contemporaries judgements as to how he would behave and with whom he would eventually side were matters of guesswork.

At this point the issue of foreign policy supervened to add to the complexity. April, 1859, witnessed a critical development of the Italian question with the outbreak of Franco-Piedmontese hostilities against Austria. The support Gladstone had given to the Government over Reform was unlikely to extend now to foreign affairs. Ever since his Letters to Lord Aberdeen in the early 'fifties his ardent belief in the Italian cause had been widely celebrated. On his return journey from Ionia he had met and conversed in confidence with Cavour and the leading figures in the Risorgimento.<sup>1</sup> During his few weeks back in England he had devoted great energies to promoting the cause of the recently arrived Neapolitan exiles.<sup>2</sup> It was, therefore, hardly to be expected that Gladstone would continue to acquiesce in the conduct of foreign policy remaining in the hands of a Government generally acknowledged as decidedly pro-Austrian.<sup>3</sup> At the editor's bidding he rushed into print in the Quarterly with an essay on "The War in Italy", a work "done in haste" during the early days of April just before the war broke out.<sup>4</sup> Although Gladstone aimed at a measured analysis his strictures on Austria and his doubts about Malmesbury as Foreign Secretary angered the journals' Conservative readers. Elwin, the editor, told Gladstone that he had

1. 3rd & 4th Mar. '59, Diaries, v, p. 377.

2. A number of Italian liberals, including Poerio and Settembrini whom W.E.G. had visited in prison in 1850, had recently been released and exiled from Naples. W.E.G. became an organising member of the Neapolitan Exiles Committee set up to assist them when they arrived in England. March & April '59, Diaries, v, pp. 379-84

3. See, Disraeli, p. 407

4. 11th April, '59, Diaries, v, p. 386

been "vehemently" abused by the Austrian lobby for allowing him the freedom of the Quarterly's pages to advance his arguments.<sup>1</sup>

Given the tension of the time with war imminent it was natural that Gladstone's detractors should have put the worst construction on his article but in truth it did achieve a degree of balance that merited greater attention. It lacked, for example, the passionate involvement of his Neapolitan Letters, which he was currently preparing for a reprint.<sup>2</sup> He deeply regretted that the justice of the Italian cause could be established only by recourse to arms and he feared the unforeseeable consequences attaching to all wars of this kind.<sup>3</sup> Having surveyed Italian history since 1815 he asserted:

France has not a rag of title to make war upon Austria in the name of Italy. She is nowhere damaged except in Rome, and there it is by her own criminal act. <sup>4</sup>

His survey was aimed at showing that "the conduct of Austria towards Italy at large has involved a glaring and systematic contempt of liberty"<sup>5</sup> but he was equally concerned to emphasise how great a barrier the temporal power of the Papal States was to the growth of free institutions in Italy.<sup>6</sup> He also stressed the great difficulties facing Austria in effecting a dignified withdrawal from the peninsula.<sup>7</sup>

1. Elwin to W.E.G. 5th May '59, Add. Ms. 44152, f.83. To lessen the impact of the article on Tory susceptibilities Elwin had added an election rallying call on the last page of the journal. Q.R., April '59, p.564
2. 6th April. '59, Diaries, v, p.385
3. "Foreign Affairs - War in Italy", Q.R., April '59, pp.527-29
4. Ibid., p.536
5. Ibid., p.544
6. Ibid., p.557. In June '59 as a member of Palmerston's Government he wrote a memo urging that British policy should have two basic aims " 1. the cessation of the direct dominion of Austria in Italy, and 2. an essential change in the position of the Papedom with reference to its temporal prerogatives ". 30th June '59, Add. Ms. 44748, f.93. Diaries, v, p.405
7. Q.R., p.552

As to the attitude England should adopt towards what now seemed an unavoidable conflict his conviction was that it was not merely prudence but a matter of "the very highest obligation" that she should remain neutral.

The relief of Italy is an honourable end but it must not be sought by unholy means ... The power of Austria is vital to the equilibrium of Europe: but we must not be parties to defending for the sake of that power the acts and maxims by which she has been the means of inflicting ... such woes on mankind. If we cannot assist Louis Napoleon without fear of promoting piracy, so neither can we help Austria without the certainty of becoming tools of Tyranny. Our task should be to keep our moral and material force entire and unimpaired. 1

Gladstone ended his article by regretting that the current domestic crisis had lessened England's ability to speak with an unequivocal voice. The Government's Reform bill had split the Cabinet, Russell's amendment had been "supported and carried by statesmen irreconcilably at variance among themselves as to its purpose"; confusion had been worse confounded by Derby's decision to dissolve rather than stay and fight.<sup>2</sup> Clearly he had come to accept that Reform and Italy were now an interwoven issue in English politics. In a striking passage applying to England as well as Italy Gladstone reasserted his conviction that only by timely concessions could the stability of existing institutions be preserved. It was, he observed, the melancholy truth, that "a blind Conservatism may come to be the most dangerous Radicalism, and that the closets and cabinets of despotic sovereigns are too often the main factories of Revolution".<sup>3</sup>

Gladstone's wish to give as broad as possible a definition of the Italian problem challenges the correctness of one of Greville's observations made at this time:

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1. Ibid., p.563
  2. Ibid., pp.563-4
  3. Ibid., p.538

Gladstone is come back from Italy completely duped by Cavour, who has persuaded him that Piedmont has no ambition or aggressive objects, and that Austria alone is guilty ... He told this to Aberdeen, who treated his delusions and his credulity with the utmost scorn and contempt, but he is said to have found John Russell more credulous, and ready to accept Gladstone's convictions. 1

Greville would, of course, have been relying on hearsay since he had no direct contact with Gladstone.<sup>2</sup> It is also noteworthy that at this particular period Greville held a very jaundiced view of politics, having a good word for scarcely anyone.<sup>3</sup> Even so, what Greville's comment may unwittingly reveal is that in his private conversations Gladstone took a stronger pro-Cavour and anti-Austrian line than he did in his published statements. Greville was not to know, for example, that Gladstone in his long article would make only passing reference to Cavour.<sup>4</sup> The most logical explanation for this toning down was Gladstone's awareness that the forthcoming dissolution and election had put a premium on moderate public utterance. It would also better accord with his expressly didactic aim in the article of enlightening an English public largely uninformed on the Italian question. His purpose in writing was to provide those "broad views" that fair-minded Englishmen traditionally sought when facing domestic or foreign crises.<sup>5</sup>

