

ASPECTS OF LIBERALISM IN SHEFFIELD

1849 — 1886

by

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University of Sheffield.

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SUMMARY

The introduction traces the origins of Sheffield Liberalism in the reform movements of 1790 - 1848. Part one looks at the divisions between the Whig Radicals and the Democrats and the decline and disappearance of the Democrats in 1854. Liberals were agreed about the Crimean and China Wars and middle class control of the party was firmly established by 1857. Part two examines Liberal attitudes to Italy, Poland and the American Civil War, the struggle for parliamentary reform and the growing dissatisfaction with Roebuck, culminating in his rejection by the progressive Liberals and the election of Mundella in 1868. Part three deals with the Radical Nonconformist revolt, with reference to the education question, Liberation and social issues, and the schism in the party caused by the Chamberlain candidature in 1874. Union was re-established with the formation of the Sheffield Liberal Association, but in the years 1877 - 1880 the political balance swung decisively towards the Conservatives, who, through a highly efficient organisation and an influential newspaper, succeeded in making Sheffield a centre of Jingoism and won a notable victory in the election of 1880. Part four discusses the problems facing the Liberals in the 1880's, the strength of local Conservatism and the impact of national questions, and ends with the Home Rule crisis in 1886. In each part there are chapters reviewing the national scene and the social and economic development of Sheffield. The conclusion seeks to emphasize certain themes, such as the middle class defection to Conservatism, the influence of Nonconformity and the impact of outside influences and to discover the essence of Liberalism in Sheffield.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN FOOTNOTES

L.C.	Leader Collection
M.D.	Miscellaneous Documents
S.C.L.	Sheffield City Library
S.D.T.	<i>Sheffield Daily Telegraph</i>
S.F.P.	<i>Sheffield Free Press</i>
S.I.	<i>Sheffield and Rotherham Independent</i>
S.L.R.	<i>Sheffield Local Register</i>
S.P.	<i>Sheffield Post</i>
S.T.	<i>Sheffield Times</i>
S.U.L.	Sheffield University Library

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Radical Sheffield

Sheffield was a populous and thriving industrial town in 1790. Situated at the confluence of five fast-flowing rivers which provided abundant water power, and near iron-ore deposits and coal-fields, it had long been famous for its cutlery and iron industries. In the course of the eighteenth century new industries, Old Sheffield Plate, precious metal smelting and the Britannia metal trade, had been established. Benjamin Huntsman had perfected crucible steel, and the main industry, cutlery, was on the verge of a transformation in 1790 with the application of steam power to the process of grinding. Communications had been improved, and Sheffield merchants had established direct contacts with the continental markets. The first bank, Roebuck and Shore, was founded in 1770 and Joseph Gales began to publish the *Sheffield Register* in 1787. The population was growing rapidly: in 1750 there were 20,000 in the parish; in 1801 there were more than 45,000.¹ Yet despite its economic importance, the town had no representatives in Parliament and the freeholders had to make the journey to York in order to vote. In 1801 the Sheffield township had a population of 30,000, but the Poll Book for 1807 registers 626 voters.² In view of the sharp contrast between its economic and political status, it is not surprising that Sheffield became a centre of radical activity in the last decade of the eighteenth century.

Radicalism, which meant thorough and fundamental reform in Church and State, had its origins in the struggles between George III and the Commons which had prompted discussion about the English Constitution and a wish to recapture that true political liberty which, it was believed, had been established at the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Radical ideas had been popularized in the writings of political theorists, and especially by Tom Paine in *The Rights of Man*. But by far the greatest stimulus to the growth of Radicalism was the French Revolution of 1789. By showing that far-reaching constitutional change was indeed possible, it dealt a severe blow to the idea of Edmund Burke, that a constitution was sacrosanct and therefore fundamental changes could not be made. It gave rise to radical activity throughout Britain, especially in the emerging industrial towns of the North which had no representation in Parliament.

In Sheffield, the nature of the local cutlery industry fostered the growth of Radicalism. Organized on a small scale, with few large manufacturers, it was a workshop industry. Some men worked for an employer on his materials, but most were tenants renting "trows" in "hulls",³ taking in work from outside. The out-workers were those who merely rented room and power or worked in small workshops or sheds. All workers in the cutlery trades were highly skilled and independent in their outlook, working irregular hours. Moreover, because it was not a factory industry, the ascent from journeyman to master was fairly easy, so much so that the distinction between master and workman was often almost imperceptible. Because the capital required to set up as a master was so small, it was common for journeymen to become "little mesters"⁴ during periods of depression when work was scarce. These "little mesters" proved harmful to the trade since they tended to depress prices and often to produce inferior goods in an attempt to reduce costs. When trade improved, many of them returned to being journeymen, usually with an increase in earnings. Thus the structure of the staple industry was such that "class" was not sharply defined in Sheffield society.

"There is not," wrote John Parker in 1830, "that marked line of difference between the rich man and the poor man, which is becoming annually more observable in other places. The middle ranks are 'nearer' both to the upper and the lower. The trade here is, as it ought to be, republican and not an oligarchy: it is in the town, and not in the hands of a few enormous capitalists."⁵

1 *Population in Sheffield, 1086-1951*, local history leaflet, S.C.L., 1955.

2 Quoted in H. N. Crashaw, *Movements for Political and Social Reform in Sheffield, 1792-1832*, Sheffield M.A. Thesis, 1954, p.3.

3 A "hull" was a workroom which held a number of "trows" (troughs) in which the grindstones ran.

4 The term "can be appropriately applied to every semi-capitalistic out-worker. Strictly speaking, however, the name "little mester" applies only to men whose enterprise, on account of its nature or scope, involves a substantial share of commercial risks and liabilities." G.I.H. Lloyd, *The Cutlery Trades*, 1913, p.191.

5 J. Parker, *A Statement of the Population, etc. etc. of the Town of Sheffield*, Sheffield, 1830, p.18

For these reasons, there was an absence of that social tension which developed in other industrial towns as the gulf between master and workman widened. Though sturdily independent in their political outlook, the artisans were ready to co-operate with the middle class reformers in Sheffield, and they could make time to attend political meetings. They regarded Radicalism as a means of alleviating their economic distress, which was often prolonged and severe.

Although the line which separated master and workman in the cutlery trades was indistinct, there was an upper middle class in Sheffield, composed of prominent steel masters and merchants, such as the Wards and the Baileys, of long-established Sheffield families, such as the Rawsons of Wardsend and the Shores, and of professional men — lawyers, doctors, clerics. They had social standing in the town and a number of them were sympathetic towards movements for humanitarian and moderate political reform. Although the Yorkshire Association appears to have had little impact in Sheffield itself, James Wilkinson, the Vicar of Sheffield, and the steel master, Samuel Shore, attended the meeting which inaugurated the Association in 1779.¹ Nonconformity was strong in Sheffield, and interest in reform among this class was stimulated by a sense of social and political exclusion which many of them felt as Dissenters. With a strong feeling of social duty, they were ready to take part in any movement which had as its object moderate political or social reform. Very few of them had any sympathy with Radicalism because they believed that it would endanger the existing social structure. They were, however, prepared to contemplate change and to this extent they had a common ground for co-operation with the working class reformers in Sheffield.

The Society for Constitutional Information

The Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information was founded in the autumn of 1791, stimulated by events in France and at a time of severe depression in the local trades. Beginning in "an assembly of some five or six mechanicks",² membership increased so rapidly that in March, 1792, it was said to number two thousand.³ It seems that it was composed almost entirely of artisans, "the inferior sort of manufacturers and workers",⁴ as Vicar Wilkinson described them. The purpose of the Society was to "educate" the people by the distribution and discussion of political propaganda. It published original pamphlets and earlier radical tracts in favour of universal adult male suffrage, annual elections and equal electoral districts. Reform was seen as a renovation rather than an innovation, a return to English liberty; by eliminating ministerial malpractices, leading to more efficient government, it was believed that reform would alleviate economic distress. The reformers cited earlier political theorists, especially John Locke, and even the Bible, to justify their demands.

While it remains true that the society was composed predominantly of artisans, there were several men closely associated with it who did not belong to this class. Henry Redhead Yorke⁵ was not a native of Sheffield and was a recent recruit to the cause of reform. It appears that he was never a member of the Sheffield Society, but he attended meetings fairly frequently and occasionally chaired them. He was a flamboyant character, given to high-flown rhetoric which often led him to make extreme and incautious remarks. He was a close friend of Joseph Gales⁶ who was undoubtedly the dynamic force behind the Society. Bookseller, auctioneer and printer, but primarily a journalist, in 1787 he had begun to publish the *Sheffield Register*, a very radical paper which advocated parliamentary reform and popular rights, printing extracts from the writings of Tom Paine. Gales and Yorke were probably responsible for one of the most important publications of the Society, *The Spirit of John Locke*. James Montgomery⁷

1 G. P. Jones, "The Political Reform Movement in Sheffield", *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*, Vol. 4, 1937, p.57.

2 Quoted in A.W.L. Seaman, "Reform Politics at Sheffield, 1791-97", *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*, Vol. 7, 1957, p.216.

3 Figures of membership are unreliable, see Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

4 Quoted in Seaman, *op. cit.*, p. 216

5 Henry Redhead Yorke, 1772-1813: In Paris in 1792; while living at Little Eaton, nr. Derby, wrote a pamphlet in support of negro slave trade; changed his mind and joined Radical Society at Derby and went to Sheffield in 1793. Indicted for conspiracy in 1794, fined £200 and sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment in July, 1795; in prison repudiated his earlier Radical views; 1805-11 edited *Political Review*. See J. Taylor, "The Sheffield Constitutional Society, 1791-95," *Transactions of the Hunter Archaeological Society*, vol. 5, 1939, pp. 145-146.

6 Joseph Gales, 1761-1841: b. Eckington, son of parish clerk; apprenticed to a printer at Newark; after his flight from England in 1794, ran a newspaper in Philadelphia; became official printer to State of North Carolina and ran a newspaper in Raleigh, N.C. See Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

7 James Montgomery, 1771-1854: b. Irvine, Ayrshire, of Irish Moravian missionary parents; educated at Moravian settlement at Fulneck, nr Leeds; after working in a store at Wath-upon-Deerne and in a printer's office in London, came to Sheffield in 1792; 1795-1825 editor and proprietor of *Iris*; opposed French wars; famous poet and hymn writer and zealous philanthropist. See J. Holland and J. Everett, *Memoirs of James Montgomery*, 7 vols., 1854-56.

was an employee and friend of Gales. He was not a member of the Sheffield Society, nor were his political opinions as radical as those of Gales. He favoured a moderate and balanced reform of Church and State, such as he outlined in the *History of a Church and a Warming Pan*, written in 1793. Indeed, as the years passed, a much more conservative outlook replaced his earlier Radicalism, and he turned away from politics, devoting himself more and more to religion, literature and philanthropy.

The influence of Nonconformity upon this reform movement was considerable. Samuel Roberts, manufacturer, philanthropist and a conservative in politics, wrote in his autobiography: "to many, even professed ministers of the Gospel, it [Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*] appeared to become dearer than their Bible, and their visits to their flocks were made with the *Rights of Man* in their pockets to induce them to read it".¹ Jehoiada Brewer, minister of Queen Street Independent Chapel, was renowned for his extremely radical opinions.² The proceedings of a public meeting held by the reformers in West Street in February, 1794, as a protest against the war with France, were remarkable in that they were "at the same time politically ultra-radical and wholly religious."³ The meeting began with prayer, followed by a hymn written for the occasion by James Montgomery (himself a Nonconformist) and ended with a decidedly evangelical address. At his trial in 1795, Henry Yorke called as witnesses two Independent ministers, one of them being the Rev. Moses Taylor of Howard Street Chapel.⁴ The Established Church and the Wesleyan Methodists were staunchly Tory and of course not all Dissenters were Radicals, but the influence which Nonconformity exerted upon a predominantly artisan reform movement is remarkable, especially when it is remembered that most artisans did not regularly attend a place of worship.⁵

The problem which the reformers faced was how to secure reform, how to make the theoretical sovereignty of the people a reality. They had met in small discussion groups, they had studied *The Rights of Man* and they had petitioned Parliament. But they had achieved nothing. There was no next step but to resort to arms, and this the reformers refused to do. At a large meeting held on Castle Hill (7 April, 1794), it was resolved that no more petitions would be presented. The Government interpreted this as meaning that the next step would be armed rebellion. Yorke was arrested and Gales fled the country. The Society managed to hold two large meetings before its dissolution in 1795.

The dissolution of the Society is not hard to explain. From the start, the reformers had to contend with strong counter-propaganda, especially after the outbreak of war with France, when they could be accused of being disloyal and unpatriotic. Widespread unemployment in the Sheffield trades as a result of the loss of French markets, made the finances of the Society unstable. The demand for universal suffrage alarmed men of property and position. Yorkshire Association reformers, such as Samuel Shore, could not support extreme Radicalism, however anxious they might be not to weaken the cause of moderate reform. Despite their insistence that their intentions were peaceful and that they aimed at political and not social change, in view of events in France, the middle classes in Sheffield could not but regard the artisan reformers with suspicion and alarm. Moreover, considering the repressive attitude of Pitt's Government towards Radicalism, there were no legal means whereby the Society could achieve its aims. Finally, the imprisonment of Yorke and the flight of Gales seriously weakened it by depriving it of its leadership. Even the gentle Montgomery, who in 1794 continued Gales' newspaper under the title of the *Iris*, was hounded by the authorities and suffered two periods of imprisonment. But the prosecutions did not destroy the *Iris*, nor did Montgomery abandon the cause of reform in its pages.

1 Quoted in E. R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, 1957, pp. 62-63.

2 R. E. Leader, *Reminiscences of Old Sheffield*, 1875, p. 174.

3 Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

5 Doubtless the more prosperous artisans did attend church and chapel, and in the absence of evidence, attendance among the workmen is difficult to measure but "our knowledge of the proprietary nature of the churches and chapels of the time . . . coupled with our general knowledge of the social group that was the mainstay of the Old Dissent in the eighteenth century, does not encourage us to think that the poorer common folk 'belonged'." Wickham, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

Although organized reform agitation among the artisans ceased after 1795, the next twenty years were marked by spasmodic outbursts of discontent.¹ Distress was acute in Sheffield during the war years; in 1799, for example, 10,000 out of a population of 31,314 in the Sheffield township were in need of voluntary poor relief.² The high price of bread led to nocturnal meetings in 1800 and 1812, and there were serious bread riots in 1800, 1812 and 1817. There were also short-lived Secret Societies in 1801 and 1816 - 17. Their history is obscure, but it seems that they were in contact with outside societies and involved in weapon manufacture.

The middle classes in Sheffield were sympathetic towards the grievances of the artisans, as their generous subscriptions towards poor relief showed. But they had been alarmed by the events of the French Revolution and by the agitation for universal suffrage. As time passed, and the threat to property appeared less great, their interest in reform revived and in 1810 a distinctly middle class reform movement appeared in Sheffield.

The Friends of Reform

The Friends of Reform emerged at a time of political and economic crisis. The Walcheren Expedition had proved a costly failure, and trade was bad as a result of the Orders in Council which had imposed an embargo upon the Napoleonic Empire. As a political reform movement, however, the Friends of Reform had serious weaknesses from the outset. There was no organisation, no fixed membership and no agreed policy.³ Unlike the Constitutional Society, it made no attempt to organize public opinion, although 7,000 - 8,000 people attended a meeting of 6 June, 1810, and 8,000 - 10,000 that of 9 October, 1816.⁴ Even more serious was the disagreement among the Friends of Reform about the extent of reform that was necessary. At the meeting of 6 June, 1810, Thomas Rawson advocated universal suffrage and annual parliaments, while Thomas Asline Ward spoke in favour of "a moderate and necessary Reform".⁵ So the movement was divided into extremists, such as Thomas Rawson of Wardsend⁶ and John Payne of Newhill,⁷ and moderates, such as Thomas Asline Ward,⁸ John Bailey⁹ and Ebenezer Rhodes.¹⁰ By 1816 the extremists had gained control of the movement, and in January, 1817, a petition was presented to the Commons asking for universal suffrage and annual parliaments.¹¹ Nor did the Friends of Reform represent the middle classes in Sheffield. In 1810 Parliament was presented with a counter-petition from the Church Burgesses, the Town Collector, the Cutlers' Company and 300 merchants and manufacturers, and in 1817 the Church Burgesses and Town Trustees presented a Loyal Address to the Prince Regent.¹²

Like the Constitutional Society, the Friends of Reform believed that reform would be a remedy for economic distress. They opposed the Orders in Council and the Sinking Fund, and they demanded rigid economy and the abolition of the Standing Army in 1816.¹³ They saw reform in terms of a restoration of political liberty rather than an innovation. But the middle class reformers differed from the artisans of 1791 in that they could not agree about the measure of reform required. The movement disappeared in 1817 partly because there was no next step after their petitions had failed, and partly because they were seriously alarmed at the violence and suspected plots among the artisans in May - June, 1817.¹⁴

1 This paragraph is based mainly on H.N. Crashaw, *Movements for Political and Social Reform in Sheffield, 1792 - 1832*, Sheffield M.A. Thesis, 1954, pp. 33 - 54.)

2 Mary Walton, *Sheffield: Its Story and Its Achievements*, Sheffield, 1968, p. 148.

3 Crashaw, *op. cit.*, p. 59 seq.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

6 Thomas Rawson, 1748 - 1826: country gentleman, member of long-established family; 1781 founded Pond Street Brewery and by 1821 proprietor with John Barker of Sheffield Lead Works; known as "the rich man's model and the poor man's friend"; member of Yorkshire Association, but no connection with Constitutional Society.

7 John Payne: country gentleman and veteran reformer; active in Constitutional Society, friend of Gales and contributed to *Register* as "Vicinius".

8 Thomas Asline Ward, 1781 - 1871: prosperous cutler (Master Cutler, 1816); born an Anglican but became a Unitarian; active in humanitarian reform; 1824 - 29 editor of *Sheffield Independent*; 1830 President of Political Union; President of Literary and Philosophical Society and prominent in Mechanics' Institute. See G.D. Jennett, *Thomas Asline Ward - His Life and Achievements*, Sheffield M.A. Thesis, 1954.

9 John Bailey: a prosperous merchant, whose brother, Samuel, was known as the "Bentham of Hallamshire"; active in Political Union.

10 Ebenezer Rhodes, 1762 - 1839: b. Masborough; in cutlery trade with Thomas Champion but not a good businessman; author of *Peak Scenery* and a friend of James Montgomery; not a member of Constitutional Society; editor of *Sheffield Independent* 1820 - 24; a leader of Political Union.

11 Crashaw, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

Although they disappeared as a movement after March, 1817, the Friends of Reform remained important as individuals interested in reform. Samuel Shore chaired a meeting protesting against the Peterloo Massacre, at which Rawson, Bailey and Asline Ward spoke.¹ In December, 1820, Bailey and Rhodes attended a meeting to draw up a petition for the dismissal of the ministers, and a letter from Samuel Shore was read.² Being dissatisfied with the increasingly conservative attitude of Montgomery and the *Iris*, reformers founded the *Sheffield Independent* in 1819 which, under the editorship of Ebenezer Rhodes (1820 - 24) and Thomas Asline Ward (1824 - 29), rapidly superseded the *Iris* as the organ of reform in Sheffield.

Nonconformity was a powerful influence upon the Friends of Reform, as it had been upon the Constitutional Society. While Methodism had breathed a new vigour into Dissent, the Established Church had slumbered apathetically, displaying a marked lack of real spirituality. As a result of its conservative political outlook the Church became identified with reaction and repression. Apart from general dissatisfaction with the Established Church, Dissenters had real social and political grievances. The Test and Corporation Acts excluded them from Parliament and corporations, while they were called upon to pay Church Rates towards the upkeep of the Established Church. Excluded from the University of Oxford and prevented from taking degrees at Cambridge, doubts were even cast upon the validity of their marriage and funeral services. Dissenters were very numerous in Sheffield and included many of the most prominent and successful men in the town. One of these was Thomas Asline Ward, a Unitarian who attended Upper Chapel. A prosperous cutlery manufacturer, he achieved the position of Master Cutler in 1816. Ward must have felt sharply the contrast between his real position in Sheffield society and the social and political exclusion which he suffered as a Nonconformist. When he became editor of the *Independent* in 1824, he began a campaign for complete religious toleration, which meant not only repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, but also Catholic Emancipation. Catholic Emancipation was disliked by many Nonconformists in Sheffield; of two petitions drawn up in 1829, that in favour had 7,000 signatures, while the one against had 30,000,³ an indication of the prejudice and suspicion felt towards Roman Catholicism. Yet the struggle for complete religious toleration, which was by no means achieved in 1829, formed an important part of the radical programme.

The struggle for civil and religious liberty can be seen as part of a wider reforming impulse which included humanitarian reform, a movement which was particularly strong in Sheffield in the early nineteenth century. In the absence of a coherent and humane approach to the problems of local government, "improvement" was left to individual philanthropy. James Montgomery, Thomas Asline Ward, Samuel Roberts, George Bennet and Rowland Hodgson were all active in charitable and humanitarian work. It has been said that "from early in the century Evangelicalism was firmly entrenched in Sheffield Christianity",⁴ and interest in evangelical work was intense among Churchmen and Nonconformists.

1 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

3 Crashaw, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

4 E.R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, 1957, p. 82.

Varied in scope, the work included Sunday and Day Schools, Foreign Missions, the Abolition of Slavery, the cause of boy chimney sweeps, the Aged Female Society, the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor, the Mechanics' Library and Institute, the Savings' bank, the Infirmary and charities for the relief of local distress. It was an expression of the social conscience of the elite of Sheffield society, and it brought the middle classes into closer contact with the artisans. Yet, generous and sincere as these men were, individual philanthropy could not meet the needs or solve the problems of an industrial town which was growing at such a rapid rate. What was needed was a rational and efficient system of local government.

The Political Union

Rapid economic expansion took place in the years after 1815. New markets for Sheffield's cutlery goods were found in America and on the Continent and trade increased, especially after the reduction of long-term credits. Although Messrs. Greaves erected the Sheaf Works in 1823, in which all the processes of manufacture from iron to the finished product were centralized, small-scale organization predominated in the cutlery industry. Expansion was conspicuous; between 1824 and 1851 the numbers engaged in the cutlery and tool trades almost doubled.¹ The consequent demand for steel stimulated growth in the steel industry which in 1851 was employing about 5,200.² Economic expansion was accompanied by a rapid growth in the population. Between 1801 and 1851 the population of the country doubled, while that of Sheffield trebled.³ There was a particularly spectacular increase between 1821 and 1831,⁴ and by 1851 the population had reached 135,300, of which about 120,000 lived within a mile radius of the parish church.⁵ Economic growth led to a depression in the conditions of the artisans, although their standard of living probably remained higher than in most other industrial towns. Artisans had their own houses, there were no cellar dwellings and in periods of good trade workmen and their families ate comparatively well. But a number of social surveys,⁶ carried out in Sheffield in the 1840's, revealed sanitary neglect, sewage, smoke and burial grounds being especially serious problems. Water and gas supplies were inadequate, and, as industrialization proceeded, sanitary conditions became progressively worse. Most working class families existed barely on the subsistence level and few could afford medical care. The infant mortality rate was well above the national mean, and the adult death rate was so high because grinding was such a hazardous occupation; most grinders died from silicosis long before they reached the age of forty. It was calculated that half the workmen were illiterate, and G. C. Holland believed that "two-thirds of the working class children are growing up in a state of comparative ignorance".⁷ Church attendance among the artisans was rare.⁸ Conditions were especially hard when trade was bad, and it was at such times that the workmen were most likely to be politically active. The absence of sharply defined classes in Sheffield eliminated social acrimony to a large extent; while both the artisans and the middle classes had their own traditions of radical activity, there was no real barrier to co-operation in the cause of reform.

1 S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, Liverpool, 1959, p. 6.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

4 Population growth:

1801	45,755
1811	53,231
1821	65,375
1831	91,692
1841	110,891
1851	135,310
1861	185,172

Population in Sheffield, 1086-1951, S. C. L., 1955.

5 Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

6 J. C. Symons, *A Report on the Trades of Sheffield and the Moral and Physical Conditions of the Young Persons Employed in Them*, 1843. G. C. Holland, *The Vital Statistics of Sheffield*, 1843. J. Haywood and W. Lee, *A Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Borough of Sheffield*, 1848.

7 Quoted in E. R. Wickham, *Church and People*, p. 91.

8 Holland remarked: "the artisans generally are not frequent attendants on a place of worship", quoted *ibid.*, p. 92.

A number of circumstances contributed to revive interest in parliamentary reform. The attainment of a large measure of religious toleration in the 1820's gave a fillip to political reform because it disposed of the myth of a sacrosanct constitution, and it was logical that an extension of civil liberties should be accompanied by an extension of political liberties. Trade was bad between 1828 and 1830, and poor harvests forced up the price of corn so that by December, 1828, it had reached 85s. per quarter on the Sheffield market.¹ In addition, national finances were precarious. Finally, early in 1830, the Bourbons fell and parliamentary government was established in France. As early as 19 February, 1830, the Sheffield reformers convened a meeting which petitioned for the enfranchisement of Sheffield.² Opinion was almost unanimous in favour of reform and it is recorded that when Brougham, the Whig, spoke in Paradise Square during the election of 1830, 10,000 people listened to him, while Duncombe, the Tory, was heard by a mere 2,000.³ The refusal of Wellington to countenance reform opened the door to Grey and the Whigs. When it was discovered that Sheffield was not included in Russell's proposed bill, John Parker wrote a pamphlet⁴ in which he argued that in view of the size of its population and the importance of its industry, Sheffield had a right to representation. Sheffield was included in the bill which was put before Parliament.

