William Ewart Gladstone

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

No man has lived in our times of whom it is so hard to speak in a concise and summary fashion as Mr. Gladstone. For forty years he was so closely associated with the public affairs of his country that the record of his parliamentary life comes near to being an outline of English politics. His activity spread itself out over many fields. He was the author of several learned and thoughtful books, and of a multitude of articles upon all sorts of subjects. He showed himself as eagerly interested in matters of classical scholarship and Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical history as in questions of national finance and foreign policy. No account of him could be complete without reviewing his actions and estimating the results of his work in all these directions. But the difficulty of describing and judging him goes deeper. His was a singularly complex nature, a character hard to unravel. His individuality was extremely strong; all that he said or did bore its impress. Yet it was an individuality so far from being self−consistent as sometimes to seem a bundle of opposite qualities capriciously united in a single person. He might with equal truth be called, and he has been in fact called, a conservative and a revolutionary. He was dangerously impulsive, and had frequently to suffer from his impulsiveness; yet he was also not merely wary and cautious, but so astute as to have been accused of craft and dissimulation. So great was his respect for authority and tradition that he clung to views regarding the unity of Homer and the historical claims of Christian sacerdotalism which the majority of competent specialists have now rejected. So bold was he in practical matters that he transformed the British constitution, changed the course of English policy in the Orient, destroyed an established church in one part of the United Kingdom, and committed himself to the destruction of two established churches in two other parts. He came near to being a Roman Catholic in his religious opinions, yet was for twenty years the darling leader of the English Protestant Nonconformists and the Scotch Presbyterians. No one who knew him intimately doubted his conscientious sincerity and earnestness, yet four fifths of the English upper classes were in his later years wont to regard him as a self−interested schemer who would sacrifice his country to his lust for power. Though he loved general principles, and often soared out of the sight of his audience when discussing them, he generally ended by deciding upon points of detail the question at issue. He was at different times of his life the defender and the assailant of the same institutions, yet he scarcely seemed inconsistent in doing opposite things, because his method and his arguments preserved the same type and color throughout. Any one who had at the beginning of his career discerned in him the capacity for such strange diversities and contradictions would probably have predicted that they must wreck it by making his purposes weak and his course erratic. Such a prediction would have proved true of any one with less firmness of will and less intensity of temper. It was the persistent heat and vehemence of his character, the sustained passion which he

threw into the pursuit of the object on which he was for the moment bent, that fused these dissimilar qualities and made them appear to contribute to and to increase the total force which he exerted.

CHAPTER II: EARLY INFLUENCES

The circumstances of Mr. Gladstone's political career help to explain, or, at any rate, will furnish occasion for the attempt to explain, this complexity and variety of character. But before we come to his manhood it is convenient to advert to three conditions whose influence on him has been profound: the first his Scottish blood, the second his Oxford education, the third his apprenticeship to public life under Sir Robert Peel.

Theories of character based on race differences are dangerous, because they are so easy to form and so hard to test. Still, no one denies that there are qualities and tendencies generally found in the minds of men of certain stocks, just as there are peculiarities in their faces or in their speech. Mr. Gladstone was born and brought up in Liverpool, and always retained a touch of Lancashire accent. But, as he was fond of saying, every drop of blood in his veins was Scotch. His father was a Lowland Scot from the neighborhood of Biggar, in the Upper Ward of Lanarkshire, where the old yeoman's dwelling of Gledstanes−−"the kite's rock"−−may still be seen. His mother was of Highland extraction, by name Robertson, from Dingwall, in Ross−shire. Thus he was not only a Scot, but a Scot with a strong infusion of the Celtic element, the element whence the Scotch derive most of what distinguishes them from the English. The Scot is more excitable, more easily brought to a glow of passion, more apt to be eagerly absorbed in one thing at a time. He is also more fond of abstract intellectual effort. It is not merely that the taste for metaphysical theology is commoner in Scotland than in England, but that the Scotch have a stronger relish for general principles. They like to set out by ascertaining and defining such principles, and then to pursue a series of logical deductions from them. They are, therefore, somewhat bolder reasoners than the English, less content to remain in the region of concrete facts, more eager to hasten on to the process of working out a body of speculative doctrines. The Englishman is apt to plume himself on being right in spite of logic; the Scotchman delights to think that it is through logic he has reached his conclusions, and that he can by logic defend them. These are qualities which Mr. Gladstone drew from his Scottish blood. He had a keen enjoyment of the processes of dialectic. He loved to get hold of an abstract principle and to derive all sorts of conclusions from it. He was wont to begin the discussion of a question by laying down two or three sweeping propositions covering the subject as a whole, and would then proceed to draw from these others which he could apply to the particular matter in hand. His well−stored memory and boundless ingenuity made this finding of such general propositions so easy a task that a method in itself agreeable sometimes appeared to be carried to excess. He frequently arrived at conclusions which the judgment of the sober auditor did not approve, because, although they seemed to have been legitimately deduced from the general principles just enunciated, they were somehow at variance with the plain teaching of the facts. At such moments one felt that the man who was charming but perplexing Englishmen by his subtlety and ingenuity was not himself an Englishman in mental quality, but had the love for abstractions and refinements and dialectical analysis which characterizes the Scotch intellect. He had also a large measure of that warmth and vehemence, called in the sixteenth century the perfervidum ingenium Scotorum, which belong to the Scottish temperament, and particularly to the Celtic Scot. He kindled quickly, and when kindled, he shot forth a strong and brilliant flame. To any one with less power of self−control such intensity of emotion as he frequently showed would have been dangerous; nor did this excitability fail, even with him, to prompt words and acts which a cooler judgment would have disapproved. But it gave that spontaneity which was one of the charms of his nature; it produced that impression of profound earnestness and of resistless force which raised him out of the rank of ordinary statesmen. The tide of emotion swelling fast and full seemed to turn the whole rushing stream of intellectual effort into whatever channel lay at the moment nearest.

With these Scottish qualities, Mr. Gladstone was brought up at school and college among Englishmen, and received at Oxford, then lately awakened from a long torpor, a bias and tendency which never thereafter ceased to affect him. The so−called "Oxford Movement," which afterward obtained the name of Tractarianism and carried Dr. Newman, together with other less famous leaders, on to Rome, had not yet, in 1831, when Mr. Gladstone won

his degree with double first− class honors, taken visible shape, or become, so to speak, conscious of its own purposes. But its doctrinal views, its peculiar vein of religious sentiment, its respect for antiquity and tradition, its proneness to casuistry, its taste for symbolism, were already potent influences working on the more susceptible of the younger minds. On Mr. Gladstone they told with full force. He became, and never ceased to be, not merely a High−churchman, but what may be called an Anglo−Catholic, in his theology, deferential not only to ecclesiastical tradition, but to the living voice of the visible church, respecting the priesthood as the recipients (if duly ordained) of a special grace and peculiar powers, attaching great importance to the sacraments, feeling himself nearer to the Church of Rome, despite what he deemed her corruptions, than to any of the non−episcopal Protestant churches. Henceforth his interests in life were as much ecclesiastical as political. For a time he desired to be ordained a clergyman. Had this wish been carried out, it can scarcely be doubted that he would eventually have become the leading figure in the Church of England and have sensibly affected her recent history. The later stages in his career drew him away from the main current of political opinion within that church. He who had been the strongest advocate of established churches came to be the leading agent in the disestablishment of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Ireland, and a supporter of the policy of disestablishment in Scotland and in Wales. But the color which these Oxford years gave to his mind and thoughts was never obliterated. They widened the range of his interests and deepened his moral zeal and religious earnestness. But at the same time they confirmed his natural bent toward over−subtle distinctions and fine− drawn reasonings, and they put him somewhat out of sympathy not only with the attitude of the average Englishman, who is essentially a Protestant,−−that is to say, averse to sacerdotalism, and suspicious of any other religious authority than that of the Bible and the individual conscience,−−but also with two of the strongest influences of our time, the influence of the sciences of nature, and the influence of historical criticism. Mr. Gladstone, though too wise to rail at science, as many religious men did till within the last few years, could never quite reconcile himself either to the conclusions of geology and zoology regarding the history of the physical world and the animals which inhabit it, or to the modern methods of critical inquiry as applied to Scripture and to ancient literature generally. The training which Oxford then gave, stimulating as it was, and free from the modern error of over specialization, was defective in omitting the experimental sciences, and in laying undue stress upon the study of language. A proneness to dwell on verbal distinctions and to trust overmuch to the analysis of terms as a means of reaching the truth of things is noticeable in many eminent Oxford writers of that and the next succeeding generation−−some of them, like the illustrious F. D. Maurice, far removed from Dr. Newman and Mr. Gladstone in theological opinion.

