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Mr. GLADSTONE SEEKS A SEAT

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Gladstone entered Parliament at the age of 23 as a representative of the borough of Newark. He owed his election to the support of the Duke of Newcastle, father of his close friend Lord Lincoln, who held control over some quarter of the less than sixteen hundred voters in the borough.¹ This influence had been briefly challenged in the exceptional election of 1831, but a state of normalcy was restored with the election of the Duke's young nominee at the head of the pole in 1833. The Duke was a reactionary Tory, but he allowed his son's friend to retain the seat for the three following General elections and we may suppose was not displeased to see his protégé become a member of Peel's administration in 1841 and to enter the Cabinet in 1843. He probably approved the young Minister's quixotic action in resigning office over the Maynooth seminary grant in 1845, but he could not understand or condone the subsequent support Gladstone gave the measure as a private member.²

An immediate crisis was provoked when on 22 December, 1845, less than eleven months after his resignation from the Board of Trade, Gladstone accepted the Colonial Office, vacated by Lord Stanley's resignation over the proposed repeal of the Corn Laws. Return to the ministry in these circumstances inevitably put Gladstone at odds with his patron, who was a died in the wool Protectionist. Nor could the issue be evaded since acceptance of office automatically forced the Minister to seek reelection.

Gladstone wrote a straightforward letter to the Duke informing him of the situation and expressing his regret that he differed from his patron both on the question of trade as well as on what he called "one question of higher character" (i.e. Maynooth). While thanking the Duke for his past kindness and generous support, he clearly did not expect it to be continued.³

¹ John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (1903), Vol. I, 88-94.

² British Museum, Ad. Ms. 44261, ff. 96-100. Gladstone now accepted the necessity of the Maynooth policy, but felt that he could not retain office in the Government responsible for the measure since it was at variance with the principles enunciated in his book on *Church and State*. Cobden found his explanation incomprehensible as probably did Peel and most of his contemporaries. Gladstone's support of the Maynooth grant had produced an exchange of letters indicating a difference with his patron on this subject.

³ *Ibid.*, ff. 101-102, 22 December 1845. Gladstone's tenure of the Newark seat had never been secure since several years earlier the Duke had indicated that some day he would want it for a member of his family. *Ibid.*

On Christmas eve the Duke replied that it was "utterly impossible" for him to promise the slightest support from any influence that he might possess in the borough. He continued:

You are quite right in thinking that I disapprove of Sir Robert Peel's return to office. I was in hopes that we were clear of him for ever, and that he who has already done such unpardonable mischief and is prepared to do so much more, so that ruin and revolution shall be our fated country's terrible future would not again be permitted to convulse the nation...⁴

Gladstone managed to find two possible interpretations to this letter and was so bold as to enquire whether the Duke intended to put another candidate into the field, in which case he made it clear, he recognized his duty to retire. But if the Duke intended to disclaim interference — a surprising supposition from a young Tory — then Gladstone said he would feel free to seek support in the constituency.⁵ The Duke of Newcastle's answer this time was quite explicit: "I am opposed to your return for Newark, and it is my intention to promote, as far as my influence goes, the return of another candidate who will offer himself."⁶

Consequently Gladstone resigned himself to drawing up an address to his constituents explaining his withdrawal,⁷ which he forwarded to his election committee. These gentlemen, however, rebelling against the tyranny of the Duke, met on 5 January and requested their late member "to offer himself again to the constituency, promising their exertions to secure his re-election". In the meantime a nominee of the Duke appeared upon the scene in the person of a Mr. J. Stuart, who announced his intention to contest the borough since, as he alleged, Gladstone had withdrawn. This greatly annoyed the latter who immediately drafted an eighteen page letter to Stuart⁸, pointing out that he had only withdrawn to avoid opposing the Duke's candidate and that it was futile for Stuart to disavow any intention of displacing him.

This letter nicely reflects the conflicting strains ever struggling in Gladstone's breast, the natural conservative instinct to accept traditional ways and customs as right and proper, and the growing sense of natural justice and individual rights that sooner or later would lead him to challenge accepted custom. The Duke's final letter to Gladstone bluntly indicated that he trusted nothing would induce Stuart to withdraw.⁹ Already the late member for Newark had begun to look elsewhere.

⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 103, 24 December 1845.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 105-106, 26 December 1845.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 107-108, 28 December 1845.

⁷ *Ibid.*, ff. 109-110, Gladstone to Newcastle, 1 January 1846.

⁸ B.M. Ad. Ms. 44363, ff. 131-137, 9 January 1846.

⁹ Ad. Ms. 44261, f. 113, 9 January 1846. It is interesting to note that on this occasion Lord John Manners sent Gladstone a sympathetic letter couched in the language of Young England. While expressing total disagreement with Gladstone's

In this predicament, it was only natural for a young minister to turn to the great expert in these matters, the party's election manager, Philip Bonham. As early as 16 January 1846, Gladstone asked Bonham's assistance in a letter that revealed how sheltered an electoral life he had led for fourteen years. "I am not exactly aware", he wrote, "of the steps that a man in office and out of Parliament should take in order to remove the anomaly by supplying himself with a seat".¹⁰ The veteran may have smiled at such innocence, but the task was to be no easy one, especially with a fastidious client, who was to consider at least sixteen possibilities before the search was concluded.

Yet possible openings were not long in appearing. As early as 6 January some Liverpool merchants, anxious to support the Government's policy of Free Trade and "desirous at this eventful crisis of laying aside all party considerations", invited Gladstone to contest a Liverpool seat. A. H. Wylie, their spokesman, corresponded with him for several weeks with regard to the prospects of his candidature, which was said to be supported by two local newspapers.¹¹ As son of a wealthy Liverpool merchant, Gladstone appeared to be a good candidate, but in the end the proposal fell through, apparently because of the inclination of the Liverpool Free Traders to return one Liberal and one Conservative Free Trader. Lord Sandon, a sitting member for the city, filled the latter category and so left no room for the Conservative minister, although at one stage there was hope that Sandon might be raised to the Upper House. (Actually the latter succeeded his father as Earl of Harrowby in 1847.)

With the chances in Liverpool receding a possible opening appeared in Wigan where a Captain Lindsay expected to be unseated by an Election Committee of the House of Commons. In such an event, he informed Gladstone, it was the wish of both parties that "you should allow yourself to be put in nomination". Neither party felt strong enough to return two candidates. Consequently, according to Captain Lindsay:

The general wish therefore seems to be, that... you should now come forward, and be their member for the remainder of the present parliament; and at a general election you should engage not to stand for the Borough *to the prejudice of any neighbouring or local interest*; the

views he added "but I know your gentleness and toleration too well to fear you will be angry with it". As to Newark he wrote: "... there appears to be a general impression in the Borough that something is wrong somewhere; if so, according to my gloomy view, Newark is but a fair epitome of England at large, handed over to be fought by two furious factions in a struggle that must be fatal, whichever side gains the victory. I see but one mode of ultimate safety, that is in the Queen resuming her crown, and governing according to the theory of the Church, her people. But of course there is no chance of the Queen's doing so... Ad. Ms. 44363, ff. 148-149, 15 January 1846.

¹⁰ B.M. Ad. Ms. 44110, ff. 170-171, 16 January 1846.

¹¹ B.M. Ad. Ms. 44363, ff. 154-156, 169-170, 196-6, 197, 198-199, 204, 207, 6 January -10 February 1846.

meaning of this is in fact *almost* to debar you from standing at a General Election.¹²

Gladstone welcomed this overture and accepted Lindsay's conditions, but suggested "that what has now passed between us in writing should remain strictly private as almost every explanation of this kind, however strictly warrantable in substance, is liable to misconstruction and to the charge of an interference with the freedom of Election".¹³ Indeed Gladstone was both willing and anxious to obtain the Wigan seat, but he warned E. Woodcock, who was promoting his interests in Wigan, not to act precipitately "in anticipation of the sentence of a judicial tribunal".¹⁴ This was well said but too late for on the same day Captain Lindsay reported that some persons were attempting to defend his return.¹⁵ Two days later Lindsay wrote: "I am annoyed exceedingly after all that has been arranged between ourselves that Mr. Woodcock's ill judged proceedings will be the very cause of preventing or at least of delaying what he had undertaken to help in performing, Viz, your becoming a candidate for Wigan." It appeared that a petition had been presented, unknown to Lindsay, asking permission to defend his return. "This petition has for its object", Lindsay wrote, "to *keep you out* and it is got up by the Protectionist party as an annoyance to the Ministers."¹⁶ In the end to Lindsay's embarrassment, he retained his seat and poor Gladstone could do nothing but congratulate him.¹⁷

