

RALEIGH LECTURE ON HISTORY

GLADSTONE AND IRELAND

By JOHN VINCENT

Read 5 October 1977

THE Irish nationalists, so Mr. Gladstone reflected as his mind moved towards Home Rule, were like vermin about a man's person, troublesome and disagreeable, able to give annoyance, but not to interfere with his action.¹ Bearing this warning against making simple assumptions about the relation between Irish cause and British response very much in mind, this paper seeks to ascertain what underlay Gladstone's calculations about, and attitudes towards Irish matters.

The questions involved are many. They refuse to converge readily on a single focus. There is the question of the kind of Ireland Gladstone wished to see, and its converse, whether Gladstone wished to see the kind of Ireland that actually emerged. There is the question of how far Gladstone recognized Irish nationality. There is the question of the degree of deliberateness with which Gladstone approached Irish affairs, and its converse, how far apparently deliberate results derived from improvisation and opportunism. There is the question whether his views differed substantially from those of other politicians. If there is a common element behind these questions, it is to be found in relation to the perplexing matter of Gladstone's greatness. With Gladstone's greatness as an individual now more clearly understood than ever,² it has become needless to rest his fame on an Irish Church Act that was at best a plausible distraction, an 1870 Land Act that was largely unnecessary or inoperative, an 1881 Land Act whose central ingredient Gladstone denounced as robbery, an 1884 Reform Act ostensibly aimed at splitting nationalist opinion, and an 1886 Home Rule

¹ '... He did not think the Parnellites strong enough ever to cause real danger or to do serious mischief; they would be, he said, like vermin about a man's person, troublesome and disagreeable, able to give annoyance, but not to interfere with his action' (Lord Derby's diary, 8 October 1883, reporting a private conversation with Gladstone).

² Except, it may be hinted, in matters of finance.

Bill which gave no prospect of Home Rule. As to peasant ownership of the soil, Gladstone's own legislation on the subject failed to work, and he condemned the first effective scheme of land purchase, Ashbourne's Act, as 'mischievous and dangerous'. Of all his Irish policies, the one which worked best was the repression of 1881-5, yet even here he can claim only a small part of the credit for one of the most distinct British successes of the later nineteenth century.

Gladstone's Irish policy is normally explained in terms of continuity, intention, and natural development, rather than as sharply discontinuous, somewhat haphazard, and as much a matter of response as of initiative. Certain notorious quotations¹ have been allowed to speak too strongly in favour of continuity. The 1880s are seen as a development, not as a contradiction, of what went before; and throughout, what Gladstone did is represented as significantly in advance of what others did or thought.

Ireland was a possible political direction for Gladstone but not, up till 1867, an actual or even probable one. In a career so multifarious, there are of course traces of interest, but the simple conclusion can hardly be avoided that Gladstone steered clear of Ireland until he was 57. In this there is one feature that does not become less extraordinary as one dwells upon it: the fact that he only stayed in Ireland once,² in 1877. He was an inveterate traveller to uncomfortable places, and the Irish Mail practically went past his door each night. Moreover, he had time to spare. From 1845 to 1859, fourteen of the best years of his life, he was in office for only two and a half years, and was

¹ On 12 October 1845 Gladstone's Catholic sister Helen, then in Germany with her brother, was held down by force to have leeches put on (*Diaries*, vol. iii, p. 488). Gladstone began a letter to his wife before the leeches incident, but completed it the following morning. It is the latter part of this letter which contains the famous apostrophe, bearing no intelligible relation to the main thread of the letter: 'Ireland, Ireland! that cloud in the west, that coming storm, the minister of God's retribution upon cruel and inveterate and but half-atoned injustice!' (A. Tilney Bassett ed., *Gladstone To His Wife*, p. 64).

Every biographer knows that Gladstone said in December 1868, 'My mission is to pacify Ireland' (Sir P. Magnus, *Gladstone: A Biography*, 1963 ed., p. 193). Few have related this aspiration to the statistics of agrarian crime and eviction, which show an Ireland already as pacified as it was ever to be during Gladstone's career. Agrarian crime only once subsequently fell below the 1868 figure. Evictions reached their lowest point between 1846 and 1886 in 1869.

² He also put ashore for a few hours in 1880 on a cruise.

not leading an opposition. Yet on only one occasion, prior to his eventual visit, did he so much as consider a tour that was increasingly obligatory for a rising politician.

In the late 1830s and first half of the 1840s, Gladstone gave much thought to Ireland, but with what objects in mind it is not easy to say. In 1841 he hoped to be made chief secretary for Ireland:¹ 'the idea of Ireland had nestled imperceptibly in my mind'.² What curious project lay behind this has not been brought to light. Gladstone had spoken on Ireland in 1835, 1836, and 1838, but between 1838 and his resignation on Maynooth in 1845 he left the subject alone.³ It would be unwise to read into his frame of mind at this time any element of precocious liberalism on Irish matters. His deep emotion about Rome continued unabated. O'Connell was 'a man regardless of all laws human and divine',⁴ and Gladstone made inquiries about the extent to which he broke the Sabbath. It was in 1842, moreover, that Gladstone wrote urging his father that his Catholic sister Helen should be required to leave the family home. Finally, there is the question of Maynooth. Gladstone emerged from the Maynooth controversy in 1845 wearing the mantle of a soul won for liberalism. What is less remarked, but was probably more important at the time, was that Gladstone entered the Maynooth controversy when it commenced in 1844 as the leader of the hard-line Protestants in the cabinet. The Maynooth episode is normally treated as the vagary of a stainless spirit. There was more to it than that. It gave Gladstone a future if anything happened to Peel. It gave Gladstone a 'Protestant' power base without giving him a reactionary image.

¹ Morley, *Gladstone*, vol. i, p. 244; *Diaries*, vol. iii, p. 136; John Brooke and Mary Sorensen ed., *The Prime Ministers' Papers: W. E. Gladstone. I: Autobiographica*. (1971), vol. ii, p. x.

² *Diaries*, 1 September 1841.

³ Cf. Arthur Tilney Bassett, *Gladstone's Speeches: Descriptive Index and Bibliography, with a Preface by Viscount Bryce O.M. and Introductions to the Selected Speeches by Herbert Paul* (London, 1916), pp. 7-11; Gladstone's own list of 'important speeches' printed in the *Diaries*.

⁴ By 1881, however, Gladstone was drawing a highly flattering contrast between 'the leadership and doctrines of O'Connell and the leadership and doctrines that are now in vogue', and discovered no less than five principles from which O'Connell never swerved: loyalty to the Crown, a desire for friendly relations with Great Britain, he 'respected law and human life', 'he used the remarkable expression that political change, political improvement, was not worth having at the expense of a drop of blood', and he respected property (speech at Knowsley, *The Times*, 28 October 1881, p. 8).

It even raised thoughts of a Wellington–Gladstone or a Stanley–Gladstone ministry.¹

By 1852 Gladstone was ready to say, in respect of the New Zealand constitution of that year, that ‘every question in which you cannot show the Imperial interest shall be left to be dealt with and managed by the Colonies themselves’. A lesson had been learned, a liberal imperial rhetoric had been created, but it no more had an Irish dimension than it (or his ecclesiastical or economic or Italian liberalism) determined his party allegiance. He had arrived at a view of imperial statesmanship common to his generation, and in common with them did not apply it to Ireland. Indeed, he explicitly denied in a somewhat embarrassed way that the new doctrine could apply to Ireland, in his correspondence with Manning. In his only two important ventures into Irish affairs in the twenty years between 1845 and 1865, the introduction of income tax into Ireland in 1853, for which he was directly responsible, and his part in the Peelite capture of the Irish Brigade in the period following the Papal Aggression of 1851, the tendency of his actions was to unite Ireland more closely with Great Britain than before. In the case of income tax, Gladstone overcame a cabinet majority who still thought Ireland should be treated as a special case. Gladstone pressed his argument that there was no difference between well-off Irishmen and well-off Englishmen, and pressed it without any show of sympathy.²

¹ When Louis Philippe suggested a Wellington–Gladstone ministry to replace Peel, Disraeli replied ‘I told the king that he was quite equal to Peel, with the advantage of youth’ (Disraeli to Manners, n.d. but Dec. 1845, in C. Whibley, *Lord John Manners and his Friends* (1925), vol. i, p. 196).

² The financial changes of 1853 were complicated. Gladstone remitted £240,000 in Irish annuities, chargeable locally mainly on poor districts in the south and west of Ireland. In return, he imposed an income tax bringing in an estimated £460,000 (actually £480,000), an Irish spirits duty producing £198,000 (actually £213,000), and, thirdly, succession duties producing a variable amount. His measures in one way produced a redistribution of burdens from the poorer areas and people in Ireland to the richer ones, but also left a considerable gain for the Exchequer, even on his own reckoning. Three points should be remembered. The income tax of 1853 was meant to be a temporary tax for seven years only. Secondly, the spirits duty in Ireland was set at 8*d.*, against 1*s.* in Scotland, and a previous level of 8*s.* in England. Thirdly, Irish income tax was assessed in a way which made it much less burdensome than in Great Britain. In England, the landlord paid tax on the full nominal rental, whereas in Ireland he paid on the Poor Law valuation, which was perhaps a third less than he really received. Irish tenant farmers also paid income tax on much more favourable principles of assess-

Gladstone, indeed, saw Ireland with the eyes of a Chancellor of the Exchequer, not of a Peelite social engineer. In certain obvious ways he did not take up the legacy of the Devon Commission. He did not speak on the Irish land acts of 1849 and 1860.¹ Up to 1863, indeed, Gladstone spoke very rarely on Ireland. Between 1853 and 1859 he made no speech of any length on Ireland. The intricate financial questions raised by the Famine found him silent, suited though they were to his special abilities. He had no obvious commitment for or against coercion. On the other hand, he was every inch committed against the mixture of regional policy, graft, and special pleading for infant industries, which was the form in which Irish policy most impinged on the Exchequer. On one occasion he noted 'all the Irish were there, most of them vying with one another in eagerness to plunder the public purse'. His opposition to making Galway a second Liverpool at public expense is one example.² While local log-rolling remained paramount, and Irish national issues lay in the background, Gladstone could not emerge as a friend to Ireland.

Besides, the Liberals were the enemies of the Pope in Italian ment, so that it cost them probably half what it would have done an English tenant farmer (cf. *Parl. Deb.*, 3, vol. clxxi, col. 833, 12 June 1863.) Cf. Morley, *Gladstone* (1903), vol. i, pp. 646–7, for Gladstone's memorandum on the question, and his Aberdeen speech of 26 September 1871 for Gladstone's remarks on the burdens avoided by the Irish taxpayer. See below, pp. 232–6.

¹ He was unable to speak on Stanley's Compensation for Improvements Bill of 1845, as the measure was introduced into the Upper House and never reached the Commons.

² The collapse of Lever's Galway packet station project had a curious sequel. The project in some way involved the Whig magnate Lord Clanricarde; both he and his son Lord Dunkellin spoke on the subject in parliament. In 1866 it was Dunkellin whose amendment led to the fall of the ministry. A letter from Clanricarde illuminates the kind of Irish politics with which Gladstone had no wish to associate: 'I am afraid that as you narrate, Lever is making a sad fool of himself and injuring the prosperity of our company, by his attempts at meddling in Party Politicks. I have tried to stop him and I hope not wholly without effect, we have put before him that his colleagues and shareholders are mostly Liberal (at least)—that the present ministry will most likely be out of office before the Co. is ready to sign a contract, and that if he gets himself in antagonism with their successors, he cannot expect favours, or more than scant justice from them' (Clanricarde to W. H. Gregory, 11 March 1859, Clanricarde MSS., Leeds, Bundle 42. I owe this reference to Dr. K. T. Hoppen). Lady Clanricarde 'detests' Gladstone (Lord Stanley's diary, 16 May 1865) and her husband was hostile to any reform bill (*ibid.*, 23 June 1866).

politics. Gladstone was an enthusiast in the Italian cause. His last major speech on Italy was in 1862.¹ His first hint of Irish interests came in 1863.² In 1864 Garibaldi's visit again placed Gladstone at the head of a Protestant frenzy. It was not until the election year of 1865 that Gladstone was free enough of Italian connotations, and of a Protestant constituency,³ to take up the threads of friendship with Catholic Ireland.

It is worth reflecting on Gladstone's view of what Ireland was, and where it was going. He did not deliver himself very fully on the matter, except on his visit in 1877, but all the hints tell the same story, whether we look at the 1860s or 1870s or 1880s. He believed in Irish landlords 'whose social and moral influence we must look upon as absolutely essential to the welfare of the country'.⁴ If he wished for a change, it was not that Irish landlords should exert less power, but that they should become more like English landlords, that is, a strong and active force in the life of the community. Even in 1870, he defined his object in terms of the landlord's mission as a guarantor of a free but orderly, hierarchical society. 'We ought to look forward', he said, 'with hope and expectation to bringing about a state of things in which the landlords of Ireland may assume . . . the position which is happily held, as a class, by the landlords of

¹ *Parl. Deb.*, 3, vol. clxvi, cols. 933-50, 11 April 1862. In this speech Gladstone dismissed as 'victims of credulity' leading Irish Catholic members of both parties who had raised the issue of alleged Piedmontese atrocities in Naples. (Gladstone's attitude resembled that of Disraeli to the Bulgarian atrocities.) Later that year the Liberal chief whip wrote, 'You are losing the support of the Irish R. Catholics, the natural enemies of a Liberal Govt. . . . In the south [of Ireland] our prospects are very bad: and all that we can hope to do is to save a few seats from the general wreck' (Brand to Palmerston, 24 August 1862, Hampden MSS., House of Lords Record Office).

