

# William Ewart Gladstone

1809 – 1898



## **Early Life:**

Born in Liverpool (29 Dec) to Scottish parents, 4<sup>th</sup> son of John & his 2<sup>nd</sup> wife Anne. Father was one of the largest slave-owners in the British Empire. Educated locally in Seaforth, then at Eton, before matriculating at Christ Church, Oxford, getting a double 1<sup>st</sup> in Classics and Maths.

Did the Grand Tour with his brother before entering Lincoln's Inn in '33. He didn't pursue a career as a barrister. At the 1832 G.E (the 1<sup>st</sup> after the Great Reform Act) he was elected as MP for Newark, thanks to the patronage of the Duke of Newcastle, who controlled 25% of the votes.

## **1<sup>st</sup> Term (1832-1841):**

His maiden speech as a "High Tory" was a defence of the rights of West Indian sugar plantation magnates (slave-owners) among whom his father was prominent. He immediately came under attack from anti-slavery elements. He also surprised his patron, the Duke, by urging the need to increase pay for unskilled factory workers. After new bills to protect child workers were proposed following the publication of the Sadler Report, he voted against the 1833 Factory Acts that would regulate the hours of work and welfare of minors employed in cotton mills.

## **Attitude towards Slavery;**

Gladstone's early attitude towards slavery was highly shaped by his father. Gladstone wanted gradual rather than immediate emancipation, and proposed that slaves should serve a period of apprenticeship after being freed. He opposed the international slave trade (which lowered the value of the slaves his father already owned) but also the immediate abolition of slavery. He said in 1832 that emancipation should come after moral emancipation through the adoption of an education and the inculcation of "honest and industrious habits" among the slaves. Then "with the utmost speed that prudence will permit, we shall arrive at that exceedingly desired consummation, the utter extinction of slavery." His early Parliamentary speeches followed a similar line: in June 1833, Gladstone concluded his speech on the 'slavery question' by declaring that though he had dwelt on

"the dark side" of the issue, he looked forward to "a safe and gradual emancipation".

In 1834, when slavery was abolished across the British Empire, the owners were paid full value for the slaves. Gladstone's father obtained £106,769 in official reimbursement by the government for the 2,508 slaves he owned in his nine Caribbean plantations.

In later years Gladstone's attitude towards slavery became more critical as his father's influence over his politics diminished and he broke with his father when, as President of the Board of Trade, he advanced proposals to halve duties on foreign sugar not produced by slave labour, in order to "secure the effectual exclusion of slave-grown sugar" and to encourage Brazil and Spain to end slavery. Looking back late in life, Gladstone named the abolition of slavery as one of ten great achievements of the previous sixty years where the masses had been right and the upper classes had been wrong.

### **Opposition to the Opium Trade;**

Gladstone was an intense opponent of the opium trade between British India and Qing China, describing it as "infamous and atrocious". He emerged as a fierce critic of the Opium Wars (which Britain waged to re-legalise the British opium trade into China, made illegal by the Chinese government). He publicly lambasted the wars as "Palmerston's Opium War" in May 1840. He criticised the 1<sup>st</sup> Opium War as "a war more unjust in its origin, a war more calculated in its progress to cover this country with permanent disgrace"(His hostility to opium stemmed from the effects of opium upon his sister Helen). He was reluctant to join the Peel government because of the First Opium War.

### ***Minister under Peel (1841-1846):***

Gladstone was re-elected in 1841. He served in Peel's second Term as President of the Board of Trade (1843–1845).

Gladstone became concerned with the situation of "coal whippers" and initiated the Coal Vendors Act 1843, which set up a central office for employment. Looking back in 1883, Gladstone wrote that "In principle, perhaps my Coal-whippers Act of 1843 was the most Socialistic measure of the last half century".

Gladstone was also responsible for the Railways Act 1844, regarded by historians as the birth of the regulatory state, of network industry regulation, of rate of return regulation, and telegraph regulation. Examples of its foresight are the clauses empowering government to take control of railway in time of war, the concept of Parliamentary trains, limited in cost to a penny a mile, of universal service, and of control of the recently invented electric telegraph which ran alongside railway lines.