If balance was what Gladstone aimed for it was not, as Elwin's note on Tory reactions showed, what he achieved. In the circumstances it was inevitable that as the country divided into pro and anti-Austrian camps Gladstone should be seen as belonging firmly to the latter.<sup>6</sup>

1. 24th Mar. '59, Greville Memoirs, vii, p. 408.
2. W.E.G. had frequent meetings with Aberdeen at this time but according to his journal only one with Russell; that at a Royal Academy dinner: "My neighbours were ... Lds Branville, J. Russell, Shelburne. We talked Austria, Italy, & the Ionian Islands". 30th April '59 Diaries. v, p. 390
3. E.g. see Greville Memoirs 15th May '59, vii, p. 404.
4. Q.R., op.cit., pp. 538, 541, 559
5. Ibid., p. 529
6. Blake regards the divisive effect of the Italian war on English opinion as comparable with the Bulgarian atrocities, the Spanish Civil War and Suez. Disraeli, p. 403. See also D.E.D. Beales, England and Italy, London, 1961, passim

His basic antipathy to Disraeli was important here. From the first intimation of the Italian crisis Disraeli had personally involved himself in Government diplomacy, often simply ignoring Malmesbury, the Foreign Secretary.<sup>1</sup> When, therefore, Gladstone came to consider the question on his return to England his judgements were coloured by what he regarded as Disraeli's meddling. He believed that Disraeli had deliberately used the announcement of the dissolution to avoid proper parliamentary discussion of Italy.

The horizon is darkened abroad .... this most blameworthy Dissolution cripples the Agency of England. I never saw Dizzy shuffle more in Parliament than last night. The scene was sickening. 2

Privately he asserted that Disraeli's Commons' statements constituted  
<sup>3</sup>  
 "a lengthening catalogue of his fibs"; in public he took the last opportunity before the prorogation to attack what he regarded as Disraeli's acceptance of the validity of Austrian claims to certain areas of Italy, most notably Trieste.<sup>4</sup>

During the period of prorogation the political bargaining increased in intensity.<sup>5</sup> Disraeli still hoped that by attracting the likes of Palmerston and Gladstone to its ranks the Government would survive as a strengthened force. However, as the results of the election filtered through it became clear that Derby would still not be able to

1. Malmesbury complained to Derby that Disraeli did not even bother to read the F.O. dispatches he received, preferring to gain his knowledge of foreign affairs from the Jews of Paris and London. 7th Jan. '59, in M.&B. iv, p.224
2. W.E.G. to C.G., 9th April '59, Bassett, pp.123-4
3. W.E.G. to Herbert, 12th April '59, Stanmore, ii, p.178.
4. 18th April '59, H. cliii, 1881. Disraeli had argued that "Trieste is not merely an Italian port; it ... belongs to the Germanic Confederation". H. cliii. Derby maintained throughout that the Government had "endeavoured studiously to maintain the strictest impartiality" towards rival claims in Italy, The Times, 26th April '59, reporting Derby's address at the Lord Mayor's Banquet on 25th April, a function which W.E.G. and his wife attended. Diaries, v, p.389
5. Greville Memoirs, vii, pp.417-19. The Diaries bear witness to the increased frequency of W.E.G.'s meetings with the leading political figures; he also attended an unusually high number of social functions with clear political associations, Diaries v, pp.390-99.

command a majority in the new parliament. The obvious question that arose was how long the opposition would tolerate a continuation of the present Administration. Palmerston and Russell were the key figures in this. As Disraeli had feared their co-operation over the Reform resolution presaged a rapprochement and their frequent meetings in May led by the end of the month to a substantial agreement on essentials.<sup>1</sup> All this while Russell had himself taken soundings as to possible allies in the bringing down of the Government and in the formation of a new one. The ex-Peelites he regarded as essential lieutenants. He told Graham that in any new cabinet "unless I can see you and Gladstone and Sidney Herbert in office, I'll none of it".<sup>2</sup> Graham and Herbert acted very much as confidants to Russell at this time relaying information and offering advice on his suggestions. Not unnaturally Gladstone figured frequently in their correspondence but it is interesting that he seems seldom to have taken the initiative in clarifying his own position; the result was that he continued to remain an uncertain, albeit much sought-after, quantity.

The form which the challenge to Derby's Government should take now became crucial for on it would depend the degree of support the opposition could expect to achieve. Palmerston made his position clear to Russell: "he would disapprove any amendment censuring the dissolution, or insisting upon immediate introduction of a Reform Bill, or censuring the conduct of foreign affairs. But he would approve of an amendment ... declaring want of confidence".<sup>3</sup> Russell accepted these tactics as the best means of attacking Derby and, seeking to marshal support for the policy, he asked Herbert to communicate with Gladstone:

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1. Russell to Graham, 23rd May '59, Graham, ii. p. 386; Greville Memoirs, vii, p. 419,
  2. Russell to Graham, 7th May '59, Graham, ii. p. 381
  3. Russell to Graham, 16th May '59, ibid., p. 382-3

I don't know how far Gladstone is willing or averse to a direct motion of want of confidence, but he must see that the foreign policy of the present Government, intended to abet Austria ... is most dangerous to our position ....

