

THE JOURNAL *VANITY FAIR* AND LATER VICTORIAN POLITICS

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THE English periodical *Vanity Fair* provided some of the most incisive, outspoken, and witty commentary on the political and diplomatic developments of the last third of the nineteenth century. Although it is now remembered only for its caricatures of men of the day by *Ape* and *Spy* and as the originator and most successful exponent of society journalism, the magazine was then required reading for the upper ten thousand who still dominated British politics and society. The *Newspaper Press Directory and Advertisers' Guide* for 1875 described *Vanity Fair* as "the especial journal and accepted organ of society . . . clever, sparkling, and ably written, . . . making it the most desirable and appropriate ornament for the drawing room." In the opinion of the *Directory*, "to those who are in society *Vanity Fair* is indispensable."¹ *Deacon's Press Guide* for 1881 confirms this evaluation, indicating that *Vanity Fair* was "probably read by a larger number of official and wealthy persons than any other English weekly journal."² The views expressed in its pages gained a ready reception among the gentlemanly class of Britain. The journal was both a creator of West End London opinion and a barometric indicator of this elite's responses to the political changes of the time.

The recent increase in scholarly interest in Victorian periodicals has focused almost exclusively on the fortnightly, monthly, and quarterly reviews. The only attention which the weekly *Vanity Fair* has received has come from scholars interested in the history of caricature and cartooning. Eileen Harris's masterful introduction to the catalog of the National Portrait Gallery's 1976 exhibition of *Vanity Fair* caricatures is by far the best study of the subject to date.³ Carlo Pellegrini, *Vanity Fair*'s most famous and talented cartoonist, *Ape*, has been studied in a

¹ *The Newspaper Press Directory and Advertisers' Guide*, Vol. 13 (London: Mitchell and Co., 1875).

² Alvar Ellegard, "The Readership of the Periodical Press in Mid-Victorian Britain" *Goteborgs Universitets Arsskrift*, lxiii (1957), pt. 3, p. 38.

³ Eileen Harris, "Introduction," *Vanity Fair: An Exhibition of Original Cartoons* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1976).



Carlo Pellegrini by A. J. Marks, 27 April 1889; titled "Ape" and signed "A.J.M."
Courtesy of Vanity Fair Ltd., Cincinnati, Ohio.

second article by Harris.⁴ *Ape's* less creative protege and successor, *Spy*, has been the subject of a brief article by Roy Matthews.⁵ An anecdotal biography of Thomas Gibson Bowles, the founder of *Vanity Fair*, was written by the late Leonard Naylor, who was private secretary to Bowles's son.⁶ Naylor made no attempt to evaluate the periodical's editorial policy and his book is useful chiefly because he had access to diaries and papers which have since disappeared. None of these studies attempts to assess *Vanity Fair's* crusades against incompetence, lack of principle, nepotism, and the growing power of party machinery in British politics.

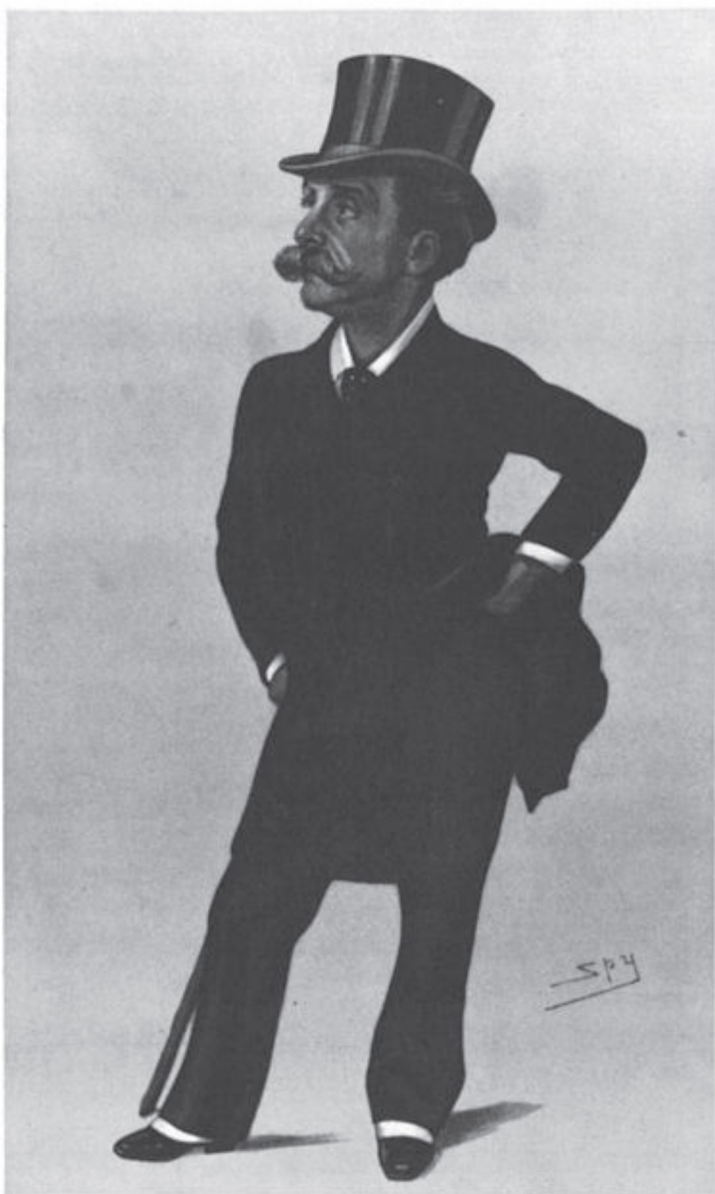
Thomas Gibson Bowles published his first issue of *Vanity Fair* on 7 November 1868 and remained owner and editor of the journal until 1889. Like his contemporary Walter Bagehot he believed government to be the responsibility of the gentlemanly elite—of those with the education, the leisure, and the experience to rise above parochial and class interests and judge what was best for the nation as a whole. Believing vigorous debate by that group's parliamentary representatives to be a prerequisite of good government, Bowles hoped to educate his elite readership by praising those among their leaders whose courage, intellect, and adherence to principle he admired, while attacking those with whom he disagreed. He saw himself as a gadfly and used irony and his caustic wit to expose political folly. Bowles criticized parliamentary equivocators, time-servers, and opportunists without regard for their party affiliations. *Vanity Fair's* willingness to chastise all who wielded power was in marked contrast to the partisan positions taken by most Victorian journals.

