

A SQUIRE IN THE THE BIOGRAPHY OF

When Lord Kimberley died on 8 April 1902, he was most commonly remembered as Gladstone's loyal lieutenant: competent, hard-working, high-minded, and self-sacrificing. By praising these very civilian virtues in the context of war-charged, turn-of-the-century high politics, his twentieth-century eulogists were politely wondering exactly why Kimberley had mattered. After all, as one journalist wrote, 'he was as far removed from the younger school of statesmen as if he had lived and served his country in the days of Queen Anne'.¹ **John Powell** examines Kimberley's record.

Opposite:
John Wodehouse,
1st Earl
Kimberley, in
1862

None could deny that his record of service was impressive. He had been Minister Plenipotentiary to Russia (1856–58) in the tense days following the Crimean War; earned an Earldom as Viceroy of Ireland (1864–66); and sat in every Liberal cabinet between 1868 and his death, serving successively as Lord Privy Seal (1868–70), Colonial Secretary (1870–74, 1880–82), India Secretary (1882–85, 1886, 1892–94), and Foreign Secretary (1894–95). He was also much liked as party leader in the Lords (1891–94, 1896–1902). His long and varied career, though distant, was full of high diplomacy, high places, and high stakes, thus inviting incongruous comparisons.

Shortly after Kimberley's death, the Vicar of Wymondham Church delivered a sermon based (very loosely) on Hebrews 11:32ff.:

David, after he had saved his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers.

After praising Kimberley's 'prominent public career' and 'conspicuous ability', Rev. Parker then recalled the legacy of another prominent man, recently deceased – Cecil Rhodes – recalling his 'vastness of ideas', 'great force of character', and 'generous benefactions'. The vicar then

encouraged his parishioners to follow the example of the two great men who, however different from one another, shared a common 'steadfastness of purpose'. The sermon was fair to the achievement of both men, but there can be little doubt that as the last strains of 'A Few More Years Shall Roll' wafted out into the churchyard, almost everyone would have understood what Rhodes's purpose had been, almost no one Kimberley's.² Journalists played a similar game, but preferred standing him alongside party leaders. Kimberley was, a writer for the *Oxford Chronicle* reminded his readers, 'on diplomatic service before Lord Rosebery had gone to school, and was holding important office when Lord Salisbury was still engaged in writing articles for the press!'³ Comparisons to Rhodes, Rosebery, and Salisbury, however, only obscured Kimberley's true legacy as one of the great administrators of his generation. He had neither talent nor ambition for party leadership, and always yearned for the end of session and a return to country life. Across fifty years of government service, he retained the sensibilities of a country squire, deeply rooted in the nature and society of his native Norfolk.

Early life

John Wodehouse was born on 7 January 1826, the first of four children of Henry Wodehouse,

HOUSE OF LORDS: LORD KIMBERLEY



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an uncommon commitment among members of the 'fast set'.

In May 1846 his studies were interrupted by the death of his great-grandfather. He succeeded as third Baron Wodehouse in May 1846, inheriting an estate of almost 10,000 acres in Norfolk and several hundred in Cornwall, mostly in Falmouth city. Wodehouse returned to Christ Church in October. Disgusted with the teaching there, he read privately with the philosopher Henry Longueville Mansel and in 1847 took a first in classics, reputedly one of the best in years. Matriculating with him upon his return had been John Charles Henry Fitzgibbon, eldest son and heir of the third Earl of Clare, and brother to Florence Fitzgibbon, who soon attracted Kimberley's attention. Though some questioned the wisdom of an Irish match, he proposed marriage at a breakfast given by the Duchess of Bedford, only ten days after their first meeting. They married on 16 August 1847, and eventually had five children: John (1848–1932), Alice (1850–1937), Constance (1852–1923), Alfred (1856–58), and Armine (1860–1901). By almost all accounts the marriage was happy, though Florence was delicate and displeased by posts abroad. Wodehouse remained close to his children throughout his life.

Returning from their Italian honeymoon in March 1848, the Wodehouses were caught in the revolutions then sweeping central Europe. Between 20 and 25 March, they travelled by coach from Florence to Padua, then by gondola on to Venice, uncertain of the status of particular Austrian garrisons but bringing the first news of successful revolts in Vienna, Modena, and Venice to throngs of Italian villagers along the way. Addressing cheering revolutionaries in his broken Italian invigorated his liberal Liberal? sympathies. Upon reaching 'tranquil' England, however, and observing the aftermath of those heady, revolutionary days, he reflected unfavourably on 'the

present anarchy of Europe'. It confirmed the wisdom of Burke's *Reflections*, and encouraged Wodehouse to keep 'usage and precedent' before him as a political touchstone.⁵

