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ISBN 0 86076 029 4

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Inaugural Lecture
Delivered at the College on 18 November 1980
by

RICHARD T SHANNON M.A., Ph.D.
Professor of Modern History

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SWANSEA
1982

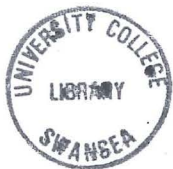
First published 1982 by University College of Swansea

Obtainable from Registrar's Office, University College of Swansea,
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MR. GLADSTONE AND SWANSEA, 1887.

An Inaugural Lecture by Professor Richard Shannon, Professor of Modern History,
University College, Swansea, delivered on 18 November, 1980.

Mr. Principal, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The first occupant of the Chair of Modern History at this College, the late, loved and much lamented Alun Davies, observed, on the occasion of his own inauguration in 1961, that a historian is confronted on such occasions with the options either of talking history or of talking about history. Alun Davies elected, with his characteristic blend of stylishness and wisdom, to do the latter: 'Modern History at a University'. But he made an interesting observation in passing: he remarked that the alternative of offering as it were a sample of one's expertise would be the easier, the safer, and perhaps the more profitable option. Well, of course, as those who are of my acquaintance will readily testify, all my instincts revolt against taking a path merely of ease, safety, and profit. Rather, my instinct bade me to turn the question ingeniously and grapple with the sombre intellectual conundrum of 'History at a Modern University'. But, sir, to my dismay I find that that stony but much desired path of laborious virtue has been denied me by that other notable spurner of the tinsel allurements of ease, safety, and profit, my senior colleague, still, as the formula has it, gloriously reigning, Glanmor Williams. Debarred thus, Mr. Principal and ladies and gentlemen, from the honourable if dangerous post of justifying my discipline, I trust that you will make, in your charity, due allowance for the difficulties of my position. Forced by sovereign and ineluctable circumstances, I bow to an iron necessity; and, fleshed to my feeble sin, I go so far in hebetude as to offer a discourse I dare say easy, I trust safe, and I hope perhaps even of some profit, combining with shameless convenience my old intellectual preoccupation with Gladstone and my new academic preoccupation with Swansea. And I console myself with the reflection that Alun Davies, ever a charitable man, would have approved of a theme which, in its way, celebrates the two central and formative dynamics of his own life and career: the great emancipating movements in later nineteenth-century Wales of national consciousness and religious equality. For Gladstone's grand progress from Hawarden to Swansea in the spring of 1887 signalled as no other event did, or could, the inauguration of modern Wales.

I can, also, plead justification much in the manner of Mr. Gladstone himself. Like Mr. Gladstone, I have certain fortuitous connections with Wales; enough, perhaps, to compensate in some measure even for my rather untimely connections with New Zealand.¹ I can echo Mr. Gladstone's statement to the Eisteddfod at Mold in 1873: 'I own to you that since it has been my duty to make myself in some degree acquainted with the past and present relations of Wales and England, I have found the subject to be full of interest.' Mr. Gladstone had a home in North Wales; I have a home in Mid-Wales. I have not, like Mr. Gladstone, married, so far, a Welsh lady; but I did go to Cambridge by grace of that munificent son of Caius, David Thomas, Viscount Rhondda. And like Mr. Gladstone, I first came to Swansea in the spring time, and in the same dripping rain, via the Mid-Wales railway, to High Street Station. There, alas, the comparison ends abruptly: Mr. Gladstone drove off through cheering crowds and the thunder of saluting cannon in a carriage with Sir Hussey Vivian to a select dinner party at Singleton Abbey. I proceeded, via a hamburger parlour, to a quite different kind of select party at the Abbey.