A few weeks later another interesting possibility developed in the form of a proposal from one, Henry Raikes, who wrote that he knew of a borough in the south of England where "a permanent family or personal interest might be invested by an outlay of from £5,000 to £7,000 in Mortgage on household security". In Raikes' view it was a place "which ought to return a Minister from the trifling nature of the local interests that would be represented", and he offered personally to keep the negotiation open on Gladstone's behalf.¹⁸ Unfortunately there is no further correspondence to be found in connection with this intriguing proposition unless the borough in question was Dorchester of which more below.

In the meantime the great debate on the Corn Laws was proceeding with the Colonial Secretary still outside the House and unable to participate. On 6 June with the end of the struggle in sight he told his friend Lincoln that he was "unhappy and uneasy" about his "want of a seat and total inability to get one by any unexceptional means". He had never

¹² *Ibid.*, ff. 275-276, 10 March 1846.

¹³ *Ibid.*, ff. 277-278, 10 March 1846.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ff. 306-307, 16 March 1846; see also f. 272, 9 March 1846.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 304-305, 16 March 1846.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 321-322, 18 March 1846. Compare Gladstone's minister account in Ad. Ms. 44791, f. 88.

¹⁷ Ad. Ms. 44364, ff. 23-24, 9 April 1846.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 40-41, 21 April 1846.

said anything to Sir Robert Peel on the subject of resigning simply because he did not know what could be done about a replacement, but he had asked Goulburn and now asked Lincoln to let him know should an opportunity arise where his resignation would be advantageous. "I hope you will think that I am right", he wrote to Lincoln, "in preferring an intention of this kind to any direct overture to Sir R. Peel. Offers made to the Prime minister as such assume of necessity something of a formal air: and I have an intense repugnance to making any offer which has the aspect of being made in order that it might be rejected".¹⁹

By the time the Government fell at the end of June, Gladstone had held office for six months without a seat. The change of ministry, of course, necessitated by-elections for the new Ministers and Lincoln suggested to him the possibility of challenging Hobhouse at Nottingham. On reflection, however, Gladstone concluded that he was not entitled to oppose a new Minister under such circumstances. After rehearsing all the arguments against the proposal he concluded with the cryptic remark: "All this is said as you well observe without the smallest reflection on the honour and purity of Nottingham."²⁰

About the same time Gladstone received a letter from another friend, Robert Williams, suggesting that he might come forward to succeed Sir James Graham at Dorchester in the event of an early dissolution. Williams made the offer of support on behalf of his father. "I am happy to say that he most cordially concurs in my suggestion", he wrote, "feeling with me that, setting aside particular political opinions it would be an advantage to our little borough to secure the services in parliament of such a representative as yourself".²¹ Williams indicated that they would have to communicate with Lord Shaftesbury with whom they shared the patronage of the borough but that he anticipated no difficulty there. He also added that election expenses would be £500 inclusive of a dinner, plus "a general liberality towards their public institutions and all that goes on from time to time".²²

This looked promising, but when an early dissolution failed to materialize they mutually agreed to leave the question in abeyance. "You may obtain a seat elsewhere, before a dissolution takes place", Williams wrote to Gladstone; "and when it comes, you may (as you say) be claimed at Newark. [Apparently Gladstone was still unreconciled to his ouster by the Duke of Newcastle]. We on the other hand may have occasion to

¹⁹ Ad. Ms. 44262, ff. 72-73, 6 June 1846.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 74-76, 29 June 1846. Cf. N. Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, (London, 1953), p. 126, re the venality of Nottingham.

²¹ Ad. Ms. 44364, ff. 241-244, 27 June 1846. The father was presumably Edward Williams of Herrington.