When the brilliant young Oxonian entered the House of Commons at the age of twenty−three, Sir Robert Peel was leading the Tory party with an authority and ability rarely surpassed in parliamentary annals. Within two years the young man was admitted into the short−lived Tory ministry of 1834, and soon proved himself an active and promising lieutenant of the experienced chief. Peel was an eminently wary and cautious man, alive to the necessity of watching the signs of the times, of studying and interpreting the changeful phases of public opinion. His habit was to keep his own counsel, and even when he perceived that the policy he had hitherto followed would need to be modified, to continue to use guarded language and refuse to commit himself to change till he perceived that the fitting moment had arrived. He was, moreover, a master of detail, slow to propound a plan until he had seen how its outlines were to be filled up by appropriate devices for carrying it out in practice. These qualities and habits of the minister profoundly affected his gifted disciple. They became part of the texture of his own political character, and in his case, as in that of Peel, they sometimes brought censure upon him, as having withheld too long from the public views or purposes which he thought it unwise to disclose till effect could promptly be given to them. Such reserve, such a guarded attitude and conservative attachment to existing institutions, were not altogether natural to Mr. Gladstone's mind, and the contrast between them and some of his other qualities, like the contrast which ultimately appeared between his sacerdotal tendencies and his political liberalism, contributed to make his character perplexing and to expose his conduct to the charge of inconsistency. Inconsistent, in the ordinary sense of the word, he was not, much less changeable. He was really, in the main features of his political convictions and the main habits of his mind, one of the most tenacious and persistent of men. But there were always at work in him two tendencies. One was the speculative desire to probe everything to the bottom, to try it by the light of general principles and logic, and where it failed to stand this test, to reject it. The other was the sense of the complexity of existing social and political arrangements, and of the risk of

disturbing any one part of them unless the time had arrived for resettling other parts also. Every statesman feels both these sides to every concrete question of reform. No one has set them forth more cogently, and in particular no one has more earnestly dwelt on the necessity for the latter, than the most profound thinker among English statesmen, Edmund Burke. Mr. Gladstone, however, felt and stated them with quite unusual force, and when he stated the one side, people forgot that there was another which would be no less vividly present to him at some other moment. He was not only, like all successful parliamentarians, necessarily something of an opportunist, though perhaps less so than his master Peel, but was moved by emotion more than most statesmen, and certainly more than Peel. The relative strength with which the need for comprehensive reform or the need for watchful conservatism presented itself to his mind depended largely upon the weight which his emotions cast into one or the other scale, and this element made it difficult to forecast his probable action. Thus his political character was the result of influences differing widely in their origin−−influences, moreover, which it was hard for ordinary observers to appreciate.

CHAPTER III: PARLIAMENTARIAN

Mr. Gladstone sat for sixty−three years in Parliament, and for more than twenty−six years was the leader of his party, and therefore the central figure of English politics. As has been said, he began as a high Tory, remained about fifteen years in that camp, was then led by the split between Peel and the protectionists to take up an intermediate position, and finally was forced to cast in his lot with the Liberals, for in England, as in America, third parties seldom endure. No parliamentary career in English annals is comparable to his for its length and variety; and of those who saw its close in the House of Commons, there was only one man, Mr. Villiers (who died in January, 1898), who could remember its beginning. He had been opposed in 1833 to men who might have been his grandfathers; he was opposed in 1893 to men who might have been his grandchildren. In a sketch like this, it is impossible to describe or comment on the events of such a life. All that can be done is to indicate the more salient characteristics which a study of his career as a statesman and a parliamentarian sets before us.

The most remarkable of these characteristics is the sustained freshness, openness, eagerness of mind, which he preserved down to the end of his life. Most of us, just as we make few intimate friends, so we form few new opinions after thirty−five. Intellectual curiosity may remain fresh and strong even after fifty, but its range steadily narrows as one abandons the hope of attaining any thorough knowledge of subjects other than those which make the main business of one's life. One cannot follow the progress of all the new ideas that are set afloat in the world. One cannot be always examining the foundations of one's political or religious beliefs. Repeated disappointments and disillusionments make a man expect less from changes the older he grows; and mere indolence adds its influence in deterring us from entering upon new enterprises. None of these causes seemed to affect Mr. Gladstone. He was as much excited over a new book (such as Cardinal Manning's Life) at eighty− six as when at fourteen he insisted on compelling little Arthur Stanley (afterward Dean of Westminster, and then aged nine) to procure Gray's poems, which he had just perused himself. His reading covered almost the whole field of literature, except physical and mathematical science. While frequently declaring that he must confine his political thinking and leadership to a few subjects, he was so observant of the movements of opinion that the course of talk brought up scarcely any topic in which he did not seem to know what was the latest thing that had been said or done. Neither the lassitude nor the prejudices common in old age prevented him from giving a fair consideration to any new doctrines. But though his intellect was restlessly at work, and though his eager curiosity disposed him to relish novelties, except in theology, that bottom rock in his mind of caution and reserve, which has already been referred to, made him refuse to part with old views even when he was beginning to accept new ones. He allowed both to "lie on the table" together, and while declaring his mind to be open to conviction, he felt it safer to speak and act on the old lines till the process of conviction had been completed. It took fourteen years, from 1846 to 1860, to carry him from the Conservative into the Liberal camp. It took five stormy years to bring him round to Irish home rule, though his mind was constantly occupied with the subject from 1880 to 1885, and those who watched him closely saw that the process had advanced some considerable way even in 1881. And as regards ecclesiastical establishments, having written a book in 1838 as a warm advocate of state churches, it was not till

1867 that he adopted the policy of disestablishment for Ireland, not till 1890 that he declared himself ready to apply it in Wales and Scotland also.

Both these qualities−−his disposition to revise his opinions in the light of new arguments and changing conditions, and the reticence he maintained till the process of revision had been completed−−exposed him to misconstruction. Commonplace men, unwont to give serious scrutiny to their opinions, ascribed his changes to self−interest, or at best regarded them as the index of an unstable mind. Dull men could not understand why he should have forborne to set forth all that was passing in his mind, and saw little difference between reticence and dishonesty. Much of the suspicion and even fear with which he was regarded, especially after 1885, arose from the idea that it was impossible to predict what he would do next, and how far his openness of mind would carry him. In so far as they tended to shake public confidence, these characteristics injured him in his statesman's work, but the loss was far outweighed by the gain. In a country where opinion is active and changeful, where the economic conditions that legislation has to deal with are in a state of perpetual flux, where the balance of power between the upper and middle and poorer classes has been swiftly altering during the last sixty years, no statesman can continue to serve the public if he adheres obstinately to the views with which he started in life. He must−−unless, of course, he stands aloof in permanent opposition−− either submit to advocate measures he secretly mislikes, or else must keep himself always ready to learn from events, and to reconsider his opinions in the light of emergent tendencies and insistent facts. Mr. Gladstone's pride as well as his conscience forbade the former alternative; it was fortunate that the inexhaustible activity of his intellect made the latter natural to him. He was accustomed to say that the great mistake of his earlier views had been in not sufficiently recognizing the worth and power of liberty, and the tendency which things have to work out for good when left to themselves. The application of this principle gave room for many developments, and many developments there were. He may have wanted that prescience which is, after integrity, the highest gift of a statesman, but which is almost impossible to a man so pressed by the constant and engrossing occupations of an English minister that he cannot find time for the patient study and thought from which alone sound forecasts can issue. But he had the next best quality, that of always learning from the events which passed under his eyes.

With this singular openness and flexibility of mind, there went a not less remarkable ingenuity and resourcefulness. His mind was fertile in expedients, and still more fertile in reasonings by which to recommend the expedients. This gift was often dangerous, for he was apt to be carried away by the dexterity of his own dialectic, and to think schemes substantially good in whose support he could muster so formidable an array of arguments. He never seemed to be at a loss, in public or private, for a criticism, or for an answer to the criticisms of others. If his power of adapting his own mind to the minds of those whom he had to convince had been equal to the skill and swiftness with which he accumulated a mass of matter persuasive to those who looked at things in his own way, no one would have exercised so complete a control over the political opinion of his time. But his mind had not this power of adaptation. It moved on its own lines−−peculiar lines, which were often misconceived, even by those who sought to follow him most loyally. Thus it happened that he was blamed for two opposite faults. Some, pointing to the fact that he had frequently altered his views, denounced him as a demagogue profuse of promises, ready to propose whatever he thought likely to catch the people's ear. Others complained that there was no knowing where to have him; that he had an erratic mind, whose currents ran underground and came to the surface in unexpected places; that he did not consult his party, but followed his own predilections; that his guidance was unsafe because his decisions were unpredictable. Both these views were unfair, yet the latter came nearer to the truth than the former. No great popular leader had in him less of the true ring of the demagogue. He saw, of course, that a statesman cannot oppose the popular will beyond a certain point, and may have to humor it in order that he may direct it. Now and then, in his later days, he so far yielded to his party advisers as to express his approval of proposals for which he cared little personally. But he was too self−absorbed, too eagerly interested in the ideas that suited his own cast of thought, to be able to watch and gage the tendencies of the multitude. On several occasions he announced a policy which startled people and gave a new turn to the course of events. But in none of these instances, and certainly not in the three most remarkable,−−his declarations against the Irish church establishment in 1868, against the Turks and the traditional English policy of supporting them in 1876, and in favor of Irish home rule in 1886,−−did any popular demand suggest his pronouncement. It was the masses who