Why did Mr. Gladstone progress from Hawarden to Swansea in the spring of 1887? It was not for the lack of previous invitations. Hussey Vivian had invited Gladstone in December 1875 to attend the first anniversary in January 1876 of the Swansea Working Men's Club. They deserved, Vivian urged, 'a little countenance in these parts, for Glamorganshire is I believe the only County in the United Kingdom which returns an unbroken phalanx of Liberals.' 'I need not say', he added, 'with how much pleasure Mrs. Vivian and myself would receive you if we could induce Mrs. Gladstone and your daughters to accompany you. We have much that is worth seeing both industrially and otherwise in this neighbourhood.' Hitherto, as far as I can make out, Gladstone had not been nearer Swansea than when on holiday in July 1852 at Tenby, with visits to Pembroke, Carmarthen and the Towy vale; and then to Builth - 'all beautiful' - Rhayader and thence to Hawarden via Hereford. Perhaps the notion was revived on the occasion of a dinner invitation to Vivian from Gladstone for 16 April 1887 at Dollis Hill in Willesden. (The young H. H. Asquith, newly elected to the Commons, was a fellow guest.) At all events,

1. In the 1979 season a triumphant New Zealand rugby team decisively avenged the tragic misjudgment of 1905 whereby a crucial, palpable and morally unchallengeable New Zealand try against Wales was unaccountably disallowed.

the invitation which eventually bore such splendid consequences was made by Sir Hussey when sitting next to Gladstone in the House of Commons prior to the Whitsun recess. Upon learning from Gladstone that he had no engagements for the latter end of the recess, Sir Hussey invited him to visit Swansea by way of returning to Westminster for the renewed session. It was decided that Gladstone should receive the freedom of the borough and open the new free Public Library to lend formal official ostensibility to what would in fact be a shameless political and partisan manifestation. Vivian (since 1882 a baronet by Gladstone's grace) assured his chief in May about all the detailed arrangements for the real purpose of the visit: to stage a Liberal political demonstration of unprecedented dimensions to the greater glory of the 'Grand Old Man', to the greater glory of Swansea, of Welsh Liberalism, of Liberalism in general, of the Vivians of Singleton, and, somewhat, of Home Rule for Ireland. Vivian promised Gladstone 'such a reception as has I think never been given to anyone.' There would be a 'grand march past of the Representative Bodies of whatever kind', headed by 'Chairmen and Committees', in 'long procession', presenting their addresses as they pass. 'I have mentioned this to pretty nearly all the South Welsh members and they approve cordially and without exception. They are communicating with our Committee at Swansea.' There were, however, difficulties; and, predictably perhaps, they came from Cardiff.

'If Cardiff does not join but seeks to get up a separate function', grumbled Vivian, 'it must at any rate diminish our numbers'. Sir Hussey, as we shall see, tended to be too anxious on the score of numbers. Cardiff, indeed, very unwilling to cede the primacy of South Wales to a town indeed civically senior, characterised as 'horrible and sublime', but which in the opinion of Cardiff was much more of the former than the latter, insisted on a 'separate function'; and poor Sir Hussey was put to shifts to mollify Cardiff's offended dignity by arranging for the Grand Old Man to spend three hours there on the journey on from Swansea to the recalled parliamentary session in London. Still, even the jealous and beady eye of Cardiff could not deprive Hussey Vivian of his heady anticipations. 'I propose to ask all the Welsh members and other Representative men to meet you at dinner on the 4th June which Morley told me was considered most suitable', he informed the no doubt suitably impressed and gratified Gladstone. 'I hope that we shall have the pleasure of receiving Mrs. Gladstone and yourself and Mr. W. Gladstone early in that week; the earlier the better: we think we could make four days agreeable and that you would enjoy our coast scenery.'

Accordingly, the Gladstones (accompanied by the Reverend Stephen instead of Willy) left Hawarden on the morning of Thursday, 2 June and joined their special chartered train at Saltney, whence they set off at 12.30. By 12.44 they arrived at Wrexham, where Gladstone was treated to a vigorous harangue from the local Liberal Association on the issue of disestablishment and on the necessity of recognising that the Welsh were a nation and that while devotedly loyal to the Throne of Great Britain and Ireland, they had national aspirations to manage their own affairs. This indeed was the leading theme of the innumerable addresses Gladstone would receive as he made his way south. By 2.30 he was at Newtown, where there was another brief stop. A special platform had been erected and Gladstone was induced to leave his saloon to allow the crowd of 2-3,000 a glimpse of him and to sing 'See the Conquering Hero Comes'. Gladstone in reply dilated upon his leitmotiv theme that 'the cause of Ireland is the cause of Wales'; and Mrs. Gladstone was presented with a Welsh wrap. At Llanidloes 'a number of fog signals' were discharged in Gladstone's honour and Mrs. Gladstone was presented with a shawl of Welsh manufacture. Then by way of Rhayader to Builth at 4.20; where, getting a little hoarse, Mr. Gladstone expressed himself particularly gratified at the references in the address to the providential government of a Higher Power. At Talgarth the weather started to deteriorate; and by now Mrs. Gladstone, no doubt to her relief, received only flowers: at Tallyllyn, white lilacs, where indeed was a triumphal arch of the same. An immense crowd greeted Gladstone at Merthyr at 5.45, to which the Hero of Wales continually and speechlessly bowed for ten minutes, to cheers for the 'Grand Old Man' and 'Liberation of Ireland'. Mrs. Gladstone got her hands on a pot of tea and as 'Land of my Fathers' was fervently sung Mr. Gladstone appeared at the door of his saloon and toasted Merthyr with a cup of tea.

