

Kevin A. Morrison, "John Morley through French Eyes"

French admire J. Morley immensely."¹² She continues: "I can quite see how thoughtful Frenchmen must be struck by Morley [...]. He looks at life from a height, quietly, objectively, and a little greyly." "There is," she concluded, "a thin line between his principles and his personality" (47).

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From John Morley: Critic, Journalist, and Statesman

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[....] John Morley's political genesis is quite different [from Lord Randolph Churchill or Joseph Chamberlain]. From the meditations of the study, he went into journalism, and from there, to the responsibilities of power, not as a disillusioned or cynical individual turning his back on the philosophical ideal of his youth, but instead as a practical logician who does not believe he has fully explored the depth of his ideas until he has put them into practice, and for whom action is the second stage of life, after thought. Until then, there was many an example of thinkers who had pitifully failed in Parliament. Mr. Morley's success in these two fields is significant: he shakes up the old notion according to which there are two kinds of intelligence that ignore and scorn each other: the creators of ideas and the leaders of men.

Although for a long time he was the only one of his opinion on an issue of national interest [home rule for Ireland], Mr. Morley suddenly saw half of England rally to his point of view. Overnight, he became the spokesperson for a large party that would govern tomorrow, the inspiration

and the heir apparent to the old Gladstone. Like it or not, this theoretician, this “reasoner,” the first English leader to have come out of our ranks – us, people of letters – who, in power represents the Idea, just as Randolph Churchill represented modernised Tradition and Joseph Chamberlain the popular interests. Let us look at the man and let time be the judge of his work.



A wide peaceful street in South Kensington, with no shops, a straight perspective of one hundred similar houses, with front steps, gate, four floors and three windows at the front. You ring the doorbell of one of these houses that cannot be told apart from the one next door.¹³ A parlormaid greets you, wearing the traditional bonnet and printed cotton dress if it is morning, or black merino wool if it is after 3 o’clock. You have an appointment: you are introduced without unnecessary words. A feeling of contemplation takes hold of you. There are no noises of children. The house is silent. Ben Jonson’s character who hated noise and only wanted to be surrounded by mutes,¹⁴ would have gladly settled in such a place. Halfway up the well-lit staircase is a large mirror, in which the visitor can see himself climbing the stairs. On the first floor, you are left on your own in a drawing room that reinforces the impression [of this house as a place for quiet contemplation]. Bookshelves take up an entire wall. No knickknacks, no bright colors, not a trace of affectation or exoticism. The furniture is vaguely modern, without an exact date and without a distinguishing style. There is a severity halfway between banality and elegance in a harmony of subtle and pale tones. The master of the house must like whiteness, not the glaring, aggressive whiteness that affronts the eye, but the discreet, slightly gray whiteness that rests and caresses the sight, and which, to the thinker, may have the symbolic charm of a synthesis of colors.

The door opens, Mr. Morley appears in the doorway, very straight, a little stiff: the half-century he has already lived does not weigh the least on his shoulders. If the first impression remains uncertain, it must be one’s own fault, as never has a physiognomy appeared more frank. The short smoothed down hair makes the forehead look wide and high. No beard or

moustache, none of these parasite growths, which are, according to a Church father, a lie to the truth of the human face. But already the dual nature, the man's dual vocation is revealed and is starting to worry the person who has come here to study and penetrate him. Looking at him sideways, with his sharp, almost aggressive nose, taking with it the mouth forward, he has an expression of battle. He looks ready to attack. Face to face, all you can see are those clear and calm eyes, searching and thinking in the shadow of the eyebrows' arch.

Quick, without brusqueness, polite, but grave, Mr. Morley leads the visitor to his office. All the tools for intellectual work – more books and a lot more light – are located there. Seated opposite you, Mr. Morley is ready to hear you, as he has a quality that is rare for a master of words: he listens admirably. If you ask him to reveal a few words about himself, avoiding vulgar biographical confidences, he will simply and modestly explain his intellectual life. He will extend his hand towards a group of portraits hung to the wall amongst which the expressive faces of two old men stand out, and he will tell you: "Two men made me, John Stuart Mill and Mr. Gladstone." [...] But do not forget that John Morley, disciple of Mill, friend of Chamberlain, lieutenant of Gladstone, is above all John Morley.

He was born in December 1838 in Blackburn, where his father was, I believe, a doctor.¹⁵ This very year [1891], as he was reproached for his extreme sensitivity about an Irish riot, he said in the Commons, with a smile: "The sight of smashed heads does not scare me; I was brought up in a surgeon's dispensary." From there, he went to college in Cheltenham, and then to Oxford. At the age of twenty, he was a Bachelor of Arts and a lawyer. (He later became a Master of Arts). The year was 1859. Until then he had followed everyman's path. His vocation as a literary man affirmed itself and his taste for writing was already accompanied with a need for independence and authority, as we find him, before the age of twenty-five, editor of the *Literary Gazette*, which soon became *Parthenon* and which, in its format, its internal division and the general characteristics of the editing, resembles the *Athenaeum*, its competitor. In 1867, [George Henry] Lewes gave John Morley the

Fortnightly Review,¹⁶ which had recently been launched and was still largely unknown. What Mr. Morley did with it during his editorship of fifteen years, we shall see later. [...]

