

# The Mind of Gladstone

*Religion, Homer, and Politics*

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# Preface

WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE is a figure of world historical importance because of his achievement as a statesman. He successfully reorganized the taxation of the first modern industrial nation; he suggested far-ranging solutions to the perennial problems of the relationship between Britain and Ireland; he led the Liberal party to victory in three general elections, and after another, despite not having been leader during the election, he was propelled into office because no other premier was conceivable. He was an MP for over sixty years; he was among the greatest of political orators; and he remains the only person to have become Prime Minister after the age of 80. He embodied the spirit of the Victorian House of Commons. Yet this book is not about his political life, concentrating instead on aspects of his intellectual career. It deals with his ideas rather than with his ambitions, manoeuvres, or policies. That task is far easier than it would have been in the past thanks to the publication, completed in 1994, of the statesman's diaries. Recording Gladstone's daily reading, the diaries provide a guide to his assimilation of opinions from elsewhere. They allow the development of Gladstone's views to be traced with far more confidence than before. They show how the mind of the statesman evolved.

The mental world of Gladstone is eminently worth exploring. He wrote copiously, corresponding with many of his contemporaries as well as issuing a plethora of books, pamphlets, and articles. He touched on most aspects of the thinking of the age, but, like most thinkers worth studying, concentrated his efforts in particular fields. As somebody who originally intended ordination in the Church of England, Gladstone was perennially fascinated by questions of religion. He followed the theological debates of the day with unceasing vigilance, often contributing to them himself. As a product of a rigorous classical education, he maintained a lifelong commitment to the study of antiquity. The poet Homer, standing at the beginnings of recorded history, was long the subject of his researches. In the political field, he necessarily often focused on pressing issues of policy, but he also reflected at length on deeper-seated subjects. Whether in private memoranda or in public speeches, he explored issues of political thought, both as a Conservative at the opening of his career and as a Liberal during its flowering. So the central themes of this book are three: religion, Homer, and politics. One of its aims is to show that they were not isolated from each other, but rather intertwined.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help of many people and institutions with the project that over many years has given rise to this volume. At the start the late

Colin Matthew encouraged me to take up the enterprise, subsequently offering guidance with unfailing generosity. Sir William Gladstone, the great-grandson of the Prime Minister, kindly gave me access to the books kept in the Temple of Peace, Gladstone's study at Hawarden Castle. They are quoted here by permission of Sir William's son, Charles Gladstone. Sir William's late brother, Peter Gladstone, allowed me to see the family papers at Fasque in Kincardineshire. I am grateful to Pusey House, Oxford, for permission to quote from the Pusey and Scott Papers and to other libraries and archives for the use of their holdings. In particular I want to express my appreciation of the provision for the study of Gladstone at his own foundation, St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden. The wardens, librarians, and other staff, together with the staff of the Flintshire County Record Office, have made it a great pleasure to read the statesman's books and papers there. Peter Francis, the present warden, was good enough to arrange a visiting scholarship. The dedication expresses a little of my debt to the institution. The British Academy awarded me a grant to permit the purchase of a section of the Gladstone Papers at the British Library; it also supported some of my travel expenses, as did the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland and the Arts Faculty of the University of Stirling. I am very pleased to acknowledge this essential aid.

Several friends have given advice, help with sources, and constructive criticism, sometimes at considerable trouble to themselves: Eugenio Biagini, Ruth Clayton, Peter Erb, Jane Garnett, Emma Macleod, Jim McMillan, Colin Nicolson, Mark Nixon, Alison Peden, and Mike Rapport. Their generosity with their time is much appreciated, though they bear no responsibility for the finished product. Listeners to various papers based on parts of the project have refined it by asking pertinent questions. Members of my course on Gladstone Studies at the University of Stirling over the years often contributed more than they knew, and one of them, Christine Hayter, deserves special thanks for putting her notes on Gladstone's speeches at my disposal. Margaret Hendry, formerly Departmental Assistant in the Department of History, gave her services once more by skilfully typing the text. My wife Eileen and my daughter Anne have visited Gladstonian sites, attended Gladstonian occasions, and pursued Gladstonian themes with forbearance as well as dedication. To them, as ever, I am extremely grateful.

*D W B*

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# Introduction

‘GENERALLY SPEAKING’, declared the preacher in St Paul’s Cathedral on Easter Day 1870, ‘. . . men who write books are unpractical.’ The preacher was Henry Parry Liddon, a leading Anglo-Catholic churchman who in the following month was to be installed as a canon of the cathedral. But, he went on, when ‘a literary statesman’ with applied skills of government does arise, ‘it is reasonable to combine the book with the policy of . . . the minister, on the grounds that both are products of a single mind’.<sup>1</sup> The exceptional figure Liddon had in view must surely have been William Ewart Gladstone, then in office as Prime Minister for the first time. Both men were graduates of Christ Church, Oxford, though Liddon was the younger by twenty years. While Gladstone served as MP for the University of Oxford, the churchman was one of his most ardent supporters. When, in 1865, the statesman delivered a lecture on the place of ancient Greece in the providential order as Lord Rector of the University of Edinburgh, Liddon was full of enthusiasm for (as he wrote to a friend) the ‘wonderful Rectorial address’ showing such a grasp of ‘a subject lying altogether apart from the field of his daily work’.<sup>2</sup> In the year before the sermon at St Paul’s, Gladstone had published *Juventus Mundi*, the second of his works on Homer. The book was probably in Liddon’s mind when, as a canon-elect of the cathedral on Gladstone’s own nomination, the churchman expressed his admiration for the ability to unite literary composition with practical statesmanship. Liddon surmised that in these circumstances the writings would sometimes recall the statesman, that ‘the public policy of the country will now and then be more intelligible when placed in the light of the known peculiarities of the author’.<sup>3</sup> It is the contention of this book that Liddon was correct. Gladstone’s literary output was not just a significant intellectual achievement in its own right but also had a bearing on the central role he played in British politics.