The Sheffield Political Union was formed late in 1830. Although it originated among the Sheffield artisans, it was very soon "captured" by the middle classes and became eminently "respectable", for, as the *Independent* remarked:

"[They] are not those who wish for annual parliaments and universal suffrage, and they are very desirous that the affairs of the Union should be chiefly directed by men whose known respectability of character, and whose liberal political opinions, might be at once a pledge to the Union that it should be rendered as efficient as possible in making known to the Legislature, by legal means, the wants and wishes of the people; and to the public that no measures should receive its sanction which were not strictly constitutional".⁵

A committee, with Thomas Asline Ward as President, was elected in January, 1831. But very soon after the formation of the Political Union, the rift between moderates and extremists, which had divided the Friends of Reform, emerged once again. The moderates were content to leave the details of reform to Parliament and in their petition of December 1830, had called only for a "full, fair and free" representation of the people.⁶ The extremists replied with a counter-petition in which they demanded nothing less than universal suffrage, annual parliaments and secret ballot.⁷ While they favoured secret ballot, the moderates would not accept universal suffrage because they considered the artisans lacked the necessary education to exercise the franchise and because they were afraid of the consequences of working class political power. Unwilling to sacrifice the bill for the sake of the secret ballot, they supported the Whigs. In Sheffield the division was not between reformers and anti-reformers, but between those who accepted Grey's bill as a prelude to further reform and those who considered that the Whig measure did not go far enough.

The moderates were men from the upper middle class of Sheffield society. They included merchants, large manufacturers and professional men.⁸ The leaders were Thomas Asline Ward, John and Samuel Bailey, the Parkers of Woodthorpe, who were university-educated barristers and bankers, and Doctors Knight and Holland. Luke Palfreyman, a solicitor, bridged the gap between the moderates and the extremists. The son of a hosier and educated at the local Grammar School, his political opinions tended towards the extreme but he stood with the moderates, thinking the bill preferable to no bill at all. The extremists, on the other hand, produced only one leader of note. This was Isaac Ironside, a self-made man who had risen to become an accountant. Ironside drew his support completely from the working classes, but he had no success and the moderates triumphed in the Political Union. The moderates were men of the highest social standing and they were able to convince the artisans that their interests were identical to those of the middle classes. The artisans were prepared to accept the bill in the firm belief that more detailed reform would follow.

1 H. N. Crashaw, *Movements for Political and Social Reform*, p. 98.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

4 J. Parker, *A Statement of the Population etc. etc. of the Town of Sheffield*, Sheffield, 1830.

5 *S.J.*, 1.1.1831, quoted in Betty Thickett, *Radical Activity in Sheffield, 1830-48*, Durham B.A. dissertation, 1951, pp. 22-23.

6 Crashaw, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 110

Finally, many workmen probably thought that they could attain the proposed £10 property qualification and thus secure the vote. So between 1830 and 1832, they were ready to support the Political Union under middle class leadership. It resembled the Constitutional Society in its low subscription (6d.) and in the emphasis which it placed upon discipline and orderly proceedings. But it did not possess an elaborate organization and it relied not on class meetings or political pamphlets, but on the public meeting, and in these respects it was more like the Friends of Reform.¹

The course of the Reform Bill was followed with intense interest in Sheffield. Contributions were made to the expenses of the reform candidates in the election of March, 1831, when four reformers were elected for the county. The Sheffield reformers were angered by the vehement opposition to the bill of a local landowner, Lord Wharnccliffe, and William IV, who had earlier been praised loudly as a patriot, was denounced with equal bitterness by the *Independent* when he accepted the resignation of Grey and the Whigs, and in May, 1832, a large meeting in Paradise Square gave three groans for the king and drew up petitions to the king and the Commons.² Perhaps no event has ever caused greater excitement in Sheffield than the passing of the Reform Bill. Ebenezer Elliott³ wrote a hymn for the occasion and a giant procession passed through the town. All reformers believed that this was the first step to further reform. But this was not to be, and the working classes soon came to realise that they had gained nothing by their alliance with the middle classes in 1832. For their part, the middle class reformers became increasingly dissatisfied with the Whig Government as it failed to carry out the further reforms which they considered necessary.

Some of these political tensions were reflected in the first parliamentary election in Sheffield in 1832. There were four candidates. John Parker was a Whig who enjoyed the backing of the extensive Parker influence. His Whiggery appealed to those who sought a "safe" man, and he even drew some support from the small Tory faction in the town. James Silk Buckingham, though not a native of Sheffield, was a Radical, who enjoyed the support of the *Iris* and who had acquired great local popularity as a result of lectures he had given in the previous year on the evils of the monopoly of the East India Company. The really popular candidate, however, was Thomas Asline Ward; at a meeting in July, 1832, the non-electors committed themselves to support Ward and Buckingham. The fourth candidate was Samuel Bailey, a philosopher and Radical, whose popular appeal was fairly narrow, especially as the Baileys were reputed to be bad masters. But because Ward entered the contest late, after Bailey had agreed to stand, both contended for the same votes with the result that neither was successful. A serious riot occurred when it was known that Ward and Bailey were likely to be defeated. This showed the intense interest which the non-electors took in the election, while the fact that the Whig candidate, John Parker, who was not popular with the artisans, topped the poll showed just how small their real political influence was. Parker was able to retain his seat until 1852, but in these years Sheffield always returned one Radical M.P. — Buckingham, H. G. Ward⁴ and J. A. Roebuck. The small Tory faction in Sheffield, drawing support from the Wharnccliffe influence in the West Riding, some manufacturers and merchants, Churchmen and Wesleyan Methodist ministers, was politically unimportant.⁵

Corn Law Repeal and Chartism

In 1837 a severe depression hit the Sheffield trades, which reached its height in 1842. In August of that year, of 25,000 adult men in the local trades, only 4,000 — 5,000 were in full work with average earnings of 18s. per week, 17,000 in part-time work, averaging 9s., and 3,000 — 4,000 were totally unemployed.⁶ Even the respected bank of Parker and Shore was forced to close. In these severe circumstances, the middle classes turned to Free Trade and Corn Law repeal, while the artisans looked to a distinctly working class movement, Chartism.

The Corn Laws, which, by restricting imports, kept the price of bread at a high level to protect the landed interests from foreign competition, had been opposed in Sheffield from their inception. In 1814-15 about 15,800 people signed a petition against them⁷. Ebenezer Elliott denounced the laws vehemently and unceasingly in his poetry, and Lord Milton, M.P. for Yorkshire, opposed them in Parliament during the 1820's.

1 Crshaw, *op. cit.*, pp. 116 - 118.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 122.

3 Ebenezer Elliott, 1781 - 1849: b. Masborough; iron merchant; poet — denounced Corn Laws; active in Mechanics' Institute.

4 H. G. Ward, M.P. for Sheffield, 1837-49: favoured abolition of Irish tithes, Church Rates, the Corn Laws and the property qualification for M.P.'s; supported an extension of the franchise and of education, the ballot and shorter parliaments. See Betty Thickett, *Some Aspects of Radicalism in Sheffield, 1830 - 70*, Durham M.A. thesis, p. 95.

5 E. R. Wickham, *Church and People*, p. 104.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 97 - 98.

7 Betty Thickett, *Radical Activity in Sheffield, 1830 - 48*, p. 44.

The Sheffield artisans formed a society to campaign for repeal, but it did not last long, being swamped in the Reform Bill agitation.¹ In January, 1834, the Sheffield Anti-Corn Law Society was founded, a middle class society, the Treasurer of which was William Ibbotson, proprietor of the Globe Works.² In a period of good trade it had little success, and it seems that it had become defunct by 1838. But the picture was altered by bad harvests and the serious trade depression of this year. The *Iris* and the *Independent* began to mount an anti-monopoly campaign, and the middle class reformers convened a meeting on 28 January, 1839, to discuss the Corn Laws.³ It was the first of many anti-Corn Law meetings to be invaded by the Chartists.

By this time the Sheffield Working Men's Association had quite a large membership. On 18 July, 1838, the *Iris* had declared its support for the People's Charter, thinking that "the lukewarmness of the middle classes for the interests of the working man is a poor return for the assistance he so unhesitatingly and perseveringly gave in acquiring for them the charter of their rights in the £10 clause".⁴ The working classes had come to realise that they had gained nothing by the Reform Act of 1832, which had admitted the middle classes to a share of political power. Chartism, with its demand for manhood suffrage, the ballot, equal electoral districts, payment of M.P.'s, abolition of their property qualification and annual parliaments, represented an attempt to concentrate political power in the hands of the working classes. Some Chartists hoped to achieve their aims by peaceful persuasion, but, in time, the movement came more and more under the control of such men as Feargus O'Connor, who were prepared to consider violence. Physical force Chartists would have no truck with the middle classes, and they regarded Corn Law repeal as an attempt to divert the working classes from the pursuit of their true interests as contained in the People's Charter. The middle classes were alarmed by the violent attitude of many Chartists⁵ and they came to equate Chartism with social revolution. The Chartists had much support among the Sheffield artisans, although the majority were not physical forcists; a meeting in October, 1838, was attended by about 20,000 people.⁶ Yet at the anti-Corn Law meeting of 28 January, 1839, the Chartist leaders, Isaac Ironside and William Gill, failed to carry a motion putting the Charter before Corn Law repeal.⁷

During 1839 the Chartists were very active in Sheffield. In June, Feargus O'Connor spoke in Paradise Square and the Sheffield Chartists sent a delegate, William Gill, to the National Convention. In August and September, following the example of other towns, they attended the parish church *en masse*. As open-air meetings had been suppressed by the magistrates in August, nightly meetings were held on the moors, and the Chartists organized themselves into "classes", of which there were about one hundred in the town. Then a series of setbacks befell the Chartists. On 4 September, the trade unions declared that because their aims were non-political they could not support the People's Charter.⁸ By November, the authorities had succeeded in preventing all Chartist meetings and the Chartists resorted to invading anti-Corn Law meetings. In January, 1840, a "plot" to capture and burn the town was uncovered, and although it appears that it was largely the work of an "agent provocateur",⁹ it served to alarm the middle classes and to discredit the Chartists.

In the autumn of 1839, the prospect of greater co-operation between the artisans and the middle classes had been held out by the formation of the Working Men's Anti-Corn Law Committee.¹⁰ Many artisans in Sheffield were interested in Corn Law repeal and they were prepared to co-operate with the middle class reformers to achieve it. In March, 1840, a Sheffield branch of the Anti-Corn Law League was founded, of which William Ibbotson was the Chairman and Luke Palfreyman the Secretary.¹¹

Chartist activity revived in 1841. H. G. Ward met with a hostile response when he visited his constituency; in May, a Corn Law meeting was invaded by Chartists, and in September, a mass meeting was addressed by O'Connor.¹² The Complete Suffrage Union, founded in December, represented an attempt by a Birmingham Radical, Joseph Sturge, to unite the middle and working classes behind a programme which, although it adopted the points of the Charter, was free from the class consciousness and revolutionary stigma of Chartism.

1 *Ibid.*, p.45

2 *Ibid.*, p.47

3 *Ibid.*, p.49

4 Quoted in Betty Thickett, *Radical Activity*, p.50

5 e.g. Ebenezer Elliott resigned from the Sheffield Working Men's Association in May, 1839, as a protest against physical force and Chartist support for the Corn Laws. See J. Watkins, *Life of Ebenezer Elliott*, 1850 pp. 148-149

6 Betty Thickett, *Radical Activity*, p.52

7 *Ibid.*, p.52

8 *Ibid.*, p.55

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 58-60

10 *Ibid.*, p.61

11 *Ibid.*, p.60

12 *Ibid.*, p.62

Although supported by the *Iris*, some middle class Radicals, notably Edward Bramley and Ebenezer Elliott, and some moral force Chartists, the Complete Suffrage Union was not a success and, like Corn Law repeal, it weakened the Chartist movement. Yet Chartist activity continued in Sheffield. In July, 1844, Thomas Duncombe, Radical M.P. for Finsbury, was presented with addresses by the Chartist leaders, Gill, Briggs and West, and the meeting was also attended by Feargus O'Connor and G. J. Harney.¹ There appears to have been a lull in their activities between 1844 and 1846, but they were strong enough to run their own candidate, Thomas Clark, in the election of July, 1847.² They also gained strength in the Town Council. In 1849 they filled eight out of fourteen vacancies, and twenty two out of fifty six members of the Town Council were Chartists.³ Chartism was a distinctly working class movement. The middle class Radicals held aloof, for, although a number of them were not unsympathetic towards the working class demands as they showed by their support for the Complete Suffrage Union, they could not support Chartism because they considered that it threatened the existing social order. There was much support among the Sheffield artisans for Corn Law repeal and yet, despite the hopes held out by the Working Men's Anti-Corn Law Committee and by the Complete Suffrage Union, the middle classes and the artisans failed to co-operate. The artisans were too anxious to avoid a repetition of 1832 when they had backed the middle classes and gained nothing by it. But the failure of Chartism showed that they could not do without the middle classes; it showed that the workmen "remained powerless in any issues in which their interests were opposed to those of the middle classes".⁴

Incorporation, Education and the Poor Law

The rapid growth of Sheffield as an industrial centre and the disorder in local government made necessary a rational and efficient system of local administration. Yet it was eight years before Sheffield made use of the provisions for incorporation contained in the Municipal Corporations Act. The opposition came mainly from the small Tory group in the town, from such men as Thomas Ellin, James Wilson, Creswick and Lomas.⁵ The opponents of incorporation had vested interests which would be swept away by a new system of local government and they feared that the artisans might gain a predominant influence in the Town Council. Finally, they objected to the expense and by harping on the cost they won the support of many artisans.⁶ A first petition for incorporation was investigated and rejected when it was found that 1,970 ratepayers were in favour, while 4,589 opposed it.⁷ But shortly afterwards, when the question of policing the town was raised, many were converted because they did not want Lord Wharnccliffe's West Riding Constabulary. A second petition was presented and accepted and a Charter was granted in 1843.

All Radicals regarded education as a matter of great importance and two notable attempts at adult education were made during this period. The middle class reformers established a Mechanics' Institute in 1832 but it was not a success.⁸ Its syllabus was narrow and restricted to technical subjects, and its finances were weak because workmen could not afford to pay their subscriptions when trade was bad. In time, workmen figured less and less among its membership and in 1849 it amalgamated with the middle class Athenaeum Club. The Mechanics' Institute was an attempt by the middle classes to give from above the kind of narrow-based practical education they thought the working classes should have. The failure of this scheme contrasts sharply with the success of the People's College.⁹ Founded by the Rev. R. S. Bayley¹⁰ in 1842, its aim was to provide the working classes with a liberal higher education. It was completely self-supporting and it was highly successful, although it never received any support from the middle class reformers. No doubt they regarded it as a rival to their own Mechanics' Institute, but also they probably believed that by giving a classical education to the working classes and by educating them above their position in society, ultra-radicalism might be fostered. At the same time, facilities for elementary education were totally inadequate. Nonconformists in Sheffield were opposed to any scheme of national education which might strengthen the position of the Established Church, and they petitioned against

1 *Ibid.*, p.66

2 *Ibid.*, p.69

3 Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, Liverpool, 1959, p.49

4 Pollard, *op. cit.*, p.49

5 Betty Thickett, *Radical Activity*, p. 78

6 *Ibid.*, p.78

7 *Ibid.*, p.79

8 G. P. Jones, *A Report on the Development of Adult Education in Sheffield*, Sheffield Social Survey Committee, Survey Pamphlet No. 5, 1932, pp. 12-16.

9 See G.C. Moore Smith, *The Story of the People's College, Sheffield, 1842-78*, Sheffield, 1912.

10 Robert Slater Bayley, 1801-59: b. Lichfield; baptized an Anglican but trained for Congregational ministry; came to Sheffield in 1836 as minister of Howard Street Chapel; a noted antiquarian (Fellow of Society of Antiquaries); opponent of Corn Laws and Chartism; saw no prospect of a system of national education from government — people must educate themselves; 1848 left Sheffield and moved to Queen Street, Ratcliff; while in London, founded People's College, Norwich; 1856 minister of Eignbrook Chapel, Hereford.

Graham's scheme in 1843.¹ In Sheffield, as elsewhere, educational progress was retarded by sectarian rivalry.

The Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834, which prevented all out-door relief, gave rise to an anti-Poor Law agitation, in which, with the exception of Thomas Dunn, the middle class Radicals refused to take part. Adopting a utilitarian approach, they considered that the new Poor Law was an improvement on the old wasteful system. "The agitators were a rare and curious mixture of ultra-Radicals (mainly workmen), Tories, such as the Wilsons, Ellins and Youngs, and philanthropists such as Samuel Roberts",² and this Tory-Radical alliance also formed the basis of the campaign for factory reform, in which the *Iris* played a prominent part. Of course, in an industrial town such as Sheffield the new Poor Law could not be enforced too rigorously when so many were in need of short-term poor relief, and an indirect consequence of the Act was to stimulate the growth of Trade Unions, which helped to fill this need in their capacity as friendly societies.

Between 1790 and 1848 Sheffield was an important centre of radical and reform activity. A Tory group did exist but it had very little power to influence local politics. Social acrimony was largely absent because Radicalism was the province of both the middle and the working classes and, because of the structure of the staple industry, these classes themselves were not sharply defined. Radicalism, and especially middle class Radicalism, was strongly influenced by Dissent, which also fostered a strong humanitarian reform tradition. But the impact of Radicalism was weakened by the failure of the Radicals to agree and to co-operate. Tensions and divisions, latent in the Political Union, became a wide gulf in the 1840's, as the Chartists remained hostile to the Anti-Corn Law League. The middle class reformers had no interest in the agitation against the Poor Law or in factory and sanitary reform, nor did they support adult education as the workmen themselves developed it in the People's College. But the failure of Chartism showed the working classes that they could achieve nothing alone. They needed the middle classes. The middle classes, on the other hand, made solid gains in this period. The Reform Act of 1832 had given them a share of political power and the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 had confirmed that power. The future lay with them and they faced it with optimism and confidence.

1 Thickett, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 107.

CHAPTER 1

The National Scene

"We live in such an age of material and intellectual development as the world has never seen before, and the human race is hastening on with yearly accelerated progress to its climax".¹

"One of the most obvious evils which prosperity may produce is an indifference to political improvement".²

By 1850 the economic hardship, the bitter controversy over the Corn Laws and the violent class conflicts inherent in Chartism had passed, and the turbulence of the previous decade was giving place to a period of relative calm. Society was no longer threatened by violence, and "life could be enjoyed with a greater measure of security and ease".³ The tranquillity could be disturbed from time to time; anti-Catholic feelings were aroused in 1851 by the "Papal Aggression" when the Pope divided England into dioceses and restored the Catholic hierarchy, and there was a public outcry against the mismanagement of the Crimean War, but the structure of society was never in danger. This change in the national mood was brought about largely by increasing prosperity. Despite the war and a severe temporary economic crisis in 1857, trade expanded and both prices and real wages rose steadily. Free traders were in no doubt as to the cause: "the mighty progress we are making results simply from the free exercise of the industry and energy of the people".⁴ All classes benefited from better times and, as a result, the widespread dissatisfaction with society, which had nourished Owenism and Chartism, was removed. The arguments of Bagehot that in a "system of removable inequalities" social elevation was possible through effort and ability were widely disseminated, as were the teachings of Samuel Smiles that through hard work, thrift and determination, even a poor man could achieve anything. Indeed, after 1850 the skilled workmen were coming more and more to accept middle class values and middle class political leadership. They were accepting the social system which in the 1840's they had sought to change. The general satisfaction with society as it was, rather than a pre-occupation with what it should be, gave it a stability and balance; it also made it very difficult for those who saw the need for further political reform. "I conceive at the present time there is a great apathy in the public mind as to Parliamentary Reform", Roebuck told his constituents in Sheffield in July, 1850,⁵ and time and again demands for reform were met with the assertion that the country did not want it. The pressure outside Parliament for political reform, so strong in the previous decade, was absent in the 1850's, although demands were made for administrative and financial reform.

At the same time, the structure of politics would have made far-reaching reform difficult. Stability had been destroyed in 1846 when the Conservative party split into the opponents and supporters of the repeal of the Corn Laws. The Tories, who refused to abandon agricultural protection until after the election of 1852, were in a minority not only in Parliament, when opposed by Whigs and Peelites, but also in the country,⁶ while the insistence of the Peelites to maintain a separate political identity throughout the 1850's rendered a satisfactory alliance with the Whigs impossible. So ministries tended to be of short duration and a prey to crises, unable to carry out sweeping reforms even if they had wished. This is not to say that governments did nothing,⁷ but government action was limited in scope and vision, partly by the widespread emphasis on economy and partly by the inadequacy of the administration. The low level of administrative competence, so clearly revealed during the Crimean War, and the hatred of jobbery, understandable when the government was controlled almost exclusively by the aristocracy, gave rise to a widespread fear of centralization. The Police in Counties and Boroughs

1 S.I., 1.1.1853.

2 S.I., 12.1.1850.

3 W.L. Burn, *The Age of Equipoise*, 1964, p. 67.

4 S.I., 10.5.1851.

5 S.I., 27.7.1850.

6 A. Briggs, *Victorian People*, 1954, p. 39.

7 E.g. the Nuisances Act, Vaccination Act.

Act, 1856, provoked a national controversy,¹ while the ideas of the constitutional lawyer, Joshua Toulmin Smith, who contrasted the vitality of local government and institutions with the deadening influence of centralization, were much in vogue. In fact, the level of centralization achieved was not great and it was widely accepted that the role of the state was supplementary, one of its main responsibilities being to limit its own activities.²

Various forms of social discipline also helped to stabilize society. The importance of the home and family and the influence of landlords, employers, trade unions and organized religion, though varied, must have been very great. If the upper strata of the working classes were seeking to gain "respectability" by adopting the manners and values of the middle classes, the middle classes, for their part, were seeking to acquire gentility and to copy the aristocracy.³ The influence of the aristocracy in society was paramount, and that influence, based on wealth and control of county and national government, was maintained because the aristocracy was prepared to recognise the classes below it, and at times practise political deference towards them. So the demands of the Radicals in Sheffield and Newcastle in 1855 that there should be an enquiry into administrative incompetence were met, and by recognizing the importance of these rising industrial towns the Government took the sting out of a potentially dangerous movement.⁴

Society is never static and social development proceeded in the 1850's, even if the signs of this were not as visible as they had been in the 1840's or were to be in the 1860's. Social balance was certainly achieved to a marked extent but at the same time society was poised for further change which was not far distant.

SHEFFIELD: Economy and Society

On the whole, the 1850's were prosperous days in Sheffield. In the light trades an expansion began which was to reach its height in the next decade. The structure of the industry did not change much, small-scale organization, narrow capital basis and a semi-independent labour force being its main characteristics. The most conspicuous development, however, occurred in the heavy industry, and the 1850's saw the birth of the modern steel industry in Sheffield. The industry was transformed by the Crimean War and by the introduction of the Bessemer process. The war created such a demand for munitions that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that it "marks the metamorphosis of Sheffield from a small manufacturing centre into a large-scale industrial city".⁵ To meet this demand, a local ironmaster, John Brown, established the Atlas Works in January, 1856, in which he proceeded to use the new Bessemer process which made possible the production of very large castings cheaply. In the next decade the industry expanded at an incredible rate, incorporating new processes such as those of Mushet and Siemens. The industry was organized in large firms with vast capital outlay and employing a very large labour force, which in Sheffield was a new kind of labour, completely different from that employed in the light trades. The steelworkers were mostly unskilled and worked regular hours within a factory system. Moreover, in the absence of transport, they had to live near their places of work in the east end of the town. So the growth of the steel industry brought about a very important change in the distribution of population in Sheffield, with the beginnings of dense settlement in Brightside and Attercliffe,⁶ and a slight decline in population in the central areas. The growth of the steel industry was phenomenal in the second half of the nineteenth century⁷ and all workers benefited from the expansion; in both branches of Sheffield industry real earnings rose.⁸

1 The *Sheffield Free Press* described it as "an insidious, subtle and fatal measure", *S.F.P.*, 16.2.1856.

2 Burn, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

3 Many of the skilled craftsmen were attending church and chapel, while successful members of the middle classes were sending their sons to public schools and moving out of the towns into imposing mansions.

4 See A. Briggs, "John Arthur Roebuck and the Crimean War", *Victorian People*, 1954, pp. 60-94.

5 W.H.G. Armytage, "Sheffield and the Crimean War. Politics and Industry 1852-57", *History Today*, Vol. 5, 1955, p. 479.

6 1851-91 459% population increase in Brightside, 633% in Attercliffe. S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, Liverpool, 1959, p. 89.

7 1851-91 employment increased by 300% (50% in light trades). *Ibid.*, p. 159.

8 *Ibid.*, p.105.