He resigned in 1845 over the Maynooth Grant issue, which was a matter of conscience for him. He had previously argued in a book that a Protestant country should not pay money to other churches, but nevertheless supported the increase in the grant and voted for it in Commons, but resigned rather than face charges that he had compromised his principles to remain in office. After accepting Gladstone's resignation, Peel confessed to a friend, "I really have great difficulty sometimes in exactly comprehending what he means". In December 1845, Gladstone returned to Peel's government as Colonial Secretary. As such, he had to stand for re-election, but the strong protectionism of the Duke of Newcastle, his patron in Newark, meant that he could not stand there and no other seat was available. Throughout the corn law crisis of 1846, therefore, Gladstone was in the highly anomalous and possibly unique position of being a secretary of state without a seat in either house and thus unanswerable to parliament.

## **Opposition 1846 – 1851:**

When Peel's government fell in 1846, Gladstone and other Peel loyalists followed their leader in separating from the protectionist Conservatives; instead offering tentative support to the new Whig prime minister Lord John Russell. After Peel's death in 1850, Gladstone emerged as the leader of the Peelites in the Commons. He was re-elected for the University of Oxford (i.e. representing the MA graduates of the university) at the GE in 1847, whence he became a constant critic of Lord Palmerston.

In 1848 he founded the Church Penitentiary Association for the Reclamation of Fallen Women, as part of which he met prostitutes late at night. In 1850–51 Gladstone visited Naples for the benefit of his daughter Mary's eyesight, and was aghast at what he found there, in particular the imprisonment of the British Embassy's legal adviser for his liberal views.

## **Aberdeen's Coalition (1852-1855)**

Following the appointment of Lord Aberdeen as PM and head of a coalition of Whigs and Peelites in 1852, Gladstone became Chancellor of the Exchequer (both the Whig Sir Charles Wood and the Tory Disraeli had both been perceived to have failed in the office and so this provided Gladstone with a great political opportunity).

His first budget in 1853 almost completed the work begun by Peel eleven years before in simplifying Britain's tariff of duties and customs. 123 duties were abolished and 133 duties were reduced. The Income Tax had legally expired but Gladstone proposed to extend it for seven years to fund tariff reductions:

*"We propose, then, to re-enact it for two years, from April, 1853, to April, 1855, at the rate of 7d. in the £; from April, 1855, to enact it for two more years at 6d. in the £; and then for three years more ... from April, 1857, at 5d. Under this proposal, on 5 April 1860, the income-tax will by law expire."*

Gladstone wanted to maintain a balance between direct and indirect taxation and to abolish income tax. He knew that its abolition depended on a considerable retrenchment in government expenditure. He therefore increased the number of people eligible to pay it by lowering the threshold from £150 to £100. The more people that paid income tax, Gladstone believed, the more the public would pressure the government into abolishing it. Gladstone argued that the £100 line was "the dividing line ... between the educated and the labouring part of the community" and that therefore the income tax payers and the electorate were to be the same people, who would then vote to cut government expenditure.

The budget speech of 18 April was nearly five hours long, raised Gladstone "at once to the front rank of financiers as of orators". It was written that Gladstone "made finance and figures exciting, and succeeded in constructing budget speeches epic in form and performance, often with lyrical interludes to vary the tension in the Commons as the careful exposition of figures and argument was brought to a climax". The contemporary diarist Charles Greville wrote of Gladstone's speech:

*"... by universal consent it was one of the grandest displays and the most able financial statement that ever was heard in the House of Commons; a great scheme, boldly, skilfully, and honestly devised, disdaining popular clamour and pressure from without, and the execution of it absolute perfection. Even those who do not admire the Budget, or who are injured by it, admit the merit of the performance. It has raised Gladstone to a great political elevation, and, what is of far greater consequence than the measure itself, has given the country assurance of a man equal to great political necessities, and fit to lead parties and direct governments."*

During wartime, he insisted on raising taxes and not borrowing funds to pay for the war. The goal

was to turn wealthy Britons against expensive wars. Britain entered the Crimean War in February 1854, and Gladstone introduced his budget on 6 March. He had to increase expenditure on the military and a vote of credit of £1,250,000 was taken to send a force of 25,000 to the front. The deficit for the year would be £2,840,000 (estimated revenue £56,680,000; estimated expenditure £59,420,000). Gladstone refused to borrow the money needed to rectify this deficit and instead increased income tax by half, from sevenpence to tenpence-halfpenny in the pound (from 2.92% to 4.38%). By May another £6,870,000 was needed for the war and Gladstone raised the income tax from tenpence halfpenny to fourteen pence in the pound to raise £3,250,000. Spirits, malt, and sugar were taxed to raise the rest of the money needed. He proclaimed:

*“The expenses of a war are the moral check which it has pleased the Almighty to impose upon the ambition and lust of conquest that are inherent in so many nations ... The necessity of meeting from year to year the expenditure which it entails is a salutary and wholesome check, making them feel what they are about, and making them measure the cost of the benefit upon which they may calculate.”*

He served until 1855, a few weeks into Lord Palmerston's first premiership, and resigned along with the rest of the Peelites after a motion was passed to appoint a committee of inquiry into the conduct of the war.