It was a commonplace among Gladstone’s contemporaries, especially his supporters, that he took great delight in the life of the mind. According to an anonymous admirer in 1890, he was ‘devoted as ardently to scholarship as to

<sup>1</sup> H. P. Liddon, *Forty Sermons on Various Subjects preached in the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, London* (London, 1886), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> J. O. Johnston, *Life and Letters of Henry Parry Liddon, D.D., D.C.L., LL. D.* (London, 1904), pp. 98–9, 91, 99.

<sup>3</sup> Liddon, *Forty Sermons*, p. 11.

politics'.<sup>4</sup> Just after the statesman's death in 1898, his son-in-law Edward Wickham, Dean of Lincoln, went further, claiming that politics gave him no pleasure. 'His heart', Wickham wrote, 'was more in his books and in the questions of theology and philosophy which stirred him deeply.'<sup>5</sup> Certainly Gladstone loved published works. Books, Gladstone declared in a much quoted eulogy, 'are the voices of the dead. They are a main instrument of communication with the vast procession of the other world.'<sup>6</sup> In his early years he was one of the band of men who founded the London Library; in his closing years he created another library, later known as St Deiniol's, in his home parish of Hawarden, with his own collection of 27,000 books as its core.<sup>7</sup> The statesman was himself a prolific author, publishing some two-dozen titles (over and above political speeches) together with a plethora of articles. When in opposition during his later career he would turn out an article virtually every month for the *Contemporary Review*, the *Nineteenth Century*, or the *North American Review*. The writing covered questions of politics, religion, philosophy, literature, and classical studies while touching on related themes in history, science, anthropology, and other fields. It was the verdict of John Morley, Gladstone's first biographer, that he was not a 'great born man of letters like Gibbon, Macaulay, Carlyle'.<sup>8</sup> Yet in his day Gladstone enjoyed an enviable degree of recognition for his standing as a writer. When, in 1883, the *Pall Mall Gazette* asked just over 500 people to specify their choice of the ablest living authors for an imaginary English Academy, Gladstone came as high as thirteenth in virtue of his *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age* (1858). He stood well below the top four who each received more than 400 votes—Tennyson, Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, and Browning—but, with 107 votes himself, he ranked ahead of W. E. H. Lecky (95), F. W. Farrar (78), J. R. Seeley (62), and Leslie Stephen (55). The result, claimed the newspaper, was 'a fair gauge of literary fame'.<sup>9</sup> Gladstone attained a measure of celebrity in his own day as a scholar.

Yet his writing was far from immune to criticism. Even a contributor to a memorial volume published in the year after Gladstone's death felt bound to concede that he was no master of English prose. Unlike his magnificent speeches, which were brought to life by his personality, Gladstone's writing, the author admitted, was inadequately polished, his sentences ungainly and his meaning obscure.<sup>10</sup> The statesman lacked a natural fluency. While working on one of his earliest books, Gladstone himself reported to his brother-in-law that he went through his labour 'not by a genuine elasticity of spirit but by a plodding

<sup>4</sup> 'Mr. Gladstone and the Classics', *Mr. Gladstone in Scotland* (Edinburgh, [1890]), p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> E. C. Wickham, 'Mr. Gladstone as seen from Near at Hand', *Good Words* (July 1898), p. 482.

<sup>6</sup> W. E. Gladstone, 'On Books and the Housing of Them', *Nineteenth Century*, 27 (1890), p. 386.

<sup>7</sup> F. W. Ratcliffe, 'Mr Gladstone, the Librarian, and St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden', in P. J. Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone, Politics and Religion* (London, 1985), pp. 51–2; P. J. Jagger, 'Gladstone and his Library', in id. (ed.), *Gladstone* (London, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Morley, 1, p. 195.

<sup>9</sup> Cutting from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26 Nov. 1883, GGM 1635.