As industrialization proceeded sanitary conditions worsened. Very little was done to combat the serious problems of smoke and sewage, though Sheffield was not alone in failing to come to grips with the problems of public health in this period.¹ There were not lacking men anxious to bring forward proposals for improving the sanitary conditions of the borough but the middle class ratepayers feared for their property rights and opposed expenditure on sanitary improvements, because they lived in parts of the town where these problems were not so immense. They were in full control of the Town Council after 1854 and "economy was the first order of the day".² A public meeting of ratepayers rejected a proposed Improvement Bill in 1851 and in the municipal elections of November, 1858, the sanitary improvers were defeated in every contest.³ In November, 1854, the Health Committee of the Town Council was reduced in numbers owing to the lightness of its duties!⁴ In 1856 it was reported that the Highway Boards encountered much opposition to their efforts to prohibit open channels across footpaths.⁵ The fetish for economy can be seen in the workhouse controversy of 1856-57. The Guardians, supported by the Poor Law Board, proposed that a new workhouse should be built, for which they purchased a site at Darnall. The ratepayers opposed the scheme and Guardians who were hostile to it were returned by large majorities. The site was re-sold, the project abandoned and improvements were carried out to the existing workhouse.⁶ Little in the way of sanitary improvement, or indeed general municipal improvement, could be expected from a Town Council which resolved in 1860, "That it is not expedient at the present time to consider the most efficient means for improving the sanitary condition of the Borough".⁷

As for the opportunities for adult education in Sheffield at this time, the *Independent* commented that "such institutions [literary and scientific] are here few in number, with (in most instances) inefficient means of carrying out their objects and with little hold upon the great mass of our townsmen".⁸ It seems that the merchants and manufacturers of the town had little connection with the Literary and Philosophical Society, and the Mechanics' Institute was in debt.⁹ Separated from the Athenaeum in 1851,¹⁰ the Mechanics' Institute survived, but only just, and the days of the Mechanics' Library, which "has long been acknowledged as one of the most valuable institutions in the town",¹¹ were numbered after the opening of the Free Library in 1856 and it disappeared in 1861. But the Free Library was one of the most hopeful signs of the times, as was the great success enjoyed by the People's College in the 1850's. The College was in decline when the Rev. R. S. Bayley left Sheffield in 1848, but sixteen young men determined to keep it alive.¹² The government passed from one man to a committee of the students themselves and a unique corporate spirit was fostered. As an entirely self-supporting institution (donations were refused), the College flourished¹³ as an instrument of adult education among the working classes in Sheffield and as a model for similar institutions in other towns.

1 Cf. the disappearance of the Central Board of Health in 1854.

2 J. D. Leader, "Fifty Years of Household Suffrage", *Pall Mall Gazette*, 21.1.1884.

3 *S.I.*, 6.11.1858.

4 J. M. Furness, *Record of Municipal Affairs in Sheffield, 1843-93*, Sheffield, 1893, p. 104.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

8 *S.I.*, 8.1.1853.

9 *Ibid.*

10 J. Salt, *Isaac Ironside and Education in the Sheffield Region in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Sheffield M.A. Thesis, 1960, p. 136.

11 *S.I.*, 8.1.1853.

12 G. C. Moore Smith, *The Story of the People's College, Sheffield, 1842-78*, Sheffield, 1912, p. 41.

13 There were 530 students in 1849, 630 in 1849-50. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

It was recognized that the working classes were alienated from organized religion. Samuel Earnshaw, an assistant minister at the parish church, was of the opinion in 1861 that "the Christian religion has almost entirely lost its hold upon the artisans of this country".¹ Horace Mann's survey in 1851 had revealed the extent of working class estrangement from organized religion in the large towns. Although numbers of skilled working men did attend church and chapel and the influence of individual ministers often extended far more widely than their congregations, it is clear that the expansion which took place after 1851 affected chiefly the middle classes.² In Sheffield this expansion involved all denominations, but it was especially marked among the Primitive Methodists and the Congregationalists, many of whom were active in the Liberal party.³

1 Quoted in E.R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, 1957, p. 151.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 132, 136.

THE LIBERALS IN SHEFFIELD

The name "Liberal" was used in the 1850's to denote those who believed in progress, in going forward politically as opposed to the Tories who were believed to be against such advancement. The term was a vague one, but because of this, men who held very different political opinions were all able to call themselves Liberals. Liberals were agreed that further parliamentary reform was necessary, but they were far from agreed as to the measure of reform required. Divisions among Liberals in Sheffield were accentuated by the weakness of Toryism in the town, since Liberals were far more likely to act together when threatened by a serious Tory challenge, and by the legacy of the 1840's, which had seen the emergence of independent working class political action and disagreements with the middle classes over education, incorporation, the Poor Law and public health. The two main sections of the Liberal party in Sheffield are treated separately, though, as will appear, differing shades of political opinion existed within each.

The Whig Radicals

The influence of such Liberals as Thomas Dunn,¹ Edward Smith,² William Fisher³ and J. W. Pye-Smith⁴ was based upon the general esteem and respect in which they were held in the town, and upon the *Sheffield Independent*, a weekly newspaper, owned and edited by an able journalist, Robert Leader,⁵ and which set out the moderate liberal viewpoint to a wide reading public.⁶ But the middle class Liberals were by no means in agreement on all subjects. Edward Smith, J. W. Pye-Smith, a brother-in-law of Edward Baines of Leeds, and Robert Leader were the leading opponents of state interference in education in Sheffield. As Dissenters, they feared that a government-sponsored scheme would strengthen the power of the Established Church: "we believe the danger to be that Parliament will not grant a system of secular and unsectarian education", Leader wrote.⁷ They also disliked centralizing measures which they thought would only create more sinecures. Leader stood firmly on the voluntary principle: "let the means of education be multiplied among us. But let them be conformed in principle to the self-educating, self-sustaining habits of the English people. Let them be guided by our wants, our opinions, our interests. Let them be modified or changed from time to time by the free movements of the national mind, not cast in the government mould,

1 Thomas Dunn, 1801-71: educated at Sheffield Grammar School; coal-owner; ceased to attend Queen Street Chapel after moving to Richmond Hill, Handsworth, and became a member of Church of England; 1845 Mayor, 1856 Town Trustee.

2 Edward Smith, 1800-68: member of a long-established Quaker family which owned an Ironfoundry in the Wicker; champion of negro emancipation, a total abstainer and believed that education should be left to voluntary effort; a member of the Council of the Anti-Corn Law League and a close friend of Cobden; agreed with Cobden about injustice of Crimean and Chinese Wars, which, together with serious illness, caused him to retire from active public life; 1831-57 a director of Sheffield Banking Company; 1843 President of Literary and Philosophical Society; 1850 Town Trustee; a director of Great Western Railway and chairman of audit committee of London and North-Western railway; generous benefactor to local charities. See R. E. Leader, *Reminiscences of Old Sheffield*, Sheffield, 1875, pp. 322-325.

3 William Fisher, 1780-1861: horn and Ivory merchant; born an Anglican but, like Thomas Asline Ward, became a Unitarian and attended Upper Chapel; veteran reformer.

4 J. W. Pye-Smith, 1809-64: younger son of Dr. John Pye-Smith, the distinguished Congregational theologian; 1836 married Caroline Phoebe Baines, daughter of Edward Baines, M.P. for Leeds 1834-41 and proprietor of the *Leeds Mercury*; solicitor; 1851 Alderman, 1856-57 Mayor.

5 Robert Leader, 1809-85: grandson of Daniel Leader who was a partner in silver plate firm of Tudor, Leader and Nicholson; educated at Sheffield Grammar School and served an apprenticeship with James Montgomery on *Iris*; 1833 editor of *Independent* which his father had bought, and edited the newspaper, later in partnership with his own sons, John Daniel and Robert Eadon Leader, until 1875; 1860 Town Trustee; 1876 entered Town Council, 1880 Alderman; 1881 J.P.; active Congregationalist.

6 1850 weekly average 3,997 copies (*cf. Sheffield Times* 2,538) *S.I.*, 27.9.1851.

7 *S.I.*, 13.4.1850.

to become ere long hindrances rather than helps".¹ Richard Solly,² on the other hand, supported a national system of secular instruction and spoke at a meeting for this purpose in May, 1850. He argued that the voluntary system was not sufficient and called for a measure that "should reach everyone".³ In the same year he and William Fisher, Junr.,⁴ attended the first meeting of the General Committee of the National Public School Association.⁵ Although the scheme which Solly envisaged was that laid down in W. J. Fox's bill, which provided for a system of secular education, maintained out of the rates and therefore largely free from central control, it was not acceptable to those who believed that education should be left entirely to voluntary effort.⁶ It is interesting that in Sheffield, as was the case in Leeds,⁷ Unitarians were prominent in the movement for national education. Although these differences over education never really came out into the open in the 1850's, they simmered beneath the surface and were of considerable political importance. Richard Solly's opinions about education and parliamentary reform brought him into close contact with the other main section of Liberals in Sheffield, the Ironside "party", which was committed to universal suffrage and a national system of secular education. His name was put forward by the *Sheffield Free Press* in 1851 as a suitable candidate for alderman in preference to the Queen Street "prop", J. W. Pye-Smith.⁸ Solly and William Fisher, Junr., were two of the leading supporters of John Arthur Roebuck⁹ who was in favour of a national system of secular education. J.W. Pye-Smith, on the other hand, was active in bringing forward George Hadfield,¹⁰ a Congregationalist and voluntaryist, to oppose Roebuck in 1852 and he was annoyed when Solly suggested that behind the opposition to Roebuck "there was some little narrow-minded sectarian feeling".¹¹ The tensions between Unitarians and Congregationalists, apparent in the education question, were no doubt the product of the long years of struggle between 1825 and 1844 by the Unitarians for possession in law of their chapels, and no one had been more assiduous in challenging their rights than George Hadfield.¹² Even as late as 1857, William Fisher, Junr., was complaining to Roebuck: "the fact is I have as grave objections to Mr. Hadfield as I had when he first came to Sheffield. It is not merely that he disturbed the Liberal party, but that he never gives a vote or makes a speech on any subject connected with the education of the people, or with the management of our foreign affairs, which does not annoy or disappoint me, and I consider him also very narrow on the Sunday question".¹³

1 S.I., 13.9.1851.

2 Richard Solly, 1805-68: ironmaster; Unitarian-attended Upper Chapel; 1853 Alderman; left Sheffield in 1855 and died in Santiago, Chile.

3 S.I., 18.5.1850.

4 William Fisher, Junr., 1813-80: son of William Fisher; Unitarian and member of Upper Chapel; 1853 Alderman; 1854 Mayor; founded a local charity, the "Fisher Institution".

5 J. Salt, *Isaac Ironside and Education in the Sheffield Region in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Sheffield M.A. Thesis, 1960, p.131.

6 S.I., 13.4.1850.

7 E.g. the Rev. Wicksteed, a Unitarian minister, was a member of a committee formed in Leeds in 1849 to promote national education. As in Sheffield, however, they could make no progress in the face of bitter opposition from the voluntaryists, led by Edward Baines. T. Wemyss Reid, *Life of the Rt. Hon. W. E. Forster*, 1888, Vol. 1, pp. 436-439.

8 S.F.P., 26.4.1851.

9 John Arthur Roebuck, 1802-79: b. Madras, grandson of founder of Carron Iron Works; 1815-24 lived in Canada; returned to England and entered legal profession; leading member of Utilitarian Society; 1832-37 Radical M.P. for Bath; 1837 lost seat due to his outspoken Radicalism, his opposition to sabbatarian legislation and Tory bribery; 1841-47 re-elected M.P. for Bath; 1847 defeated again, due to opposition of Nonconformists - his support for a national system of secular education; 1849 elected M.P. for Sheffield without opposition.

10 George Hadfield, 1787-1879: b. Sheffield; became a solicitor and in 1809 moved to Manchester; active Congregationalist and strict voluntaryist in education question; 1835 contested Bradford without success; prominent in Anti-Corn Law agitation.

11 S.I., 3.4.1852.

12 J.E. Manning, *A History of Upper Chapel, Sheffield*, Sheffield, 1900, p. 107.

13 Wm. Fisher, Junr., to J. A. Roebuck, 26.3.1857, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 186.

The support which Hadfield enjoyed is an indication of the power of Dissent in Sheffield. Most of the leading middle class Liberals were Nonconformists who were opposed to religious and educational endowments and in favour of a separation of Church and State. Fear of encroachment by the Established Church lay behind the strong opposition to national education, and all measures were rigorously opposed, which were likely to strengthen the Anglican Establishment, "one of the greatest curses of the country",¹ as the Rev. H. G. Rhodes² called it.³ There was pressure for reform to end the monopoly of the Capital Burgesses, who besides controlling a large amount of property had made the grave error of appointing a high churchman, Mr. Trevor, as an assistant minister of the parish church. Robert Leader warned his townsmen that they must be "alert, vigorous and resolute, or their ancient rights so long in abeyance, through their neglect and the contrivance of the Capital Burgesses, will now be taken from them for ever".⁴ Church Rates, long since abandoned in Sheffield, were still a live issue in Rotherham and Leader argued "in relation to religion, it is not only the right, but the duty of all men to ignore the State".⁵ He opposed the creation of more bishops⁶ and condemned the ecclesiastical courts.⁷ Nonconformists were anxious to bring about the complete separation of Church and State. In March, 1850, Edward Smith, a Quaker, chaired a meeting of the Anti-State Church Association, and the arguments which he put forward in favour of Disestablishment provide an interesting statement of the Nonconformist position.⁸ He thought that the House of Commons and the ministers were in no way qualified "to exercise control over religion", and the Church of England was not the purest form of Christianity and therefore no more than any other church should it be set up as a State Church and enjoy patronage. At the same time as the Church occupied its privileged position, although it did not, as was asserted, contain the bulk of the people, Dissenters suffered all kinds of disadvantages and were treated as "schismatics and heretics". Here Smith touched upon one of the main forces behind militant Dissent, the refusal of Nonconformists to be regarded as second-class citizens. He proceeded to argue that because the Church was part of the Establishment, it was hardly likely to speak out against it and it was therefore an anti-reforming force. Hostility was directed not so much at the Anglican Church itself as at the connection between Church and State, although Smith believed that the Church would derive real spiritual advantages from a separation. J. Kingsley dwelt on the evils of the Irish Church, the greatest single argument against the assertion that the Established Church contained the bulk of the people, and he argued that the Anglican Church itself was not free from schism, a reference to the tractarian movement. Other speakers included William Fisher and the Rev. Messrs. Clarkson, Horsfield, Mursell, Batey and Larom, minister of Townhead Baptist Chapel.⁹ Although he was not a speaker at this meeting, Robert Leader supported Disestablishment, maintaining that the Church should not be the "hireling of the state",¹⁰ and "if the Church would be free, she must give up the riches and honours as well as shake off the fetters of the state".¹¹ The Anti-State Church Association was an important protest movement in Sheffield in the early 1850's and Edward Miall, its leading national spokesman, addressed a meeting in the town in November, 1850.¹²

1 *S.I.*, 18.5.1850

2 Hugh Garside Rhodes, 1789—1873: minister of Fulwood Congregational Chapel 1827-73.

3 *E.g. S.I.*, 15.6.1850.

4 *S.I.*, 13.7.1850.

5 *S.I.*, 12.4.1851.

6 *S.I.*, 16.2.1850.

7 *S.I.*, 5.3.1853.

8 *S.I.*, 9.3.1850.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *S.I.*, 16.3.1850.

11 *S.I.*, 19.7.1851.

12 *S.I.*, 16.11.1850.

The opposition of Nonconformists was directed at the privileged position of the Established Church in society, not at the Anglican Church as a spiritual institution. Indeed, Richard Solly admitted that "the Church had been a great blessing in a vast number of instances".¹ Nonconformists were hostile to tractarianism² and supported the Vicar of Sheffield, Dr Sutton, in his refusal to admit the high churchman, Mr. Trevor, to his pulpit. On the election of Trevor by the Capital Burgesses, Leader wrote that "a conflict has begun here, in the Church itself, between the evangelical element and the high churchism that maintains . . . all those doctrines which are in favour of a ruling priesthood".³ The strength of Nonconformity in Sheffield helps to explain why ritualism did not take root there in the nineteenth century and why Sheffield remained a "model parish of evangelical churchism".⁴ In 1851 Leader supported Russell's Ecclesiastical Titles Bill designed to check the "Papal Aggression". While he did not miss the opportunity to protest against all religious endowments, he wrote: "It [Rome] moves by political and not religious influences . . . we object, as English citizens, to this Catholic hierarchy claiming territorial authority in England . . . when Rome arrogantly asserts a claim to authority over us, it is surely no unreasonable thing for the Parliament of England to enact, that everything which the servants of Rome may do, in pursuance of that claim to authority, shall be in law null and void".⁵

Leader differed from Roebuck who insisted that the Papal claims were unimportant and should not be made the subject of legislation.⁶ Popery implied spiritual and political despotism since "the pretensions of the papacy are wholly incompatible with the existence of free government",⁷ and Leader regarded the attendance of the Duke of Norfolk⁸ at the parish church as "nothing less than a renunciation of that priestly domination in which he was brought up".⁹ Although Leader was anxious that nothing should be done to endanger the toleration given to Roman Catholics to worship in their own way, it was inevitable that the "Papal Aggression" crisis would stir up anti-Catholic feelings and these were played upon by a number of anti-Catholic lecturers, such as Father Gavazzi, who spoke in Sheffield on several occasions in the 1850's.¹⁰ Sheffield did not, however, experience the serious anti-Catholic riots which occurred in some other towns where there was a large Catholic community.¹¹

The "Nonconformist Conscience" was an important formative influence upon Sheffield Liberalism. Liberals were generally opposed to capital punishment and Edward Smith, Robert Leader and J. W. Pye-Smith spoke at a meeting against it in January, 1851.¹² Richard Cobden's work for peace, a natural concomitant of free trade which, it was believed, would improve international relations, was regarded as "a field that yet will yield a rich harvest",¹³ and in April, 1850, Edward Smith chaired a meeting to petition Parliament in favour of Cobden's motions for international arbitration and disarmament, at which the guest speaker was the Nonconformist orator, Henry Vincent, and the meeting was also addressed by William Fisher, J. W. Pye-Smith, Richard Solly and Robert Leader.¹⁴ The Frankfort Peace Congress in August, 1850, aroused much interest in Sheffield.¹⁵ By contrast, Sheffield Liberals do not appear to have been excessively rigid on the Sunday question. There was some debate in 1850 as to whether Sunday work in the Post Office should be allowed and for a short time work was actually suspended. Robert Leader admitted that there was necessary work to be done on Sundays and he believed that the whole question was not a matter for legislation. "The only way," he believed, "is for each to act according to his own conscience, and by persuasion

1 S.I., 18.5.1850.

2 As was Thomas Dunn, himself an Anglican. Thomas Dunn to Wm. Fisher, 10.3.1852, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C.186.

3 S.I., 25.5.1850.

4 S.I., 26.10.1850.

5 S.I., 15.2.1851.

6 S.I., 8.2.1851.

7 S.I., 3.1.1852.

8 Henry Charles Howard, 13th Duke of Norfolk 1791-1856: broke with Roman Catholicism; little connection with Sheffield. Family links with Catholicism re-established by 14th Duke, Henry Granville Fitzalan Howard, 1815-60.

9 S.I., 6.9.1851.

10 E.g., S.F.P., 20.11.1852.

11 In 1851 the Irish-born accounted for 3.3% of the population. S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, Liverpool, 1959, p.7.

12 S.I., 25.1.1851.

13 S.I., 5.1.1850.

14 S.I., 27.4.1850.

15 S.I., 31.8.1850.

and example to recommend, as much as possible, his convictions to others".¹ Nor, despite the widespread prevalence of drunkenness in the town, "the sad besetting vice", Edward Smith called it,² does there appear to have been much support for prohibitive legislation. Leader certainly believed that intemperance would not be cured by such measures as the Maine Liquor Law which excited much attention in England. It seems fair to conclude that compulsory Sabbatarianism and prohibition of the drink trade were not live political issues in Sheffield in this period.

In January, 1849, the middle class Liberals had founded the Reform Society of Sheffield, of which Edward Smith was the President and William Fisher and Richard Solly the Vice-Presidents.³ Besides its declared policy of free trade, the ballot, an extension of the suffrage, financial reform and opposition to the extension of religious endowments, one of the principal aims of the society was to attend to the registration of voters both in Sheffield and in the West Riding. For this purpose it was linked to a central office in Leeds "where all changes in the register are systematically recorded, and the register is kept in such a way as to show the relative strength of parties, and to be always ready for an election".⁴ In its work of registration, for which it had an office and a regular secretary, the society appears to have been successful. In 1849 109 out of a total Liberal gain of 231 votes in the West Riding revision were accredited to the Sheffield district.⁵ In 1850 the gain in Sheffield was 44.⁶ Members of the committee attended meetings of the Central Executive Committee in Leeds and twice visited Rotherham "to urge their subscribing their proportion to the general fund".⁷ In 1851 the Liberal gain was 46.⁸ The society does not appear to have met after 1852,⁹ and the reason is quite clear. Registration had become its sole work because it "requires a permanent and considerable income, which can only be ensured by carefully abstaining from subjects on which the various sections of reformers are not pretty well agreed",¹⁰ and no financial assistance was received from the Whig gentry of the West Riding.¹¹ Moreover, during a period of political quiet and Tory weakness, the incentive to pay careful attention to the register did not exist.

According to a statement by W. S. Brittain at the first annual meeting, the Reform Society numbered several hundreds.¹² But it never attained real popularity in Sheffield because it refused to make an explicit declaration about the suffrage. This was quite deliberate because, in William Fisher's words, it "was such an interminable question that it was difficult to get any considerable number of persons together to agree upon a definite point".¹³ R. J. Gainsford,¹⁴ for instance, believed that the franchise was not a right, but something for which the people must show that they were fit, and they could do this only by taking "the proper means to acquire the knowledge that would fit them to exercise it",¹⁵ a reference, no doubt, to the little-used Mechanics' Institute. The Rev. H. G. Rhodes was of the same opinion, thinking that the "suffrage should be given to mind instead of matter".¹⁶ William Fisher, on the other hand, declared that "he was not afraid of going

- 1 S.I., 13.7.1850.
- 2 S.I., 2.3.1850.
- 3 S.I., 20.1.1849.
- 4 Annual Report, 1849. S.I., 2.2.1850.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Annual Report, 1850. S.I., 22.2.1851.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Annual Report, 1851. S.I., 20.3.1852.
- 9 There are no more annual reports in the *Independent*.
- 10 Annual Report, 1851. S.I., 20.3.1852.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 S.I., 2.2.1850.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Robert John Gainsford, 1807-70: solicitor; Roman Catholic.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*

as far as any man towards an extension of the suffrage, and Richard Solly's position was the same as that of Cobden.¹ Then there were Liberals, such as Charles Alcock and W. S. Brittain who, although committed to universal suffrage, were prepared to co-operate with the more moderate Liberals. In May, 1850, Charles Alcock and Ald. Isaac Schofield,² an advanced Liberal, were the Sheffield delegates to a conference of the National Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association which aimed at household suffrage.³ However, the Association did not make much impact in Sheffield. Charles Alcock declared in January, 1852, that about one third of the funds contributed by Sheffield had been subscribed by Richard Solly⁴. Liberals simply could not agree about the extent of reform required and tended to take refuge behind such vague statements as "an end to nomination and a return to the true principle of representation by election".⁵

Whatever their differences about parliamentary reform, Liberals were united in their support for the freehold land movement, which Leader described as "one of the happiest signs of the times."⁶ The land societies bought land which was then divided into plots among their members. The owners of these plots secured a 40s. freehold vote, tactics which the Anti-Corn Law League had employed. But the societies were not only a means of increasing the political influence of the working classes, they were evidence also of "a worthy ambition to rise, to evince self-respect, and to gain the respect of others".⁷ They conferred social and political benefit upon the working classes. As the surveyor of the Park Wood Springs Freehold Land Society, Mr. Holmes, remarked at the first anniversary dinner of the society, in January, 1851, "it was calculated to create in the minds of the working classes, a desire to advance themselves, not only politically, but morally and physically"⁸ The dinner was attended by Isaac Ironside and Robert Leader, men representative of the advanced and moderate sections of the Liberal party in Sheffield. A year earlier, Leader had praised the Sheffield Freehold Land Society and the efforts of the Walkley, Hallcar and Birkendale societies, all run by working men, and he had so much confidence in the movement that he believed that alone it would bring about the necessary parliamentary reform.⁹ The Reform Freehold Land Society was formed in February, 1849, and its first purchase was 4½ acres at Crookes, at a cost of £700.¹⁰ In November, 1849, there were 186 members, holding 257 shares,¹¹ and two years later the society had 258 members, holding 423 shares.¹² In February, 1851, Richard Solly reported to the Sheffield Reform Society that twelve of the Reform Freehold Society's allottees at Crookes had been placed on the register, despite strenuous Tory opposition.¹³ But the belief, long held by Richard Cobden, that Parliament could be reformed silently by the organized purchase of 40s. county freeholds, was misplaced, and, in time, it became clear that, however they might benefit the working classes morally and socially, the freehold land societies could not be used to bring about political change.¹⁴

All Liberals were enthusiastic about the freehold land movement, and another subject, upon which moderate and advanced Liberals were agreed, was the need for economy. Robert Leader declared in March, 1850, "there is much room for retrenchment still", and he praised Cobden's efforts in this direction: "on the whole, we regard the movement for national economy as one of the most hopeful signs of the times".¹⁵ In April, 1850, George Thompson, M.P., a "Manchester School" reformer, addressed a meeting in Sheffield as a delegate of the National Parliamentary

1 *Ibid.*, Cobden supported household suffrage, though in a private letter, written in 1848, he said that he was ready to support manhood suffrage, with a 6 mth. or 12 mth. residence qualification to exclude "all the floating mischief".
D. Read, *Cobden and Bright. A Victorian Political Partnership*, 1967, p. 156.

2 Isaac Schofield, 1796-1863: cutlery manufacturer; expelled by Wesleyan Methodists in 1850 for attending reform meetings and became an active member of Methodist Free Church, served in Town Council 1843-58; an advanced Liberal - supporter of the People's Charter.

3 *S.I.*, 18.5.1850.

4 *S.I.*, 24.1.1852.

5 *S.I.*, 20.7.1850.

6 *S.I.*, 12.10.1850.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *S.F.P.*, 4.1.1851.

9 *S.I.*, 2.2.1850.

10 *S.L.R.*, 24.12.1849.

11 *S.I.*, 10.11.1849.

12 *S.L.R.*, 10.11.1851.