For my part, I should like to see Graham, you, Gladstone, and Milner Gibson members of any new Cabinet. 1

Herbert forwarded this letter from the "little man", his designation for Russell, to Gladstone, adding that he deduced from it that Russell contemplated Palmerston as "Prime Minister in the Lords".<sup>2</sup> Herbert took a pessimistic view of things. To Russell he had specified three necessary conditions for the formation of a genuine alliance against the Government; "union among the mass of the Liberal party ... A clear understanding as to Reform ... A certainty that the proposed motion can be carried", but he intimated that he could not see these being achieved.<sup>3</sup>

Gladstone's response was to declare that found the current state of public affairs "extremely embarrassing". Of the two outstanding issues, Italy and Reform, he found the latter the more immediately demanding. His future conduct would be determined by his earnest wish to see the matter settled at the earliest opportunity. As to Russell's specific query he wrote:

I do not know the reasons which may have recommended to the minds of others a vote of want of confidence, but I regard it both individually and generally with scruple. I could not as at present advised, undertake to support it. 4

1. Russell to Herbert, 16th May '59, Stanmore, ii.p.182. Milner Gibson was a Radical colleague of Bright's. In a finely divided House it was felt that Bright with his thirty-five followers would hold the balance; hence the efforts of both sides to attract him. Graham to Russell, 17th May '59, Graham, ii.pp.383-4
2. Herbert to Gladstone, 17th May '59, Stanmore, ii.p.182.
3. Herbert to Russell, 17th May '59, ibid., ii.p.183-4
4. W.E.G. to Herbert, 18th May '59, ibid., ii.pp.184-5



He was not prepared to dismiss the Government "on grounds of political morality" but neither did he feel it his duty to keep them in power. Like many others he had hoped "to see Reform settled by Lord Derby's Government pur et simple" ; he now doubted that this could be done but he was no more certain that a new government could achieve it. For one thing "Disraeli's force<sup>in</sup> opposition will be increased, and he will use it, if a judgement is to be formed from the past, with very little scruple".<sup>1</sup> Disraeli he saw as the eminence grise:

[Gladstone] Thought the only chance of a strong government was an engrafting of Palmerston upon Lord Derby, dethroning Disraeli from the leadership of the House of Commons, arranging for a moderate Reform Bill, placing the foreign office in other hands but not in Disraeli's. 2

Russell relaying to Herbert the progress of his discussions with Palmerston regarding the formation of a future government added the interesting titbit: "Palmerston said he understood from Granville that Gladstone wished his former score to be rubbed out. But, as you say, Oxford University is a drag not easily shaken off".<sup>3</sup> Granville, the Whig peer, then wrote directly to Herbert giving his account of the negotiations between Russell and Palmerston, stating that, "They agreed as to the character and composition of a new Government to be as comprehensive as possible. You, Gladstone, and advanced Liberals".<sup>4</sup> Nobody, it appeared, could conceive of the next government without Gladstone, irritating though his procrastination might be. It was Wood's belief that if Gladstone, who agreed with Palmerston and Russell on essentials, were to commit himself to them in the overthrow of Derby they would make an unstoppable combination.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid.

2. R. Phillimore's journal 18th May '59, in Morley, i.p. 465. Diaries, v.p. 394

3. Russell to Herbert, 21st May '59, Stanmore, ii.p. 187

4. Granville to Herbert, 23rd May '59, ibid., ii.p. 188

5. Wood to Herbert, 24th May '59, ibid., ii.pp. 188-89

Two days earlier Wood had been shocked to learn that Catherine Gladstone contemplated her husband's forming a union with Derby. Wood told her that this was an impossibility. Gladstone had been wrong in leaving Palmerston's Government in 1855; he would be equally wrong not to join him now.<sup>1</sup>

Wood then judged from a direct conversation with him that Gladstone would support an amendment to the Queen's Speech condemning the dissolution but was reluctant to vote for a motion of no-confidence.<sup>2</sup> The conjectures regarding Gladstone's possible behaviour must have reached the ears of Disraeli, still deep in his own haggling, for he was able to give the following advice and information to Derby:

Palmerston and J.R. had agreed on all points of foreign policy; on Reform; and on their Cabinet; but not as to mode of attack .... There is a small section for censure on dissolution, and they urge that Gladstone has promised to vote for that, and also speak. But this proposition is not favourably received. Lord Palmerston is for want of confidence, but whether on Address or on a subsequent and substantive motion hesitates. The hitch is that many Radicals hold aloof.<sup>3</sup>

Disraeli saw fit to criticise his leader for not acting on his earlier suggestion which, if followed, would have won over Gladstone to the Government:

Gladstone will vote against vote of confidence. I wish, now, you had seen him, and then we should have had all his reasons against dissolution, and been able to discount his objections before he spoke.<sup>4</sup>

Disraeli's apparent conviction that Gladstone could have been enlisted by a relatively simple adjustment of tactics suggests that he had yet to appreciate the strength of Gladstone's dislike for him personally. He had, nonetheless, grasped the increasing importance

1. C.Wood's journal, 22nd May '59, Morley, i.p.464
2. 27th May '59, ibid., p.465
3. Disraeli did accept, however, that Bright had been secured by the Palmerston-Russell coalition. Disraeli to Derby, 26th May '59. M.&B. iv, p.244
4. Ibid.

which both sides now attached to the acquisition of Gladstone's support. Palmerston told Herbert "if you and Gladstone and some others were willing to form part of any new Government to be made, I should not fear any insurmountable difficulty in forming a very efficient administration". Wood gave a strong clue as to why Gladstone was seen as such a potential asset to a Liberal Government. The traditional prejudice that Whig-Liberal administrations were essentially inimical to the Church would be greatly weakened if such a government could boast the services of a man who by general repute was one of parliament's great apologists for the ecclesiastical interest. On the vital issue of Church patronage Gladstone would be able to speak with authority thus ensuring "a less one-sided description of appointments".<sup>1</sup> In Wood's judgement all that was now needed from the leading Liberals was a firm resolution to form a government.