Upon returning to England in April 1848, Wodehouse did not immediately plunge into the 'icy cold atmosphere' of the House of Lords.⁶ In part this reflected his disappointment at missing the real political stage, but there were also other matters requiring immediate attention. Wodehouse had inherited the Kimberley estate with encumbrances of more than £140,000, and set out to do something about it. With the assistance of his uncle, city banker Raikes Currie, he leased and sold land in and around Falmouth as the arrival of the railway spurred development. It was a slow process, but by 1864 all creditors had been paid. While these personal financial considerations weighed upon him, the daily unfolding of political events on the Continent reminded him of the narrowness of his Oxford education. As a result, he embarked upon a systematic, four-year study of modern philosophy, history, politics, and political economy, one that reinforced both his liberal Liberal? tendencies and his natural caution. By 1850 he felt sufficiently prepared to make a maiden speech, judged one of 'great promise'. Though usually supporting the Whigs, he guarded his political independence, refusing on at least one occasion to second the address and devoting most of his energies in 1850 and 1851 to the work of the Colonial Reform Society, an organisation comprised of men of 'all parties' seeking systematic reform of colonial policy and self-government for the settlement colonies. As one of only a handful of rising young noblemen, he was courted by the Whigs, and formally joined them in 1852. He undertook hazardous duty in opposing Lord Derby in the Lords. He also began to canvass the gentry in an effort to reinvigorate the party in Norfolk, ultimately play-

ing a significant role in 1857 in electing the first Liberal in East Norfolk since 1832. With the help of Currie, he was appointed to Aberdeen's government as Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office (1852–56) at the age of 26, a promising start for a young man of no great wealth or family. As Currie wrote to his son, 'if the Government last, as Johnny [Lord John Russell] can never lead the House of Commons and really do the work of the Foreign Office, this most interesting and important department will almost fall into the hands of our industrious and noble friend'.⁷

What might have been the perfect situation turned cloudy when Russell suddenly left the Foreign Office in 1853. He was succeeded, however, by Lord Clarendon, who liked Wodehouse personally, appreciated his work, and appointed him Minister Plenipotentiary to Russia (1856–58) following the Crimean War. By some accounts, Wodehouse's diplomacy was direct, unflappable, and confident, perfectly suiting Clarendon's determination to 'meet coldness with coldness'. Wodehouse resigned with the fall of Palmerston's government in 1858, but returned as Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office under Russell in the following year, with full charge of foreign affairs in the House of Lords. Later in 1859 he was selected second English plenipotentiary to the abortive Congress of Villafranca. The idiosyncratic qualities and political opinions that appealed to Palmerston were neatly summarised by Greville, who observed that Wodehouse was 'clever, well informed, a prodigious talker and a great bore, speaks French fluently, and has plenty of courage and aplomb; his opinions are liberal but not extravagant'.⁸

Wodehouse seemed well situated to continue his climb when he once again collided with Russell, who was elevated to the peerage in July 1861. He resigned immediately, despite Russell's request that he remain. 'Having

Opposite: 'Lord Wodehouse, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland', *Illustrated London News* 12 May 1865

had charge of the business for two years in the House,' he wrote in his first diary entry, 'I could not submit to the loss of position'.⁹ The Liberal leadership was eager to find something for him, but there was nothing at home and he firmly resisted offers abroad, turning down governorships of Madras and Bombay, the Governor-Generalship of Canada, and perhaps the Turkish embassy. Although no permanent position could be found, in December 1863 Wodehouse was given the delicate task of mediating the intractable Schleswig-Holstein dispute. Negotiations with Bismarck and the kings of Prussia and Denmark were unsuccessful, but the failure did little harm to his career, and did provide valuable diplomatic experience and international visibility. As almost everyone recognised, he failed where 'probably no man could have succeeded'.¹⁰ Still no suitable positions opened. After almost three years out of office, in April 1864 Wodehouse reluctantly accepted Palmerston's offer to serve as Under-Secretary at the India Office. 'All my hardworking service has not advanced me an inch,' he wrote, reflecting on eleven years of service since the Aberdeen administration. Clarendon, who had recommended him for the vacant Duchy of Lancaster (which Clarendon eventually took himself), advised Wodehouse to accept the position. Weighing his old mentor's advice and with little recourse but retirement, he finally agreed. The nature of his assent suggests, however, his determination and sense of alienation from the party leadership. 'At all events I shall make it a little more difficult for my Whig friends to get rid of me.'¹¹

It was a good decision. Five months later Palmerston offered him the Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland, not the office he wanted, but 'a great advancement' and clearly a stepping stone to the Cabinet. Kimberley dutifully kissed the ladies at Dublin Castle, received endless deputations, visited agricultural fairs and art shows, and



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hunted and dined with the Irish lords. He was determined, however, to do real work, promoting grants-in-aid for land drainage and disestablishment of the Anglican church in Ireland. These battles could not be won in Dublin. A smouldering Fenian conspiracy in September 1865, however, presented an immediate problem that required resolute action and political courage. Wodehouse ran 'some risk of exceeding the law' in order to obtain the necessary intelligence to enable the government to make a dramatic night raid on the homes and offices of the chief conspirators.¹² His handling of the Fenian rebellion was the single most important episode in Wodehouse's career. As a hardworking and talented but largely unconnected young Liberal vying for one of a handful of important government posts, his initiative provided the party leadership with visible proofs that his services might have public use as well as private merit. It gave him, for the first time, a small degree of leverage. Widely praised, by February 1866 Wodehouse made it clear to Russell that he would resign if another peer were put in the Cabinet ahead of him – a calculated risk that could have effectively ended his career. Wodehouse's Irish successes were also recognised by Queen Victoria, who conferred upon him the title Earl of Kimberley. With new social standing and a small supply of political capital, a new era in his life had begun. Rosebery later judged the Viceroyalty his 'best piece of work'.¹³

