

Reviews

attempts to meliorate the treatment of suffragettes in prison, including forcible feeding (which he sanctioned with great reluctance). Nevertheless, by 1909 Gladstone had shown himself to be a quietly effective minister and a force for unity within the Liberal Party and, when the 1910 inauguration date for the recently formed Union of South Africa was announced, Asquith regarded Gladstone, with a proven ability to bring together individuals of differing outlooks and abilities, as the best candidate to serve as the inaugural governor general of South Africa and high commissioner of the adjacent British protectorates, a decision which Edward VII sanctioned, albeit reluctantly. Gladstone was duly raised to the peerage as Viscount Gladstone of the County of Lanark.

During his four years in South Africa, Gladstone faced major challenges. These included the tensions arising from Indian immigration and settlement, not least during Mohandas Gandhi's campaign of passive resistance in 1912, and reports of police ill-treatment of striking Indian workers in Natal and Transvaal, which Herbert sought to diffuse by decisively forcing a full commission of inquiry. He also sanctioned the deployment of Imperial troops to police the disorders associated with the strikes on the Rand in the summer of 1913 (although he had some sympathy with the strikers' cause) and his actions were vindicated both within the British parliament and by the official Witwatersrand Disturbances Report. Indeed, Professor Brown refutes the charge that Gladstone's governor-generalship paved the way for apartheid in South Africa by showing that in avoiding open racial conflict, in assisting the development of an infrastructure for future social and economic development, and in maintaining the Union within the sphere of British influence, Gladstone played a pivotal role in the development of the new Union. This was acknowledged by Louis Botha and Jan Smuts (who both wished him to continue beyond 1914) and who admired his tact, wisdom and impartiality.

Throughout the First World War, Gladstone played a leading role within the War Refugees Committee and contributed to several charitable and philanthropic initiatives. He regarded Lloyd George's accession to the premiership in 1916 as more the product of Asquith's inadequacies rather than Lloyd George's ambitions but his antipathy towards the

latter (whom he described as 'The Welsh Goat'), especially after the Coupon Election and the return of the Liberal–Unionist coalition government, rested largely on Lloyd George's policies and behaviour, including the shameless use of the honours system, which he regarded as the antithesis of William Ewart Gladstone's principles and integrity. This antipathy was mutual, Lloyd George describing Herbert as 'a man without adequate gifts ... the best living embodiment of the Liberal doctrine that quality is not hereditary'.

Herbert Gladstone held that Liberalism needed to be revitalised from within during the post-war years and agreed to oversee the organisation of the Independent Liberal Party but his efforts were hampered by party disagreements over the leadership, the development of a distinct policy framework, and the replenishing of party funds. As Professor Brown shows, the fall of Lloyd George in 1922 posed further problems, for while most rank and file Liberals hoped for a reunited party and compromises between Lloyd George's National Liberals (who were well-financed) and the ILP, this proved difficult to achieve and, under Asquith's leadership, the Liberals were annihilated at the 1924 general election, securing only forty-three seats. This left Lloyd George, still Liberalism's most dynamic and charismatic politician, in the party's driving seat. Deflated by these developments, Herbert Gladstone's efforts were largely directed towards containing Lloyd George's influence within Liberalism by highlighting the contrast between the characters of its most eminent leader (William Gladstone) and the most plausible claimant to his succession (Lloyd George) and by protecting and sustaining his father's legacy. Indeed, Professor Brown argues

that during his final years Herbert Gladstone's concept of Liberalism, which was essentially Victorian, was increasingly out of step with the international and domestic challenges arising in the post-First World War world.

This is a fine book, characterised by meticulous and wide-ranging research, which presents a sympathetic yet critical biography in which Herbert Gladstone emerges as a Christian gentleman, a modest, unassuming and compassionate man who never sought office for its own sake but as a matter of public duty and one who remained loyal to his father's principles throughout his life. He was also intensely devoted to his parents, siblings and wife (Dolly Paget, twenty years his junior, whom he married late in life in 1901) and loyal to his political friends, especially Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith. Unlike the 'Grand Old Man', however, Herbert was socially gregarious, with a wide circle of friends and a range of interests, including cricket, tennis, golf, music, field sports and country life in general. Again, unlike his father, he was not an intellectual and his parliamentary performances – he was a good speaker but never a great orator – and reserved manner in cabinet meetings were indicative of self-doubt and a certain lack of confidence. Yet, he was an efficient administrator who achieved much, often working at his best quietly in the background. Professor Brown is to be congratulated for his efforts in restoring Herbert Gladstone to his rightful place in the historiography of the Liberal Party.

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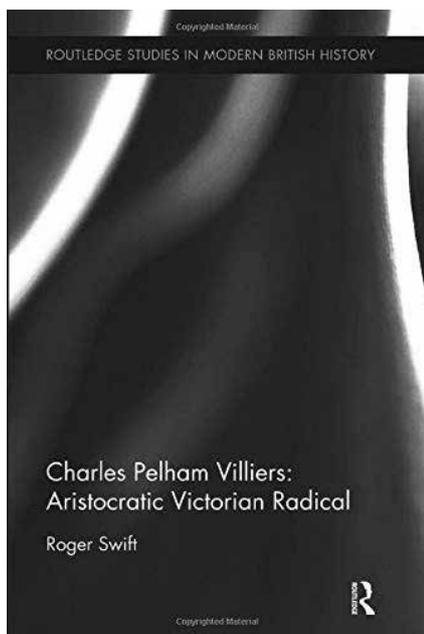
Aristocratic Radical