²² *Ibid.* (Gash, *op. cit.*, lists Lord Shaftesbury as the patron of Dorchester.)

dispose otherwise of the seat at Dorchester".²³ This sounded rather vague, but Gladstone informed Bonham, whom he continued to consult, "I think I am provided at the General Election at Dorchester if not elsewhere". In the same letter he alluded to a vacancy at St. Ives and asked Bonham whether there was any reason to consider it a suitable opening.²⁴

Mrs. Gladstone had received the news about St. Ives from the Duke of Wellington who a few days later wrote to her husband to say that he had been offered the seat for a friend, but knew nothing about it other than that the place did not have a good reputation and that the person who offered it, he feared, was not of very good character.²⁵ This was scarcely an attractive prospect for a man with Gladstone's moral values. In any event, Bonham threw cold water on the idea with the news that the Mr. Praed, the late member, had promised to make way for a Mr. Lee at the next election.²⁶

The next prospect, which came only a few days later, sounded more attractive. Lord Westminster's letter to Gladstone regarding the possibility of an opening at Chester reveals some of the complications involved in seat hunting in those days:

Under the impression that you may be desirous of returning to the House of Commons [he wrote] I take the liberty of calling your attention to a vacancy that may possibly soon occur at Chester in consequence of Mr. Byng's illness, which from its not yielding immediately to remedies must at his age be alarming and which, through a fatal termination, would cause my brother's resignation for Chester in order that he might be at liberty to offer himself for Middlesex.²⁷

I cannot enlighten you much as to the state of parties at Chester — the influence of my family can now at best be but slight....

There seems a chance that a person of modest Politics might come in at this moment on my brother's vacancy but it will be necessary for you to make up your mind whether you will risk the expense and [incur?] the trouble of a contest which may arise before you embark in the undertaking.

²³ *Ibid.*, ff. 268-269, 9 July 1846. He wrote again on 13 July regretfully declining an invitation to visit the Gladstones and expressing satisfaction at Gladstone's agreement to leave the Dorchester question open (ff. 276-277).

²⁴ Ad. Ms. 44110, ff. 175-176, 14 July 1846.

²⁵ Ad. Ms. 44364, ff. 278-279, 14 July 1846.

²⁶ Ad. Ms. 44110, ff. 177-178, 14 July 1846. In a further letter he explained away Wellington's mysterious information about the borough. "As to St. Ives", he wrote on 4 August, "I ascertained that Lord Mornington! on the score of a former idle expenditure had offered the seat to his uncle (Wellington) without the possibility of obtaining a single vote against the *united* determination to support the old *Bolton interest* in the person of Ld. Wm. Paulet". (*Ibid.*, f. 153.) Gladstone was fortunate to have such an adviser as Bonham to guide him through this labyrinth!

²⁷ Ad. Ms. 44364, ff. 284-285, 18 July 1846.

In a later letter on 4 August, however, he had to write:

Mr. Dixon [the agent] has been with me in London and I have ascertained that there is such a division of parties in Chester, that although they would unite in bringing in my son as a neighbour we cannot count on any other person being returned *without a contest*.

I believe this to be simply the state of the case, and no disinclination generally towards you — on the contrary many would have supported you zealously. Meanwhile Mr. Byng is himself again — and my brother thinks it worthwhile to take a place at court, and to be reelected for the remainder of the Parliament.²⁸

As a postscript by way of consolation, the noble lord invited Gladstone to shoot over his ground in September.

On the same day the faithful Bonham wrote to enquire whether Gladstone would be prepared to accept an offer at Whitby through the influence of Hudson, the Railway King, but “on the score of *perfect independence*”.²⁹ In a characteristic reply Gladstone expressed his doubts on five grounds, especially on Hudson’s connection with the Protectionists. As to cost he was explicit: “I should not be disposed at this time of the Parliament to go to any great expense, and with illegal expense of course I could not have anything to do”.³⁰ In the end the railway man changed his mind to the relief of Bonham who admitted he “never thought well of *Whitby under the auspices of Hudson*”.³¹ The two correspondents continued to discuss the prospects of an early election and Gladstone still talked of falling back on Dorchester as a “*ratio ultima*”. “Public reasons”, he added, “might make it my duty to stand for some larger place but I cannot tell whether this is likely while it would certainly be far from agreeable”.³²

