

# LETTERS

## Mill and Morley

In his article, 'John Stuart Mill and the Liberal Party', in the spring issue of the *Journal of Liberal History*, Eugenio Biagini reminds us that John Morley, 'one of Gladstone's most enthusiastic collaborators and his greatest biographer' was so closely associated with Mill's intellectual legacy that he was called 'Mr Mill's representative on earth.' This is cited as evidence of the close link between Mill's thinking and Gladstonian Liberalism but it would surely be wrong to put too much weight on a joke (albeit a very funny one), clearly designed to ridicule the notorious agnosticism of both Mill and Morley.

There is of course no doubt about the deep reverence that Morley felt for Mill, but it is important to bear the timescale in mind. Morley's acquaintance with Mill covered only the last eight years of the older man's life, up to his death at Avignon in 1873. This was ten years before Morley was first elected to parliament as a Gladstonian Liberal, and thirty years before he published his *Life of Gladstone*. The Morley whom Mill knew was not a parliamentary politician but the radical young editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, in which he published articles by an impressive list of contributors (including Frederic Harrison, Leslie Stephen, and T.H. Huxley) as well as many articles that the editor wrote himself. Morley, then nearly 27, was introduced to Mill at the end of 1865 and became a regular guest at the Blackheath dinner parties where the philosopher entertained friends and disciples. Two years later, when Morley was about to visit the United States, Mill introduced him to Emerson as 'one of our best and most rising periodical writers on serious subjects'.

When Mill died in 1873 Morley described him to his sister as 'the one living person for whom I have an absolutely unalloyed veneration and

attachment'. Over a period of months he wrote a series of tributes, totalling over forty thousand words, for the *Fortnightly Review*. For Morley, Mill's distinctive vision was the union 'of stern science with infinite aspiration, of rigorous sense of what is real and practicable with bright and luminous hope'. He described *On Liberty* as 'one of the most aristocratic books ever written', and quoted from it Mill's elitist belief that in a successful democracy 'the Sovereign Many' must allow themselves to be guided by 'a more highly gifted and instructed One or by Few'. Morley saw his role as a writer and editor as contributing to this task of guidance. Only later did he feel the need to play a more active part in parliamentary politics, finding in Gladstone a father-figure who to some extent replaced Mill.

Incidentally I wonder whether Sue Donnelly, whose article described the appalling way in which Mill's papers were treated after his death, knows that John Morley offered to help Helen Taylor to edit them, 'to repay a trifle of the debt I owe ... to one whose memory will always be as precious to me as to a son'.

Patrick Jackson

## Mill and equality

Alan Butt Philip's 'John Stuart Mill as politician' (*Journal of Liberal History* 70, spring 2011) rightly stresses Mill's credentials as a 'thoroughly modern man'. Re-reading *The Subjection of Women* last summer, I was struck how Mill's impassioned arguments focused not only on equality, but also on efficiency, describing women's subordination as 'one of the chief hindrances to human improvement'.

What is nowadays known as the 'business case' for gender balance (research by Catalyst, McKinsey and others showing that businesses with

gender-balanced leadership outperform those with male-dominated leadership) was foreshadowed by Mill as long ago as 1869: 'In all things of any difficulty and importance, those who can do them well are fewer than the need, even with the most unrestricted latitude of choice: and any limitation of the field of selection deprives society of some chances of being served by the competent, without ever saving it from the incompetent'.

How much longer until politicians in Mill's former constituency of Westminster catch up with their insightful forebear?

Dinti Batstone

## Chamberlain's relatives

Paul Tilsley's interesting article about Birmingham (*Journal of Liberal History* 70, spring 2011), and the photograph of Highbury Hall, prompted a number of family memories.

My family has well over a century of links with Birmingham. For a start, anyone with the surname Chamberlain, Slade, Beale or Kenrick is likely to be related to us on my father's side and, as if that were not enough, my grandfather on my mother's side, himself a widower with five daughters at the time, married Joseph Chamberlain's widow, the third Mrs Chamberlain. My grandmother had died very young in 1905, leaving my grandfather with five daughters. He was a very tall, good-looking but impoverished Protestant Irish clergyman who came to Birmingham with his daughters in 1905 as rector of St Philip's Church, near Highbury. In this capacity he got to know the Chamberlains well. The Chamberlains had married in 1887 when she was 23 and he was 51. Joe Chamberlain was a wealthy man and Mary Endicott, his third wife, was equally comfortable in her own right because she was the daughter of the Governor of Massachusetts. They lived in style in Highbury Hall.

Soon after my grandfather first met them Joe Chamberlain had the serious stroke that was

to incapacitate him for the rest of his life. He died in 1912 and my grandfather married Mrs Chamberlain in 1915. They moved to London because he was appointed Canon and sub-Dean of Westminster and Chaplain to the House of Commons. They lived in 17 Deans Yard, now, I believe, the home of the Headmaster of Westminster School, where Canon and the new Mrs Carnegie liked to hold political dinner parties, but as far as I know, because of Joe's change of allegiance from Liberal to Liberal Unionist to Tory, the guests were only ever Tory ministers or prime ministers. However, my grandfather was often criticised for some of the left-of-centre views he expressed in his sermons, particularly in the aftermath of the First World War.