<sup>10</sup> William Tuckwell, 'Mr. Gladstone as a Critic', in Sir Wemyss Reid (ed.), *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (London, 1899), p. 469.

movement'.<sup>11</sup> His style, according to one review in the 1870s, was 'diffuse and laboured', a censure that Gladstone took to heart by underlining it.<sup>12</sup> He had little or no style at all, remarked another review of the same period, though he seemed to manage without one. 'Sometimes we have a sentence so long and involved that nothing but a passionate intensity of meaning and a profuse vocabulary could have avoided a disastrous collapse.'<sup>13</sup> The quality of Gladstone's analysis received almost as much condemnation as the pattern of his prose. Like Newman, thought the novelist Mary Ward, Gladstone lacked a critical sense of evidence.<sup>14</sup> The statesman showed the same characteristics, it was said in 1876, in his writing as in his politics: a 'readiness to make sweeping deductions from narrow premisses', a 'headstrong and impetuous view of the moment', and an 'unwillingness to believe that any "reasonable mind" can differ from him'.<sup>15</sup> But the sharpest critic was Gladstone's opponent in two controversies towards the end of his career, the scientist T. H. Huxley. Gladstone brought to the discussion of questions in letters or science, according to Huxley, the methods of the politician, 'rhetorical artifices', 'mere dexterity in putting together cleverly ambiguous phrases', and 'the great art of offensive misrepresentation'.<sup>16</sup> Even when allowance has been made for *odium theologicum* and political partisanship, many of these charges stick. It had become second nature for Gladstone to construct passages containing their own potential for spin. The result can be illustrated from a sentence in his book *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture* (1890). 'But this', he wrote, 'I have no doubt is due in part to an enemy very far more powerful than what is called the higher criticism.'<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, the phrases 'I have no doubt' and 'very far' are emphatic, adding authority to the statement; on the other, the words 'in part' and 'what is called' are qualifications, allowing for future modification. The result was built-in complexity. Gladstone's habitual verbal juggling detracted alike from the clarity of his prose and from the power of his argument.

Nevertheless Gladstone's intellectual approach had many conspicuous strengths. They arose not from genius, according to a journalist covering his earlier career, but much more from excellent education and sustained study.<sup>18</sup> His family, as well as his school, encouraged him to nurture a natural inclination towards verbal combat. The consequence, as a political subordinate put it, was that his mind was 'like the steam-hammer, which can either crack nuts, or mould masses of stubborn iron'.<sup>19</sup> A delicate capacity for fine distinctions coexisted with a titanic ability to demolish opponents. Yet, as he justly remarked in correspondence, he had learned to probe the source of differences in human opinions and

<sup>11</sup> W. E. Gladstone to Lord Lyttelton, 9 Dec. 1840, GGM 35.

<sup>12</sup> Cutting from the *Globe*, 10 Mar. 1876, p. 6, GGM 1640.

<sup>13</sup> Cutting from the *Athenaeum*, 22 Feb. 1879, p. 241, GGM 1642.

<sup>14</sup> [Mary A.] Ward, *A Writer's Recollections* (London, 1918), p. 239.

<sup>15</sup> Cutting from unidentified source, 18 Mar. 1876, GGM 1640.

<sup>16</sup> T. H. Huxley, 'Illustrations of Mr. Gladstone's Controversial Method', *Nineteenth Century*, 29 (1891), p. 465.

<sup>17</sup> *IRHS*, p. ix.

<sup>18</sup> James Grant, in A. F. Robbins, *The Early Public Life of W. E. Gladstone* (New York, 1894), p. 394.

<sup>19</sup> [Samuel] Laing, *Problems of the Future and Essays* (London, 1889), p. 300.

so had come to take a sympathetic interest in views very different from his own. Although a dogmatist, he was not liable to hard thoughts or hard words about others in speculative matters.<sup>20</sup> ‘Even when you differ most’, he adjured himself in a private memorandum of 1882, ‘be ever eager to learn . . .’<sup>21</sup> His extraordinary volume of reading reveals how fully he took his own advice. He devoured books old and new, congenial and uncongenial, weighty and slight. Daily diary entries record the reading of some 21,000 titles,<sup>22</sup> and that tally is by no means comprehensive because from other evidence it is clear that he absorbed many items that are not recorded. It was rare, even when Gladstone was premier, for a day not to include a bloc of general reading. The range extended far beyond the English language, entailing explorations of Italian (in which he delighted and from which he translated whole volumes) and French (which accounted for nearly 7 per cent of the items listed in the diaries). Although the number of books recorded as read in German was smaller (235 as against some 1,200 in French),<sup>23</sup> its mastery was a crucial accomplishment since it was the language of advanced scholarship in many theological and classical fields. Thus in 1847 Gladstone asked his brother-in-law to obtain for him seven German works relating to Homer from the London Library, and he was still wading through theological tomes in the language over forty years later.<sup>24</sup> Although (as we shall see) Gladstone often had a sharply defined polemical purpose in his scholarly endeavours, he also possessed a catholicity of intellect that delighted in new information on whatever theme. There was therefore a sense in which he showed a remarkably open mind.