Rain now fell steadily; notwithstanding which, crowds of people lined the route through Neath. By now Gladstone was quite speechless; and to a vociferous demand for 'one word', croaked, 'God bless you, sir'. By now also his saloon was filling with the local notabilities taken on en route: Lord Aberdare, Stuart Rendel, and Henry Richard prominently among them. At Neath, once more: 'See the Conquering Hero Comes'. Salutes were fired at Landore junction by men from the works adjoining the line; and by 7.15 the train

steamed with dignity into Swansea High Street Station. A 'privileged number' of 400 were admitted to the station, while outside thousands packed in the steady drizzle. As Gladstone stepped on to the platform 'Land of my Fathers' was once more struck up, led by Mr. 'Mabon' Abrahams, M.P. for Rhondda Valley. Gladstone's party entered Sir Hussey's landau, drawn, we are told, by two champing bays and with coachmen and footman in Singleton mourning livery, and drove off for their select dinner party at the Abbey along Alexandra Road and Walter Road. (An attempt to detach the horses was foiled by Capt. Colquhoun's alert constabulary.)

The Abbey was no stranger to exalted guests. Only a few years earlier the Vivians had received the Prince and Princess of Wales on the occasion of the opening of the great new dock. The difference was that then Sarah Vivian, the formidable dowager, still lived; and Hussey and Averil had much ado moving the old lady out and moving themselves in from neighbouring Park Wern* in order to do the honours of the Abbey. By 1886 Sarah was dead; and Sir Hussey and Lady Averil were at last able to call Singleton their own. The Gladstone visit in fact inaugurated Hussey Vivian's long awaited, and, as it happened, rather brief, possession of his patrimony.

Friday the 3rd of June was a day of recuperation. The day, as The Times correspondent noted with a certain malicious satisfaction, 'broke unpropitiously, a heavy mist obscuring the Mumbles Head,' and the 'interesting programme', including a cruise in the bay, designed for Mr. Gladstone's entertainment, had to be cancelled. Nevertheless, a dauntless and intrepid tourist, Mr. Gladstone prepared himself at Singleton by reading the Swansea guide with care. (Mrs. Gladstone struck Sir Hussey as being 'a sensible woman with a silly manner, but all there'.) After luncheon there was a drive to Oystermouth and a walk around the heads to Bracelet Bay. Gladstone was bullied by a Mumbles oystervoman into eating oysters, a dish he detested; and that evening the Swansea United Choir rendered a selection of Welsh airs for the entertainment of the Singleton party on the Abbey terrace. Hussey and Lady Averil were undoubtedly disappointed with the Swansea weather but they put a brave face upon it. The music, at any rate, was 'most lovely'.

The following day, Saturday the 4th, was the great day at the Abbey; and perhaps indeed the greatest political day Swansea has ever seen. There was a general holiday in the district; all collieries and timplat works were closed. Sixty special trains poured Liberal deputations in from all parts of Wales, and some indeed from Ireland. An immense procession formed in the town and, wearing green and white rosettes, marched out six deep linking their little fingers

'Yorkshire style' to Singleton, brave with bands, banners and flags, arriving at noon. They marched through the Abbey gate on the Mumbles Road and swung round across the great sward in front of the south terrace of the Abbey and marched out by the lower gate further down the road. Hussey noted in his diary: 'This was the day of the great demonstration when not less than 49,000 people marched past Mr. Gladstone. They took four hours and 25 minutes to pass. Nothing could have been more successful and Singleton looked its best. I had taken a great responsibility and was very thankful that all went well. We dined 74 in the dining room and 20 in the Library'. On the platform on the south terrace, wearing a large leek in his right lapel, Gladstone took the salute surrounded by the flower of Welsh Liberalism: the Vivians, Rendel, Aberdare, Lord Kensington, Richard, and a clutch of Welsh members of Parliament and representative notabilities. Fortified during the grand event by sandwiches and claret thoughtfully disguised in teacups, Gladstone was certainly impressed. He confided to his Diary: '12 - 4½ the astonishing procession. Sixty thousand! Then spoke for nearly an hour. Dinner at 8. Near a hundred. Arrangements perfect. Spoke for nearly another hour'.