If Palmerston, Lord John, Gladstone, and yourself [Herbert] are shown to be now acting cordially together, with the bona fide intention of acting together in a Government, I have no fear of our not having a fair majority. 2

As the discussions continued Russell, in contrast, became less confident; he had never been entirely happy about his own position vis a vis Palmerston and the premiership, "I am not as yet ready to engage myself in a future Ministry of which I am not to be the head." He expressed doubts about being able to achieve the necessary Liberal unity: "One very unfavourable symptom is that Gladstone hangs back. If he will not vote a want of confidence, will he accept office in a new Government?"<sup>3</sup>

1. Wood to Herbert, 26th May '59, Stanmore, ii.p.192
2. Ibid., ii.pp.192-3
3. Russell to Herbert, 26th May '59, Graham, ii.p.388

Gladstone was still as hard to pin~~down~~ to a definite decision; he frequently claimed that he was in a position of especial difficulty compared with other men. "A'broad bottom' Government" would have pleased him best, he told Wood, but accepted that Disraeli was a real barrier to this.<sup>1</sup> On 28th May he held a private discussion with Palmerston during which, according to Phillimore's account, he told him that he would not vote against Derby in support of Russell's proposed motion on the Address. The Government Gladstone thought most desirable would be a fusion of Palmerston and his supporters with Derby which implied the loss of at least half the present cabinet. As things were tending, "Gladstone will have to vote with government and speak against the cabinet, and violently he will be abused". Phillimore found Gladstone to be "much harassed and distressed" at the oddity of his position in relation to government and opposition. He was still resolved to vote against a motion of no confidence but would support a censure resolution on the dissolution.<sup>2</sup> Aberdeen from his relatively detached position judged that a recent election speech by Palmerston in which he took a strongly pro-Italian line had been deliberately calculated to attract a hovering Gladstone to the Liberal side: "Gladstone is ready to act with him, or under him, notwithstanding the three articles of the Quarterly and the thousand imprecations of late years".<sup>3</sup> Given the great respect in which Gladstone held Aberdeen and their many meetings in these critical weeks<sup>4</sup> Aberdeen's observation is very likely to have been drawn from a genuine knowledge rather than mere guesswork. If this was indeed the case and Gladstone, in spite

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1. W.E.G. to Wood, 27th May '59, Stanmore, ii, p.197. W.E.G. dined with Wood on this day, Diaries, pv, p.396
  2. Phillimore's journal, 31st May & 1st June '59, Morley, i, p.465  
W.E.G. recorded meeting Palmerston on 28th May, and attending "a formidable & highly political" dinner party on 31st May at Lord Carlisle's at which Phillimore was a guest. Diaries, v, pp.396-7
  3. Aberdeen to Graham, 26th May '59, Graham, ii, p.388.
  4. E.g., 3rd, 6th, 18th, 20th, 29th May '59, Diaries, v, pp.391-7

of all he had felt and said against Palmerston, could be won over by a simple ploy it puts a large question mark against the strength, not to say sincerity, of his convictions.

A feature of Gladstone's attitude is the special place he ascribed to himself in the political order. In his early career he had seen himself as the Lord's lieutenant sent to wage war against secularism; this view he had seriously modified when faced by the realities of public life but he never lost the presumption that his was a special calling in politics. The number of occasions he invoked the Almighty or Providence as justifications for, and guides of, his actions is surely significant in this respect.<sup>1</sup> Although, as his journals testify, he was still subject to troughs of serious doubt regarding his own moral worth he appeared seldom to experience misgivings regarding political decisions once taken. There is a strain of conceit about his politics which, difficult though it is to measure, explains why he was able to keep himself detached from his fellows when prudence if not duty argued for union. It was as if he judged himself by a different set of values. Throughout the succession of ministerial and party crises of the 'fifties it is noticeable that Gladstone invariably approached the question of allegiance in terms of his own disposition. His constant complaint in his political writings was of the disappearance of the traditional party system but he did little himself to re-establish the structure whose decline he regretted. He was unwilling to subordinate his tortuously defined scruples to the needs of party. To the numerous approaches made to him providing the opportunity to clarify and regularise his party affiliation his response was at best, only grudgingly

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1. There is an interesting treatment of W.E.G.'s concept of Providence in Deryck Schreuder's essay "Gladstone and the Conscience of the State", in P.Marsh (Ed.), The Conscience of the Victorian State, pp.81-83

co-operative, at worst, positively obstructive; hence the exasperation of so many of his contemporaries.

The previous year when rejecting office with Derby Gladstone had written:

The question goes back therefore to myself individually; and upon that question, so restricted, I cannot entertain a serious doubt. At the bottom of the well I must remain, so long as it shall please Providence to leave me without the means of safely - that is, honourably and usefully - emerging into daylight and the upper air. 1

He had informed Disraeli at the same time that there was "a Power beyond us that disposes of what we are and do, and I find the limits of choice in public life to be very narrow", implying that for his peers those limits were much wider.<sup>2</sup>

In the current 1859 crisis Gladstone made much of what he regarded as the special difficulties of his particular position. He told Herbert that he felt he had to look at the situation from a different viewpoint from the others involved.<sup>3</sup> Wood noted that Gladstone "says that we, the opposition, are not only justified but called upon by the challenge in the Queen's speech on the dissolution to test the strength of parties; but that he is himself in a different position".<sup>4</sup>

What he had said to Wood he repeated to Palmerston when directly asked how he stood in regard to the coming vote. For Palmerston's benefit Gladstone defined "this personal difficulty" in which he found himself:

1. W.E.G. to Graham, 26th May '58, Graham, ii.p. 351. On a previous occasion he had claimed that it was not his will but his sense of providential duty that kept him in politics. "For personal comfort I would gladly do any act not of cowardice to be away; but no such act is open to me." W.E.G. to Graham, 10th Nov. '56, ibid., ii, p. 289.
2. 25th May '58, Add. Ms. 44389, f. 235
3. 18th May '59, Stanmore, ii.p. 186.
4. 27th May '59, Morley, i.p. 465.

it will not be pleasant to me to have to give a vote which will appear to mean confidence in the Government ... Such, however, seems likely to be my fate. For I have not brought myself to think that a man who has been acting as I have wholly out of concert with Opposition, can safely, I would almost say can honourably, enter Opposition, so to speak by a vote of such sweeping and strong condemnation as a vote of no confidence must always be, and, of course, intended for the resumption of office. 1.