Yet there is no doubt that certain authors exercised a disproportionate sway over his intellectual formation. John Morley, Gladstone’s first biographer, records that he used to refer to his four ‘doctors’: Aristotle, Augustine, Dante, and Butler.<sup>25</sup> Aristotle’s ethical texts formed the core of the syllabus that Gladstone had studied at Oxford. The Greek philosopher supplied him with a whole array of intellectual tools that he subsequently deployed to analyse politics, theology, and even his feelings for women other than his wife.<sup>26</sup> The opinion of Aristotle could still be cited as settling an issue in Gladstone’s last published book of 1896.<sup>27</sup> Next there was Augustine. The greatest of the fathers of the Western Church inspired the dogmatic content of Gladstone’s mature religious faith. During the 1830s Gladstone put himself through a sustained examination of Augustine’s writings in the original Latin, and, impressed by the theologian’s intellect as well as by his emphases, the statesman never subsequently deviated from the substance of

<sup>20</sup> W. E. Gladstone to Harriet Grote, 29 Apr. 1874 (copy), GP 44443, f. 182v.

<sup>21</sup> GP 44766, f. 49 (7 Apr. 1882).

<sup>22</sup> *D*, 14, p. xi.

<sup>23</sup> Christiane d’Haussy, ‘Gladstone, France and his French Contemporaries’, in Peter Francis (ed.), *The Gladstone Umbrella* (Hawarden, Flintshire, 2001), p. 118.

<sup>24</sup> W. E. Gladstone to Lord Lyttelton, 22 Jan. 1847, GGM 35. W. E. Gladstone to Lord Acton, 7 June 1888; 21 Mar. [sc. 4 Mar.] 1890; 4 Aug. 1891 (copies), GP 44094, ff. 32v, 78–8v, 176.

<sup>25</sup> Morley, 1, p. 207.

<sup>26</sup> The last is evident (‘myself in regard to you’) in his unguarded correspondence with the coquetish Mrs Laura Thistlethwayte: W. E. Gladstone to Laura Thistlethwayte, 21 Oct. 1869, in *D*, 8, p. 566.

<sup>27</sup> *Studies Subsidiary*, p. 4.



Augustine's teaching.<sup>28</sup> Another Christian writer, but this time a creative artist, was the third doctor. Gladstone became fascinated by the poetry of Dante, and especially his *Paradiso*, from the 1830s onwards, delighting in the mediaeval Florentine's use of language as well as his spiritual vision. The poet, a partisan of the empire against the papacy, confirmed the Catholic, but not Roman Catholic, allegiance of the statesman.<sup>29</sup> Finally there was Bishop Butler. Gladstone encountered the writings of Butler at Oxford, but his enthusiasm for their study was rekindled in the 1840s. Thereafter the statesman regarded the eighteenth-century bishop's apologetic for revealed religion as a model of reasoning technique as well as a decisive vindication of Christian belief. In conversation during the 1890s he would see no force in objections to Butler's case and, as his final publishing enterprise, edited the bishop's works, adding a set of essays defending and applying his subject's line of thought.<sup>30</sup> There were other authors for whom Gladstone professed an almost lifelong devotion—Edmund Burke in politics, for example, or William Palmer in religion—but it was to these four that he constantly turned for stimulus and orientation. Authors from Greek and Latin antiquity, the Christian middle ages, and the Georgian Church of England gave him a thorough grounding in the historical experience of western civilization.

Gladstone once remarked that 'it is but rarely that we can trace the influence exercised by particular books upon particular minds through the medium of actual record'.<sup>31</sup> The statesman himself must stand as one of the most striking exceptions to his own generalization. His diary entries, continuous from 1825 to 1894, allow the student of his mind to identify when, and sometimes to what extent, he read specific works, though rarely specific passages. The annotations by the editors, Michael Foot and Colin Matthew, provide invaluable guidance in identifying the titles, and the index of Gladstone's reading, printed in the final volume of the published diaries, supplies a means of access to individual entries.<sup>32</sup> Beyond the diaries, however, are the actual books that Gladstone read, most of them preserved at St Deiniol's Library or, in a few cases, at his home, Hawarden Castle. The statesman habitually added marginal notes during his reading and compiled an index to specially significant passages at the end of each volume. The symbols used in the marginalia have been more or less understood for some time, and their value has been demonstrated by John Powell.<sup>33</sup> In 2001 Ruth Clayton published Gladstone's own key to the symbols that she had discovered in one of the books at St Deiniol's. It included 'ma' (the Italian for 'but') for reservation, '+'

<sup>28</sup> *Autobiographica*, p. 142.

<sup>29</sup> Owen Chadwick, 'Young Gladstone and Italy', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 30 (1979), repr. in P. J. Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone, Politics and Religion* (London, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> Asa Briggs (ed.), *Gladstone's Boswell: Late Victorian Conversations by L. A. Tollemache and Other Documents* (Brighton, 1984), pp. 41–2, 142–3. WJB; *Studies Subsidiary*.

<sup>31</sup> *Studies Subsidiary*, p. 132.

<sup>32</sup> Occasional errors and omissions in the published diaries and index have been recorded in the footnotes of this book whenever they have been noticed.

<sup>33</sup> John Powell, 'Small Marks and Instinctual Responses: A Study in the Uses of Gladstone's Marginalia', *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 19 (n.d.).

for approbation, 'x' for disapprobation, and 'xx' or even 'xxx' for special disapprobation.<sup>34</sup> The symbols make us aware of Gladstone's initial reactions, revealing something of his anterior state of mind as well as of his view of fresh opinions. Although only a small proportion of the annotations in the Hawarden collections has been examined for the current book, in a few cases they have proved highly revealing. There is almost endless scope for future study of Gladstone's mind within the library he founded at Hawarden.