The time for the biography has not yet come for Mr. Morley. I am merely recounting the history of his ideas. I am drawing it from his [...] writings. I am guessing at it from the general or more specific influences to which he was submitted during the decisive years of his intellectual formation. However, a few testimonies collected here and there show him as a young man of serious morals. "We have never seen Mr. Morley enjoy himself," writes one of his former political press colleagues. Do not conclude that he did not have the ability to lighten up. "Laughter," he said, "has a beautiful place in life." But his was not everyone's laugh and did not come from the same causes. He was not, like the other Englishmen his own age, a good punter, an intrepid cyclist, a skilled cricketer, or a footballer. He was, I imagine, a very average rider and a mediocre hunter. He liked music, the type that proffers emotions, the kind that hurts because it gives so much pleasure. He also liked the countryside and taking long walks together with a friend. [...] In the pleasant countryside around Guildford, where the wide open plateaus alternate with shadowy retreats, he had more than once as a companion his master and friend Stuart Mill [...] or Owen Meredith,¹⁷ who, in the evening in the parlor of some rustic inn, read to him the stanzas written the same morning, the chapter of a book sketched during the day. If he did not have a companion, he most probably had in his pocket one of his favorite books, about which he will soon tell us. Sometimes he had a poet or a novelist: George Sand, who was to him "the first writer of prose of the century"; Goethe, who, despite Stuart Mill's authority, he preferred to Schiller; Wordsworth, who impressed upon English morality the romantic feeling of the visible world's beauty; and Emerson, "the only reformer who calms," the only thinker of this time who united science and democracy. Emerson: for whom poetry is only the natural language of religious philosophy and who "through translating the thought of Kant through Coleridge, made it a gospel."

[...] [In regard to domestic matters,] it is indiscreet to probe the private life of one's contemporary. But on the other hand, it is difficult to speak about a man when you do not know what place a woman holds in a man's life. [...] Without being puritanical, I believe that he must always have had this taste for whiteness, which is apparent in his house. This severe man must have been – as much as any other – capable of love; but there is a refinement of spirit that protects from certain failings and serves as a virtue better than virtue itself.¹⁸ Virtue! In England, more so than anywhere else, it can become unpleasant. It preaches, quacks, intones, and damns, with a heart of stone and a tender voice, those who do good according to a different formula and seek the truth through other means. This is what is called *cant*. Mr. Morley hates *cant*. He has more than once treated rudely those who can only say "Lord! Lord." He wrote about Byron: "Great Britain deserved Don Juan. A nation, whose disrespect for all ideas and aspirations that cannot be supported by a text, nor circulated by a religious tract society [...] received no more than chastisement in 'the literature of Satan.'" This does not mean that there was nothing in common between Lord Byron's hero and Mr. Morley. As for the puritans, whose ridiculous jargon and ferocious exclusivism he hated, and who despised him because he would write the word God with a small g, he oftentimes had to work alongside them and, in one memorable circumstance in his life, he had to accept their moral instinct as a guide.

In some exceptional beings, the brain takes over and subordinates other organs. "We know," Mr. Morley says about Turgot, "the temperament which from the earliest hour consumes with eager desire for knowledge, and energizes spontaneously with unceasing and joyful activity in that bright and pure morning of intellectual curiosity, which neither the dull tumultuous needs of life nor the mists of spiritual misgivings have yet come up to make dim." If he knew this temperament so well it is because he had observed it in himself. He indicated in one word to which group of minds he belonged: "We need light even more than heat."

In order to find this light, he had to find his direction first. What were others thinking when Mr. Morley started to write? Which men and ideas

reigned? He said himself, “In my Oxford days, the star of Newman had set and the sun of Stuart Mill had risen.” In [my essay] about the historian [J.A.] Froude for this *Revue*, I tried to define the influence of the great recently departed Cardinal Newman, who almost undid the Anglican reform.¹⁹ On one of these days when his genius was frothing at the mouth, [Thomas] Carlyle said of Newman that he must have “the intellect of an average-sized rabbit.” Mr. Morley would not have given such coarse form to his disdain. He half felt the penetrating charm of the unique pages of the *Apology*, but he believed humanity had had enough of theology, as a twenty-year old man believes he will never once again read *Donkey Skin*.²⁰

[Thomas Babington] Macaulay was acclaimed, as was Stuart Mill. The famous historian had just died at the height of his glory. Knowing the *[Critical and Historical] Essays* by heart and being able to quote sentences was then a journalist’s first duty. Not only did Mr. Morley not admire Macaulay, he must have been one of the first to attack, one of the most bitter to denounce this bourgeois rhetoric hiding underneath its brilliant staging, with much ignorance and error, mediocrity – one could even say moral vulgarity. Macaulay has the merit of always saying something, but this “something,” what is it worth? With Macaulay, as with [Adolphe] Thiers,²¹ science is done and society is fine as it is; the human mind is achieved, and consequently stalled. Their rally is success. Their method is to please. Their art is to praise their friends and adorn their ideas. For thirty years, Macaulay forbade the study of the 1688 revolution, just as Thiers had forbidden writing the story of Napoleon.