² *Parl. Deb.*, 3, vol. clxxi, cols. 825-36, refusing a request from an Irish Conservative for a select committee on Irish distress. This was Gladstone's first substantial discussion of Irish policy since 1853, and it was a response (to Irish distress, and to a backbench request), not an initiative.

³ The University Elections Act of 1861 (24 and 25 Vict. c. LIII) provided for university electors to vote by means of voting papers. This gave greater weight than before in Gladstone's Oxford University seat to the non-resident electors, many of them strongly Conservative clergy. Whether such constituency matters affected Gladstone's behaviour between 1861 and 1865 is hard to compute, because it has not been established that he expected to lose Oxford. It may, however, be noted that his speeches to popular audiences began in the session following the University Elections Act, and not in 1860 or 1861. It should also be remembered that the Catholic vote in S. Lancashire was considerable.

⁴ *Parl. Deb.*, 3, vol. clxxi, col. 827, 12 June 1863.

this country, a position marked by residence, by personal familiarity, and by sympathy with the people among whom they live.' Though he in later days spoke harshly of Peel's 'great failure in regard to Ireland',¹ there is no sign that he wished, before 1865, to go as far as Peel had wished to go in 1845.

Gladstone, for a large part of his middle life, thought Ireland was not a problem. All the recent statistical and social research, he argued in 1863, showed that until the bad season of that year, Ireland was making great and clear progress in everything connected with agricultural and manufacturing wealth.² These views were not quickly abandoned. They were still firmly held in 1877. He might concede the case for greater liberality in lending public money to enterprise in Ireland than in Scotland, but this was only because Ireland was climbing the same ladder of progress as the other countries, if a rung or two lower down. Even in 1866, when moving the suspension of Habeas Corpus, he offered a perspective which linked progressive Unionism and evolutionary optimism, saying 'it is our duty . . . to record the signs of progress made . . . Some progress, at least, has been made towards unity of sentiment . . .'³ Up to the end of 1866, there was nothing about Gladstone's Irish statements that gave any hint of what was to come, or that set him apart from other leading men. If Gladstone had qualms concerning the Irish Church, about which he pledged himself to take no action in his speech of 1865 and his letter of that year to Dr. Hannah, so had most of his contemporaries. That most average of official Liberals, Sir Charles Wood, said 'that for himself he thought the Irish Establishment an abomination, and believed most public men did so, but to attempt to meddle with it would be madness'.⁴ That most moderate of Conservatives, Lord Stanley, thought: 'The truth is that to settle the Irish Church question satisfactorily is impossible, except by total disendowment; . . .'⁵ If there was a bee buzzing in Gladstone's bonnet in

¹ 'His great failure was in regard to Ireland. He thought he could cobble up the Irish difficulty by endowing Maynooth, and establishing what the strong Protestants called "Godless Colleges".'—L. A. Tollemache, *Talks with Mr. Gladstone* (London 1898), p. 127.

² *Parl. Deb.*, 3, vol. clxxi, col. 836, 12 June 1863.

³ *Ibid.*, 3, vol. clxxi, col. 723, 17 February 1866.

⁴ Stanley diaries, 16 March 1865, recording Wood's private conversation with Stanley.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10 April 1866. Stanley had prepared a speech against the Irish Church in 1866, but did not deliver it because of its possible bad effect on Conservative unity over parliamentary reform.

1864-7, it was that he was 'decidedly in favour of the plan of buying up the interest of the [railway] companies on behalf of govt'.¹ The question to be asked is why Gladstone, having steered clear of Irish issues until the end of the session of 1866, then took them up in the session of 1867. There is no single answer. The suggestion that it was a response to serious unrest in Ireland fails to fit chronologically. The nearest one can get at present is to say that Gladstone took the question up in early 1867 because Russell was taking it up; that he pursued Irish questions later in 1867 because they reunited the party and enabled him to avoid more divisive issues; and that in 1868 he pressed forward to attack to avoid the danger of Disraeli dealing with the question. In other words, he did what the changing position made him do, and would have made any leader in comparable circumstances do.

As Gladstone twice said,² Ireland had little to do with his first steps in Irish policy. There is no difficulty in showing that he, like his colleagues, was turning over Irish issues, particularly the Irish Church issue, throughout 1867, and that his and their intentions to do something antedated both the fragmentation of the Liberal party in the spring of 1867, and the sensational Fenian incidents of the autumn.³ Gladstone's first major speech

¹ Stanley diaries, 18 March 1865. In the winter of 1865-6 Derby and Disraeli were more nervous about a rumoured financial 'sensation measure' from Gladstone than about reform of parliament. Their anxiety was that the certain profits of railway nationalization would allow Gladstone to make dazzling tax cuts. Had not Russell's radicalism and proletarian distemper retarded progress, Gladstone might have initiated the mixed economy in 1866. For Gladstone's evident enthusiasm for railway nationalization in 1864, see the correspondence about this 'very great and fruitful measure' in Philip Guedalla ed., *The Palmerston Papers. Gladstone and Palmerston, being the Correspondence of Lord Palmerston with Mr. Gladstone 1851-65* (London, 1928), pp. 291-2, 308-9, 315-20.

² Gladstone said that Fenianism 'had not been an influence in determining, or in affecting in the slightest degree, the convictions which we have entertained with respect to the course proper to be pursued in Ireland' (Morley, *Gladstone*, 1903, vol. ii, pp. 241-2, citing *Parl. Deb.*, 3, 31 May 1869). Subsequently, in his twelfth Midlothian speech, he broadened the terms of the proposition. 'In the case of Ireland, it was not the decision of the people of Ireland that led to the destruction of the Established Church. The people of Ireland had borne it so long, had been so accustomed to the work of submission, that they hardly stirred upon the subject.'

³ Gladstone took a strong line about the Manchester Martyrs. He firmly refused to support a miscellaneous Irish and radical request for allowing them to appeal, leave having been refused by the courts. He argued 'the judgment of those judges shall be final' (*Parl. Deb.*, 3, vol. cxc, col. 126, 21

to a popular audience on the Irish issue followed within a few days of the Clerkenwell bombing,¹ but what he said had been foreshadowed during the session.² The first stirrings on the question perhaps came from Russell,³ and it was probably because of Russell rather than Gladstone that by February 1867 it was generally known that the Irish Church was marked for the axe. Gladstone's involvement in the Irish Church question was less than entirely voluntary, for had he not taken up the question he ran the risk of being badly outflanked by Russell.

Gladstone's Southport speech⁴ revealed another dimension of his Irish intentions. In it he not only used the Irish question to reunite a demoralized party, but also made it serve to rule out popular education and the ballot as party commitments. Gladstone's choice of the Irish Church issue was therefore as much a rejection of two issues he regarded as unsuitable, as an espousal of a cause he preferred for its own sake. As to the kind

November 1867. The execution took place on the 23rd). At Southport Gladstone argued that the Fenian assailants of the police van did not fire their revolver in order to break open the lock, thus only accidentally killing the policeman inside, but that they fired through the ventilator grill and that the death was therefore no accident.

¹ His speech at Southport on 19 December 1867 followed directly upon the Clerkenwell bomb explosion of 13 December. However, on 30 November Gladstone had told Bright that he was willing wholly to suppress the state church in Ireland (*The Diaries of John Bright*, ed. Walling, p. 313), a statement which went beyond his remarks at Southport.

² On 7 May 1867 Gladstone strongly attacked the Irish Church in parliament, saying, 'I refuse to give my countenance to that strange, anomalous, and most injurious state of things which prevails in Ireland', and denied that there were any grounds on which the Irish Church could be maintained. On 29 May 1867 the House decided to defer the subject until the next session. On 18 July 1867 Gladstone reminded the House, 'It was time that in some at least of these Irish questions progress should be made'; on 24 July Bright found Gladstone 'earnest, especially on Ireland' and thinking 'the Irish question the most urgent'; on 1 August Gladstone pressed in bold terms for nationalization of Irish railways. Before the Fenian incidents of autumn 1867, Gladstone had put forward a whole programme of Irish reform.

³ In the winter of 1866, when Russell was at Florence and Gladstone at Rome, Russell took the initiative in asking Gladstone to have a talk about the Irish Church. Gladstone made an excuse, but Russell later claimed to have ascertained that Gladstone was 'as little disposed as I was to maintain Protestant ascendancy in Ireland' (Lord John Russell, 1st Earl Russell, *Recollections and Suggestions, 1813-1873* (1875), p. 345, where no documentation is given).

⁴ 19 December 1867.

of Ireland he wished to see, Gladstone's tone was grating. 'What we want is to have Ireland like Scotland', he asserted; 'that union of heart and spirit which is absolutely necessary for the welfare of the country has not yet been brought about.' His ultimate object was 'that end of which I never despair—viz. of redeeming the reproach of total political incapacity to assimilate to ourselves an island within three hours of our shores . . .' Governing by Irish ideas was a programme, however well meaning, for integrating Ireland more firmly within the British political structure, just as the working class had been so integrated.

Gladstone's involvement in Irish reform, then, was not a response to particular phases of external agitation. It was not an intelligent anticipation of agitation, unless it is intelligent to have prior knowledge of one's own decision to agitate. Nor was it a response to the ailments of the Liberal party, since it both preceded those ailments and it was uncertain until late in the day whether it would cure them. Reform was not an attempt to satisfy the new democracy, except in the special sense that it served to head them off from more radical or more divisive areas of policy, such as the ballot and education.¹

Gladstone not only had to pull his party together. He had to prevent Disraeli from keeping his options open. The danger was that the Conservatives might confine themselves to platitudes on the Irish Church until after the election. If Disraeli had retained office uncommitted until after the election, he could have offered a 'reform' of the Irish Church which would have

¹ *A Chapter of Autobiography* is, as apologetic for Gladstone's course in 1867–9, sadly defective. His main assertion, that since his resignation over Maynooth in 1845, he had never said one word 'which could pledge me on principle to the maintenance of the Irish Church' perhaps explains his benevolent neutrality between 1845 and 1867. 'True I did not say that I was thenceforward prepared at any moment to vote for removal of the Established Church in Ireland . . . on the contrary, I was willing and desirous that it should be permitted to continue . . .' What the pamphlet does not even try to explain is why Gladstone ceased to be benevolently neutral in between 1866 and 1867, and became actively hostile. After much circuitous statement of positions of the most ordinary kind, he concludes by saying that his reason for dealing decisively with the Irish Church now must be treated elsewhere. As the reasons lay in 'the dialectic of party', they could not form part of his apologetic. Irish land legislation was not part of the election programme of 1868; rather, it was part of the pre-election consensus of 1866–7 which emerged again as cabinet business in autumn 1869, but did not require either Gladstone or political upheaval or 'democracy' to obtain a place on the agenda of the reformed parliament.

had attractions for some Irish and more Whigs. It was true that the Catholic prelates were almost all for complete disendowment—nothing for nobody. Their austerity did not, however, derive from any particularly profound aversion to money, but from a belief that they needed Liberationist votes to topple the Church. If Disraeli were to offer them the same result based on Whig votes, then their voluntaryism was an uncertain quantity. Disraeli's most vigorous and idiosyncratic election campaign, that of 1868, was forced on him against his better judgement by the inability of his cabinet to agree on an opposite policy. It was good luck¹ which gave Gladstone a reactionary response from the ministry, rather than a situation in which the Conservatives made sensible reformist proposals to which Gladstone offered doctrinaire opposition.

The parliamentary situation was primary. The Irish prelates supported the voluntaryist section of the Liberals because of their power, not because of their views; but it is likely that concurrent endowment had a more numerous and influential following in the party. But its Whig supporters could not defect to Disraeli's radical opportunism with ease, even if Disraeli had been able to offer a policy tailored to their needs. The voluntaryists were powerful, not because they were any stronger than they had been while in the wilderness since 1847, but because the events of 1867 had destroyed the Conservative alternative for moderate Liberal opinion.

The Land Act of 1870, unlike the Church Act, was not part of Gladstone's election programme. A compensation for improvements bill was expected, having been proposed by both parties; the much larger bill that emerged from the cabinet was not. Yet the Act of 1870, with its general attempt to protect tenants against unreasonable eviction, was as close to average opinion in 1870 as the compensation bills had been in 1866 and 1867, perhaps closer, because average opinion itself had moved on. Both landlords and Conservative politicians took the view 'it might be worse', thinking Gladstone's measure 'not practically injurious' and 'a tolerably fair bill'.² The bill passed the

¹ The luck took the form of having Cairns, a Belfast Protestant, and Hardy, the member for Oxford University and a militant churchman, as the two best debaters, party men, and strong personalities in a rather weak Conservative cabinet.

² Cf. Derby's notes on two meetings of Conservative leaders: '[The landlords] . . . expected a more stringent and revolutionary proposal, and on the whole seem disposed to say "It might be worse". In fact the power of eviction which the bill limits is one which few landowners are able to exercise,

House of Commons by 442-11, the House of Lords without a division. With the Conservatives *hors de combat*, cabinet opponents of the bill like Clarendon and Lowe were in a weak position. Lowe, as a doctrinaire, detested the bill in principle; as a politician, he was not anxious to lose the chance of passing his popular budget of 1870. Clarendon, a dying man and a poor man with family interests to think of, was not well placed to make a stir. The current assumption was that radical democracy was master, and no one, least of all its opponents, wished to bring that force into play by necessitating an election.