Roger Swift, *Charles Pelham Villiers: Aristocratic Victorian Radical* (Routledge, 2017)

Review by Ian Cawood

ROGER SWIFT'S BIOGRAPHY OF Charles Pelham Villiers is the first modern study of the man who still holds the record for the longest

unbroken period as an MP for a constituency. Villiers was elected to parliament for the constituency of Wolverhampton in 1835 in the aftermath of the Reform



crisis and remained one of the town's MPs for sixty-three years until his death in 1898 amidst the height of Imperial expansion. A radical in his early days, he played a significant role in the Anti-Corn Law League. Anthony Howe describes him as 'the most single-minded opponent of the Corn Laws in Parliament' – though his aristocratic connections at Westminster were probably as significant a contribution to the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 – however his role has been overshadowed by that of Richard Cobden and John Bright. His political career was undistinguished thereafter, but he supported the extension of the franchise in 1867 and the introduction of the secret ballot in 1872. He also became a symbol for Wolverhampton's ongoing independent identity and so was commemorated by a 3.5 metre tall marble statue, which now stands in the city's West Park. Although Villiers failed to attend the statue's unveiling in 1879 and never set foot in the city in the last twenty years of his life, Swift convincingly explains that his connections with Wolverhampton were still strong. He split with Gladstone over the issue of Irish home rule in 1886, as he considered the potential break-up of the United Kingdom to be as serious as the Confederacy which caused the US Civil War. Villiers ended his life and career as a Liberal Unionist, but with no great regard for either Lord Hartington or Joseph Chamberlain which, in light of how they treated those who had sacrificed office for their principles, probably supports Queen Victoria's description of him in her diary as 'a very clever man'.

The book is a fascinating account of the development of Victorian political Liberalism, from the harsh political economy of the Poor Law Amendment Act (for the preparation of which Villiers acted as an assistant commissioner), through the triumphant achievement of Free Trade and the defeat of Chartism, to the meritocratic reforms of the Gladstone ministries and finally to the argument over which faction, Liberal Unionist or 'separatist' Liberal, embodied the party's true heritage. The only real problem with Swift's otherwise excellent book is his rather poorly drawn definition of contemporary political philosophy. He lists 'democracy' as one of the 'essential causes of nineteenth century liberalism' (p. 229), when, as he must surely know, the term was largely avoided by the Gladstonian Liberals as it denoted the menace of an uneducated electorate, susceptible to bribery, intimidation and careless political choices. If any party was the advocate of democracy in the 1890s, it was the Conservative Party, which was flirting with the idea of extending the franchise to women as well as working-class men by this point in history. If the Liberals listened to any form of mass support, it took the form of 'public opinion' frequently invoked by Gladstone and his party, which, as James Thompson has recently demonstrated, was in fact *middle-class* opinion as marshalled and directed by powerful newspaper editors, such as W. T. Stead at the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Roland Quinault has shown in his 2011 study of British prime ministers' relationship with the concept of democracy that Gladstone's objective in introducing a Reform Bill in 1866 and then passing a Reform Act in 1884, was to create a system of popular consent, not universal suffrage. As a result of these measures the male head of the household was now able to represent the other members of his household in the same fashion that parliament represented the regions and interests of the nation. This could only be described as 'democratic' in the vaguest sense of the word.

Chapter 8 is a detailed account of the home rule debate in 1886 and, in many ways, it is representative of the strengths and weaknesses of the whole book. Although it contains the most accurate, succinct and precise summary of the causes of the Home Rule crisis yet published and it explores the thoroughly *liberal* reasons for which the 'dissentient' Liberal Unionist MPs

opposed it, it loses its focus as the chapter progresses. Villiers was absent for the climactic parliamentary vote which defeated Gladstone's Irish Government Bill on 8 June 1886 but he chose to join the nascent Liberal Unionist party, established after Gladstone refused to retire, and was then subjected to an intense local smear campaign led by the *Express and Star* newspaper, funded by Andrew Carnegie. The fascinating archival material justifies the inclusion of what is a fairly minor affair in Villiers' career, but not the detail in which the chapter describes the ultimate fruitless attempt to unseat Villiers between 1886 and 1892. Ten pages are devoted to this incident, while the significance of the local Liberal icon's support for the new political party in the same period (an issue that I myself ignored in favour of greater attention to John Bright's similar role in my own study of the period) is barely acknowledged. Although he cites Jon Lawrence's pioneering study of the politics of the town in this period, he does not challenge some of Lawrence's less convincing interpretations which Villiers' career should have enabled him to contest. One wishes, for example, that Swift had recognised that, as Villiers failed to speak and rarely voted in this period, his local career after 1886 is largely of interest for the evidence it provides of a political crisis of liberalism, with its greatest energy directed towards the rival wings of the party, instead of towards the rising challenge of the Labour movement.

This is, nevertheless, a vital text for anyone interested in or studying Victorian liberalism. Any slight faults in its delineation of political Liberalism arise from the contradictory and evolving nature of that ideology as the nineteenth century wore on. It may sometimes detour into less engaging material, but it sheds a light on a career that has been shamefully neglected by modern historians and Professor Swift's achievement in reconstructing such an epic life story with such a rigorous attention to archival detail ought to be applauded unconditionally.

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