Bowles doubted the efficacy of either public opinion or the national will in guiding the affairs of England. While public opinion might claim to rule over the nation, it was a master who was never on the spot to control the politicians who were its chief servants. In Bowles's opinion, so long as ministers were able to keep peace with their party they were immune to rebuke by the nation. Should public opinion come tardily to uncover misconduct or discover incompetence, it had little choice after the fact but to overlook or affirm these actions. Contending that "English ministers are indeed and in fact English rulers, as powerful and as irresponsible as any that exist under more despotic titles in any part

⁴ Idem, "Carlo Pellegrini: Man and 'Ape'," *Apollo*, January 1976.

⁵ Roy Matthews, "Spy," *British History Illustrated*, June/July 1976.

⁶ Leonard E. Naylor, *The Irrepressible Victorian: The Story of Thomas Gibson Bowles* (London: Macdonald, 1965).



Thomas Gibson Bowles by Leslie Ward, 13 July 1889; titled "Tommy" and signed "Spy."

of the world," Bowles committed his journal to what he considered the vitally important task of educating the ruling classes to the natures of these men who held the destiny of the country in their hands.⁷

In the late 1860s and early 1870s the democratizing effects of the Reform Act of 1867 had yet to be felt. The rulers of Britain were still drawn from an exclusive social elite whose world encompassed the London clubs, the universities, the great country houses, the Church of England, the judiciary, the military and the professions, leavened since the Reform Act of 1832 by the most successful of the new commercial classes. While the governors of England might ignore the amorphous national will with impunity, they were much more vulnerable and sensitive to the criticisms of their own order. It was to this upper order that Bowles addressed his editorials and it was this group whom he hoped to educate with his humorous and ironic assessments of the men of the day. He sought to keep the rulers of Britain up to the mark by using his acid wit to burn away their masks of hypocrisy, thus influencing them by exposing the reality of their motives and policies to both the dominant classes in society and their colleagues in Parliament.

Although Bowles developed his critical evaluations of the leaders of the day and their policies in the editorial pages of his weekly journal, it was the witty and satirical biographical sketches of these men and the accompanying lithograph caricature-portraits that won *Vanity Fair* its special readership. As originally conceived, the journal was without illustration, and it was not until the innovation of Carlo Pellegrini's full-sized color caricature of Disraeli in issue number thirteen that *Vanity Fair*'s fortunes were assured. After the commencement of the weekly lithograph-caricature on 30 January 1869 the circulation rose from 500 to over 2,500 copies per week.⁸

Drawing under the pseudonym of *Singe* and then the more familiar *Ape*, Pellegrini introduced a softened, satirical, Italian adaptation of Daumier's savage *portrait chargé* to England. This form exaggerated the features of a single individual, and his use of it set *Ape*'s work apart from the earlier narrative-style cartoons of Cruikshank, Rowlandson, and *Punch* which then still dominated English caricature.⁹ Considered by Max Beerbohm and many critics of cartooning to be the outstanding caricaturist of the Victorian era,¹⁰ Pellegrini was accused by others of

⁷ "Preface," *Vanity Fair Album* 1 (1869).

⁸ Naylor, p. 20.

⁹ Harris, "Introduction," p. 7.

¹⁰ Bohun Lynch, *A History of Caricature* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1926), p. 70.

being cruel.¹¹ There is some justice in this latter assessment. The early caricatures which *Ape* did for *Vanity Fair* were uncompromising in their portrayals of individual physiognomy and character traits. The victims were made to look like animals¹²—a bird of prey—a pig—a squirrel—a crane—as if *Ape* wished to show a bestial kinship between his pseudonym and his subjects.

Whether cruel or comic in intent, Pellegrini's caricature portraits were undoubtedly envisioned by Bowles as serving a very serious purpose. In the editor's view the caricaturist stresses the existing lines and tones in his subject's physical appearance in order to reveal the essential points of the individual's character and "exaggerates it until there is no fear that the dullest intellect will henceforth lose sight of it."¹³ This opinion of the purpose of *Ape*'s caricature was also held by Frank Harris. Harris, who edited *Vanity Fair* from 1907 until 1911, believed that Pellegrini sought "to depict the very soul of the sitter" in his caricatures.¹⁴ Pellegrini's *portrait chargé* form, concentrating as it did on a single person, was a medium ideally suited to *Vanity Fair*'s goal of exposing the virtues and vices of the individual politicians and statesmen of the day.

Bowles's sardonic biographical sketches, signed *Jehu Junior* after the avenging Old Testament King, appeared alongside Pellegrini's cartoons. As viewed by Bowles, they were to do in print what *Ape* was doing in pictures: they were literary caricatures that endeavored to give the reader a clear idea of the character of the man portrayed, "sufficient to warrant safe inferences as to the position he holds in, and the causes he is likely to take upon, public affairs."¹⁵ The union formed by Bowles and Pellegrini has been described by T.H.S. Escott, an astute observer of the later Victorian scene, as "the same successful conjunction that in opera bouffe was presented by the co-operation of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan."¹⁶

Jehu Junior's character sketches reflect Bowles's conviction that Britain's leaders should be judged on the basis of individual merit and adherence to principle rather than party affiliation. Although philosophi-

¹¹ Harry Furniss, *My Bohemian Days* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1919), p. 70.

¹² Augustin Filon, *La Caricature en Angleterre* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et cie., 1902), p. 269.

¹³ *Vanity Fair* (London) 11 September 1869, pp. 145-46.

¹⁴ Frank Harris, *My Life and Loves*, ed. John F. Gallagher (New York: Grove Press, 1925), p. 344.

¹⁵ "Preface" *Vanity Fair Album* 1 (1869).