The Act, if not a failure, was a modest success as an old-fashioned compensation for improvements bill, its least revolutionary and controversial feature. As far as land purchase went, the Bright clauses were virtually inoperative. This too helped the tenant, by saving him from buying at the top of the market. Tenant-right was given only to those who already had it, namely the Ulstermen. Otherwise, the bill did not protect against evictions, which were never so low again.¹ This is only to say that evictions followed the economy, not the statute-book, in the 1870s and 1880s. Even if state intervention in the relations of landlord and tenant be taken as a great change of principle, it was a change that was meant to lead nowhere, that did in fact lead nowhere, and whose effect on the legislation of the 1870s was to make it more supine by reaction.

If the Act failed to prevent evictions, make the hens lay more eggs, or effect land purchase, it achieved something politically more significant. If it satisfied no one else, it satisfied Gladstone, and his satisfaction, indeed his complacency, about his handiwork dominated his approach to Irish affairs in 1870-81, and but for unforeseen calamities of weather, price collapse, and disaffection, would probably have continued to determine

in the actual state of popular feeling, and considering the prevalence of assassination on the most trivial pretexts' (Derby diary, 19 February 1870).

'... All the members of the H. of C. agreed that our friends there are inclined to accept the bill—some being in fear for their seats, others really thinking it a tolerably fair bill, and all agreeing that they expected something worse. . . . I do not think the bill practically injurious, though doubtful as to its justice in principle' (ibid., 5 March 1870; Derby was still a large Tipperary landowner at this time).

In 1871 Derby described the Act as 'more revolutionary in principle than any Act which Parliament has yet sanctioned, though in practice it works fairly enough' (6 May 1871).

¹ The number of evictions rose from a low of 374 families evicted in 1869, to within the range 463 to 726 in 1870-7.

his views for the rest of his life. With Irish fickleness he was, however, disgusted.

At the 1874 election Disraeli accused Gladstone of being too hard on the Irish. Gladstone accused Disraeli of having links with the Irish Catholic prelates. After the election, Gladstone, distinctly avowing that he would never need the Irish Catholics again, launched his offensive attacks on Vaticanism. Disraeli planned a visit to Ireland. Gladstone was as ready to play an anti-Catholic hand as Disraeli was to play a pro-Catholic one. Once he believed himself no longer in need of their votes, Gladstone lost no time in erecting an apparently insuperable barrier of theological insult between himself and his former Irish clients.

Gladstone resumed interest in Ireland in order to re-establish himself as a Liberal leader.¹ By 1877 he was back in business, and this meant among other things rebuilding his standing as a friend of Ireland, in a series of speeches between 1877 and 1880. His optimism about Ireland was boundless:

Now, gentlemen, I had something to do in introducing into Ireland that state of things in which we can say that justice is the principle which regulates the relation of government and governed. . . . I have an undoubting and cheerful confidence—it is as certain, I believe, as the revolution of heavenly bodies—that what has been done for Ireland will have its fruits, and that the little inconveniences and secondary evils of which we may now, perhaps, complain . . . will pass away and be forgotten, but that the Union of these countries may be said now to rest upon something like a firm foundation; . . .²

¹ In August 1876, just before his return to politics, he told an effusive Irish correspondent, 'The feelings you describe are not the less valued by me because all probability has ceased of their finding in the future any scope for action' (*The Times*, 18 August 1876, p. 9, col. f). Gladstone was replying to an 'Irish Catholic Layman', who expressed gratitude for what Gladstone had done for Ireland and expected to see him premier again. 'When the time for taking that position arrives, your old and grateful friends in Ireland will prove to the world that Irish Catholics are never ungrateful, and that honesty of purpose, even when directed against what they hold most dear, cannot blot from their memory past favours.'

² *The Times*, 2 June 1877, p. 12, col. a, reporting speech of previous day to the Birmingham Liberal Association. Gladstone's dominant idea was that Ireland could and should be regained for the Liberal party. Gladstone set out to solve the question why Ireland was still dissident after 'changes which have removed by far the greatest and most crying, and the most searching and the most pervading evils.' (He did not consider the possibility of nationalism.) His reply to the Home Rulers' wish to obtain prosperity through particularism was 'I need not say . . . they make a great mistake.' He believed

In autumn 1877 Gladstone at last visited Ireland.¹ His report to Granville was that of an innocent abroad. He radiated optimism about economic prospects and gloom only about parliamentary ones. 'The upshot is that with the social condition of Ireland and the prospects of its future solid happiness

'that we have laid in Ireland the foundations of national content', and that the Irishman 'will learn—to a great extent has learnt—to cease to view in the law of the government of his country his natural enemy'. Now that 'a more genial temper possesses the national mind', he expected 'all our questions with Ireland will now be symptomatic and superficial'. If there was an Irish problem, it was a problem of parliamentary faction. The existence of the Home Rulers was 'an evil—it is a public evil, it is a serious evil', but only at a parliamentary level.

¹ Gladstone, accompanied by his wife and daughter and his nephew Spencer Lyttelton, arrived at Kingstown on Wednesday, 17 October, leaving for home on Monday, 12 November, when he addressed a deputation on his arrival at Holyhead. His visit was an active and successful one. On arriving, he was recognized by a news vendor, who cried, 'Welcome to Ireland!' to which Gladstone raised his hat, saying, 'I thank you!' His hosts were Lord Meath (17–25 October), Lord Fitzwilliam (25–9 October), Lord Powerscourt (29 October–1 November), Lord Monck (1 November), the Duke of Leinster (1–6 November), Lord De Vesci (7–10 November), and Lord Annaly (10–12 November). On 20 October he lunched with the Lord-Lieutenant, the Duke of Marlborough; on the 22nd he lunched with the Provost and Fellows of Trinity College, and spoke impromptu to a crowd of students; on the 23rd he visited the Lesser Sugarloaf mountain, and on the 24th Kilkenny Hill near Bray, in the latter case with Judge Lawson and Judge Keogh, infamous in nationalist eyes; on the 30th he spoke to boys at Powerscourt Reformatory, exhorting them, at the behest of a priest, to humility; on 5 November he visited Maynooth, then dined with the Protestant Archbishop; on the 6th visited Cardinal Cullen, received a deputation from the County Down Farmers Association, and dined at Trinity College. On the 7th he received the Freedom of the City of Dublin, making two speeches in reply, one at the presentation, one at a *déjeuner* at the Mansion House. His miscellaneous sightseeing included Christ Church Cathedral, the Synod House, the Bank of Ireland, the Royal Irish Academy, St. Patrick's Cathedral, the National Gallery, the College of Physicians, and the Industrial Schools. He was also presented with a 'sprig of shillelagh' cut from the famous oak at Aghrim. He appears to have extended his visit, his reported original intention having been to depart before the first week in November.

Gladstone declined an invitation from Major Crawford, brother of Mr. Sharman Crawford, M.P., the Ulster Liberal leader, to visit the north of Ireland on the grounds that 'in the present state of Irish opinion he should do best to keep silent on public affairs'.

In his Knowsley speech (*The Times*, 28 October 1881, p. 8), Gladstone emphasized that he had received the Freedom of the City of Dublin by a unanimous vote, and that the honour was so rarely awarded that his name then stood alone on the list with that of Butt.

I am thus far quite contented, and this is the thing really important: but in its politics, the politics of the day and on the surface, I do not at present see any daylight. I think there is a sense of shame about them but they do not know how to mend their ways.' On the eve of the Land War, Gladstone foresaw 'future solid happiness' for Ireland, and his main anxiety was that its politicians had cut loose from the Liberal party.

On returning, he regarded his visit with some complacency. Cardinal Cullen may have said 'You know, Mr. Gladstone, we could have given you a warmer reception if it had not been for certain pamphlets which we in Ireland did not like very well',¹ but for Gladstone nothing was so striking 'as the apparent eagerness of the Parish Priests to meet me, and their warmth'.² He saw no real difficulty in coming to a sensible arrangement with the Home Rulers. 'Had the Home Rulers a real leader whom they were disposed to follow I cannot think it would be difficult to arrange a *modus vivendi* with them.'³

His Dublin speech⁴ showed what Gladstone hoped and expected to see in Ireland during the rest of his political career. He waxed lyrical on the modernization of the Irish economy. He deplored emigration, but thought it at an end; noted a halving in crime; dwelt on the rise in the value of agricultural produce; and claimed 'we have arrived . . . at the real stage of improvement'. He showed no false modesty in his assessment of his 1870 Land Act. 'The landlord is better, the farmer is better, the cottager is better . . .' he asserted with gusto. The only weakness in the 1870 Act, it appeared, was in the purchase clauses inserted by Bright; and here Gladstone was not attacking purchase, but deploring its rarity.⁵

Since all was for the best in the best of all possible Irelands,

¹ Morley, *Gladstone* (1903), vol. ii, p. 571.

² Gladstone to Granville, 20 November 1877, in A. Ramm ed., *The Political Correspondence of Mr Gladstone and Lord Granville 1876-1886* (1962), vol. i, p. 58.

³ *Ibid.* Gladstone was silent while in Ireland on 'the one subject on which I am now in thorough accord with the popular party in Ireland'. This was the question of amnesty for the two Fenians still confined for the Manchester murder of 1867. Gladstone had, however, recently urged amnesty in parliament, on 20 July 1877, which must have done something to smooth his Irish visit. See Ramm, *loc. cit.*, n. 1 and 2.

⁴ 7 November 1877.

⁵ Five thousand purchasers, amounting to three-quarters of Church tenants, had bought under the 1869 Church Act. The Bright clauses of the 1870 Act created only 870 owners in 1870-81.

it followed that there was no need for a split between English Liberals and Irish Home Rulers, and that the latter should be gently admonished. The sinner, not the sin, was to be rebuked; home rule might be accommodated by calling it local government, but to create a separate body of men called Home Rulers, distinct from the British Liberals, was an unnecessary blunder.¹ For Gladstone, whether in 1877 in Birmingham and Dublin, in 1879 and 1880 in Midlothian, or in 1880 in office, the expectations were clear. Gladstone saw no reason why his later years should be much involved with a country whose problems were so largely solved, and solved by him.² His visits in 1877 and 1880 had been agreeable.³ For the Irish in parliament, some accom-

¹ Gladstone's line on this point hardened in a textually curious way. In his Ninth Midlothian speech, he misquoted his Dublin speech as follows: 'I ventured to expostulate with them upon the policy they had adopted . . . I said, "I will take the liberty of saying that the present state of the representation with this formation of a Home Rule party is deplorable".' This 1879 version was much sterner than what he had actually said in 1877. It leaves no doubt that the common assertion that Gladstone only once and lightly attacked Home Rule suppresses a truth about Gladstone's public expressions towards Home Rulers. Gladstone repeatedly made it clear that Irishmen might support home rule, but they should not set up as Home Rulers.

² Gladstone's optimism about Ireland was, even in November 1877, not quite up to date. After a spring and summer of quite appalling rainfall, the potato yield had fallen to less than half the 1876 level. Gladstone eulogized Irish economic growth a few months after continuous decline had actually begun. But his opinions, if a year or so out of date, represented a general consensus about Irish serenity. Beach, Disraeli's chief secretary for Ireland, wrote of the Home Rule Party, 'Their humbug helps to keep the country quiet'; Trollope, the only English pundit who had lived in rural Ireland for a long period, wrote at this time a peculiarly radiant passage on Irish tranquillity: 'Rents are paid with more than English punctuality. And the religious enmity between the classes, though it is not yet dead, is dying out. Home-rule no doubt is a nuisance—and especially a nuisance because the professors of the doctrine do not at all believe in it themselves' (Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (World's Classics ed. 1947), pp. 65–6.)

³ In August 1880 Gladstone put ashore in Dublin Bay while on a cruise in the *Grantully Castle*. 'On the quay a considerable crowd had collected, by whom the Premier was cheered. Rough working men, grey-haired priests, and railway porters came forward and shook him by the hand, some of them crying out, "You are a friend to Ireland"'. The Prime Minister was evidently very much pleased with the visit which he had determined to pay to Irish soil . . . Mr. Gladstone proceeded to Dublin by the first train and drove in an outside car to Christ Church Cathedral . . . Mr Gladstone walked back to the station, being greeted with great enthusiasm on the way. The station was crowded and so was that at Kingstown, where the ticket collectors were too much engaged in cheering, and waving their caps to attend to their

modation could be made using such elastic quantities as local self-government and land purchase. What none of these things amounted to, especially against the backcloth of 'Beaconsfieldism', was an idea of a mission to Ireland of which a first stage had been completed but a second had yet to be fulfilled. When Gladstone returned to office in April 1880, and for about six months afterwards, he thought his Irish work had been completed, not that it was just about to begin.

The Midlothian speeches, taken as a whole, offered no Irish programme or policy.¹ They showed openness towards some mild form of devolution, interest in peasant proprietorship, and disapproval of Home Rulers. On no topic was there anything amounting to a commitment.² Irish disturbances, Irish distress,³ Irish nationality were not mentioned. Gladstone supported the

business of taking the tickets' (*The Times*, 30 August 1880, p. 8, col. 4). This 'truly warm Irish reception' must take its place along with dogmatic claims about the tense state of Irish opinion in 1880. According to the *Illustrated London News*, the premier 'was received with loud cheers by an immense crowd' on arrival at Kingstown (*I.L.N.*, 4 September 1880, vol. lxxvii, p. 230), although his landing had been delayed by fog.