A few days after making this observation Gladstone received an overture from Aberdeen. A Mr. Wm. Forbes Skene, a liberal Conservative whom Bonham described as “a very respectable professional man from an old family”,³³ wrote to tell Gladstone that it was expected that the Whig member, Mr. Bannerman would resign to accept the Commissionership of Excise. A Mr. D. Fordyce, “an extreme liberal” and a free-churchman, was expected to stand for the vacancy, but Mr. Skene, whose family controlled twenty-two votes, told Gladstone:

... I and many of my friends in town think that if you could be induced to stand on the Conservative interest that you would unite all the other sections of the Conservative and moderate Whigs who are not Freechurch-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 289-290, 4 August 1846.

²⁹ Ad. Ms. 44110, ff. 183-184, 4 August 1846.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 185-186, 7 August 1846.

³¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 187-188, 14 August 1846.

³² *Ibid.*, ff. 189-190, 21 August 1846.

³³ *Ibid.*, f. 194, 30 August 1846.

men in your support and we are quite ready to start a requisition to you to come forward as a candidate.³⁴

Gladstone's response was cautious, perhaps because of the Free Kirk complications, which Bonham thought would make success doubtful.³⁵ In his answer he made it clear, he told Bonham, "*That I could not stir except upon a requisition of such a nature as to exclude all reasonable doubts of success—nor could I be liable as matters now stand for expenses unless both legal and very limited...*" "It will surprise me much, all things considered", Gladstone added, "if the good folk of Aberdeen show a disposition to be represented by me. But unless they do show such a disposition unequivocally, I am by no means disposed to disturb their peace".³⁶ Skene, for his part continued to write optimistically,³⁷ and offered his own professional services gratuitously, but on September 8 he had to report that "Mr. Bannerman will not retire as soon as expected".³⁸ Thus Aberdeen, like Dorchester, was left up in the air, but it was clear from their continued correspondence that Gladstone found Skene's liberal views congenial.³⁹ Indeed Skene placed more faith in the liberalism of the Peelite Conservative than of the Whig Government.⁴⁰

As late as the following July Gladstone was consulting Lord Aberdeen as to the possibility of contesting the Aberdeen seat in the event of his being defeated for Oxford, but he hesitated to run against a Whig "of moderate views and stable character".⁴¹ In the end, however, as we shall see such insurance was not necessary.

In October Bonham reported two further possibilities, one at Newcastle-under-Lyme in view of the dangerous illness of one of its members, J. C. Colquhoun, the other at Wolverhampton, where Charles Villiers was expected to vacate a seat upon appointment to the governorship of Bombay.⁴² Neither of these openings materialized, however, since Colquhoun recovered and Villiers failed to receive his appointment.⁴³

Nothing daunted Bonham continued the search and one day in November dashed off a breathless note to his client that deserves quotation in full:

I have only a moment to send you a rumour which I am *not* able to authenticate that Sir G. Cockburn has had an apoplectic attack of the most severe kind, at 75 this is serious. I will write to you again Monday.

³⁴ Ad. Ms. 44364, ff. 317-322, 24 August 1846.

³⁵ Ad. Ms. 44110, f. 194, 30 August 1846.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 192-193, 27 August 1846; Ad. Ms. 44364, ff. 351-352, 27 August 1846.

³⁷ Ad. Ms. 44364, ff. 335-338, 363-368, 26 and 29 August 1846.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 14-15, 8 September 1846.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 18-21, 11 September 1846.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 34-39, 23 September 1846.

⁴¹ Ad. Ms. 43070, ff. 188-189, 30 July 1847.

⁴² Ad. Ms. 44110, ff. 196-197, 17 October 1846.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, ff. 200-201, 29 October 1846.