Sadly I never attended any of those occasions. My grandfather died in 1936, before I was born, and although my step-grandmother remained remarkably spry and interesting for another 21 years, I never felt old enough to discuss politics with her, although she quite frequently used to refer to Joseph Chamberlain, calling him 'Uncle Joe' because of his relationship to our family on my father's side.

As history relates only too well, there were a number of Chamberlains in politics in the Conservative Party over the years but, as far as I know, in our unusually linked family not a single active Liberal politician between the original Liberal Joseph Chamberlain and myself. Nor has there been one since. Not much of a political dynasty, I am afraid, but a small fragment of Liberal Democrat party history perhaps.

Adrian Slade

## Liberal peerages

Reading in J. Graham Jones' excellent 'Archie and Clem' article (*Journal of Liberal* 70, spring 2011) of Archie Sinclair's long wait for a peerage – Churchill was never likely to deny his companion in the

– concluded on page 51

ROSS MCKIBBIN

PARTIES  
and PEOPLE  
ENGLAND 1914–1951

alignment with political reality. This was done by fusing a significant section of the Liberal Party (along with Ramsay MacDonald and the few who followed him out of the Labour Party) with the Conservatives in an anti-socialist alliance. Although an independent Liberal Party remained, it was no longer a significant political force. But for those Liberals, led by Sir John Simon, who served through the 1930s in the National Government, it was not a simple case of capitulation to the Conservatives. The Tory party of Baldwin was very different from the strident, aggressive opposition of 1914. As McKibbin puts it, Baldwin's party was 'primmer, calmer, more even-tempered ... less imperial'. As a result it was an anti-socialist alliance not a progressive one that dominated 1930s politics.

As its title indicates, this book is not just about the decline of the Liberal Party, and its later chapters address the causes of the 1945 Labour landslide and the record of Attlee's government through to its election defeat in 1951. If McKibbin sees 1931 as a defining date in bringing anti-socialist forces into alignment, he argues that 1940 is the key date for the collapse of their

hegemony. The failure of appeasement discredited its Conservative proponents completely, making them seem, as McKibbin puts it: 'not just incompetent, but in some way traitors'. It guaranteed that the Conservatives would have lost any election after 1940. The increased role of the state during the war, and its further expansion envisaged by the Beveridge report, helped to legitimise Labour's view of the world, but was not the cause of their 1945 victory.

McKibbin is highly critical of the Attlee government, in particular its identification of socialism with nationalisation at the expense of any interest in institutional and constitutional reform: of the House of Lords, the public schools, the ancient universities and the professions. The result, he concludes, was that for the second half of the twentieth century England became 'a society with powerful democratic impulses but political structures and habits of mind which could not adequately contain them'.

All of which might leave readers of this journal wondering how different British political history might have been had Labour in the 1920s tried to retain the progressive alliance in some form – could it have been possible to create a

political force for which social and welfare reform went hand-in-hand with constitutional change and tackling privilege? But it is something that Labour simply would not have countenanced, and this book does not deal in such counterfactual speculation. What it does do is offer a fascinating discussion of the key developments in British party politics from just before World War I to a few years after the second. It is based on the author's 2008 Ford Lectures at Oxford University, and as a result has a more informal, conversational tone than one usually finds in academic writing. McKibbin writes with a ready wit: for example, rebutting the suggestion that people's greater interest in football than politics was a sign of apathy, he comments: 'Hardly anyone leads a purely "political" existence, and those who do are usually dangerous.' This book can be read and enjoyed by the general reader as well as the academic specialist, and it is pleasing to see that it has been priced accordingly.

*Iain Sharpe recently completed a University of London PhD thesis on 'Herbert Gladstone and Liberal Party revival, 1899–1905'. He is leader of the Liberal Democrat group on Watford Borough Council.*

### Letters

*continued from page 21*

trenches of World War I as well the cabinet room of World War II – reminds me of something I was told in 1959.

Jeremy Thorpe was about to take the Cambridge team helping him in August to tea with Isaac Foot ('no canvassing on a Sunday – unless you pretend to be Tories'). Jeremy told us how, Viscount Thurso being ennobled, when Clem Davies was asked for a Liberal peer for the coronation honours, he nominated Isaac. According to Jeremy, Churchill replied: 'no, he has sons, I want a token Liberal peer, not a Liberal dynasty', so the future Lord Grantchester was agreed upon.

*Dr Peter Hatton*

### Reports

*continued from page 37*

lit by the SDP? 'It is a question to which there is no conclusive answer', warns Lord Adonis – but his choice is the modern Labour Party. At 'Class of '81', he recalled a lunchtime meeting with Tony Blair in about 1993 at which the future prime minister asked Adonis, who was then a journalist and card-carrying Liberal Democrat, why it was so difficult for Labour to reach out to Middle England. Adonis suggested: 'It's the name Labour, it puts people off.' To which Blair replied: 'So what should we call ourselves?' Adonis smiled and said: 'How about Liberal Democrats?' Two years later, the name change came – Blair opted for 'New Labour' – and so, too, did ideological