The books, however, do not exhaust the sources for the statesman's intellectual evolution. As he read a volume, Gladstone would sometimes take detailed notes on the contents, almost page by page. This practice, begun at school and university, was much more common in the early part of Gladstone's career, when he had sufficient time for the task and wished to lay the foundations of his thinking. Most of these manuscripts survive in the Gladstone Papers at the British Library. Although they chiefly contain the marrow of the books, they also include personal reflections. 'Also NB connection of mild manners & light diet', he noted down when first carefully scrutinising the *Iliad* in 1846. 'But beware', he added, 'of rash inferences therefrom.'<sup>35</sup> These analyses of texts are supplemented by essays, some of them lengthy, and brief memoranda, some of them printed in the later volumes of the diaries. Such manuscripts beam a shaft of light into Gladstone's mind: because they were intended for his eyes alone, they capture his authentic convictions. They form, for example, the prime source for his early political thought. Another category of manuscript in the British Library consists of the sermons preached by Gladstone in his capacity as head of household from the 1830s to the 1860s. Although conditioned by the (supposed) spiritual needs of the hearers, they lay bare the speaker's religious assumptions and sometimes his social and psychological premises too. Never previously used, they turn out to reveal the most deep-seated shift in his convictions during the 1850s and 1860s. The body of private manuscript material in the British Library, neglected in comparison with the correspondence that is also there, supplies much of the raw material for the present study. Its relative abundance for the earlier stages of Gladstone's career explains how it is possible to give detailed coverage to the era when his thought was undergoing its most rapid evolution. It also allows the statesman to be evaluated not by what he said in public but by what he thought in private.

There are, however, additional bodies of primary sources over and above Gladstone's published output. Gladstone's vast correspondence (when in office he could dispatch more than 20,000 letters a year) contains a good deal of material relevant to the statesman's intellectual development. Most useful, perhaps, is the exchange of letters in his later years with the polymath Lord Acton, some of which has appeared in print.<sup>36</sup> In Gladstone's earlier years there was an equivalent openness on theological topics with Robert Hope-Scott and Henry Manning,

<sup>34</sup> Ruth Clayton, 'W. E. Gladstone: An Annotation Key', *Notes and Queries*, 246 (2001).

<sup>35</sup> GP 44736, f. 57v (on XIII.5, 6).

<sup>36</sup> J. N. Figgis and R. V. Laurence (eds), *Selections from the Correspondence of the First Lord Acton*, 1 (London, 1917).

whose correspondence with Gladstone, edited by Peter Erb, is about to be published. The Gladstone Papers usually contain the letters Gladstone received rather than those he sent, though copies of important out-letters were sometimes made (as in the Acton correspondence) and occasionally his letters were returned to Gladstone (as in the Manning correspondence). A few other archive collections, including Hope-Scott's and Edward Pusey's, include significant letters written by Gladstone that are not preserved at the British Library. By far the most important cache of manuscripts outside the Gladstone Papers, however, is the collection of Glynne-Gladstone Manuscripts at the Flintshire Record Office, housed in the rectory at Hawarden where Gladstone's brother-in-law Henry Glynne once lived. The family papers are mostly assembled here. They include the most illuminating correspondence on classical themes, the letters sent to another of Gladstone's brothers-in-law, Lord Lyttelton. Here, too, are Gladstone's dossiers of reviews of his own works, some of them with revealing annotations. The statesman's speeches, the finest output of all, have not been ignored for this study, for, as Chapter 9 shows, they constitute by far the best source for the nature of Gladstonian Liberalism as defined by its author. There is nevertheless a wealth of manuscript material, probably unparalleled in quantity for any other major public figure of any land in any century, that lies behind the published output. The approach taken here is to allow Gladstone's personal musings and exchanges of thought with his closest circle to illuminate the man of action. The aim, as it were, is to study Gladstone from the inside out.

He was an independent thinker from an early age, but not from a very early age. There is evidence for the future statesman's opinions while he was still in the sixth form at Eton in a magazine he edited during 1827, *The Eton Miscellany*. Amidst the forced humour and schoolboy self-mockery there are indications of the man that was to be. His concluding words, for example, mount to a high religious seriousness in thanking the Almighty for his blessings.<sup>37</sup> His friends had supposed, when the miscellany began, that he would be able to contribute nothing but Methodist hymns.<sup>38</sup> There is also, however, a candid avowal of ambition, though veiled in an ironical mode, together with a recognition that ambition could best be fulfilled in parliament.<sup>39</sup> Gladstone's political views were still in flux. On the one hand a Whiggish friend, Arthur, the son of the historian Henry Hallam, could taunt him with displaying a 'Cavalier spirit' and devotion to Charles I, king and martyr, but on the other Gladstone claimed to be 'no party man' and in 1826 expressed doubts about the plans of the Tory administration.<sup>40</sup> His chief fixed point was allegiance to George Canning, his father's patron and

<sup>37</sup> 'Bartholomew Bouverie', *Eton Miscellany*, 2 (1827), pp. 263-4.