Kimberley and Gladstone

When Kimberley returned to London in July 1866, the Liberal Party was being transformed, though it was not clear what the outcome would be or how long it would take. When Palmerston died in October of the previous year, Kimberley had hoped that Gladstone would be his successor, though the Queen's call went to Russell instead. The Liberals ought to be banished from office,

Kimberley told John Thaddeus Delane of *The Times*, 'and only return when the old batch are fairly out of the way'.¹⁴ Kimberley viewed Gladstone as the natural leader of a modern Liberal Party largely shorn of its Whig trappings.

Though Gladstone was seventeen years Kimberley's senior, their political association went back at least to 1849, when both took a significant interest in the non-partisan 'export nationalism' of the Colonial Reform Society (CRS) and the Canterbury Settlement. Both men believed that free trade and reduced government expenditure were guarantees of good government, and this laid a solid foundation for cooperation on other matters. As Kimberley and Gladstone moved in the same direction toward the modern Liberal Party, there were nevertheless notable differences. Where Gladstone had been dismayed by Russell's anti-Papal campaign of 1851, Kimberley actively opposed both 'foreign interference' and 'Romish practices' in the Anglican church, which had 'encouraged if not caused, that interference'.¹⁵ Kimberley had supported Palmerston in the 'Don Pacifico' debate, and generally throughout the 1850s found Gladstone's 'message of mercy and peace' regarding foreign relations naïve and pusillanimous.¹⁶ Kimberley later repented of both his religious intolerance and international jingoism, though he remained more ready than Gladstone to project British influence in the world.

Three issues eventually drew them together politically around 1860: Italian policy, free trade, and the budget. Kimberley was naturally much involved with Italian affairs, handling the Foreign Office business in the Lords and having prepared specially for the abortive Congress of Villafranca in December 1859. Gladstone had a more personal interest in the peaceful unification of Italy, having spoken and published widely on the subject, beyond the 'bounds of discretion', according

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to some. When the Marquis of Normanby accused Gladstone in the Lords of circulating false accusations against the Duke of Modena, Kimberley found himself in the middle of a peculiarly personal feud. Being unable to defend himself in the House of Lords, Gladstone requested that Kimberley quash the 'loose statements', and remarked that he was 'quite at ease' knowing that his case was in Kimberley's hands. On 22 July 1861, Kimberley responded vigorously to Normanby, alluding to the difficulties involved in a peer attacking a member of the House of Commons, smartly suggesting how 'very disagreeable' it would be to Gladstone's accusers 'to meet him face to face'. Kimberley conceded what Gladstone had admitted already – that an error had been made regarding one particular case in Modena – then defended the validity of Gladstone's principal accusation of arbitrary government on the part of the Duke.¹⁷

Gladstone's budget campaign of 1860–61, including battles over every aspect of the French Commercial Treaty and repeal of the paper duties, constituted one of the great political triumphs of the Victorian era. Yet he considered it 'the most trying part' of his entire political life, and the 'nadir' in his 'public estimation'.¹⁸ When it is remembered that he was opposed by virtually the whole of the Cabinet on one or both of these issues, that he saw little prospect for attaining Liberal leadership, that he was hated by the Whigs and 'old Tories', and that it was still wondered aloud whether he could harness his great gifts, one is reminded of Gladstone's precarious personal position. 'Ill; vexed and indignant at the possible and probable conduct of the peers' in the spring of 1860, Gladstone received hearty support from Kimberley on both the commercial treaty and repeal of the paper duties. Though in no position to aid Gladstone in the Cabinet or the Commons, he did provide relevant foreign information and

support for the measures in the House of Lords at a time when it mattered.

While in Ireland between 1864 and 1866, Kimberley corresponded with Gladstone on Irish questions, seeking metropolitan financing for arterial drainage and declaring himself in favour of a land bill, concurrent endowment, and an inquiry into the question of national education. It is impossible to say exactly at which points the two influenced one another, but Kimberley had certainly been forced to deal with Irish questions more systematically at an earlier date than Gladstone, and had arrived at essentially the same positions well before Gladstone became prime minister. No one was surprised when he was among the small meeting of previous cabinet members and others, called by Gladstone to discuss Irish affairs on 24 February 1868.¹⁹

The charmed circle

With Gladstone's offer of the Privy Seal in December 1868, Kimberley finally gained the Cabinet, which had been his primary political goal. As he observed, the office itself was nothing, but it put him 'well on the road to promotion when the occasion offers'. He did receive promotions, to the Colonial Office and India Office, and briefly under Rosebery, the Foreign Office. But apart from a real eagerness to get the Colonial Office in 1870 – his first major administrative post – he was content with a voice in the Cabinet. Apart from an earlier appointment to the Foreign Office or the premiership itself, neither of which he coveted, there was nowhere else to go. Kimberley had arrived, and the question then became, could he meet the expectations of high office?