¹⁶ T.H.S. Escott, *Masters of English Journalism* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1911), p. 263.



Benjamin Disraeli by Carlo Pellegrini, 30 January 1869; titled "He educated the Tories and dished the Whigs to pass Reform, but to have become what he is from what he was is the greatest reform of all" and signed "Singe."

cally conservative in outlook, *Vanity Fair* was neither a strong supporter of the Tory Party nor of any other party. Those who through lack of principle or an invertebrate constitution gave unquestioning support to their party or followed their own narrow self-interest received little sympathy from *Vanity Fair*. Sir Stafford Northcote, Disraeli's successor as Conservative leader in the House of Commons, was described in the 8 October 1870 caricature biography as "a somewhat colourless politician, of whom all that there is to be said is that he does his duty to his party, and is fortunate if it happens to be also his duty to his country." Lord Stanley, the future Earl of Derby, received even harsher treatment on 26 June 1869 for "he thinks with one party and acts with the other—a course which enables him to think as he likes and act as he is told." On the other hand, Liberal leader Lord John Russell received high praise from *Jehu Junior* in the letter-press accompanying his caricature of 5 June 1869:

It is given to few men to do so much for their country; and since he has done it without ever swerving from as perfect loyalty to his colleagues as to his principles, and without ever descending to intrigue, the merit he deserves is such and so great as few of the present generation of politicians can claim.

The constitutional ideal by which *Vanity Fair* judged Britain's leaders was that system of politics that had been in operation between the passages of the reform bills of 1832 and 1867 and described by Walter Bagehot in his *English Constitution*. Known as the "golden age of the private Member of Parliament," it had been a time when representatives of Britain's educated elite ruled relatively unfettered by either aristocratic domination or party controls. Bowles viewed with apprehension the way the changes initiated by the Reform Act of 1867 were undermining the political authority of Britain's educated elite. In the satire and wit of *Vanity Fair* is found the same concern for the future of the English constitution which Bagehot expressed in his introduction to the second edition of *The English Constitution* published in 1872.

Both men abhorred the rise to power of groups who placed their own special interests above the good of the nation. They saw their political world dominated by a new plutocracy which was replacing the old ruling elite. Lord Palmerston was much admired by Bowles for the way he had kept this new wealth under control by redirecting its natural but base commercial interests to the benefit of the nation. Bowles

felt that with Palmerston's death no leader of comparable ability had risen to power. The plutocrats were coming increasingly to dominate politics, ruling for their own benefit with an avaricious lack of charity and thrusting aside the English gentlemen.¹⁷

Both Bagehot and Bowles also loathed the ignorant multitudes who had been enfranchised in 1867. *Vox populi* was *Vox diaboli* for *Vanity Fair* as well as for Bagehot. The residuum were judged by *Vanity Fair* to be incapable of intelligent action and prone to putting their own personal prejudices and class interests above the needs of the country.¹⁸ Both men feared that Britain's political parties would make demagogic bids for working class support, or worse, that the new electorate would combine and enforce their class's will upon society. Thus Bowles, like Palmerston, feared that extending the franchise would ultimately undermine the authority of the traditional rulers of the country.

Equally upsetting to Bowles was the way the post-1867 generation of political leaders were increasingly able to manipulate both party and electorate to silence all opposition and exclude Britain's traditional elite from their rightful place of dominance in Parliament. At the time of the founding of *Vanity Fair*, Members of Parliament still gained their seats through personal connections or by their own efforts, thus limiting the amount of control party whips could exercise over them and providing broad scope for the clash of individual personalities and ideas. Bowles's definition of party as "a body of men who share the same opinion and act together to promote them"¹⁹ still had validity. The rise of parties with mass appeal led by dominant personalities increasingly made this view of party invalid after 1867. Neither as editor of *Vanity Fair* nor later as a Member of Parliament would Bowles countenance the discipline from above that was becoming a major part of British political life. He was a strong defender of the individual Member's of Parliament right and responsibility to support the principles of his political creed even when they were proposed by the opposition party. With Bagehot, he feared that without such an independent gentlemanly elite "the House of Commons would cease to be a representative assembly, and would become like an American Electoral College—a mere Convention of Delegates, pledged to support particular men, irrespective of any special consideration of their measures."²⁰

¹⁷ *Vanity Fair*, 21 November 1868, p. 31.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14 November 1868, p. 21; *Ibid.*, 9 January 1869, p. 111.

