

est when he was under severe stress with problems in his family or political life.

Fifty years ago, this book would have come as a great revelation. Now no biographer can escape an exploration of his hero's motives and Gladstone has not escaped the attentions of Jenkins, Matthew, Shannon *et al.* Travis has added valuable new insights, but they are too often points of detail rather than breakthroughs. Importantly, the

book is not laden with jargon and acts as a good short introduction to the life for those who already have some understanding of the politics – and adds that little extra understanding for the specialist.

Notes

- ¹ H. J. Hanham: *Elections and Party Management* (Longmans, 1959), p. 202.
- ² J. Morley: *Life of Gladstone* (1903).
- ³ P. Magnus, *Gladstone* (Murray, 1954).
- ⁴ R. Jenkins, *Gladstone* (Macmillan, 1995).

Some Gladstonian Attitudes

Peter J. Jagger (ed.):

Gladstone

(The Hambledon Press, 1998)

Reviewed by Tony Little

The opening illustration of Peter Jagger's book shows a cartoon of Gladstone at work in the Commons, but it is the other meaning of attitudes which comes over in this book. Any book with essays on Gladstone and Acting, Ireland, Rhetoric, America, Disraeli, the working man, Ruskin, Railways, to name some of the topics, and with authors as good as Asa Briggs, Lord Blake and David Bebbington, to select just some of those whose names start with B, is bound to offer some little treat. This book offers a whole feast.

When he died Gladstone left his library at St. Deiniol's, Hawarden, for the use of scholars. Each year a Founder's Day lecture is held to commemorate some aspect of Gladstone's life. All but two of these essays were first given as lectures at St. Deiniol's over the period 1968–96 and all but a (different) pair appear for the first time in this volume. The Blake piece on the rivalry with Disraeli was first published in the now out of print first volume of Founder's Day lectures and is well worth the reproduction, though not without the unworthy thought that it would be hard to imagine a similar book on the Tory leader that en-

compassed such a wide range of interests.

In his introduction, Peter Jagger describes Gladstone as a 'Victorian colossus: a man of boundless energy and varied and great gifts'; here we are given a glimpse as to just how wide these gifts were, and an introduction to the magnitude of the problems he was prepared to tackle. Some, such as Ireland, the Balkans and management of the railways are still unresolved. The problem with a colossus is its sheer scale. The Gladstone diaries, as published, take up fourteen volumes, and the Gladstone papers have now been published on 262 reels of microfiche,

of which the thirty reels of general correspondence and associated letter books alone cover more than 15,000 letters. As Peter Jagger makes clear in his own contribution on 'Gladstone's Library', Gladstone's 30,000 books were a working library and there is evidence from the diaries and the books themselves (heavily annotated) that he read around 20,000 of them. It is not surprising that biographers as practiced as Lord Jenkins have approached their subject with some trepidation.

It is also no surprise that many prefer to specialise, tackling just some part of Gladstone's contribution to the nineteenth century. It is in this specialisation that this book finds some of its strength. For example, Glynne Wickham is not just a great grandson of the Grand Old Man but also a professor of drama, well-placed to demonstrate the influence of classical oratorical skills on both Victorian politicians and actors, to illustrate Gladstone's love of the theatre (once he had overcome his evangelical fears of its sinfulness) and his willingness to promote the profession in society. He persuaded Victoria to offer a knighthood to Irving (refused at the time but accepted later) and invited him to breakfast at Downing Street – luvvies and politics go back a long way.

David Bebbington offers one of the most sparkling pieces on what might at first be thought an especially obscure subject – 'Gladstone and Grote'. 'Who he?' would probably be the reaction of most readers, but this merely illustrates the strength of Bebbington's essay. Grote was a somewhat idealistic radical MP, utilitarian, strongly in favour of democracy and fanatical about the secret ballot, at a time when Gladstone (who later ironically introduced the secret ballot), a rising Tory, opposed each of these views. Grote is now more famous for his pioneering history of Greece, but into this history he imported his philosophical ideas, placing temptation in the path of that amateur classicist Gladstone, who was temperamentally incapable of resisting the call to respond, toss-

ing off a three-volume 1500-page work on Homer. This defended not just Homer's unique pre-vision of biblical tradition, but also an idealised view of Homeric kingship and aristocracy which matched Mr. G's own view of how the British constitution ought to work. Homeric studies became political warfare by other means.

The reader will pick and choose among these essays in accordance with personal predilection but I hope that all Liberal Democrats will read the two lectures on Ireland and Wales. Each is still of relevance to today and helps shape our politics.

How do we rise to the challenge that Gladstone set himself, quoted at the end of Boyce's shaping of the deeper context of Liberal Irish policy? 'We live ... in a labyrinth of problems, and of moral problems from which there is no escape permitted us.'

The challenge issued at the Gladstone Centenary International Conference was to rebuild Gladstone as an integrated personality. This book illustrates the breadth of that task, and the words quoted above represent one of the keys to the way in which Gladstone approached not just politics but his whole life.

There were too few real aristocrats to be statistically significant, and the things they shared with their poorer sisters were too limited to be constrained by the same theories. And it is hard to call them victims. Consequently this book is a welcome diversion which makes a strong case, not only for looking at these women in a new light, but perhaps also for pointing the way to a re-examination of the variety in the role of women in the other layers of society.

Reynolds makes the argument that for women in the higher reaches:

- the theory of separate spheres of influence between the genders is not adequate;
- we should see their lives as part of a continuity of aristocratic modes of behaviour from the eighteenth century (or even earlier); and
- a satisfactory role in politics was open to women and accepted by men even though women did not have the vote and could not take part in parliament.

One of the great attractions of the nineteenth century is the abundance of material from both private and public sources. This is much less obviously true of the areas studied in this monograph. So much of what Reynolds is trying to illustrate was just normally accepted behavior among those studied that there was never a need to write it down. Some positives are proved by criticism of negative behaviour (for example criticism of Lady (John) Russell's failings are used to deduce what the role of a political hostess should be), and quotations from fiction are sometimes made to fill a gap. I do not feel that damage is done to the argument by either device.

Reynolds worries a little about the political bias of the book. Whig/Liberal ladies appear to have kept rather more extensively available records than the Tories. Again this is a bias for the *Journal* to forgive readily and it is good to be reminded of the part played by the Duchess of Sutherland in the career of Gladstone, or of the importance of Lady

'The only being who elects without voting, governs without law'¹

K D Reynolds:

Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain

(Oxford University Press, 1998)

Reviewed by Tony Little

For many years history appeared to carry the gender implicit in the first part of the word. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the Victorian era where, apart from the Queen and the Lady with the Lamp, few schoolchildren could name another significant female Victorian.

The greater assertiveness of women in our own time has been reflected in a greater focus on women in history. A number of different theories have been developed but unfortunately all too often driven to see women purely in terms of their sex rather than in their varying roles. There has also been a focus, quite rightly, on the middle and working classes. But here, for the Liberal, there can be severe disadvantages, particularly the tendency to work on the

masses rather than on the individual, to look for the typical, common, behaviour rather than to celebrate differences, to use statistics to make up for a paucity of other forms of records. There has also developed a stereotype of the female victim of the patriarch, confined to child-rearing, prostitution or servitude, which is all too common in popular 'historical' drama, especially on the television.

Victorian aristocratic ladies do not readily conform to stereotypes.