If he dies Lord de Grey will have the return for Rippon [sic]. Could you manage this? ⁴⁴

Gladstone answered with suitable reserve:

If, as I trust may not be the case, so valuable a man as Cockburn is to be lost whether by death or otherwise to the public service, there will indeed be an opening at Ripon, but I fear that I have no means of putting myself in Lord De Grey's way. ⁴⁵

Bonham must have sometimes felt that his client was not the easiest man to help. Nevertheless he continued to issue bulletins on the state of Cockburn's health. On 24 November he was able to report that the physician "was recalled by express messenger to see Sir George who had just suffered a severe stroke of apoplexy", ⁴⁶ but on the next day he had to admit that the patient was considered "out of *immediate* danger". Paralysis, however, precluded any further political activity. ⁴⁷

On 3 December Bonham wrote again, observing that "poor Sir George is not at all rallying, tho' he may linger for some time". ⁴⁸ The important news in this letter, however, was that "'Jeremy' Bradshaw the M. P. for *Canterbury* is in a most hopeless state and his dissolution hourly expected". Since he was no longer acting as a general party manager Bonham could not vouch for the state of the constituency, but knew "of late years it was very conservative". He suggested that Gladstone's name "could not be without effect" there and he had "little doubt that the seat now obtained would be perfectly safe at a General Election and on a footing too of perfect independence".

But Gladstone was a difficult man to please in these matters.

I am afraid [he wrote] of altogether arresting, by my chilling replies, your labours in a field so unprofitable as that of my parliamentary interests — but I suppose the real trouble is, though I have scarcely yet spoken it out to myself, that I feel a great repugnance to introducing myself to leaders of any constituency in the way of solicitation . . .

The constituency of *Canterbury* I should suppose from rumour to be a very corrupt one. Ripon would be delightful but is too good to hope [for]. Lord de Grey knows my case If he is not disposed to lift the lame dog over the style without my barking to remind him, I do not think the sound of my voice will mend his inclination. ⁴⁹

In the meantime he had authorized his wife's brother-in-law, Lord Lyttelton, to look into a possible vacancy in *Worcestershire*, which he would gladly seize "to put an end in some way to embarrassment", but he did

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 204 (21 November 1846).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 205-206, 24 November 1846.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 207, 24 November 1846.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 208, 25 November 1846.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 209-210, 3 December 1846.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 211-212, 8 December 1846.

not expect it to come to anything. "I shall indeed very gladly find myself in but if I remain out I do not know that anybody will be much the worse for it."

Early in the new year Wigan again became a possibility with the illness of Captain Lindsay's colleague. Stuart Wortley was one of several friends to bring this to Gladstone's attention: "I write one line to say that poor Standish is lying in a hopeless state and is not likely to survive a week. I don't know whether you have still any thoughts of the case, but Lindsay told me that he thought that unless a native was in the field you would have a very good chance there."⁵⁰ In view of his previous correspondence with Lindsay Gladstone was of the opinion that he could scarcely become a candidate without the concurrence of the two parties "which", he wrote to Bonham, "they can only be likely to give in the improbable contingency of their each being convinced that the antagonist is formidable and the struggle for the seat during the short remainder of the Parliament not worthwhile."⁵¹ Nevertheless Gladstone solicited the assistance of another friend Wilson Patten who sounded out the Liberal agent. The latter was forthcoming but thought his party would "hesitate to allow a member not of their own opinions to be elected now."⁵² Sir John Young, Peel's former chief whip, who was also consulted believed the Radicals were unlikely to allow the seat to go uncontested, but in any event he reported that Standish was "better and in no immediate danger."⁵³ So the prospects at Wigan again faded, but Patten promised that he was keeping his eye on several boroughs in his own county and might have something to propose when they next met.

At the end of March the Dorchester possibility came to a head with a long letter from Williams informing Gladstone of his father's recent death and of his decision to sell the property. He continued:

Now will you buy? Your father seemed inclined towards it once — and I am unwilling to lose the chance of providing the town of Dorchester such a portion. I therefore make you the first offer before communicating with anyone else on the subject. I told you once before I that I considered £50,000 *about* the price — independent of the house and grounds . . .