<sup>38</sup> A. H. Hallam to W. W. Farr [17 July 1827], in Jack Kolb (ed.), *The Letters of Arthur Henry Hallam* (Columbus, Ohio, 1981), p. 155.

<sup>39</sup> *Eton Miscellany*, 2, pp. 146, 109.

<sup>40</sup> A. H. Hallam to W. E. Gladstone [31 Dec. 1826]; Hallam to Gladstone [8 Jan. 1827], [13 Aug. 1827]; Hallam to W. W. Farr [20 Sept. 1826], [28 September 1826], in Kolb (ed.), *Letters of Hallam*, pp. 108, 109, 115-16, 164, 81, 87.

Prime Minister briefly in 1827: ‘Distant from all extremes—firm in principle, and conciliatory in action—the friend of Improvement, and the enemy of Innovation . . .’<sup>41</sup> Canning inspired a plastic liberal Toryism capable of being moulded into almost any shape. On cultural issues Gladstone expressed respect for Homer, though (unlike in later years) doubting whether he was the real or sole author of the *Iliad*; he airily dismissed Aristotle, Plato, and Cicero as the authors of ‘vague and futile systems’ in a way that would later have horrified him; and he reached the conventional judgement that Newton, Shakespeare, and Milton were unrivalled in the history of the world.<sup>42</sup> Literature, with the encouragement of Hallam, was a major preoccupation, though Gladstone never felt he thoroughly understood or appreciated a poem until he had discussed it with his friend.<sup>43</sup> To the end of his days Gladstone recalled Hallam’s moral character and mental powers with deferential admiration.<sup>44</sup> While at Eton the young Gladstone was already preoccupied with religion, politics, and broader cultural questions, but, not surprisingly, he had attained few settled convictions of his own. It was only after leaving school that he developed a personal standpoint. For that reason the study of his mind that follows begins with his undergraduate career at Oxford from 1828 to 1831.

The literary interests kindled at school, however, never deserted him. He toyed with writing English verse and contributed reviews of novels to the monthlies until late in life. He read the latest fiction, often judging it severely. Thus he condemned Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* as ‘actionless’ and pronounced George Eliot’s novels to be lacking in harmony because absurd people married one another.<sup>45</sup> His warmest appreciation was reserved for Sir Walter Scott, whose only fault, he claimed, had been to write too much. Scott possessed the ‘power of reviving antiquity’ and an ability to draw character that ranked him third in world literature, behind only Homer and Shakespeare.<sup>46</sup> Gladstone enthused over Scott’s *Woodstock* while at school and in 1895 was still eulogizing ‘the immortal works of Sir Walter Scott’.<sup>47</sup> The Scottish novelist, as we shall see, exercised sufficient sway over Gladstone’s imagination to affect his analysis of Homer.<sup>48</sup> No other literary figure—apart from Homer himself together with Dante—achieved a comparable feat in influencing his deeper convictions. In modern poetry Gladstone placed Wordsworth firmly below Tennyson,<sup>49</sup> on whom he wrote a eulogistic article in the *Quarterly Review*. The statesman very reasonably isolated for special praise Tennyson’s gift of drawing on nature for illustrations, but also admired his feeling for beauty, harmony, motion, light, and colour as well as his

<sup>41</sup> *Eton Miscellany*, 2, p. 64.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 57, 62.

<sup>43</sup> [W. E. Gladstone] to Henry Hallam, 12 Apr. 1834, in *Remains in Verse and Prose of Arthur Henry Hallam* (London, 1863), p. xxxiv.

<sup>44</sup> W. E. Gladstone, *Arthur Henry Hallam* (Boston, Mass., 1898), pp. 7–10.

<sup>45</sup> D, 7 Oct. 1856; Briggs (ed.), *Gladstone’s Boswell*, p. 47.

<sup>46</sup> Speech at Hawarden, 3 Feb. 1868, in cutting from *Chester Courant*, in ‘Speeches and Writings’, St Deiniol’s Library, Hawarden.

<sup>47</sup> A. H. Hallam to J. M. Gaskell, 23 Aug. 1826, in Kolb (ed.), *Letters of Hallam*, p. 68. T, 16 Apr. 1895, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> See Ch. 6, pp. 150–1.

<sup>49</sup> Briggs (ed.), *Gladstone’s Boswell*, p. 125.

mastery of language. If Tennyson could maintain the level of ‘Guinevere’ for the entire cycle of *The Idylls of the King*, Gladstone wrote on its appearance in 1859, the work as a whole would be ‘by far the greatest poetical creation, that, whether in our own or in foreign poetry, the nineteenth century has produced’. Tennyson, however, was not a seminal force in Gladstone’s world of ideas. The contemporary poet’s standards are judged by reference to Homer and Dante, the true arbiters of taste. In terms of values, *The Idylls* were ‘national’, ‘Christian’, ‘human’, and ‘universal’—qualities that Gladstone looked for in Tennyson because other sources had taught him to prize them.<sup>50</sup> It is true that the statesman’s continuing fascination with literature did more than satisfy his capacity for flights of fancy since he warmed to its intellectual content when, but only when, it harmonized with his existing way of thinking. He would have had no time for Tennyson, as he had little for Milton, if the poet had espoused principles contrary to those Gladstone professed. Even Tennyson, however, like all other modern imaginative writers other than Scott, exercised virtually no creative role in his thought. Although Homer and Dante were in an exceptional category, generally literature was a mirror rather than a motor of his mind. It therefore receives only incidental attention in these pages.