Gladstone's declared unwillingness to vote against the Government on the no-confidence issue may well have deterred Palmerston from inviting him to the meeting at Willis's Rooms on 6th June; it is now clear from the Diaries that although Gladstone returned to London on that date he did not in fact attend that celebrated gathering of Whigs, Peelites, and Liberals which voted overwhelmingly to support a motion of lack of confidence in the Derby Administration.<sup>2</sup>

The meeting was a result of a joint approach from Russell and Palmerston inviting Bright and Milner Gibson, as spokesmen of the Radicals, to join with the Liberals in a common front for the purpose of bringing down the Government.<sup>3</sup> Russell, Palmerston and Bright all addressed the meeting which after showing considerable amity finally agreed that Hartington should introduce the no-confidence resolution. Russell, who appeared to have mastered his earlier uncertainties, and Palmerston both declared their readiness to co-operate with whomsoever the Queen might ask to lead a Liberal Government.<sup>4</sup> That Gladstone should have

1. W.E.G. had certainly conversed at least once with Palmerston and possibly again at a dinner party given by Lady Palmerston on 28th May '59, Diaries, v, p.397. As he told Herbert, it was then that he had informed Palmerston what his likely vote would be. Palmerston accepted this "with his usual good humour". W.E.G. to Herbert, 29th May '59, Stanmore, ii, p.196-97
2. 5th & 6th June '59, Diaries, v, pp.396-7. The meeting is now generally regarded as marking the beginning of the nineteenth-century Liberal Party. E.g., see, Feuchtwanger, p.105; Blake, Disraeli, p.406
3. 3rd June '59. Bright's Diary, pp.237-8
4. Herbert also spoke, urging the Liberal forces to unite; his account of the meeting is in Stanmore, ii, pp.197-8. See also Greville Memoirs, 7th June '59, vii, pp.422-3

played no positive part in such a formative event indicates how, by his insistence on the special nature of his own position, he had denied himself opportunities for policy making. He was, of course, still a vital figure, as the various efforts to win him prove, but his role at this stage was very much a passive one.

There is evidence that despite Gladstone's express reluctance to vote against the Government on the no-confidence resolution Palmerston still considered him a likely member of the next government. On 30th March Palmerston drew up a list of projected cabinet members which included Gladstone as Colonial Secretary; two other undated lists show Gladstone at the India Office and again as Colonial Secretary. In all three lists Cornwall Lewis is nominated as Chancellor of the Exchequer.<sup>1</sup> This would suggest that Palmerston intended remaining loyal to Lewis who had served him as Chancellor for three years following Gladstone's resignation in February 1855. However, in spite of being high critical of Lewis' measures at the Exchequer Gladstone had not been unwilling to assist him to settle into the office;<sup>2</sup> it may have been gratitude for this together with an awareness that he could not hope to compete with Gladstone in matters financial that led to Lewis's offering to stand down. Abraham Hayward, the essayist and Q.C., acted as middle-man:

It was through me that Sir George Lewis communicated to Gladstone his readiness to give up the Chancellorship of the Exchequer to him if he wished and it was I who first told Lord Palmerston that Gladstone would join. 3

1. Broadlands M s., GMG/136,138, in Diaries, v.p.xxvii
2. See above, p. 199.
3. A. Hayward to Frances Hayward, 16th June '59, in Carlisle, op.cit., ii, p.34. Matthew suggests the 2nd June '59 as the date of W.E.G.'s meeting with Hayward (Diaries, Introduction, v.p.xxvii, footnote 6.) but judged by the journal entries and Herbert's letter to W.E.G., it is more likely to have been 28th June '59 Diaries, v.pp.296-7



In the period before the opening of the session and the introduction of Hartington's resolution the Diaries reveal feverish political activity going on around Gladstone. The uncertainty as to how he would eventually vote was undoubtedly the basis of the many conversations he noted.<sup>1</sup> Significantly absent, however, are the detailed memoranda and passages of self-analysis that were an inevitable accompaniment of the previous political crises in which he was involved. This betokens the degree of relative detachment he wished to maintain.<sup>2</sup>

He continued to preserve his silence even after the session opened. Hartington introduced his resolution on 7th June and the ensuing debate took up the next three days; Gladstone attended throughout but made no contribution.<sup>3</sup> This approach coincided with the tactics urged upon the Conservatives by Disraeli. He had encouraged them to say as little as possible in the debate hoping that this would shorten proceedings with the result that the vote would be reached before the opposition had fully mustered their forces.<sup>4</sup> The plan failed; Russell recruited as many speakers as he could and in the division on 10th June the no-confidence motion was carried by 323 to 310 with Gladstone going into the Government lobby.<sup>5</sup> This vote marked the last time he would formally

1. Ibid., v.pp.393-99. Argyll, a Peelite peer but firm supporter of Palmerston since 1855, appears to have made strong efforts to gain W.E.G.'s support by playing upon the dangers of the Government's Italian policy. 14th May, 5th June, ibid., pp.393-398; Eighth Duke of Argyll, Autobiography, ii.p.138
2. In commenting on this Matthew cites (Diaries, p.xxvii) as examples of W.E.G.'s unease a bout of self-flagellation and a "Restless half-night", 25th May, 3rd June '59. ibid., pp.396, 398. The context of both these entries, however, indicates that they relate to his rescue work rather than to his politics.
3. 7th - 10th June '59, Diaries, v, pp.399-400. H. cliv, 51-417
4. Disraeli to Derby, 26th May '59, M. & B. iv, pp.244-5. Disraeli to Mrs. Disraeli, 7th June '59, ibid. pp.250-1. 9th June, Greville Memoirs, vii, p.423. This is not to suggest that there was any understanding between W.E.G. and Disraeli over this.
5. The Times, 8th & 9th June '59; H. cliv, 417

support the Conservative Party in the House of Commons but his journal in simply noting the division figures suggests no awareness of anything especially significant.<sup>1</sup>

Following his defeat Derby immediately resigned; the Queen, unhappy at the prospect <sup>of</sup> either Russell or Palmerston, first asked Granville to form a government. <sup>f</sup>After a day of vain endeavour Granville gave up the impossible task<sup>2</sup>. In his initial plans, encouraged by Clarendon, he had contemplated approaching Gladstone but he seems not to have gone through with this although he conveyed to the Queen what he understood to be Gladstone's disinclination to co-operate.<sup>3</sup> Granville's failure left the Queen with no choice but to ask Palmerston, l'homme inevitable, to fashion a cabinet. He straightaway offered Gladstone the Exchequer: "Went to Lord P[almerston] by his desire at night: & accepted my old office".<sup>4</sup> The undramatic way in which Gladstone entered Palmerston's Government belied the remarkable nature of what he was doing. For over three years Gladstone had conducted what amounted to a campaign of vilification against Palmerston, characterising <sup>him</sup> in "a thousand imprecations"<sup>5</sup> as the epitome of all that was worst in English public life, as the man singly the most responsible for the demoralisation of Parliament. It was in those concerns closest to Gladstone's heart that Palmerston had been at his most culpable;