But the English youth had other masters. Carlyle – this “moral force,” whose development and influence Goethe had predicted thirty years earlier in a conversation with [Johann Peter] Eckermann²² – was reaching the pinnacle of his popularity. While in his Chelsea attic turned into a research studio²³ and struggling with his last book, which was so difficult to publish, the new generations were devouring his *Cromwell*, his *French Revolution*, his *Heroes and Hero Worship*, and even *Sartor Resartus*, which had previously been rejected by the publishers. The admirable artist – the prestigious writer Carlyle did not want to be, but was nonetheless –

was working on John Morley's nerves without touching him fully. He admitted that "in its most humble parts, Carlyle's work reflects the whole universe," that "Carlylism had brought back to respect the revolted world of Byronism." But he did not follow the Sage of Chelsea, because he wanted to go somewhere and the Sage of Chelsea leads nowhere.

Evolutionism had just appeared and was making a quick fortune, invading all areas. Behind Darwin were [John] Tyndall and [Thomas Henry] Huxley. Christianity, the nominal religion, was cooling off and becoming emptier by the day. It had merely become – so it was thought – a cenotaph, a hollow under official drapes. Science was going to explain everything and propound everything. There were a few years of confident and conceited satisfaction, a moment of enthusiasm, which will probably be the last in the history of the mind. What made it stronger was that it coincided with a beatitude spreading out the social body, similar to the beatitude that spreads through the physical body after a copious meal and good digestion. England had never earned so much money. Humanity, having finally reached adulthood, had broken free from all religious, economic, and military superstitions. No more dogma, no more boundaries, no more wars. One only had to live happily and do business.

John Morley had been bathed in this positivism in which he had been born and grown up. But he was already carrying inside him a secret protestation against the optimism of science and society. Stuart Mill himself could not have convinced him that logic alone governs everything. When he praised his master of "never leaving a problem without having solved it," he must have thought that the really great minds are those who know insoluble problems.

He was a melancholic. Not the type of melancholia that follows pleasure or effort: of the first, he had little concern for, and the second, far from crushing him, was giving him a healthy excitation. But his melancholia had been born with him. From the very first glance at the world around him, he had known that the world was bad, that it could get better and that it will never be good; that "the things called intelligence and human goodness are built up painfully, with a lot of patience and

despicable materials.” One of the first of his time, one of the only among his race, in the midst of the vacuous joviality or the busy brutality, he could smell this fragrance of death, this fine and delicate odor of autumn rot characterizing the end of a civilization and that some today savor to the point of inebriation.

This pessimistic disposition leads many writers to wither into revolt and a kind of mental anarchy, or to the abdication of reason and voluntary subjection, or eventually to some state of sad and feeble indifference, in which the artist survives by himself and is only capable of translating sensations. John Morley could not fall victim to any of these feelings. His masters had taught him to revere the idea of law, whose field science has extended indefinitely. It was this idea that had to be “the great modern inspiration.” It is in the very conscious participation into the game and the march of the forces of nature that the happiness of intelligence resides. He believed in this noble idea. To tackle it and make it his own, he could, like the others, build a system. He chose instead to become a critic and an historian. [...] That the religion of law came out of this research weakened or strengthened, the years of action would come after the years of study and thought. I dare say it was the plan of a beautiful life. If action does not apply the conquered principles, it consoles from the disappointments of speculation. There are two beautiful words in human languages: truth and freedom. Which of these two is divine? This is what John Morley was looking for by trying, in turn, through history, the virtues of these two words.



[....] With so many ideas analyzed, criticized, judged *a priori* or *a posteriori*, in their philosophical principle or in their historical consequences, he still had a certain number of acquired notions, facts from experience, high or low probabilities, truths and half-truths, leaving between them contradictions and gaps, but no system. Mr. Morley would admit it, and this was his originality amongst the thinkers. Indeed, the only system, the true explanation of the world is Science, which is always in a process of formation and progress. None of us will ever know total and definitive Science. Man was made to search, and the day he finds, he will just have to disappear.

This conception of life and science produces in some a disposition to sluggishness, indifference or abstention: "What is the point of effort, since the path is so hard and the truth so far away! One might as well live in an old house built of errors and furnished with prejudice! Let us make it comfortable for us and for our children!" Mr. Morley did not share this opinion. This world was simply an immense rough draft, a gigantic makeshift: so be it. Each generation nonetheless had the duty to attempt to improve it. The human history, with its countless abortions, wasted efforts, and wasted energies it tells is far from having exhausted all its possibilities. What has been found is imperceptible besides what is yet to be discovered. What has been done is nothing besides all that is yet to be done. Evolution is not a cause, but a law which will be accomplished without us and even against us, but which will be accomplished better and faster if we give it our spontaneous adhesion, our intelligent and enthusiastic support. Let us work on our dual task: widen the field of knowledge and better the human fate. Two related tasks: for every acquisition of understanding is an extension of life, a social progression, provided the philosopher and the legislator can agree. In order to impose this agreement and dictate its precise terms, Mr. Morley wrote the boldest, most significant and most controversial of his books: *On Compromise*.

[...] A great writer dreamt of a cross on the Eiffel Tower. Mr. Morley also felt the need to crown the scientific building for which our generation has been the prodigious architect, and, in the last part of his book, *On Compromise*, he vaguely sketched the religion of the future as he predicts it. He lets us catch a glimpse of "the legend of Pity incorporated into some new and wider gospel," for which a purified Christianity would provide the material, as the faith of the scientific eras will come from the current faith, as it came from the Jewish faith. But, in the same way Christianity violently broke away from Judaism, it will also be in the midst of struggles and rifts that the new religion will be born. "It will not bring peace, but a sword." Cursed by its own mother, it will fight it mercilessly.