took their view from him, not he who took his mandate from the masses. In all of these instances he was at the time in opposition, and was accused of having made this new departure for the sake of recovering power. In the two former he prevailed, and was ultimately admitted, by his more candid adversaries, to have counseled wisely. In all of them he may, perhaps, be censured for not having sooner perceived, or at any rate for not having sooner announced, the need for reform. But it was very characteristic of him not to give the full strength of his mind to a question till he felt that it pressed for a solution. Those who discussed politics with him were scarcely more struck by the range of his vision and his power of correlating principles and details than by his unwillingness to commit himself on matters whose decision he could postpone. Reticence and caution were sometimes carried too far, not merely because they exposed him to misconstruction, but because they withheld from his party the guidance it needed. This was true in all the three instances just mentioned; and in the last of them his reticence probably contributed to the separation from him of some of his former colleagues. Nor did he always rightly divine the popular mind. Absorbed in his own financial views, he omitted to note the change that had been in progress between 1862 and 1874, and thus his proposal in the latter year to extinguish the income tax fell completely flat. He often failed to perceive how much the credit of his party was suffering from the belief, quite groundless so far as he personally was concerned, that his government was indifferent to what are called Imperial interests, the interests of England outside England. But he always thought for himself, and never stooped to flatter the prejudices or inflame the passions of any class in the community.

Though the power of reading the signs of the times and moving the mind of the nation as a whole may be now more essential to an English statesman than the skill which manages a legislature or holds together a cabinet, that skill counts for much, and must continue to do so while the House of Commons remains the supreme governing authority of the country. A man can hardly reach high place, and certainly cannot retain high place, without possessing this kind of art. Mr. Gladstone was at one time thought to want it. In 1864, when Lord Palmerston's end was evidently near and Mr. Gladstone had shown himself the most brilliant and capable man among the Liberal ministers in the House of Common's, people speculated about the succession to the headship of the party; and the wiseacres of the day were never tired of repeating that Mr. Gladstone could not possibly lead the House of Commons. He wanted tact (they said), he was too excitable, too impulsive, too much absorbed in his own ideas, too unversed in the arts by which individuals are conciliated. But when, after twenty−five years of his unquestioned reign, the time for his own departure drew nigh, men asked how the Liberal party in the House of Commons would ever hold together after it had lost a leader of such consummate capacity. Seldom has a prediction been more utterly falsified than that of the Whig critics of 1864. They had grown so accustomed to Palmerston's way of handling the House as to forget that a man might succeed by quite different methods. And they forgot also that a man may have many defects and yet in spite of them be incomparably the fittest for a great place.

Mr. Gladstone had the defects that were ascribed to him. His impulsiveness sometimes betrayed him into declarations which a cooler man would have abstained from. The second reading of the Irish Home−Rule Bill of 1886 would probably have been carried had he not been goaded by his opponents into words which seemed to recall or modify the concessions he had announced at a meeting of the Liberal party held just before. More than once precious time was wasted in useless debates because his antagonists, knowing his excitable temper, brought on discussions with the sole object of annoying him and drawing from him some hasty deliverance. Nor was he an adept, like Disraeli and Sir John A. Macdonald, in the management of individuals. He had a contempt for the meaner side of human nature which made him refuse to play upon it. He had comparatively little sympathy with many of the pursuits which attract ordinary men; and he was too constantly engrossed by the subjects of enterprises which specially appealed to him to have leisure for the lighter but often very important devices of political strategy. A trifling anecdote, which was told in London about twenty−five years ago, may illustrate this characteristic. Mr. Delane, then editor of the "Times," had been invited to meet the prime minister at a moment when the support of the "Times" would have been specially valuable to the Liberal government. Instead of using the opportunity to set forth his policy and invite an opinion on it, Mr. Gladstone talked the whole time of dinner upon the question of the exhaustion of the English coal−beds, to the surprise of the company and the unconcealed annoyance of the powerful guest. It was the subject then uppermost in his mind, and he either did not think of

winning Mr. Delane or disdained to do so. In the House of Commons he was entirely free from airs, or, indeed, from any sort of assumption of superiority. The youngest member might accost him in the lobby and be listened to with perfect courtesy. But he seldom addressed any one outside his own very small group of friends, and more than once made enemies by omitting to notice and show some attention to members of his party who, having been eminent in their own towns, expected to be made much of when they entered Parliament. Having himself plenty of pride and comparatively little vanity, he never realized the extent to which, and the cheapness with which, men can be captured and used through their vanity. And his mind, flexible as it was in seizing new points of view and devising expedients to meet new circumstances, did not easily enter into the characters of other men. Ideas and causes interested him more than personal traits did; his sympathy was keener and stronger for the sufferings of nations or masses of men than with the fortunes of a particular person. With all his accessibility and immensely wide circle of acquaintances, he was at bottom a man chary of real friendship, while the circle of his intimates became constantly smaller with advancing years.

So it befell that though his popularity among the general body of his adherents went on increasing, and the admiration of his parliamentary followers remained undiminished, he had few intimate friends, few men in the House of Commons who linked him to the party at large and rendered to him those confidential personal services which count for much in keeping a party in hearty accord and enabling the commander to gage the sentiment of his troops. Thus adherents were lost who turned into dangerous foes−−lost for the want not so much of tact as of a sense for the need and use of tact in humoring and managing men.

If, however, we speak of parliamentary strategy in its larger sense, as covering familiarity with parliamentary forms and usages, the powers of seizing a parliamentary situation and knowing how to deal with it, the art of guiding a debate and choosing the right moment for reserve and for openness, for a dignified retreat, for a watchful defense, for a sudden rattling charge upon the enemy, no one had a fuller mastery of it. His recollection of precedents was unrivaled, for it began in 1833 with the first reformed Parliament, and it seemed as fresh for those remote days as for last month. He enjoyed combat for its own sake, not so much from any inborn pugnacity, for he was not disputatious in ordinary conversation, as because it called out his fighting force and stimulated his whole nature. "I am never nervous in reply," he once said, "though I am sometimes nervous in opening a debate." And although his impetuosity sometimes betrayed him into imprudence when he was taken unawares, no one could be more wary or guarded when a crisis arrived whose gravity he had foreseen. In the summer of 1881 the House of Lords made some amendments to the Irish Land Bill which were deemed ruinous to the working of the measure, and therewith to the prospects of the pacification of Ireland. A conflict was expected which might have strained the fabric of the constitution. The excitement which quickly arose in Parliament spread to the whole nation. Mr. Gladstone alone remained calm and confident. He devised a series of compromises, which he advocated in conciliatory speeches. He so played his game that by a few minor concessions he secured nearly all of the points he cared for, and, while sparing the dignity of the Lords, steered his bill triumphantly out of the breakers which had threatened to engulf it. Very different was his ordinary demeanor in debate when he was off his guard. Observers have often described how his face and gestures while he sat in the House of Commons listening to an opponent would express all the emotions that crossed his mind; with what eagerness he would follow every sentence, sometimes contradicting half aloud, sometimes turning to his next neighbor to express his displeasure at the groundless allegations or fallacious arguments he was listening to, till at last he would spring to his feet and deliver a passionate reply. His warmth would often be in excess of what the occasion required, and quite disproportioned to the importance of his antagonist. It was in fact the unimportance of the occasion that made him thus yield to his feeling. As soon as he saw that bad weather was coming, and that careful seamanship was wanted, his coolness returned, his language became guarded and careful, and passion, though it might increase the force of his oratory, never made him deviate a hand's breadth from the course he had chosen.

CHAPTER IV: ORATOR

Of that oratory, something must now be said. By it he rose to fame and power, as, indeed, by it most English

statesmen have risen, save those to whom wealth and rank and family connections have given a sort of presumptive claim to high office, like the Cavendishes and the Russells, the Cecils and the Bentincks. And for many years, during which Mr. Gladstone was distrusted as a statesman because, while he had ceased to be a Tory, he had not fully become a Liberal, his eloquence was the main, one might almost say the sole, source of his influence. Oratory was a power in English politics even a century and a half ago, as the career of the elder Pitt shows. But within the last fifty years, years which have seen the power of rank and family connections decline, it has continued to be essential to the highest success although much less cultivated as a fine art, and brings a man quickly to the front, though it will not keep him there should he prove to want the other branches of statesmanlike capacity.