### **Opposition 1855 – 1859:**

The Conservative Lord Derby became Prime Minister in 1858, but Gladstone, as a Peelite still nominally a Conservative, declined a position in his government, opting not to sacrifice his free trade principles.

However, between November 1858 and February 1859, Gladstone, on behalf of Lord Derby's government, was made Extraordinary Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands, journeying via Vienna and Trieste on a twelve-week mission to the southern Adriatic entrusted with complex challenges that had arisen in connection with the future of the British protectorate of the United States of the Ionian Islands.

In 1858, he took up the hobby of tree felling, mostly of oak trees, an exercise he continued with enthusiasm until he was 81 in 1891. He was also a lifelong bibliophile and in his lifetime, read around 20,000 books, and eventually owned a library of over 32,000.

### **Chancellor of the Exchequer (1859–1866):**

In 1859, Lord Palmerston formed a new mixed government with Radicals included, and Gladstone again joined the government (with most of the other remaining Peelites) as Chancellor of the Exchequer, to become part of the new Liberal Party.

He inherited a deficit of nearly £5,000,000, with income tax now set at 5d. Like Peel, Gladstone dismissed the idea of borrowing to cover the deficit. Gladstone argued that "In time of peace nothing but dire necessity should induce us to borrow". Most of the money needed was acquired through raising the income tax to 9d. Usually not more than two-thirds of a tax imposed could be collected in a financial year so Gladstone therefore imposed the extra four pence at a rate of 8d. during the first half of the year so that he could obtain the additional revenue in one year.

Gladstone's dividing line set up in 1853 had been abolished in 1858 but Gladstone revived it, with lower incomes to pay 6½d. instead of 9d. For the first half of the year the lower incomes paid 8d. and the higher incomes paid 13d. in income tax.

Gladstone's budget of February 1860 was introduced along with the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty between Britain and France that would reduce tariffs between the two countries. [This budget "marked the final adoption of the Free Trade principle, that taxation should be levied for Revenue

purposes alone, and that every protective, differential, or discriminating duty ... should be dislodged". At the beginning of 1859, there were 419 duties in existence. The 1860 budget reduced the number of duties to 48, with 15 duties constituting the majority of the revenue. To finance these reductions in indirect taxation, the income tax, instead of being abolished, was raised to 10d. for incomes above £150 and at 7d. for incomes above £100.

In 1860 Gladstone intended to abolish the duty on paper (a controversial policy) because the duty traditionally inflated the cost of publishing and hindered the dissemination of radical working-class ideas. Although Palmerston supported continuation of the duty, using it and income tax revenue to buy arms, a majority of his Cabinet supported Gladstone. The Bill to abolish duties on paper narrowly passed the Commons but was rejected by the House of Lords. No Money Bill had been rejected by Lords for over 200 years, and a furore arose over this vote. The next year, Gladstone included the abolition of paper duty in a consolidated Finance Bill (the first ever) to force the Lords to accept it, and accept it they did. The proposal in the Commons of one bill only per session for the national finances was a precedent uniformly followed from that date until 1910, and it has been ever since the rule.

Gladstone steadily reduced Income tax over the course of his tenure as Chancellor, by 1865 it was down to fourpence. He believed that government was extravagant and wasteful with taxpayers' money and so sought to let money "fructify in the pockets of the people" by keeping taxation levels down through "peace and retrenchment". In 1859 he wrote to his brother, who was a member of the Financial Reform Association at Liverpool: "Economy is the first and great article (economy such as I understand it) in my financial creed. The controversy between direct and indirect taxation holds a minor, though important place". He wrote to his wife on 14 January 1860: "I am *certain*, from experience, of the immense advantage of strict account-keeping in early life. It is just like learning the grammar then, which when once learned need not be referred to afterwards".

Due to his actions as Chancellor, Gladstone earned the reputation as the liberator of British trade and the working man's breakfast table, the man responsible for the emancipation of the popular press from "taxes upon knowledge" and for placing a duty on the succession of the estates of the rich. Gladstone's popularity rested on his taxation policies which meant to his supporters balance, social equity and political justice.