It was in fact a very frank, slightly harsh, hardly conciliatory book, imperious as a summons. Mr. Morley's goodness did not come with

sweetness. Even his pity, coming from too high, could hurt. The book was widely noticed and widely read. It gave thinking England a salutary tremor. It awakened those who were slumbering on the edge of abyss, troubled in their peace these elegant Agnostics of the established Church who “commit when entering life to no longer search,” and who “in order to insure their material existence make the pact to walk through the world masked and gagged.” It is good that, from time to time, those who do not want to think, those who play with words and cheat with their understanding be invited to choose between the aye and the no. But if we were to listen to Mr. Morley, the churches would be empty this very day! Let them be empty, and from tomorrow they would fill up with another race of men worthy of collecting the Word from the very lips of Paul or Augustine!

Very few people dared to approve of *On Compromise*.²² However, Mr. Morley’s politico-historical writings received a respectful and pleasant welcome. He tackled Burke twice, in 1869 and in 1878. The first study is an analytical and critical dissertation; the second, more a biography, belongs to the famous series of *The English Men of Letters*. Written ten years apart, these three texts do not betray any sensitive divergence between the young man’s and the mature man’s thoughts. One may only perceive in one more confidence in the virtue of principles, and in the other a deeper, more detailed knowledge of government.

Mr. Morley’s *Burke* and *Walpole* deserve to be studied for pleasure, as lessons in political science and works of art. [...] Although they belonged to the same party, these two characters appear to be at each extremity of politics. One is a skilled handler of men and a great businessman. To help the French readers understand him, they perhaps ought to be told that Walpole is essentially “bourgeois,” if the word can be applied to an eighteenth-century English gentleman, hunter, player, drunk, atheist, and libertine. And Burke? Burke is “the Bossuet of politics.” He loved and admired the English Constitution, as it ought to be loved and admired. “One believes, one does not understand and one is saved.” This much suffices, and the reader can see it, whilst a slight effort

was necessary for Mr. Morley to sympathise with Burke, he needed a much greater one to understand Walpole. He judged this effort to be useful. First of all, he was tired of being called a doctrinarian, and he would have written the entire book just so as to insert this little proposal, which summarizes it: "After all, the government's first task is the expedition of affairs." But he enjoyed proving to himself, once again, that theory and action are not enemies, that this page from Burke is merely the generalization of Walpole's governmental practice.

In order to end what I had to say about the writer, I have passed over the date of his entry into active politics, which may be situated in May 1880, at the time when he undertook the management of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. He had been at the head of the *Fortnightly Review* for over twelve years, which he had turned into one of the main organs of European thought, not without outraging and irritating some. It is not forbidden to believe that the *Fortnightly Review* borrowed some of its traits, and consequently some of the causes for its success, to the *Revue* in which this study is being published. Nevertheless, the *Fortnightly Review* was in all aspects different from the old quarterly reviews. In its tone, its form, the subject distribution, the size of its articles, especially the fact that, neither frivolous nor solemn, it was essentially modern. Its triumph established their decrepitude. Very "advanced" in political, religious, and pedagogical questions, it was open, with a welcoming eclecticism, to all that was new, daring, and curious. In 1870, it did not celebrate our sorrows. It did not, along with the old Carlyle, celebrate the birth of Germany as a victory of justice and intelligence. Apart from a few banal insults to Napoleon III and a few undeserved sarcasms against the conservative Republic, which then saved our country, the *Fortnightly Review* proved to be sympathetic toward France, its recovery, the restoration of its influence, the definitive establishment of its new form of government, to the point of being itself suspected of republicanism.

Mr. Morley was taking a big step going from the periodical press to the militant press, from the battle of ideas, serene and peaceful indeed, to the otherwise noisy and furious scrum of men and interests. The confidences of his former lieutenant allow us to follow him in the

managing office of Northumberland Street, of which I presently have the photographic reproduction under my eyes and which, with its disorderly chairs, its pillaged bookcases, its books lying open, its carpet littered with torn and crunched up papers unmistakably suggest the idea of daily skirmishes, of the never ending combat of arguments, in which wounds are cured with new injuries and in which the dead are left to bury themselves. Each morning, arriving in the still deserted and fresh room, themselves refreshed by the night's sleep and the morning air, the editor and the sub-editor would start from the first word, launch into a discussion of principles, until the moment when Mr. Morley would put an end to this useless effusion of intellectual blood and bring his young and fiery companion back to the issues of the day.

At the journal, no one was taking liberties with Mr. Morley. He was liked and he was feared. Sometimes he would have a slight bout of gout in his foot. In a nervous twitch, in a greater stiffness of the whole physical being, one could feel the storm brewing: "On these days, his collaborator told us, everyone was behaving perfectly at the *Pall Mall Gazette*." Besides, never a harsh word, nor a rude word. No one was better at listening to the contradiction. It was around this time that Mr. Gladstone told Mrs. Novikoff about Morley: "We all like Mr. Morley because he is humble."²⁵ Humble! This sometimes-aggressive snobbish thinker! Humble! The one who would easily call men "these cheese worms"! This word uttered by Gladstone may be surprising. It ought to have been imagined. However, it does not surprise the very people who have worked under Mr. Morley. In each of his orders, as in all his reproaches, there was a sad leniency for human misery. He would not ask people more than they could, remembering that he was strong and that he too had been weak at times.