The permanent reputation of an orator depends upon two things, the witness of contemporaries to the impression produced upon them, and the written or printed−−we may, perhaps, be soon able to say the phonographed−−record of his speeches. Few are the famous speakers who would be famous if they were tried by this latter test alone, and Mr. Gladstone was not one of them. It is only by a rare combination of gifts that one who speaks with so much readiness, force, and brilliance as to charm his listeners is also able to deliver such valuable thoughts in such choice words that posterity will read them as literature. Some few of the ancient orators did this; but we seldom know how far those of their speeches which have been preserved are the speeches which they actually delivered. Among moderns, some French preachers, Edmund Burke, Macaulay, and Daniel Webster are perhaps the only speakers whose discourses have passed into classics and find new generations of readers. Twenty years hence Mr. Gladstone's will not be read, except, of course, by historians. They are too long, too diffuse, too minute in their handling of details, too elaborately qualified in their enunciation of general principles. They contain few epigrams and few of those weighty thoughts put into telling phrases which the Greeks called [Greek text].

The style, in short, is not sufficiently rich or finished to give a perpetual interest to matters whose practical importance has vanished. The same oblivion has overtaken all but a very few of the best things of Grattan, Pitt, Canning, Plunket, Brougham, Peel, Bright. It may, indeed, be said−−and the examples of Burke and Macaulay show that this is no paradox−−that the speakers whom posterity most enjoys are rarely those who most affected the audiences that listened to them.

If, on the other hand, Mr. Gladstone be judged by the impression he made on his own time, his place will be high in the front rank. His speeches were neither so concisely telling as Mr. Bright's nor so finished in diction; but no other man among his contemporaries−− neither Lord Derby nor Mr. Lowe nor Mr. Disraeli nor Bishop Wilberforce nor Bishop Magee−−deserved comparison with him. And he rose superior to Mr. Bright himself in readiness, in variety of knowledge, in persuasive ingenuity. Mr. Bright required time for preparation, and was always more successful in alarming his adversaries and stimulating his friends than in either instructing or convincing anybody. Mr. Gladstone could do all these four things, and could do them at an hour's notice, so vast and well ordered was the arsenal of his mind.

His oratory had many conspicuous merits. There was a lively imagination, which enabled him to relieve even dull matter by pleasing figures, together with a large command of quotations and illustrations. There were remarkable powers of sarcasm−−powers, however, which he rarely used, preferring the summer lightning of banter to the thunderbolt of invective. There was admirable lucidity and accuracy in exposition. There was great skill in the disposition and marshaling of his arguments, and finally−−a gift now almost lost in England−−there was a wonderful variety and grace of appropriate gesture. But above and beyond everything else which enthralled the listener, there were four qualities, two specially conspicuous in the substance of his eloquence−−inventiveness and elevation; two not less remarkable in his manner−−force in the delivery, expressive modulation in the voice.

Of the swift resourcefulness of his mind, something has been said already. In debate it shone out with the strongest ray. His readiness, not only at catching a point, but at making the most of it on a moment's notice, was amazing. Some one would lean over the back of the bench he sat on and show a paper or whisper a sentence to

him. Apprehending its bearings at a glance, he would take the bare fact and so shape and develop it, like a potter molding a bowl on the wheel out of a lump of clay, that it grew into a cogent argument or a happy illustration under the eye of the audience, and seemed all the more telling because it had not been originally a part of his case. Even in the last two years of his parliamentary life, when his sight had so failed that he read nothing, printed or written, except what it was absolutely necessary to read, and when his deafness had so increased that he did not hear half of what was said in debate, it was sufficient for a colleague to whisper a few words to him, explaining how the matter at issue stood, and he would rise to his feet and extemporize a long and ingenious argument, or perhaps retreat with dexterous grace from a position which the course of the discussion or the private warning of the "whips" had shown to be untenable. No one ever saw him at a loss either to meet a new point raised by an adversary or to make the most of an unexpected incident. Sometimes he would amuse himself by drawing a cheer or a contradiction from his opponents, and would then suddenly turn round and use this hasty expression of their opinion as the basis for a fresh argument of his own. In this particular kind of debating power, for the display of which the House of Commons−−an assembly of moderate size, which knows all its leading figures familiarly−−is an apt theater, he has been seldom rivaled and never surpassed. Its only weakness sprang from its superabundance. He was sometimes so intent on refuting the particular adversaries opposed to him, and persuading the particular audience before him, that he forgot to address his reasonings to the public beyond the House, and make them equally applicable and equally convincing to the readers of next morning.

As dignity is one of the rarest qualities in literature, so elevation is one of the rarest in oratory. It is a quality easier to feel than to describe or analyze. We may call it a power of ennobling ordinary things by showing their relation to great things, of pouring high emotions round them, of bringing the worthier motives of human conduct to bear upon them, of touching them with the light of poetry. Ambitious writers and speakers incessantly strain after effects of this kind; but they are effects which study and straining do not enable a man to attain. Vainly do most of us flap our wings in the effort to soar; if we rise from the ground it is because some unusually strong or deep burst of feeling makes us for the moment better than ourselves. In Mr. Gladstone the capacity for feeling was at all times so strong, the susceptibility of the imagination so keen, that he soared without effort. His vision seemed to take in the whole landscape. The points actually in question might be small, but the principles involved were to him far−reaching. The contests of to−day seemed to interest him because their effect would be felt in a still distant future. There are rhetoricians skilful in playing by words and manner on every chord of human nature, rhetoricians who move you indeed, and may even carry you away for the moment, but whose sincerity you nevertheless doubt, because the sense of spontaneity is lacking. Mr. Gladstone was not of these. He never seemed to be forcing an effect or assuming a sentiment. To listen to him was to feel convinced of his own conviction and of the reality of the warmth with which he expressed it. Nor was this due to the perfection of his rhetorical art. He really did feel what he expressed. Sometimes, of course, like all statesmen, he had to maintain a cause whose weakness he knew, as, for instance, when it became necessary to defend the blunder of a colleague. But even in such cases he did not simulate feeling, but reserved his earnestness for those parts of the case on which it could be honestly expended. As this was true of the imaginative and emotional side of his eloquence altogether, so was it especially true of his unequaled power of lifting a subject from the level on which other speakers had treated it into the purer air of permanent principle, perhaps even of moral sublimity.

The note of genuineness and spontaneity which marked the substance of his speeches was no less conspicuous in their delivery. Nothing could be more easy and graceful than his manner on ordinary occasions. His expository discourses, such as those with which he introduced a complicated bill or unfolded a financial statement, were models of their kind, not only for lucidity, but for the pleasant smoothness, equally free from monotony and from abruptness, with which the stream of speech flowed from his lips. The task was performed so well that people thought it an easy task till they saw how immeasurably inferior were the performances of two subsequent chancellors of the exchequer so able in their respective ways as Mr. Lowe and Mr. Goschen. But when an occasion arrived which quickened men's pulses, and particularly when some sudden storm burst on the House of Commons, a place where the waves rise as fast as in a mountain lake under a squall rushing down a glen, the vehemence of his feeling found expression in the fire of his eye and the resistless strength of his words. His utterance did not grow swifter, nor did the key of his voice rise, as passion raises and sharpens it in most men. But

the measured force with which every sentence was launched, like a shell hurtling through the air, the concentrated intensity of his look, as he defied antagonists in front and swept his glance over the ranks of his supporters around and behind him, had a startling and thrilling power which no other Englishman could exert, and which no Englishman had exerted since the days of Pitt and Fox. The whole proud, bold, ardent nature of the man seemed to flash out, and one almost forgot what the lips said in admiration of the towering personality.

People who read next day the report in the newspapers of a speech delivered on such an occasion could not comprehend the impression it had made on the listeners. "What was there in it so to stir you?" they asked. They had not seen the glance and the gestures; they had not heard the vibrating voice rise to an organ peal of triumph or sink to a whisper of entreaty. Mr. Gladstone's voice was naturally one of great richness and resonance. It was a fine singing voice, and a pleasant voice to listen to in conversation, not the less pleasant for having a slight trace of Liverpool accent clinging to it. But what struck one in listening to his speeches was not so much the quality of the vocal chords as the skill with which they were managed. He had the same gift of sympathetic expression, of throwing his feeling into his voice, and using its modulations to accompany and convey every shade of meaning, that a great composer has when he puts music to a poem, or a great executant when he renders at once the composer's and the poet's thought. And just as great singers or violinists enjoy the practice of their art, so it was a delight to him to put forth this faculty of expression−− perhaps an unconscious, yet an intense delight; as appeared from this also, that whenever his voice failed him (which sometimes befell in later years) his words came less easily, and even the chariot of his argument seemed to drive heavily. That the voice should so seldom have failed him was wonderful. When he had passed his seventy−fifth year, it became sensibly inferior in volume and depth of tone. But its strength, variety, and delicacy remained. In April, 1886, he being then seventy−seven, it held out during a speech of nearly four hours in length. In February, 1890, it enabled him to deliver with extraordinary effect an eminently solemn and pathetic appeal. In March, 1895, those who listened to it the last time it was heard in Parliament−−they were comparatively few, for the secret of his impending resignation had been well kept−− recognized in it all the old charm. But perhaps the most curious instance of the power it could exert is to be found in a speech made in 1883, during one of the tiresome debates occasioned by the refusal of the Tory party and of some timorous Liberals to allow Mr. Bradlaugh to be sworn as a member of the House of Commons. This speech produced a profound impression on those who heard it, an impression which its perusal to−day fails to explain. That impression was chiefly due to the grave and reverent tone in which he delivered some sentences stating the view that it is not our belief in the bare existence of a Deity, but the realizing of him as being also a Providence ruling the world, that is of moral value and significance, and was due in particular to the lofty dignity with which he declaimed six lines of Lucretius, setting forth the Epicurean view of the gods as unconcerned with mankind. There were probably not ten men in the House of Commons who could follow the sense of the lines so as to appreciate their bearing on his argument. But these stately and sonorous hexameters−−hexameters that seemed to have lived on through nineteen centuries to find their application from the lips of an orator to−day; the sense of remoteness in the strange language and the far−off heathen origin; the deep and moving note in the speaker's voice, thrilled the imagination of the audience and held it spellbound, lifting for a moment the whole subject of debate into a region far above party conflicts. Spoken by any one else, the passage culminating in these Lucretian lines might have produced little effect. It was the voice and manner, above all the voice, with its marvelous modulations, that made the speech majestic.