The same is true of many other facets of Gladstone’s mental world. His massive three-volume *Studies on Homer* reveals an engaging intellectual curiosity: anthropology and etymology are central to volume 1; the second volume concentrates on mythology; the third deals, among other topics, with geography, aesthetics, and colour theory. As fellow-guests discovered at dinner parties, Gladstone was a ready speaker on almost any subject. Yet his conversation tended to concentrate on how the themes were handled by Homer or how they impinged on his other central concerns. Marcia Pointon has shown how Gladstone’s artistic taste was far from random but instead was moulded by his religion and his love for Dante.<sup>51</sup> Likewise in music, an interest he shared with his wife Catherine, Gladstone was most attracted by compositions for the liturgy. His taste was formed by the reinvigoration of Anglican worship in the wake of the Oxford movement.<sup>52</sup> Gladstone monitored the spread of choral singing in parish churches, insisting that every syllable should be as plainly audible as if the words were spoken.<sup>53</sup> He held strong opinions on the subject because the welfare of true religion was at stake. Similarly on questions of education, his principal preoccupations were with how changes would impinge on the Church of England or else with how much attention was being paid to Homer, Butler, and the Italian language. Other issues that, like education, became subjects for legislation took up a great deal of his reading time. Railways, protective tariffs, and Irish land tenure necessarily became the focus of his attention for protracted periods. Yet these topics, and even the political economy that underlay his attitude to each of them, are not the theme of what

<sup>50</sup> W. E. Gladstone, ‘Tennyson’ [1859], *Gleanings*, 2, pp. 171, 174, 153.

<sup>51</sup> Marcia Pointon, ‘Gladstone as Art Patron and Collector’, *Victorian Studies*, 19 (1975).

<sup>52</sup> See Ch. 4, p. 82.

<sup>53</sup> GP 44776, ff. 16–20 (7 Jan. 1894), in *D.*

follows here. The subjects examined in this book are those on which he lavished as much leisure time as he could spare from public life, the ones that conditioned his stance towards art, music, education, or political economy. The areas for consideration here are the fields of study that clustered round his fundamental values.

These subjects are essentially three: political theory, theology, and classical studies. Each branched out into a variety of related disciplines, and Gladstone would sometimes pursue these adjacent studies with single-minded rigour, but these three alone remained the core of his intellectual concerns. To awed observers he might appear superbly informed on almost any issue, but he realized that, in the nineteenth century, mental resources had to be carefully husbanded. Leibniz in the seventeenth century, he once observed, had been the last man of encyclopedic learning; now was the day of specialism.<sup>54</sup> Naturally he spent time in examining the foundations of his own profession, the issues raised in political theory. Early in his career he devoted painstaking study to authors ancient and modern who discussed public affairs from a philosophical standpoint. He even wrote a book, *The State in its Relations with the Church*, which was conceived as a contribution to political science. Although in later years he was more cautious about addressing similar theoretical topics in print, he continued to take notes and reflect on them. His public speeches contain far more than is usually noticed of an abstract nature. But the statesman never lost the conviction that nearly drove him from Oxford into the Christian ministry, the belief that eternal issues were ultimately far more important than temporal affairs. His second work, though he was well embarked on a career in politics, was on *Church Principles considered in their Results* (1840); a plethora of theological articles followed; and he devoted a great deal of energy during his last three decades to defending Christian orthodoxy against hostile assailants. The study of divinity was ever a favourite pastime. Yet, like many another Victorian gentleman, the statesman also spent vacant hours translating classical verse; and he published two volumes of the results, one jointly with Lord Lyttelton. From the 1850s onwards, however, his classical scholarship concentrated on the earliest of Greek poets, Homer. Gladstone devoted five separate books and over two-dozen articles to Homeric studies. The statesman's stance could therefore be summed up by a former subordinate as 'ecclesiastically-minded and Homerically-minded'.<sup>55</sup> Politics, theology, and the classics formed the trio of his intellectual priorities.

Gladstone's thought has not received the attention it deserves. Biographers (with some exceptions) have usually concentrated on the statesman's public career, relegating his ideas to the margins unless they demonstrably impinged on his policies. This remains true, for example, of Roy Jenkins's admirable recent study of a politician by a politician.<sup>56</sup> In one sense the biographers are right: in a

<sup>54</sup> Gladstone, 'On Books', p. 386.

<sup>55</sup> S[amuel] Laing, *Modern Science and Modern Thought* (London, 1886), p. 322.