Kimberley accurately appraised his own gifts, which were well suited to administrative work and political argumentation in the 'icy' atmosphere of the House of Lords, but less attractive to the public at large. Nowhere

was this self-awareness more evident than in his deference to Rosebery, twenty years his junior, who went to the Foreign Office in 1886. When Rosebery at first declined the office in 1892, Kimberley feared that he would have to undertake the job. 'Happily,' he wrote in his diary, 'there can be very little probability of such a *pis aller*. We should be terribly weakened by losing R., not only because he is by far the most acceptable person for the F.O., but because, next to Gladstone, he is by far the most influential man in the country of our party.'²⁰ Kimberley nevertheless was willing to help the party in almost any way. He led the Lords in the late 1880s when Granville was ill; after Granville's death (1891 to 1894); then by consensus after Rosebery's retirement in 1896. He was even willing to take the detested Lord Presidency of the Council on a temporary basis.

Kimberley is so closely identified with his work at the Colonial and India Offices that it is easy to forget that his first eighteen months in office were spent on Cabinet committees studying questions of Irish land, church, and disturbance of the peace, and drafting of the required legislation. The dramatic increase in departmental work after 1880 precluded much close involvement with Irish affairs thereafter, though he was frequently consulted by Gladstone, particularly on financial matters. At the Colonial Office (1870–74, 1880–82), Kimberley continued the Liberal policy of troop withdrawals from the settlement colonies, oversaw the granting of full responsible government to Cape Colony, and approved selected African annexations. In the tropical colonies and southern Africa he rejected Cardwell's extreme policy of retrenchment, annexing the diamond fields of Griqualand West and laying the groundwork for the annexation of Fiji and extension of British influence in Malaya and the Gold Coast. Kimberley took Gladstone's retirement at face value in 1875, warmly

supporting Hartington, but nevertheless welcoming Gladstone's return. He stunned Gladstone by refusing the Indian Viceroyalty in 1880, but agreed to return to the Colonial Office.²¹ The Cabinet immediately reversed Lord Lytton's forward policy in India, but supported confederation in southern Africa, begun under Lord Carnarvon in 1877. The resulting Boer War (December 1880 – March 1881), in which British troops suffered a morally devastating, though strategically inconsequential, defeat at Majuba Hill, led to the only challenge to Kimberley's Cabinet position during his career. Backed by Gladstone, he weathered the press storm and the doubts of some among the Liberals. On 3 August 1881, the Convention of Pretoria was signed, restoring self-government to the Transvaal under the 'suzerainty' of Britain.

When the fifteenth Earl of Derby joined Gladstone's second administration in December 1882, Kimberley agreed to go to the India Office, where he served during the remainder of the government and during the third and fourth Gladstone administrations (1882–85, 1886, 1892–94). While there, he impressed Permanent Under-Secretary Arthur Godley as second only to Gladstone as an administrative official. Kimberley urged a non-partisan approach to India work, which earned him considerable support on both sides of the aisle. Though he supported the principle of Viceroy Lord Ripon's measures for local self-government, he modified ambitious details in the interests of sound administration, arguing that 'for the ultimate safety and security there should be a gradual introduction of Natives into our services' in order to avoid a 'high autocratic policy'.²² Concerned with the looming Russian advance in Central Asia, Kimberley encouraged Ripon's early retirement, a more conservative domestic administration of the government under Lords Dufferin (1884–88) and Lansdowne (1888–94), and a strong frontier

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policy. Russian occupation of the Penjdeh district of Afghanistan on 30 March 1885 brought the two countries to the brink of war. The Cabinet agreed with Kimberley that further encroachments should be met with force. By the end of Gladstone's second ministry in June, Russia had accepted the principle of arbitration, and a formal settlement was eventually reached a year later, defining more than 300 miles of the Russo-Afghan border.

During Gladstone's fourth ministry (1892–94), the decline of the rupee was the most troubling issue in India, leading to depression and the loss of capital investment. In an attempt to bolster the value of the currency, Kimberley

**'Uncle Kim',
a senior party
figure, 17 July
1901**

adopted the recommendations of the Herschell Committee in 1893, including a controversial plan for closing mints to the coinage of silver, an early step toward establishing a gold exchange standard. As a result of financial conditions in India, he resisted motions brought forward in the House of Commons that might have led to the reduction of opium revenues, at one point politely threatening to resign if Gladstone persisted in supporting such a motion. In the end Gladstone argued Kimberley's points as if they were his own, 'utterly pulverise[ing] the Resolution'.²³

With Gladstone's resignation in March 1894, a Liberal era clearly passed. Lord Rosebery,

widely considered the most attractive Liberal in the country after Gladstone, now had to compete for influence with the Leader of the House of Commons, Sir William Harcourt. With Rosebery making Kimberley's appointment to the Foreign Office a *sine qua non* to his own acceptance of the Prime Ministership, Kimberley's position was politicised from the start. From this divided beginning, he entered upon the most difficult and least satisfying ministerial experience of his career: uncomfortable with Rosebery's methods, at odds with Harcourt's policies, and unable to find common ground with the other powers.

