

how far they overlapped and the degree to which they survived initial enthusiasm. One at least is still in operation today. To what extent was Catherine the prime mover? Did she work with a regular band of helpers or create teams for each project?

Janet Hilderley has written a gossipy, even 'noveletish' introduction to Catherine Gladstone, rather than the more academic analytical biography that Mrs G deserves and still awaits. Ordinarily, that should not be seen as an obstacle to recommending a book, but in this case I hesitate to do so out of concern over the weak editing and fact checking. On the back cover of the book and in the text, Catherine is described as an earl's daughter. But her father was a baronet and her mother the daughter of a baron. Gladstone's father, Sir John, is described as 'used to working among belching fires while children crawled under whirling machines' (p. 19). Sir John was originally a corn merchant who succeeded as a trader with the Americas and became a West Indian plantation (and slave) owner

rather than a manufacturer. Catherine is described as making a trip to Dalmeny in 1837 to the 'home of the Jewish Lord and Lady Rosebery' where 'no mention is made of the heir, Archibald Primrose' (p. 10). The Roseberys were a Scottish family but not Jewish, though Archibald married a Rothschild. It is not surprising Archibald was not mentioned as he was not born until 1847: in 1837 Archibald's father was the heir. The well-known City solicitors, Freshfields, are described as bankers (p. 59), and John Bright is described as a 'Chartist politician' (p. 132). It would be unfair but not difficult to continue. This book would best appeal to those new to its subject, but these are the readers who should be most protected from such confidence-sapping errors.

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- 1 Sir Edward Hamilton, quoted in *Mrs Catherine Gladstone*, p. 237.
- 2 *The Times* obituary, 15 June 1900.
- 3 Sir Edward Hamilton, quoted in *Mrs Catherine Gladstone*, p. 237.

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two leaders, as well as their political careers. Dick Leonard considers the impact of religion on the two men, their contrasting oratorical skills, their attitudes to political and social reform, foreign affairs and imperialism as well as their relationship over the decades with Queen Victoria.

The author has clearly fully immersed himself in the extensive scholarly literature on both politicians, but has kept clear of manuscript and documentary source materials. He has made full use of the published diaries of W. E. Gladstone edited by Colin Matthew (witness the multitude of references to 'GD' in the endnote references).

The volume is an unfailingly engrossing read from cover to cover – although it contains little that is really new. We read of Disraeli's lack of a formal education (he had attended neither public school nor university), of his first meeting with Gladstone in about 1835, and (reflecting his fondness for more mature women) of his marriage to Mary Anne Lewis, fully twelve years his senior, in August 1839. The love-match was to prove durable until her death nine years before her husband. He apparently succeeded almost completely in concealing the existence of his two illegitimate children. Gladstone, in striking contrast, received a gentleman's education at Eton, where he initiated the life-long practice of keeping an immensely detailed diary, and Christ Church, Oxford, where he achieved a celebrated 'Double First' in classics and mathematics in 1831 (see p. 29).

The main themes of both lives are most competently and vigorously dissected. Gladstone's pursuit, and attempted rescuing, of numerous 'fallen women' was apparently in full swing early in his career and continued unabated at least until his final retirement as prime minister in 1894 (see pp. 72 and 195). The main steps in his political career are clearly explained here, including the preparation and contents of his various budgets, especially the celebrated 1853 budget speech which continued for four hours and 45 minutes. Earlier in his parliamentary career he had been viewed 'as something of a maverick whose

The Grand Old Man and Dizzy re-examined

Dick Leonard, *The Great Rivalry: Gladstone & Disraeli* (I. B. Tauris, 2013)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

IN ACADEMIC CIRCLES, Dick Leonard is best known as the author of an authoritative trilogy of the lives of British prime ministers from the eighteenth century almost to the present day. Leonard is a leading, widely published authority on politics and elections in the UK and the European Union. His respected volume *Elections in Britain*, first published way back in 1968, is now in its fifth, completely revised edition. He was assistant editor and then Brussels correspondent of *The Economist* after a term as an independent-minded Labour MP himself. He has also worked for the BBC and contributed to many leading newspapers across the globe.

