

Grigg showed how poorly the Liberals fared in that election. The Liberal vote rose by two million from 1924 but the enfranchisement of women under thirty had added six million new voters to the electoral register. Further, the Liberals put up many more candidates than in 1924. The party's average share of the vote in the seats it contested fell from 31% to 28%.

In any case, to quote John Grigg, the Yellow Book 'cut little ice with the general public'. People were more concerned with the party's overall 'image' and its credibility as a prospective government. These were based mainly on the deep divisions the party had suffered over recent years and the dubious reputation of Lloyd George.⁴ Skidelsky believes that, although the Liberals had the radical programme and the Conservatives and Labour both offered 'safety first', voters saw the election 'as a fight between the 'capitalist' parties on the one hand and the 'Labour and Socialist Party' on the other'.⁵ Still, the Yellow Book may have helped the Liberal Party to survive as a political force. Richard Grayson suggested that there was still considerable public interest in the party during the 1920s — the report provided both a focus for that latent support and evidence of the Liberals' continuing vitality and relevance. It also served an internal purpose, providing a source of motivation for candidates and activists.

According to John Grigg, the publication of the Yellow Book brought a 'bemused, bored' reaction from the political class. Nevertheless, many of its contents would be central to British politics for more than fifty years. Their significance went beyond the usual confines of the 'right' and 'left'. The report's influence can be clearly seen in Oswald Mosley's famous 'Memorandum' to the Cabinet of May 1930, calling on his Labour colleagues to tackle unemployment by setting up a state finance corporation and mounting a central public works programme.⁶ It can also be seen in *The Middle Way*, 'a comprehensive statement of the

case for a managed economy'⁷ published in 1938 by the dissident Conservative MP Harold Macmillan.

John Grigg argued that the Yellow Book prefigured 'Butskellism', the partly mythical post-1945 consensus between the Labour and Conservative parties on running the mixed economy. He demonstrated the connection between the Inquiry's recommendations for state investment in industry and the 'Little Neddies', government investment boards that included employer and union representatives, set up in the early 1960s. Indeed, the assumption that the state should take responsibility for the country's economic well-being was not seriously disputed until the late 1970s.

This longer term significance of the Yellow Book has a powerful irony. Just as they gained more currency with the other parties, the findings of the Liberal Industrial Inquiry became less relevant to Liberal policies and campaigns. As Duncan Brack reminded the meeting, after Lloyd George no Liberal leader until Jo Grimond showed any interest in its proposals. And it finds few echoes in the contemporary

economic policies of the Liberal Democrats, or, indeed, those of any major political party.

The Yellow Book may have built on the version of Asquithian Liberalism that accepted the need for a more active role for the state and carried it forward into new forms of industrial interventionism and, indeed, corporatism. But the decisive break for twentieth-century Liberalism was made very early on, when the New Liberals moved away from the Gladstonian, minimalist vision of the state's role. For the Liberal Party at least, the Yellow Book was, in John Grigg's words, something of a blind alley.

Notes:

- 1 Roy Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970*, (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971), p. 201.
- 2 Robert Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump* (Macmillan, 1994), p. 52.
- 3 Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: The Economist as Saviour* (Macmillan, 1992), p. 264.
- 4 Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party*, pp. 206–7.
- 5 Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump*, p. 51.
- 6 See Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (Macmillan, 1990), Chapter 10.
- 7 Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945* (Pimlico, 1994), p. 43.

Reviews

Virtues and Flaws

Richard Shannon: *Gladstone: Heroic Minister 1865–1898* (Penguin Press, 1999)

Reviewed by Tony Little

Gladstone undoubtedly ranks as the greatest leader of British Liberalism and would be a challenger for the country's greatest Prime Minister, holding office four times. A front-bencher in the 1830s, he did not retire from office until 1894.

In 1982, Richard Shannon published the first half of his biography of Gladstone, now re-issued by Penguin in paperback as *Peel's Inheritor 1809–*

1865. This covered Gladstone's journey from Peelite Tory to Peelite Liberal. His reputation was made at the Exchequer in the 1850s but, in the

first volume, Shannon left him facing his first true test of leadership after the death of Palmerston. We have had to wait seventeen years for the second half of the story, now available in hardback. Taken together, the two volumes have a good claim to be considered the standard modern biography of Gladstone. What light do they throw on the man and the leader?