13 Annual Report, 1850. *S.I.*, 22.2.1851.

14 D. Read, *Cobden and Bright*, pp. 157-158.

15 *S.I.*, 16.3.1850.

and Financial Reform Association, and he denounced all kinds of "profligate expenditure", such as exorbitant salaries and the high cost of the army and navy, fortifications and foreign outposts.¹ Referring to the inequality of taxation, he called for financial reform: "you are to be taxed, because the more taxation the more revenue, the more revenue the more expenditure, the more expenditure the more patronage". Liberals believed that the only way to achieve economy and financial reform was by parliamentary reform since, in the words of Michael Beal,² financial abuses "originated from the preponderating influence in Parliament of the aristocracy whose families had to be provided for out of the public purse".³ It was because they believed that the government of the country was "nothing more than a family compact"⁴ that Liberals resisted further encroachments by the central power. "We would foster", wrote Leader, "by all means, the English antipathy to centralisation and to government meddling, whether general or local, as one of the most effective conservators of our liberties".⁵ In June, 1851, he opposed the Church Building Act Amendment Bill because it provided opportunities for "legislative jobbery",⁶ and one of his main objections to state-sponsored education was that it would create more placemen.⁷ Government had no business to interfere in the sphere which concerned local government: "We have little faith in central authorities when dealing with the affairs that concern localities; the sound principle appears to us to be that the business, which is purely local in its nature, shall be under local management, and that all the authority to be exercised shall be derived from the ratepayers, who have the greatest interest in combining efficiency and economy".⁸

Institutions such as the General Board of Health were especially suspect and Liberals were fond of contrasting the vitality of local government with the deadening influence of centralization: "while it is of the nature of free local government progressively to improve, it is of the nature of central authority removed from adequate inspection and control to grow corrupt".⁹

Although they disagreed about the best means to promote education, Liberals of all shades of political opinion were as one in recognising its value and importance. So the moderate middle class Liberals co-operated with the ultras in the campaign for the abolition of the paper duty, the newspaper stamp duty and the advertisement duty, which were known collectively as the "taxes on knowledge". A meeting for this purpose was held in February, 1850, chaired by William Fisher, and at which the Democrats, Isaac Ironside and Richard Otley, spoke.¹⁰ Ironside remarked that "however they differed on other points, they agreed in this, that ignorance was the evil, and knowledge the remedy", and on this question he was in agreement with such a moderate Liberal as Ald. T. R. Barker¹¹ who declared that "by the help of an unrestricted press, man's course is onward from darkness and ignorance to intelligence and light", and their object was "to make knowledge as free as the winds of heaven, to expel the demon of mental darkness, to extirpate the hand of oppression, and to elevate, enlighten and purify the great mass of society". Edward Smith stated the main arguments against the taxes. By keeping education from the people, they encouraged crime and intemperance, and, by keeping the working classes in a state of ignorance, provided a barrier to further political change, in addition to preventing public opinion from acting on the House of Commons. Finally, the taxes should be abolished because they fell most heavily upon the poor and as

1 S.I., 13.4.1850.

2 Michael Beal, 1810-91: watchmaker and jeweller; moral force Chartist and opponent of Corn Laws. served in Town Council 1853-56, 1856-58, 1858-83, 1871 Aldermen.

3 S.I., 24.5.1851.

4 Beal's words. *Ibid.*

5 S.I., 3.1.1852.

6 S.I., 28.6.1851.

7 S.I., 13.4.1850.

8 S.I., 12.7.1851.

9 *Ibid.*

10 S.I., 2.3.1850.

11 Thomas Rawson Barker, 1812-73: lead smelter; 1848 Mayor.

part of a general reduction of taxation. The meeting ended with a resolution in support of the Newspaper Stamp Abolition Committee in London and of a society recently formed in Sheffield, of which the secretary was Creswick Corbitt.¹

All Liberals in Sheffield were sympathetic towards the oppressed nationalities, Italy and Hungary, which were struggling to be free from Austrian control. In August, 1849, Isaac Ironside presided at a meeting to express sympathy for the Hungarians,² and in September, 1851, on the occasion of the visit to England of Kossuth, the leader of the Hungarian revolt, Robert Leader wrote: "we trust that the people of England will not be defrauded of an opportunity to shew to the world, by their reception of Kossuth, how deeply they sympathise with the cause of continental freedom".³ This sympathy for the cause of liberty abroad was always an important feature of Liberalism. Sheffield Liberals were united in their opposition to the Kaffir War, which broke out in South Africa in 1851, and a large protest meeting was addressed by Henry Richard of the Peace Society in February, 1852.⁴

The middle class Liberals differed from the Democrats in their general, though at times qualified, support for the Whig Government of Lord John Russell. While the democratic *Sheffield Free Press* thundered that "the country is fast growing weary of a clique which exists as a government only for the emoluments of office",⁵ the *Sheffield Independent* took an altogether more kindly view of the ministry, upholding Lord Palmerston over the Don Pacifico incident, thinking that "the people of England must stand by the Minister who stands by the cause of liberty and foils the despots".⁶ The *Independent* praised Sir Charles Wood's budget in 1850,⁷ and had a high opinion of Lord John Russell.⁸ To the moderate Liberals, in the political circumstances of 1850 and 1851, the Whig Government, however inadequate, was closer to the Liberal cause outside Parliament than a Tory ministry would have been. Leader wrote in February, 1852: "we admit that it has been a weak ministry", but "what we need in government is not a master, but an intelligent, honest and manageable servant", and "no government, within the memory of the present generation, has left affairs in a state nearly so satisfactory".⁹ Not all Liberals in Sheffield shared this view.

The Democrats

It is impossible to study Sheffield politics in the 40's and 50's without being fascinated by the amazing career of Isaac Ironside. He was born in 1808 in Masborough into a poor family, which had strong connections with Dissent¹⁰ and ultra-radical politics. What little formal education he received was imparted at Queen Street Sunday School and the Sheffield Lancasterian School, but, although he left school at the age of twelve and was apprenticed as a stove-grate fitter, he continued his education in the evenings and became an accomplished mathematician, winning prizes offered by the *Edinburgh Review*.¹¹ He had a genuine sympathy with the working classes from which he had risen,¹² and he had an unshakeable belief in the power of education as a means of working class self-improvement. To Ironside education was something more than elementary instruction; it implied

1 *Ibid.*

2 *S.L.R.*, 6.8.1849.

3 *S.I.*, 13.9.1851.

4 *S.I.*, 7.2.1852.

5 *S.F.P.*, 12.4.1851.

6 *S.I.*, 25.5.1850.

7 *S.I.*, 23.3.1850.

8 *S.I.*, 17.8.1850.

9 *S.I.*, 28.2.1852.

10 His father was a lay preacher at Queen Street Chapel, his uncle led the singing at Nether Chapel and a brother became a Methodist missionary in New Zealand. J. Salt, *Isaac Ironside and Education in the Sheffield Region in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Sheffield M.A. Thesis, 1960, p.3.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

12 In 1833 he became a partner in an estate agency business, recently begun by his father, in which he appears to have been successful, for he bought a sizeable house at Crookes.

a complete mental and moral elevation. He was an enthusiastic worker in the Mechanics' Library and the Mechanics' Institute,¹ and in 1837, supported by Ebenezer Elliott and the Rev. R. S. Bayley, he pressed unsuccessfully for a national system of secular education.² As a growing spirit of independence emerged among the working classes in Sheffield in the later 1830's and a desire to secure political and social reform by their own unaided efforts, Ironside moved away from co-operation with the middle classes and became one of the leaders of moral force Chartism, although he saw the Six Points of the Charter as a prelude to far-reaching social reform,³ and at this time he became a friend and disciple of the utopian socialist, Robert Owen.⁴ To propagate Owenite ideas and as an institution to spread education among the working classes, Ironside founded the Sheffield Hall of Science in March, 1839, at which G. J. Holyoake taught for some time.⁵ Although he broke with Owen in May, 1844,⁶ he never lost his faith in socialism and in 1849 he visited Paris, met the leading French Communists and presented an "Address", which was a thoroughly socialistic document.⁷ He played an active part in the Chartist agitation of 1847-48, stressing the need for peaceful change. In the education controversy of 1847 he supported the proposed government measure and opposed the voluntarists in Sheffield in a public meeting which lasted six hours, but resulted in the defeat of the supporters of a national system of education.⁸ In 1849 as a leading member of Roebuck's election committee, he helped to secure Chartist support for Roebuck, which resulted in his being returned unopposed.⁹

Ironside was anxious that the working classes should acquire knowledge and that they should think and act politically, and he considered that the inert Town Council was an excellent instrument for their political education. He sought to make it a little parliament, a source of free and rational enquiry, as he had intended the Hall of Science should be. Therefore, when he entered the Town Council in 1846, he insisted that it should discuss matters of national importance, a view of the role of the Town Council which was vigorously opposed by Thomas Dunn and the Whigs. He also demanded that the Town Council pay some attention to public health, an interest which was directly traceable to Owen's emphasis on the working class environment. His first proposal, on entering the Council, was for the formation of a Health Committee, of which he became the secretary.¹⁰ Although it had no money and no power, it may have helped to make Sheffield a little more health conscious.¹¹ Ironside was elected an Improvement Commissioner in August, 1847, and in February, 1848, he became an honorary secretary of a local branch of the Health of Towns Association.¹²

Much as they disliked the ultra-radicalism and what they considered to be the overbearing arrogance of Isaac Ironside, the moderate middle class Liberals received an even greater shock when he proceeded to organize the Democratic party within the Town Council. This was never a truly working class party because it was not possible to find sufficient working men with the necessary education and property qualifications to sit in the Town Council. So at municipal elections the Democratic party sponsored mainly middle or lower middle class candidates, often tradesmen and small manufacturers, who were prepared to support the Chartist demands, which included universal suffrage.

1 Where he taught algebra.

2 Salt, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 53

4 He was a member of the Central Board of the Queenwood agrarian community, an interest which he later continued in the Hollow Meadows farm project. *Ibid.*, pp. 65, 188-195.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 63. *seq.*

6 "Mr. Owen's scheme could not succeed", quoted *ibid.*, p. 85.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

9 Thomas Clark, the Chartist candidate in 1847, withdrew in favour of Roebuck. Cf. "I hope to be of service by promoting good feelings between working men and their employers. If I commenced with differences between the Chartists and myself, my chance of peace making would be very much diminished. Besides I own that I have strong feelings of sympathy with the working men. There are admirable traits in their character which have always excited my regard — a sterling manliness which I could wish all classes to share. A quarrel with the men themselves would really give me pain". J. A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, Junr., 13.4.1849, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C.186.

10 Salt, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

11 Sheffield received widespread praise for its handling of the 1849 cholera epidemic. S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, Liverpool, 1959, p. 10.

12 Salt, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

With strong working class support and with very efficient organization at ward level, the Democrats soon became a real force in local politics. In November, 1849, they filled 8 out of 14 vacancies on the Town Council, which gave them 22 out of a total number of 56 seats¹ and seriously threatened the middle class predominance. Not surprisingly, Leader declared "we earnestly desire to see a termination of that class jealousy which characterises these municipal struggles".²

The progress of the Democratic party seemed irresistible. In January, 1851, it acquired its own weekly newspaper, when Ironside encouraged William Eaton and John Blenkin, previously compositors on the staff of the *Independent*, to found the *Sheffield Free Press*. In their first editorial they stated that the newspaper supported manhood suffrage, a state system of national education, rigorous economy in government and especially in the army, navy and civil list, and a reform and reduction of taxation, and it opposed class distinctions, capital punishment, the taxes on knowledge and centralization.³ The Democrats believed that "government as it concerns all, should be under the direction of all",⁴ a view which few of the middle class Liberals would have shared. The Democrats were openly contemptuous of the Whig Government and wanted a complete social and political regeneration. In July, 1851, the "Central Democratic Ward Association" was formed, the crowning glory of the Democratic party organization. The scheme had been outlined in a letter to the *Sheffield Free Press* in June, 1851.⁵ It was "to be conducted by a president, secretary, treasurer and council, consisting of two delegates from each ward, who must be elected at the ward meetings". The nominal membership subscriptions (1s. p.a.) of the central association would provide a fund to return radical town councillors.⁶ The association vetted candidates and sought to unify Democratic policy.⁷ At a meeting of the Central Democratic Association on 8 September, 1851, at Theaker's coffee rooms, a motion by a Mr. Glaves (Ecclesall ward) was carried unanimously that it should not approve any candidate who would not support universal suffrage, the selection of aldermen by burgesses in public ward meetings, the gradual reduction of the national debt, the abolition of nuisances,⁸ and all measures of economy and reform agreed to by public meetings of the burgesses.⁹ The middle class Liberals viewed the Ironside party with a mixture of contempt and alarm. It was not merely that they were ultra-radicals who were stirring up class feelings, but they were introducing party faction into the Town Council. To Robert Leader the Central Democratic Association was nothing more than an instrument of "arrant demagoguism"¹⁰ and he warned that "unless the burgesses generally bestir themselves, the spirit of dictation and faction will hold complete sway".¹¹ But he had a more serious warning for the working classes. "The middle classes are not very likely to furnish the sinews of war for political agitation for the benefit of the unenfranchised, when it is made a boast that they are excluded by 'democratic triumphs' from most of the wards of the borough, and efforts are being made to turn them out of the rest".¹²

Leader believed that Ironside and his supporters were causing divisions among the Liberals of Sheffield and by their irresponsible behaviour were damaging the reputation of the Town Council and harming the cause of reform: "If the answer be that it [extended suffrage] would work throughout the borough as the municipal franchise has worked in Ecclesall, in St. Philip's, in Brightside, in Nether Hallam, and that such democratic gems as Messrs. Groves, Platts, Ironside, Booth etc. would be elected for the borough, we cannot conceive of a reply more sure to chill all enthusiasm in favour of an extension of the suffrage".¹³ He thought that they were lowering the whole tone of local government and discouraging the respectable and best men from entering the Town Council. For their part, the Democrats dismissed such strictures as the complaints of a Whig clique annoyed that their hold over local government was being challenged.

- 1 Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
- 2 *S.l.*, 26.10.1850.
- 3 *S.F.P.*, 4.1.1851.
- 4 *S.F.P.*, 11.1.1851.
- 5 *S.F.P.*, 21.6.1851.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Salt, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
- 8 *I.e.* smoke, sewage.
- 9 *S.F.P.*, 13.9.1851.
- 10 *S.l.*, 24.1.1852.
- 11 *S.l.*, 23.10.1852.
- 12 *S.l.*, 24.1.1852.
- 13 *Ibid.*

Ironside was greatly influenced by the writings and ideas of the antiquarian and constitutional lawyer, Joshua Toulmin Smith, whose most important work *Local Self-Government and Centralization* appeared in 1851. Toulmin Smith believed that the great evil was centralization which had usurped the direct political power which the people of England had once enjoyed. He recommended decentralization and a transference of power to revived local institutions in which the people themselves should actively participate. The central feature of Smith's philosophy was the "wardmote" which "is simply the meeting together of the residents in a ward to moot all or any questions affecting their well-being".¹ The wardmote was so attractive to Ironside because it seemed to present an instrument of education among the lower classes through their playing an active and meaningful part in the process of local government.² He had said in January, 1851, "let them have intelligence and power would follow",³ and wardmotes would impart that intelligence. He thought that more was to be expected from "local self-government than from parliamentary reform",⁴ and he was opposed to any further encroachment by the central power; in April, 1851, for instance, he carried a motion in the Town Council for a national system of secular education under local authorities and free from all central control.⁵ "Centralization and local self-government — these are the two fundamental antagonistic principles which have now to do battle with each other over all the earth", declared the *Sheffield Free Press*.⁶ The first wardmote was established in Nether Hallam in 1851 and soon afterwards there were monthly meetings in St. George's, Ecclesall, St. Philip's and the Park, which anyone could attend. Fairly typical of the activities of the wardmotes were the proceedings of the Nether Hallam wardmote, which met at the Queen's Arms, Portmahon, on 8 December, 1851.⁷ Isaac Ironside, as permanent chairman, presided and the number present varied from ten to sixteen. It considered the care of a local delinquent and discussed motions, about the watch rate for instance, to be introduced at the next Town Council meeting. The highlight of the meeting was when Ironside read from the writings of Toulmin Smith in favour of "a system of mutual reliance amongst the people instead of a delegated reliance — a dependence upon the police".⁸ Wardmotes discussed a variety of subjects and at the St. Philip's meetings papers on general topics were read, which illustrates the direct connection between the wardmote movement and education.⁹ But it appears that the movement did not achieve any great success¹⁰ and it undoubtedly weakened the Democratic party by alienating two of its ablest members, Isaac Schofield and William Harvey.¹¹

The Democratic party also suffered as a result of the aldermanic question of 1851. Owing to a misinterpretation of the law, seven aldermen had failed to retire in the previous year, as they were required to do under the Municipal Corporations Act. The Mayor and Council duly applied for a "mandamus" to hold an election. Whereupon a small meeting was called by the Democrats at which it was resolved "that the seven persons they approved be elected Aldermen of the Borough"¹² and the Town Council was called upon to confirm the decision. The Democrats argued that the "mandamus" was illegal and that aldermen should be elected, not by the Mayor and Council, but by the burgesses in public meetings. But these arguments did not disguise the fact that this represented an ill-conceived attempt on the part of Ironside and his supporters to gain control of the aldermanic bench. It failed and as far as the Democratic party was concerned the whole episode was a great mistake. It gave the impression, already held by the middle class Liberals, that they were ambitious and unscrupulous men with no regard for the public good.

1 *S.F.P.*, 22.5.1852.

2 J. Salt, *Isaac Ironside*, p. 139.

3 *S.I.*, 4.1.1851.

4 *S.I.*, 17.1.1852.

5 J. M. Furness, *Record of Municipal Affairs in Sheffield, 1843-93*, Sheffield, 1893, p. 93.

6 *S.F.P.*, 3.1.1852.

7 *S.T.*, 13.12.1851.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Salt, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

10 This was the opinion of the *Sheffield Times*. *S.T.*, 13.12.1851.

11 William Harvey, 1818-86: auctioneer; a student at the People's College.

12 Furness, *op. cit.*, p. 93. The "People's Aldermen" were C. Alcock, W. Groves, I. Ironside, W. Harvey, T.E. Mycock, W.R. Harrison and W. Crowther. *S.I.*, 4.11.1854.

This view seemed to be confirmed by Ironside's attitude to the Improvement Bill of 1851. He had done as much as anyone to promote the bill, but then he suddenly turned against it and helped to defeat it in a public meeting of ratepayers late in 1851.¹ Ostensibly, his opposition to the bill was that in the form in which it emerged it gave excessive powers to policemen and magistrates: "we want no more fetters. Better remain as we are", declared the *Sheffield Free Press*.² But it seems that Ironside really objected to the centralizing tendencies of the bill. The Democratic journal declared that "the centralizing spirit is apparent throughout" and it sneered at the *Independent*, which supported the bill, that "in the political glossary of the Snighill faction, local self-government evidently means local selfish government, government according to the narrow ideas of a clique".³ But this was hardly a sufficient reason to reject the bill completely, and Ironside almost certainly miscalculated. His aim, probably, was to delay the bill so that it might be considered in the wardmotes,⁴ thereby raising their prestige. But by opposing it in the ratepayers' meeting, Ironside ensured that the bill was lost and the Democrats took the blame. At the same time he alienated those members of his own party, such as Schofield and Harvey, who supported the Improvement Bill.⁵

In 1852 the Liberal party in Sheffield was broadly divided into the moderate middle class Liberals and the Ironside party. Richard Solly, who was anxious to bring about union between the middle and working classes, referred to this split in Sheffield Liberalism between those Democrats⁶ who demanded nothing less than the Charter and other reformers, and he believed that "animosity between the radicals and the chartists was a suicidal policy . . . it appeared in their wardmotes, their elections, and had been carried even into the sanitary affairs of the borough".⁷ It was to appear also in the parliamentary election of 1852.

1 Furness, *op. cit.*, p. 94

2 *S.F.P.*, 29.11.1851.

3 *S.F.P.*, 6.12.1851.

4 Salt, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

6 There were Democrats, such as Charles Atcock, who were prepared to co-operate with the middle classes to secure less than the Charter as a beginning. Ironside was not prepared to compromise.

7 *S.I.*, 24.1.1852.

THE ELECTION OF 1852

The divisions among the Liberals in Sheffield were clearly seen in the events which led up to the parliamentary election of 1852. When Lord John Russell's ministry finally fell in February, 1852, and the Tory ministry of Lord Derby was in a minority in the House of Commons, it was clear that a general election would not be long delayed and between February and July, when the election was held, Sheffield buzzed with political activity.

Of course, Isaac Ironside was deeply involved. He was determined to secure the election of Joshua Toulmin Smith for Sheffield. He had begun late in the previous year with resolutions in the Nether Hallam and Ecclesall wardmotes, but Toulmin Smith made it clear that he would stand only if a requisition were presented to him by a public meeting, properly convened.¹ It seems that Ironside also approached Professor Newman, whose views on the need to remove the national debt were currently popular, but he declined to stand. The Central Democratic Association sent a requisition to the Mayor, signed by 18 Democratic town councillors and about 50 others, to convene a meeting to consider inviting Toulmin Smith to address the electors with a view to his being adopted as a candidate.² Charles Alcock chaired the meeting and the motion to invite Smith was carried with only three or four against, which indicated that most Democrats were prepared to support the candidature. In view of this, an attempt was made to unite the two sections of the Liberal party in Sheffield. A meeting was held between the Whig-Radicals, represented by Leader, the Fishers, Solly, Beal, J.Fowler, G.A.Wood and Downend, and the Democrats, Foster, Wostenholm, Issac and James Ironside, and Councillors Thompson, Saunders, Alcock, Elliott and Westran.³ But it appeared that the "real ultras", some Chartists meeting in Steelhouse Lane, were not present. So it was decided to appoint a committee, consisting of 4 Whig-Radicals (Solly, Fisher, Dunn, Leader), 4 Democrats (Westran, Foster, Wostenholm and Issac Ironside) and 2 from Steelhouse Lane (Bagshaw and Clarkson). But the hope for united action, by compromise on the reform question, was shattered by Ironside who, supported by the Steelhouse Lane Chartists, insisted on nothing less than universal suffrage.⁴

On 16 February, Joshua Toulmin Smith addressed a meeting of electors in Sheffield. He thought that "the tendency and disposition to think that parliament could do everything, to believe in parliamentary omnipotence, and to crave its aid for everything, was the crying evil of our time", and he advocated local control of local affairs, "the maintenance of the right of self-government in opposition to centralization".⁵ He was in favour of parliamentary reform⁶ and opposed to state education because it was an instrument of centralization.⁷ The meeting decided unanimously to adopt Toulmin Smith as a parliamentary candidate and the *Sheffield Free Press* urged his return as a "protest against the centralizing tendencies of our legislature".⁸ It is clear that at this stage the Democrats thought that Toulmin Smith should replace John Parker⁹ who had held office under Russell and now represented "the whig ministry rather than the town",¹⁰ and whose politics were not thought radical enough. They hoped that Toulmin Smith would be returned with Roebuck. The *Sheffield Free Press* declared: "We cannot do our townsmen the injustice to suppose that they would sacrifice the superior abilities, fearless independence and unswerving, uncompromising honesty of Mr. Roebuck, in favour of a placeman [Parker] whose chief claim to a seat in parliament would seem to be a talent for keeping himself out of sight, and quietly drawing his salary".¹¹

Toulmin Smith could be elected only if he were associated with a candidate who could command widespread support among the electors. Roebuck, however, was not prepared to be a tool in the hands of Ironside and the Democrats, nor to lose much middle class support which he would undoubtedly have lost, had he severed the Parker connection. Roebuck had disappointed Ironside who had been one of his principal

1 *S.I.*, 14.2.1852.

2 *I bid.*

3 Westran was secretary of the Central Democratic Association.

4 *S.I.*, 14.2.1852.

5 *S.I.*, 21.2.1852.

6 On 29 March, 1852, he declared "by common right, every occupier had a right to the franchise". *S.I.*, 3.4.1852.

7 *S.I.*, 21.2.1852.

8 *S.F.P.*, 21.2.1852.

9 John Parker, 1799 - 1881: educated at Brasenose College, Oxford; barrister; served as a Lord of the Treasury and First Secretary of the Admiralty, 1854 Privy Councillor.

10 The words of Charles Alcock. *S.I.*, 14.2.1852.

11 *S.F.P.*, 21.2.1852.

supporters in 1849. Ironside disliked what he considered to be Roebuck's off-hand treatment of him,¹ as well as his strong centralizing tendencies. So it was that by early March, 1852, Roebuck no longer fitted into Ironside's plans and he determined to remove him. He appeared to have a favourable opportunity to discredit Roebuck in the eyes of the Sheffield electors, when some letters were published linking him with a notoriously corrupt election agent, Coppock and purporting to show that he had "sold" Bath to the Whigs in the election of 1841 and was therefore not an independent member of Parliament. The Democrats sought to use these "revelations" to smear Roebuck. "He stood before the world divested of his robe of honour — the mask of probity was torn from his face," declared the *Sheffield Free Press*.² But as usual Ironside overplayed his hand. The accusations were shown to be unfounded and were easily refuted, and far from discrediting Roebuck, the cry of "Coppock", raised by his opponents, strengthened his position with the main body of electors in Sheffield.