¹ The second Midlothian speech tried to detach the question of Home Rule from political nationalism by making it a matter of parliamentary reform, local government, and 'the constitution of secondary and subordinate authorities', and by refusing to treat Ireland as a special case: 'I will consent to give to Ireland no principle, nothing that is not on equal terms offered to Scotland and to the different portions of the United Kingdom.' In the sixth Midlothian speech, Gladstone said, 'In Ireland, I have not the least hesitation in saying it is most desirable to encourage the formation of a small proprietary.' The ninth Midlothian speech attacked the Home Rule party as deplorable and a Tory front. (In personal vein, Gladstone made capital out of Beaconsfield having appointed a Conservative Home Ruler, King-Harman, as Lord-Lieutenant of Roscommon.)

² In January 1879 when Granville raised the question of an accommodation with the 'reasonable' Irish, Gladstone responded with much the same ideas as in 1877. Denominational education and local government (Gladstone's underlining) were seen as suitable areas for meeting Irish wishes. As Gladstone was a whole-hearted denominationalist, it was easy for him to overlook what was clear to Granville, that a Liberal party dependent on English Nonconformists could never gratify the priests. The areas which Gladstone marked out in the late 1870s as ripe for action—education, local government, land purchase—were precisely those not tackled in the 1880s.

³ The story of the Conservative reaction to Irish distress in 1879 has not been fully told, but see C. H. D. Howard and P. Gordon, 'The First Balmoral Journal of Dudley Ryder, Viscount Sandon (later third Earl of Harrowby), 6–14 November 1879', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, vol. xlx, May 1977, p. 90: 'I told her [the Queen] that the condition of Ireland and probable famine in certain districts, had occupied us [the cabinet] largely.'

creation of a peasant proprietary; so did Hartington.¹ Nothing came of this when the Liberals were in power. It was a minority Conservative government which, within weeks of taking office, and at the end of the session, passed the first effective legislation on the subject in 1885.

Not having an Irish policy appeared to the incoming government of 1880 entirely adequate. Gladstone himself later acknowledged his initial complacency.² He hardly knew there was a land war on, financial and foreign policy claiming all his attention. What was true of Gladstone was true of his colleagues. The uniform despondency of winter 1880 was preceded by an equally uniform complacency.

Ministers readily abandoned coercion.³ They produced a Disturbance Bill,⁴ but barely reacted to its defeat in the Lords.

¹ When Derby pressed Hartington for an exposition of his Irish views, 'the only definite decision' which Derby could extract was 'that he would support a plan for buying by help of the State the lands of willing sellers, to be resold to the tenants. He seemed to think obstruction would die out of itself, in a new parliament: Parnell nearly mad, and not unlikely to go quite so' (Derby diary, 26 October 1879).

² Gladstone's election address of 10 March 1880 made no reference to Ireland, except to say that the Conservatives were the party whose past actions had endangered the Union (W. Saunders, *The New Parliament 1880*, n.d., p. 31). Gladstone wrote to Granville, 18 December 1880, commenting on the rather weak appointment of Cowper as Lord-Lieutenant: 'There can be no doubt that if in April [1880] we had anticipated what we now have to encounter we should have sought for a man of more experience' (A. Ramm ed., op. cit., vol. i, p. 231). Speaking at Edinburgh, 1 September 1884, Gladstone explained, 'I freely admit that I had much upon my hands connected with the doings of the Beaconsfield government in almost every quarter of the world, and I did not know, no one knew, the severity of the crisis that was already swelling upon the horizon that shortly after rushed upon us like a flood' (Morley, *Gladstone*, vol. iii, pp. 47-8). One source refers to a speech made at Edinburgh in 1880 when Gladstone spoke of 'an absence of crime and outrage, with a general feeling of comfort and satisfaction, such as was unknown in the previous history of the country': see Bernard Holland, C.B., *The Life of Spencer Compton, Eighth Duke of Devonshire* (London, 1911), vol. i, p. 264, but not traced in press.

³ 'When the new parliament assembled for business, there were only twelve days,—from the 20th of May to the 1st of June,—before the time at which the Peace Preservation Act of 1875, and all the older laws kept in force by it, would expire' (Roundell Palmer, Earl of Selborne, *Memorials. Part II. Personal and Political, 1865-1895*, vol. ii, p. 8). Cf. Selborne, *ibid.*, pp. 6-10, for the arguments against renewal of coercion in 1880. Ireland had been continuously under coercive legislation in the quiet decade from 1870 to 1880.

⁴ In the Queen's Speech, ministers offered Ireland no land legislation,

Forster¹ and Gladstone² thought a good harvest would dispose of the difficulty. Such complacency³ in hindsight seems strange. The reaction to the Land War of 1879–80 was a decision to drop coercion and to let events take their course.

If Gladstone was slow to recognize the Land War as a problem, he was slower still to recognize the Parnellites as speaking for Ireland. So long as the Parnellites were the truly anti-English, socially radical group that men like Dillon seemed to be achieving in 1881, Gladstone rejected any suggestion that they were more than 'a few individuals'.⁴ Gladstone accepted the Parnellites only when they came to heel, and only when it had become apparent that the Conservatives were not above joint parliamentary action with them. In 1881, however, Gladstone saw his task as crushing radical nationalism, and peremptorily denied 'there were more than 10 or 12 really disaffected Irishmen in the House. He believed the Irish people as a body to be loyal'.⁵ Gladstone's heart was never more thoroughly

but only an irrelevant trifle in the form of an adjustment of the Irish borough franchise. The Disturbance Bill was an afterthought.

¹ *Parl. Deb.*, 3, vol. cclv, col. 315.

² Gladstone considered that an imminent good harvest 'may dispose of a great portion of the difficulty' and 'may help to bring about that improvement between classes which in some districts of the country is so much to be desired'. If this failed, the government would provide for law and order especially by pressing landlords to stop evictions (Gladstone to Granville, 3 August 1880, in A. Ramm, ed., *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 155).

³ Childers was sent to Ireland to report. Hamilton, Gladstone's private secretary, wrote on 26 September 1880: 'Ireland seems quieting down. Childers writes cheerfully of the country and says the good harvest has worked wonders.'

⁴ As late as six months before Kilmainham, Gladstone made great play with the fact that Parnell and Dillon had been refused the Freedom of the City of Dublin, which he, Gladstone, had been awarded unanimously.

⁵ Derby's diary, 28 October 1881, reporting Gladstone's private conversation. See also Gladstone's speech at Knowsley, *The Times*, 28 October 1881, p. 8. Gladstone denounced 'not the Irish party in general' but 'the knot of men associated with Mr. Parnell' for making 'every effort to damage and discredit, and if possible to overturn the Land Bill in its passing, to make its enactments hopeless . . .' 'It is idle', he said, 'to talk of either law or order or liberty or religion or civilization, if these gentlemen are to carry through the reckless and chaotic schemes that they have devised. Rapine is the first object; but rapine is not the only object. It is perfectly true to say that these gentlemen wish to march through rapine to disintegration and dismemberment of the Empire, and, I am sorry to say, even to the placing of different parts of the Empire in direct hostility one with the other. . . . Our opponents are not the people of Ireland. We are endeavouring to relieve the people

in his Irish work than when he undertook in autumn 1881 to show that 'the resources of civilization were not exhausted' in the face of Irish lawlessness.

By November 1880, complacency had given place to dismay in English ruling circles.¹ Gladstone, however, went on denying that there was an Irish question until well beyond the last moment. Early in November, Gladstone opposed Forster's request for coercion. Later in the month, he argued against immediate legislation to repress crime as being justified only 'in the face of a great outburst of crime, which neither has occurred, nor is likely at an early (I doubt it at a later) date, the case we have to deal with being a paralysis of certain most important civil rights'.² This view that boycotting, not crime, was the root problem was hardly borne out by the dramatic rise in Irish agrarian crime.³ Gladstone's instinct was to respond by letting well alone.

One of his reasons was that a coercion bill would entail remedial land legislation to which he was opposed. Another was that concentration on Irish measures would deprive him of any chance to bring forward a great financial scheme.⁴ Gladstone in fact had to be dragooned into action. His second phase of Irish legislation was no more voluntary than his first. He was at heart a principled opponent of his greatest legislative achievement, the 1881 Land Act, and his real views slipped out when he told parliament that no country in the world would eventually derive more benefit from perfect freedom of contract

of Ireland from the weight of a tyrannical yoke.' Gladstone at this time was guarded by ten policemen day and night, and was under formal sentence of death from an Irish-American 'court'.

¹ On 8 November 1880 Gladstone's secretary Hamilton wrote, 'Never had a Government a more difficult problem to solve than that of Ireland at the present moment.'

² Gladstone to Granville, 18 November 1880, in A. Ramm ed., *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 220. As late as 19 December 1880, Lord Cork found Gladstone saying there was very little crime. When introducing the Land Bill on 15 April 1881, a measure prompted in no small part by homicide or fear of it, Gladstone thought it proper to stress that 'The homicides of Ireland have shrunk to a mere fraction of what, within my recollection, they habitually were.'

³ Agrarian crime rose from 136 cases in 1875 to 2,590 in 1880. Families evicted rose from 667 in 1876 to 2,119 in 1880.

⁴ What Gladstone hoped to achieve in 1881 was a large plan for re-arranging the succession duties so that property paid more. Cabinet opposition led to the plan being dropped (Lewis Harcourt's diary, 2 April 1881).

in land than Ireland.¹ Whether one looks at land or coercion, the idea of a progressive Gladstone restraining a repressive Forster is untrue² for all but the last few weeks of the Forster regime of 1880–2. As late as April 1882, Gladstone could tell Forster, ‘If you go, and go on Irish grounds, surely I must go too’. Gladstone’s resistance to the introduction of coercion, based partly on lack of information, partly on unwillingness to admit that Irish problems could recur in serious form, partly from a desire not to be lumbered with consequential changes in land legislation, must be coupled with his steady support for Forster’s policy once it had been introduced. If Gladstone differed from Forster over coercion prior to their final quarrel, it was because Gladstone was looking for more effective ways of attaining the same ends. Where Gladstone fell behind Forster was over the Land Act; and over Irish local government he barely kept abreast of him.³

Some facets of Gladstone’s policy on coercion have been misunderstood. Gladstone was against coercion not because it punished Irishmen unfairly, but because it did not punish them enough. Thus he was anxious to change Forster’s method of repression by means of administrative detention into repression by use of the criminal law. This looks, on the face of it, like a Liberal scruple about Habeas Corpus. But administrative

¹ On introducing the Land Bill, 7 April 1881. In the process of passing the measure, Gladstone as usual developed an enthusiasm that was distinctly lacking at first. The Bill was undoubtedly a difficult one to steer through parliament, but it would have been much simpler but for complications introduced to meet Gladstone’s qualms. In 1870 he had committed himself in the strongest terms against fixity of tenure, not once, but many times, e.g. ‘... I am irreconcilably opposed to fixity of tenure’.

² See A. B. Cooke and J. R. Vincent, ‘Select documents: XXVIII. Herbert Gladstone, Forster, and Ireland, 1881–2’, in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. xvii, no. 68, September 1971, pp. 521–48, and *ibid.*, vol. xviii, no. 69, March 1972, pp. 74–89. See especially Gladstone’s letter to Forster, 5 April 1882 (cited above, p. 527, from Sir T. W. Reid, *Life of the Rt. Hon. W. E. Forster*, vol. ii, p. 413): ‘I do not admit your failure, and I think you have admitted it rather too much—at any rate, by omission: by not putting forward enough the fact that in the main point, namely, the deadly fight against the social revolution, you have not failed . . . If you go, and go on Irish grounds, surely I must go too.’

³ Gladstone said Forster ‘also is broad in his ideas as to what will have to be granted to Ireland in the way of local government’ (Gladstone to Granville, 16 September 1881, in Ramm, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 293). One other area of Irish policy, that of tenant purchase of their holdings, strongly urged by Gladstone in 1877, 1879, and 1880, had fallen by the wayside, an early victim of the Land War.

detention was notoriously a gentlemanly affair: a change towards using the criminal law for the same clients would mean inflicting on them ordinary imprisonment, a much severer deterrent, though not one which breached Habeas Corpus.¹ The other point, perfectly clear in the printed sources, but muddied since in popular tradition, is that Gladstone would have dropped coercion at the time of the Kilmainham Treaty had it not been for the Phoenix Park murders; that getting rid of Forster meant getting rid of repression; and that Parnell's terms, indeed Parnell's victory, included an agreement to drop coercion. One hesitates to refute a tradition so edifying, so comprehensive, and so perfectly groundless. However, Parnell's terms did not include coercion;² the differences with Forster turned on personality rather than policy; and Lord Frederick Cavendish was working on 'a bill to replace the coercion bill' as the euphemism went, immediately prior to his death. If there was a golden chance of reconciliation in 1882, it arose from the fact that Parnell, not Gladstone, was willing to make very large, perhaps very generous concessions.

This is not the place to discuss the collusive drama of Parnell's arrest and the destruction of the Land League in 1881-2, nor the tragic dénouement of Kilmainham, the breaking of Forster, and the murder of Lord Frederick Cavendish. This is the best-known aspect of the Irish policy of Gladstone's second ministry. What preceded it, Forster's regime of 1880-2, is not so much little-known as unfairly judged in the light of contemporary nationalist propaganda and Gladstonian hindsight.

Gladstone began his second inquiry into the Irish land question with the advantage of knowing the answer. Before taking office, he had publicly stated his belief in supply and demand.

¹ Gladstone claimed in retrospect that what he had wished, instead of the 1881 Coercion Act, was to suppress the Land League. The abortive plan to establish Provincial Councils in spring 1882 should probably be understood as a pre-emptive strike designed to prevent the situation which arose at the 1885 election. The object was to get Provincial Councils working while radical nationalism was, in Ireland and in parliament, safely under control. The first signs of Tory-Irish tactical co-operation in 1882 must have hastened Gladstone's wish to avoid the opportunist settlement that he already foresaw.