When Gladstone first joined the government in 1859, he had opposed further electoral reform, but he changed his position during Palmerston's last premiership, and by 1865 he was firmly in favour of enfranchising the working classes in towns. The policy caused friction with Palmerston, who strongly opposed enfranchisement.

## **American Civil War**

Shortly after the outbreak of the war Gladstone wrote to his friend the Duchess of Sutherland that "the principle announced by the vice-president of the South...which asserts the superiority of the white man, and therewith founds on it his right to hold the black in slavery, I think that principle detestable, and I am wholly with the opponents of it" but that he felt that the North was wrong to try to restore the Union by military force, which he believed would end in failure. Palmerston's government adopted a position of British neutrality throughout the war, while declining to recognise the independence of the Confederacy. But, in October 1862 Gladstone made a speech in which he said that the Confederate leaders had "made a nation", that the Confederacy seemed certain to succeed in asserting its independence from the North, and that the time might come when it would be the duty of the European powers to "offer friendly aid in compromising the quarrel." The speech caused consternation on both sides of the Atlantic and led to speculation that the Britain might be about to recognise the Confederacy. But, in a memorandum to the Cabinet later that month Gladstone wrote that, although he believed the Confederacy would probably win the war, it was "seriously tainted by its connection with slavery" and argued that the European powers should use their influence on the South to effect the "mitigation or removal of slavery."

## **Electoral Reform**

In May 1864 Gladstone said that he saw no reason in principle why all mentally able men could not be enfranchised, but admitted that this would only come about once the working classes themselves showed more interest in the subject. Queen Victoria was not pleased with this statement, and an outraged Palmerston considered it a seditious incitement to agitation.

On Palmerston's death in October, Earl Russell formed his 2nd ministry. Russell and Gladstone (now the senior Liberal in the House of Commons) attempted to pass a reform bill, which was defeated in the Commons. The Conservatives then formed a ministry, in which after long Parliamentary debate Disraeli passed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reform Act 1867 (enfranchising male workers). Gladstone's proposed bill had been totally outmanoeuvred; he stormed into the Chamber, but too late to see his arch-enemy pass the bill. Gladstone was furious; his animus commenced a long rivalry that would only end on Disraeli's death.

## **Leader of the Liberal Party, from 1867**

Lord Russell retired in 1867 and Gladstone became leader of the Liberal Party. In 1868 the Irish Church Resolutions was proposed as a measure to reunite the Liberal Party in government (on the issue of disestablishment of the Church of Ireland - this would be done during Gladstone's First Government in 1869 and meant that Irish Roman Catholics did not need to pay their tithes to the Anglican Church of Ireland). When it was passed Disraeli took the hint and called a G.E.

## **First premiership (1868–1874)**

Gladstone was elected for Greenwich in the 1868 G.E. (he failed in his previous seat South Lincs.) and became P.M. for the first time.

In the 1860s and 1870s, Gladstonian Liberalism was characterised by a number of policies intended to improve individual liberty and loosen political and economic restraints. First was the minimisation of public expenditure on the premise that the economy and society were best helped by allowing people to spend as they saw fit. Secondly, his foreign policy aimed at promoting peace to help reduce expenditures and taxation and enhance trade. Thirdly, laws that prevented people from acting freely to improve themselves were reformed.

Gladstone's first premiership instituted reforms in the British Army, civil service, and local government to cut restrictions on individual advancement. The Local Govt. Board Act 1871 put the supervision of the Poor Law under the Local Government Board and Gladstone's "administration could claim spectacular success in enforcing a dramatic reduction in supposedly sentimental and unsystematic outdoor poor relief, and in making, in co-operation with the Charity Organisation Society (1869), the most sustained attempt of the century to impose upon the working classes the Victorian values of providence, self-reliance, foresight, and self-discipline". Gladstone was associated with the Charity Organization Society's first annual report in 1870. Some leading Conservatives at this time were contemplating an alliance between the aristocracy and the working class against the capitalist class, an idea called the New Social Alliance. At a speech at Blackheath on 28 October 1871, he warned his constituents against these social reformers:

*“... they are not your friends, but they are your enemies in fact, though not in intention, who teach you to look to the Legislature for the radical removal of the evils that afflict human life. ... It is the individual mind and conscience, it is the individual character, on which mainly human happiness or misery depends. The social problems that confront us are many and formidable. Let the Government labour to its utmost, let the Legislature labour days and nights in your service; but, after the very best has been attained and achieved, the question whether the English father is to be the father of a happy family and the centre of a united home is a question which must depend mainly upon himself. And those who ... promise to the dwellers in towns that every one of them*

*shall have a house and garden in free air, with ample space; those who tell you that there shall be markets for selling at wholesale prices retail quantities - I won't say are impostors, because I have no doubt they are sincere; but I will say they are quacks; they are deluded and beguiled by a spurious philanthropy, and when they ought to give you substantial, even if they are humble and modest boons, they are endeavouring, perhaps without their own consciousness, to delude you with fanaticism, and offering to you a fruit which, when you attempt to taste it, will prove to be but ashes in your mouths."*

Gladstone instituted abolition of the sale of commissions in the army: he also instituted the Cardwell Reforms in 1869 that made peacetime flogging illegal. In 1870, his government passed Forster's Education Act, which started State Education. In 1871 his government passed the Trade Union Act allowing trade unions to organise and operate legally for the first time (although picketing remained illegal). Gladstone later counted this reform as one of the most significant of the previous half century, saying that prior to its passage the law had effectively "compelled the British workman to work...in chains." In 1871, he instituted the Universities Tests Act, abolishing religious tests except for a Degree in Divinity. He secured passage of the Ballot Act for secret ballots, and the Licensing Act 1872. Many things in this Act, including Licensing Hours, offences of being drunk in charge of a horse, or a steam engine!

In foreign affairs his over-riding aim was to promote peace and understanding, characterised by his settlement of the Alabama Claims in 1872 in favour of the Americans. His leadership also led to the passage of the Supreme Court of Judicature Act 1873 restructuring the courts to create the modern High Court and Court of Appeal.

Gladstone unexpectedly dissolved Parliament in January 1874 and called a General Election, which Disraeli won, even though the Liberals received a majority of the vote in each of the constituent countries of the United Kingdom and 189,000 more votes nationally than the Conservatives, but did not win the majority of seats in the Commons. He resigned his leadership of the Liberal Party, but remained an MP. It was the first to take place with secret ballots, and the first to see a significant third party (the Irish Home Rule Party with 60 seats).

## **Opposition (1874–1880)**

During this period, Gladstone demonstrated his strong opposition to Catholicism, particularly the issue of Papal infallibility. He was also opposed to socialism, with his strong insistence on the gospel of thrift, self-help, settlement of wages by the higgling of the market, and non-interference by the State.

The "Bulgarian Horrors" of 1876 saw him attacking the Disraeli government for its indifference to the Ottoman Empire's violent repression of the uprising. He was careful to focus his hostility on the Turks, not their religion. However, he was definitely hostile to the Jews, and what he saw as their malign influence in the Balkans.

During the 1879 election campaign, called the Midlothian campaign, he rousingly denounced Disraeli's foreign policies during the ongoing Second Anglo-Afghan War. He saw the war as "great dishonour" and he also criticised British conduct in the Zulu War. Gladstone also (on 29 November) condemned what he saw as the Conservative government's profligate spending:

*...the Chancellor of the Exchequer shall boldly uphold economy in detail; and it is the mark ... of ... a chicken-hearted Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he shrinks from upholding economy in detail, when, because it is a question of only £2,000 or £3,000, he says that is no matter. He is ridiculed, no doubt, for what is called saving candle-ends and cheese-parings. No Chancellor of the Exchequer is worth his salt who is not ready to save what are meant by candle-ends and cheese-parings in the cause of his country. No Chancellor of the Exchequer is worth his salt who makes his own*



*popularity either his first consideration, or any consideration at all, in administering the public purse. You would not like to have a housekeeper or steward who made her or his popularity with the tradesmen the measure of the payments that were to be delivered to them. In my opinion the Chancellor of the Exchequer is the trusted and confidential steward of the public. He is under a sacred obligation with regard to all that he consents to spend.... I am bound to say hardly ever in the six years that Sir Stafford Northcote has been in office have I heard him speak a resolute word on behalf of economy.*

## **Second premiership (1880–1885)**

In 1880, the Liberals won again and the Liberal leaders, Spencer Cavendish in the Commons and Lord Granville in the Lords, retired in Gladstone's favour. Gladstone won his constituency election in Midlothian, but also in Leeds which he passed to his youngest son Herbert. Gladstone's second administration, both as Prime Minister and again as Chancellor of the Exchequer till 1882, lasted from June 1880 to June 1885. He originally intended to retire at the end of 1882, the 50th anniversary of his entry into politics, but did not do so.

