

Gladstone, the Man

Doctor Gunsaulus

IF Sir John Gladstone's son, William Ewart, had been only a perfectly sphered ivory or beryl ball of conservatism, brilliant and sufficiently pure, the gift of heaven might have been kept securely and comprehensively enough in a golden box, but no hope would have gone out in any proposed planting of such an unresponsive thing in our world's rich soil. But unfortunately for Toryism, and fortunately for Liberalism, he was a vital seed, not a cold gem, and, granted sun and rainfall, he could not, and he did not, remain ever an understandable, manageable, erubescant and dead item of human life's equation, but he was, instead, an ever wondrous and perhaps to the dull-eyed, a too eager and elusive reality into whose career the life and hope of this planet ran for succor, and from whose being and action there went forth a revealment of God in the form of humanity. Three score and ten years had passed since Tennyson and he talked of the future they dreamed for Arthur Henry Hallam. Fifty years ago, death silenced Hallam and each of those years had given Gladstone an opportunity to embody in himself the prophecy made of the other :

“A life with civic action warm,
A soul on highest mission sent,
A potent voice of Parliament,
A pillar steadfast in the storm.”

These words of Tennyson came to many a heart on that May day when the silent crowd vanished from the Abbey. Yonder, by the side of Robert Browning and in front of the Chaucer monument, lay the poet who wrote the prefatory sonnet for Gladstone's heart-searching appeal for Montenegro; now and hither had been borne the remains of the statesman to be buried next to the dust of William Pitt and close to the bust of Lord Beaconsfield,