² For Gladstone's announcement, prior to the Phoenix Park murders, of further coercive legislation, see *Parl. Deb.*, 3, vol. cclxviii, cols. 1965-70, 2 May 1882. The new legislation was 'to strengthen the ordinary law', unlike Forster's act of 1881 which overrode the ordinary law; but, this apart, there was no change of policy. See Cooke and Vincent, *Irish Historical Studies*, loc. cit., p. 81, n. 27.

With mid-Victorian certainty, he declared in his Sixth Midlothian speech 'that the relation of landlord and tenant will unquestionably be decided by the true state of the market'. This did not presage an easy abandonment of market economics. When he heard the news that the Bessborough Commission were coming out in favour of 'the Three F's', Gladstone exclaimed, 'I have not heard', adding, 'it is incredible!'¹ He did not accept the incredible with a good grace. Early in January he spoke strongly against both fixity of tenure, and fair rents, saying that both were a robbery of the landlord.² For Gladstone, robbery of the landlord was the central issue against which he fought in 1881, and fought with considerable success. The famous Three F's were so contrived that they became a snare and a delusion. 'Fair Rents' meant a compulsory 15-year lease on terms which soon became unfair to the tenant. 'Free Sale' meant that one peasant could charge a rack-rent in capital form to another peasant. 'Fixity of tenure' had little effect in preventing evictions caused by inability to pay unfair 'Fair Rents'.³ Evictions remained high, far higher than in the 1870s. Even in 1886, with Gladstone in power for half the year, and 'fixity of tenure' in operation, they were at three times the highest annual rate reached under Disraeli (in 1879).

Putting aside those complexities which have baffled lawyers and farmers down to the present day,⁴ one should ask three

¹ Morley, *Gladstone* (1903), iii. 56. There were other sharp reminders of Gladstone's attitude. '. . . I, at least, shall never be a party to the introduction of the Irish Land Act into England', closed one door (*The Times*, 8 October 1881, p. 6, col. c), while Gladstone's speech at his own tenants' dinner warned them in no uncertain terms that there were to be no 'Fair Rents' on the Hawarden estate, only supply and demand (*The Times*, 13 January 1882, p. 6, col. a). Gladstone showed that market forces could respond adequately to agricultural depression, by lowering his farmers' rents by 25 per cent in 1880-1 (*The Times*, 12 January 1881, p. 9, col. f).

² 'The Premier called on Ly D[erby] this afternoon, and talked with her freely on current events. . . . I gather that he expressed himself strongly against the Irish schemes of fixity of tenure, and settlement of rents generally by a court, saying that both one and the other were a robbery of the landlord: which confirms what we heard last month, that he is more moderate in his proposals than even the moderate section of the Cabinet' (Derby's diary, 8 January 1881).

³ Purchases under the 1869 Church Act tenants' clauses created 5,000 owners by 1877. The Bright clauses of the 1870 Act created only 870 owners in 1870-81. The 1881 Act created only 733 owners in 1881-5.

⁴ Farmers and lawyers in Northern Ireland, where these Acts still apply, were in 1971 still so apprehensive of these complexities, that they avoided at

questions: what was Gladstone trying to do, what was the Act as eventually passed designed to do, and what did it in fact do?¹ In practice the bill produced a general reduction in rent of nearly 20 per cent. This reflected the views of the land courts rather than of the creators of the bill. The balance of opinion among ministers principally involved was in favour of true fair rents fixed from time to time in court, with freedom of contract thrown overboard. The object of the cabinet was rather to avoid exorbitant raising of rents, than to effect a general reduction; for Irish rents were known to be low. Gladstone's purpose was to preserve freedom of contract wherever was possible. He was successful only to the extent that he prevented true fair rents and created an extremely complex bill. His colleagues, especially his Whig colleagues and Forster, were amongst his severest critics. Forster, indeed, said that Gladstone's first ideas of the bill were so inadequate, that he had told Gladstone he could not be a party to such a measure and must resign. Har-

all costs the creation of agricultural tenancies. Instead they used conacre and agistment (licences to enter on land to cultivate and graze on a seasonal basis). Such licensees took everything they could out of the soil and put nothing back. The present state of affairs is thus, because of Gladstonian legislation, exactly what that legislation was intended to remedy: the non-owning cultivator has no incentive to improvement. Cf. *Survey of the Land Law of Northern Ireland*. By a working party of the Faculty of Law, The Queen's University, Belfast. Chairman Professor L. A. Sheridan. (H.M.S.O., Belfast, 1971), pp. 111-12. For another outburst against the complexities of the 1881 Act, see Michael McCarthy, *Five Years in Ireland 1895-1900* (London and Dublin, 6th ed., 1901), pp. 234-6. J. C. W. Wylie, *Irish Land Law* (London, 1975) points out that Gladstonian legislation on agricultural tenancies still bedevils both parts of Ireland in the 1970s, and will gradually become more important as such tenancies increase, their creation having until recently been severely restricted.

¹ Because the bill changed its character in its passage through the cabinet, even experienced observers thought when it was announced that it was a bill, not for, but against, the Three F's. 'The [Queen's] speech was read after dinner . . . [On Irish land] the language is studiously and skilfully moderate. The object is declared to be to amend and supplement the Act of 1870, not to supersede it—which at once excludes the "three F's" and absolute fixity of tenure. I said to Cork after the reading, "This means that you break with the Ultras": he answered, "It certainly does, and I am very glad of it". On the other hand Ld O'Hagan looked grave and gloomy, and feared that what was proposed would never go down in Ireland' (Derby's diary, 5 January 1881). Even in the debate on the second reading, Derby noted, the common remark was that Gladstone dwelt little on the justice of the bill, but treated it exclusively as a matter of political expediency (*ibid.*, 20 May 1881).

court, a vehement supporter of a strong bill, said Gladstone's first project would have been laughed out of the House as utterly inadequate. Gladstone's initial cabinet paper of 17 December 1880 on Irish land was described by Carlingford, then serving on the Richmond Commission, as 'very insufficient and confused'. Another high authority, the official draftsman Thring, thought a broad and simple bill giving judicial rents and qualified fixity of tenure would have been enough, but Gladstone had introduced the distinction between present and future tenants, and all the complications. When the bill was published in April 1881, Carlingford, the minister responsible for it in the House of Lords, noted, '. . . after a first reading I find it hard to see clearly its bearing and effect'. Gladstone's (private) outline of its provisions showed him 'very averse to interference with freedom of contract'.

The simplest explanation, and one often resorted to, is that Gladstone alone really understood Irish land, and any divergence between him and colleagues represents a failure on the part of the latter fully to apprehend the issues. But in 1880-1, unlike in 1870, Irish land was not an unexplored issue. Two Royal Commissions had examined it. Again, in 1880-1, unlike in 1870, Gladstone was under pressure from the moderates in the cabinet to make large changes. In this the moderates reflected average opinion in both parties and both Royal Commissions, which took judicial Fair Rents as a basis and was willing to accept qualified fixity of tenure. What has to be explained is why a simple bill establishing a permanent settlement on the basis of dual ownership was not pushed through on the grounds of practical necessity. Instead, Gladstone's conception of an emergency to be dealt with in a way which would not block the return to traditional landlordism and freedom of contract, struggled within the cabinet and within the bill against far more collectivist ideas. The result was a legislative hybrid.

Had the Act been designed to lower rents below market levels, then the 1881 Act would have been a revolutionary measure, at odds with the whole tradition of Victorian legislation. As the Act was designed to make the free market work, in the rather special circumstances where the price mechanism worked more freely in the courtroom than the world of boycotts and hedgerows, it simply carried out by special means the general aims of Victorian legislation. Gladstone's object, indeed, was only to use judicial arbitration to pave the way to a return

to free individual bargaining¹ in more stable circumstances. 'My great desire', he said, 'is to avoid arbitration upon rents generally and prospectively',² that is, he wished to make a once-for-all judicial reduction of exorbitant rents, with landlords thereafter to get what they could when vacant possession occurred. It was the Land Courts, not Gladstone, who made the 1881 Act what in the event it was, an Act for the general reduction of rents.

Gladstone himself must have thought that, after Phoenix Park,³ the course was set. He entered a period of partial retirement. His career as an Irish statesman seemed likely to conclude without further upheaval. He said in May 1882, 'It is enough for me to have conquered the most formidable social revolution of modern times.' In 1882, also, Gladstone reassured Granville: 'There is not the least chance of any question as to any sort of

¹ The legal history of the Act's working is curious and reflects the divided intentions of its creators. Fixity of tenure, supposedly created by the 1881 Act, was found in practice to terminate with the fifteen-year statutory period of tenancy, after which ejectment became possible. It was the Land Law Act of 1896 that gave real fixity of tenure, or apparently did so until a judgement of the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland removed fixity of tenure from non-statutory tenancies (by then the great majority). For a few years in the late 1920s Northern Ireland got on well enough without the supposed necessities of Fair Rent or Fixity of Tenure. The extreme rarity of agricultural tenancies in Northern Ireland today makes it impossible to say what the position now is. Expert opinion favours a return to a pre-Gladstonian freedom of contract. Cf. Wm. A. Leitch, 'Present Day Agricultural Tenancies in Ireland', *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly*, vol. 16 (1967), pp. 491-507. Mr. Leitch makes the incidental suggestion that the majority of tenants, having had their Fair Rents fixed by Gladstonian methods twice, say over the thirty years 1881-1911, then relapsed into negotiating their own tenancies with their landlord.

² Gladstone to Granville, 1 December 1880, in Ramm, *op. cit.*, vol. i p. 226. In this letter Gladstone said, 'I certainly wish that on the vacancy of a farm the landlord should be free to take what rent he can get.'

³ Before Phoenix Park, Gladstone was the driving force behind Irish policy both in its repressive aspects (as in autumn 1881) and in conciliation through victory (as at Kilmainham). From 1882 to 1885 Gladstone ceased to be the driving force in Irish affairs, which passed into the hands of the executive, namely Spencer and Harcourt. The lack of a biography of Spencer, the relative remoteness of his large and well-ordered archives, and the lack of stature and archives on the part of Spencer's two Chief Secretaries, Trevelyan and Campbell-Bannerman, have tended to lead to an underestimate of the Gladstonian repression of 1881-5. Agrarian crimes in Ireland fell from 4,439 cases in 1881 to 762 cases in 1884. While Gladstone toyed with paper exercises for Irish constitutional reform, Spencer executed the decisions of 1881-2.

assembly in Dublin.' Perhaps, therefore, this is the place to classify Gladstone's various initiatives and responses according to their degree of deliberateness.

There were the schemes long approved by Gladstone which ran into the sand. These included peasant proprietorship, his only Irish policy to achieve the status of a pet idea in the late 1870s, and possibly also the state acquisition of Irish railways, which had fascinated him as far back as the mid-1860s. Virtually nothing was heard of these schemes after 1880.

Then there were the schemes which grew out of Gladstone's 1879 doctrine of home rule as a mixture of parliamentary reform, local government, and administrative devolution. These were Erskine May's Grand Committee proposal of 1880; the elective county government promised in the Queen's Speech of 1881; the Provincial Councils scheme of 1882; the local government bill of 1883; and the Central Board scheme of 1885. All these vanished readily enough into the dustbin of history, though they represented the consistent centre of Gladstone's thought and intentions.¹ All these schemes can be taken, as Hammond takes them, to show that Gladstone already approved of Home Rule. They can equally well be read as showing that he wished to forestall Home Rule.

Finally, there were the projects which were not a product of deliberate intention, but arose from an immediate crisis, from parliamentary forces, or from chance. Among these we may include the 1881 Land Act, the 1881 and 1882 Coercion Acts, the inclusion of Ireland in the 1884 Reform Act,² and more ambiguously the Home Rule Bill itself. These were responses to situations.

Looking at these questions as a whole, one can but note the darkening tone of distrust which the Irish agitation produced in

¹ His comments on these projects were not flattering to their supposed beneficiaries. In one case he wrote of allowing Irish M.P.s 'to knock their heads against one another upon questionable theories'; in another, that it would show, 'the antics of a Central Board essentially municipal, not parliamentary'. Every year from 1880 to 1886 some constitutional change for Ireland was mooted. Of these, only the reform bills of 1884-5 passed, and these only because the government took the line of least resistance.

² Gladstone argued in cabinet that a mass electorate in Ireland would split nationalist opinion on class lines. Tactical reasons almost certainly weighed more heavily with him. To get the bill through, he needed Irish support and could not afford Irish antagonism. Tory-Parnellite collusion was to be expected in 1884, unless the Irish could be bought. The Tories therefore secured the Irish labourer his vote.

Gladstone's mind. This distrust was not confined to the 'handful of men' who 'follow Mr. Parnell',¹ or to contempt for Irish M.P.s generally, whom he found, in 1886, 'gloomy, monotonous, and vulgar'.² The pessimism extended to the Irish people. The buoyancy about Irish prospects to be found in the 1860s and 1870s had disappeared.