The Great Rivalry, building on the individual biographies in the

trilogy, describes the political drama of what was probably the most fascinating personal rivalry in the whole span of British political history, between the magisterial William Ewart Gladstone and the eclectic, mercurial Benjamin Disraeli, an unlikely Victorian as we imagine them today, but unexpectedly a favourite (and flatterer) of Queen Victoria. Although there are already several authoritative biographies of both men and many specialised studies on certain aspects of their careers, the author rightly felt the need 'for a single volume, of moderate length, which would constitute a comparative biography of the two men' (pp. ix–x). This book provides the full story of their rivalry and its origins, comparing the upbringing, education and personalities of the

heart was not really in the political game' (p. 91). When he received the queen's (reluctant) offer of the premiership for the first time in 1868, he was at his Hawarden Castle home indulging in his second favourite pastime of tree-felling on the estate. The account of the impressive welter of reforming legislation passed during his first administration of 1868–74 is comprehensive. Even so, its passage did not endear him to the queen whose heart – unlike Disraeli – he certainly never won. Gladstone's efforts to cajole her out of her inordinately lengthy period of reclusiveness following the tragic, premature death of the prince consort in 1861, and to bestow upon the Prince of Wales a far more extensive role in public life, met with an icy response from the monarch. When Gladstone returned to power for the second time in 1880, the queen wrote to her daughter Vicky that the experience was 'a bitter trial for there is no more disagreeable Minister to have to deal with' (p. 178). As late as 1892, when Gladstone's fourth and last ministry was formed, Queen Victoria had seriously considered an attempt to avoid having 'that dangerous old fanatic thrust

down her throat', but she was dissuaded from pursuing such a strategy (p. 189). There was never any reconciliation between these two headstrong figures.

Disraeli's political career, too, is outlined competently and with conviction. As Tory leader in the early years, he was, apparently, 'far more single-mindedly committed to his political career than Gladstone', fully mastering government blue books and other official documentation, and spending many long hours in the chamber each day, partly as the result of the ineptitude of his colleagues (see p. 73). His detailed daily reports to the queen on the proceedings of parliament much impressed her, she fully supported his proposal that his elderly, ailing wife might become Viscountess Beaconsfield in her own right in 1868, and he, in turn, was instrumental in ensuring that the queen should become Empress of India in 1876 – to the intense annoyance of the Prince of Wales (p. 164). When Disraeli died in 1881, the queen was most anxious for her old friend to be given a grand state funeral at Westminster Abbey, an ambition, however, thwarted by the terms of his will.

The evolving, ongoing relationship between Gladstone and Disraeli is carefully noted at various points in the narrative. Gladstone was certainly sympathetic when Mary Anne Disraeli suffered serious illness and when she died, aged 80, in 1872, but thereafter, generally, 'their relationship descended into one of pure hatred' (p. 135). Disraeli, we are told, proved supportive of the passage of the Secret Ballot Act of 1872 – although it had been introduced by Gladstone's first administration. Leonard is especially competent on the political significance of Benjamin Disraeli's many, highly regarded novels. Some of his Conservative colleagues 'took a dim view of his literary activities, believing that he pursued them at the expense of his parliamentary work', so that, in consequence, 'he had failed to mount an effective challenge to Gladstone' (p. 150). Furthermore, in the opinion of the author, he was really 'not much of a social reformer himself', other ministers being responsible for the framing of social legislation. It was, rather, his novels, pre-eminently *Sybil* or the

Two Nations, 'which gave him the reputation for being sympathetic to the poor and the working class' (p. 204).

Gladstone was to survive Disraeli by a little over seventeen years. In the penultimate chapter which examines this final period (1881–98), the most evocative image is that of the still vigorous, elderly man transporting in a wheelbarrow some 32,000 volumes from his Hawarden home to the newly established St Deiniol's Library which he had recently founded with a huge pecuniary donation of £40,000. Recently rechristened the Gladstone Library in 2010, it still serves its purpose well to this very day, preserving and honouring its founder's ambitious ideals for its purpose. A final, brief section contrasts the roles and contributions of the two politicians and points up their continuing influence – extending even to the present day coalition government.

At some points, the author, clearly the victim of a tight word limit, is compelled to simplify and generalise. But he has still succeeded in producing eminently readable and valuable mini-biographies of these two outstanding political figures. Throughout, the text is penned in a lively, personal, compelling writing style, sure to captivate the reader. The book also includes some nice, evocative photographs. It should certainly be read alongside Richard Aldous's *The Lion and the Unicorn: Gladstone vs Disraeli* (Hutchinson, 2006), reviewed by the present reviewer in a previous issue of this journal,¹ to which it is an admirable companion volume. Both books have succeeded in providing significant new perspectives on the two pre-eminent political figures of the Victorian age and will surely prove durable and influential. My advice would be to digest and appreciate the contents of both.

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¹ Dr J. Graham Jones, 'Dizzy and the Grand Old Man', *Journal of Liberal History*, 58 (Spring 2008), pp. 40–1.