During his first months in office, Kimberley routinely sought Rosebery's advice, seemingly a sound transition policy, as the two men had worked together cordially during Gladstone's third and fourth ministries and were both committed to a policy of imperial consolidation. Kimberley soon became uneasy, however, with Rosebery's penchant for secrecy, and felt compelled to communicate more freely with the Cabinet than Rosebery preferred. Kimberley's first major act was to conclude the controversial Anglo-Belgian treaty of 12 April 1894, largely negotiated under Rosebery's direction during the previous year. German and French protests against Britain's leasing of a strip of Congolese territory bordering German East Africa led to a withdrawal of that portion of the treaty, and much of Kimberley's energy at the Foreign Office thereafter was expended in improving strained relations with Germany. Talks with German and French representatives smoothed immediate difficulties but proved inconclusive in settling broader international tensions. Kimberley agreed to allow German recruitment of labourers at Singapore, and discussed a potential future division of the Portuguese empire in east Africa, but adamantly opposed German influence in the Transvaal and resisted attempts to embroil Britain in Franco-Italian disputes in East Africa. Concerned over growing Russian influence in East Asia, in 1894 Kimberley negotiated a new commercial treaty with Japan, renouncing British extra-territoriality in order to create an 'invaluable ally in case of need'.²⁴ Courting Japan, however, further strained relations with the powers. After some early success in bringing Russia and France into a plan for collectively enforcing reforms on the Ottoman empire following the Armenian massacres of 1894, Kimberley ultimately failed to gain their support for coercive measures, in part because Britain had declined to join Russia, Germany, and France in forcing Japan

to moderate its settlement of the Sino-Japanese War during the spring of 1895.

More troubling for the government was the internecine war between Rosebery and Harcourt, who questioned the prime minister's leadership at every turn and vigorously promoted a Little England policy. He wrote long jeremiads full of 'blood and thunder', eventually demanding that 'all questions of importance relating to Foreign Affairs should be submitted' to him before they were made in the Commons. Rosebery refused to speak directly to Harcourt, forcing Kimberley to act as the necessary medium for carrying on business. According to Rosebery, there was a 'deepseated and radical difference of opinion' on foreign policy. 'His view is broadly that in questions between Great Britain and foreign countries, foreign countries alone are in the right and Great Britain always in the wrong' / Kimberley agreed. After a tumultuous fifteen months, the only thing all three could agree upon was resignation, which took effect on 29 June 1895.²⁵

Last years

From 1895 Kimberley played the role of elder statesman, 'Uncle Kim' to a younger generation of Liberals. To Rosebery he was 'an honest straightforward able old Whig', 'conciliatory and popular to the last degree' as leader in the House of Lords. He spoke more frequently on behalf of Liberal candidates, particularly after the death of his wife in 1895. He often quietly mediated personal disputes, as he had in Gladstone's second, third, and fourth ministries. He was frequently consulted by younger Liberals, who drew upon his long experience. By 1898, with both Rosebery and Harcourt gone, Kimberley worked cordially with Henry Campbell-Bannerman to repair party fortunes. He attempted to bridge the middle ground between CB and the Gladstonians, who generally sought to

maintain liberal Liberal? orthodoxy; and Rosebery and the Liberal Imperialists, who favoured substantial party reform. Though a thorough Gladstonian in his commitment to the ideals of Irish home rule, free trade, and individualism, Kimberley consistently backed law and order, both domestic and international, as the true foundation of liberal governance. Thus he supported the Conservative government during the Boer War, continuing his long tradition of bipartisan foreign policy.²⁶ Although he criticised the government's lack of foresight, he supported the fundamental principle that the Boers must be militarily subdued before negotiations could begin. His conservatism on this point, in conjunction with staunch support for liberal domestic measures, minimised the negative impact of 'pro-Boer' activity within the party, providing a patriotic shield as Liberals began to reorganise under Campbell-Bannerman. Though ill, just before his death Kimberley agreed to stay on as 'nominal leader' in the Lords, anticipating a Liberal resurgence that was years away.

Assessment

After reading Kimberley's manuscript memoir in 1906, Rosebery wrote a telling minute, full of both insight and misperception:

I doubt if he ever knew much except of the surface of political proceedings ... And so engaged in honest work, he knew little else. His judgments are not profound but sincere. The whole record is the honest, humble and sincere record of a hardworking, simple life. *Simple* not in the sense of plain living but of a certain innocence as compared with worldliness.

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Kimberley's political creed was undoubtedly simple. He was a profound believer in Burke's dictum that a 'disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve' were the standards of a successful statesman.

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were the standards of a successful statesman. By this standard, however, caution was always to the fore, leading younger politicians to sometimes accuse him of a kind of 'inert Whig *laissez faire*'.²⁷ Kimberley also believed that what was true in theory was frequently false in practice; he was therefore against all reforms based merely on appeal to categories or theories. Reform was a matter of details. He was perfectly willing for Gladstone to set the agenda – one naturally based upon shared principles – then to assist in drafting detailed legislation or dispatches for implementing the policies. Few problems were easily resolved, for they could be variously contextualised, and sometimes required resolution of irreconcilable elements. When governments were routinely required to tread such dangerous ground, it simply was not prudent to take a dogmatic line.