With respect to the seat — I am pretty sure you may reckon with it — at the same time there *is* an independent portion of the constituency — which might overpower both my property and Lord Shaftesbury's put together if all *combined* against the two properties. But the principal people of the place are very anxious to avoid a contest, and would probably gladly rally around such a landlord as yourself — whom they would expect, on the other hand, to show himself heartily interested in the borough . . .

⁵⁰ Ad. Ms. 44365, ff. 106-107, 2 February 1847.

⁵¹ Ad. Ms. 44110, ff. 213-214, 2 February 1847.

⁵² Ad. Ms. 44365, ff. 116-117 (11 February 1847 ?).

⁵³ Ad. Ms. 44237, ff. 184-187, 17 February 1847.

If you lived in Wollaston House yourself for a month or two in the autumn and Winter — attended sessions and Assizes — and took an interest in the institutions of the town I have no doubt you would easily secure their permanent support — and this approaches almost as near to a close seat as any other in these days.⁵⁴

Gladstone declined the offer as one beyond his reach and so ended the prospects of a safe seat at Dorchester, since Williams was committed to an early sale.⁵⁵

Other possible openings appeared at Leicester, Boston and Scarborough, but none seemed to attract our fastidious seat hunter.⁵⁶ In the cases of Boston and Scarborough, he objected to the necessity of treating, a subject on which he had strong views as may be seen from the following extract from a letter to Sir F. W. French who had suggested the Scarborough seat:

I have always entertained an insuperable objection to what is called treating at elections as well as to whatever resembles political corruption. I am aware indeed that the services of many people may be required in a [contested?] election as well as the use of many articles, and that the expenditure connected with them cannot well be conducted with the same care as that of a domestic establishment. I do not now refer to laxity of this kind within any moderate bounds, but under the name of treating I mean to include all those methods of entertainment which lead to drunkenness and debauchery, and under that of political corruption I could not refuse to class all payments so arranged as in fact though not in form to give the voter a price for his vote. Now I do not know enough of your election at Scarborough to be able to judge whether my views might prove to be in harmony with those of the leaders of the constituency upon these vital subjects, and think it right to put them forward prominently and in the first instance...⁵⁷

Finally the long hunt came to an end when Gladstone found a most congenial haven in his old home — the University of Oxford, where he was nominated on the eve of the General Election. As early as January 1846 Stafford Northcote, who had been his private secretary at the Board of Trade, had raised the possibility of his representing Oxford University should Escourt, one of the sitting members, decide to retire.⁵⁸ Some people felt that Gladstone was a natural candidate for the University seat, but there were two difficulties — his support of the Maynooth grant and the fact that he came from Christ Church, the same college as the senior Oxford member, Sir Robert Inglis, a reactionary but popular old Tory.

⁵⁴ Ad. Ms. 44365, ff. 127-134, 31 March 1847.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, ff. 138-139, 9 April 1847.

⁵⁶ Ad. Ms. 44262, ff. 10304, 20 April 1847.

⁵⁷ Ad. Ms. 44365, ff. 151-152, 30 April 1847, Draft.

In the same letter Gladstone emphasized his determination if he re-entered Parliament to do so without pledges and also indicated that he adhered to a strict rule of making no religious subscriptions in the community "except within the Communion the Church".

⁵⁸ Ad. Ms. 44216, ff. 36-37, 21 January 1846.

Early in 1847 Northcote and others again reopened the question but it was not until May that the way was in the end cleared by Estcourt's decision to retire. Gladstone and his enthusiastic supporters both in Oxford and in London consequently began to make their plans for the coming General Election.⁵⁹

There was, however, one unfortunate snag. Edward Cardwell, a junior colleague of Gladstone's in Peel's administration, was also a contestant for the vacant seat, as well as a nonentity by the name of Round. While there was little difference in their political views, Cardwell was a more acceptable candidate than Gladstone in the eyes of the Low Church interest. At any rate Gladstone's committee, regarding Inglis' seat as safe, concentrated on Cardwell as the main opponent. They acknowledged Cardwell's administrative talent but asked whether he had "any very definite political or politico-religious principles at all", and if so whether they coincided "with those of members of Convocation". The Gladstone election circular posed three choices:

Mr. Round will feel with you, and vote for you. Will he or can he do more? Mr. Cardwell will advocate your claims—unless indeed the obnoxious measure is a Government one, and he is in the Administration; and then which will be more prominent—the member of the University or the rising Politician?