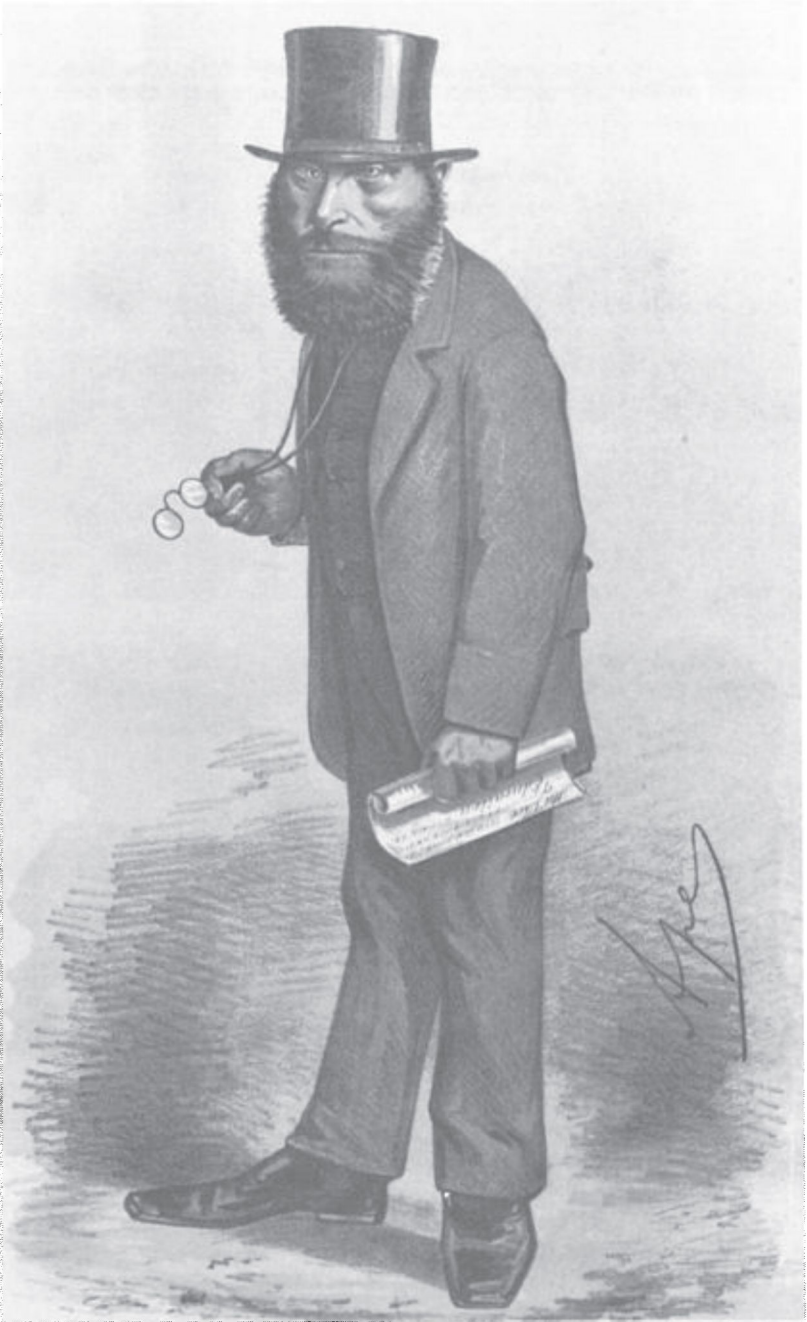
¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5 December 1868, p. 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12 December 1868, p. 65.



Ape's victims were made to look like animals—a bird of prey—a squirrel—a crane.

Earl Grey, "A privileged person," 8 May 1869.



Ape's victims were made to look like animals—a bird of prey—a squirrel—a crane.

W. E. Forster, "If he is not an advanced liberal, it is for want of advancing himself," 6 March 1869.

Bowles found it particularly disquieting that Gladstone and Disraeli had made themselves irreplaceable as the loci around which their respective political coalitions had formed:

There is something very startling in the notion that out of a country numbering thirty millions of inhabitants, two men only should be capable of ruling; and that of these two, the one should owe his rise to qualities chiefly useful in a counting house; the other to half-a-dozen second rate novels and a few speeches remarkable merely for their versatility.²¹

Gladstone had been the subject of the second caricature Pellegrini executed for *Vanity Fair* on 6 February 1869. At that time *Jehu Junior* found Gladstone's sense of justice so intense and his enthusiasm for the right so unbounded that he proclaimed: "were he a worse man, he would be a better statesman." *Vanity Fair* soon concluded that the moralizing Gladstone was more astute politically than it first suspected. He rapidly came to be accused of being without any principle or purpose other than the desire to stay in office. For all his learning and "earnest honesty," declared Bowles, he lacked the stability to remain committed to his decisions. He was viewed as "without convictions" and was condemned for the lack of distinct principles behind his foreign, colonial, and home policies.²²

Within five months of the formation of Gladstone's first ministry, the fledgling *Vanity Fair* was also denouncing his ministers for their unquestioning support of the Prime Minister. Composed of an unstable Whig-Radical coalition, the cabinet came increasingly to look to Gladstone as a source of unity and tended, in Bowles's view, to compromise principles in order to retain office. These new middle class rulers of the country were seen by Bowles as backing Gladstone "without so much as taking the trouble to form an opinion upon any subject, or to make any other inquiry about it than the cue they are to follow."²³ *Vanity Fair* found these new rulers to respect neither tradition nor law and condemned them for administering the affairs of the country as if it were "a small grocer's shop."²⁴

Viewed with equal apprehension was Gladstone's increasing tendency to bypass the opinions of the gentlemanly classes and appeal directly to the electorate when thwarted by Parliament. As early as the 1871

²¹ *Ibid.*, 17 August 1872, p. 49.

²³ *Ibid.*, 8 May 1869, p. 343.

²² *Ibid.*, 7 October 1871, p. 110.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 July 1873, pp. 2-3.

debate over reform of the Army, Bowles accused Gladstone of appealing over the heads of the "intellect of the country" to the masses,²⁵ expressing a view widely held among England's elite that such action could only convince the masses that they had the right to rule.²⁶ It was because of such political innovations that *Vanity Fair* came to denounce Gladstone as a revolutionary underminer of the foundations of the English constitution. Thus, Bowles helped create the ever-growing aversion which the Conservative Party and the upper orders came to feel for Gladstone. Robert Rhodes James has observed that the Conservative Party came to regard Gladstone with "emotions of fear and detestation" and hated him as an "unbalanced and unscrupulous fanatic" renegade who "trumpeted the cause of class war in his desperate ambition for power."²⁷ *Vanity Fair's* increasingly bitter attacks on the Liberal leader give great insight into the reasons behind the growing divisions between Gladstone and the gentlemanly classes of England.

These issues between Gladstone and Britain's educated elite finally came to a head over the Bulgarian atrocity question of 1876. Gladstone returned from political retirement and threw himself with fanatical zeal into the crusade against Turkish misrule in the Balkans. When neither Disraeli nor West End London society showed the same concern, Gladstone denounced them for betraying their responsibility, saying, "when did the Upper Ten Thousand ever lead the attack in the cause of humanity? Their heads are always full of class interest and the main chance."²⁸ Convinced that Britain's elite ruled for the benefit of class not country, Gladstone advocated balancing this class interest by appealing to the business and working classes. Both *Vanity Fair* and respectable England were outraged and saw Gladstone as a renegade from the educated classes. Bowles denounced Gladstone's Bulgarian agitation as "lynch law in foreign affairs."²⁹ Gladstone's radical innovation of appealing directly to the public on a question of foreign affairs was condemned by *Vanity Fair* as previously his appeals over the head of Parliament on domestic issues had been. "Never before," said Bowles, "did an ex-premier of Britain degrade himself to the level of a stump orator, still less endeavor to upset the policy of the Government of his country at

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 July 1871, p. 19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4 November 1871, p. 142.