The second part of Ironside's plan to secure the return of Toulmin Smith was to find a popular candidate to stand with him. A group of influential Nonconformists in the town, including J.W. Pye-Smith, H.G. Rhodes, H.E. Hoole³ and E.B. Schofield were dissatisfied with Roebuck. They disliked his views on education and resented his comments on the Kaffir War.⁴ They were anxious to secure the return of George Hadfield, a Manchester solicitor and a prominent Congregationalist. The Hadfield name was well-known in Sheffield. In 1850 George had helped to establish the Hadfield Charity under the terms of his brother's will. As the chief beneficiary of Samuel Hadfield, the highly respected Sheffield merchant, his own income doubled and he became an exceedingly rich man. Ironside and the Democrats decided to support Hadfield as a colleague for Toulmin Smith, and on 18 March H. Wostenholm, the secretary of Toulmin Smith's election committee, wrote to Hadfield inviting him to stand with Toulmin Smith.⁵ It seems that the Democrats played a trick on the Dissenters, several of whom signed the requisition to Hadfield on the understanding that he was to stand quite independently of Smith.⁶ Hadfield was ignorant of the state of politics in Sheffield and, without consulting any of the leading Liberals, rather imprudently agreed to address a public meeting with Toulmin Smith on 29 March.⁷ He impressed the meeting with his opinions in favour of a large extension of the suffrage, local self-government and against all religious and educational endowments and against the connection between Church and State, and on the motion of H.E. Hoole, seconded by Ald. Isaac Schofield, by a large majority, Joshua Toulmin Smith and George Hadfield were adopted as parliamentary candidates.⁸

In fact, the Democrats were seeking to exploit a split among the middle class Liberals between the supporters and opponents of Roebuck. At this stage, Hadfield was considered a threat to Roebuck, not to Parker, whose "quiet worth and diligent service, his high personal character and his honourable self-denial, have made him so much esteemed by men of all classes that his re-election is considered sure".⁹ Robert Leader had no objection in principle to Hadfield except that, by standing, he would split the Liberal party and, by challenging Roebuck, might endanger the Radical seat. He explained to Hadfield that "our opposition to you cannot be one of principles — it is opposition to a personal and political friend who has been placed in a false position with regard to us, through the machinations of his and our opponents".¹⁰ Leader believed that the real villain was Isaac Ironside and that Toulmin Smith was no more than a pawn in his hands. On 3 April, 1852, this view of Smith's candidature was set out in the letter of "an elector", published in the *Sheffield Independent*. "You [Toulmin Smith] were found by Mr. Ironside, and brought by Mr. Ironside. You are the candidate for Ironside, and, if elected, you would be the member for Ironside. Mark! The possibility of your election could only exist in the midst of destructive dissensions among the Liberals of Sheffield . . . you have gained the approbation of the Democrats, but remain almost unknown to the people of Sheffield".

Ironside was linking Toulmin Smith with Hadfield and bidding for the support of those Non-conformists who opposed Roebuck. Leader would have been glad to see the return of Hadfield, had there been a vacancy, but he was committed to the support of Parker and Roebuck. Parker was a personal friend,

1 It was said that after 1849 Ironside bombarded Roebuck with letters, few of which he answered.

2 *S.F.P.*, 3.4.1852.

3 Henry Elliott Hoole, 1806 - 91: stove-grate manufacturer and proprietor of Green Lane Works; Congregationalist; a founder of Ragged Schools; 1856 Alderman; 1859 Mayor.

4 In Sheffield, in January, 1852, he had said that "war and war alone can preserve the colonies of South Africa". *S.I.*, 17.1.1852.

5 G. Hadfield, *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, MS., S.C.L., p.170. *S.I.*, 3.4.1852.

6 R. Leader to G. Hadfield, 26.3.1852, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C.186. *S.I.*, 3.4.1852.

7 *S.I.*, 3.4.1852.

8 *S.I.*, 3.4.1852.

9 *S.I.*, 27.3.1852.

10 R. Leader to G. Hadfield, 26.3.1852, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 186.

who had served the borough with distinction for twenty years, and, moreover, as a Whig, he was acceptable to those electors who sought a "safe" man. Roebuck was a distinguished Radical who, despite his faults,¹ was a credit to Sheffield and had done nothing which should cause the electors to reject him. On 1 April, Parker and Roebuck's election committee convened a meeting of about 300 electors favourable to Roebuck and Parker by invitation (to exclude the Democrats). At the meeting Ald. T. Dunn, Ald. T.R. Barker, Richard Solly and Michael Beal expressed their confidence in and support for Roebuck, and the meeting resolved by an overwhelming majority to invite Roebuck to address the electors.² Roebuck himself attributed Hadfield's candidature to the machinations of the Anti-Corn Law League. He told William Fisher, Jnr., "the League and its leaders have never been cordial with me" and he remarked that "Mr. Hadfield will be thought to have done service to a clique if he succeeds in ousting me".³ On 8 April, Parker and Roebuck addressed a large open-air meeting in Paradise Square.⁴ John Parker had a very stormy hearing; he had doubts about the ballot and refused to commit himself on the question of parliamentary reform. He regretted the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, for which he had voted, and the Kaffir War, for which he had voted supplies. Roebuck's speech, on the other hand, was well received. He was in favour of the ballot, a large extension of the suffrage and complete civil and religious liberty.⁵ He gave a satisfactory explanation of the Coppock business and spoke to the Nonconformists in his characteristically blunt manner: "of the great dissenting bodies, taking them as a whole, I am bound to speak with the greatest possible regard . . . but whenever I think them wrong, I shall say so". Ironside then rose to mount an attack on Parker and Roebuck. He dismissed Parker as an appendage of the Whig ministry, an unthinking adherent of Russell and not a popular candidate. As for Roebuck, he said that he had changed his mind since the Coppock disclosures and he now believed that he was not a fit person to represent Sheffield in Parliament. But the meeting did not agree with him and an amendment, put by William Harvey and seconded by William Fisher, in favour of Roebuck was carried by a large majority. However, the amendment of Ald. Dunn, seconded by Ald. Barker, in support of Parker was defeated, a clear indication, if further evidence were needed,⁶ that Parker was certainly not a popular candidate.

After the meeting, addressed by Toulmin Smith and George Hadfield on 29 March, a joint election committee had been formed. But almost as soon as it had been cemented, this Democrat-Dissenter coalition, the most improbable of all alliances, began to dissolve. It soon became clear that many electors who would support Hadfield did not want Toulmin Smith, and a separate election committee for Hadfield was established.⁷ Both committees produced requisitions.⁸ Then Hadfield disclaimed all connection with Toulmin Smith. Of course, to Ironside this rendered the whole purpose of the Hadfield alliance useless, and on 2 April he visited Hadfield and persuaded him to retire from the contest.⁹ This incensed Hadfield's supporters, especially Mac Turk and the Rev. H.G. Rhodes, and meetings were held to promote the revival of the Hadfield candidature.¹⁰ Ironside was now in an impossible position. Toulmin Smith had no hope of being returned unless he stood with Hadfield, and this was now out of the question. Moreover, the Toulmin Smith committee had incurred large debts. In an effort to salvage something from a desperate situation, the Democrats resorted to some shady dealings and Ironside was definitely associated with them.¹¹ They sought to persuade Hadfield's friends to pay off the debt incurred by the Toulmin Smith candidature in return for the recall of Hadfield.¹² At a meeting of Toulmin Smith's committee on 19 April, it was resolved "that the cordial support of the electors attending this meeting be given to Mr. Hadfield at the ensuing election, and that all members of this committee be urgently requested to do the same", which, in effect, confirmed the resolutions made at a smaller meeting on 15 April.¹³ On 16 April, a deputation, consisting of Gatley, Hoole and Schofield

1 Leader admitted that "unhappily he sometimes brands as error and prejudice what many regard as sacred truths and principles, and speaking with the vehemence of infallibility, he too often offends those from whom he differs". *S.I.*, 27.3.1852.

2 *S.I.*, 3.4.1852.

3 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, Junr., 1.4.1852, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 186.

4 *S.I.*, 10.4.1852.

5 He had been an opponent of the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill.

6 In 1851, Parker had declined a requisition signed by 1,600 electors calling for his resignation. *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, p. 169.

7 *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, p. 172. *S.I.*, 10.4.1852

8 *S.I.*, 10.4.1852.

9 *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, p. 172. *S.I.*, 10.4.1852.

10 *I bid.*

11 J. Salt, *Isaac Ironside*, p. 152.

12 *S.I.*, 17.4.1852.

13 *S.I.*, 24.4.1852.

brought Hadfield a requisition signed by 1,200 electors, with 600 verbal promises of support, which he accepted.¹ In effect, the Democrats² had sold their support to Hadfield in return for the payment of the debts incurred by the Toulmin Smith venture. When he heard about it, Smith was shocked and instantly retired from the contest.³ The *Sheffield Independent* made the most of these questionable dealings:

"Our opposition is not to Mr. Hadfield, or to his political principles, but to his position here. If he become a candidate, it will be as a divider of the Liberal party, — as an opponent of men who have hitherto united and served that party, — and as entering the field by virtue of a pecuniary bargain, and with support as corruptly purchased as ever were, the votes of the Edwards party at St. Albans".⁴ The split in the Liberal party and the entry of Hadfield encouraged the Tories to try their luck. William Overend⁵ accepted a requisition to become Conservative candidate. He was in favour of Free Trade but opposed to parliamentary reform, the ballot and shorter parliaments. He supported state education (based on religious instruction) and the connection between Church and State.⁶*

The tables had been turned on the Democrats. They had sought to use Hadfield, but Hadfield had refused to be used. Now they were committed to the support of one Radical, but the question was whom should they support as his colleague? It could only be Roebuck, who strengthened his position with the electors of Sheffield still further at a meeting in the Town Hall on 13 May.⁷ So the Democrats made a complete *volte-face* and the *Sheffield Free Press* blithely announced "Roebuck, with all thy faults, we love thee still",⁸ and the men who a few weeks earlier had tried to destroy his political career now took up the cry "Roebuck and Hadfield".⁹ The *Sheffield Times*,¹⁰ which supported Parker and Roebuck, attacked the Democrats for their inconsistency, "that wretched clique who first endeavoured to disparage him [Roebuck] and finding that game would not do, now fawn upon him".¹¹ Hadfield, it thought, was supported by "the most conceited elements of Chartism and the bitterest ingredients of Dissent",¹² and his "main" supporters, the Dissenters, were "actuated by a personal and political hostility to Mr. Roebuck".¹³ It is interesting that all the leading Nonconformists who were opposed to Roebuck were Congregationalists. They included H.E. Hoole, J.W. Pye-Smith, the Rev. H.G. Rhodes, Mc Turk and E.B. Schofield. As voluntaryists, they disliked Roebuck's support for national education, but more important was their wish to secure the election of a fellow Congregationalist. Leader was an exception for, though a Congregationalist, he was unwilling to abandon Roebuck. He was especially anxious to ensure the re-election of John Parker and Parker's only hope of success lay in the maintenance of the Roebuck alliance. Most of the middle class Liberal leadership — Thomas Dunn, the Fishers, Richard Solly and T.R. Barker — supported the sitting members. Roebuck and Hadfield were the popular candidates, backed by the Democratic machine. Parker's position would have been stronger if there had been no Conservative candidate, for he would no doubt have received many of the votes which were given to Overend.

At the nomination, on 6 July, Parker was proposed by Ald. Dunn and seconded by J.W. Pye-Smith, and Roebuck by William Fisher, seconded by Ald. T.R. Barker. In proposing Hadfield Ald. Hoole said that his candidature was directed against Parker, who was not a Radical, and as a colleague for Roebuck. His seconder, Isaac Schofield, also supported him as a colleague for Roebuck in place of Parker whom he described as "a political dummy".¹⁴ Overend was proposed by W.F. Dixon¹⁵ as "a liberal conservative". In his speech Parker declared that he was a free trader and "a friend of education". Roebuck set out clearly the broad national issue: "you are here because Lord Derby wants to do away with free trade". He said that

1 *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, p. 173.

2 Not all approved of what happened. The business alienated H. Wostenholm and the solicitor, C.E. Broadbent.)

3 *S.I.*, 24.4.1852.

4 *S.I.*, 1.5.1852.

5 William Overend, 1809 - 84: b. Sheffield, son of Hall Overend, surgeon; educated at Sheffield Grammar School; barrister; 1867 appointed Commissioner to enquire into Trade Union outrages in Sheffield.

6 *S.I.*, 17.4.1852.

7 *S.I.*, 15.5.1852.

8 *S.F.P.*, 15.5.1852.

9 *S.I.*, 22.5.1852.

10 The *Sheffield Times* was first published in 1846 as a Peelite newspaper. Political comment was so sparse that *The Leader* accused it of giving up politics to please its Tory advertising friends. *S.F.P.*, 18.1.51. In August, 1851, William Willott of London became sole proprietor and the editor was John Clarke Platt. 1853 - 57 Henry Pawson and Samuel Harrison were the joint owners and the politics of the paper became solidly Tory.

11 *S.T.*, 22.5.1852.

12 *S.T.*, 29.5.1852.

13 *S.T.*, 15.5.1852.

14 *S.I.*, 10.7.1852.

15 William Frederick Dixon of Page Hall, 1801 - 71: large manufacturer; Deputy Lieutenant of West Riding.

he was standing with Parker because there was a danger that a Conservative might be elected if two Radicals stood together, as had happened when he was defeated at Bath in 1847, and because, whatever Hadfield's supporters now said, Hadfield had been brought to Sheffield to oppose him. Hadfield stood for parliamentary reform, free trade and peace. Overend stated that he was not a supporter of Lord Derby's Government and claimed to be an independent. The show of hands was in favour of Roebuck and Hadfield, and Parker and Overend demanded a poll. The result was heard by a crowd of between 18,000 and 20,000 people. Roebuck and Hadfield were elected.¹ The 1852 Poll Book gives the following analysis of the voting:

	P	R	H	O	PR	PH	PO	RH	RO	HO	TOTAL
SHEFFIELD	125	42	327	298	540	59	227	704	13	74	2,409
ECCLESALL	31	15	87	163	175	20	94	236	6	32	859
BRIGHTSIDE	12	6	27	65	107	8	35	69	4	9	342
NETHER HALLAM	9	2	43	43	45	12	15	63	5	13	250
UPPER HALLAM	1	—	17	27	8	2	5	11	1	10	82
ATTERCLIFFE	3	1	4	14	24	1	19	19	1	6	92
TOTAL	181	66	505	610	899	102	395	1,102	30	144	4,034

4,034 votes were polled out of an electorate which in February, 1852, numbered 5,352.²

The result could not have been unexpected. Hadfield's victory was due to his radical opinions and to Nonconformist support. The Democrats had been won over by his Radicalism and by the payment of the Toulmin Smith debt, "an expenditure of money such as has never before marked a Sheffield election".³ "My success," Hadfield explained, "was occasioned by the principles I avowed on civil, religious and commercial freedom and reforms, the fairness and earnestness with which I advocated them, the testimony of a long life, the knowledge of my family, and the excellent and zealous management of my committee and solicitors — Mr. H.E. Hoole was a splendid Chairman, Mr. Mc Turk and many others paid incessant attention to the canvas".⁴

Parker was defeated because Radicals preferred Roebuck and Hadfield, and many Nonconformists preferred Hadfield. It is probable that his support for the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill lost Parker some Roman Catholic votes.⁵ Moreover, as the poll analysis shows, Overend received the most "plumpers" (610)⁶ and these were votes that Parker would probably have received, had there been no Conservative candidate. Leader was convinced that the responsibility for the divisions in the Liberal party in Sheffield rested with those who had sought to oust the sitting members.⁷ The Democrats, who appeared to be the villains, were seriously weakened as a party by the Toulmin Smith venture. But they did not cause the division among the middle class Liberals between those who supported Parker and Roebuck throughout and those who brought in Hadfield against Roebuck and then directed him against Parker, after Roebuck's successful campaign in May. These divisions were not soon forgotten and were to rankle for several years. Nevertheless, Sheffield was now represented by two Radicals, a clear indication that "the majority of the electoral body have resolved upon the further progress of reform".⁸

The Gas Question and the Disappearance of the Democrats, 1852 - 54.

Despite the failure to secure the return of Joshua Toulmin Smith in 1852, Isaac Ironside continued his plans for the political education of the working classes by their direct participation in the operation of local government. He was anxious that they should play a prominent part in affairs which touched their interests. One of these matters was the question of public health. As chairman of the Sheffield Highway Board, Ironside supervised the laying of deep drains in all the major streets in the centre of Sheffield. This work, carried out between 1852 and 1854, was a considerable achievement, though it appears that most of

1 S.I., 10.7.1852. The voting was
 Roebuck 2,092
 Hadfield 1,853
 Parker 1,580
 Overend 1,180

2 S.L.R., 9.2.1852. Russell's proposed Reform Bill would have raised the Sheffield constituency to 11,386.

3 S.I., 10.7.1852. The sum of money involved was £100.

4 *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, pp. 174 - 175. Hadfield's expenses amounted to £1,770. 18. 10d., of which the press was the chief item.

5 S.I., 10.7.1852.

6 An elector could either "plump" for one candidate or "split" his vote between two candidates.

7 S.I., 10.7.1852.

8 S.I., 10.7.1852.

it was contrary to the law.¹ To sanction these extra-legal activities of the Sheffield Highway Board, Ironside summoned vestry meetings so that the people themselves were actually providing the "legal basis" and at the same time were being instructed in the "science of direct legislation".² But the theory of "vestry authority" was to be given a far more exacting test in the great gas question.

As early as 1850 Ironside had begun a campaign against the United Gas Company, which he reckoned supplied gas at too high a price. He also disliked the old Gas Company, the chairman of which was James Montgomery, because it represented the forces of tradition and authority in the town.³ So in October, 1851, he became a member of a provisional committee, headed by the Mayor, T.B. Turton,⁴ to form a new gas company, the Sheffield Gas Consumers' Company, which began to supply gas in the following year at a reduced rate. The new company was firmly backed by the Democrats and Charles Alcock became chairman. Even the *Sheffield Independent* believed that competition would be beneficial, though it did not concede "all that credit for disinterested zeal for the public, which they claim for themselves".⁵ To the supporters of the new company, gas was more than simply a commodity to be sold at a reduced rate, it was a regenerative force, for where there was gas, there was health, morality, cleanliness and light. With education, it dispelled the darkness that clouded the lives of the lower classes. But, above all, he saw the gas question as a means of making a triumphant assertion of the power of local self-government. He argued that an Act of Parliament was unnecessary since it was sufficient for the activities of the Gas Consumers' Company to be sanctioned by the local Highway Boards, whose authority, in turn, was based upon vestry meetings.⁶ His opinion prevailed and the new company placed its faith in "vestry authority" rather than in an Act of Parliament.

There was much public support for the new venture, and the old company was forced to reduce its price to a competitive level. It also began to sabotage the installations of its rival and for some time a kind of civic war raged between the two companies. But it was not long before the Gas Consumers' Company encountered serious difficulties. At York Assizes, in March, 1853, it was judged that the powers of the new company did "not extend so far as to enable them to do that which in law was a nuisance"⁷ and this applied to the breaking up of streets for the purpose of laying pipes. Then Ironside, who was not satisfied with the running of the company, made a bid to secure complete control of the venture by accusing the directors in April, 1853, of "shameless and complete abandonment of principle . . . on the question of pure gas".⁸ But all he succeeded in doing was to sow dissension. The old company continued to employ sabotage, which added to the technical problems of the new company, and on 31 May, 1853, a very serious explosion occurred on Spital Hill. Most important of all, was that the York decision was upheld in the Court of Queen's Bench in June, 1853,⁹ and this effectively disposed of Ironside's theory of "vestry authority". "Vestry authority" could not provide the legal basis for the venture. If the new company were to continue its activities, it must apply for an Act of Parliament. But this was a costly business, and the Gas Consumers' Company was in debt. So it agreed to amalgamate with the old company in April, 1854. The scheme had failed and the *Sheffield Free Press* regarded the amalgamation as a triumph for monopoly.¹⁰

By November, 1853, the Democratic party was disintegrating. There was no longer a single national issue upon which all Democrats could co-operate and agree, no longer a "cause" to hold the party together. In these circumstances, dissension crept in among the Democratic leadership. The aldermanic question of 1851 caused serious trouble, and Isaac Schofield and William Harvey were alienated by wardmotes, opposition to the Improvement Bill and the attempt to oust Roebuck. Richard Otley disliked the Toulmin Smith venture,¹¹ and the quarrels over the election expenses of Toulmin Smith's committee turned Henry Wostenholm and C.E. Broadbent into Ironside's bitterest opponents. Indeed, as secretary of the election committee

1 J. Salt, *Isaac Ironside*, p. 149.

2 Quoted *ibid.*

3 *Ibid.* p. 159.

4 Thomas Burdett Turton, 1806 - 69; large manufacturer; 1843 Alderman; 1846 Master Cutler; 1851 Mayor.

5 *S.I.*, 9.10.1852.

6 Salt, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

7 Quoted *ibid.*, p. 163

8 Quoted *ibid.*, p. 164.

9 *Ibid.* p. 164.

10 *S.F.P.*, 29.4.1854.

11 Salt, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

of H. Vickers and Michael Beal, Wostenholm helped to bring about the defeat of Ironside in Ecclesall in the municipal election of November, 1853,¹ a defeat which the *Sheffield Free Press* ascribed to "unscrupulous misrepresentation and secret machinations, inspired by personal malevolence and aided by a lavish expenditure of money".² Finally, Ironside's attack on the directors of the Gas Consumers' Company alienated, among others, the chairman, Charles Alcock. It would have taken a great leader to have held the Democratic party together and this Ironside never was. He did not know the meaning of compromise and he expected the Democrats to follow blindly wherever he went. His language was often over-vehement, as when he made a wild accusation of corruption against the directors of the Midland Railway Company, for which he was forced to apologize.³ He also made a series of serious political blunders over the "People's Aldermen" question, the Improvement Bill, the Toulmin Smith candidature and the gas question. There is no doubt that his adherence to the theories of Toulmin Smith and especially the wardmote movement heightened tension among the Democrats, to whom the middle class Liberals were always hostile:

"It has aimed," Leader wrote, "to set up a dictatorship, armed with a set of organised cliques, called 'central democratic associations' and 'ward-motes'; it has endeavoured to engross all local offices in the hands of subservient nominees of the moving power."⁴

The decline of the Democrats can be seen in the results of the municipal elections. The first symptoms were apparent in November, 1853, when Ironside was defeated in Ecclesall. But in the following year, the Democrats suffered serious defeats, 7 losses to 1 gain,⁵ including the defeat of Ironside in Nether Hallam. This was the last municipal election which the Democrats fought as a party. The Central Democratic Association was defunct in February, 1854, when Ironside tried without much success to form a Municipal Association as a successor to it.⁶ The middle class Liberals were overjoyed at the disappearance of the Democrats who several years earlier must have seemed a real threat to their political predominance. Leader announced in November, 1854, that "true liberalism has gained the day. False liberalism has been checked and humbled." This represented "the utter failure of the attempt to construct a party bound to unconditional obedience, ruled by one will, and devoted to its own aggrandisement".⁷ This experiment in popular politics had failed; undeniably, the future lay with the middle class Liberals. For the next twenty years Sheffield Liberalism was a Liberalism of personal influence. The "violent conflicts" had certainly given way to "a more quiet state of things".⁸

1 *Ibid.*, p. 166.

2 *S.F.P.*, 5.11.1853.

3 Salt, *op. cit.*, p. 157

4 *S.I.*, 9.4.1853.

5 *S.I.*, 4.11.1854.

6 *S.L.R.*, 6.2.1854.

7 *S.I.*, 4.11.1854.

8 *S.I.*, 3.11.1855

CHAPTER IV

SHEFFIELD LIBERALISM AND THE CRIMEAN WAR, 1853 - 56.

The attempts of Russia in 1853 to press unjustifiable demands upon the Turks aroused widespread opposition in Sheffield. When Russian troops invaded the Danubian principalities in July, the *Sheffield Independent* declared that "the acts of Russia are those of the unprincipled bully, bent upon fighting on the most flimsy pretences".¹ Although all Liberals in Sheffield were loud in their condemnation of Russia, some hoped that war might be prevented and supported the efforts of Lord Aberdeen's Government to preserve peace. As late as October, 1853, Leader wrote that "while any, the remotest, chance of a satisfactory settlement exists, it would be wickedness and madness to resort to arms".² The Democrats, on the other hand, were raising a "war-cry" in the Town Council in July, 1853,³ and the *Sheffield Free Press* denounced English foreign policy as "trimming and truckling".⁴ They regarded war against Russia as a crusade, necessary in the interests of Turkey and of European liberty:

"We are called upon to defend right against rapacity, our honour against suspicion, and international morality against wrong and violence. We are summoned by the God of Freedom to oppose the God of the Russians, and by the interests of European civilization to arrest the threatened deluge of Cossack barbarism".⁵ So Liberals in Sheffield were divided between those who wished to preserve peace, while condemning Russian actions, and the Democrats who wanted war which, though "it is a desperate remedy, . . . is a necessary one: necessary to prevent the spread of despotism — necessary to restore the health, nay, to save the life, of European freedom",⁶ and who denounced "the disgraceful inaction of our government",⁷ " 'peace' — palsied and Aberdeen-ridden".⁸

There was widespread support in Sheffield, as in many other industrial towns, for the declaration of war against Russia in April, 1854. War fervour was partly a reaction to a long period of peace, but it was so high because Russia was the enemy, and, in the popular mind, Russia was synonymous with despotism and oppression. Russia was the enemy of liberty in Europe, and the oppressor of Poland. Sheffield Liberals had always been especially sympathetic towards the Poles in their struggle for freedom. It was believed that Russian power had to be checked in the interests of European liberty. There was a long tradition in England of Russophobia, nurtured by such writers as David Urquhart. It is not surprising, therefore, that once war had been declared, there was a general wish that it should be prosecuted with vigour and resolution. But it became obvious, as the months went by and no victories were won, that the Coalition Government of Lord Aberdeen, which had striven so hard to avoid war, was not the Government to do this. The *Sheffield Free Press* denounced Aberdeen as the "friend of the Czar"⁹ and believed that, until some explanation for the lack of success was given, "the nation will continue to question the judgement or honesty of its rulers, and the impression will not cease to prevail that the true strongholds of the Czar are Downing Street and Secret Diplomacy".¹⁰ The Democrats mounted a campaign to oust the Government.