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1. 10th June '59, Diaries, v, p. 400
  2. The Times, 13th June '59; 12th & 13th June '59, Greville Memoirs, vii, pp. 423-24
  3. Granville to the Queen, 12th June '59, Letters of Queen Victoria, I, iii, p. 440; Lord Edmund Fitzmaurice, Life of Granville, i, p. 336  
See Diaries, v, p. 400 (Ed.'s footnote 2)
  4. 13th June '59 *ibid.*, W.E.G. told Herbert he would have accepted no other office. 15th June '59, Stanmore, ii, p. 200. No doubt bitter at her husband's surprising exclusion (see Greville Memoirs, v, p. 425) Lady Clarendon wrote in her journal: "Why he who voted in the last division with the Derby Ministry should not only be asked to join this one, but he allowed to choose his office, I cannot conceive". in H. Maxwell, The Life and Letters of Clarendon, ii, p. 196.
  5. The words were Aberdeen's to Graham, 26th May '59, Graham, ii, p. 388, describing the ferocity of W.E.G.'s attacks on Palmerston in his recent articles: "The Declining Efficiency of Parliament", Q.R., Sept. '56; "Prospects Political and Financial", Q.R. Jan. '57; "The New Parliament and its Work", Q.R. April '57; "The Past & Present Administrations", Q.R. Oct. '58

in foreign affairs he had betrayed England's honour, in finance he had disregarded her needs, and by his misuse of patronage he had undermined her Church.<sup>1</sup> Yet when during these black years Gladstone had been offered numerous opportunities to help bring down Palmerston or himself join governments so that in an executive capacity he might undo the evils of Palmerstonism he had with circuitous reasoning declined them all. Now without hesitation he had accepted office under the very man he had affected so to detest.<sup>2</sup> It was aberrant behaviour which Gladstone never satisfactorily explained or, indeed, ever made the effort to do so. There is no equivalent of the reams he penned in regard to the relatively minor political adjustments he had previously made. It sometimes seems that the amount Gladstone wrote was in inverse proportion to the importance of the subject.

A better perspective may be obtained by viewing his decision not in isolation or as a sudden event. Clearly it baffled many of his contemporaries but it was of a piece with the general trend of his political career. Since 1845 he had been prepared to abandon, when reality or necessity demanded it, the principles with which he had entered politics and it is this that gives that peculiarly chequered pattern to his development. Despite his constant attempts in his writings to invest politics with principle his own career was in a strict sense unprincipled; that is to say, his political decisions cannot be consistently related to a fixed set of determinants.

1. Complementing what he wrote against Palmerston in his published articles W.E.G., in 1857, had drawn up an "Indictment of Lord Palmerston" dealing with the Crimean War, the Roebuck Committee and Church Patronage. Add. Ms. 44747, fos. 53-81. It remained unpublished.
2. "The most remarkable of the admissions, Gladstone's who has never shown any good will towards Palmerston." 26th June '56, Greville Memoirs, vii, p. 425

Morley spoke more truly than he knew when in disputing that Gladstone's acceptance of office in June 1859 was a "chief landmark" in his journey from tory to liberal he commented: "To join the new administration, then, marked a party severance but no changed principles".<sup>1</sup> The truth was that Gladstone had no principles to change. Salisbury showed he had grasped this essential when he asserted that the key to Gladstone's politics was his will not his intellect; he emphasised the error of believing that

Gladstone's mind is constructed upon any ordinary plan. The process of self-deceit goes on in his mind without the faintest self-consciousness or self-suspicion .... the conscience which activates him, though a very active organ, is ... intermittent in its activity .... The only mode of reconciling his sincerity with the facts, is to assume that the process by which the mind is made to accept the most advantageous or most convenient, belief, is with him automatic and unconscious. 2

Lecky expressed the same thought more succinctly when he described Gladstone as "an honest man with a dishonest mind".<sup>3</sup> Discovering a deep affinity between Gladstone and Newman, Lecky suggested that "both men were by nature extraordinary masters of the art of casuistry".

There are men who are wholly incapable of wilful and deliberate untruthfulness, but who have the habit of quibbling; with their convictions persuading themselves that what they wish is right.<sup>4</sup>

W.E. Forster observed that Gladstone "can persuade most men of most things. He can persuade himself of almost anything". Dean Lake said that Gladstone's "intellect can persuade his conscience of anything", while J.R. Lowell referred to Gladstone's "wonderful power of improvising convictions".<sup>5</sup> Sharper still was Shaftesbury's criticism of

1. Morley, i. pp. 470-1
2. Q.R., July 1866, p. 267 quoted in Schreuder "Gladstone and the Conscience of the State", in Marsh, op. cit., p. 84
3. W.E.H. Lecky, Democracy and Liberty, London, 1899, i. p. xxvi. What adds interest is that W.E.G. told Morley that Lecky had "real insight into the motives of Statesmen", 22nd Feb. '91. Morley, ii. p. 498
4. Lecky, op. cit., i. p. xxvi
5. In ibid., i. p. xxxvii

of Gladstone's perversities:

his language and his acts, his private statements, all prove him to be governed by the greed of place and salary and power. 1

This is the abiding difficulty for those writers who seek to plot Gladstone's career according to a discernible pattern. He did strike attitudes and he did adopt causes but there was about him a basic irregularity that cannot be ignored in any analysis of his political motivation. As observed by Schreuder in his recent essay:

The intricacy of the Gladstonian mind, and its expression in public life, certainly require an analytic approach which is equally complex in probing the many layers - of ideas, ideals and impulses - out of which his politics grew. 2