[...] At the *Pall Mall [Gazette]*, he would deal with only one question, the Irish question, studying it every day with attention, sympathy, and increasing passion and modifying his ideas or, rather, developing his convictions on this point according to his discoveries. Besides, it was in order to mature this Irish issue that he had entered the *Pall Mall Gazette*

at the same time as his friend Chamberlain had entered the cabinet. How can one not talk about this friendship, which occupied such an important place in their lives? In these already faraway times of the Beaconsfield Parliament, from 1874 to 1880, Morley and Chamberlain were seen many times occupying neighboring stalls and returning home chatting, arm in arm, through the solitude of the noisy streets. Talking of this era with a nuance of sadness, Mr. Morley was telling me: "We were brothers." I repeated the word to Mr. Chamberlain, who gravely responded: "It is true." What men and what friendship! But which one of the two was the leader, the inspiration? When Mr. Morley opened the *Fortnightly Review* to Mr. Chamberlain, the latter was still only a provincial great man, the Birmingham idol, "our Joseph," the municipal spokesperson crowned with a half-menacing half-ridiculous revolutionary aura. Thanks to the *Fortnightly Review*, his true character and talent were revealed as an eloquent logician, at once daring and skilled, enlightened and refined, who drew his great force from common sense. In turn, Mr. Chamberlain, having become a minister, was leading his friend into a common campaign that was not devoid of perils for either the journalist or the statesman. The task at hand was to bring ahead the Irish issue, which no one in England wanted to hear about. [...]

[...] Mr. Morley's opinion had long been made up when it came to Ireland on the issue of history. Seven centuries of plundering and violence, indifference alternating with ferocity. Not a hint of humanity or political wisdom. Not even the intelligence of a farmer sparing his mare so that it does not die. Such were his compatriots in Ireland until the end of the eighteenth century, and such did they appear to Mr. Morley. No one could, on the other side of Saint-George Channel, find expressions stronger than his. As for the Union, the issue was becoming dubious. England had proven its good will by emancipating the Catholics, disestablishing the Church of Ireland, reviewing the agrarian issue and preluding a reform of land ownership with a few timid legislative drafts. On the other hand, Ireland had compromised its cause with Fenianism and obstruction – that is to say, through violence and bullying. Everyone agreed that it was

presently ungovernable. Were the governors or the governed to be blamed? In 1878, in *The Life of Burke*, Mr. Morley was still sticking to the solution of all the English statesmen: "Ireland is too near to be independent; its future, its happiness as a nation consist in the equal sharing of the duties and the benefits with the mainland." In 1880, in an electoral manifesto addressed to the Westminster voters, he was still of the opinion that there was no Irish issue to be put on the Liberal party's agenda. [...]

For many people, and even for a large number of journalists, a journal office is a noisy and dirty place, in which many muddy feet and absurd speculations pass through. It is a shop of news, where scissors play a greater role than the pen. It is the domain of the transient, in which ideas die of decay at the age of twenty-four hours. For minds such as Mr. Morley's, a journal office is a surgery of social and political vivisection, a chamber of experiments in which facts penetrate like a flood, drop from everywhere, flow in through the post, the telegraph, the telephone, climb the stairs in human form to be studied and catalogued. The experience of the day denies that of the previous day and will be contradicted by tomorrow's; the conviction, hardly born and still unsettled, is subjected to terrible tremors, which almost knock it over. Never mind. Notions are sorted, gathered, flattened. Inductions are formed by themselves and are condensed into laws.

I suppose this is what happened from 1880 to 1883 in the Northumberland Street office, where Mr. Morley was meditating at the heart of the action. He then became intimately linked to the Irish MPs, who the English public opinion pictured as a gang of mindless adventurers, but who instead constituted an élite of talents. [...] Not satisfied with merely listening to them and hundreds of others, Mr. Morley several times went to Ireland, pursuing his inquiry, trying especially to penetrate the sorry mystery of a territorial system condemning to misery both the owner and the farmer. The nominated masters of the land being ruined, with no influence, no credit, the entire authority is handed over to the Catholic clergy and the popular party; a nation that can only be governed by

sentiment, which its current masters do not comprehend, actually determined to conquest its autonomy, whatever the cost, and to desperately fight until it gets it; sinister, destructive forces working in the shadow; the American Ireland rising behind Ireland and lending fighters, along with unlimited treasures, the possible support of the great Transatlantic republic: this is what Mr. Morley saw. A moment came when, in his mind free of prejudice, a double conviction imposed itself: the moral obligation and the political necessity to grant Ireland what it was demanding. We *had* to give in. It was essential to rid Ireland of England and rid England of Ireland. It was a danger for Westminster; the other was an intruder in Dublin Castle. Perfectly identical institutions could not suit different peoples. [...] He was becoming the man of practical solutions, crying out to his friends: "It is time, we must give in."