To others of his entourage it was a spectacle more sublime than astonishing. It was Wales on the march. To Henry Richard of Tregaron, M.P. for the Merthyr Boroughs since the great Welsh political resurgence of 1868, it was no less than just that: 'Our Welsh nation marching up from Edom and Bozrah!' The senior member for Merthyr was observed to bend his head and shake with emotion. Even the correspondent of the Cardiff Western Mail conceded the unique grandeur of the phenomenon, in defiance of the editorial hostility of his paper. Clearly he did not believe his editor's insistence that there were only 30,000 marchers; and indeed he was put in mind of Plutarch's description of that epic march long ago, of the Cymry into Italy. The procession took on a kind of remorseless dynamic of its own: a battalion of 300 divines, the flower of Welsh Nonconformity, assumed that they could exert the privilege of the cloth and pause for a special tribute of their own; but they were disconcerted to find themselves haplessly swept along by the human tide.

On the Sunday the Gladstones attended twice at St. Paul's, Sketty, the Vivian church built a generation before in the north-eastern corner of the Singleton estate; and where Hussey, as Lord Swansea, would be interred. In the morning service they were treated to a long and eloquently aggressive sermon by the Rev. Canon Smith, Vicar of Swansea, in defence of the Church

Establishment in Wales, which Gladstone, a connoisseur, marked as 'notable'. Gladstone received an Irish deputation in his return to the Abbey; and afterwards, as one who piqued himself on his expertise as a landscaper, inspected the grounds and the gardens. Hussey was pleased that the Rhododendrons were looking 'quite superb'. On Monday the 6th, again a general holiday in the district, was the opening of the Free Library and the presentation of the freedom of the borough; after 'looking in' at the Mayor's luncheon (there was some municipal chagrin at the brevity of this part of the proceedings) there was a drive to the Gower for tea at the Vivians' model farm. On Tuesday the Gladstones left Singleton and set off for London. Hussey accompanied them for the demonstrations at Cardiff and Newport. 'It really has been a "progress"', noted Gladstone; 'and an extraordinary one'. On the Wednesday Hussey recorded himself as 'At home all day pulling myself together after all the excitement'.

Hussey Vivian had every reason to reward himself with a holiday. He had pulled off a superb stroke of political impresarioship both for Singleton and for Swansea. It was a pity that Cardiff should be so grudging; but then, had not Cardiff only itself to blame? The Cardiff Corporation remained Unionist, and sturdily refused to present an address to Gladstone. And, at the grand Singleton demonstration, a protest was delivered from the leading shipowners, merchants and professional men of Cardiff by the 'ex-officers of the Cardiff Liberal Club', denouncing the sentiments about Irish Home Rule presented to Gladstone in the name of Cardiff Liberalism and urging him not to be misled by 'fictitious appearances of a unanimity which does not exist in fact'. Possibly, had the ex-officers of the Cardiff Liberal Club wished to open old wounds and rub in salt, they might have drawn attention to the fact that Sir Hussey Vivian himself had voted against Irish Home Rule in 1886; and that only with some difficulty was he later constrained to conform to the extraordinary consensus on this issue among Liberals in what was, as Gladstone pointed out in wonder and admiration, the most Protestant country in Europe.