²⁷ Robert Rhodes James, *The British Revolution: 1880-1939* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 49.

²⁸ Philip Magnus, *Gladstone: A Biography* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1964), p. 245.

²⁹ *Vanity Fair*, 30 September 1876, p. 201.

so important and critical a juncture.”³⁰ Such demagoguery subverted the proper constitutional processes and raised a spectre, frightening to Bowles, of the lower orders becoming involved directly in the governance of the country. During the remainder of his tenure as editor of *Vanity Fair*, Bowles subjected Gladstone to increasingly harsh and outspoken personal attacks, ridiculing his sanctimoniousness, self-righteous earnestness, and irrational changeability.

The increasingly caustic nature of *Vanity Fair*'s attacks on Gladstone can be judged from the letter presses that accompanied his caricatures. *Spy*'s July 1879 caricature of a grim-faced Gladstone was punctuated by *Jehu Junior*'s observation that “Mr. Gladstone is an honest man . . . which . . . does but increase the vehemence with which he adopts and advocates that course of action which chance and accident, rather than reflection, have caused him for the moment to adopt.” Given power, he could only get “his country's affairs into a muddle.” The letterpress to Gladstone's portrait of 5 November 1887 was even more pointed in holding his motives up to skepticism and scorn:

Mr. Gladstone is indeed the most successful of political hypocrites for he succeeds in deceiving even himself; and the marvel of the future will be that any members of a plain people like the English should ever have taken seriously the insincere sincerities, the plausible sophistries, and the canting platitudes with which he has again and again paved his way to power and salary.

Dislike of Gladstone and the Liberals did not lead *Vanity Fair* immediately to embrace Disraeli and the Tory party. Benjamin Disraeli's brief ministry in 1868 had convinced Bowles that he was an opportunist, committed only to his own advancement.³¹ Particularly disappointing to Bowles was Disraeli's failure to implement the paternalistic ideals he had espoused in *Sybil* and *Coningsby*. Echoing Disraeli's “Young England” novels and Thomas Carlyle, Bowles looked for the solution to Britain's social problems not in democratic political reforms but in having the traditional rulers of Britain acknowledge their responsibility to the masses by treating them with kindness and goodwill.³² Even more disgraceful to Bowles was the fact that, after years of having arraigned the faults of English government, Disraeli reproduced them all once he gained office.³³ Within months of Disraeli's return to office, *Vanity Fair* was calling for his resignation.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 21 October 1876, pp. 252-53.

³² *Ibid.*, 29 November 1873, p. 179.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 14 November 1868, p. 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, 21 November 1874, p. 279.



William Ewart Gladstone by Carlo Pellegrini, 6 February 1869; titled "Were he a worse man, he would be a better statesman" and signed "Singe."

Bowles was equally scornful of the Conservatives' foreign policy record. His disillusionment with the Tories went back to the Balkan crisis of 1876-1878. He never forgave Lords Salisbury and Beaconsfield for the compromise solution they worked out at the Congress of Berlin in June 1878. While Liberal and Conservative alike had praised Beaconsfield's "peace of honour," the independent and iconoclastic Bowles denounced the settlement as little more than a reaffirmation of the major provisions of the Russian-dictated Treaty of San Stephano. The glorious victory proclaimed by the rest of the British press was labelled an ignoble surrender by Bowles. With some justice, he declared that it would have been better for Britain to have accepted the Treaty of San Stephano. To have come forward as the defender of Turkey, only to dismember her, destroyed Britain's honor and Turkey's trust while gaining nothing but the "white elephant" of Cyprus.³⁴

In Bowles's view, Beaconsfield had surrendered his principles completely in the face of the lunatic agitation inspired by Gladstone and the Liberals. As a consequence, "no honest and informed man can find in either Government or opposition aught but objects of contempt and disgust, or in the Future of England committed to such people anything but the promise of ruin and disaster."³⁵

Despite these grave reservations about the leadership of the Conservative Party, *Vanity Fair* saw the Tories as the only group capable of stemming the ever-increasing radicalism and disastrous foreign policy instituted by Gladstone after his return to power in April 1880. In the wake of the Tory electoral disaster of 1880, *Vanity Fair* threw itself into a campaign to revitalize the Tory Party's electoral machinery and open the party up to educated gentlemen with ability. Gladstone's Midlothian campaign of 1879-1880, combined with the application of the methods of Joseph Chamberlain's Birmingham caucus to the nation as a whole, had contributed greatly to the overwhelming Liberal victory at the polls in 1880. As much as Bowles loathed such demagoguery and manipulation of the electorate by party machinery, he came to recognize that these tactics were essential if the gentlemanly classes of England were to retain their position of leadership in a democratic age. His commitment to truth and candor did not extend to enlightening the demos. Finding them too ignorant and self-serving to respond to an appeal to the best interests of the nation, Bowles advocated wooing and manipulating them

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 29 June 1878, pp. 386-87.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3 August 1878, pp. 59-60.

in order to ensure the continued dominance of the traditional ruling classes in politics.

On the eve of the election, 20 March 1880, Bowles warned the Tories of their impending defeat at the polls with a caricature celebrating the organizational skill of Markham Spofforth. It was he whose reorganization of the Conservative Party's electoral machinery after the passage of the Reform Bill of 1867 had helped the Tories to victory in 1874. The magnitude of the Conservative defeat shook even the most complacent of the Tories and made them more receptive to Bowles's criticism. He had attacked those who had allowed Spofforth's electoral machinery to fall into decay as a "self-appointed clique of men . . . devoted to the trivialities of the partridge and the pheasant." Since 1867 power had been transformed from "men of position and intelligence to the vulgar and ignorant masses." There was no reason, said Bowles, why this new democracy should not support the Conservative Party rather than the Liberal Party except that the Liberals had "taken the trouble to flatter and befool it. . . . The mob must be courted," continued Bowles. "If you neglect it, it will take sides against you; if you condemn it, it will destroy you."³⁶ Punctuating this view was a caricature of John Gorst which appeared on 30 July 1880, praising him for the brilliant way in which he had developed a decentralized local Conservative Party organization and calling for his reinstatement at the head of the Tory Party's electoral machinery. "He it is," said *Jehu Junior*, "who alone among the Conservative members seems to have the energy, the experience, and the shrewdness which are required for the reorganization of the scattered forces of the party."