When Morley completed his classic biography in 1903, it was intended as an act of homage, putting Gladstone, the heroic statue, on its pedestal. Since then we have discovered more of the feet of clay. Gladstone's diaries, in particular, have revealed the fallibility of the man, but in the process have enhanced the scale of his achievement even if one sometimes wishes to join Roy Jenkins in expressions of headmasterly exasperation. To the modern man in the street the fallibility which is remembered is the rescuing of fallen women but, to his contemporaries even in a more religious age, Gladstone's direct link to the divinity must have been a greater trial. As Labouchere put it: 'I do not object to the old man always having a card up his sleeve, but I do object to his insinuating that the Almighty placed it there'. To Gladstone himself the feeling that what he was doing served the divine purpose was a source of immense strength, recognised more clearly by Shannon than by other modern biographers.

A first-rate man of business

What then marked Gladstone out as the leader to succeed Palmerston? Firstly, he was a first-rate 'man of business' — a government minister completely in control of his brief. Secondly, he was a compulsive if sometimes convoluted communicator. His budget speeches could last for three hours but throughout he would hold the attention of the House and command coverage in the newspapers. More importantly he aroused a natural empathy with

the public, particularly the striving lower middle and working classes, at a period when these were becoming electors — through the second and third Reform Acts — and when popular appeal was first used to support a government and a positive programme. Until the 1860s, it was more critical to command the support of the elite, though fear of mob rule could occasionally drive reforms for which the elite had no real enthusiasm. Once Gladstone had demonstrated the value of appealing to the electorate over the heads of parliamentarians, mass public meetings became a necessary component of every general election until the advent of television.

Part of Gladstone's mass appeal was the firm moral drive with which he endowed policy and the importance he vested in his chosen policies. A feature of his speeches was the way in which he talked up rather than down to vast audiences, seeming to involve them in deciding the great issues of state. And while speeches could cover a compendium of issues, each election campaign had a clear single issue on which to focus. Gladstone was reluctant to adopt the omnibus manifesto strongly advocated by Joe Chamberlain.

Gladstone failed that first test of leadership in 1866–67 — outmanoeuvred by the flexibility of Disraeli on the Reform Bill and unwilling to compromise with the rebels in his own party. But he bounced back to win the 1868 election with his plan to disestablish the Church of Ireland. With the defeat of his government in 1874 he retired, hurt and perplexed, only to recover with the campaign against Bulgarian atrocities of 1876 and the 1879 Midlothian onslaught on the cynical foreign policy of Disraeli. The great final crusade for Irish Home Rule started in 1886 demonstrates his technique and its importance in all its flawed magnificence. Gladstone's chosen policies so became the party's that as Harcourt argued to Gladstone in 1885: 'Pray do not entertain the notion that you can say anything *personally* which does

not commit and bind the party. *You are the party* and your acts are its acts.' (Shannon p. 253)

The flaws of his virtues

But like all great leaders, Gladstone had the flaws of his virtues. These Shannon makes abundantly clear, almost as if determined to offset some of the more flattering accounts. The strong drive for achievement of great ends led him to use the party as an 'instrument' for their accomplishment. The Liberal Party was not something to be nurtured or cherished and developed in its own right but was just available to be employed as required. While personally sociable, he did not make sufficient effort to mollify his colleagues or flatter his back-benchers and increasingly, as he aged, looked to the support of a close family group — the same flaws which helped to destroy Peel.

In consequence, while the party 'out of doors' continued to identify itself entirely with the Grand Old Man, in each of his governments he drove the parliamentary party to destruction. Internal revolt and exhaustion brought down the first three governments. The final government ended with Gladstone's resignation in a quarrel with his ministers, but the party failed to revive under his successor. More importantly, his sense of mission, or perhaps his ego, as we would now describe it, prevented him from recognising the right moment to retire or from developing a worthy successor. Shannon is particularly scathing about the failure of Gladstone either to retire after 1882 or to put forward a substantive programme for the 1880–85 government. This government was marked by uncontrolled quarrelling inside the cabinet. Gladstone's comeback after 1876 destroyed Hartington's chance of leadership and his underestimation of Chamberlain wrecked another strong candidacy. Rosebery, who inherited by default, was not up to the job and talked himself out of it even before Gladstone's death.