<sup>56</sup> Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone* (London, 1995).

world-historical perspective what Gladstone did as Prime Minister matters more than what he thought of Homer. Yet the ideas of so scholarly a man warrant examination in their own right; and the suggestion of Liddon that there is an affinity between his writings and his politics is pre-eminently worthy of investigation. The neglect of Gladstone's mind, however, has been by no means total. Sidney Checkland has touched on the young man's intellectual development down to 1851 in the context of his family history.<sup>57</sup> Peter Jagger has examined his earliest religious evolution and Perry Butler has pursued the task over a longer period, shedding light on the germination of Gladstone's first two books.<sup>58</sup> Richard Helmstadter has helpfully discussed *The State in its Relations with the Church* and Agatha Ramm has analysed Gladstone's early Aristotelian cast of mind.<sup>59</sup> In another article Agatha Ramm has vindicated Gladstone's right to be treated as a man of letters.<sup>60</sup> The statesman's Homeric studies have been scrutinized by Hugh Lloyd-Jones and Frank M. Turner.<sup>61</sup> Deryck Schreuder has written a synoptic essay on Gladstone's religion and his politics, while Boyd Hilton, in two stimulating accounts, has proposed a specific relationship between the two that the present book will aim to evaluate.<sup>62</sup> Most telling, however, is the treatment of the statesman's ideas by Colin Matthew, the editor of *The Gladstone Diaries*. Because he explored the manuscript sources as well as the diaries far more thoroughly than any previous scholar, Matthew was able to offer a more rounded picture of Gladstone's worldview.<sup>63</sup> Yet in his study of the man and statesman, even Matthew was not concentrating on the thinker. Much remains to be done in uncovering the structure and development of Gladstone's ideas.

A beginning is made in this book. Far more could be achieved in the elucidation of almost any aspect of Gladstone's thought, and, now that the published diaries are available, it is to be expected that study of the statesman's cultural significance will flourish as never before. For the time being, however, this volume tries to establish some preliminary parameters. It is offered not as an intellectual biography, which would be a far more massive undertaking, but as a

<sup>57</sup> S. G. Checkland, *The Gladstones: A Family Biography, 1764–1851* (Cambridge, 1971).

<sup>58</sup> P. J. Jagger, *Gladstone: The Making of a Christian Politician: The Personal Religious Life and Development of William Ewart Gladstone, 1809–1832* (Allison Park, Penn., 1991); Perry Butler, *Gladstone: Church, State and Tractarianism: A Study of his Religious Ideas and Attitudes, 1809–1859* (Oxford, 1982).

<sup>59</sup> R. J. Helmstadter, 'Conscience and Politics: Gladstone's First Book', in B. L. Kinzer (ed.), *The Gladstonian Turn of Mind: Essays presented to J. B. Conacher* (Toronto, 1985); Agatha Ramm, 'Gladstone's Religion', *Historical Journal*, 28 (1985).

<sup>60</sup> Agatha Ramm, 'Gladstone as Man of Letters', *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, 17 (1989–90).

<sup>61</sup> Hugh Lloyd-Jones, 'Gladstone on Homer', *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 Jan. 1975, pp. 15–17, repr. in Lloyd-Jones, *Blood for the Ghosts* (London, 1982); F. M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, Conn., 1981), 159–70, 236–44.

<sup>62</sup> D. M. Schreuder, 'Gladstone and the Conscience of the State', in P. T. Marsh (ed.), *The Conscience of the Victorian State* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1979); Boyd Hilton, 'Gladstone's Theological Politics', in Michael Bentley and John Stevenson (eds), *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1981); Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785–1865* (Oxford, 1988), ch. 9.

<sup>63</sup> The introductions to the diary volumes were consolidated, with minor revisions, in Matthew.

case-study in the evolution of Gladstone's thinking, though one that concentrates on what was most important to the statesman himself. In Chapter 2 there is an analysis of Gladstone's early political thought that examines not only the content but also the sources of his highly intellectual version of Conservatism. Chapters 3 to 5 turn to the statesman's theology. They scrutinize how he left behind his early evangelicalism, transferring his allegiance to a personal form of Orthodox High Churchmanship before moving on again into Tractarianism. Subsequently, without repudiating his High Churchmanship, he continued his pilgrimage in a Broad Church direction. Chapters 6 and 7 explore another field, Gladstone's study of Homer, his chief scholarly preoccupation in later life. There is discussion of the reasons for his engagement with the Greek poet before an analysis of how his views on what he called Homerology changed over time. Then, in Chapter 8, there is an examination of Gladstone's part in the debates surrounding the Victorian crisis of faith. The coverage returns in Chapter 9 to political thought with a dissection of the type of Liberalism that Gladstone purveyed as leader of the party. There the broader significance of his religious and classical studies for public affairs comes more fully to light. Pivotal concepts derived from these sources turn out to have become organizing principles of the Liberal message he brought to the masses. Gladstonian Liberalism, as a body of ideas, was profoundly indebted to the classical texts and ecclesiastical concerns on which Gladstone lavished so much of his time; and it was rooted in the particular understanding of the human condition that Gladstone took from his theological and Homeric investigations. The resulting amalgam enjoyed enormous appeal in Gladstone's own day, but also had affinities with much of the progressive political thinking of the earlier twentieth century. Gladstone's mind shows him to have been a man who drew deeply from the wells of western civilisation and then passed on an influential set of political ideals to the future.