Bowles was aghast at the lack of leadership the Tories showed in opposition. When Disraeli was elevated to the House of Lords in 1876 his successor as Conservative leader in the House of Commons was Sir Stafford Northcote, described tartly by *Vanity Fair* as "one of those feeble and colourless politicians without power and without resource who are a curse to any Ministry."³⁷ Leading the opposition did not improve Northcote's reputation with *Vanity Fair*. Never a robust leader, he had once been Gladstone's private secretary and remained very deferential to him,³⁸ seemingly anxious "to help the Premier out of his

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 May 1880, p. 245.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 July 1877, p. 48.

³⁸ Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, *Rambling Recollections*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908), 2:253.

scrapes rather than to keep the country out of the consequences of them.”³⁹

The lack of boldness in opposition shown by Northcote and the other Tory leaders antagonized not only Bowles, but Lord Randolph Churchill, John Gorst, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, and Arthur James Balfour as well. They saw Northcote’s meekness as disastrous to the party. When, in 1880, he showed no inclination to challenge the atheist Charles Bradlaugh’s right to take his seat in the House, they saw a perfect opportunity to embarrass Gladstone and leapt to the attack.⁴⁰ Thus was born the Fourth Party. What brought them together was their commonly held belief that the future of the Tory Party lay with the resurrection and establishment of Disraeli’s ideal of “Tory Democracy”⁴¹ and the reorganization of the Tory electoral machinery and leadership to accomplish this end.

The Fourth Party came immediately to the attention of Bowles who saw in its concerted attacks on Gladstone the type of independent, intelligent, energetic, and courageous conservatism he had so long advocated. Bowles used his pen and his caricaturists to publicize and support the rebel quartet celebrating their success by publishing the famous *Spy* caricature of the group on 1 December 1880. In the letterpress of this cartoon *Jehu Junior* credited the four with breaking the “superannuated oligarchy” of Sir Stafford Northcote and his associates. Bowles expressed the hope that the Fourth Party would “breathe a new life into the dead bones of Conservatism. . . .” Convinced that the Conservative Party’s future as a power in the governance of England depended upon its becoming a popular party, Bowles threw himself into the Fourth Party’s campaign to wrest control of the Tory electoral machinery and establish Tory Democracy.

The animosity Bowles felt towards the leadership of the Conservative Party because of its resistance to reform was based on personal experience as well as principle. He had run as a Conservative at Darlington in 1874 and Banbury in 1880 and would contest the Salford seat for the party in 1885. Each was a Liberal stronghold and each was assigned to him by the Tory leadership in the “forlorn hope” that he might win.⁴² No party support was forthcoming, and in each case inevitable defeat followed. While Bowles fought these hopeless contests with his

³⁹ *Vanity Fair*, 4 March 1882, p. 113.

⁴⁰ Harold E. Gorst, *The Fourth Party* (London: Smith Elder and Co., 1906), pp.

52-53.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 80-81.

⁴² *Vanity Fair*, 13 July 1889.

own money, he saw the aristocratic clique that dominated the nominating and electioneering machinery of the party supporting well-placed but stupid younger sons or boorish, ignorant, narrow-minded but successful local businessmen.⁴³ It is not surprising therefore that the outspoken Bowles came to attack the Tory leadership, saying bitterly that "whenever there is a safe seat in the House of Commons going, they inevitably job it away to some nonentity of one of the 'families' of their own official clique."⁴⁴ This resentment of the unwillingness of the Tory leaders and the back bench squirearchy in Parliament to share the rewards of office with outsiders gave Bowles a further bond with the Fourth Party and especially with Drummond Wolff and Gorst who nursed similar grievances.⁴⁵ As Lord Randolph Churchill struggled with the Tory Party hierarchy for control of the National Union of Conservative Associations in 1884, the journal argued persuasively in support of his program of Tory Democracy and open party leadership.⁴⁶ The Primrose League, organized by Drummond Wolff and Bowles's old friend Algernon Borthwick, editor of the *Morning Post*, to help popularize Tory principles,⁴⁷ also gained support from *Vanity Fair* and included Bowles on its executive board.

Vanity Fair, with its close connection to the Fourth Party reformers, provides substantiating evidence to support historian James Cornford's contention that the dispute over Tory Democracy was not about measures but about methods of organization.⁴⁸ The Tory democrats no more wanted working class participation in party affairs than the old Tory squirearchy did. They only desired the creation of new machinery to win the votes of the new urban working class voter. As late as 1875 *Vanity Fair* had declared that "Demos is neither wise nor witty, delicate or high-minded, and he is totally unfit to rule. . . ."⁴⁹ Tory Democracy was not going to share rule with the masses, but use new democratic methods of persuasion to assure that the masses were "tamed and harnessed."⁵⁰ For Bowles as for the Fourth Party reformers, "the Tory Party has to appeal to the people at large, and must deal with them and commend itself to them by appropriate methods."⁵¹ Such concerns and

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 19 October 1878, p. 207.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 15 September 1883, p. 137.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2 October 1880, p. 186.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 21 June 1884, pp. 349-50.

⁴⁷ W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle, *Life of Benjamin Disraeli*, 2 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1929), 2: 1503.

⁴⁸ James P. Cornford, "The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Victorian Studies* 1 (September 1963): p. 48.

⁴⁹ *Vanity Fair*, 2 July 1875, pp. 45-46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 16 October 1880, p. 214.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10 May 1884, p. 252.

the demand for breaking the control of the party by the ruling clique are the only ones expressed by *Vanity Fair* in its support of Randolph Churchill's struggle for control of the National Union of Conservative Associations in the summer of 1884.