I mention these circumstances to introduce what might be termed the unofficial dimension of the great event. Let us try to edge around behind the imposing scenes of public display. One thing that becomes quite evident as one pokes about amid the props and stage carpentry of this superb exercise in political theatre is that Cardiff was not the only place which looked upon Swansea and Singleton with a jealous and beady eye. There was a North Welsh perspective on the matter, represented by that redoubtable Montgomeryshire duumvirate Stuart Rendel and his faithful henchman A. C. Humphreys-Owen, which

viewed Sir Hussey's performance as impresario with a certain - what shall one say? - critical detachment? Was not Sir Hussey, after all, for all that he was sound on disestablishment, rather Whiggish for a Welsh member of parliament in those post-third Reform Act days? And if the ex-officers of the Cardiff Liberal Club refrained from reminding the world of Sir Hussey's shuffling on Home Rule, both The Times and the Western Mail certainly felt no such compunction, acidly contrasting Vivian's sad twists with the principled honesty of John Bright. Rendel had little enthusiasm for his role as super upon a stage set by Sir Hussey. His main concern was to secure maximum exposure for the G.O.M. under his auspices in the progress through Montgomeryshire. Rendel handled the press; Humphreys-Owen was entrusted with the task of organising the railways: particularly to make sure that rail arrangements were kept out of the hands of the Great Western and put into the hands of the much more amenable Cambrian and Mid-Wales companies. (Willy Gladstone, who handled the initial negotiations at Hawarden on his father's behalf, remarked rather pointedly on the extra fatigue of time imposed thus on his aged father: but then, what is a Hero for if not to be Heroic?) Thus, possibly, reasoned Rendel and his henchman. Not that Humphreys-Owen was particularly ruthless in exploiting his directorship in the Cambrian company. He bullied Conacher, the secretary; but even so, when he reported to Rendel on 26 May that the railways people were urging strongly that there should be no stop at Newtown - 'they will take the train through quite slowly so that Mr. G. might be well seen', thus allowing ten minutes at Llanidloes, ample time for presenting three or four addresses - he admitted his nervousness of criticism. 'It will be politic to yield', he advised Rendel, 'for I fancy there is in the air that I am using the railway for my politics.' Rendel was made of sterner stuff. No stopping at Newtown? What nonsense! 'It will not do to throw Newtown over', he admonished his henchman on the 27th. He was willing, indeed, to add another special on the route and charge £10 or £15 a head 'rather than cut too short the stoppages in Montgomeryshire'. Not only would there be a stop at Newtown, there would be a special platform designed for the better display of the sacred icon in its passage among the adoring faithful; those adoring faithful who sent Rendel to Westminster, and, after Rendel's elevation to a peerage on Gladstone's retirement, Humphreys-Owen in his place. Suitably chastened, Humphreys-Owen jumped on the bandwagon: 'I have your telegram as to the Newton Station. If the Llanidloes folk are sharp they will ask for the same'. The Llanidloes folk were sharp enough to get a stop, too, with Gladstone, ushered by a beaming

Rendel, 'just showing himself outside the station door', on another specially built platform.

A second object dear to Rendel was to make sure that that Jerusalem of Welsh Radicalism, Merthyr, should be piously catered for. Here, indeed, Sir Hussey's Whiggery was too shamelessly exposed. He expressed apprehensiveness that Gladstone's passing through Merthyr might set off a kind of chain reaction of explosive enthusiasm which would compromise the éclat of his Swansea production. Rendel was impatient. 'In this Sir Hussey is too anxious.' Doubtless Hussey would have preferred the route via respectable Brecon, that town of regimental garrisons and the Church. Perhaps he had reason. The original plan was to leave the train at Cefn and drive through Merthyr and rejoin the train at the station there. This plan was abandoned: would Mr. Gladstone ever have got to Swansea? As it was, we are assured that 'Excited men literally stormed the central platform' at Merthyr as the train steamed out. Even Humphreys-Owen conceded that Merthyr had its dangers. 'You know what a Welsh crowd is. If they can get hold of him no power on earth would prevent their parading him all round the town and beside the fatigue to Mr. G. himself punctuality at the stations further South would be hopeless and his arrival at Swansea might be delayed 2 or 3 hours.' Rendel was perhaps in two minds about this. There was no love lost for Sir Hussey: 'if he gets a chance, he may put a spoke in our wheel'. On the other hand, he could hardly avoid appearing in the Swansea show, and, if so, being in the official Gladstone party at Singleton would be much the most convenient and graceful mode of playing his part. The problem here was that the beady eye he trained upon Sir Hussey was only too keenly reciprocated. Rendel was dubiously persona grata at Singleton. This put Rendel in a quandary as to whether to continue in Gladstone's train to Swansea. 'I suppose this will be wise,' he confided to Humphreys-Owen, 'but it will be a great nuisance especially as I suspect Sir Hussey Vivian may not invite me until the Saturday.' It was not until 29 May that a relieved Rendel could report: 'I am to be at Singleton on Thursday'. The public decencies would be observed.

