

REVIEWS

good clear printing on decent paper and a spine made using proper glue – particularly important in a reference work. Counting against is the poor index, which a series of spot checks showed up to miss many items. Page 160 is also in the wrong place and a description of US primaries that states there are four types is not followed by details on all four.

For someone wanting to know more about what happens in campaigns and why, the book is a success – just don't expect to learn how to do actually do it yourself.

Mark Pack has a doctorate in nineteenth century English elections and now works in the Liberal Democrats' Campaigns and Elections Department, specialising in internet and legal matters.

extract covering the Unionist years privately in 1981³ and the period when Derby served under Disraeli, ending with his resignation in 1878, was not published until 1994⁴. These, presumably final, extracts have had to wait a further nine years.

This new volume contains a selection from the hitherto unpublished period 1878–85, together with a reprint of the hard-to-obtain, privately printed selection from 1885 onwards. In one extensive volume we have the bulk of Derby's jottings on his Liberal and Liberal Unionist periods.

John Vincent suggests that the diary entries were made at the time or delayed by only a day or two by pressure of business or illness. Vincent adds that they have not been subject to retrospective correction. Internal evidence appears to substantiate this. The entries sometimes repeat views from a few days earlier and show no sign of hindsight. Derby is – at least sometimes – careful to distinguish comments he has noted immediately from those he was not able to record at the time and has had recorded from memory. He is also careful how he handles mere hearsay.

So what do we learn? These diaries served a very different purpose to Gladstone's. Gladstone provided effective time-management sheets, occasionally enlivened by a stray comment, to ensure that he could account to his deity for his labours on earth. Derby was not a religious man. Rather, he recorded the passing events, as they occurred, which were significant to one of the country's leading landowners and front-rank politicians. He is particularly useful in his occasional thumbnail sketches of his contemporaries and sometimes waspish about the recently deceased, repeating the gossip which inevitably coloured contemporary responses to events but which is usually missing from official lives and academic studies. Even after Vincent's editing, we see a glorious mixture of the

The diary of a somebody

John Vincent (ed.): *The Diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1826–93) Between 1878 and 1893: A Selection* (Leopards Head Press, 2003)

Reviewed by **Tony Little**

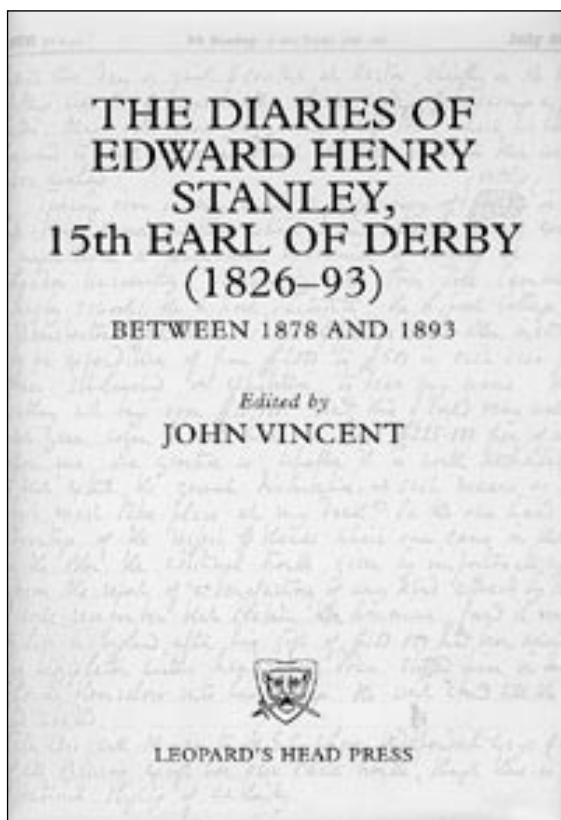
The Stanleys have not been well treated by history, or at least not by historians of the nineteenth century. Edward George Stanley, the 14th Earl of Derby (1799–1869) led the Conservative Party through the difficult period that followed the destruction of Peel's government in the Corn Laws dispute, and, without ever commanding a majority, he held the premiership three times. He paved the way for the leadership of Disraeli, whom the Tory party would probably never have accepted without Derby's backing. Yet he did not receive a Victorian 'tombstone biography' of any weight and Vincent argues that he still does not have the modern biography he deserves.¹