While supporting the flamboyant Lord Randolph Churchill in this campaign, *Vanity Fair* was not blind to his faults. Bowles admired Churchill's abilities at harassing Gladstone and the leadership of the Tory Party, not his commitment to principle. Bowles had long suspected Churchill to be an opportunist but was still shocked and disillusioned by the way he so quickly gave up his hard won control over the National Union for a high place in the party leadership. When Churchill replaced Northcote as Conservative leader in the House of Commons, *Vanity Fair* began to raise grave doubts about his ability to lead:

In spite of his brilliancy and his audacity . . . he lacks fidelity to principle . . . and it would seem as though he referred all his acts to the one object of securing his own personal advancement. He is an excellent Lieutenant to employ in the battlefield, but a bad General to consult in the council-chamber. Yet it is the General's place alone that he will deign to fill . . .⁵²

Churchill compounded his difficulties with Bowles when, in seeming rejection of the Fourth Party's condemnation of nepotism, he carried into office with him his cousin as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and Lord George Hamilton, a man with Churchill family connections, as first Lord of the Admiralty. *Vanity Fair* lashed out, saying that his "one great Party and National object is the promotion of the Churchill family, and its head, the distinguished younger son."⁵³

Having sacrificed his power base with the Conservative National Union for leadership in the House of Commons, Churchill tried to build up popular support by advocating policies more in keeping with the principles of the radical wing of the Liberal party than those of his own. This move culminated in his speech at Dartford on 20 October 1886 in which he proposed radical innovations in domestic, Irish, and foreign affairs. The Dartford Program shocked Salisbury and the Tory leadership. It confirmed Bowles's suspicions about Churchill's lack of principle and *Vanity Fair* condemned it as belonging "properly to the Revolutionary Party alone."⁵⁴ Bowles feared that Churchill aimed to

⁵² *Ibid.*, 27 March 1886, pp. 172-73.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 7 August 1886, p. 59.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 9 October 1886, p. 203.

make himself a dictator and predicted anxiously that "his reign will . . . be marked by the most dangerous proposals in point of policy and the most unscrupulous adventures in point of tactics. . . ." ⁵⁵

Bowles's hopes for Tory Party reform through the actions of the Fourth Party were shattered by Churchill. The experience caused him to take a somewhat more charitable view of Lord Salisbury. Bowles had never forgiven Salisbury for his part in the settlement of the Eastern Question at the Congress of Berlin. However, faced with the alternatives of Gladstone, whom Bowles considered mad, or Churchill with his opportunism and lack of principle, Salisbury's defects began to fade. When the possibility of a contest for party leadership between Salisbury and Churchill developed in the summer of 1887, *Vanity Fair* came out in support of Lord Salisbury, who, said *Jehu Junior*:

is far from perfect. He is wrapped up in triple folds of relations and back-stair advisors; he has introduced some most unnecessary and dangerous measures of a very revolutionary character . . . and he sits in a remote paradise of deaf and blind optimists, who assure him that all is peaceful and prosperous with him and with the Party which he leads. But if Lord Salisbury is not perfect, Lord Randolph, with his chancy character and his declared opinions . . . is dangerous. . . . ⁵⁶

Although he grudgingly backed Lord Salisbury, Bowles found it impossible to abandon his self-appointed post as gadfly to the Tory Party. He continued his strong criticisms of Conservative Party nepotism, defects in political organization, and lack of inspired leadership. Bowles had little respect for the majority of the men who made up Lord Salisbury's cabinet, finding too many of them to be Cecil relatives or toadies. Salisbury's nephew, Balfour, an early deserter from the ranks of the Fourth Party, was caricatured on 24 September 1887 after he became Irish Secretary. While forced to admit that Balfour was proving an able adversary for the Irish, Bowles found him "effeminate and languid in manner, and somewhat indolent," lacking "only a greater capacity for hard work and a stronger grasp of essential principles."

Jehu Junior showed no such charity towards the able but colorless William H. Smith, now First Lord of the Treasury and leader of the House of Commons. Smith personified the *nouveau riche* businessman without social position or commitment to principle whose advancement

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14 August 1886, p. 87.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 July 1887, p. 18.

in the Tory Party was due, in Bowles's view, solely to his lavish donations to the party coffers. Already satirized by W. S. Gilbert as "The ruler of the Queen's Navy" when First Lord of the Admiralty, Smith received piquant treatment from Bowles in a 12 November 1887 caricature. His political success was attributed to his servile deference to the Cecil family. He was described as having "no imagination and not an atom of wit or fancy, all which makes him seem a safe agent for a Prime Minister, who has had a bitter experience of the alliance with Brains."

Despite Bowles's sharpshooting at Tory Party leaders, the radical Gladstone remained the primary focus of Bowles's concern. *Vanity Fair* reflected a common conservative view of the late 1880s that Gladstone must be kept out of power at all costs until he either retired "for the second and last time" or showed himself to the electorate as "the political madman that he is."⁵⁷ It is for this reason that both *Vanity Fair* and its elite readership came to be more supportive of Salisbury's Conservative Party in the late 1880s despite their resentment at being excluded from its leadership. While still critical of Tory Party nepotism, political organization, and lack of inspired leadership, these topics and politics in general came less and less to dominate the pages of *Vanity Fair*.

Bowles himself seems to have grown disenchanted with the world of journalism in the late 1880s. His biographer Naylor reports that he was left with little interest in *Vanity Fair* after the death of his wife in June of 1887.⁵⁸ In that year he hired Oliver Armstrong Fry to act as assistant editor, and in August he left the journal in Fry's hands while he went on an extended cruise.⁵⁹ Possibly the death of his old friend and fellow collaborator Carlo Pellegrini on 22 January 1889 finally led Bowles to sell *Vanity Fair* to Arthur H. Evans at the end of March 1889 for the princely sum of £20,000.⁶⁰ Evans promoted Fry to the editorship of the journal and it remained under his direction from 1889 until 1904, retaining the same general format if not always the combative freshness of its earlier years. After 1904 *Vanity Fair* began to decline, passing through a variety of editorial hands, including those of Frank Harris, until its ignominious end in 1914 when it was absorbed beyond recognition into the women's magazine *Hearth and Home*.