There is a second level 'behind the scenes' probably best expressed in a remark made by Humphreys-Owen to Rendel during the 1886 elections on the issue of Home Rule for Ireland: 'We must go to the country on the Gladstone ticket, say as little as we can about Ireland and as much about Church and Land'. Yet what is so clearly apparent in Gladstone's utterances on the way to Swansea and in Swansea in 1887 is that he said as much as possible about

Ireland and as little as possible about Welsh disestablishment and Welsh land. To the massed throng at Singleton he had this to say about disestablishment: 'I am going to be very stinted and jejune indeed on this subject with you'. And stinted and jejune indeed he was. On tithes, at a time when waves of riots were sweeping through rural Wales, especially in Gladstone's own northern diocese of St. Asaph: 'I am not going to enter this question, but what I have to say is this: it is extremely urgent and should be discussed'. In general, to the glittering dinner party that evening: 'I have a great horror of premature decisions'. And to his diary: 'Got through a most difficult business as well as I could expect'. The Times, after denouncing Gladstone's 'coarse flattery of a spurious and belated nationalism', took the point very accurately. Gladstone was 'skating on thin ice. He has not fallen, and he has not broken through, and he deserves our admiration for his cleverness'. The bitterly hostile Western Mail rejoiced indeed that all that the 'Wales of Dissent and disintegration' got was to have their objects postponed till the Greek Kalends. Even the loyal Swansea Cambrian remarked on Gladstone's skipping 'lightly and gracefully over a wide extent of ground', with his 'wonderful mastery of circumlocutory eloquence', 'not leaving many clearly-defined footprints to indicate the way he had passed'. 'We hope that Mr. Gladstone means more than he clearly expressed at the Singleton dinner table.'

Looking at this episode, it is not too difficult to discern what most of its component participants were 'up to'. Hussey Vivian was setting the seal on his grandeur in Swansea and Glamorgan, consummated logically by his peerage when Gladstone next returned to office. Likewise the intrepid Montgomeryshire duumvirate were ingenuous of motive. In the maximising of the benefits for Wales of Welsh strength within British Liberalism it is easy to see what the Welsh Liberal politicians and Liberal Associations were up to. It is easy enough to discern what the Welsh crowds were up to, as they converted their chapel, radical and national emotions into a hero-worshipping response to the first major British statesman who had, in his turn, responded sympathetically and encouragingly to Welsh grievances and Welsh aspirations. But what was the Grand Old Man up to?

As in all attempts to penetrate his motives several layers of complexity are involved, usually, as with geological faults, extruding or intruding upon each other. On the surface, there was no stint of general sympathy and vague encouragement: 'Wales is not only a nationality, it has grievances'. Beneath

this, Gladstone's purpose of converting the energies of Welsh nationalism and Welsh grievance into tractive power for the benefit of Irish nationalism and Irish grievance was not lost on the clutch of Welsh politicians and notabilities who clustered busily about him. They were recharging the batteries of their prestige and reputation by public proximity to the most powerful source of political electricity; at the same time they were shrewdly bargaining with a fellow politician from the unprecedented position of advantage which the elections of 1886 had conferred upon Wales. In choosing to undertake the progress to Swansea in 1887 Gladstone acknowledged this great practical fact. The 'natural' Liberal majority widely assumed to be inherent in the third Reform Act of 1884 was shattered in 1886. Gladstonian, or Home Rule, Liberalism was thin on the ground in the English heartland of the British Isles. It had been superseded in Ireland by the Nationalist party. Its strength remained in the 'Celtic fringe' of Great Britain; and nowhere was that strength manifested more triumphantly than in Wales.