The fears that moved Gladstone towards Home Rule were all anti-Irish in tone and mostly wrong. He feared a violent rising: 'There is a Parnell party and a Civil War party, and the question which is to have the upper hand will be decided in a limited time.' He feared that the nationalist M.P.s would set up a Dáil in Dublin. He feared the Irish tenant would not pay his debts while Britain ruled: 'The Irish tenant cannot, in my deliberate opinion, be safely accepted as a debtor on a large scale to the Imperial Treasury.'³ These views were shared by others, including competent officials; but taken as a whole, they amounted to a picture of Ireland which was unduly alarmist and which showed Gladstone as really not a competent judge of the position there. How far Gladstone was in 1886 from thinking that the Irish were fit to be trusted, is shown by his assumption that Irish land was an imperial matter which could not be left to Ireland to decide.⁴

Land purchase, as Ashbourne said when introducing the first effective measure in 1885, was '... a non-party question'. It contained many cross-currents. The first measures enabling tenants to purchase, those of 1869, 1870, and 1881, affected only small numbers. In so far as they prevented Irish tenants from buying at the peak, the ineffectiveness of Gladstone's legislation did them a notable service. Gladstone had created,

¹ *Leeds Speeches*, p. 13.

² Cooke and Vincent, *The Governing Passion* (1974), p. 328; Cooke and Vincent, *Lord Carlingford's Journal: Reflections of a Cabinet Minister, 1885* (1971), 141-2. The only exception made by Gladstone to this condemnation was a certain Callan, a nationalist at daggers drawn with Parnell. Callan was distinguished by his drunkenness and by being a tool of Chamberlain and Churchill; Gladstone singled him out for praise.

³ Gladstone to Granville, 13 April 1882, Ramm, *op. cit.*, vol. i, p. 360. The House of Lords committee of inquiry into the working of the 1881 Land Act impelled Gladstone to produce an outline of a provincial councils bill (printed, Hammond, 259-62).

⁴ Besides the three excessive fears about Ireland (civil war, secession, non-payment) there was the quite separate issue of Scottish devolution, which had shown signs of becoming intermittently troublesome in the early 1880s. No statesman, especially one with a Scottish seat, could take up questions of Irish government without recognizing their possible Scottish implications.

by 1885, only about 6,500 peasant proprietors, against the 250,000 created by Wyndham's Act in 1903. It was not that kind words and fond hopes were wanting. Gladstone spoke in 1877, 1879, and 1880 in favour of a peasant proprietary. In May 1882 Granville announced that revision of the 1881 Purchase Clauses was being considered. In 1883 Lord George Hamilton, son of a great Ulster landowner, carried a unanimous motion calling for the purchase clauses to be made effective. In May 1884 Trevelyan, the chief secretary, introduced a bill offering easier terms to the purchaser, including abolition of any deposit. This idea of 100 per cent advances turned opinion against the bill and killed it. The Liberals tried, but not very hard, to turn consensus into fact, but land does not sell readily in a falling market, and when they went out of office nothing had been done.

The real question is not why the Liberals' actions were ineffective, but whether their sympathies were at least in spirit with the enterprise. This question really arose over Ashbourne's Act of 1885, the legislative foundation of modern Ireland. The Act passed without controversy, despite its avowed motive of removing 'the block in the land market', i.e. buying up land which landlords could not sell. Spencer, for the Liberals, opposed the 100 per cent advances for fear of a rent strike,¹ and his coldness suggested deeper doubts.² Gladstone was unable to speak on the measure because of a throat strain,³ but a year later he condemned Ashbourne's Act as 'dangerous and mischievous'.⁴ The question that arises is whether a peasant proprietary did not mean one thing to the Liberals and another to the Conservatives: in the first case the creation of a class of kulaks, in the second the elevation into owners of the mass of existing occupiers. Apart from his own land scheme of 1886, which he took a leading part in extinguishing, Gladstone notoriously opposed further land bills, partly for tactical reasons. Romantic though Gladstone could be in his occasional

¹ *Hansard*, vol. 299, col. 1344, 21 July 1885.

² Spencer's papers at Althorp are unenlightening on the Liberal response to Ashbourne's Act. A hint of his views may be gained from Thring's letters to Spencer of 18 and 22 July 1885, which suggest that Spencer was troubled by the bribes offered to both buyer and seller, by the possibility that the Act might unduly raise the price of land, and by the fear that it was open to improper manipulation. I owe this information to Dr. P. Gordon.

³ On 14 July 1885 Gladstone's doctors ordered him to be silent 'almost like a Trappist'. Morley, *Gladstone* (1903), vol. iii, p. 216.

⁴ Gladstone to Bright, 2 July 1886, *The Times*, 3 July 1886, p. 11, col. e.

references to *petite culture*, no one could claim that Gladstone was an enthusiast for an Ireland of peasant proprietors, or that he would have followed Arthur Balfour in describing the Irish land system after the Gladstonian reforms as 'essentially and radically rotten' and requiring 'heroic measures'.¹ If there is a residue of continuous intention to be extracted, after deductions made for tactical constraints, in Gladstone's view of the Irish land system, it would be this: that he could not see much beyond a reformed landlordism because he had no wish to; that he distrusted projects which depended on Irish honesty; and that he naturally overrated the efficacy of his own reforms.

When the 1885 election precipitated a crisis that was far more parliamentary than Irish, it found Gladstone in no particularly good shape to mould a policy. He was prey, as we have seen, to alarmist assumptions about what might happen in Ireland. He thought, or wished others to think, that there was an Irish crisis as well as a parliamentary one. He had nobody particularly sensible telling him what to think about Ireland, and his personal contact with Irish politicians could hardly have been less. (It was in January 1886 that he and Parnell, finding themselves on the same platform at Chester station while waiting for different trains, ostentatiously avoided each other.) He had no burning ambition, such as was to fill Arthur Balfour, to set to work upon Irish society as a social engineer or 'professional humanitarian'. His emotions on the subject of Ireland were nevertheless running at a higher pitch than anything he had mooted in the last five years would justify. His expressions were not those of the strictly rational supporter of devolution, of the Peelite imperial statesman. They were the emotions of a deeply moved man. It will be necessary for purposes of analysis to draw a sharp line between the sober garb of Home Rule before Easter 1886, and its wild and extravagantly radical tendency in the summer of that year. In doing so, we must not forget that the passion so embarrassingly to the fore in the election campaign, was also to be found in the preceding Christmas vacation.

¹ Ashbourne's Act of 1885 made £5m. available for purchase. Ashbourne's Act of 1888 provided another £5m.; Arthur Balfour's Act of 1891 (introduced in 1890, but delayed by Gladstonian and Irish obstruction) provided £33m. (Dugdale, *Life of Balfour*, vol. i, p. 181). 24,900 tenants purchased their farms under the Acts of 1885 and 1888. Out of this number, only twenty-two were considered in 1896 as bad debtors. The Liberals opposed land purchase in 1888 and 1891, and did nothing to forward it while in office in 1892-5.

How was this emotion to find a focus, given that he did not greatly want to change Ireland, and that he could hardly become passionate against his own stewardship? One answer lay in the instant creation of a tradition of historical interpretation centring on the wickedness of the Act of Union. Unable openly to preach Irish nationalism, or to condemn his own years in office, Gladstone centred his argument on immemorial oppression. This endorsement of native Irish traditions of hatred was the real concession to Ireland made in 1886.

He talked of the Union—called it a frightful and absurd mistake, thought Pitt had been persuaded into it by the King, who believed it would act as a check upon the Catholics, said that every Irishman 'who was worth a farthing' had opposed it, and if he had been an Irishman he would have done so to the utmost. He believed in nationality as a principle—whether Italian, Greek, Slav, or Irish—quoted as I had heard him do before, a saying of Grattan about 'the Channel forbidding Union, the ocean forbidding separation'—which he considered as one of the wisest sayings ever uttered by man—then dwelt on the length of time during which Ireland had possessed an independent, or at least a separate legislature.¹

This belief in the wickedness of the Act of Union, suddenly discovered in 1886, provided a ready target for Gladstone's opponents, but there is no doubt that what might be called the historical case for Home Rule was there within him and that it provided a focus for the irrational passions that stirred him. Nationalism he could not openly preach, and perhaps did not, in the Irish case, quite believe. The historical doctrine of the oppression of 1800 served as an indirect relief for the emotions of nationalism. Added to other weaknesses, this reliance on what even then was weak polemical history limits even further his title to be regarded as acting from motives of insight and wisdom.

Nor can he be given much credit for his ideas as to how Home Rule was to pass. One is left with the rather unpleasant choice between assuming he was acting in bad faith, or assuming he was acting wildly. When pressed upon the point, his answer suggested an excitable unreality about strategy, not in keeping with his shrewd daily tactics:

He had his answer at once. Why should the peers reject it? who could tell that they would? and if once, would they do it a second time? What need was there for a dissolution? He then went into an argument as to the right of the peers to force a dissolution, as if he had contemplated the case occurring.²

¹ Derby's diary.

² *Ibid.*

Going rather beyond the normal duties of his office, Gladstone had apparently offered the Queen odds of 40 to 1 against Home Rule passing; and if he did so, he was surely correct. There was no conceivable situation in the 1880s or 1890s in which the House of Lords would have passed a Gladstonian Home Rule Bill. The resistance would have had an absolute quality such as no Liberal premier had had to encounter since 1832. A dissolution would not help. A creation of peers was most improbable. Resignation aimed at leaving the country without a government required a degree of Liberal unity and popular enthusiasm which did not exist.

The mystery about how Gladstone would achieve Home Rule implies a greater mystery as to why and even whether he set out to achieve Home Rule. There are some strange clues, among them an account from one of those interviewed for office on the formation of the 1886 government:

Gladstone drew a distinction between Home Rule—a phrase which he said he disliked—and the local autonomy which he thought it possible to create. . . . I should note that in the early part of the conversation he drew a distinction which I could not well follow, but to which he seemed to attach some importance—he said he disliked the name of Home Rule and preferred to call it ‘local autonomy’. He did not explain the difference.¹

The course of events requiring construction is as follows: Gladstone, by the Hawarden Kite, was able to draw the Irish back into his orbit, without making any public or private commitment, and without coming to an arrangement with Parnell. Gladstone, in fact, secured the Irish for a song, or rather a press leak. His *faux naïf* overtures to the Conservatives did much to ensure that they played the Orange card. When he was asked to form a government, what did he do? To some extent he was simply trying to form whatever could be formed; but to a surprisingly large degree he offered places on a basis which would have created a Unionist cabinet. Some of his offers were no doubt not intended to be accepted.² Even so, there was no real guard against what in retrospect looked like unwanted Unionists taking a large number of cabinet places. When we come to Sir Henry James, all ambiguity ceases. Gladstone undoubtedly wanted to build his House of Commons team round James, a doormat, but a Unionist doormat. Home

¹ Derby's diary, 30 January 1886.

² Hartington and Selborne may have carried away from Gladstone a false impression that Irish M.P.s were to remain at Westminster.

Rule was not a condition of entry into the 1886 cabinet; indeed, explicit disclaimer was possible. Gladstone could not have foreseen in advance that he would be able to form a cabinet; he could not have foreseen in advance that the cabinet would be so much less Unionist than he apparently was willing for it to be; and having once formed it, he could not then foresee what line the cabinet, or indeed those who were not yet its declared opponents, would take.

It was not a Home Rule cabinet. Harcourt and Chamberlain, the chief lieutenants in the Commons, hated Home Rule and had only to lift their little finger jointly to stop it ever getting past the cabinet. Harcourt 'thought Home Rule would inevitably lead to Civil War'.¹ Herschell, the Lord Chancellor, was privately opposed or at best very doubtful. Trevelyan was obsessively opposed, without Chamberlain's qualifications. Rosebery kept to himself in the Foreign Office and was probably Hartington's man in the cabinet, grooming himself to be Hartington's Foreign Secretary. Kimberley and Ripon were Whig pessimists and did not count outside their departments and imperial policy. Mundella and Campbell-Bannerman had done their best to undergo instant conversion but were barely of ministerial calibre. Of the 'true' Home Rulers, John Morley had hesitated to join Gladstone, and put land ahead of Home Rule; Childers tried to sabotage the bill by press leaks at a crucial stage; Granville had nearly refused to serve on grounds of *amour propre* because of his relegation; and Spencer's support on Home Rule was conditional on a land settlement which quickly proved a phantom. On normal expectations of how cabinets behave, then, the balance of power in the cabinet did not permit of a Home Rule Bill being even introduced.

There was, moreover, no distinct need to introduce a bill.

¹ At a dinner in autumn 1886 Harcourt's son had to stuff his father's mouth with a napkin to restrain his denunciations of Home Rule and the Irish. Chamberlain's position, commonly said to have always stopped short of Home Rule, may possibly have been more open:

'I had also some interesting talk with Chamberlain as to the future of Ireland: he admits to almost universal hatred of England: thinks it may die out, as a similar feeling has done in Scotland: he seemed to me to admit that a federal union is practically impossible, and that federalism is only a step to separation. He did not say in so many words that he was ready to accept separation as a possible solution, but implied it by arguing that after all the danger that could arise from Ireland being free was rather imaginary than real: that the Irish could do us no harm "a miserable little island at 4 hours distance": but he seemed to ignore the possibilities of French or American alliance' (Derby's diary, 4 January 1884).