### **Foreign policy**

Historians have debated the wisdom of Gladstone's foreign-policy during his second ministry. Paul Hayes says it "provides one of the most intriguing and perplexing tales of muddle and incompetence in foreign affairs, unsurpassed in modern political history until the days of Grey and, later, Neville Chamberlain." Gladstone opposed himself to the "Colonial Lobby" pushing for the scramble for Africa. His term saw the end of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, the First Boer War, and the war against the Mahdi in Sudan.

But, on 11 July 1882, Gladstone ordered the bombardment of Alexandria, triggering the short Anglo-Egyptian War of 1882. The British won decisively, and although they repeatedly promised to depart in a few years, the actual result was British control of Egypt for four decades, largely ignoring Ottoman nominal ownership. France was seriously unhappy, having lost control of the canal that it built and financed and had dreamed of for decades. Gladstone's role in the decision to invade was described as relatively hands-off, the ultimate responsibility being borne by certain members of his cabinet.

Historian A.J.P Taylor says that the seizure of Egypt "was a great event; indeed, the only real event in international relations between the Battle of Sedan (Franco-Prussian War, 1870) and the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War 1904-5. Taylor emphasizes long-term impact:

The British occupation of Egypt altered the balance of power. It not only gave the British security for their route to India, it made them masters of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. It made it unnecessary for them to stand in the front line against Russia at the Straits....And thus prepared the way for the Franco-Russian Alliance ten years later.

Gladstone and the Liberals had a reputation for strong opposition to imperialism, so historians have long debated the explanation for this reversal of policy. It was probably no more than serious concern regarding the security of the Suez Canal.

### **Ireland**

In 1881 he established the Irish Coercion Act, which permitted the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to detain people for as "long as was thought necessary", as there was rural disturbance in Ireland when Cavendish, the Irish Secretary, had been assassinated by Irish rebels in Dublin. He also passed the



Second Land Act (the First, in 1870, had entitled Irish tenants, if evicted, to compensation for improvements which they had made on their property, but had little effect) which gave Irish tenants the "3Fs"—fair rent, fixity of tenure and free sale.

## **Franchise**

Gladstone extended the vote to agricultural labourers and others in the 1884 Reform Act, which gave the counties the same franchise as the boroughs, adult male householders and £10 lodgers, and added six million to the total number of people who could vote in parliamentary elections. Parliamentary reform continued with the Redistribution of Seats Act 1885, which allocated constituencies an equal number of voters.

Gladstone was increasingly uneasy about the direction in which British politics was moving. He criticised Tory Democracy as being still, in secret, "as obstinately attached as ever to the evil principle of class interests". He found contemporary Liberalism better, "but far from being good". Gladstone claimed that this Liberalism's "pet idea is what they call construction,—that is to say, taking into the hands of the state the business of the individual man".

## **Failure**

Historian Sneh Mahajan has concluded, "Gladstone's second ministry remained barren of any achievement in the domestic sphere." His downfall came in Africa, where he delayed the mission to rescue General Gordon's force which had been 10 months besieged in Khartoum. It arrived in January 1885 two days after a massacre killed approximately 7,000 British and Egyptian soldiers and 4,000 civilians. The disaster proved a major blow to Gladstone's popularity. Queen Victoria sent him a telegram of rebuke which found its way into the press. Critics said Gladstone had neglected military affairs and had not acted promptly enough to save the besieged Gordon. Critics inverted his acronym, "G.O.M." (for "Grand Old Man"), to "M.O.G." (for "Murderer of Gordon"). He resigned as Prime Minister in June 1885 and declined Queen Victoria's offer of an earldom.

## ***Third premiership (1886)***

The Hawarden Kite, a December 1885 press release by Gladstone's son and aide Herbert announcing that he had become convinced that Ireland needed a separate parliament, was a bombshell announcement resulted in the fall of Lord Salisbury's Conservative government. Irish Nationalists, led by Charles Parnell's Irish Parliamentary Party, held the balance of power in Parliament. Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule convinced them to switch away from the Conservatives and support the Liberals using the 86 seats in Parliament they controlled. Gladstone regained his position as Prime Minister and combined the office with that of Lord Privy Seal. During this administration he first introduced his Home Rule Bill for Ireland. The issue split the Liberal Party (a breakaway group went on to create the Liberal Unionist party) and the bill was thrown out on the second reading, ending his government after only a few months and inaugurating another headed by Lord Salisbury.