"To effect the required change in the conduct of the war," the *Sheffield Free Press* announced, "it will be necessary, primarily, to arouse the people of England, locally and nationally, in opposition to the Coalition Cabinet . . . Sheffield is, we believe, now ripe and ready for action, and will follow in the wake of Newcastle. Let all our great towns swell the cry of, 'No confidence in the Coalition' and its downfall will be certain and speedy".¹¹

On 25 September, 1854, a large public meeting was held "for the purpose of considering whether the government is deserving of the confidence of the country".¹² Ald. Carr¹³ expressed a lack of confidence in Lord Aberdeen, and Charles Alcock said that he did not like "the conduct of the Whig government". Despite William Harvey's argument that "there were only a few twaddling, bigoted tory papers who were attempting to raise up an opposition to the government, of whose alleged unfitness no proof was given",

1 S.I., 9.7.1853.

2 S.I., 1.10.1853.

3 S.I., 16.7.1853.

4 S.F.P., 20.8.1853.

5 S.F.P. 8.10.1853.

6 S.F.P., 25.2.1854.

7 S.F.P., 3.12.1853.

8 S.F.P., 12.11.1853

9 S.F.P., 24.6.1854.

10 S.F.P., 22.7.1854.

11 S.F.P., 16.9.1854.

12 S.I., 30.9.1854.

13 John Carr, 1802 - 87: surgeon; 1843 Alderman; 1852 Mayor; served in Town Council 1843 - 59, 1861 - 80.

a vote of no confidence was carried by a large majority. The meeting was then addressed by Charles Attwood of Newcastle, chairman of the Northern Political Union. A Sheffield committee was elected, which included Ironside, Gill, Carr and Schofield, to co-operate with a committee in Newcastle, which aimed at the removal of the Aberdeen Coalition and a more vigorous prosecution of the war".¹ In November, 1854, the *Sheffield Free Press* warned that "unless our government shall now at last manifest the necessary activity and energy, the cry for their impeachment, which has already more than once been raised in Sheffield and Newcastle, will reverberate throughout the land".² The same newspaper denounced the Government's negotiations for a treaty with Austria: "while the immortal heroes of the Crimea are so nobly sustaining the martial fame of England, the cause for which they have braved so much is disgraced at home by association with despots and hirelings".³ This agitation in Sheffield for the removal of Aberdeen's Government was, in some ways, similar to the much larger and more important Urquhartite movement which became strong in the town in 1855. It was led by those Liberals who drew their support from the working classes, especially the Democrats Ironside, Alcock and Schofield. No middle class Liberals spoke at the meeting of 25 September, 1854;⁴ indeed, the *Sheffield Independent* was very sympathetic towards the Government. At the close of 1854, it concluded that "no reasonable man, looking to the greatness of the power with which we are at war, can fairly be disappointed with the results of the first campaign".⁵ The anti-Aberdeen agitation may be regarded as the last campaign of the Democrats before they disappeared in November, 1854. As will appear, with the exception of Isaac Ironside, none of the principal Democrats, who took part in this agitation, were actively involved in the Urquhartite movement of the following year. But both movements were confined to the working classes and in neither were the middle class Liberals in any way involved. The agitation of 1854 also resembled that of the following year in its emphasis upon the evils of "secret diplomacy".

"How long", asked the *Sheffield Free Press*, are we to endure this smothering of truth, in obedience to official etiquette? This paralyzing of justice, and this fostering of treachery? Nothing short of a destruction both of secret diplomacy and of our whole system of resident embassies will effect it. The public often know, or can know, more than ambassadors know or choose to know".⁶ The references to Lord Aberdeen as the "friend of the Czar" echo the accusations against Palmerston in the following year. Both movements had strong links with similar movements in other industrial towns, and especially Newcastle. Finally, both agitations arose as a result of the failure of the Government to prosecute the war with as much vigour as the urban Radicals wished. The gulf between the Government and the people was widened still further in January, 1855, when the press revealed gross and scandalous mismanagement which had caused the army in the Crimea to suffer unbelievable hardships throughout the Russian winter. The public cried aloud for action, and it was the M.P. for Sheffield, John Arthur Roebuck who rose from his sick-bed to give voice to the public indignation which was felt nowhere more keenly than in his own constituency. An independent who distrusted the Whigs, fearless and vehement, Roebuck moved on 27 January, 1855, "that a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the condition of our army before Sebastopol, and into the conduct of those departments of the Government whose duty it has been to minister to the wants of that army".⁷ The motion, which was carried by a majority of 157, gave the death-blow to Aberdeen's already weak Government. It is a measure of the strength of support in Sheffield for the war and for Roebuck that George Hadfield, who had close links with Cobden, Bright and the "peace party", moved round to a qualified support of the war.⁸ and seconded Roebuck's motion. In Sheffield the "peace party" never had a chance.⁹ "It is a most unfortunate course which Mr. Bright and some of his old friends have taken on the subject of the war", Leader wrote in December, 1854,¹⁰ and the *Sheffield Times* was even more condemnatory: "the appeals to our selfishness made by Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright fail at present, as we hope they will always do, to produce any effect".¹¹ All Sheffield Liberals stood

1 *S.I.*, 30.9.1854.

2 *S.F.P.*, 18.11.1854.

3 *S.F.P.*, 23.12.1854.

4 Ald. Carr might be thought an exception, but, as Mayor in 1852, he had been criticised for his conduct in the Town Council and especially for his open identification with the Toulmin Smith party. See *S.I.*, 21.2.1852.

5 *S.I.*, 30.12.1854.

6 *S.F.P.*, 25.2.1854.

7 Quoted in R.E. Leader, *Life and Letters of John Arthur Roebuck, 1897*, p. 259

8 A. Briggs, *Victorian People*, 1954, p. 74. In his autobiography, Hadfield described it as a "sinful and bootless conflict" which could have been averted. *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, p. 181.

9 Edward Smith withdrew from politics at this time. "He uniformly and unequivocally advocated the doctrines of the Peace Society, and when these doctrines led to his divergence from the views of other members of the Liberal party, he withdrew from a connection in which he could no longer work harmoniously". R.E. Leader, *Reminiscences of Old Sheffield*, Sheffield, 1875, p. 323.

10 *S.I.*, 23.12.1854.

11 *S.T.*, 30.12.1854.

firmly behind the war and Roebuck. Leader wrote: "We are glad that the public voice has found a spokesman in the House of Commons so able and fearless as our member, Mr. Roebuck . . . ministers must make a wonderfully cogent answer to Mr. Roebuck before they can satisfy either the House of Commons or the country that their duty has been done, and that our whole system of administration does not need a radical change".¹ The revelations of administrative mismanagement prompted two quite distinct movements in Sheffield, the one dominated by the middle class Liberals and the other confined exclusively to the working classes, but both with the same aim – the vigorous prosecution of the war.

The Sebastopol Investigation Committee, of which Roebuck was elected chairman, began its investigations in March, 1855, and the press was full of startling disclosures of "imbecile and wasteful mismanagement".² But one fact emerged above all others, which was that the reasons for the chaos and confusion in the Crimea could not be found in the incompetence of particular individuals but were the product of the system of administration itself.³ What was needed, therefore, was a thorough reform of the whole structure and central to the thinking of administrative reformers was the belief that this could be achieved by the introduction into the administration of commercial expertise, that "the panacea was to remake the Civil Service in the image of private business".⁴ In Leader's words, "we must introduce into our administration the common sense, knowledge, activity and industry that make our commercial undertakings successful . . . we must have a sweeping and thorough reform, and infuse into the administrative system of our government the genius of the country".⁵ In Sheffield the middle class Liberals supported the demand for administrative reform. Leader believed that the Administrative Reform Association would do valuable work "in the collection and diffusion of information, in keeping watch on the systems of patronage and promotion in our various services, in checking abuse by the fear of exposure and in strengthening the hands of honest administrators against the sinister influences which tend to pervert their choice".⁶ Leader called for a "properly" formed Administrative Reform Association in Sheffield,⁷ but it does not appear that one was established.⁸ However, on 20 June, 1855, a large public meeting was held in favour of administrative reform and the speakers included Fisher, Leader, Dunn, Alcock, Carr and Ironside.⁹ But the middle class Liberals did not speak at a public meeting on 30 April, to petition Parliament in favour of army reform,¹⁰ probably because they thought that army reform should not be attempted while the war was still being fought.¹¹ The administrative reform movement in Sheffield, carried on against the background of Roebuck's Committee, was important as an expression of the middle class Liberal reaction to the mismanagement of the war. The working class reaction was altogether more spectacular.

This agitation owed its existence to the influence of David Urquhart. An ex-diplomatist, he loathed Russia and the Czar whom he regarded as the Anti-Christ, and not much less was his hatred of Lord Palmerston whom he held responsible for his expulsion from the diplomatic service some years earlier and whom he firmly and seriously believed was a Russian agent. Urquhart travelled the country addressing meetings and organizing Foreign Affairs Committees, the purpose of which was to study and investigate foreign policy with a view to "exposing" Russian influence. In Sheffield he found a ready disciple in Isaac Ironside, whose political fortunes were at a very low ebb in 1855. Ironside hated Russia as furiously as Urquhart nor did he have any liking for Palmerston.¹² But Urquhartism appealed to Ironside principally because it was concerned with education or rather it seemed to provide an instrument of education. Like the wardmote, but on a larger scale, it sought to purify and regenerate society by a process of "education", which Ironside regarded as the means whereby the masses would play an active part in, and therefore exercise a very real influence over national affairs.¹³ It was Ironside who organized the Urquhartite agitation in Sheffield. He established the Sheffield Foreign Affairs Committee, became joint owner with John Blenkin of the *Sheffield Free Press* in April, 1855,¹⁴ and established complete control of the newspaper in the

1 *S.I.*, 27.1.1855

2 *S.I.*, 17.3.1855.

3 Briggs, *op. cit.* p. 84.

4 Olive Anderson, *A Liberal State at War*, 1967, p. 116.

5 *S.I.*, 31.3.1855.

6 *S.I.*, 26.5.1855.

7 *S.I.*, 12.5.1855.

8 Cf. Olive Anderson's description of the "meteoric Administrative Reform Association – founded in May, 1855, a mass movement by June, and by August quite insignificant". Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

9 *S.I.*, 23.6.1855.

10 *S.I.*, 5.5.1855.

11 Cf. the defeat of Goderich's proposals in the House of Commons. Briggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 84 - 85.

12 He seems to have bombarded Palmerston with letters and not to have been satisfied with the replies.

13 J. Salt, *Isaac Ironside*, p. 175. It must also be remembered that, like Toulmin Smith, Urquhart stressed the importance of local institutions. He was concerned to reduce the power of the Cabinet and to encourage each individual to think about and influence national affairs. For a fuller discussion of Urquhart's ideas, see Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 139 - 143.

14 *S.F.P.* 7.4.1855.

following November.¹ The newspaper became the organ of the Urquhartite agitation in Sheffield. With Urquhart, Ironside founded the *Free Press* which first appeared as a national paper on 13 October, 1855,² and which was printed in Sheffield until it was transferred to London in August, 1856.³ W. Cycles, secretary of the Sheffield Foreign Affairs Committee, C.D. Collet, active in the campaign for the abolition of the taxes on knowledge, the Secularist G.J. Holyoake and Karl Marx were all associated with it and Marx wrote a series of articles, entitled *Revelations of the Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century*, which were published in the *Sheffield Free Press* in 1856.⁴ By July, 1855, the agitation was in full cry in Sheffield. It was a hysterical movement which saw Russian influence everywhere. The *Sheffield Free Press* hoped that "means may yet be found to arrest the Satanic heads, hearts and hands, which are now, and have been for so long a time, playing the game of Russia in the secret cabinet of Britain — secret, but sacred no more!"⁵ G.S. Phillips (known more widely as January Searle), a co-editor of the *Free Press*, denounced Palmerston as a Russian agent at large meetings on 4 July, 7 and 8 November, 1855, and 17 January, 1856.⁶ On 4 August, 1855, the *Sheffield Free Press* declared: "The campaign against the traitors and treason of the British Government is proceeding with unabated vigour. Hitherto it has been a series of successes . . . the towns of England are moving each other, and we hope shortly to see the whole people animated with one purpose — to impeach and punish the traitors that have betrayed the honour and best interests of England".⁷ Of Palmerston's guilt it had no doubt: "we denounce him as the aider and abettor of Russia, and are prepared to prove that in nearly all his foreign transactions he has sacrificed not only English interests, but those of Turkey, to the very enemy with whom we are now at war".⁸

Ironside was appointed permanent chairman and W. Cycles secretary at a meeting of the Sheffield Foreign Affairs Committee on 1 January, 1856.⁹ The Committee met weekly to discuss and investigate foreign policy. Ironside himself described it in 1863 as "a committee of working men",¹⁰ and it is clear that the Urquhartite agitation was confined to the working classes. The *Sheffield Independent* stated that at the public meeting on 7 November, 1855, there was a numerous attendance, principally working men.¹¹ The Foreign Affairs Committee was a pressure group concerned to influence public opinion by propaganda and public meetings. On 7 November, 1855, a public meeting was convened by the Sheffield Investigation Committee,¹² at Ironside's suggestion, to consider the high price of food, and David Urquhart was the principal speaker.¹³ On 4 March, 1856, he addressed a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee itself, when "about 40 persons attended".¹⁴ The Committee remained in existence almost until 1870,¹⁵ although it was most active in the years 1855 - 56. But the Urquhartite agitation, of which Sheffield was probably the most important centre, was limited in its influence. It was weakened by divisions, principally between the supporters of Urquhart and those who refused to accept all his extreme views, although this does not appear so noticeable in Sheffield. Of course, Urquhart's extreme opinions commanded no support in Parliament, where Palmerston slowly strengthened his position in 1855. Roebuck certainly did not agree with Urquhart, although he was careful not to antagonize the Urquhartites. Also it must be remembered that the agitation was confined to a section of the lower classes. Like the wardmote, the Foreign Affairs Committee proved an inadequate instrument of education and political emancipation among the working classes. Apathy soon set in, and yet another of Ironside's dreams dissolved before him. But it would be incorrect to suggest that the Urquhartite agitation was unimportant. It strengthened that deep-seated Russophobia in Sheffield which was to be of great political significance in the Balkan crisis of 1876 - 78.

The two agitations, that for administrative reform and the Urquhartite agitation, show that Liberals in Sheffield, both moderates and extremists, were active during the war and were at least agreed in wanting it prosecuted as vigorously as possible. They believed that this would make army and administrative reform absolutely necessary and that only by the complete defeat of Russia would liberty in Europe be achieved.

1 *S.F.P.*, 17.11.1855.

2 W.H.G. Armytage, "Sheffield and the Crimean War. Politics and Industry, 1852 - 57", *History Today*, Vol. 5, 1955, p. 475.

3 Salt, *op. cit.*, p. 177. It was then known as *The Diplomatic Review*.

4 *S.F.P.*, 28.6.1856 and subsequent issues.

5 *S.F.P.*, 14.7.1855.

6 Armytage, *op. cit.*, p. 478.

7 *S.F.P.*, 4.8.1855. The talk of impeachment reflected the antiquarian and retrospective bias of the movement. Olive Anderson states that Urquhart's ideal was "a return to the Act of Settlement", 1701, that is a return to the constitution as it had been before the rise of cabinet government. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

8 *S.F.P.*, 6.10.1855.

9 *S.F.P.*, 5.1.1856

10 Quoted in Salt, *op. cit.*, p. 174 footnote.

11 *S.I.*, 10.11.1855

12 Leader said "the Investigation Committee is an offspring of the recently defunct Foreign Affairs Committee". *S.I.*, 10.11.1855. But the Foreign Affairs Committee was not defunct;

13 *S.I.*, 10.11.1855

14 *S.F.P.*, 8.3.1856.

15 Salt, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

"When we say that the war will promote liberty", Leader wrote, "we mean that it will do so by weakening the powers of tyranny, by destroying the prop on which they have relied, and by leaving rulers and peoples to work out their own internal controversies free from the interference and dictation of an overbearing Czar".¹ But in 1856 Palmerston found it impossible to continue the war, partly because of parliamentary pressure but more especially because his ally, Napoleon III, refused to fight on. The Treaty of Paris, signed in March, 1856, was greeted everywhere coldly and in Sheffield with hostility. When it was suggested that the end of the war should be celebrated, Leader commented, "we do not think that the peace is so glorious or the prospect of its continuation so sure, as to make it wise to spend our time in processions or our money in gas lights".² The middle class Liberals soon forgot their disappointment and stood firmly behind Palmerston's Chinese policy in 1857. The Urquhartites, on the other hand, regarded Palmerston's peace as the ultimate sell-out to the Russians: "The manner in which the peace is received shows, not that the people of this country hold this or that opinion on the war, but that they are servilely devoted to their Government in all matters of great importance, and that while they are willing to join a cry upon some crotchet, they are not willing to undergo the labour of studying public affairs".³ In fact, with the conclusion of peace, the mood of national fervour, which at times approached hysteria, passed and political calm was restored.

The Election of 1857

In 1857 there was universal support in the country for Palmerston's policy in China⁴ and he was as popular in Sheffield as in any other town. The *Sheffield Independent* declared that "Lord Palmerston is laudably jealous for the honour and interests of the country"⁵ and "he is the only man who, during the last two years, has risen to the greatness of the occasion, and has fairly represented the spirit and will of the British people".⁶ When Palmerston's prestige was at its height, a coalition of his principal opponents in the House of Commons — Radicals, Peelites and Tories — succeeded in bringing about his defeat by carrying Cobden's motion condemning his Chinese policy. Palmerston immediately applied for a dissolution of Parliament and appealed to the country. The election posed two main problems for the Liberals in Sheffield. If they were to attain any measure of unity, it was necessary to heal the split which had been caused by the intervention of George Hadfield and the defeat of John Parker in 1852. Secondly, assuming that the Liberals of Sheffield could unite in support of Roebuck and Hadfield, there was the problem of upholding them against the universally popular Palmerston, whose policy they had opposed by voting for Cobden's motion, a position which the Conservative candidate, William Overend, sought to exploit by claiming to be a supporter of Lord Palmerston.

In 1852 Liberals in Sheffield had been broadly divided between those who supported Parker and Roebuck and those who backed the candidature of George Hadfield. Roebuck had declined to associate himself with Hadfield, because, in the first instance, Hadfield had been brought forward to oppose him, and because he was conscious that Parker's Whiggery could command the votes of lukewarm Liberals who would not vote for two Radicals. Robert Leader believed that Liberalism in Sheffield would be strengthened if a Whig stood with a Radical, and this was a common practice in industrial towns at this time. This consideration, rather than personal ties, explains why such men as Leader, Dunn, Solly and Fisher supported Parker in 1852. His defeat caused much bitterness among Liberals which lasted for several years. Roebuck's resentment was apparent in a letter he wrote to William Fisher, Junr., in 1854: "I am not well pleased by this attempt of Mr. Hadfield to make himself of importance. What he did last year may be summed up in the word nothing and anything that he may say to the contrary will be simply pretence . . . I must say that the manner of Mr. Hadfield's election does not make me anxious to strengthen him in the good opinion of the electors — let him get through his work as he can".⁷ In the interests of Liberal unity and in view of the serious Conservative challenge, it was decided on 13 March, 1857, to amalgamate the election committees of Roebuck and Hadfield.⁸ But, despite this, it is quite clear that the Roebuck — Hadfield alliance was far from smooth. On the day before the nomination, William Fisher, Junr., told Roebuck that he had "as grave objections to Mr. Hadfield as I had when he first came to Sheffield".⁹ Shortly after the election, Roebuck

1 *S.I.*, 13.10.1855.

2 *S.I.*, 17.5.1856.

3 *S.F.P.*, 10.5.1856.

4 Canton was bombarded because the Chinese refused to apologize for arresting the crew of a small vessel which had been engaged in smuggling and piracy, while flying the British flag.

5 *S.I.*, 7.2.1857.

6 *S.I.*, 7.3.1857.

7 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, Junr., date illegible, 1854, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 186.

8 *S.L.R.*, 13.3.1857.

9 Wm. Fisher, Junr., to J.A. Roebuck, 26.3.1857, Leader MSS., S.C.L. L.C. 186.

wrote to Fisher: "The absence of my old friends was, I acknowledge, a cause of sincere regret to me. I attributed that absence to change of feeling and am glad to find that in your case I was mistaken. The alliance was thought necessary to success, and for the benefit of the liberal cause in Sheffield".¹ It was his hope "that now peace and good will, will return to all in Sheffield".² Obviously bitterness persisted despite the alliance. Indeed, it did not end there. In the following year there was friction between Thomas Dunn and H.E. Hoole who claimed that Dunn had slighted him by not consulting him properly.³ Hadfield complained about Leader's hostility to H.E. Hoole, which was obviously bound up with Hoole's aspirations to the mayoralty.⁴ It was clear that the joint committee hid wide personal differences.

Yet the alliance was necessary to secure the return of the members in view of the widespread support for Palmerston. Although most Liberals disagreed with them over the China question, they were unwilling to lose the services of men who had played such a prominent part in the previous Parliament. On 9 March, a meeting of Roebuck's friends unanimously decided to support him, though regretting his vote on the China motion.⁵ In view of Palmerston's popularity, the contest was bound to be close. William Overend stood as a supporter of Lord Palmerston and had the backing of the *Sheffield Times*, now a solidly Tory newspaper under the control of Samuel Harrison.⁶ Always opposed to Hadfield, the *Sheffield Times* disliked what it thought amounted to dictation by Roebuck: "Let us give Mr. Roebuck all the rope he wants, and he shall continue to be the useful censor over government which he hitherto has been, but let us resist his attempt to tie that rope round our necks with a heavy weight attached to it, that so he may choke the free expression of a vote for Mr. Overend, if in our consciences we think it desirable that the town should have an intelligent and practical representative, who will strengthen Lord Palmerston in his foreign policy, and sensibly control our domestic reforms and retrenchments".⁷ After the election it sneered "this Robin Hood carries with him a Little John pledged to follow in his freebooting footsteps".⁸ Hadfield declared that the Conservatives in Sheffield "appeared to be stronger than ever before".⁹ Partly, no doubt, this was because Overend benefited from Palmerston's popularity. But the Conservatives also gained the votes of those lukewarm Liberals who previously had voted for Parker as a "safe" man but who were not prepared to vote for such advanced Radicals as Roebuck and Hadfield. In other words, the Conservatives had gained by the Liberal split of 1852; the marginal Liberal voters, or, as Hadfield described them, "some professed reformers of the old School",¹⁰ were lost, though probably in the long run Sheffield Liberalism gained by their defection.

Nevertheless, in 1857, the Conservatives did very well.¹¹ Overend lost by only 812 votes and received by far the most "plumpers" (1,596), which is evidence of the existence of a solid core of Conservatism in Sheffield of great importance for the future. Undoubtedly, the success of the Liberal candidates was due to the amalgamation and co-operation of their committees, although Thomas Dunn considered that the expenses were about double what they should have been.¹² In their election address Roebuck and Hadfield stated that they stood on the same principles as in 1852 — extension of the franchise and economy — and they claimed that in the last Parliament they had supported the Government, differing on only one vote.¹³ The Conservative challenge enabled the Liberals in Sheffield to attain a greater measure of unity than they had known for a number of years. The Democrats were no longer a threat to middle class predominance.¹⁴ "The Liberal party is reunited", Leader declared in April, 1857.¹⁵ There were still differing shades of opinion, but Liberals were at least agreed about the men who should represent them in Parliament.

1 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, Junr., 1.4.1857, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 186.

2 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, Junr., 2.4.1857, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 186.

3 Hadfield noted in his autobiography, "I had an unpleasant correspondence with Mr. Dunn of Sheffield", G. Hadfield, *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, MS., S.C.L., p 195.

4 G. Hadfield to R. Leader, 7.11.1858, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

5 S.L.R., 9.3.1857.

6 Samuel Harrison, 1827 - 71: b. Banwell, Somersetshire, son of a Wesleyan minister; 1853 - 57 joint owner with Henry Pawson of *Sheffield Times*; member of Carver Street Wesleyan Chapel; 1857 - 71 owned and edited *Sheffield Times*, devoting his energies to "the advocacy of Conservative principles". S.I., 22.2.1871.

7 S.T., 28.3.1857.

8 S.T., 4.4.1857.

9 *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, p. 188.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

11 The voting was:
 Roebuck 3,200
 Hadfield 2,871
 Overend 2,059

The votes were cast as follows:

	PLUMPERS			SPLIT VOTES		
	R	H	O	RH	RO	HO
S.L.R., 28.3.1857.	84	90	1,596	2,717	399	64

12 T. Dunn to R. Leader, 11.4.1857, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 186.

13 S.I., 28.3.1857.

14 The *Sheffield Free Press* ceased publication in 1857. Ironside tried to dispose of the paper to Leader for £1,500, and he told Leader that "it is as likely for a new paper to be started in Sheffield as a new Gas Co." I. Ironside to R. Leader, 10.2.1857, Leader Collection, Newspaper Cuttings Relating to Sheffield, VOL. 21, S.C.L.

15 S.I., 4.4.1857.

The bitter divisions of the 1840's and early 1850's seemed far away. If November, 1854, marked the demise of independent working class political action, the election of 1857 underlined middle class political predominance in Sheffield.