As Gladstone publicly flattered Swansea, he privately calculated what he could get and what he would have to give for it. The flattery, it should be said, was not, in The Times's word, 'coarse'. He pronounced fervently on 'this beautiful district' and this 'marvellous development of industry, less beautiful perhaps (laughter) than the rest of the district'. Perhaps it was fortunate that he could press his notorious passion for porcelain into service. 'Although Swansea had suffered in the battle of life', he told the audience at the Library opening, 'and had some defacements and mutilations on some of its beauties, yet ... she had not lost her love for the beautiful manufacture of porcelain. I assure you that I had not forgotten that manufacture, and I call upon my kind host and hostess both to bear witness that one of the first things I asked after I reached Singleton was whether they had any good specimens of Swansea porcelain. I made it one of the positive conditions of my stay that I should be allowed to see and admire the specimens'.

The tactical consequences in 1887 of the facts of 1886 are sufficiently evident in Gladstone's pronouncements at Swansea. But what is not at all evident, I think, is a deeper layer of strategic explanation of Gladstone's motives, deriving from a perspective which embraces almost the whole span of Gladstone's career. For he was I believe, fundamentally a very consistent man; there is a pattern of continuity about him which transcends particularities and especially which transcends the division between his earlier Toryism and his later Liberalism. Gladstone's was, I would argue, a



singularly designed career. Underlying it was an extraordinarily intense religiosity which he translated into both social or philanthropic and public or political action. At its core was his own early Evangelical experience of election and redemption; and his life was in essence a series of efforts on both the smallest and largest scales to offer various kinds of redemption. His work to 'rescue' prostitutes from their fallen state is well-known; but needs to be set in a larger context which included in the 1840s the Thames coal-whippers and ballast heavers; which commenced in the 1850s to embrace a new notion of what, at Manchester in 1853 he saluted with a frisson of novel excitement, 'the people'. His earliest public vocation in the 1830s and 1840s had been a mission to redeem the State from Christian consciencelessness and reintegrate it with a Church redeemed from sordid Erastianism. Having convinced himself of the hopelessness of that enterprise he transferred his vocation into a fulfilment of Peel's financial policy on the grand and crucial moral mechanism of a new prosperity and a new reconciliation of classes, inaugurated by his 1853 budget and completed, despite the interruption of the Crimean War and Palmerston, in the '860s. His interpretation of the politics of the 1860s was that that grand design had succeeded: beneficent executive power had evoked a corresponding public response of confidence and deference. That confidence and deference could be mobilized for further great strokes of executive potency by harnessing its energies in an expanded parliamentary franchise. For that purpose he needed to camouflage himself as a Liberal, because it was only in that form that executive power could have scope.

The important thing that needs attention called to it is Gladstone's confidence as a wielder of power, a harnesser of public energy, and a successful promoter of issues. Of course Gladstone's intense religiosity, especially its Evangelical residuum, made it perfectly natural for him to see himself, however unworthy, as an agent of Divine Providence. It is easy to discount his innumerable claims in this respect as pious verbiage, eccentricity, fanaticism, or hypocrisy. He was, I believe, perfectly sincere and perfectly serious. There is no way otherwise of satisfactorily interpreting his intellectual obsessions with Bishop Butler as the great guide in the conduct of the worldly warfare of righteousness against evil; and of Homer as a secular teacher of the great lessons of human nature who yet had a divine legation as the precursor and complement of the Jewish dispensation. 'Why have I not come by this time habitually to reconise my proper and peculiar exercise', he demanded

of his Diary on 21 March 1841: he had 'not yet got that higher natural theology, which reads & applies to practice design in all the forms of incident that beset & accompany our daily course'. It was his pertinacity in this quest together with his immense natural energy and talents which made Gladstone so formidable. By the end of his life Gladstone was convinced that he had trained himself in the higher natural theology to read and perceive the great truth about the relationship between design and himself:

There is a providence that shapes our ends

Rough-hew them how we may.

I think that no one can be more deeply penetrated with these words, than I am or ought to be.

The whole of my public and exoteric life has been shaped as to its ends by me, scarcely rough hewn by me.

The mode by which he translated higher natural theology into political action Gladstone described thus: if Providence had entrusted him with a 'striking gift', it had been shown, he thought, 'at certain political junctures, in what may be termed appreciation of the general situation and its result'. Gladstone insisted that this must not be confused with a mere reading of public opinion, 'founded upon the discernment that it has risen to a certain height needful for a given work, like a tide'. Gladstone saw it rather as both a much higher and a much more manipulative accreditation: 'It is an insight into the facts of particular eras, and their relations one to another, which generates in the mind a conviction that the materials exist for forming a public opinion, and for directing it to a particular end'.