## ***Opposition (1886–1892)***

Gladstone supported the London dockers in their 1889 strike. After their victory he gave a speech at Hawarden on 23 September in which he said: "In the common interests of humanity, this remarkable strike and the results of this strike, which have tended somewhat to strengthen the condition of labour in the face of capital, is the record of what we ought to regard as satisfactory, as a real social advance [that] tends to a fair principle of division of the fruits of industry". This speech has been described as having "no parallel in the rest of Europe except in the rhetoric of the toughest socialist leaders". Gladstone was impressed with workers unconnected with the dockers' dispute who "intended to make common cause" in the interests of justice.

In October 1890 Gladstone at Midlothian claimed that competition between capital and labour, "where it has gone to sharp issues, where there have been strikes on one side and lock-outs on the other, I believe that in the main and as a general rule, the labouring man has been in the right".

On 11 December 1891 Gladstone said that: "It is a lamentable fact if, in the midst of our civilisation, and at the close of the nineteenth century, the workhouse is all that can be offered to the industrious labourer at the end of a long and honourable life. I do not enter into the question now in detail. I do not say it is an easy one; I do not say that it will be solved in a moment; but I do say this, that until society is able to offer to the industrious labourer at the end of a long and blameless life something better than the workhouse, society will not have discharged its duties to its poorer members". On 24 March 1892 Gladstone said that the Liberals had:

*...come generally...to the conclusion that there is something painful in the condition of the rural labourer in this great respect, that it is hard even for the industrious and sober man, under ordinary conditions, to secure a provision for his own old age. Very large propositions, involving, some of them, very novel and very wide principles, have been submitted to the public, for the purpose of securing such a provision by means independent of the labourer himself....our duty [is] to develop in the first instance, every means that we may possibly devise whereby, if possible, the labourer may be able to make this provision for himself, or to approximate towards making such provision far more efficaciously and much more closely than he can now do.*

Gladstone wrote on 16 July 1892 "In 1834 the Government...did themselves high honour by the new Poor Law Act, which rescued the English peasantry from the total loss of their independence".

But, there were many who disagreed with him.

### **Fourth premiership (1892–1894)**

The 1892 General Election resulted in a minority Liberal government with Gladstone as Prime Minister. The electoral address had promised Irish Home Rule and the disestablishment of the Scottish and Welsh Churches. In February 1893 he introduced the Second Home Rule Bill, which was passed in the Commons at second reading on 21 April by 43 votes and third reading on 1 September by 34 votes. The House of Lords defeated the bill by voting against by 419 votes to 41 on 8 September.

The Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act, passed in 1893, required local authorities to provide separate education for blind and deaf children.

Conservative MP Colonel Howard Vincent questioned Gladstone in the Commons on what his government would do about unemployment on 1 September 1893. Gladstone replied:

*I cannot help regretting that the honourable and gallant Gentleman has felt it his duty to put the question. It is put under circumstances that naturally belong to one of those fluctuations in the condition of trade which, however unfortunate and lamentable they may be, recur from time to time. Undoubtedly I think that questions of this kind, whatever be the intention of the questioner, have a tendency to produce in the minds of people, or to suggest to the people, that these fluctuations can be corrected by the action of the Executive Government. Anything that contributes to such an impression inflicts an injury upon the labouring population.*

In December 1893, an Opposition motion proposed by Lord George Hamilton called for an expansion of the Royal Navy. Gladstone opposed increasing public expenditure on the Naval Estimates, in the tradition of free trade liberalism of his earlier political career as Chancellor. All his Cabinet colleagues believed in some expansion of the navy. He declared in the Commons on 19 December that naval rearmament would commit the government to expenditure over a number of

years and would subvert "the principle of annual account, annual proposition, annual approval by the House of Commons, which...is the only way of maintaining regularity, and that regularity is the only talisman which will secure Parliamentary control". In January 1894, Gladstone wrote that he would not "break to pieces the continuous action of my political life, nor trample on the tradition received from every colleague who has ever been my teacher" by supporting naval rearmament. Gladstone also opposed Chancellor Sir William Harcourt's proposal to implement a graduated death duty. In a fragment of autobiography dated 25 July 1894, Gladstone denounced the tax as