THE NATIONAL SCENE

"Lord Palmerston was the successful Minister, not because he imposed his policy upon the country, but because he understood and expressed the country's wants and wishes".¹ "In the country Mr. Gladstone's name and leadership will secure support, and probably draw forth that popular energy, on which the success of a reform bill must largely depend".² In the general election of 1859 the electorate had pronounced firmly against Disraeli's hollow scheme of parliamentary reform and had given yet another vote of confidence to Lord Palmerston. Palmerston's bluff and genial manner caught the popular imagination and everyone knew that he could be relied upon to conduct a foreign policy which was at once sympathetic to all liberal aspirations abroad and yet always mindful of British interests. He reflected the mood and temper of the country in the early 1860's, when prosperity at home and exciting events abroad diverted popular attention from domestic questions such as parliamentary reform. Although he must have realized that a solution to this problem could not be long delayed, Palmerston was able to point to the absence of a popular demand for reform, and he helped to foster this by his reluctance to bring in any reform bill or indeed to raise the question at all after the rejection of Russell's bill in Cabinet in 1860. He realized that the political situation and the mood of the country did not favour organic change. Such an attitude made him acceptable to the Conservatives who regarded him as the most effective check to the demands of the Radicals in Parliament. Palmerston understood the mood of the House of Commons and he knew how to handle it. His greatest political achievement was the creation of a parliamentary Liberal party.³ He welded into a party in the House of Commons Whigs, Peelites and even Radicals, and he was able to hold them together because there were no domestic issues to split the party. The Whigs accepted him because he offered them political power without the need to come to grips with the difficult problem of parliamentary reform. The Peelites also sought office and were at one with Palmerston in their enthusiasm for the cause of liberalism abroad. Even the Radicals, or most of them,⁴ thought that he was preferable to Lord Derby and the Conservatives. The parliamentary Liberal party was held together by his personal ascendancy and political expertise. He was also fortunate in that the quiescent state of the country in regard to domestic politics enabled him to avoid questions which might have split the party, and the thorniest question of all was that of parliamentary reform.

Yet before Palmerston died in October, 1865, there were clear signs that the demand for parliamentary reform among the unenfranchised was growing. Chartism had disappeared by 1861⁵ and its place had been taken by a labour movement directed by men with a far different outlook. It was associated with the emergence of the New Model unions, large craft unions organized on a national scale with headquarters in London, the aim of which was to make trade unionism respectable and therefore acceptable to the middle and upper classes. The new unionists abandoned Chartist notions of class warfare and of a working class utopia. They accepted, to a large extent, the competitive system and middle class political economy, and, above all, they were prepared to co-operate with the middle classes. They had close connections with the Positivists,⁶ intellectuals such as Professor Beesly and Frederic Harrison, who provided the movement with a social philosophy. In their economic and political aspirations the New Model unionists found ready support from enlightened employers such as Samuel Morley, Titus Salt and A.J. Mundella. These men saw the need for a recognition of trade unions and the free adoption of the principle of arbitration and showed a deep concern for the material and social welfare of their workmen. Most of them were Nonconformists with a profound sense of social and political mission. Their links with the new labour leaders were extremely close and amounted in some cases to a real friendship. The outlook of the New Model unionists can be seen in the career of Robert Applegarth,⁷ who in 1862 became secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners. Under his guidance it became a national organization which by 1870 had over 230 branches with more than 10,000 members.⁸ He built up a financially sound, effective and powerful union for the purpose of open collective bargaining, and which at the same time provided all the benefits of a friendly society. The keynote was moderation and respectability and strike action was the very last resort. Although probably no more than 10% of the working classes belonged to these unions, it was

1 S.I., 19.10.1865.

2 S.I., 1.1.1866.

3 See J. Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857 - 1868*, 1966, pp. 146 - 149.

4 Roebuck was an exception. From 1859 he insisted that a good measure of parliamentary reform was more likely to be carried by the Conservatives.

5 R. Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, 1965, p. 2.

6 The followers of Auguste Comte (1798 - 1857).

7 See A. Briggs, "Robert Applegarth and the Trade Unions", *Victorian People*, 1954, pp. 176 - 204.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

this "labour aristocracy" or rather its leaders which came to control the labour movement.¹ In the quarter of a century after 1850 a vast gulf developed between the skilled and the semi-skilled or unskilled worker. Alfred Marshall wrote in 1873 that "artisans whose labour is not heavy, who are paid chiefly for their skill and the work of their brains, are as conscious of the superiority of their lot over that of their poorer brethren as is the highest nobleman in the land".² This was reflected in a sharp wage differential and a marked improvement in the economic status of the labour aristocracy in relation to the working classes as a whole.³ The greatest wish of these men was to rise in the social scale and to be socially acceptable to the classes above them. When they spoke of the working classes, they thought in terms of the skilled elite, and they were as suspicious of the "residuum", that part of the working classes which could not safely be admitted within the pale of the constitution, as was John Bright himself.

The builders' strike of 1859 - 60 is rightly regarded as a turning-point in the history of the labour movement, because from that time leading trade unionists became more politically conscious. This was reflected in the formation of the London Trades Council and the foundation of a trade union newspaper, the *Bee Hive*, in which a number of London trades held shares. There were obvious political implications in the demands of the builders for a nine-hour day, and in the agitation to secure the repeal of the Master and Servant Act, which made the breaking of a contract a criminal offence for an employee but not for an employer. The political consciousness of the working classes was increased by events abroad, by the struggle for liberty in Italy and Poland, but more especially by the triumph of democracy in the American Civil War. The majority of trade unionists supported the cause of the North,⁴ especially after it had become identified with the destruction of slavery, as they showed at the great St. James' Hall meeting in March, 1863. The American Civil War was probably the most powerful stimulus of all to English workmen to demand their political rights. Moreover, it helped to broaden their horizons; English trade unionists played a prominent part in the foundation of the First International in 1864.⁵ The reluctance of trade unionists to take part in political agitation was being overcome. The Miners' Association, formed at Leeds in 1863, had a definite political programme and committees to promote it.⁶ Most important of all, trade unionists were prominent in the Reform League, founded in February, 1865, the secretary of which was George Howell, a builder and secretary of the London Trades Council. The purpose of the League, which had branches throughout the country, was to agitate for registered and residential manhood suffrage and the ballot. Trade union participation was very marked in London because of the influence of the London Trades Council and the fact that the New Model unions were based there. In Sheffield, by contrast, it was negligible. Indeed, the Northern Department of the Reform League was supported by independent working class action from unionists and non-unionists, pro-unionists and anti-unionists. The trade union branches tended to remain aloof, confining their attentions to specifically trade union matters, an indication that in the North the old idea that politics were not the concern of the trade unions died hard.⁷ There may also have been an element of suspicion of the London-based New Model unions which were the backbone of the Reform League in the capital.⁸ An important feature of the Reform League was that it was prepared to co-operate with the middle classes and indeed to receive financial support from wealthy manufacturers such as Samuel Morley. They were ready to compromise with John Bright who, with the backing of the Manchester-based, middle class National Reform Union, was conducting a popular agitation for household suffrage. Indeed, throughout the struggle for reform in 1866 and 1867, the Reform League accepted the leadership of Bright who was most successful in bringing about middle class - working class co-operation and in persuading the working classes to accept much less than their original demand for registered and residential manhood suffrage. That he was able to do this was an indication of how conciliatory the labour leaders were prepared to be and how much the attitude and outlook of the movement had changed since the days of Chartism. So when Palmerston died, there already existed the basis in the country for a popular reform agitation. His successors, Russell and Gladstone, recognised that a reform of Parliament was now a political necessity.

Russell, who became Prime Minister, had abandoned the principle of finality as early as 1849 and since that time had endeavoured without success to carry a reform bill. Gladstone's conversion to moderate reform of parliament had come in 1864 when, in a speech on Baines' Bill, he said that "every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of political danger, is morally

1 Harrison, *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

2 Quoted *ibid.*, p. 27.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

4 Confederate sympathies were strong among a number of labour leaders, especially of the older generation, but the rank and file appear to have been solidly pro-Federal. See R. Harrison, "British Labour and the Confederacy", *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 2, 1957, pp. 78 - 105. Also "British Labour and American Slavery", in *Before the Socialists*, 1965, pp. 40 - 77.

5 Frances E. Gillespie, *Labour and Politics in England, 1850 - 67*, Durham (U.S.A.), 1927, p. 227.

6 *Ibid.*

7 M.R. Dunsmore, *The Northern Department of the Reform League*, Sheffield M.A. Thesis, 1962, p. 25.

8 R. Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, 1965, p. 118.

entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution".¹ Although Gladstone supported only a very moderate extension of the franchise, his words were widely interpreted in the country as an argument for democracy. But the Liberal reform bill, introduced in March, 1866, was extremely moderate. Its main feature was a £7 property franchise in the towns, and the entire scheme would have created about 400,000 new voters. The bill was opposed in the House of Commons by Conservatives and a group of Whigs, led by Lord Elcho and Robert Lowe, who were against any kind of parliamentary reform. These "Adullamites", as Bright termed them, possessed in Robert Lowe a most powerful and influential parliamentary orator.² He argued that reform was unnecessary because the political system was satisfactory, and that even a moderate reform would open the door to democracy which was to be dreaded because it would lead to the transference of political power to the ignorant, would destroy real leadership and would inaugurate widespread social reform. Gladstone's lack of tact in handling the Whigs and his refusal to be conciliatory widened the breach, which Derby and Disraeli were quick to exploit, insisting that the absence of a widespread popular agitation was proof that the country was indifferent to the question of parliamentary reform. They soon discovered how wrong they were. The Ministry resigned in June, 1866, when it was defeated by a Conservative - Adullamite coalition on Lord Dunkellin's motion to substitute a rating for a rental franchise, which would have nullified the whole scheme. The popular indignation at the rejection of such a moderate reform bill was expressed in numerous public meetings throughout the country. A riot occurred in Hyde Park when the Conservative Government locked the gates to prevent a Reform League meeting. The sight of the mob running wild in the park frightened respectable London and the riot was a clear warning to the Conservatives that the reform question could not be ignored.

Disraeli realised that the Conservative party could gain great advantage from a satisfactory settlement of the problem. He was concerned to retain power and to keep the Liberals divided. At the same time, he was determined to carry a reform bill, which would bring credit and prestige to his party, as well as specific electoral advantages.³ To achieve his aims, he was prepared to be as devious and politically opportunist as necessary. Both Derby and Disraeli believed that a comprehensive settlement of the question was not inconsistent with Toryism, since they regarded the Conservative party as the true party of reform.⁴ In any case, it was worth a "leap in the dark" to establish the party as a serious political alternative to the Liberals, which they had not been since 1846. Gladstone was faced with the difficult task of holding a Liberal party together, which was divided into moderates, Radicals and Adullamites. The Reform Act of 1867, which emerged from a labyrinth of political manoeuvring, was in part the result of Disraeli's skilful handling of a House of Commons, the conservatism of which would always have prevented him from being pushed too far by the Radicals. But it was also the product of a general realization that only a really comprehensive measure of reform would settle the question and quieten the agitation outside Parliament. What emerged was household suffrage in the boroughs, which, radical as it seemed, did not significantly alter the existing political structure.⁵ The Reform Act enfranchised the skilled urban artisans, the "labour aristocracy" of the New Model unions and the Reform League.

The struggle for parliamentary reform co-incided with the discussion of another subject of vital concern to the working classes, the future of trade unions. It must have seemed at this time that their very existence was threatened. Men like Applegarth had spent years trying to make unionism respectable, and all their efforts were jeopardized by the methods of intimidation employed by certain of the small craft unions in Sheffield. These outrages had occurred many times in the past but national attention was focused on Sheffield in October, 1866, after an explosion of gunpowder in the house of a man who had recently seceded from the local Saw Grinders' Union. So great was the outcry that a Royal Commission was established to investigate trade unions in general and the situation in Sheffield in particular. The public was shocked by the disclosures before the tribunal at Sheffield, when it appeared that twelve out of sixty local unions were implicated in the crimes and that the instigator was William Broadhead, secretary of the Saw Grinders' Union and treasurer of the United Kingdom Alliance of Organized Trades.⁶ Although respectable unionism, represented in Sheffield by William Dronfield of the letterpress printers and George Austin of the spring makers, and the national trade union leadership condemned the outrages, the effect on public opinion was by no means favourable to trade unions. At the same time, in the *Hornby v. Close* case it was ruled that, as trade unions were not friendly societies, their funds were not protected by law and they had no legal redress against dishonest officials. Trade unionists realized that they must exercise some influence upon any legislation affecting the unions. This helps to explain why they were so anxious to secure the franchise in 1867 and why the unions were so interested in the election

1 Quoted in P. Magnus, *Gladstone*, 1954, p. 160.

2 See A. Briggs, "Robert Lowe and the Fear of Democracy", *Victorian People*, 1954, pp. 240 - 271.

3 M. Cowling, *1867, Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, Cambridge, 1967, p. 48.

4 A. Briggs, *Victorian People*, 1954, p. 286.

5 Cowling, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

6 S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, Liverpool, 1959, p. 156.

of 1868. For the working classes the central feature of the election was not the Disestablishment of the Irish Church but the future of trade unionism. The powerful machinery of the Reform League was used to back Liberal candidates,¹ and the support which they obtained from the newly enfranchised artisans contributed to the great Liberal victory of 1868.

Sheffield : Economy and Society

In the decade 1861 - 71 the population of Sheffield increased more rapidly than in any corresponding period between 1851 and 1891. When compared with the previous decade, it is clear that the increase in population was the result of a natural increase rather than the consequence of migration,² the level of which remained constant. The statistics compiled for Russell's reform bill of 1860 showed that a population of 183,095 occupied an area of 22,370 acres.³ By 1871 the population numbered 240,000⁴. Settlement was particularly dense in the east end of the town in Brightside and Attercliffe, near to the large steel works. Between 1851 and 1871 the population of the former increased from 12,000 to over 48,000 and the latter from over 4,000 to over 16,000.⁵ The problems of public health and housing became more acute, but in the 1860's no serious efforts were made to solve them. The Town Council remained solidly opposed to expenditure on sanitary improvements. Workmen's houses were built mainly during periods of depression when costs were low, which meant that there was an acute shortage of housing in boom years when the labour influx was rapid.⁶ Moreover, it has been shown that in 1870 the bulk of workers' houses were owned in blocks of between ten and fifty by such people as tradesmen and publicans who could least afford improvements, and that large firms in Sheffield did not own much property. In 1870 - 71, for example, only two firms owned more than fifty houses; these were Benjamin Huntsman with ninety four and John Brown with fifty three.⁷ House ownership by building societies was negligible and there was no inducement to improve the worst property which was built on land held on short lease from the Town Trustees, the Church Burgesses and the Duke of Norfolk.⁸

The Town Council in the 1860's showed little enthusiasm and aroused little interest. Although by 1869 the majority of municipal electors were artisans, the Council was dominated by the middle classes whose overriding concern was for economy, which is partly understandable because Sheffield possessed no source of revenue apart from the rates. An opportunity to remedy this came in 1864 when the Dale Dyke reservoir burst its banks, causing great loss of life and property. The Water Company presented a bill to Parliament giving it power to raise its rates by 25% to cover the cost of compensation. But the bill aroused such opposition in the town that a special meeting of the Town Council on 27 June, 1864, attended by 31 of the 56 members, resolved to purchase the Water Company.⁹ The Conservative *Sheffield Times* welcomed the decision, having declared some weeks earlier, "we have now a chance of escaping from our municipal smallness and poverty."¹⁰ W.C. Leng¹¹ mounted a campaign against the Water Company and in favour of municipalization in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*.¹² The Conservative element in the opposition to the Water Company was partly political since a number of leading Liberals were important shareholders, including one of the borough members, George Hadfield. Robert Leader in the *Sheffield Independent* was sympathetic towards the Water Company and its bill, although he favoured some limitation of the Company's power to increase water rates.¹³ He was against purchase by the Corporation because it "falls so short of its proper duties, that in its hands bad management and jobbery would be inevitable".¹⁴ Leader's poor opinion of the Town Council may partly have been dictated by dislike of the increasing Conservative influence in the Council,¹⁵ but the incompetence with which it conducted its opposition to the Water Company's bill in

- 1 i.e. official candidates. A compact was made with the Liberal Whips, by which, in return for financial support, the Reform League agreed not to aid any candidate against the Liberals. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 151.
- 2 See table in Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
- 3 *S.L.R.*, 7.1.1860.
- 4 Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 89
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 101
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *S.I.*, 28.6.1864.
- 10 *S.T.*, 23.4.1864.
- 11 William Christopher Leng, 1825 - 1902: b. Hull, son of a seaman; 1859 - 64 worked as a journalist in Dundee; 1864 owner and editor of *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, a Conservative newspaper founded in 1855; 1887 Knighthood.
- 12 See K.G. March, *The Life and Career of Sir William Christopher Leng*, Sheffield M.A. Thesis, 1966, pp. 34 - 36.
- 13 *S.I.*, 2.7.1864. Leader had no financial interest in the question since he never owned shares in the Water Company. *S.I.*, 13.5.1871.
- 14 *S.I.*, 18.6.1864.
- 15 See J.D. Leader, "Fifty Years of Household Suffrage", *Pall Mall Gazette*, 21.1.1884.

Parliament would seem to justify his view. Not only did it fail to buy the Company but it failed to secure any limitation of its wide powers to raise its rates. The water question had political consequences because a group of councillors accused Roebuck of supporting the interests of the Water Company against the town and made a bid to oust him in the election of 1865.

Leader listed "an uninterrupted career of stupidities as cannot be taken to prove anything less than that the Town Council has sunk utterly below the level that should entitle a public body to confidence and respect".¹ These included an abortive scheme for a new Town Hall, apathy about the condition of the present Town Hall, the loss of a government allowance towards the police force, the inept handling of a cabmen's strike, the water question and an opposition to placing Sheffield on the main North-South railway line. Allowing for Leader's Liberal bias, the record of the Town Council was not impressive, especially in view of its refusal to carry out sanitary improvements. However, a step of great importance for the future was taken in July, 1864, when the Town Council adopted the Local Government Act which abolished the township highway boards.² A small public meeting met on 4 July, 1864, to protest against the adoption of the Act.³ It was argued that the burgesses had not been asked and Stephen Lister objected to "the abolition of the highway boards, and the centralising of all local authority into the hands of the Town Council". There was a fear, expressed by J.W. Burns, that the working classes would lose to a middle class body what small powers in local government they possessed, but there were workmen, such as George Crapper, who supported the adoption of the Act.⁴ Leader fully supported the Act, and he thought that "the hostility comes from owners of small property in a bad condition, from people who love to spend the rates, almost irresponsibly, as members of township highway boards, from township officers and collectors who fear the disturbance of their comfortable berths by any change".⁵ The assumption by the Town Council of authority for all sanitary matters was important for the future, even though it made little use of its powers in this period.

There are signs that the living conditions of the working classes in Sheffield were improving in the 1860's. Real earnings continued to rise and the greater spending power of the working classes was seen in the consumption of good quality food, in the purchase of furniture and furnishings and in an increase in savings.⁶ Co-operation began to develop in this period, the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society being founded in 1868. These gains were being made by the skilled artisans, the "labour aristocracy". It was men of this class who were prominent in the congregations of the Wesleyan Reform Union, which built seventeen chapels between 1851 and 1881 in working class areas,⁷ and of the Primitive Methodists, the chapels of which were situated mainly in working class districts. The Rev. Robert Stainton⁸ had a flourishing congregation of intelligent and politically alert working men at Garden Street Congregational Chapel. A leading Liberal and teetotaller, he was very concerned with the social problems of the time. In July, 1867, for example, he addressed 15,000 working men on the trade outrages,⁹ and in August, 1867, he called upon the saw grinders to expel the culprits, Broadhead and Crookes.¹⁰ The influence of such ministers as Stainton, John Calvert,¹¹ Henry Tarrant¹² and David Loxton¹³ was very wide, the more so because they concerned themselves with social and political questions of vital importance to the working classes. Their influence, therefore, extended far beyond their individual congregations.

In the light trades expansion continued in the 1860's, interrupted by a brief slump in 1862 caused by the decline of exports to the United States as a result of the Civil War, but this was soon made up by the opening up of Continental markets and the absorption of surplus labour in the heavy industry.¹⁴ So prosperous were the light trades in this period that there was an acute shortage of labour in the years 1864 - 66.¹⁵ Such material prosperity favoured the growth of trade unionism and the political activities of workmen. But the slow

1 S.I., 7.7.1864.

2 S.L.R., 6.7.1864

3 S.I., 5.7.1864.

4 *Ibid.*

5 S.I., 6.7.1864.

6 Pollard, *op. cit.*, pp. 108 - 109.

7 E.R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, 1957, pp. 130 - 131.

8 Robert Stainton, 1825 - 90: b. Hawick, Scotland; came to Sheffield in 1865 from George Street, Huddersfield.

9 S.I., 9.7.1867.

10 S.I., 21.8.1867.

11 John Calvert, 1832 - 1922: b. Dalton, Dumfriesshire; trained at Rotherham College; 1857 - 95 minister of Zion Chapel Attercliffe; 1863 new chapel built at cost of £3,000.

12 Henry Tarrant, minister of Wicker Congregational Chapel, which he left in 1868 to take up a pastorate in Leeds.

13 David Loxton, 1818 - 76: b. London; trained at Highbury College where he was a contemporary of the Rev. Newman Hall; pastorates at Gainsborough and Liverpool before coming to Mount Zion Chapel, Sheffield, in 1850; local secretary of London Missionary Society and West Riding Congregational Union.

14 Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

progress towards mechanisation began in the 1860's and machinery was introduced in the file trade by Thos. Turton's in 1865. The great file strike of 1866, ostensibly caused by a dispute over wages, was in fact fought on the question of the introduction of machinery.¹ The strike, which lasted sixteen weeks, failed and the file unions were forced to agree to machinery. The local craft unions made some progress towards collective action in this period. In 1858, the Sheffield Association of Organized Trades was founded. In March, 1861, the secretary, William Dronfield² reported that 26 trades and 4,000 members were affiliated.³ Its purpose was to settle trade disputes. As a result of the file strike, a conference of trade unions was held in Sheffield in July, 1866, to form an organization to sustain unions against lock-outs.⁴ The United Kingdom Alliance of Organized Trades was established with its headquarters in Sheffield and with Sheffield unionists acting as officials. It is interesting that the large amalgamated unions held aloof.⁵ The Alliance broke up in 1867 due to lack of funds and the discovery that its treasurer, William Broadhead, was the instigator of the outrages. However, the majority of local leaders were not involved and continued to play an active part in the trade union movement.

Heavy industry expanded rapidly in the 1860's. The technical innovations of Bessemer and Siemens made possible the production of high quality steel in large quantities. The firms engaged in steel production — Brown's, Firth's, Cammell's and Vickers — had an enormous capital basis and employed large numbers of workmen. The 1860's were years of boom and high profits, and even the financial crisis of 1866 checked expansion only slightly. By 1867, ¾ of the plates for new British ironclads were made at John Brown's Atlas Works.⁶ With the exception of the engineers, most workers in the steel industry were not organized in trade unions.⁷ Sheffield was a prosperous industrial town but it lacked that sense of civic pride which distinguished Leeds and Bradford in this period. The Rev. J.P. Gledstone, writing in 1867, said that Sheffield had no public buildings "of any size or worth".⁸ Certainly there was nothing to compare with Leeds Town Hall or the Bradford Exchange. Such outward symbols of civic pride were absent because Sheffield did not possess a real civic consciousness. It has been said that it was more like a village than a town, "for long not one single city but a number of relatively distinct working class communities".⁹ Gledstone believed that "of opinion we have a full share, but of public opinion we have none, or next to none, We are an aggregate of men; we are not a community; we are thousands of Englishmen, but we are not united in our social life".¹⁰ Imposing civic buildings were expensive and Sheffields drew a distinction between non-productive and therefore unjustifiable expenditure, which included "extravagant public buildings", and productive expenditure.¹¹ Sheffield ratepayers wanted a tangible return for their money. They would agree to the widening of streets, because that would improve commerce, but they had no interest in monuments of civic pride and in March, 1851, the burgesses had vetoed a scheme to couple the new Free Library with a costly municipal hall.¹² But the Sheffield temperament alone cannot be blamed for the absence of a true civic consciousness. The town lacked a true civic leadership. There was no one in Sheffield of the stature of Sir Titus Salt to provide social and political leadership. The principal industrialists in Sheffield were either Tories or had strong Tory leanings and, though very generous in their benefactions, their personalities unfitted them for this kind of role. The Liberal leadership in Sheffield was not drawn from those classes which had the wealth, time or breadth of vision to provide the kind of civic leadership which Birmingham enjoyed in the 1870's. The Sheffield Town Council, increasingly dominated by Conservatives, with an overriding emphasis on economy and characterized by mismanagement and petty squabbles, could give no lead. It is hard to disagree with Gledstone's conclusion that "one of our greatest wants is a larger diffusion of zeal for the good of the whole community".¹³

1 *Ibid.*, p. 140.

2 William Dronfield, 1826 - 94: 1849 secretary of Typographical Association in Sheffield; 1866 secretary of United Kingdom Alliance of Organized Trades; 1867 secretary of Sheffield Trade Union Defence Committee, See W.H.G. Armytage, "William Dronfield and the Good Name of the Sheffield Workman in the 1860's", *Notes and Queries*, Vol. 193, 1948, pp. 145 - 148.

3 *S.L.*, 9.3.1861.

4 *S.L.*, 21.7.1866.

5 Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

6 Mary Walton, *Sheffield: Its Story and Its Achievements*, Sheffield, 1952, p. 193.

7 Pollard, *op. cit.*, pp. 170 - 171.

8 J.P. Gledstone, *Public Opinion and Public Spirit in Sheffield. A Letter to the Manufacturers, Merchants and Principal Tradesmen of the Town of Sheffield*, Sheffield, 1867, p. 9. J.P. Gledstone was minister of Queen Street Chapel from 1862 to 1872.

9 A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, 1963, p. 34.

10 Gledstone, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

11 See *S.L.*, 16.8.1856.

12 *S.L.R.*, 1.3.1851

13 Gledstone, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

CHAPTER VI

THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY ABROAD

English Liberals had always had great sympathy for oppressed nationalities struggling to be free and aiming to secure liberal institutions, and between 1859 and 1865 their enthusiasm was roused to fever pitch by events in Italy, Poland and America. Not only does it help to explain why this was a period of domestic political calm, but the focus of popular attention on political rights provides the background to the struggle for parliamentary reform in England in 1866 and 1867. These events also broadened the horizons of politically-conscious Englishmen of every class.