The Parnellites and the Tories had, for the present, cut themselves off from reunion. Gladstone's majority was safe, and large.¹ Ireland was in a manageable state. The need to do anything was not apparent. The cabinet were not actually pressing for legislation, indeed were quite in the dark as to their Irish programme. The Liberal party was united and Hartington in a state of almost lukewarm friendliness.² On 4 March 1886, indeed, Gladstone obtained what was presumably his largest majority³ on a major Irish vote, when he defeated Holmes's motion to withhold supply on the grounds of the disturbed state of Ireland by 364 to 204. Gladstone was in a position where it was easier, far easier, to do very little. Why then did he go decisively for Home Rule? The obvious answer is that that was what he wanted to do. Certainly the mystique that he was able to engender around Home Rule in the next few months cannot have come from nowhere, and the answer as to his personal commitment cannot be fully known until Oxford makes his diaries as accessible as they were to Hammond. But we must not make too much of his intense response to so ambiguous a writer on Anglo-Irish relations as Burke; this has normally been taken as a clue, but it is a clue open to many interpretations. Nor can we neglect the fact that from 1879 to 1885, Gladstone's views, in private as well as in public, seemed to settle on average at the level of a central board 'essentially municipal'. It may be, then, that Gladstone's private views on this as on so many other occasions were not the most powerful forces shaping his course. Instead, one would use the ample tools of common sense and dwell on three inescapable causes of Home Rule: the question of the parliamentary timetable, the question of the choice between two evils, and the question of the Chamberlain *démarche*.

Gladstone, in the spring of 1886, was understood to be going to introduce an Irish Land Bill and a Home Rule Bill. One did

¹ It is a common fallacy that the Parnellites held the balance of power in the 1886 parliament. Numerically this is so. Politically it meant nothing. After the Conservatives came out for coercion on 26 January 1886, the Irish vote became a cipher. The Parnellites were less powerful than before.

² Hartington's political factotum, Sir Henry James, speaking at Bury on 1 March 1886, said, 'I am going to take up my abode in no cave' (*The Times*, 2 March 1886). On 5 March Hartington spoke to the Eighty Club, stressing that 'up to the present time we, the Liberal party, are still one, and all of us are free and uncommitted' (*The Times*, 6 March 1886).

³ Hartington, James, and most of the leading Liberal Unionists of the future voted with Gladstone on this occasion.

not have to be an old parliamentary hand to see that both bills could not possibly pass within one session, merely on grounds of time. One of the two bills, therefore, was a dummy—a well-intentioned dummy, perhaps, betokening concord and the promise of things to come, but nevertheless so far as that session went, a dummy. In hindsight, we take it for granted that the Land Bill was the dummy, and that Spencer, in particular, was Gladstone's dupe. This was not necessarily so at the time. Both Spencer and Morley expected the land legislation to precede that on Home Rule, and moreover the Land Bill was actually the first of the two to reach the cabinet. What we have, up to mid-March, is a premier with two bills on his hands, one of which looks as though it will have to be dropped or postponed, and the Home Rule Bill running in second place. Nor can one neglect the weighty and generally accepted reasons for giving priority to a settlement by Westminster of Irish land: the landlords had to be protected from a predatory parliament in Dublin. In parliamentary terms, too, the Land Bill was easier to try first. The outgoing Conservative ministry had in their last days of office committed themselves to prompt legislation to extend land purchase, which in any case they liked; and potential Whig dissidents, too, were friendly to the idea of protecting the landlords by purchase. Even from a Home Rule point of view, priority for land meant that one of the strongest arguments against devolution, namely that it would imperil the landlords, would be removed. If Gladstone wished to represent the consensus of British opinion, while isolating the Conservatives as harbingers of conflict, and retaining Irish goodwill, his proper course was to carry a Land Purchase Bill, building on the acknowledged success of the Conservative Bill of 1885. As Gladstone up to Easter 1886 appeared to wish to proceed by consensus, it is especially hard to see why this did not happen.

One reason why it did not happen was the strong feeling among nearly all Liberal and many Conservative politicians that Irish policy was a choice of evils: there was repression, which nobody believed would really work; and there was Home Rule, which few people believed would work well. Gladstone, with his long-standing instinct that Parnell was the man to back if one wanted an orderly Ireland, went further than most, but even with him it is unlikely he had positive enthusiasm for Home Rule at the time he first endorsed it, that he supposed it would bring better government, or that he had much regard for those to whom it would hand power. His reasons were

negative, and therefore may be called 'Peelite': Home Rule was an expedient to adopt lest worse befell, rather than a Liberal reform based on 'gorgeous reckless optimism'. Since the Conservatives had chosen repression, and it had done them little good in parliamentary terms, the Liberals were driven willy-nilly towards Home Rule. It was 'the devil or the deep blue sea' as Gladstone said; and 'the devil' having been pre-empted, the only real question was why some compromise was not possible leaning towards, but falling short of, Home Rule. One reason, but not the decisive one, was that Parnell was less willing than ever to compromise; another, probably more weighty, was that Liberal politicians genuinely expected a compromise of the 'Central Board' type to produce the worst of both worlds. The Liberals took up Home Rule because there was no other available position. Choice or conversion, in the early stages, appeared to play less part than necessity. There was sugar on the pill, for Home Rule appeared to mean the expulsion¹ of the Irish from Westminster, and, for many, to have an attractively punitive aspect. In this matter of choice between almost balanced evils, Gladstone faced what he and other Liberals saw as an unpleasant dilemma rather than an exciting opportunity. In this he was characteristic. Where he was uncharacteristic was in his power of developing and transmuting his initial position into positive belief.

Then there was Chamberlain's *démarche*. On 13 March 1886 the cabinet discussed Irish legislation for the first time. The matter before them was the Irish Land Bill, and perhaps only that. Chamberlain, so far as one can collect from the imperfect accounts remaining, switched the business of the meeting by raising the question of Home Rule. It is not now possible to reconstruct what Gladstone had intended to happen at the meeting, and what should develop from it. What is clear is that as late as 12 March, Gladstone was finding opportunities to put the stress on Irish land legislation. His letter² to the leader of the southern Irish landlords, seeking a solution to the Irish land question by agreement, implied developments in that

¹ 'Converting Ireland into a colony *pur et simple*', as Harcourt said (Cooke and Vincent, *The Governing Passion*, p. 395).

² Gladstone wrote to Lord De Vesci, 12 February 1886, inviting 'free communication of views' from responsible individuals in Ireland on the subjects of Gladstone's re-election address, namely social order, land, and government in Ireland. The letter was printed in *The Times*, 16 February 1886, p. 6, col. c.

direction, while the bait of Home Rule tomorrow kept the Parnellites in tow. Up to 12 March Gladstone had avoided using Irish questions as an issue which might radicalize the Liberal party. It is also clear that, whether he wanted it or not, Gladstone could not have foreseen so early and so direct a confrontation with Chamberlain on the Home Rule issue which, though entwined in the land legislation, the premier may have wished to keep below the surface. Much of this is speculation. What we can say is that the cabinet entered Downing Street on 13 March 1886 with no distinct Irish policy known to most of its members, and emerged from it committed to Home Rule in principle rather than as a practical and immediate legislative commitment. The next cabinet, before Chamberlain's resignation was written, was called to work over details of Irish land, the Land Bill retaining its priority. It was Chamberlain's resignation which made Home Rule the central issue and which created a situation to which Gladstone had to respond. The unfavourable parliamentary reaction to the Land Bill in April was its *coup de grâce*, but the Land Bill had already fallen from first to second place by the time of the cabinet of 29 March. Gladstone began March 1886 as a discreet, possibly procrastinating, Home Ruler who was anxious to legislate on Irish land while avoiding radical overtones; he ended the month as an unenthusiastic land reformer whose chief immediate commitment was to Home Rule. The details are uncertain, but it is likely that 13 March 1886 was the point at which history jumped from one set of tracks to another. The result was to make Gladstone's burning intensity of the Christmas vacation, his Home Rule legislation of April 1886, and his somewhat manic election campaign in June, appear as three closely linked expressions of a single inner moral experience and an outer political radicalism, which was not necessarily the case.

The decision to put Home Rule in the foreground of immediate politics was of far greater significance than the earlier decision to form a ministry to which Home Rule leanings could be imputed. The earlier decision, it may be argued, created the Irish-Liberal alliance, for it enabled the Parnellites to support Gladstone. This ignores the fact that the Parnellites became Gladstonian fellow travellers not because of what Gladstone did, or because Parnell secured certain terms from the Liberals, but because the Conservatives made it impossible for the Irish to support them in any circumstances. It was only with the

decision to make Home Rule legislation the central issue in the 1886 session that the stage was set for a conflict in which moral Gladstonian 'masses' encountered the upper 'classes' in a crusade—exactly the situation which Gladstone had been trying to avoid, with some skill and success, in the first three months of 1886. Gladstone's manifesto of 1 May 1886 announced that Chamberlain's and Hartington's bid for the centre before Easter had left Gladstone free to establish his position on the left, and to carry out that 'democratic' polarization of parties which Chamberlain had unsuccessfully attempted at the 1885 election. What Gladstone was doing was not passing Home Rule, but carrying out the reorganization of party structure on lines which Gladstone had ably resisted when it had been pressed by Chamberlain.

If Gladstone had been primarily concerned with Home Rule, he should have given more serious thought to passing on the torch to Hartington than he did. What mattered about Hartington was not what he had said against Home Rule, but what he had not said in favour of coercion. Hartington, having made an appropriate show of resistance, was in a strong position to make, and to carry, some form of accommodation with the Irish, under a different form of words. He would have faced the usual dilemma whether to govern with or without bayonets, and as the Liberal party would certainly not have supported bayonets, the rest followed. Gladstone could not have put Hartington in office as his successor, leading a united and pro-Irish Liberal party, because the Queen's actions were so unpredictable; but he could have done something to make the matter possible. Instead, he used the device of a crusade to make a Hartington succession impossible.

Gladstone did not idealize the Irish. It would be too simple to say he did not like Irishmen, though the outward and social forms which commonly express liking were absent.¹ What is lacking is something more impersonal and significant, that process of idealization which attended a Gladstonian enthusiasm. Gladstone idealized the Waldenses in youth,² the Italians in

¹ e.g. his refusal to visit Ireland in autumn 1886 when invited by the Irish ladies' deputation which visited Hawarden (*The Times*, 5 October 1886, p. 10, col. a). Davitt had already in an interview spoken of Gladstone being 'tendered a grand banquet in Dublin in October . . .' (*The Times*, 20 August 1886, p. 9, col. f).

² Cf. his 'To Violets in a Vaudois Valley', March 1832, in *The Prime Ministers' Papers: W. E. Gladstone. I: Autobiographica*, ed. John Brooke and Mary Sorensen (1971), pp. 232-3.

middle age, the Montenegrins in age,¹ and the Scotch always. From about 1870 he began to idealize that 'strong, stern, masculine race', as he called them, the Welsh. In his great speech at Swansea, Gladstone made startling assertions, going far beyond what politics demanded. He took issue with those who thought Wales a mere geographical expression. He asked his audience to consider whether Wales was a nationality or not—a question 'on which I for one have a strong opinion'. He affirmed 'that Welsh nationality is as great a reality as English nationality' and referred to the Welsh saints 'to show how absurd it is to deny this nationality of Wales'. Then, going still higher in the scale of compliment, he added:

With the traditions and history of Wales, with the language of Wales, with the feelings of Wales, with the intention and determination of Wales, I maintain that the Welsh nationality is as true as the nationality of Scotland.²

It would be hard to find any parallel affirmation of Irish national identity, or even any extolling of Irish virtues. In his least political speeches, those given to the villagers of Hawarden, Gladstone never wearied of holding up the virtues of the Scotch, and of Aberdonians in particular, for their emulation. In these rustic homilies addressed to a Welsh audience, he dwelt repeatedly on Scottish superiority.³ It might be difficult to find a single gratuitous and non-political compliment falling from his lips about the Irish.⁴ He leaves us in doubt whether he recognized in Ireland the qualities that made up national identity in Scotland and Wales. He even pointed a finger at the Irish for letting their language decay, while the language of Wales flourished.

When all is weighed, it comes to no great sum. Gladstone did not want to see the kind of Ireland the Conservatives and the Free State created, the kind of Ireland that actually emerged, and preferred to reform landlordism rather than destroy it. He did not give cordial recognition to Ireland as a nation, as he

¹ Cf. his 'Montenegro: A Sketch', in *The Nineteenth Century*, May 1877.

² Speech at Swansea, *The Times*, 6 June 1887.

³ In 1875, 1877, 1879, 1882, 1888, and 1890.

⁴ When discoursing on Shakespeare, he let fall this pearl (to a Welsh audience) '... If you take his ideas of the Irish, they are very soon disposed of. He mentions them very seldom, and when he does mention them it is in a manner far from agreeable to the Irishman' (*The Times*, 5 September 1888, p. 6, reporting a speech at Wrexham).

⁵ See below, p. 236.

did to Scotland and Wales. His main achievements in Irish affairs were unpremeditated, the Irish Church Act being the chief exception. What he promised or hoped for of his own accord, as with Irish railway nationalization in the 1860s, land purchase in the late 1870s, and moderate devolution in the early 1880s, came to nothing. His two Irish phases overlaid and erased deeper layers of intention concerning his schemes as a financier. Ireland sidetracked him, hiding from view important parts of his genius. Where he set his great parliamentary gifts to do what other men could not, it was in the cause of legislation like that of 1870 and 1881, which in both cases only partially represented his intentions and only partially worked. Doubts arise also as to whether the Irish tenant benefited economically from Gladstonian legislation, which either gave him formally what he already had informally, or else introduced rack-renting under the name of tenant-right. What was tenant-right to a selling tenant, was tenant's wrong to an incoming occupier; and for every seller there was a buyer.