*...by far the most Radical measure of my lifetime. I do not object to the principle of graduated taxation: for the just principle of ability to pay is not determined simply by the amount of income.... But, so far as I understand the present measure of finance from the partial reports I have received, I find it too violent. It involves a great departure from the methods of political action established in this country, where reforms, and especially financial reforms, have always been considerate and even tender.... I do not yet see the ground on which it can be justly held that any one description of property should be more heavily burdened than others, unless moral and social grounds can be shown first: but in this case the reasons drawn from those sources seem rather to verge in the opposite direction, for real property has more of presumptive connection with the discharge of duty than that which is ranked as personal...the aspect of the measure is not satisfactory to a man of my traditions (and these traditions lie near the roots of my being).... For the sudden introduction of such change there is I think no precedent in the history of this country. And the severity of the blow is greatly aggravated in moral effect by the fact that it is dealt only to a handful of individuals.*

Gladstone had his last audience with the Queen on 28 February 1894 and chaired his last Cabinet on 1 March, the last of 556 he had chaired. On that day he gave his last speech to the House of Commons, saying that the government would withdraw opposition to the Lords' amendments to the Local Government Bill "under protest" and that it was "a controversy which, when once raised, must go forward to an issue". He resigned from the premiership on 2 March. The Queen did not ask Gladstone who should succeed him, but sent for Lord Rosebery (Gladstone would have advised on Lord Spencer). He retained his seat in the House of Commons until 1895. He was not offered a peerage, having earlier declined an earldom.

Gladstone is both the oldest person to form a government, aged 82 at his appointment, and the oldest person to occupy the Premiership, being 84 at his resignation.

### **Final years (1894–1898)**

In 1895, at the age of 85, Gladstone bequeathed £40,000 (equivalent to approximately £4.92 million today and much of his 32,000 volume library in order to found St Deiniol's Library in Hawarden, Wales. It had begun with just 5,000 items at his father's home Fasque, which were transferred to Hawarden for research in 1851.

On 8 January 1896, in conversation with L.A. Tollemache, Gladstone explained that: "I am not so much afraid of Democracy or of Science as of the love of money. This seems to me to be a growing evil. Also, there is a danger from the growth of that dreadful military spirit".

In the early months of 1897, Gladstone and his wife stayed in Cannes. Gladstone met Queen Victoria, and she shook hands with him for (to his recollection) the first time in the 50 years he had known her. The Gladstones returned to Hawarden Castle at the end of March and he received the Colonial Premiers in their visit for the Queen's Jubilee. At a dinner in November with Edward Hamilton, his former private secretary, Hamilton noted that "What is now uppermost in his mind is what he calls the spirit of jingoism under the name of Imperialism which is now so prevalent". Gladstone riposted "It was enough to make Peel and Cobden turn in their graves".

On the advice of his doctor in the aftermath of an attack of facial neuralgia, Gladstone stayed at Cannes from the end of November 1897 to mid-February 1898. Gladstone then travelled to Bournemouth, where a swelling on his palate was diagnosed as cancer by the leading cancer surgeon Sir Thomas Smith on 18 March. On 22 March, he retired to Hawarden Castle. Despite being in pain he still received visitors.

His last public statement was dictated to his daughter Helen in reply to receiving the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford's "sorrow and affection": "There is no expression of Christian sympathy that I value more than that of the ancient University of Oxford, the God-fearing and God-sustaining University of Oxford. I served her perhaps mistakenly, but to the best of my ability. My most earnest prayers are hers to the uttermost and to the last". He left the house for the last time on 9 April. After 18 April he did not come down to the ground floor but still came out of bed to lie on the sofa.

Gladstone died on 19 May 1898 at Hawarden Castle, Hawarden, aged 88. He had been cared for by his daughter Helen who had resigned her job to care for her father and mother. The cause of death is officially recorded as "Syncope, Senility". "Syncope" meant failure of the heart and "senility" in the 19th century was an infirmity of advanced old age, rather than a loss of mental faculties. The House of Commons adjourned on the afternoon of Gladstone's death, with A.J. Balfour giving notice for an Address to the Queen praying for a public funeral and a public memorial in Westminster Abbey. The day after, both Houses of Parliament approved the Address and Herbert Gladstone accepted a public funeral on behalf of the Gladstone family. His coffin was transported on the London Underground before his State Funeral at the Abbey, at which the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII) and the Duke of York (the future King George V) acted as pallbearers. His wife, Catherine Gladstone (*née* Glynne), died two years later on 14 June 1900 and was buried next to him.