Yet one must not forget to add that with him, as with some other famous statesmen, the impression made by a speech was in a measure due to the admiring curiosity and wonder which his personality inspired. He was so much the most interesting human being in the House of Commons that, when he withdrew, many members said that the place had lost half its attraction for them, and that the chamber seemed empty because he was not in it. Plenty of able men remained. But even the ablest seemed ordinary, perhaps even commonplace, when compared with the figure that had vanished, a figure in whom were combined, as in no other man of his time, an unrivaled experience, an extraordinary activity and versatility of intellect, a fervid imagination, and an indomitable will.

CHAPTER V: ORIGINALITY AND INDEPENDENCE

Though Mr. Gladstone's oratory was a main source of his power, both in Parliament and over the people, the effort of his enemies to represent him as a mere rhetorician will seem absurd to the historian who reviews his whole career. The mere rhetorician adorns and popularizes the ideas which have originated with others, he advocates policies which others have devised; he follows and expresses the sentiments which already prevail in his party. He may help to destroy; he does not construct. Mr. Gladstone was himself a source of new ideas and new policies; he evoked new sentiments or turned sentiments into new channels. He was a constructive statesman not less conspicuously than Pitt, Canning, and Peel. If the memory of his oratorical triumphs were to pass completely away, he would deserve to be remembered in respect of the mark he left upon the British statute−book and of the changes he wrought both in the constitution of his country and in her European policy. To describe the acts he carried would almost be to write the history of recent British legislation; to pass a judgment upon their merits would be foreign to the scope of this sketch: it is only to three remarkable groups of measures that reference can here be made.

The first of these three groups includes the financial reforms embodied in a series of fourteen budgets between the years 1853 and 1882, the most famous of which were the budgets of 1853 and 1860. In the former Mr. Gladstone continued the work begun by Peel by reducing and simplifying the customs duties. The deficiency in revenue thus caused was supplied by the enactment of less oppressive imposts, and particularly by resettling the income tax, and by the introduction of a succession duty on real estate. The preparation and passing of this very technical and intricate Succession Duty Act was a most laborious enterprise, of which Mr. Gladstone used to speak as the severest mental strain he had ever undergone.

[Greek text]

The budget of 1860, among other changes, abolished the paper duty, an immense service to the press, which excited the hostility of the House of Lords. They threw out the measure, but in the following year Mr. Gladstone forced them to submit. His achievements in the field of finance equal, if they do not surpass, those of Peel, and are not tarnished, as in the case of Pitt, by the recollection of burdensome wars. To no minister can so large a share in promoting the commercial and industrial prosperity of modern England, and in the reduction of her national debt, be ascribed.

The second group includes the two great parliamentary reform bills of 1866 and 1884 and the Redistribution Bill of 1885. The first of these was defeated in the House of Commons, but it led to the passing next year of an even more comprehensive bill−−a bill which, though passed by Mr. Disraeli, was to some extent dictated by Mr. Gladstone, as leader of the opposition. Of these three statutes taken together, it may be said that they have turned Britain into a democratic country, changing the character of her government almost as profoundly as did the Reform Act of 1832.

The third group consists of a series of Irish measures, beginning with the Church Disestablishment Act of 1869, and including the Land Act of 1870, the University Education Bill of 1873 (defeated in the House of Commons), the Land Act of 1881, and the home−rule bills of 1886 and 1893. All these were in a special manner Mr. Gladstone's handiwork, prepared as well as brought in and advocated by him. All were highly complicated, and of one−−the Land Act of 1881, which it took three months to carry through the House of Commons−−it was said that so great was its intricacy that only three men understood it−− Mr. Gladstone himself, his Attorney−General for Ireland, and Mr. T. M. Healy. So far from shrinking from, he seemed to revel in, the toil of mastering an infinitude of technical details. Yet neither did he want boldness and largeness of conception. The Home−Rule Bill of 1886 was nothing less than a new constitution for Ireland, and in all but one of its most essential features had been practically worked out by himself more than four months before it was presented to Parliament.

Of the other important measures passed while he was prime minister, two deserve special mention, the Education Act of 1870 and the Local−Government Act of 1894. Neither of these, however, was directly his work, though he took a leading part in piloting the former through the House of Commons.

His action in the field of foreign policy, though it was felt only at intervals, was on several occasions momentous, and has left abiding results in European history. In 1851, he being then still a Tory, his powerful pamphlet against the Bourbon government of Naples, and the sympathy he subsequently avowed with the national movement in Italy, gave that movement a new standing in Europe by powerfully recommending it to English opinion. In 1870 the prompt action of his government, in concluding a treaty for the neutrality of Belgium on the outbreak of the war between France and Germany, saved Belgium from being drawn into the strife. In 1871, by concluding the treaty of Washington, which provided for the settlement of the Alabama claims, he not only asserted a principle of the utmost value, but delivered England from what would have been, in case of her being at war with any European power, a danger fatal to her ocean commerce. And, in 1876, the vigorous attack he made on the Turks after the Bulgarian massacre roused an intense feeling in England, so turned the current of opinion that Disraeli's ministry were forced to leave the Sultan to his fate, and thus became the cause of the deliverance of Bulgaria, Eastern Rumelia, Bosnia, and Thessaly from Mussulman tyranny. Few English statesmen have equally earned the gratitude of the oppressed.

Nothing lay nearer to his heart than the protection of the Eastern Christians. His sense of personal duty to them was partly due to the feeling that the Crimean War had prolonged the rule of the Turk, and had thus imposed a special responsibility on Britain, and on the statesmen who formed the cabinet which undertook that war. Twenty years after the agitation of 1876, and when he had finally retired from Parliament and political life, the massacres perpetrated by the Sultan on his Armenian subjects brought him once more into the field, and his last speech in public (delivered at Liverpool in the autumn of 1896) was a powerful argument in favor of British intervention to rescue the Eastern Christians. In the following spring he followed this up by a spirited pamphlet on behalf of the freedom of Crete. In neither of these two cases did success crown his efforts, for the government, commanding a large majority in Parliament, pursued the course it had already entered on. Many poignant regrets were expressed in England that Mr. Gladstone was no longer able to take practical action in the cause of humanity; yet it was a consolation to have the assurance that his sympathies with that cause had been nowise dulled by age and physical infirmity.

That he was right in the view he took of the Turks and British policy in 1876−78 has been now virtually admitted even by his opponents. That he was also right in 1896 and 1897, when urging action to protect the Eastern Christians, will probably be admitted ten years hence, when partizan passion has cooled. In both cases it was not merely religious sympathy, but also a far−sighted view of policy that governed his judgment. The only charge that can fairly be brought against his conduct in foreign, and especially in Eastern, affairs is, that he did not keep a sufficiently watchful eye upon them at all times, but frequently allowed himself to be so engrossed by British domestic questions as to lose the opportunity which his tenure of power from time to time gave him of averting approaching dangers. Those who know how tremendous is the strain which the headship of a cabinet and the leadership of the House of Commons impose will understand, though they will not cease to regret, this omission.

Such a record is the best proof of the capacity for initiative which belonged to him and in which men of high oratorical gifts have often been wanting. In the Neapolitan case, in the Alabama case, in the Bulgarian case, no less than in the adoption of the policy of a separate legislature and executive for Ireland, he acted from his own convictions, with no suggestion of encouragement from his party; and in the last instances−−those of Ireland and of Bulgaria−−he took a course which seemed to the English political world so novel and even startling that no ordinary statesman would have ventured on it.