His son, Edward Henry, the 15th Earl, who also achieved a front-rank position in Victorian politics, as Foreign Secretary under Disraeli and as Colonial Secretary under Gladstone, also lacks a biographer. But perhaps here lies the answer. Despite the family motto, 'Sans Changer', both father and son were what some might describe as turn-coats. The 14th Earl served, as Hon. Edward Stanley, in both

Grey's and Melbourne's Whig governments before falling out over reform of the Irish Church in 1834 and joining Peel's Tories in 1837. The 15th Earl became a close political friend of Disraeli but quarrelled with him over the handling of the late 1870s' Eastern crisis and may have been 'stitched up' by Disraeli and by Salisbury, to whom he was related by marriage. Gradually he was absorbed into the Liberal Party and became the only man to serve in both Disraeli's and Gladstone's cabinets. However, yet another twist occurred, and he broke with Gladstone over Home Rule, ending his life as a Liberal Unionist.

In the absence of a biography, the diaries must serve as the monument for the 15th Earl of Derby, important not only as a significant source about his life but for the way in which they fill out the lives of his contemporaries. For this we must be grateful for the dedication and persistence of John Vincent, his collaborators and his publisher. The first extracts from Derby's diaries, covering the period from 1849 to 1869, were published in 1978.² Vincent published the

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important and inconsequential. We gain a strong impression of the man behind the writing. This is particularly the case in the early sections of this volume, which cover the aftermath of his resignation from the Conservative government and his discreet passage towards the Liberal benches, when he has no official business to monopolise his time.

Derby was keenly concerned with the management of his estates and the heritage he would pass on. By Victorian standards, his income was extraordinary. When he inherited the title he also inherited a large (70,000 acre) estate, but one which was substantially in debt. By careful management he was able to turn this round so that by the time of these diaries he was debating where to invest cash surpluses and buying further land to round out his holdings. Devoted to his wife, he organised his life to minimise the inconveniences that arose from her deteriorating eyesight and tendency to depression. His own health was also fragile; Vincent suggests that kidney problems prevented him from aiming at the premiership and

from fermenting a coup against Disraeli when they battled over the Eastern question.

Derby's lifestyle appears to be comfortable rather than extravagant, which left him those substantial spare resources and prey to any number of begging letters. Apparently reluctant to give to church-based charities, Derby was a consistent supporter of the Peabody Trust, supplying housing to the poorer classes, and played a significant part in the civic life of Lancashire – Knowsley, the family home, is just outside Liverpool. But in addition he responded generously to what appears to be a random selection of the letters that reached him from all over the country. Vincent includes a selection of entries relating to these letters and Derby's reaction almost as a form of light relief to the more general focus on politics. To quote two (not quite) random examples: 'A lady writes to say that she is out of health, that carriage exercise would be good for her, but is too expensive: will I send her £50 to enable her to hire carriages for the summer?' (25 June 1878). 'Sent £5 to a literary beggar, which I half regret, believing the fellow to be a rascal: but it is done'. (12 July 1881).

The early part of the volume gives an insight into the political methods of Lords Salisbury and Beaconsfield, which Vincent blames for the blackening of Derby's character – the Countess's character is also blackened but possibly with some cause. It also throws unexpected light on the (un)reliability of Hansard as a record of parliamentary speeches by recording the careful editing of some of Salisbury's more intemperate remarks.

While Derby did not immediately join the Liberals after his resignation from Beaconsfield's government, he quickly broke his links with the Tory party and felt that as a leading landowner he could not remain neutral in the 1880 election. His disgust with his former allies was tempered by an unwillingness to work under

Gladstone whom he felt likely to be dictatorial. Over the next two years he was wooed by a Liberal double act. Granville, the Liberal leader in the Lords, regularly consulted with his lordship and sought his advice, while Gladstone took tea with the Countess of Derby. At the end of 1882 and after a characteristic Gladstonian shuffling of the proposed reshuffle he accepted the Colonial Office. From here onwards we are given an insider's view of the 1880–85 Liberal government, with all its quarrels and indecisions as well as its achievements. This is history with the hindsight removed, with the uncertainties and lack of prescience restored, with the cabals and gossip made clearer, as men come together to make decisions without possessing adequate information. This is most obvious in relation to the government's problems over the relief force which failed to rescue Gordon from Khartoum and in the arguments between the party factions which precipitated the government's fall in 1885.