He shouted it out loud, but he was not listened to. Having become a member of the House of Commons, he proposed in November 1885 to amend the Crime Act, which placed Ireland in a kind of siege status. This amendment was not voted in. He was always stumbling over the same argument: he was being reproached by the popular violence, which, according to him, proved on the contrary the powerlessness of the coercive measures. Bizarrely, Mr. Chamberlain himself [...] was cooling off over Ireland, was becoming sceptical, almost indifferent; his smile, still as refined, likened to an athlete at rest, inspired worrying ambiguities. Mr. Morley was feeling the sadness, accompanied with some secret and melancholic delight, of being the only one of his opinion.



[...] Was Mr. Gladstone led – as was Mr. Morley – to change his mind about the Irish issue through a long series of patient and disinterested observations? Did the young writer, newly arrived within the parliamentary ring have the honor of converting his illustrious leader? Or was it merely a tactical coup, destined to ruin the secret plans of the Conservative leaders? [...] The solution to these questions should be left to more competent and more informed people, to the future, which will know how to tell everything and will tell everything. What struck the

spectators then was the way in which all the Home Rule neophytes gathered around Mr. Morley. From the background, from a kind of isolation, which is explained at once by his character, his opinions, the nature of his words, his origins as a thinker and a publisher, he was coming to the fore; he was becoming the deepest man in the party after Mr. Gladstone. It was because *he* was sincere, he was convinced, and he knew where we were heading to and why. [...]

He was, relatively speaking, a *homo novus* in Parliament. Having failed in 1869 to the Blackburn voters, in 1880 to the voters of the City of Westminster, he had been elected in Newcastle in February 1883 and re-elected in the General Elections of November 1885 by this large and populous constituency. Entering Parliament, he was bringing no illusion on the “more apparent than real bonhomie” presiding over these debates, on the average of vulgar and bourgeois ideas that reigned there, on what he would contemptuously call “the House of Commons’ view of human life.” His colleagues would listen to him with the deaf defiance of the businessmen and men of the world against the “ideologists.” His easy speech, always clear, often brilliant, would spread around it a cold doctrinal atmosphere from which his opponents would pretend to be frozen. When he was being compared to his fighting companion, Sir William Harcourt,²⁶ always agitated, always vibrant, always ready to leap and bite, much inferior as an intellectual power, much superior as a means of attack and riposte, one could have sworn that, of the two, Morley was the teacher. One must admit that the House of Commons has lost a great deal of brilliance and dignity over the past few years. It is noisy, distracted, impolite, [and] sneers or yawns [...] for anyone but the old Gladstone. When he is dead, the art of Chatham, Burke, Fox, Canning and Beaconsfield will die out, unless it seeks refuge in the House of Lords, with all the other old things that are going to die.

The task was particularly difficult and unrewarding for Mr. Morley to defend the Home Rule Bill and the Land Purchase Bill of 1886. He did not have to expose principles: his leader had fulfilled this task with a rare magnitude and a distinguished talent during the first presentation of the

proposed bills. He did not have to go into the details of the proposed measures, the discussion of the articles would take place only between the second and the third readings, when the House would be represented into a committee. His mission was to emphasize the issues left out or disregarded by Mr. Gladstone, to deal with new aspects of the question enlightened by the debate; [and] finally to sketch a few concessions and to prevent, by all means compatible with the party's dignity, the schism that could be felt. The two laws were doomed, everyone knew it. [...] Mr. Morley's advances [...] [had no] effect, and the second reading was rejected with a large majority. [...]

Over the past five years, Mr. Morley was able to preserve and consolidate the unique position that the circumstances and the friendship of Mr. Gladstone had given him. He was seen everywhere to be on the go. In London's eccentric quarters, in the provincial cities, he tackled vast popular meetings: his success disappointed his opponents and some of his friends. He learnt how to impose himself to these turbulent multitudes, how to turn them on, how to restrain them, how to talk to them, how to, at the end, leave imprinted in their minds some great enlightened statement. "You're the man for Ireland!" a member of the audience shouted at one of these large gatherings. This phrase was greeted with cries of approval and it will stick.

[...] At the same time he was fighting for the cause of the Home Rule to the popular gatherings and in Parliament, Mr. Morley was making frequent apparitions amongst the Irish. His triumphant arrival in Dublin with Lord Ripon in the evening of 1 February 1888 was not forgotten. The newspapers of the time described this procession, led by fifty masters of ceremony, lit by two thousand torches, and in which more than twenty thousand demonstrators took part; the choir, gymnastics and commercial societies, with their music and their flags; the firemen, easily recognizable with their shining helmets and their red shirts, the athletes, their bodies sheathed in colored jerseys, fishermen, with a green banner picturing [Arthur] Balfour stealing [William] O'Brien's clothes;²⁷ the heroes of the party, escorted by bodyguards from the fifteen quarters of the city; finally

the screams, the popular enthusiasm, the joy without disorder, the speeches from the high balconies and the fireworks illuminating the statue of [Daniel] O'Connell.²⁸ When Morley returned from this trip, he was the citizen of countless cities and towns in which he would never again set foot.