Shannon has clearly used the missing seventeen years to immerse himself in the Gladstone papers, and is always ready with the apposite reference. Indeed, there are times when his own prose style takes on something of a Gladstonian hue. However, this is a work for those who have some familiarity with the period, as he does not spare time in painting the background to the issues. This is a pity because Shannon

does not provide any concluding passages that might balance the justified criticisms against the great reforms we owe to Gladstone. When writing on Joe Chamberlain, Enoch Powell pointed out the inevitability of political failure in any extended political career. Gladstone's was extended well beyond anything we are likely to experience today. Its failures were significant but its achievements great.

Waugh's grandfather. Add to all this his success as a journalist, and you have the full C. B. Fry legend.

Even in cricket, though, the cracks soon appear. Fry's bowling action was illegal and he was rarely able to reproduce his best batting form in tests. Then there are his bouts of mental illness. He suffered a first breakdown at university, and a more serious attack in 1929 which kept him out of public life for several years.

Nor can you ignore Fry's strange private life. In 1898 he married Beatrice Holme Sumner, ten years his senior. She had long been involved with Charles Hoare, a married banker, and the relationship had resulted in a scandalous society divorce. Her marriage to Fry has been seen by some as a business arrangement: Fry made an honest woman of her in return for Hoare financing his cricket career. Wilton rejects this theory, yet his revelation that the first child of the marriage was probably fathered by Hoare seems to support it.

Hoare had established the *Mercury*, a training establishment for boys wishing to go to sea. On Hoare's death in 1908 Fry became its nominal head, but the real power was Beatrice. Her rule became increasingly brutal, and the rigours of life under it proved fatal to one young inmate. That reliable arbiter of morals, *The Cricket Statistician*, has gone so far as to describe both Fry and his wife as psychopaths. Yet she remained in charge until her death in 1946. Fry followed her ten years later.

Ultimately this is a sad book — sadder than Wilton admits. Yet it contains many incidental pleasures. Try the accomplished poem on Indian independence which Fry wrote for *The Times* or the photograph of Boris Karloff keeping wicket. Above all, the fact that Fry opened for England with W. G. Grace and lived to be surprised by Eamonn Andrews for *This is Your Life* makes him one of the great men of this century.

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Cricket, Albania and Liberals

Iain Wilton: *C. B. Fry: An English Hero*

(Richard Cohen Books, 1999)

Reviewed by Jonathan Calder

As English cricket disappeared beneath the waves last month, many spectators found themselves remembering the heroes of happier seasons. But there is only one England captain who also fought three seats for the Liberals, served as a diplomat at the League of Nations and was offered the throne of Albania. In short, there is only one C. B. Fry.

Iain Wilton's new biography reveals some heavy feet of clay, but first it is important to appreciate just how compelling a figure Fry was in his prime. Born in 1872, his fame came originally from his extraordinary ability as a sportsman. He equalled the world long jump record while a student at Oxford, was reserve for an England rugby trial, won an England soccer cap and played for Southampton in the FA Cup final. Contemporaries likened him to a Greek god in appearance.

As a cricketer Fry was one of the giants of the golden years before the First World War. Batting for Sussex with Rankinsinhji, the silk-shirted Indian whose wristy stroke play ravished Edwardian crowds, he turned himself into the most remorselessly effective batsman in the country.

In 1907 Ranji acceded to the throne of Nawangar, an autonomous state under the Raj. When the League of Nations was formed in 1920, he became one of India's rep-

resentatives. He invited Fry to assist him and, aided by their cricketing fame and Ranji's lavish entertaining, they exerted considerable influence.

As a Liberal candidate Fry was defeated at Brighton in 1922, at Banbury in 1924 and at a by-election in Oxford later the same year. He was an unorthodox campaigner — he liked to address voters from the back of a white horse — but at Banbury he came within 224 votes of victory. Though his politics were idiosyncratic, his support for the League of Nations, which he called 'Liberalism internationalised', places him in the mainstream of party thinking.

The most famous story about Fry is that he was offered the throne of Albania. In later life Fry liked to embroider his tales, but Wilton concludes that this one is probably true. Certainly, the Albanians were seeking 'an English country gentleman with £10,000 a year', and one of the men they approached was Auber-