While the caricatures which had made *Vanity Fair*'s fortune continued

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 August 1887, p. 131.

⁵⁸ Naylor, p. 121.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

to show occasional touches of genius, they too entered a period of decline in the late 1880s from which they never recovered. Heralding this decline was the progressive supplanting of *Ape* by Leslie Ward's *Spy*s in the 1880s. With Pellegrini's death, his younger colleague Ward succeeded him as chief cartoonist for *Vanity Fair*. Ward's caricatures had always lacked Pellegrini's brilliant wit and biting satire. While often humorous, they seldom exhibited the intelligent insight into character that had marked *Ape*'s work. Gradually, from the 1890s on, *Spy*'s cartoons degenerated into more portraiture, mirroring a general waning in the combativeness of the journal as a whole.

If *Vanity Fair* lost its brashness and verve in the 1890s, Bowles did not. He finally succeeded in winning a seat in the House of Commons in the 1892 election. Unlike *Vanity Fair* and the independent gentlemen who gradually acquiesced to Salisbury's domination of the Tory Party, Bowles refused to curb his criticism of either friend or foe. The wit, rashness, incisiveness of analysis, and scepticism which he had made the trademark of *Vanity Fair* was now transferred to the floor of the House of Commons. He explained his objectives as a member of the House in a speech he made in Parliament on 19 April 1901: "I have never put my name to a Bill since I have been in the House; I consider it my mission rather to criticize, and sometimes to endeavor to prevent legislation. . . ."⁶¹

Sir Henry Lucy, that shrewd parliamentary reporter whose columns for *Punch* appeared under the sobriquet Toby M.P., confirms Bowles's self-evaluation. Lucy chronicled the highlights of Bowles's parliamentary career in his diaries and memoirs. Unhappy with Gladstone's 1892 ministry, Bowles joined forces with Robert W. Hanbury and J.C.T. Bartley to try to embarrass the Grand Old Man as the Fourth Party had done in 1880. Lucy dubbed them "the three musketeers" but found them "scarcely the men for the task" of reviving the spirit of Lord Randolph Churchill's group. He thought Bowles the most capable of the group and observed that "if he were better advised, kept better company and, above all, sat silent through a session, he might gain a position in the House." Lucy saw little hope of this occurring, however. He found that "Mr. Bowles knows a great deal about everything, except the House of Commons";⁶² "omniscience is his foible."⁶³

⁶¹ Great Britain, Parliament, *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th Series, XCII (1901): 804.

⁶² Henry W. Lucy, *A Diary of the Home Rule Parliament, 1892-1895* (London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1896), pp. 259-62.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

Bowles's taste for opposition was not daunted by the Unionist triumph in 1895. Lucy observed wryly that he was "not deterred from criticizing ministers because they happened to be members of his own party. In fact, it adds piquancy to a speech when it is aimed at elders of one's own household."⁶⁴ Lucy believed that much of the reason for Bowles's unrestrained criticism of his own party leaders was his conviction that they failed to recognize his talents and continually passed over him for less competent men. In Lucy's view, Bowles, Bartley, and Hanbury had "appreciably contributed to the patriotic design of making office untenable by a Liberal ministry," and Bowles expected to share in the spoils of Unionist victory. While Hanbury and Bartley were eventually recognized, Bowles, "the most brilliant of the trio . . . was . . . left out in the cold."⁶⁵ When Salisbury failed to redress this wrong after the 1900 election and instead advanced relatives, party loyalists, and Liberal Unionists, Bowles began to attack him personally in the House of Commons. On 22 July 1901 he criticized the large number of Cecil family members in the Government. "We would not," he told the House, "sacrifice our country to our family, or so much as the efficiency of a single department to the urgency of a relative."⁶⁶

Arthur Balfour's failure to reorganize the government after he succeeded his uncle as premier in July 1902 evoked even harsher criticism from Bowles. "The out-going Administration . . .," he said, "has . . . shown a cynical contempt for all those qualities which have hitherto been held to constitute Parliamentary, and to suggest administrative ability, and, in fact for all qualities except those founded on consanguinity." Bowles described the outgoing administration as a "tame gallery of family portraits" and asked "are the old men to be kept on, and are the old ways to be pursued? . . . Or . . . does the right hon. Gentleman [Balfour] mean to take a broad survey . . . of all the talent he can find on those Benches . . . in order to form an Administration with a capacity sufficient to conduct the arduous affairs of this great Empire."⁶⁷ Needless to say, such outspoken criticism did little to advance him in the eyes of his party's leaders.

Bowles finally did irreparable damage to his standing with the Union-

⁶⁴ Lucy, *A Diary of the Unionist Parliament, 1895-1900* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1901), p. 106.

⁶⁵ Lucy, "From Behind the Speaker's Chair," *The Strand Magazine* 21 (April 1901): p. 412.

⁶⁶ Great Britain, Parliament, *Parliamentary Debates*, 4th Series, XCVII (1901): 1161.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, CXII (1902): 816-17.

ist Party when, in 1903, he joined other Unionist free traders in creating the Free Food League to combat Joseph Chamberlain's imperial preference campaign. As a result he was shunned by the party, defeated in 1906, and returned to Parliament for the last time in 1910 as a Liberal. He remained to the last a fierce defendant of the mid-Victorian ideal of rule by the educated and talented independent gentleman in an age which had come to demand conformity to party leadership and to ignore or break those who challenged party discipline.

Thus, in his parliamentary as in his journalistic career, Bowles remained a true independent, giving his whole-hearted support to neither party and reserving praise for those individuals of right judgment who had the courage of their convictions. While his prose analyses of individual personalities were often as much caricatures as *Ape's* drawings, they gave focus to the concerns of an embattled gentlemanly elite and, in the process, made *Vanity Fair* a Victorian and Edwardian institution.