In this regard such justifications as Gladstone did offer for his joining Palmerston's Government are instructive. Naturally it was at Oxford that the strongest criticism of his volte-face was voiced but Gladstone seemed incapable of understanding why there should be such animosity; he was curiously blind to the inconsistency of what he had done, attributing the opposition of his detractors to malice. When in the by-election necessitated by his accepting office he learned that he was to be opposed he complained: "I am sore about the Oxford Election; but I try to keep myself in order: it disorganises & demoralises me".<sup>3</sup> Pressed as to why he, who bore the responsibility for the defence of Anglican and conservative Oxford, should have joined a government of Whigs and Radicals led by a man he had denounced as unworthy Gladstone begged the question. In an open letter to the

1. Shaftesbury's journal, Mar. 9th '67, in E. Hodder, Life of Shaftesbury, 1886, iii, p. 217
2. In his own study of how W.E.G. came in his later career to see the conscience of the state as being embodied in the enlightened masses Schreuder wisely restricts himself to a synthesis of "Gladstone scholarship, Morley to Matthew", in Marsh, op. cit., p. 74
3. 20th June '59, Diaries, v. p. 402. After a fierce campaign W.E.G. was re-elected on 1st July '59, defeating Lord Chandos by 1050 to 860 votes. See Ward, pp. 225-6. He told Heathcote that although his conscience was "light and clear" he was beginning to find the strain of representing Oxford greater than its rewards. 24th June '59, Morley, i. 470

Provost of Oriel, who had asked Gladstone how he could justify voting with Derby's Government one day and then joining forces with its opponents the next, he claimed that the choice had been a simple one. The Government had shown itself incapable of satisfactorily solving the Reform question and its approach to the Italian issue suggested a similar lack of competence. Given that these were the outstanding problems of the day he felt no compunction about entering a new Administration which because it was drawn from a wider political spectrum would have greater durability and likelihood of success.<sup>1</sup> He made the same point to his fellow Oxford M.P., Heathcote, adding that he felt over Italy "a real and close harmony of sentiment" with Palmerston and Russell.<sup>2</sup> Five years afterwards he continued to maintain that it had been his belief that he could still do "useful work" in the field of finance, added to "the overwhelming interest and weight of the Italian question", that had led him to accept Palmerston's offer "without one moment's hesitation".<sup>3</sup>

What none of these answers include is any reference to the basic question: how could Gladstone bring himself to work with the man he detested. Let it be stressed again that for four years in his public writing and private correspondence he had hurled maledictions against Palmerston as a man without honour, dignity, or integrity, a leader not fitted to hold the reins of government or worthy to represent his country, a public figure responsible for the present decadence of English politics. Gladstone's denunciation of him had not been the language of mere political rivalry; it had been the expression of a deep, moral distaste.

1. 17th June '59, Add. Ms. 44206, f. 217. The letter was printed in The Guardian on 22nd June as an election address.
2. 16th June '59, Morley, i. p. 468
3. W.E.G. to Sir John Acton, '64, ibid.,

Yet when offered a cabinet post by this same man the revulsion evaporated in a moment: "Never had I an easier question to determine than when I was asked to join the government".<sup>1</sup> No amount of reference to Italy or finance could explain the inexplicable. The one question which most needed answering went unmet. Bright's totally opposite response when faced by the same question forcefully underlines the strangeness of Gladstone's decision.

In truth, I do not see how I could join Palmerston for whom I have felt so much contempt, and against whom I have spoken so freely. 2

Even when he showed some grasp of the nature of the opposition to him he dismissed it as the work of extremists which did not require answering:

The real scandal is among the extreme men on the liberal side; they naturally say, "This man has done all he could on behalf of Lord Derby; why is he here to keep out one of us?" 3

When not dismissive Gladstone's responses could be positively bland:

"I have joined the only administration that could be formed, in concert with all the friends ... with whom I joined and acted in the government of Lord Aberdeen".<sup>4</sup> Picking him up on this, Wilberforce, the Bishop of Oxford, not for the first time an astute critic of Gladstone's political shifts, pointed out that at Oxford the new Government was regarded as being "quite different in kind from Lord Aberdeen's ". The presence of Cobden and Milner Gibson in the Cabinet with Bright's support proved that. Wilberforce reminded Gladstone that he

1. W.E.G. to Warden of All Souls, 18th June '59, ibid., i.p.467

2. 13th June '59, Bright 's Diary, p.241

3. W.E.G. to Richard Greswell, 18th June '59, Morley, i.p.467

4. W.E.G. to Warden of All Souls 18th June '59, ibid.

had been elected "as a liberal Conservative"; but he had now joined a Government whose radical composition meant that it could "claim no title of Conservative at all".<sup>1</sup> Wilberforce also raised the question of Palmerston's dubious record in relation to Church patronage; it would help Gladstone's cause, Wilberforce told him, if he could lessen his constituents' fears by some indication that he had reached "an understanding with P[almerston] on this point".<sup>2</sup> Gladstone told Wilberforce that the radical threat had been exaggerated: "Bright is as far as I know in the worst possible humour up to this moment about the Gov[ernment] " and "nothing can be more uncertain than whether Cobden will accept office". He added that in any case it would be wrong "to suppose that the formation of this Cabinet is the determining crisis of its political character"; that could be properly judged only after observing its development over the next nine months.<sup>3</sup> As to ecclesiastical appointments Gladstone declined to make Palmerston's past exercise of them "the criterion of my political opposition or support". He thought it improper to expect a prime minister to enter into "any compact on such a subject" and he judged, moreover, Palmerston's instructions in the matter as "fair & just".<sup>4</sup>

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1. S.Wilberforce to W.E.G. 16th June '59, Add. Ms.44344, fos.70-1.

2. Ibid., f.72

3. W.E.G. to Wilberforce, 17th June '59, ibid., f. 73. In fact only Milner Gibson joined the Cabinet, at the Board of Trade, Greville Memoirs, vii, p.425; Bright and Cobden both refused, Bright complaining that "the chief offices are to be given to the old place-men, and the crumbs to the representatives of the Independent Liberals". Bright's Diary, June '59, p.242. W.E.G. regretted Cobden's absence; W.E.G. to Robertson Gladstone, 2nd July '59, Morley, i.p. 467. Following his own acceptance of office W.E.G. had discussed the composition of the Cabinet with Palmerston and had drawn up lists of possible candidates; these included nominating Cobden for the Board of Trade. 14th to 16th June '59, Diaries, v, pp.400-01; Add. Ms. 44748, fos. 87-90.