Mr. Gladstone both thinks and feels with you.... Vote for Mr. Gladstone.⁶⁰

Cardwell must have resented these tactics, but when he saw what way the wind was blowing he decided to withdraw and contest instead the important Liverpool seat which Gladstone had investigated the previous year.⁶¹ Gladstone responded to the news with a typically involved but friendly letter.⁶²

This withdrawal enabled Peel to give Gladstone support previously withheld as he explained in a frank letter in which he wrote:

Before I heard of your intention to be a candidate, and under the firm persuasion that the University of Oxford would object to be represented by two members of the same College, I had committed myself to Cardwell—preferring him as the representative of the University to anyone known to me not being a member of Christ Church. His withdrawal restores to

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 43-121 and Ad. Ms. 44365, ff. 163-192. Ad. Ms. 44138, ff. 1-5, for numerous letters regarding the Oxford contest.

⁶⁰ Ad. Ms. 44565, f. 76, 19 May 1847. This broadsheet did not spare poor Cardwell. "Of Mr. Cardwell's talents", it ran, "all are aware. He fitted ably and well a subordinate office in the Treasury, a subordinate position in the House of Commons. He was most useful in the Executive under the guidance of Sir Robert Peel. But we must enquire further, not respecting the Secretary of the Treasury, but the individual Mr. Cardwell,—is the soundness of his own principles as certain as his skill in carrying out those of others..."

⁶¹ Ad. Ms. 44118, f. 8, 21 June 1847.

⁶² *Ibid.*, ff. 9-10, 21 June 1847.

me an unfettered discretion and I shall exercise it with the greatest satisfaction in your favour.⁶³

Gladstone thanked Peel for his "generous" support, generous "because it touches matters on which I stand less near to you than, happily for me, I have stood in the region of opinions purely political". Of his position vis à vis Cardwell he was perhaps not entirely straightforward when he wrote:

It was very painful for me to stand even in seeming opposition to Cardwell: though it was in seeming opposition only for I am pretty confident that I did not hold off from him votes enough to have placed him in a position of reciprocity to Round. If it was otherwise I should regret having deprived Oxford of a very valuable representation.⁶⁴

The story of the Oxford election itself has been told by Morley.⁶⁵ It was a stiff fight but Gladstone beat Round for second place by 997 to 824. Northcote, who acted as Gladstone's agent, reported from Oxford: "The victory is not looked upon as Puseyite; it is a victory of the masters over the Hebdomadal Board."⁶⁶

One need not labour the moral of the story, but may suggest that it provides a nice illustration of how the old order lingered on in the years between the First and Second Reform Acts. In this respect it merely illuminates the thesis presented by Professor Norman Gash in his *Politics in the Age of Peel*. Indeed Gash told part of the story himself, but it seemed that the whole episode is not undeserving of fuller attention than he could give it in a few pages.⁶⁷ It is offered as a piece of Gladstoniana that Morley and other biographers have ignored.

If you did not have local influence in a small borough in those days, then it was a difficult and expensive task to get into Parliament and one that might well involve recourse to methods repugnant to a man of Gladstone's moral sensitivity. It was not until he had become a great national figure that he could contest large popular constituencies such as South Lancashire or Greenwich with hope of success: and by that time we are moving into the era of the Second Reform Act. Newark and Oxford University were suitable seats for the younger Gladstone in the age of Peel and Palmerston.

⁶³ Ad. Ms. 44275, ff. 309-310, 24 June 1847.

⁶⁴ Ad. Ms. 40470, ff. 444-445, 24 June 1847.

⁶⁵ Morley, *Gladstone*, I, pp. 327-336. See also Gladstone's recollections write late in life in Ad. Ms. 44791, ff. 88-9.

⁶⁶ Ad. Ms. 44216, ff. 103-106. The election cost Gladstone £1,328 of which £747 was for printing, advertising, postage, etc., £403 for travelling and £176 for rent, wages, etc. (*Ibid.*, f. 203).

⁶⁷ Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel*, pp. 235-238.