Derby did not spend long soul-searching about Britain's imperial destiny or leading the Colonial Office towards some great scheme to paint the globe red, but administered what was there and dealt with the issues arising. For anyone who does not specialise in colonial affairs, what is striking is the immensity of the low-level man-management that Derby was expected to undertake. But with the more limited communications of Victorian times, the man on the spot had considerable scope to use his initiative and it was important to a Colonial Secretary to know to whom his fate was entrusted.

Ireland, its obstructive MPs and intransigent problems, naturally predominate. No one who reads Derby's comments on the Irish Land Bill of 1881 and the comments he makes on Irish tenant farmers or their representatives throughout the diaries will be at all surprised that he sided with the Liberal Unionists in the great schism of 1886. The

CIVIL LIBERTIES IN WAR AND PEACE

Law and order has long been a major issue in British politics. The Blair Government has brought in legislation to introduce national identity cards; ministers claim that this measure will make UK citizens more secure from the threats of international terrorism and domestic crime. Especially since 9/11, how to strike the correct balance between protecting the state and promoting the liberties of the citizen has been the subject of heated political debate.

This meeting will examine how Liberals over the last 200 years have responded to repressive measures taken in the name of 'security'.

Speakers will include **Professor Clive Emsley**, Department of History, Open University and author of *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900* and *Britain and the French Revolution*. (Further speakers will be announced in the New Year.)

7.00 p.m., Monday 24 January (following the History Group AGM at 6.30 p.m.)

Lady Violet Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1

last section of the diaries covers these Unionist years.

Here I must confess to some disappointment. Like Churchill, Derby had ratted and re-ratted by forming part of the Liberal Unionist alliance with the Conservatives and, while he never again played a part in government, the complexities of party relations between 1886 and 1892 deserve more attention. In addition, the Liberal Unionist story is nearly always told from the point of view of 'Radical Joe' Chamberlain, but the breakaway Liberals were overwhelmingly Whig in character, though their leader, Lord Hartington (later Duke of Devonshire) tended to the gruff and taciturn. Derby's was another voice from the almost silent majority. But, as a reprint of the privately published *The Later Derby*

Diaries, this section is constructed on different lines to the rest of the book, with the focus on topics rather than chronology. Unfortunately, whether limited by the source material or by the economics of the original book, the space devoted to these years is modest. Excluding the introduction to this second part, only sixty-one pages cover the years from July 1885 to 1893, when Derby died, compared to the sixty-eight pages for the period April to December 1878. But this slight dissatisfaction should not be allowed to detract from the far greater merits of having ready access to the views of a sympathetic, if aristocratic, inside observer of one of the most convoluted periods of Liberal government.

At a recent conference on the Derby family, John Vin-

cent affectionately described the 15th Earl as Mr – or rather, Lord – Pooter, in tribute to his regularly commuting from Whitehall to his Kent home and to his management of official business like a carefully organised clerk. One cannot miss the Pooterish tendencies but Derby was much more than this. An underestimated minister and as dispassionate an observer as any participant in government could be, Derby has left us a valuable archive which restores to Victorian politics the uncertainties which historians spend their lives tidying away. The Leopard's Head Press must be congratulated for bringing such a substantial book to us at such a reasonable price and John Vincent for the wealth of ancillary information and footnotes without which such a book cannot be fully

appreciated. Both the specialist and the newcomer to the complex politics of the final decades of the nineteenth century can expect to be entertained and enlightened.

Tony Little is Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

- 1 This is due to be rectified shortly by Angus Hawkins.
- 2 John Vincent (ed.), *Disraeli, Derby, and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley 1849–1869* (Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978).
- 3 John Vincent (ed.), *The Later Derby Diaries: Home Rule, Liberal Unionism, and Aristocratic Life in Late Victorian England. Selected Passages* (printed and published by the author, 1981). (Vincent does not appear to go for snappy titles.)
- 4 John Vincent (ed.), *A Selection from The Diaries of Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1826–93) Between September 1869 and March 1878*, Camden Fifth Series Vol. 4 (1994).