4. W.E.G. to Wilberforce, 17th June '59, Add. Ms.44344, f.74. Ironically the evangelicals had rallied to W.E.G.'s support at Oxford since they now regard him as a colleague of Palmerston, the premier who previously put such faith in Lord Shaftesbury. See Ward, p. 226.



By any measure this was an extraordinary statement; it ran totally counter to his recent denunciations of Palmerston over this very issue. The contrast between Gladstone's new-found confidence in Palmerston and what he had written and said of him during the previous four years is little short of staggering. The answer lies not in talk of Italy, Reform and finance but in something much more obvious to hindsight and which is implicit in Gladstone's own words. His argument that the nation's problems, home and abroad, made it his first duty in June, 1859, to help create a strong government applied with equal force to all the ministerial crises throughout the 'fifties. On those occasions he had allowed personal considerations to dictate his rejection of office; now those same considerations prompted acceptance. He was aware that the likely hardening of party lines now that Palmerston was again premier would mean that for little longer would he be able to enjoy being eligible but unattached. Self-interest demanded alignment. "I felt myself to be mischievous in an isolated position, outside the regular party organisation of parliament." <sup>1</sup>

For thirteen years, the middle space of life, I have been cast out of party connection, severed from my old party, and loath irrecoverably to join a new one. So long have I adhered to the vague hope of a reconstruction, that I have been left alone by every political friend in association with whom I have grown up. <sup>2</sup>

Now at the end of those thirteen years he had been offered office once more. How, in such circumstances, he asked rhetorically, could he refuse "and be the one remaining Ishmael in the House of Commons?" <sup>3</sup>

In short, Gladstone took office for fear of being permanently isolated.

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1. W.E.G. to Acton, '64, Morley, i.p. 468.

2. W.E.G. to Heathcote, 16th June '59, ibid.

3. Ibid.

Contemporary opponents attacked Gladstone's decision to join Palmerston as being yet another of his ruses by which he affected to be following his conscience when he was in fact deliberately seeking office. His apologists and most biographers have dismissed such criticism but it must be said the charge still has weight. Significantly, his latest biographer accepts that by 1859 Gladstone was "desperate ... to get back into harness. More than he cared to admit he was now afraid of being left out in the cold".<sup>1</sup> This is certainly the conclusion towards which our own researches tend. Disguised beneath the orotund language with all its subtleties and refinements, hidden behind the principles and causes commonly adduced to have propelled Gladstone towards Liberalism — free trade, retrenchment, Italian liberty — there lay something at once both mundane and compelling, the desire for political power.

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1. Feuch<sup>t</sup>wanger, p. 106

## CONCLUSION

Traditionally historians have viewed Gladstone's career as the unfolding of a Liberal mind. This is natural enough; the father figure of English Liberalism and the dominant personality of later Victorian politics tends to be remembered as he was at the height of his career fighting the great moral crusades of Ireland and of the Eastern Question and characterising English Liberalism as the defence of freedom. That this is an accurate picture of Gladstone in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century is not here in dispute. What this study challenges is the idea of Gladstone's later Liberalism as a natural and logical progression from his earlier attitudes.

Gladstone became a Liberal out of a sense not of vocation but of compromise. Compromise is indeed the recurrent theme in his career. Having by 1845 been obliged to abandon his belief in politics as a way of serving God and His Church his career from then on was a series of adjustments, adjustments both within his own way of thinking as well as to the world at large. At times self-doubting to the point of despair he could on other occasions express a didacticism that verged on arrogance. But for all his sermonising he rarely showed genuine political initiative; in fact, so often was he surprised by the turn of events that it casts doubts on his understanding of politics. That he survived for so long at such an elevated level attests his remarkable gifts for investing everything that he said and did with high moral tone. In this he was peculiarly suited to his time. Yet as a practical politician he left, as the fate of his party after his demise indicates, much to be desired. All of which was foreshadowed in his stumbling path towards Liberalism in the years down to 1859.

He showed little interest in the development of Liberalism as a political force in the country at large. At this stage his form of Liberalism was a set of adjustments to shifts in parliament and party. It was essentially parochial.

As much a result of accident as of design, influenced more by questions of personal taste than by considerations of principle, Gladstone's adoption of Liberalism in 1859 was a matter of expediency rather than idealism. Had he not pledged himself formally to one party or another at this point he would have condemned himself to the political wilderness. By his espousal of great causes Gladstone gave a particular character to English Liberalism. What he singularly failed to do was to strengthen or deepen its philosophical basis. Despite his myriad writings on party and politics he added little of significances to Liberalism as a body of ideas. This should not surprise us: Gladstone's commitment to Liberalism was not a philosophical one. A study of the years 1845 to 1859 shows that on his journey to the Liberal party he seldom travelled by the high road of conviction. His route lay more often along the tortuous path of opportunism.

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### ABSTRACT

M.J. Lynch, "Gladstone and Liberalism:  
The Political development of W.E.Gladstone,  
1845-59.", Ph.D. thesis.

Victorian Liberalism and Gladstone's place within it are currently undergoing significant reappraisal; this study is intended as a contribution to such analysis. A detailed examination is made of Gladstone's career in the crucial years, 1845 to 1859. With a view to determining his motives for becoming a Liberal a re-assessment is made of him as a political practitioner and theorist. His Diaries, memoranda and published writings are the chief sources and close attention is paid to the critical observations of his contemporaries. Taking into account the findings of modern Gladstonian scholarship, it is contended that Gladstone's advance towards Liberalism in these years was seldom a matter of simple, political logic; the adventitious was as frequent a factor in his growth as the planned. In retrospect his entry into the Liberal Government in 1859 can be seen as a decision of great moment. It is here argued that the decision was not necessarily taken for Liberal reasons.

An attempt is made to disentangle the complexities of his thought. His attitude towards politics and politicians, his views on Church and State, the discrepancy between his public confidence and his private doubts; these are weighed as determinants of his political orientation. It is concluded that Gladstone, so often a bewildered man in a confused period, became a Liberal not from a sense of vocation but from the need to compromise. His Liberalism was a process of making virtue out of necessity.



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