Less pompous, Mr. Morley's excursion to Tipperary in September 1890 was nonetheless typical, and made even more noise. The Newcastle MP, who had come to attend a political trial, found himself at the height of one of these factitious riots, created apparently by the police's brutality and awkwardness. He saw men being hit without provocation and led away from a place the law allowed them to enter, a peaceful crowd with ladies and children being charged by policemen in greater number. Finally, he saw the blood flow around him and himself had his hat knocked off. On the following day, the whole United Kingdom was discussing the affair. The authorities were shrugging their shoulders: "What was expected of them? What had moved Mr. Morley so much was a quite natural, almost daily incident. It was customary. Since there had been an Irish issue, the constables' batons had thrown thousands of hats to the ground; only none of these hats covered a skull as precious as Mr. John Morley's." Mr. Balfour, the Secretary for Ireland, with his somewhat bold poise, went on the offensive and mocked his colleague: "I like him better, he said, when he writes history than when he makes it." He was touching a sensitive point. Mr. Morley responded disdainfully in his speech of 7 October: "I have known for a long time that to enter political life, three things are required: an ardent heart, a cool head, and a thick skin." Challenged as an historian, he was lifting the glove and promised to write English history from Mr. Gladstone's latest fall to Lord Salisbury's next fall.



[....] The Irish issue made him rise to the front bench; but whether this issue is adjourned or resolved, he can no longer be in the shadow. I know that his severity and his boldness are not to everyone's taste. He does not flatter the workers or the patriots. He chose to repudiate the name *socialist* at the very time when it is for all the European statesmen fashionable to use it. He

would subscribe to abandoning India, if it was proven to him that India costs more than it benefits. His contempt for the commonplace makes terrible holes in the banality and the routine that constitutes mundane politics. If the mantle of Elijah were to fall on his shoulders, it is not certain that some hands would not attempt to tear it off. Even among his voters, there are dissenters and malcontents, as testified by anonymous letters in which some dare to predict that he will not be re-elected. With tranquil disdain, he responded: "Whether or not I am in the House of Commons, the sun will nonetheless shine on the horizon tomorrow." It is the word of a man who has remained above politics, above even his own ambition.

In the meantime, he appears to be more than ever authorized to speak in the name of his party. Only a few days ago (1 October), his illustrious leader [Gladstone] was granting him the honor to be the first to formulate a new liberal symbol, which will be memorable in history under the program name Newcastle. In this speech, one of the most incisive, one of the most vigorous he has ever uttered, John Morley was announcing that the eight-hour issue and the vaster question of the organization itself of work would be tackled and solved in the next Gladstonian Parliament. He had already stated in Cambridge, 8 days earlier (22 September), that Egypt was "the weakness, England's vulnerable point," and by addressing smiles to the triple alliance, Lord Salisbury "had generated another alliance, much more formidable and dangerous in the future for Great Britain." In Newcastle, he renewed these declarations, and, emphasizing them, makes the evacuation of the Nile Valley an essential article of the liberal plan. He promised the Welsh the abolition of the ecclesiastical tithes – that is to say the disestablishment of the principality's Episcopal Church, the first step toward a definite separation between the spiritual and the temporal. More than ever, he affirmed the principle of Irish autonomy and, predicting the House of Lords' hostility, he made it high and clear that this act of resistance to the will of the majority could very well cost the High Chamber its life.

These are great promises or, if you wish, big threats. Mr. Morley's opponents affect to laugh about it; they may be wrong. In any case, this is

the pupil of the old Hawarden woodcutter entering the secular forest of abuse and prejudice, brandishing his master's axe. This is the author of *On Compromise* lifting his hand against both saintly arches, the Church and the Peerage. If the Newcastle program is executed, this man will have put the seal of a great reform on the democratization of England; he will have been its final laborer and will attach his name to it.

It is possible that he may be abandoned on the way, since, for a personal fault on his part, I do not believe in it. If he does not become a great leader, yet he will remain a great "moral strength."

His books are read and re-read. They are more and more often re-printed. Little by little, they penetrate the consciousness of the youth, the country's soul. It has been written, not without justification, that England was "educated, directed, governed by its clergymen." It may be John Morley's prerogative to make English thought secular.

As for us, what will we ask of him?

Obviously, his lessons do not suit everyone. We are divided. Some believe they are advancing toward a purely scientific future and think they have left behind the decreasing and withering Christianity, as an express train watches the towers and spires of the city it has left disappear. Others are convinced, to the contrary, that the Gospel is at once the truth and the freedom, that Jesus Christ will solve the social issue, as he has already solved it twice. [...] To the former, Mr. Morley can be a master. To the latter, he can be taken as an example. An example of what? Of this harmony between the rules and the actions, which is any honest man. He showed not the immutability of political programs, which is stupidity, but loyalty to philosophical principles, which is a virtue. In him, the politician has not as yet contradicted the historian or the critic. From the heights he reached at first, he will always keep a ray enlightening his speeches and his books. He remains the type of armed thinker, a militant stoic that no sadness puts off from taking action, which no disappointment discourages from good. Having reached "the continental divide" of ideas, at the pinnacle of the human path from which one can see both sides of life, he feels

neither the aggressive effervescence of youth, nor the morbid emotion of decline. The time for appeasement is not far. At the start of his career, he made this bellicose phrase from the Bible his own: "I do not bring peace, but a sword." A little while ago, he used another phrase, a phrase of trust, serenity, and strength, teaching a lesson to our impatience and our intolerance, and with which I would like to finish: "Truth is quiet!"