In this sense, it might be argued that both Gladstone and Rosebery sometimes took advantage of his *simple* political philosophy, knowing that if they argued persuasively, Kimberley would likely follow. If they could not automatically depend on his support, they knew that he fundamentally leaned in their direction, and that his natural caution might be removed by a careful argument, a little charm, and a workable piece of legislation. The most striking example of this manipulation was Gladstone's success in 1886 in convincing Kimberley to reconsider his adamant opposition to the retention of Irish members in the House of Commons. This may, however, be the exception that proves the rule, as it is the only known case in which Kimberley actually regretted a decision to support Gladstone.²⁸

On the other hand, throughout his career Kimberley took full advantage of opportunities to influence policy and legislation. The Cabinet process admitted adjustment in virtually every kind of business at every level. The views of Gladstone and Rosebery could be overturned, or, more fre-

quently, modified through private argument, committee proceedings, and the process of drafting and revising legislation and dispatches. A leader's call could also be resisted if one were willing to take political risks in matters of supreme importance. Kimberley threatened resignation on at least three occasions, in 1866 over Fortescue's inclusion in the Cabinet; in 1873 over the proposed Ashanti invasion; and in 1893 over Sir Joseph Pease's opium motion. In each case he won his point.

If Kimberley were neither a popular politician nor a visionary, he had real strengths that contributed to the success of an administration. He was well educated, bright, and thick-skinned. He got on well with members of all parties, and was widely respected. Though not a speaker of renown, he was a reasonably good debater and a quick thinker, with plenty of courage. He managed his departmental business well in the Lords, and worked efficiently with Gladstone, Rosebery, and other party leaders in coordinating policy and policy statements. He did not 'create events', either in the Cabinet or the world. If a strong measure was urged, as in sending Wolseley to the Gold Coast in 1873, or in instructing Dufferin in 1885 that 'an attack on Herat will mean war between us and Russia everywhere', even the most pacific ministers were inclined to concede its necessity. On the political level, competent departmental management minimised Liberal fracturing and limited occasions for Press importunity. Although Gladstone found no shortage of Liberals with high claims to office in 1868, the administrative failures of Lowe and Bruce, the illness of Bright, the inactivity of Dodson, the scandal surrounding Monsell and the Post Office, the conversion of Ripon to Roman Catholicism, and the relative ineffectiveness of Carlingford made safe and competent hands more necessary than ever. Kimberley continued in successive ministries to administer his departments

with energy and acumen as Liberal ministers for various reasons either left or were abandoned – Argyll, Forster, Dodson, Northbrook, Carlingford, Dilke, and the Unionist host that departed in 1886. If only for the sake of stability, Gladstone could ill afford to lose Kimberley.

Kimberley also had an uncanny ability to refine complex issues. Though a legend of garrulousness in conversation, he consistently surprised colleagues with 'admirably concise and lucid' letters and memoranda, shorn of 'irrelevant matters'. Gladstone had noted this skill as early as 1860, and continued to appreciate the way it facilitated the time-consuming process of business by committee.²⁹ In Cabinet he irritated some by speaking frequently, but he was one of the few ministers prepared to discuss the range of topics that regularly came before them, and one of the few members who understood the complexities of international finance.³⁰ If Kimberley never wrote a bill to solve an intractable problem, he was adept at clarifying the points upon which profitable discussion might turn, facilitating the process of Cabinet discussion. In a tight situation, Kimberley could be trusted to take charge of a bill in the House of Lords. Ironically, the legislation for which he was most praised, the Parish Councils Bill of 1894, came too late to have much effect on his political career.

Any assessment of Kimberley's career, however, necessarily comes back to his official work, which was usually done out of the public eye. Arthur Godley considered Kimberley the best *official* he had ever served under, excepting only Gladstone, and he was held in similar regard at the Colonial Office.³¹ He had his share of rough patches in which he was publicly and privately criticised – most notably in relation to the first Boer War (1880–81) – but these never led Palmerston, Russell, Gladstone, or Rosebery to conclude that he needed to make way for a younger, better man.

Kimberley also had an uncanny ability to refine complex issues. Though a legend of garrulousness in conversation, he consistently surprised colleagues with 'admirably concise and lucid' letters and memoranda, shorn of 'irrelevant matters'.

Kimberley was virtually unassailable at the Colonial and India Offices. Experienced, cautious, and thorough, he was seldom challenged by other members of the Cabinet. At the moment one might think him only a competent bureaucrat, he would display both mastery and resolve in taking decisive action. Sir Garnet Wolseley recalled his *surprise*, for instance, at Kimberley 'abruptly and angrily' settling the question of 'war or no war' against the Ashanti in 1873 over the objections of several ministers.³²