It is only if one puts oneself in the shoes of Parnell (or still more of Dillon) that a pattern of achievement can be seen: the suppression of radicalism and the peasant movement by the twin Acts of 1881, the imposition of responsibility by the Kilmainham Treaty of 1882, the clerical reconstruction of Irish electoral politics by the Seats Act of 1885, the demolition of the Tory-Irish alliance and thus of Parnell's independent parliamentary power, the absorption of the Home Rulers into Liberalism by the events of 1886—this, seen as a pattern, shows Gladstone as the most masterly upholder of Unionism since Pitt, one who with a minimum of real concession put the United Kingdom on a satisfactory working basis which could, so far as Ireland went, have lasted well beyond 1922.

APPENDIX A: GLADSTONE ON HOME RULE, 1871

Gladstone's speech¹ on receiving the Freedom of the City of Aberdeen deserves special attention, as the most developed and least guarded exposition of his views on Home Rule before 1886. Much in the speech is representative of Gladstone's views on Ireland at least up till 1880; the customary dismissal of it as a merely humorous and momentary aberration will not stand examination. After the usual courtesies, Gladstone took as his theme the sterling efforts made by the people of

¹ *The Times*, 27 September 1871, p. 6, cols. a-f.

Aberdeenshire in setting up their own scheme for controlling cattle plague without waiting for governmental guidance:

‘ . . . I wish to say here that which I have said elsewhere in public and in private—that it was an admirable spectacle when all over the country we were wandering and groping about, some proposing the most absurd measures by way of remedy and precaution, and others feeling themselves to be totally in the dark—it was an admirable spectacle when gentlemen and farmers of the county of Aberdeen associated themselves together with nothing to rely upon except their own energy, except their own prudence and intelligence, to devise for the ready, rapid, and complete extinction of that plague a remedy which, at a later period, after much ineffectual discussion, the Legislature found themselves counselled by prudence to adopt. I cannot recollect . . . so remarkable an example of local activity, self-reliance, practicability, and wisdom, holding up for the nation a standard which that nation was ultimately glad to follow. . . . That transaction brings to mind the extraordinary value of the principles and practice and habits of local government and local management of affairs in this country. Our great and illustrious neighbour, the French nation, probably never would have undergone the frightful calamities which it has been destined to experience during the last fifteen months had its people had that kind of training, and acquired that kind of personal and individual self-reliance by which the people of this country are so largely distinguished, and which for my own part I look upon as one of the greatest public blessings that they enjoy. That is the kind of Home Rule, such as you practised on the occasion of the cattle plague, which every man must witness with satisfaction, and I trust feel that it is, after all, in the energy of individual character and the sense of individual responsibility for public matters, and the facility of combination in our local community that we see laid the broad and solid basis upon which is erected the fabric of the national greatness . . . the very remarkable exhibition of Home Rule which I have spoken of in the county of Aberdeen reminds me of another cry for Home Rule which is now raised across the Channel in Ireland, and with which I own I find it not so easy to deal in a satisfactory manner. I am not quite certain what is meant in Ireland by the cry of Home Rule. I am glad to know from the mouths of those who raised that cry what it does not mean; they have told us emphatically by their principal organs that it does not mean the breaking up into fragments this United Kingdom. [Applause.] Well, that after all, is a most important matter. This United Kingdom, which we have endeavoured to make a united kingdom in heart as well as in law [applause], we trust will remain a united kingdom [loud applause]; and although as human beings the issues of great events are not in our hands, but are directed by a higher Power, yet we intend and mean every one of us, both high and low, not those merely who meet within this hall, but those who crowd the streets of your city, and every city from the north to the south of this

island—we intend it shall remain a united kingdom. [Loud applause.] And, my Lord Provost, as the subject has been brought into discussion and has attracted considerable attention in the sister island, I for one, have not the slightest hesitation in saying that I am extremely glad that the distinguished lawyer who has just been returned for Limerick [Mr. Butt]¹ has again found his way into Parliament; it will be an immense advantage in dealing with this question that its chief advocates should be there. It is in this way that in this country we deal with all political difficulties. If there are wild ideas abroad, depend upon it the place where they can most safely be promulgated is within the walls of the House of Commons. I may regret, perhaps, that a particular constituency seems to show a momentary sympathy with ideas which are very unintelligible and superfluous; but, presuming that that disposition exists, I say it is of great public benefit that the champions of any impracticable scheme should come before the representatives of the people in the House of Commons, and should there have the opportunity of stating all that they can state on behalf of their views, and should there be subject to have those views brought to the test of discussion and of searching examination, and when that learned gentleman makes his appearance in Parliament we shall be very glad and we shall be very anxious to do our best to discuss all about this matter of Home Rule. [Laughter and cheers.] We are told that it is necessary for Ireland to close her relations with the Parliament of this country and to have a Parliament of her own. Let me do the promoters of this movement the fullest justice. Always speaking under the conviction, as they most emphatically declare, and as I fully believe them, that the union of the kingdoms under Her Majesty is to be maintained, but that Parliament is to be broken up—“Well now”, we shall say to this learned gentleman, “Why is Parliament to be broken up? Has Ireland great grievances? What is it that Ireland has demanded from the Imperial Parliament and that the Imperial Parliament has refused?” [Cheers.] It will not do to deal with this matter in vague and shadowy assertions. I have looked in vain for the setting forth of any practical scheme of policy which the Imperial Parliament is not equal to deal with, or which it refuses to deal with, and which is to be brought about by Home Rule. So far as my research has gone, and I confess it is not extensive, we have not had the advantage of hearing all that is to be said. I have seen nothing except that it is stated there is a vast quantity of fish in the seas that surround Ireland, and that if they had Home Rule they would catch a great deal of these fish. [Much laughter and cheers.] But there are fish in the sea which surrounds England and Scotland. England has no Home Rule, and Scotland has no Home Rule, but we manage to catch the fish. [Cheers and laughter.] Unhappily, my Lord Provost, it has been one consequence of the policy towards

¹ Isaac Butt, the leader of the Home Rule movement, had been elected for Limerick City earlier in the month.

Ireland in former times that those principles of self-reliance, those powers of local action, that energy and public spirit which are the inherited possessions of this country have been steadily enfeebled and crippled in the Sister Island; and therefore it is that these things, which in this country every day and every month that we live the various classes and the various communities are doing for themselves the Irish people have not yet learnt in the same way to do; but I am bound to say they have not had the same opportunity of learning in the same degree to do for themselves, and hence they are liable to become more or less the victims from time to time of this or that political delusion. [Applause.] You would expect when it is said that the Imperial Parliament is to be broken up, that at the very least a case should be made out showing there were great subjects of policy, and great demands necessary for the welfare of Ireland, which representatives of Ireland had united to ask, and which the representatives of England, Scotland, and Wales had united to refuse. [Cheers.] There is no such grievance. There is nothing that Ireland has asked and which this country and this Parliament have refused. This Parliament has done for Ireland what it would have scrupled to do for England and for Scotland [cheers]. There remains now a single grievance—a grievance with regard to University education, which is not so entirely free in Ireland as it has now been made in England; but that is an exceptional subject, and it is a subject on which I am bound to say Ireland has made no united demand upon England; still, I regard it as a subject that calls for legislation, but there is no demand which Ireland has made and which England has refused, and I shall be very glad to see such a demand put into a practical shape in which we may make it subject of candid and rational discussion. What are the inequalities of England and Ireland? I declare that I know none, except that there are certain taxes¹ still remaining which are levied over Englishmen and Scotchmen and which are not levied over Irishmen, and likewise that there are certain purposes for which public money is freely and largely given in Ireland and for which it is not given in England or Scotland. [Cheers.] That seems to me to be a very feeble case indeed for the argument which has been

¹ Cf. Gladstone, *Parl. Deb.*, 3, vol. clxxi, col. 827, 12 June 1863: 'Men who can keep horses and carriages, or who have considerable estates in Ireland, are as rich as the same class in England. They are richer, indeed, because an income of £1,000 a year is worth more in Ireland than in England, and gives a higher social position there than here. We have in England duties on hackney coaches, horses, railways, and stage carriages, amounting to £700,000 or £800,000 per annum. All these duties are levied in England and Scotland, but not one shilling of them is paid in Ireland. We have also the assessed taxes, the land tax, and the inhabited house duty, which produce about £3,250,000 to the Exchequer in this country. Not a single shilling is paid in respect of any one of these duties in Ireland.' Gladstone pointed out that these exemptions benefited only the Irish rich; the Irish poor enjoyed, by 1863, full equality of taxation.

made by means of which, as we are told, the fabric of the United Parliament of this country is to be broken up. But while I have thus freely criticized the promoters of this movement, and endeavoured to give expression to what I believe to be your feeling and the feeling of this country about it, let me say I admit that large allowance is to be made for our friends and fellow countrymen in Ireland. Political virtues such as we have been just referring to—I mean the virtues of self-reliance and practical energy—are not the creation of a day. The circumstances under which Ireland was too long governed were hostile—nay, almost fatal to their growth, and, on the whole, we ought rather to be pleased that Ireland is what she is, for, after all, we believe this to be but a partial and superficial manifestation. We ought rather to be pleased with regard to her growing industry and her general freedom from crime than to complain that she is not something better than she has ever had an opportunity of becoming. But if the doctrines of Home Rule are to be established in Ireland I protest on your behalf that you will be just as well entitled to it in Scotland [hear hear]; and, moreover, I protest on behalf of Wales, in which I have lived a good deal, and where there are 800,000 people, who to this day, such is their sentiment of nationality, speak hardly anything but their own Celtic tongue—a larger number than speak the Celtic tongue, I apprehend, in Scotland, and a larger number than speak it, I apprehend, in Ireland—I protest on behalf of Wales that they are entitled to Home Rule there. [Applause.] Can any sensible man, can any rational man suppose that at this time of day, in this condition of the world, we are going to disintegrate the great capital institutions of this country for the purpose of making ourselves ridiculous in the sight of all mankind, and crippling any power we possess for bestowing benefits through legislation on the country to which we belong? [Applause.] One word more only, my Lord Provost, on this subject, and it is this:—People say that we have tried to conciliate Ireland, and that we have failed. I do not admit that Ireland is not going to be conciliated [applause], but I say this—that we must always keep in mind that there is a higher law to govern the actions of Parliament and of politicians than the law of conciliation, good as that law may be. [Cheers.] We desire to conciliate Ireland, we desire to soothe her people—the wounded feelings and the painful recollections of her people. We desire to attach her to this island in the silken cords of love [cheers], but there was a higher and a paramount aim in the measures that Parliament has passed, and that was that it should do its duty. It was to set itself right with the national conscience, with the opinion of the world, and with the principles of justice [loud cheers]; and when that is done, I say fearlessly that, whether conciliation be at once realized or not, the position of this country is firm and invulnerable.¹

¹ Gladstone then proceeded to discuss non-Irish subjects. In 1886, when his speech of 1871 was used in Unionist polemics, Gladstone wrote to Bright,

APPENDIX B: LORD HARTINGTON ON HOME RULE

1886¹

Sunday, 24 January 1886. . . . My conversation with Hartington yesterday was too long and turned too much on details to be noted in full. He dwelt on the impossibility of any business being done in parliament while the Irishmen sat there: this evil he seemed to think incurable by any regulations or systems of procedure. He thought it absolutely necessary that they should be turned out. 'Then', I said, 'you must give them full control over their own affairs in a local parliament.' He did not see that, thought it did not follow, was not for making concessions to them, would get rid of them for our own sake, not for theirs, assumed that in any case there must be a power in the English parliament to override a local legislature set up in Dublin—in short, he would restore the Irish parliament as it was before Grattan and 1780. 'Did he suppose that would satisfy the Irish? Would they not be worse off than before?' He could not tell, and did not much care. 'But will Gladstone agree to a plan quite different from his own?' That he did not know either. 'Would he, Hartington, agree to Gladstone's plan, by which the Irish are to be retained in the House?' 'No, certainly not'. 'Then what is to happen if the government² go out?' Much discussion followed. He seemed to think that Gladstone would try to make a government and fail, and that possibly matters might end in the present Cabinet coming back with Whig support. He distinctly assured me that he would not take office on the mere chance of being able to agree on Irish policy afterwards, but would insist on knowing what was proposed.³

'Never since Home Rule was started fifteen years ago have I once condemned it in principle' (*The Times*, 28 June 1886, p. 6, col. c).

¹ From Lord Derby's journal.

² Lord Salisbury's administration of 1885–6.

³ The assumption that Hartington's position on Home Rule was the simple contrary of Gladstone's is a good example of how conscientious archival history can mislead. The archives at Chatsworth present a picture of a splendidly conventional Hartington who never budged an inch on the principle of Home Rule. This is not because of weeding of his papers, but because his correspondents imposed this stereotype on him, and expected him to write back in the same terms, which he did. Only in certain places which have no obvious association with Hartington will the truth be found that his and Gladstone's views, if not their interests and situations, at one moment almost converged. The 'Home Rule' Hartington of c. 23–6 January 1886 may be found in the Grey MSS., Durham; Mrs. Courtney's diary, L.S.E.; Kay-Shuttleworth MSS. in an estate office in Upper Ribblesdale; Hartington's letter to Lansdowne speaking well of Home Rule; a short paragraph in *The Times* reporting a pro-Irish kite flown in a speech of Hartington's brother; and the phenomenally long meetings with Gladstone reported in

the press in January 1886, which showed the two men were meeting to consider joint party strategy. Hartington's little acts of friendliness to Gladstone in succeeding months deserve thoughtful interpretation, as does his benevolent line in early March. Until Chamberlain's *démarche* forced Hartington into the open for fear of losing the centre-right to Chamberlain, it is not clear that Hartington meant to break openly with Gladstone. The Hartington who had the leadership of a united Liberal party almost within his grasp, not the Liberal Unionist secessionist, is the figure we should see in spring 1886.