Notes

¹ Filon provides an account of his association with the imperial family in *Memoirs of the Prince Imperial (1856-1879)* (London: Heinemann, 1913) and *Recollections of the Empress Eugénie*, published posthumously (London: Cassell, 1920).

² Augustin Filon, *The English Stage: Being an Account of the Victorian Drama*, tr. Frederic Whyte (London: Milne, 1897). Filon is frequently cited, if only in passing, by scholars of nineteenth-century theater. See, for example, Sos Eltis, *Acts of Desire: Women and Sex on Stage, 1800-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 128, 147; Gilbert B. Cross, *Next Week – East Lynne: Domestic Drama in Performance, 1820-1874* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press), 120, 209-210; Richard W. Schoch, *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16, 148-49.

³ *Profils anglais* (Paris: Lévy, 1893).

⁴ See Travis L. Crosby, *Joseph Chamberlain: A Most Radical Imperialist* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Peter T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press); *Joseph Chamberlain: International Statesman, National Leader, Local Icon*, ed. Ian Cawood and Chris Upton (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2016); R.F. Foster, *Lord Randolph Churchill: A Political Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

⁵ *On Compromise, with "Mr. Swinburne's New Poems."* Ed. John Powell (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997).

⁶ Patrick Jackson, *Morley of Blackburn: A Literary and Political Biography of John Morley* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2012); Warren Staebler, *The Liberal Mind of John Morley* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, [1943] 2015); Marco de Waard, *John Morley and the Uses of History in Victorian Liberal Culture* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming 2018); Kevin A. Morrison, “Discreet Indifference”: *A Micro-History of Victorian Liberal Parenting* (Houndmills: Palgrave, forthcoming 2017) and chapter three of *Victorian Liberalism and Material Culture: Synergies of Thought and Place* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2018).

⁷ Voltaire (London: Chapman, 1872); Rousseau (London: Chapman, 1873); Diderot and the *Encyclopaedists* (London: Macmillan, 1878); Edmund Burke (London: Macmillan, 1879); and *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London: Macmillan, 1881). On the *English Men of Letters* series, see the illuminating discussion in Ira Bruce Nadel’s *Biography: Fiction, Fact, and Form* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1984), 31-47.

⁸ Walpole (London: Macmillan, 1889); *Studies in Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1890); *Oliver Cromwell* (London: Macmillan, 1900).

⁹ *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, 3 Vols. (London: Macmillan, 1903). So authoritative is Morley’s biography that modern scholars see it as the essential “starting point” for any study of Gladstone. As H.C.G. Matthew admits, “How often the modern scholar thinks he has found a startling quotation or a new idea, only to have to admit it is already ‘in Morley’!” See *Gladstone, 1809-1874* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 256.

¹⁰ Edward Alexander, *John Morley* (New York: Twayne, 1972), 76-138.

¹¹ Basil Willey, *More Nineteenth-Century Studies: A Group of Honest Doubters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956). *On Compromise* remained in print for over seventy years after first being published in 1874. It was translated into multiple languages, including German, Urdu, and Gujarati (see John Morley, *Recollections*, Vol. 1 [New York: Macmillan, 1917], 102).

¹² *Places and Persons* (London: Thornton, 1925).

¹³ Filon visited Morley at No. 95 Elm Park Gardens, where he lived from 1886-96.

¹⁴ A reference to Morose in Ben Johnson's Renaissance drama *Epicoene, or The Silent Woman*.

¹⁵ His father established a surgical practice in Lancashire, where Morley was born.

¹⁶ Founded in 1865, Lewes served a brief stint as the periodical's first editor.

¹⁷ Edward Robert Lytton Bulwer-Lytton (8 November 1831-24 November 1891), who published literary works using a pseudonym.

¹⁸ Many were unaware that Morley was married. He was extremely reticent about his personal life. It appears that he lived with Rose Ayling before marrying her in 1870. As a result, she was not wholly acceptable in society. She was also frequently ill. As a result, there was much speculation at the time about whether Morley married for love or obligation – or whether he was, in fact, even married at all. The press often characterized him as an ascetic and single.

¹⁹ "Les Historiens Anglais I: J.A. Froude." *Revue des deux mondes* (September 1887), 68-103.

²⁰ A fairytale by the French writer Charles Perrault published in 1695.

²¹ The French historian (1797-1877).

²² Morley's assertion that the world was simply "a gigantic makeshift" drew ire. One contemporary sneered: "The history of mankind, he says, is to him 'a huge *pis-aller*.'" He might as well say that the climate of the Pole was a huge *pis-aller*, because he can fancy camellia trees growing on an iceberg, and potatoes and truffles maturing themselves in the ice." See "Mr. John Morley and Progressive Radicalism," *The Quarterly Review* (January and April 1889): 273.

²³ The German poet and author (1792-1854).

²⁴ Carlyle lived with his wife Jane at 24 Cheyne Row.

²⁵ Olga Novikoff, the Russian expatriate with whom Gladstone discussed various East European issues.

²⁶ Chancellor of the Exchequer during Gladstone's brief tenure as prime minister in 1886, and again for his final term beginning in 1892.

²⁷ Balfour was, at the time the Chief Secretary for Ireland. William O'Brien was Secretary of the Irish National League.

²⁸ The Irish political leader who fought to repeal the Act of Union.