Kimberley usually agreed with Gladstone, but his disagreements were frequent enough and of a kind to suggest a distinct influence on the course of British foreign relations. He argued against the imperial antipathy of Gladstone, Lowe, and Cardwell during the first administration, and generally dampened Gladstone's instinctive moralism. By patient and studied determination, he convinced Gladstone that any attempt to prohibit Australian colonies from passing differential tariff measures in 1872 would be detrimental to the Empire, and that the annexation of Fiji, which Gladstone had gone to great lengths to prevent, was sound policy. He and Cardwell sanctioned the Ashanti expedition in 1873 without consulting either Gladstone or the Cabinet. He refused the annexation of Samoa, Namaqualand and Damaraland, and the Cameroons in 1882, the latter over the objections of Dilke and Granville. Kimberley firmly resisted Ripon's more advanced moves toward self-government in India, both on grounds of efficiency and the dangers of foreign threat. A tea planter worried over the pace of Ripon's reforms was consoled with the assurance that 'the people now in office, Lord Kimberley, Lord Northbrook, and Lord Granville, were as likely to do anything really in the direction of freeing the Indians as any three Tories in the kingdom'. Although an exaggeration, the observation points to the rising division between

Gladstonian Liberals and Radicals within the party.³³ In 1884 Kimberley convinced a reluctant Gladstone that Dufferin ought to succeed Ripon as Indian Viceroy, and resisted the Prime Minister's wish to delay Dufferin's departure in order to accommodate party need on a vote in the Lords. In 1893 he refused to make further concessions to Joseph Pease on the opium question, despite Gladstone's arguments. In 1895 he refused the annexation of Formosa on his own authority. The collective impact of these and a hundred other small decisions was substantial, and suggested already in *The Times* obituary, where he was not 'so much afraid of Imperial responsibilities and Imperial expansion as a good Gladstonian' was 'naturally expected to be'.³⁴

Kimberley was the kind of politician whose political role is most easily lost to history – an intelligent man without imagination; one who met the high expectations of his society without disturbing them. He was the quintessential conscientious administrator who made the Empire work, before heading to the country in August.

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- 1 *Candid Friend*, 19 April 1902, Kimberley Papers, Bodleian Library MS (hereafter KP), eng.c.4484, f. 133.
- 2 'Pulpit References,' *Norwich Mercury*, 19 April 1902, p. 9.
- 3 *Oxford Chronicle*, 11 April 1902, KP eng.c.4481, f. 304. This story was widely repeated in the press.
- 4 Henry Wodehouse died in 1834.
- 5 Wodehouse, notes on reading, 14 July 1848, in John Powell, ed. *Liberal by Principle: The Politics of John Wodehouse, 1st Earl of Kimberley, 1843–1902* (London: Historians' Press, 1996), pp. 58–63.
- 6 John Wodehouse. *The Journal of John Wodehouse, First Earl of Kimberley for 1862–1902*, Camden 5th ser., vol. 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Society), p. 44.

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- 7 Caroline Currie, ed. *Bertram Wodehouse Currie, 1827–1896: Recollections, Letters, and Journals*, 2 vols. (Roehampton: Manresa Press, 1901), 1:518. On Wodehouse's early career, see *Liberal by Principle*, pp. 11–16, 68–80; *Journal of Wodehouse*, pp. 44–47.
- 8 Lytton Strachey and Roger Fulford, eds. *The Greville Memoirs, 1814–1860* (London: Macmillan, 1938), 7:446–47.
- 9 *Journal of Wodehouse*, p. 61.
- 10 *The Times*, 9 April 1902, p. 3.
- 11 Wodehouse always distinguished himself from his 'supercilious exclusive friends the Whigs.' *Journal of John Wodehouse*, pp. 44, 133.
- 12 *Liberal by Principle*, pp. 106–07.
- 13 *Journal of John Wodehouse*, pp. 174 n. 465, 180, 186–87, 488.
- 14 *Journal of John Wodehouse*, p. 177, n. 473.
- 15 *Liberal by Principle*, pp. 68–69.
- 16 *Liberal by Principle*, pp. 82–83; Kimberley journal, Kimberley Papers, Bodleian Library, MS.eng.e.2790, p. 6
- 17 For the following events of 1860–61, see *Liberal by Principle*, pp. 32–34.
- 18 John Brooke and Mary Sorensen, eds. *The Prime Ministers' Papers: W. E. Gladstone*, 4 vols. (London: H.M.S.O., 1971–81), 1:83.
- 19 *Journal of Wodehouse*, p. 214. On Kimberley's Irish views and Gladstone's interest, see John Powell and Padraic Kennedy, 'Lord Kimberley and the Foundation of Liberal Irish Policy: Annotations to George Sigerson's *Modern Ireland: its vital questions, secret societies, and government*,' *Irish Historical Studies* 31, no. 121 (May 1998): 91–114.
- 20 *Journal of Wodehouse*, p. 501.
- 21 Gladstone's offer was curious and his motivation unclear. Though an undoubtedly large appointment requiring judgment and administrative skill, Kimberley's acceptance would have removed, according to received wisdom, one of Gladstone's staunchest supporters and most able lieutenants from the Cabinet. If Gladstone really believed that Kimberley could be induced to take such a post abroad, it demonstrates how little he knew his colleague.
- 22 3 *Hansard*, 277 (9 April 1883): 1736, 1767.
- 23 *Journal of Wodehouse*, p. 415; *Liberal by Principle*, pp. 210–11.
- 24 *Liberal by Principle*, p. 254, n. 52. See also Louis G. Perez. *Japan Comes of Age: Mutsu Munemitsu and the Revision of the Unequal Treaties*. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999.
- 25 For Cabinet warfare during Rosebery's administration, see *Liberal by Principle*, chapter 6; *Journal of Wodehouse*, pp. 424–37. For a sympathetic view of Harcourt, see Patrick Jackson's excellent *Harcourt and Son: A Political Biography of Sir William Har-*