His courage was indeed one of the most striking parts of his character. It was not the rashness of an impetuous nature, for, impetuous as he was when stirred by some sudden excitement, he was wary and cautious whenever he took a deliberate survey of the conditions that surrounded him. It was the proud self−confidence of a strong

character, which was willing to risk fame and fortune in pursuing a course it had once resolved upon; a character which had faith in its own conclusions, and in the success of a cause consecrated by principle; a character which obstacles did not affright or deter, but rather roused to a higher combative energy. Few English statesmen have done anything so bold as was Mr. Gladstone's declaration for Irish home rule in 1886. He took not only his political power but the fame and credit of his whole past life in his hand when he set out on this new journey at seventy− seven years of age; for it was quite possible that the great bulk of his party might refuse to follow him, and he be left exposed to derision as the chief of an insignificant group. It turned out that the great bulk of the party did follow him, though many of the most influential and socially important refused to do so. But neither Mr. Gladstone nor any one else could have foretold this when his intentions were first announced.

Two faults natural to a strong man and an excitable man were commonly charged on him−−an overbearing disposition and an irritable temper. Neither charge was well founded. Masterful he certainly was, both in speech and in action. His ardent manner, the intensity of his look, the dialectical vigor with which he pressed an argument, were apt to awe people who knew him but slightly, and make them abandon resistance even when they were unconvinced. A gifted though somewhat erratic politician used to tell how he once fared when he had risen in the House of Commons to censure some act of the ministry. "I had not gone on three minutes when Gladstone turned round and gazed at me so that I had to sit down in the middle of a sentence. I could not help it. There was no standing his eye." But he neither meant nor wished to beat down his opponents by mere authority. One of the ablest of his private secretaries, who knew him as few people did, once observed: "When you are arguing with Mr. Gladstone, you must never let him think he has convinced you unless you are really convinced. Persist in repeating your view, and if you are unable to cope with him in skill of fence, say bluntly that for all his ingenuity and authority you think he is wrong, and you retain your own opinion. If he respects you as a man who knows something of the subject, he will be impressed by your opinion, and it will afterward have due weight with him." In his own cabinet he was willing to listen patiently to everybody's views, and, indeed, in the judgment of some of his colleagues, was not, at least in his later years, sufficiently strenuous in asserting and holding to his own. It is no secret that some of the most important decisions of the ministry of 1880−85 were taken against his judgment, though when they had been adopted he, of course, defended them in Parliament as if they had received his individual approval. Nor, although he was extremely resolute and tenacious, did he bear malice against those who foiled his plans. He would exert his full force to get his own way, but if he could not get it, he accepted the position with dignity and good temper. He was too proud to be vindictive, too completely master of himself to be betrayed, even when excited, into angry words. Whether he was unforgiving and overmindful of injuries, it was less easy to determine, but those who had watched him most closely held that mere opposition or even insult did not leave a permanent sting, and that the only thing he could not forget or forgive was faithlessness or disloyalty. Like his favorite poet, he put the traditori in the lowest pit, although, like all practical statesmen, he often found himself obliged to work with those whom he distrusted. His attitude toward his two chief opponents well illustrates this feature of his character. He heartily despised Disraeli, not because Disraeli had been in the habit of attacking him, as one could easily perceive from the way he talked of those attacks, but because he thought Disraeli habitually untruthful, and considered him to have behaved with incomparable meanness to Peel. Yet he never attacked Disraeli personally, as Disraeli often attacked him. There was another of his opponents of whom he entertained an especially bad opinion, but no one could have told from his speeches what that opinion was. For Lord Salisbury he seemed to have no dislike at all, though Lord Salisbury had more than once insulted him. On one occasion (in 1890) he remarked to a colleague who had said something about the prime minister's offensive language: "I have never felt angry at what Salisbury has said about me. His mother was very kind to me when I was quite a young man, and I remember Salisbury as a little fellow in a red frock rolling about on the ottoman." His leniency toward another violent tongue which frequently assailed him, that of Lord Randolph Churchill, was not less noteworthy.

That his temper was naturally hot, no one who looked at him could doubt. But he had it in such tight control, and it was so free from anything acrid or malignant, that it had become a good temper, worthy of a large and strong nature. With whatever vehemence he might express himself, there was nothing wounding or humiliating to others in this vehemence, the proof of which might be found in the fact that those younger men who had to deal with him

were never afraid of a sharp answer or an impatient repulse. A distinguished man (the late Lord Chief Justice Coleridge), some ten years his junior, used to say that he had never feared but two persons, Mr. Gladstone and Cardinal Newman; but it was awe of their character that inspired this fear, for no one could cite an instance in which either of them had forgotten his dignity or been betrayed into a discourteous word. Of Mr. Gladstone especially it might be said that he was cast in too large a mold to have the pettiness of ruffled vanity or to abuse his predominance by treating any one else as an inferior. His manners were the manners of the old time, easy but stately. Like his oratory, they were in what Matthew Arnold used to call the grand style; and the contrast in this respect between him and most of those who crossed swords with him in literary or theological controversy was apparent. His intellectual generosity was a part of the same largeness of nature. He always cordially acknowledged his indebtedness to those who helped him in any piece of work; received their suggestions candidly, even when opposed to his own preconceived notions; did not hesitate to own a mistake if he had made one. Those who have abundant mental resources, and have conquered fame, can doubtless afford to be generous. Julius Caesar was, and George Washington, and so, in a different sphere, were Newton and Darwin. But the instances to the contrary are so numerous that one may say of magnanimity that it is among the rarest as well as the finest ornaments of character.

The essential dignity of his nature was never better seen than during the last few years of his life, after he had retired (in 1894) from Parliament and public life. He indulged in no vain regrets, nor was there any foundation for the rumors, so often circulated, that he thought of reentering the arena of strife. He spoke with no bitterness of those who had opposed, and sometimes foiled, him in the past. He gave vent to no disparaging criticisms on those who from time to time filled the place that had been his in the government of the country or the leadership of his party. Although his opinion on current questions was frequently solicited, he scarcely ever allowed it to be known, and never himself addressed the nation, except (as already mentioned) on behalf of what he deemed a sacred cause, altogether above party−−the discharge by Britain of her duty to the victims of the Turk. As soon as an operation for cataract had enabled him to read or write for seven hours a day, he devoted himself with his old ardor to the preparation of an edition of Bishop Butler's works, resumed his multifarious reading, and filled up the interstices of his working− time with studies on Homer which he had been previously unable to complete. No trace of the moroseness of old age appeared in his manners or his conversation, nor did he, though profoundly grieved at some of the events which he witnessed, and owning himself disappointed at the slow advance made by some causes dear to him, appear less hopeful than in earlier days of the general progress of the world, or less confident in the beneficent power of freedom to promote the happiness of his country. The stately simplicity which had been the note of his private life seemed more beautiful than ever in this quiet evening of a long and sultry day. His intellectual powers were unimpaired, his thirst for knowledge undiminished. But a placid stillness had fallen upon him and his household; and in seeing the tide of his life begin slowly to ebb, one thought of the lines of his illustrious contemporary and friend:

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   such a tide as moving seems asleep,
      Too full for sound or foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
      Turns again home.
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CHAPTER VI: SOCIAL QUALITIES

Adding these charms of manner to a memory of extraordinary strength and quickness and to an amazing vivacity and variety of mental force, any one can understand how fascinating Mr. Gladstone was in society. He enjoyed it to the last, talking as earnestly and joyously at eighty−five as he had done at twenty on every topic that came up, and exerting himself with equal zest, whether his interlocutor was an arch−bishop or a young curate. Though his party used to think that he overvalued the political influence of the great Whig houses and gave them more than their fair share of honors and appointments, no one was personally more free from that taint of snobbishness which is so frequently charged upon Englishmen. He gave the best he had to everybody alike, paying to men of learning and letters a respect which they seldom receive from English politicians or social magnates. And

although he was scrupulously observant of all the rules of precedence and conventions of social life, it was easy to see that neither rank nor wealth had that importance in his eyes which the latter, especially nowadays, commands in London. Dispensing titles and decorations with a liberal hand, his pride always refused such so−called honors for himself. When Mr. Disraeli became Earl of Beaconsfield, his smile had a touch of contempt in it as he observed, "I cannot forgive him for not having made himself a duke."

It was often said of him that he lacked humor; but this was only so far true that he was apt to throw into small matters a force and moral earnestness which ordinary people thought needless, and to treat seriously opponents whom a little light sarcasm would have better reduced to their insignificance. In private he was wont both to tell and enjoy good stories; while in Parliament, though his tone was generally earnest, he would occasionally display such effective powers of banter and ridicule as to make people wonder why they were so rarely put forth. A great deal of what passes in London for humor is mere cynicism, and he hated cynicism so heartily as to dislike even humor when it had a touch of cynical flavor. Wit he enjoyed, but did not produce. The turn of his mind was not to brevity and point and condensation. He sometimes struck off a telling phrase, but never polished an epigram. His conversation was luminous rather than sparkling; you were interested and instructed while you listened, but the words seldom dwelt in your memory.