This was indeed a doctrine of supreme political confidence. It subsumes Peelite executive arrogance; it presumes deferential manipulated popular response to imperious initiatives. We tend to think of Gladstone's later career in the 1880s and 1890s as a failure: glorious or inglorious. Gladstone himself saw it in no such light: especially as he reviewed the phenomena so astonishingly furnished by Swansea in 1887. His record of success, after all, was in its own way no less phenomenally astonishing: he cited a series of 'political junctures' in which he interpreted his 'insight' as playing a crucially directive and decisive rôle. The first was his inaugurating his second vocation in his budgetary evangel of 1853. The response he thereby evoked made him leader of the Liberal party and eventually prime minister. His second insight was to go for Irish Church disestablishment in 1868. On the popular energies generated by that issue he powered his ministry of 1868-74.

He failed to find a new insight in 1874; but the public found him one by itself, without benefit of his insight, over the Bulgarian issue of 1876: so well by now had it been trained. Gratefully Gladstone took over that foreign affairs vocation and led it to conspicuous success in 1880. The third great insight he claimed for himself was the imperative of going for Irish Home Rule in 1886. There was no doubt whatever in Gladstone's mind in Swansea in June 1887 that, despite the split in the Liberal party in 1886, he would succeed once more as he had never yet failed to succeed since the 1850s.

Yet, of course, we know that Gladstone failed, and that his Irish Home Rule insight had more in common with the failure of his first, State-Church vocation of the 1830s and 1840s, than of the grand series of intermediate triumphs. What Gladstone crucially over-estimated was his capacity for manipulation. He should perhaps have learned the lesson of 1876: a public opinion had learned to come to its own conclusions. Gladstone translated his reading of this instructive capacity of the 'masses' to act virtuously in 1876 in ^{the} great contraverted public question ^{as} against the narrow selfishness of the 'classes' into his own capacity, by means of the instrument under his control, the Liberal party, to apply mass moral energy to the next, great, necessary political purpose of Home Rule. But, in fact, Gladstone misread the signs. He had no insight into the facts of the era; there were not enough materials available to be shaped and directed by him for the desired end; his appreciation of the general situation was inaccurate. Nor did the great march of the 'Welsh nation' at Swansea in 1887, like Plutarch's account of the march of the Cymry into Italy, or like Israel marching up from Edom and Bozrah, inspire the English and the Scots to go and do likewise. When, in 1893-94, his last 'insight' told him that the materials existed for forming a public opinion against the House of Lords for its blocking of the second Irish Home Rule Bill, neither his government nor his party believed him.

Swansea in 1887 represented, as far as Gladstone was concerned, a great miscalculation. It was not so as far as Wales was concerned. But Wales may very well have helped very materially to deceive Gladstone; or rather, to encourage Gladstone to deceive himself. If the most Protestant people in Europe was prepared to accept the justice and necessity of Irish Home Rule, what was not possible? What was not possible was precisely the transmuting of a celebration of Welsh nationhood into something wider and larger. What

Gladstone wanted essentially to do was to gear the energies of the great public of 1876 and 1880, rewarded by a further franchise extension in 1884, in with the energies evidenced in Swansea in 1887. But the cogs were of different shapes and would not mesh.

We are left, then, with the sublime spectacle of the mighty army of righteousness marching up from Edom and Bozrah - which is to say, from the Mumbles Road. We are left, above all, with the irony of the inner, mutual misconceptions between the splendid mass of the saluters and the intrepid figure of the great saluted. Behind the seemingly magnificent appearance of resonant rapport was a profound if silent discordance. Perhaps Gladstone, the first great statesman to respond sympathetically and encouragingly to Welsh consciousness, should have been the first to appreciate that in saluting him, the Welsh were celebrating a new sense of nationhood; they were not providing an exemplary model for the permeation of British Liberalism. There can have been few more magnificent exercises in cross purposes.

Note on sources: I have avoided cluttering the text with an apparatus of references. Many of the quotations identify their own sources readily enough. For material in the Vivian and Rendel collections in the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth I am most grateful for the exemplary care and aid of its Librarians. I am grateful likewise for assistance in the newspaper files and otherwise of the Swansea City Library.

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