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- court, 1827–1904*. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004.
- 26 In Lord Salisbury's eulogy in the House of Lords, he noted Kimberley's 'singular impartiality in public affairs.' 'I do not say that he was absolutely impartial – under our system of government that is impossible ... but if he was not absolutely free from all bias, he came as near it as, I think, any man whom we have listened to and followed in this house.' 4 *Hansard*, 106 (15 April 1902):260.
- 27 *Liberal by Principle*, pp. 23–24. See particularly George Leveson Gower, *Years of Endeavour* (London: John Murray, 1942), pp. 133–34.
- 28 *Liberal by Principle*, pp. 184–85; *Journal of Wodehouse*, pp. 366–67, 499.
- 29 Gladstone to Wodehouse, 28 April 1860, KP eng.c.4003, f. 52; *Liberal by Principle*, p. 44, n. 213.
- 30 Having city banker Raikes Currie as political mentor undoubtedly contributed to Kimberley's financial acumen, and to his desire in 1852 for appointment as Vice President of the Board of Trade.
- 31 Arthur Godley was Gladstone's principal private secretary, 1880–82; Permanent Under-Secretary at the India Office, 1883–1909; *Liberal by Principle*, p. 273. On the Colonial Office see the account, probably by Robert George Herbert, permanent under-secretary at the Colonial Office, 1871–92, in *Free Lance*, 19 April 1902, Kimberley Papers, Bodleian Library c.4484, f. 143.
- 32 Wolseley to Fleetwood Wilson, 22 September 1902, Wolseley Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University, 18-H.
- 33 Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *India Under Ripon: A Private Diary* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1909), p. 18.
- 34 *The Times*, 9 April 1902, p. 3.

The theme of the meeting was an exploration of one of the most famous of Chamberlain's political personae – the provocative social-reforming campaigner, which earned him the sobriquet 'Radical Joe'.

Whiggery and the Liberal Party, 1874–1886 and *The Liberal Ascendancy, 1830–1886*). Introducing the meeting, our Chair, William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Salt-aire, President of the History Group and joint deputy leader of the Liberal Democrat peers), remarked on just how unstable a coalition the late nineteenth century Liberal Party actually was and how this instability was manifest in the career of Joe Chamberlain and the fate of the Unauthorised Programme.

Picking up on William Wallace's reference to instability, Professor Marsh began by saying how much, in his opinion, the Unauthorised Programme of 1885, and radicalism in general, was an unstable and destabilising phenomenon. This he described as the 'radical dilemma'. The Unauthorised Programme was a clumsy presentation of prescient policy because radicalism is the most difficult position to maintain in British politics while holding high office. Until Joe Chamberlain radicals either avoided high office, like Cobden, or proved innocuous in it, like Bright. This may be surprising because Professor Marsh went on to say that he saw radicalism as an essentially Liberal position, in the British (and Canadian) sense as opposed to the Continental or American. Radicalism in this interpretation was situated historically on the left flank of the Liberal Party and was not a socialist position. It was Chamberlain who was really the first Liberal to embrace radicalism and seek to implement it from the government front bench, while holding high, and seeking higher, office. It was not, however, until the Liberal governments after 1906 and Attlee's Labour administration of 1945–51 that radicalism was espoused and implemented by a British government. Interestingly, Professor Marsh thought we had been getting a version of it again since 1997 and he highlighted what he believed was a dilemma for Liberal Democrats

REPORT

Joseph Chamberlain and the Unauthorised Programme

Evening meeting, July 2005, with Peter Marsh and Terry Jenkins

Report by **Graham Lippiatt**

The cover design of the paperback edition of Denis Judd's study of Joseph Chamberlain published in 1993¹ shows a picture-postcard cartoon of the top-hatted, monocled Chamberlain wearing a patchwork coat, each segment of which contains a description of some aspect of his political life: 'socialist', 'republican', 'extreme radical', 'Gladstonian', 'Liberal Unionist', 'ordinary Conservative' and more besides. At the bottom of the coat are some unclaimed patches marked 'vacant', waiting only for the next shift in Chamberlain's career for a new label to be sewn into the fabric of this coat of many political colours.²

The theme of the History Group's summer meeting was an exploration of one of the most famous of Chamberlain's political personae – the provocative social-reforming campaigner, which earned him the sobriquet 'Radical Joe' – and an assessment of its impact on the party.

Our distinguished speakers were Peter Marsh (Honorary Professor of History at Birmingham University; Emeritus Professor of History and Professor of International Relations at Syracuse University, New York and author of *Joseph Chamberlain, Entrepreneur in Politics*) and Dr Terry Jenkins, (Senior Research Officer at the History of Parliament Trust; author of *Gladstone,*