After the death of Thomas Carlyle he was beyond dispute the best talker in London, and a talker far more agreeable than either Carlyle or Macaulay, inasmuch as he was no less ready to listen than to speak, and never wearied the dinner−table by a monologue. His simplicity, his spontaneity, his genial courtesy, as well as the vast fund of knowledge and of personal recollections at his command, made him extremely popular in society, so that his opponents used to say that it was dangerous to meet him, because one might be forced to leave off hating him. He was, perhaps, too prone to go on talking upon one subject which happened to fill his mind at the moment; nor was it easy to divert his attention to something else which others might deem more important. Those who stayed with him in the same country house sometimes complained that the perpetual display of force and eagerness fatigued them, as one tires of watching the rush of Niagara. His guests, however, did not feel this, for his own home life was quiet and smooth. He read and wrote a good many hours daily, but never sat up late, almost always slept soundly, never missed early morning service at the parish church, never seemed oppressed or driven to strain his strength. With all his impetuosity, he was remarkably regular, systematic, and deliberate in his habits and ways of doing business. A swift reader and a surprisingly swift writer, he was always occupied, and was skilful in using even the scraps and fragments of his time. No pressure of work made him fussy or fidgety, nor could any one remember to have seen him in a hurry.

CHAPTER VII: AUTHORSHIP

The best proof of his swiftness, his industry, and his skill in economizing time is to be found in the quantity of his literary work, which, considering the abstruse nature of the subjects to which most of it is related, would have been creditable to the diligence of a German professor sitting alone in his study. As to the merits of the work there has been some controversy. Mankind are slow to credit the same person with eminence in various fields. When they read the prose of a great poet, they try it by severer tests than would be applied to other prose−writers. When a painter wins fame by his portraits or his landscapes, they are apt to discourage any other kind of painting he may attempt. So Mr. Gladstone's reputation as an orator stood in his own light when he appeared as an author. He was read with avidity by thousands who would not have looked at the article or book had it borne any other name; but he was judged by the standard, not of his finest printed speeches, for his speeches were seldom models of composition, but rather by that of the impression which his speeches made on those who heard them. Since his warmest admirers could not claim for him as a writer of prose any such pre−eminence as belonged to him as a speaker, it followed that his written work was not duly appreciated. Had he been a writer and nothing else, he would have been famous and powerful by his pen.

He might, however, have failed to secure a place in the front rank. His style was forcible, copious, rich with

various knowledge, warm with the ardor of his nature. But it had three serious defects. It was diffuse, apt to pursue a topic into details, when these might have been left to the reader's own reflection. It was redundant, employing more words than were needed to convey the substance. It was unchastened, indulging too freely in tropes and metaphors, in quotations and adapted phrases even when the quotation added nothing to the sense, but was due merely to some association in his own mind. Thus it seldom reached a high level of purity and grace, and though one might excuse its faults as natural to the work of a swift and busy man, they were sufficient to prevent readers from deriving much pleasure from the mere form and dress of his thoughts. Nevertheless there are passages, and not a few passages, both in the books and in the articles, of rare merit, among which may be cited (not as exceptionally good, but as typical of his strong points) the striking picture of his own youthful feeling toward the Church of England contained in the "Chapter of Autobiography," and the refined criticism of "Robert Elsmere," published in 1888. Almost the last thing he wrote, a pamphlet on the Greek and Cretan question, published in the spring of 1897, has all the force and cogency of his best days. Two things were never wanting to him: vigor of expression and an admirable command of appropriate words.

His writings fall into three classes: political, theological, and literary−−the last including, and indeed chiefly consisting of, his books and articles upon Homer and the Homeric question. All the political writings, except his books on "The State in its Relations to the Church" and "Church Principles Considered in their Results," belong to the class of occasional literature, being pamphlets or articles produced with a view to some current crisis or controversy. They are valuable chiefly as proceeding from one who bore a leading part in the affairs they relate to, and as embodying vividly the opinions and aspirations of the moment, less frequently in respect of permanent lessons of political wisdom, such as one finds in Machiavelli or Tocqueville or Edmund Burke. Like Pitt and Peel, Mr. Gladstone had a mind which, whatever its original tendencies, had come to be rather practical than meditative. He was fond of generalizations and principles, but they were always directly related to the questions that came before him in actual politics; and the number of general maxims or illuminative suggestions to be found in his writings and speeches is not large in proportion to their sustained intellectual vigor. Even Disraeli, though his views were often fanciful and his epigrams often forced, gives us more frequently a brilliant (if only half true) historical apercu, or throws a flash of light into some corner of human character. Of the theological essays, which are mainly apologetic and concerned with the authenticity and authority of Scripture, it is enough to say that they exhibit the same general characteristics as the treatises dealing with Homer, which were the most serious piece of work that proceeded from Mr. Gladstone's pen. These Homeric treatises are in one sense worthless, in another sense admirable. Those parts of them which deal with early Greek mythology and religion, with Homeric geography and genealogy, and in a less degree with the use of Homeric epithets, have been condemned by the unanimous voice of scholars as fantastic. The premises are assumed without sufficient investigation, while the reasonings are fine−drawn and flimsy. Extraordinary ingenuity is shown in piling up a lofty fabric, but the foundation is of sand, and the edifice has hardly a solid wall or beam in it. A clever conjecture is treated as a fact; an inference possible but represented as probable is drawn from this conjecture; a second inference is based upon the first; we are made to forget that the probability of this second is at most only half the probability of the first; the process is continued in the same way; and when the whole superstructure is complete, the reader is provoked to perceive how much dialectical skill has been wasted upon a series of hypotheses which a breath of common−sense criticism dissipates. If one is asked to explain the weakness in this particular department of so otherwise strong a mind, the answer would seem to be that the element of fancifulness in Mr. Gladstone's intellect, and his tendency to mistake mere argumentation for verification, were checked in practical politics by constant intercourse with friends and colleagues as well as by the need of convincing visible audiences, while in theological or historical inquiries his ingenuity roamed with a dangerous freedom over wide plains where no obstacles checked its course. Something may also be due to the fact that his philosophical and historical education was received at a time when the modern critical spirit and the canons it recognizes had scarcely begun to assert themselves at Oxford. Similar defects may be discerned in other eminent writers of his own and preceding generations of Oxford men, defects which persons of equal or even inferior power in later generations would not display. In some of these, and particularly in Cardinal Newman, the contrast between dialectical acumen, coupled with surpassing rhetorical skill, and the vitiation of the argument by a want of the critical faculty, is even more striking than in Mr. Gladstone's case; and the example of that illustrious man suggests that the dominance of the

theological view of literary and historical problems, a dominance evident in Mr. Gladstone, counts for something in producing the phenomenon noted.

With these deficiencies, Mr. Gladstone's Homeric work had the great merit of being based on a full and thorough knowledge of the Homeric text. He had seen that Homer is not only a poet, but an "historical source" of the highest value, a treasure−house of data for the study of early Greek life and thought, an authority all the more trustworthy because an unconscious authority, addressing not posterity but his own contemporaries. With this thorough knowledge of the matter contained in the poems, Mr. Gladstone was able to present many interesting and permanently valuable pictures of the political and social life of Homeric Greece, while the interspersed literary criticisms are often subtle and suggestive, erring, when they do err, chiefly through what may be called the over−earnestness of his mind. He sometimes takes the poet too seriously; he is apt to read an ethical purpose into descriptive or dramatic touches which are merely descriptive or dramatic. But he has for his author not only that intense sympathy which is the best basis for criticism, but a real justness of poetic taste which the learned and painstaking German commentator frequently wants. That he was a sound and accurate scholar in that somewhat narrow sense of the word which denotes a grammatical and literary mastery of Greek and Latin, goes without saying. Men of his generation were more apt to keep up their familiarity with the ancient classics than is the present generation; and his habit of reading Greek for the sake of his Homeric studies, and Latin for the sake of his theological, made this familiarity more than usually thorough. Like most Etonians, he loved and knew the poets by preference. Theology claimed a place beside poetry; history came next, and was always a favorite branch of study. It seemed odd that the constitutional history of England was by no means one of his strong subjects, but the fact is that this was preeminently a Whig subject, and Mr. Gladstone never was a Whig, never learned to think upon the lines of the great Whigs of former days. His knowledge was not, perhaps, very wide, but it was generally exact; indeed, the accuracy with which he grasped facts that belonged to the realm of history proper was sometimes in strange contrast to the fanciful way in which he reasoned from them, or to the wildness of his conjectures in the prehistoric region. For metaphysics strictly so called he had apparently little turn−− his reading did not go far beyond those companions of his youth, Aristotle and Bishop Butler; and philosophical speculation interested him only so far as it bore on Christian doctrine. Neither, in spite of his eminence as a financier and an advocate of free trade, did he show much taste for economic studies. On practical topics, such as the working of protective tariffs, the abuse of charitable endowments, the development of fruit−culture in England, the duty of liberal giving by the rich, the utility of thrift among the poor, his remarks were always full of point, clearness, and good sense, but he seldom launched out into the wider sea of economic theory. He must have possessed mathematical talent, for he took a first class in mathematics at Oxford, at the same time as his first in classics, but it was a subject he soon dropped. Regarding the sciences of nature, the sciences of experiment and observation, he seemed to feel as little curiosity as any educated man who notes the enormous part they play in the modern world can feel. Sayings of his have been quoted which show that he imperfectly comprehended the character of the evidence they rely upon and of the methods they employ. On one occasion he astonished a dinner−table of younger friends by refusing to accept some of the most certain conclusions of modern geology. No doubt he belonged (as the famous Lord Derby once said of himself) to a pre−scientific age; still, it was hard to avoid thinking that he was unconsciously influenced by a belief that such sciences as geology and biology, for instance, were being worked in a sense hostile to revealed religion, and were therefore influences threatening the moral welfare of mankind.

CHAPTER VIII: RELIGIOUS CHARACTER

Of all the things with which men are concerned, religion was that which had the strongest hold upon his thoughts and feelings. He had desired, when quitting the university, to become a clergyman, and it was only his father's opposition that made him abandon the idea. Never thereafter did he cease to take the warmest and most constant interest in all the ecclesiastical controversies that distracted the Established Church. He was turned out of his seat for Oxford University by the country clergy, who form the bulk of the voters. He incurred the bitter displeasure of four fifths of the Anglican communion by disestablishing the Protestant Episcopal Church in Ireland, and from

1868 to the end of his life found nearly all the clerical force of the English establishment arrayed against him, while his warmest support came from the Nonconformists of England and the Presbyterians of Scotland. Yet nothing affected his devotion to the church in which he had been brought up, nor to the body of Anglo−Catholic doctrine he had imbibed as an undergraduate. After an attack of influenza which had left him very weak in the spring of 1891, he endangered his life by attending a meeting on behalf of the Colonial Bishoprics Fund, for which he had spoken fifty years before. His theological opinions tinged his views upon not a few political subjects. They filled him with dislike of the legalization of marriage with a deceased wife's sister; they made him a vehement opponent of the bill which established the English Divorce Court in 1857, and a watchfully hostile critic of all divorce legislation in America afterward. Some of his friends traced to the same cause his low estimate of German literature and even his political aversion to the German Empire. He could not forget that Germany had been the fountain of rationalism, while German Evangelical Protestantism was more schismatic and further removed from the medieval church than it pleased him to deem the Church of England to be. He had an exceedingly high sense of the duty of purity of life and of the sanctity of domestic relations, and his rigid ideas of decorum inspired so much awe that it used to be said to a person who had told an anecdote with ever so slight a tinge of impropriety, "How many thousands of pounds would you take to tell that to Gladstone?" When living in the country, it was his constant practice to attend daily morning service in the parish church, and on Sunday to read in it the lessons for the day; nor did he ever through his long career transgress his rule against Sunday labor.

Religious feeling, coupled with a system of firm dogmatic beliefs, was the mainspring of his whole career, a guiding light in perplexities, a source of strength in adverse fortune, a consolation in sorrow, a beacon of hope beyond the disappointments and shortcomings of life. He did not make what is commonly called a profession of religion, and talked little about it in general society, though always ready to plunge into a magazine controversy when Christianity was assailed. But those who knew him well knew that he was always referring current questions to, and trying his own conduct by, a religious standard. He was a remarkable example of the coexistence together with a Christian virtue of a quality which theologians treat as a sin. He was an exceedingly proud man, yet an exceedingly humble Christian. With a high regard for his own dignity and a keen sensitiveness to any imputation on his honor, he was deeply conscious of his imperfections in the eye of God, realizing the sinfulness and feebleness of human nature with a medieval intensity. The language of self−depreciation he was wont to use, though people often thought it unreal, was the genuine expression of his sense of the contrast between the religious ideal he set up and his own attainment. And the tolerance which he extended to those who attacked him or who had (as he thought) behaved ill in public life was largely due to this pervading sense of the frailty of human character, and of the inextricable mixture in conduct of good and bad motives. "It is always best to take the charitable view," he once observed in passing through the division lobby, when a friend had quoted to him the saying of Dean Church that Mark Pattison had painted himself too black in his autobiography−−"always best, especially in politics."

This indulgent view, which seemed to develop in his later years, was the more remarkable because his feelings were strong and his expressions sometimes too vehement. There was nothing in it of the cynical "man of the world" acceptance of a low standard as the only possible standard, for his moral earnestness was as fervent at eighty−eight as it had been at thirty. Although eminently accessible and open in the ordinary converse of society, he was in reality a reserved man; not shy, stiff, and externally cold, like Peel, nor always standing on a pedestal of dignity, like the younger Pitt, but revealing his deepest thoughts only to a very few intimate friends, and treating all others with a courteous friendliness which, though it put them quickly at their ease, did not encourage them to approach any nearer. Thus, while he was admired by the mass of his followers, and beloved by the small inner group of family friends, the great majority of his colleagues, official subordinates, and political or ecclesiastical associates felt for him rather respect than affection, and would have hesitated to give him any of friendship's confidences. It was regretfully observed that though he was kindly and considerate, would acknowledge all good service, and gladly offer to a junior an opportunity of distinction, he seldom seemed sufficiently interested in any one of his disciples to treat him with special favor or bestow those counsels which a young man so much prizes from his chief. But for the warmth of his devotion to a few early friends and the reverence he always paid to their memory, a reverence touchingly shown in the article on Arthur Hallam which he published in 1898, sixty−five

years after Hallam's death, there might have seemed to be a measure of truth in the judgment that he cared less for men than for ideas and causes. Those, however, who marked the pang which the departure to the Roman Church of his friend Hope Scott caused him, those who in later days noted the enthusiasm with which he would speak of Lord Althorp, his opponent, and of Lord Aberdeen, his chief, dwelling upon the beautiful truthfulness and uprightness of the former and the sweet amiability of the latter, knew that the impression of detachment he gave wronged the sensibility of his own heart. Of how few who have lived for more than sixty years in the full sight of their countrymen, and have been as party leaders exposed to angry and sometimes dishonest criticism, can it be said that there stands on record against them no malignant word and no vindictive act! This was due not perhaps entirely to natural sweetness of disposition, but rather to self−control and to a certain largeness and dignity of soul which would not condescend to anything mean or petty. Nor should it be forgotten that the perfectly happy life which he led at home, cared for in everything by a devoted wife, kept far from him those domestic troubles which have soured the temper and embittered the judgments of not a few famous men. Reviewing his whole career, and summing up the impressions and recollections of those who knew him best, this dignity is the feature which dwells most in the mind, as the outline of some majestic Alp moves one from afar when all the lesser beauties of glen and wood, of crag and glacier, have faded in the distance. As elevation was the note of his oratory, so was magnanimity the note of his character.

The favorite Greek maxim that no man can be called happy till his life is ended must, in the case of statesmen, be extended to warn us from the attempt to fix any one's place in history till a generation has arisen to whom he is a mere name, not a familiar figure to be loved, opposed, or hated. Few reputations made in politics keep so far green and fresh that men continue to read and write and speculate about the person when those who can remember him living have departed. Out of all the men who have played a leading part in English public life in the present century there are but seven or eight−−Pitt, Fox, Canning, Wellington, Peel, O'Connell, Disraeli, perhaps Melbourne and Brougham−−who still excite our curiosity. The great poet or the great artist lives longer−−indeed, he lives as long as his books or his pictures; the statesman, like the musician or the actor, begins to be forgotten so soon as his voice is still, unless he has so dominated the men of his own time, and made himself a part of his country's history, that his personal character becomes a leading factor in the course which events took. Tried by this test, Mr. Gladstone's fame seems destined to last. His eloquence will soon become merely a tradition, for his printed speeches do not preserve its charm. His main acts of policy, foreign and domestic, will have to be judged by their still unborn consequences. If his books continue to be read, it will be rather because they are his than in respect of any permanent contribution they have made to knowledge. But whoever follows the annals of England during the memorable years from 1843 to 1894 will meet his name on almost every page, will feel how great must have been the force of an intellect that could so interpenetrate the events of its time, and will seek to know something of the wonderful figure that rose always conspicuous above the struggling throng.

There is a passage in the "Odyssey" where the seer Theoclymenus, in describing a vision of death, says: "The sun has perished out of heaven." To Englishmen, Mr. Gladstone has been like a sun which, sinking slowly, has grown larger as he sank, and filled the sky with radiance even while he trembled on the verge of the horizon. There were able men, and famous men, but there was no one comparable to him in power and fame and honor. Now he is gone. The piercing eye is dim, and the mellow voice is silent, and the light has died out of the sky.