Italy and Poland

When war broke out between Austria and Piedmont, supported by France, in 1859, there was some debate among Liberals in Sheffield as to what the policy of England should be. A public meeting was held on 2 June, which resolved to petition the Queen in favour of non-intervention in the war.¹ This policy was supported by speeches from two of the local Liberal leaders, Robert Leader and William Fisher, by the Vicar of Sheffield, Dr. Sale,² and by the Rev. J. Flather³ who believed that "Italy would some day be free; but it would be made free, not by the intervention of France or Austria, but by working out the principle of liberty for herself". Isaac Ironside, chairman of the Sheffield Foreign Affairs Committee, opposed neutrality. He argued that France had contravened the Treaty of Vienna, that it was all part of a Russian plot and that Napoleon III was wholly under Russian influence.⁴ But few people now took Ironside seriously and his influence in local politics was by this time probably negligible. Although Sheffield Liberals had every sympathy with Italian nationalism, they were anxious that England should remain neutral. Leader thought "it [the Italian question] is rather to be solved by a policy of non-intervention than by any active measure".⁵ There was much suspicion of the devious policy of Napoleon III and disapproval of the French annexation of Nice and Savoy in April, 1860.⁶ Indeed so strained were the relations between England and France at this time that a French invasion was thought possible. Leader declared that "while the present ruler of France is on the throne, the world can never be at ease".⁷ Garibaldi's Sicilian expedition in June, 1860, aroused great enthusiasm in Sheffield. In vain Ironside applied to the magistrates to stop a public meeting to sympathise with Garibaldi and to apprehend William Sharman who was collecting subscriptions to aid the Sicilians.⁸ The meeting to render "moral and pecuniary support to the workers in the cause of Italian unity" was held on 11 June, 1860.⁹ The only interruption was from a certain Nuttall, a letter press printer and supporter of Ironside, who "walked out of the room with an air of melo-dramatic dignity". William Sharman made an earnest appeal for help and a Mr. Thomas proposed that funds should be raised by means of an artisan bazaar, an indication of working class support for Garibaldi. None of the middle class Liberal leaders attended the meeting, which was remarked upon by William Harvey who said "he was only sorry that more of the gentlemen who took a prominent part in political matters were not present to show that they were the real friends of liberty". Samuel Jackson, nail maker of Attercliffe and veteran Radical, declared that he "was prepared not only to subscribe for Garibaldi, but, if necessary, to go as volunteer to Italy". Jackson had little time for Ironside who "used to be a socialist and chartist; then he turned tory; and now he had become a confederate of the King of Naples". A committee was formed, which included middle class Liberals such as Leader, Fisher and the Rev. J. Page Hopps, minister of Uppertorpe Unitarian Chapel, and former Democrats such as the grocer Abraham Booth and William Harvey.¹⁰ Thus enthusiasm for the Italian cause was present among Liberals of differing shades of political opinion in Sheffield.

Roebuck,¹¹ however, did not share the enthusiasm of the majority of his constituents. He referred to Italy's struggle for liberty as likely to result at best in a change of masters.¹² In 1860 he visited Austria and

1 S.T., 4.6.1859.

2 Canon Sale, 1803 - 73: Vicar of Sheffield 1851 - 73.

3 John Flather, 1817 - 91: b. Nottingham, son of a lace manufacturer; Methodist New Connexion minister; active in undenominational Town Mission.

4 S.T., 4.6.1859.

5 S.I., 7.1.1860.

6 S.I., 21.4.1860.

7 S.I., 10.3.1860.

8 S.L.R., 11.6.1860.

9 S.I., 16.6.1860.

10 S.I., 16.6.1860. The full list was R. Elliott, A. Booth, R. Leader, Wm. Fisher, J. Page Hopps, Wm. Harvey, Chapman S. Jackson, Wm. Sharman, J. Wilson, W.L. Humphrey.

11 With George Hadfield he was returned unopposed in 1859. S.L.R., 29.4.1859.

12 R.E. Leader, *Life and Letters of J.A. Roebuck*, 1897, p. 279.

became convinced that some progress towards constitutional government was being made, and this prompted him to advocate an Anglo-Austrian alliance and Austria's retention of her Italian possessions.¹ This shocked his constituents who were also puzzled by his vote to keep Lord Derby in power in 1859. It was demanded that he explain his recent conduct. On 2 April, 1861, he addressed a meeting at the Surrey Street Music Hall.² He explained that his reason for supporting Lord Derby in 1859 was that he was convinced that a Liberal administration would not pass a reform bill; he refuted the allegation that he had backed Derby for a subsidy to the Galway Company, of which he had been a director. He disposed of the equally unfounded assertion that he had been in the pay of Austria. It was Roebuck's belief that England's interests lay in upholding Austria as a barrier to France and "what is for the benefit of England is for the benefit of mankind". Typically, he ended his speech by telling his constituents that "I shall do as I like". This did not satisfy the meeting which made it quite clear that it disagreed with his views on the Italian question. William Fisher thought it better for Venetia to be Italian rather than Austrian, and Dr. Holland³ believed that "Italian unity to be worth anything, must embrace the entirety of Italy". William Sharman read a letter from Thomas Dunn which showed that Dunn differed from Roebuck on the Italian question.⁴ Robert Leader was convinced that a strong united Italy, including Venetia and Rome, would be a far more effective check to France.⁵ There can be no doubt that Roebuck's popularity in Sheffield suffered as a result of his opinions on Italy, which provided a powerful argument for those who would accuse him of being a Tory in disguise.

Enthusiasm for the cause of Italian liberty was matched by the sympathy expressed for the Poles when they revolted against Russia in 1863. A meeting was held in March, 1863, and the speakers included Edward Bramley⁶ and R.J. Gainsford.⁷ William Fisher urged that England should act with France and put pressure on Russia to restore Polish liberties. Underlying this sympathy for Italy and Poland was the firm belief that they had a real "mission" to spread liberal institutions and to encourage liberalism abroad. They were convinced, in the words of the Rev. J. Page Hopps, that "God had set England to be a refuge and a light to the nations".⁸ Robert Leader, supported by the former Democrats Broadbent and Wostenholm, spoke in support of a petition to stop all trade with Russia "until she shall have restored to Poland the constitution guaranteed by the Treaty of Vienna". A committee to assist the Polish cause was established, including Leader, Page Hopps and J.W. Burns.⁹ Roebuck attended a meeting of this committee on 9 April, 1863, and poured cold water on its schemes to aid the Poles by advising it to leave matters to the Government.¹⁰ This probably reduced the effectiveness of the committee's work, for as its secretary, Henry Wostenholm, explained to a large public meeting, consisting chiefly of working men, in June, 1863, their appeals did not raise much money because it was felt that to send Poles back to their own country was to send them to their certain death, a point which Roebuck had made to the committee in April. At this meeting Charles Bagshaw of the razor smiths and chairman of the Sheffield Association of Organized Trades, urged that England should, if necessary, fight for Poland in co-operation with France.¹¹ It is interesting that at a time when trade unionists in Sheffield tended to remain aloof from politics that an influential and respected man such as Bagshaw should feel so strongly about Poland as to come forward and play a prominent part in such a meeting. But by this time the interest of all was fixed on the great struggle across the Atlantic.

America

English attitudes to the American Civil War were complex and varied according to the way in which the struggle between the North and South was interpreted. In Sheffield there was a long anti-slavery tradition and those people who thought of the war as a crusade by the North to abolish slavery were firm supporters of the Federal cause. On the other hand, there were those who saw the war primarily in political terms, as an attempt by the North to subjugate the South which had as much right to be free and independent as

1 *Ibid.*, pp. 290 - 291.

2 *S.I.*, 6.4.1861.

3 G.C. Holland, 1801 - 65: b. Sheffield, son of an artisan; self-educated and at Universities of Edinburgh and Paris; practised in Manchester and Sheffield; 1843 compiled *The Vital Statistics of Sheffield*; 1858 supported Improvement Bill; 1862 Alderman.)

4 *S.I.*, 6.4.1861.

5 *Ibid.*

6 Edward Bramley, 1806 - 65: solicitor; 1843 - 58 Town Clerk; a secretary of Political Union; brought up in Church of England but became a Unitarian in 1837.)

7 *S.I.*, 3.3.1863.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 *S.I.*, 10.4.1863.

11 *S.I.*, 16.6.1863.

Italy or Poland. They regarded the South as an oppressed nationality and played down the slavery question by insisting that the North had not embarked on the war to emancipate the slaves. The strong pro-Confederate sympathy in Sheffield owed much to the influence of John Arthur Roebuck who, in 1862 and 1863, put pressure on the Government to recognize Southern independence. It rested on admiration for their "pluck" in the face of apparently overwhelming odds, but it also rested on the conviction that it was in English interests for the Union to be divided.¹ Long before the Civil War the power and resources of the United States were a source of apprehension to many Englishmen, and they disliked her brash and bullying style of diplomacy. Nor did the North make many friends in the opening years of the war. Federal war aims were confused and battles were lost to smaller but better disciplined Confederate forces, which lent weight to the argument that the reconquest of the South was impossible.² Moreover, the North seemed never to miss a chance of insulting and provoking England. The removal of two Confederate envoys from a British ship, *The Trent*, on the high seas in November, 1861, caused great indignation and a popular demand that such an outrage to the flag should not go unpunished. Although the North backed down and the matter was settled without recourse to war, it encouraged anti-Northern feeling in England. The Conservative *Sheffield Times* remarked in January, 1862, "we regret that there should be a likelihood of America having to suffer so much, but it will at any rate tend to moderate that recklessness of temper which has characterised a part of her people".³ So underlying English sympathy for the Confederacy was the belief that the American threat to England would be reduced if the South became an independent nation.

In the *Sheffield Independent* Leader adopted an anti-Northern standpoint throughout the war. At the start of the war he wrote: "nothing can be better for the American States, and for the world at large, than that there should be a speedy and peaceable separation".⁴ He emphasized that the abolition of slavery was not a Federal war aim and that the war was being fought simply to preserve the Union. "We are against slavery. But the North would bolster up slavery if only the slave states would remain in the Union".⁵ He could see no reason why the South should not secede and he did not believe "in any of the allegations of the necessity of waging war to keep the South in union with the North".⁶ Samuel Harrison in the *Sheffield Times* not only denied that slavery was the issue in the American Civil War,⁷ but declared "it becomes more and more apparent that the war is to be one of subjugation and conquest".⁸ In May, 1862, Leader wrote that "they cannot be united without damage to both, and the thing most to be desired is an end of the strife and a quiet and permanent separation".⁹ However, at a time when the possibility of English mediation in the conflict was being widely discussed, the press of Sheffield, Liberal and Conservative, was united in insisting that England should not interfere and should maintain a completely neutral position.¹⁰ Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of January, 1863, which freed the slaves in the rebellious states, did not cause the Sheffield press to alter its view of the war. Leader remarked "if it had been an anti-slavery war, it would have been popular in England from the beginning, notwithstanding the sufferings it has brought upon our country. And if it now involve the overthrow of slavery, future generations will have reason to rejoice in the result".¹¹ The *Sheffield Times* considered that the North was waging "a war for mere empire",¹² and the Conservative *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, edited by Joseph Pearce, was equally emphatic that "the war in America is a war waged for dominion, and dominion alone".¹³ But the press was divided about Roebuck's suggestion at a public meeting in May, 1863, that the English Government should recognize Southern independence. Although he believed that separation was the best solution, Leader opposed intervention because opinion in England was divided.¹⁴ Samuel Harrison thought that "the time has not yet come for the recognition of the South".¹⁵ The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, on the other hand, was now in favour of recognizing "the

1 *E.g. S.T.*, 3.10.1863.

2 *E.g. S.I.*, 21.3.1863.

3 *S.T.*, 18.1.1862.

4 *S.I.*, 23.3.1861.

5 *S.I.*, 8.6.1861.

6 *S.I.*, 20.7.1861.

7 *S.T.*, 8.6.1861.

8 *S.T.*, 20.7.1861.

9 *S.I.*, 10.5.1862. The *Sheffield Independent* had become a daily newspaper on 1 October, 1861. *S.L.R.*, 1.10.1861.

10 *E.g. S.I.*, 4.4.1863, *S.T.*, 16.8.1862, *S.D.T.*, 16.8.1862.

11 *S.I.*, 31.1.1863.

12 *S.T.*, 4.4.1863.

13 *S.D.T.*, 28.5.1863.

14 *S.I.*, 27.5.1863.

15 *S.T.*, 30.5.1863.

States as a distinct nationality".¹ But the strong pro-Confederate sympathies of this newspaper were ended when its management changed in January, 1864, and the new owner-editor, W.C. Leng, consistently supported the North, regarding the war as a struggle against slavery.² Leader never saw it in this light. In August, 1863, he wrote "if the South be fighting for slavery, the North is fighting on false pretences for equally iniquitous objects",³ and in December, 1863, he went so far as to compare the Northern treatment of the South with Russia's treatment of Poland: "it does seem, however, to be in the power of the North to make a Poland of the South, and it would be a grievous thing to see reproduced in that vast country the horrors of Eastern Europe".⁴ Many English Liberals regarded the Confederacy as a nation struggling for freedom.

Even when the tide of war turned against the South, Leader did not alter his opinion. In May, 1864, he wrote "if any people ever justified by numbers, by unanimity, by sacrifices, by successes, by persistency, their right to set up a government for themselves, and to take leave of the system to which they once belonged, these Confederates have most unequivocally done so".⁵ In January, 1865, he stated one of the main reasons for English dislike of the United States: "the United States became the presumptuous and audacious bully of the world . . . if they must fight, they are far more properly employed in fighting one another, than in aggression upon others. The war had better go on till they have had enough of it and sigh for peace".⁶ Leader had not changed his opinion when the end of the war came in April, 1865: "The spirit of the South is as high and as resolute as ever. Its sense of wrong has been embittered by such ravages as marked the course of Goths and Vandals, rather than by the usages of civilised warfare. Yet the war approaches its end, and we hail with satisfaction almost the first mark of right feeling we have seen in the North, a desire to meet the vanquished in a merciful and conciliatory spirit".⁷ Although opposed to any kind of English intervention, the decidedly pro-Confederate and anti-Northern standpoint which the *Sheffield Independent* adopted throughout the war is important in explaining the prevalence of pro-Confederate sympathy in Sheffield.⁸

The main supporters of the North in Sheffield were the members of the Sheffield Emancipation Society who insisted that the war was being fought for the abolition of slavery. The first indication of the existence of a body of support for the North was in December, 1862, when George Thompson,⁹ the former Radical M.P. for Tower Hamlets, addressed a small audience in the Temperance Hall on "The American Question", at which the former Chartist leader, Richard Otley, carried an address to President Lincoln.¹⁰ A few weeks later the same speaker addressed what Leader described as "a most respectable audience" in Hanover Street Chapel.¹¹ The chair was occupied by the minister, the Rev. J. Guttridge,¹² who was probably the most influential supporter of the North in Sheffield. The meeting condemned the Southern states and slavery and passed a resolution in support of Lincoln and the North.¹³ A well attended public meeting, convened by the Sheffield Emancipation Society and chaired by the Master Cutler, Henry Harrison, was held in March, 1863.¹⁴ The cause of the North was defended by two visiting speakers, the Rev. Messrs. W.E. Haley, and Baptist Noel, and the meeting ended with the unanimous adoption of a resolution in support of Lincoln's policy. The main argument of the abolitionists was that slavery was the sole cause of the war and that the Northern cause was right because it sought to destroy slavery.¹⁵ However, an argument which must have weighed heavily with the working classes was stated by the veteran Radical, Samuel Jackson, at a meeting to consider the American question in May, 1863.¹⁶ He argued that antipathy to the North arose out of a wish to destroy the American

1 *S.D.T.*, 16.6.1863.

2 See W.C. Leng, *The American War: The Aims, Antecedents and Principles of the Belligerents. A lecture delivered on December 10, 1862, in Castle Street Church, Dundee, Sheffield, 1877.*

3 *S.I.*, 1.8.1863.

4 *S.I.*, 12.12.1863.

5 *S.I.*, 21.5.1864. It is interesting that the Bradford equivalent of the *Sheffield Independent*, the *Bradford Observer*, owned and edited by William Byles, was also strongly pro-Southern. E.g. in July, 1864, it asked "how long will the Northern faith in a phantom Union last? How long must blood be spilt to prevent two nations, already separated by adamant barriers, from following their separate destinies?" *Bradford Observer*, 7.7.1864, quoted in D.G. Wright, "Bradford and the American Civil War", *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 8, 1969, p. 76.

6 *S.I.*, 2.1.1865.

7 *S.I.*, 22.4.1865.

8 According to its own estimate, the circulation of the *Sheffield Independent* exceeded 45,000 per week by July, 1864. *S.I.*, 1.7.1864.

9 George Thompson, 1804 - 78: prominent in the anti-slavery movement from the 1830's; member of Anti-Corn Law League; 1847 - 52 M.P. for the Tower Hamlets.

10 *S.I.*, 1.1.1863.

11 *S.I.*, 24.1.1863.

12 John Guttridge, 1820 - 86: b. Birmingham, son of a shoemaker; 1862 minister of Hanover Street Methodist Free Church; 1863 President of Conference; distinguished preacher.

13 *S.I.*, 24.1.1863.

14 *S.I.*, 19.3.1863.

15 See the Rev. J. Guttridge's speech at the public meeting of 26 May, 1863. *S.I.*, 27.5.1863.

16 *S.I.*, 27.5.1863.

republic: "they [the supporters of the South] wanted to keep the working men in slavery not only in America but in this country". He regarded the war as a struggle for the vindication and preservation of democratic principles. There is little doubt that the working classes in the country as a whole saw the war in this light.¹ The South stood not only for negro slavery but also for aristocratic government; the North represented freedom and popular rule. Moreover, English workmen were linked with the working classes in the North by family ties and by the growing notion of international labour co-operation.

Against this must be set the support in Sheffield for the recognition of the Confederacy as an independent nation. It is quite clear that both Palmerston and Gladstone were seriously considering the possibility of a joint mediation by England, France and Russia in September, 1862.² Separation was to be the basis of negotiation which would fall through if both rejected the solution, but if the South alone accepted, Southern independence would be recognized.³ English intervention was strongly urged by Roebuck. Indeed, so strong was his support for the South and for the recognition of the Confederacy that he visited Paris in 1862 to press the Southern cause with Napoleon III, whom he had previously criticized unmercifully.⁴ In view of his forceful personality, it is not surprising that Roebuck succeeded in inducing a body of his constituents to accept his views.⁵ In May, 1863, he addressed a meeting in Paradise Square which may have been attended by as many as 8,000 people.⁶ He argued that the secessionist states were in the same position as the American colonies when they decided to separate from England, and they had successfully asserted their independence by force of arms, which should now be recognized by the English Government. Roebuck believed that the breach could not be healed and in any case it was in England's interests for America to be divided. His dislike for the North was intense: "the North will never be our friends. Of the South you can make friends. They are Englishmen. They are not the scum and refuse of Europe".⁷ He repeated the Confederate assertion that negroes were treated better in the South than in the North.⁸ His call for the recognition of the Confederacy was supported by the Rev. J. Page Hopps⁹ who argued that the subjugation of the South was impossible and that slavery would disappear sooner in an independent South, an argument frequently used by American abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison. Michael Beal, watch-maker and former Chartist, insisted that the North had embarked on the war not to destroy slavery but to extend its dominion. William Harvey, auctioneer and former Democrat, added another reason why England should support the Confederacy. The South were free traders and therefore, "we should support those who supported us". The supporters of the North — the Rev. J. Guttridge, W.J. Clegg¹⁰ and Samuel Jackson — failed to carry an amendment in favour of non-intervention and the motion for the recognition of Southern independence was carried by a large majority.¹¹ In October, 1863, Ald. Saunders¹² presided over another meeting to support the recognition of the Confederacy, attended by about 100 people.¹³ Saunders sought to show that the real cause of the war was not slavery but an "antagonism of interests", an agricultural versus a manufacturing economy. To say that the North was waging war against slavery was a sham: "it was not the question of slavery over which the Americans were fighting, but the question of whether the agricultural South was to be everlastingly taxed to enrich the manufacturing North". He believed that the South had a right to secede and "the English Government should declare the South to be a free and independent kingdom". C.E. Broadbent, a solicitor and former Democrat, and William Harvey moved a memorial to this effect addressed to Palmerston. The Rev. J. Page Hopps supported recognition because

1 R. Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, 1965, p. 65.

2 Palmerston to Gladstone, 24.9.1862, in P. Guedalla ed., *Gladstone and Palmerston. Correspondence 1851 - 65*, 1928, pp. 232 - 233.

3 *Ibid.*

4 R.E. Leader, *Life and Letters of J.A. Roebuck*, 1897, p. 296.

5 Cf. Bradford where the local M.P., W.E. Forster, was a supporter of the North. The town was "predominantly pro-North". Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

6 *S.I.*, 27.5.1863.

7 Quoted in Leader, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

8 *S.I.*, 27.5.1863.

9 In Bradford, the town's Unitarian minister had moved one of the resolutions at the pro-Northern St. George's Hall demonstration in January, 1863. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

10 William Johnson Clegg, 1826 - 95: b. Sheffield, son of a small cutlery manufacturer; solicitor; Anglican; 1880 Alderman; 1887 - 88 Mayor.

11 *S.I.*, 27.5.1863.

12 George Lemon Saunders, 1817 - 70: son of a Bath gentleman; came to Sheffield as a player, opened a music shop and taught music; Democrat; 1851 elected to Town Council for Brightside; 1859 Alderman; chairman of Poor Law Guardians; 1855 secretary to local committee for Social Science Congress. Of his career, the *Sheffield Independent* wrote: "he succeeded in his resolve to become a prominent public man, not always waiting to have honours thrust upon him, nor limiting his ambition to distinctions within his reach". *S.I.*, 1.8.1870.

13 *S.I.*, 2.10.1863.

"the Confederates are fighting in self-defence, simply asking to be let alone". Henry Wostenholm, a pocket knife manufacturer, claimed that $\frac{5}{6}$ of the country would support the recognition of the Confederacy. The memorial was adopted with only 5 or 6 dissentients.¹ But by this time the North was gaining the initiative in the war and the time for any intervention by the English Government had passed.

Yet the two meetings of May and October, 1863, shed considerable light on the nature and extent of pro-Confederate feeling in Sheffield. The meeting of 26 May was attended by a crowd which may have numbered as many as 8,000 people, of which a large majority supported the recognition of Southern independence.² Leader reported that it "comprised a larger proportion of middle class men than is usual at such gatherings",³ but it is important to notice that none of the middle class Liberal leaders spoke in support of recognition. Samuel Harrison remarked that "although his [Roebuck's] eloquence moved thousands of working men to vote in favour of intervention, he was entirely unsupported by the most influential class in the town".⁴ Leader was opposed to intervention because English opinion was so divided. Thomas Dunn disagreed with Roebuck on the American question,⁵ but kept quiet to avoid splitting the Liberal party. The middle class Liberals were opposed to intervention, as was George Hadfield. "My colleague and I differ as to the independence of the Southern States", he wrote in 1863. "I support Government non-interference".⁶ This is not to say that the middle class Liberals were ardent supporters of the North. Leader's views were pro-Confederate throughout and Dunn later admitted that he did not believe that the North began the war to destroy slavery.⁷ They considered that English interests would best be served by an adherence to the principle of strict neutrality. What is very striking is that a large number of the most vocal supporters of Confederate recognition in Sheffield were former Chartists. These included the Democrats Saunders, Broadbent, Harvey and Wostenholm and the moral force Chartist Michael Beal. But it would be wrong to interpret their Confederate sympathies in political terms. They supported the South, just as they supported Poland, as a nation struggling for freedom. There were working class Radicals who supported the North because to them the North represented freedom and the South slavery. Richard Otley, former Chartist and Democrat, was a supporter of Lincoln and the North,⁸ and Samuel Jackson insisted that the interests of the working man in England and America were bound up in the conflict.⁹ However, there is no doubt that there was support in Sheffield for Roebuck's views, but the size of the support is hard to ascertain. Commenting on the meeting of October, 1863, Samuel Harrison observed: "There are those who think that English sympathy is with the South. It is unquestionably to a large extent, and yet . . . whenever a meeting is held under the auspices of the Emancipation Society the tide of public sentiment seems on the other side".¹⁰ No doubt there were those who changed their minds about recognition of the South when it became clear that the North could win the war. But the writings of Robert Leader are evidence that pro-Confederate sympathies continued long after there was any prospect of English recognition of the Confederacy. Pro-Southern feeling was encouraged by Lincoln's refusal to make the abolition of slavery an aim in the early years of the war, which lent strength to the view that the North was fighting for dominion over the South. Finally, there was the belief, most powerfully expressed by Roebuck, that a divided America was in England's interests. Yet it would be incorrect to exaggerate the extent of pro-Confederate sympathy in Sheffield. If the *Sheffield Times* was right and "thousands of working men" did indeed vote for intervention in May, 1863,¹¹ their support for the recognition of the Confederacy could not have lasted long, for by comparison the October meeting was sparsely attended.¹² There is little doubt that the majority of working men in Sheffield realized the importance of the Northern cause as a vindication of the principle of popular government.¹³

1 *Ibid.*

2 *S.I.*, 27.5.1863.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *S.T.*, 30.5.1863.

5 *S.I.*, 19.9.1863.

6 G. Hadfield, *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, MS., S.C.L., p. 226.

7 *S.I.*, 19.5.1865. at a meeting to support the American National Freedmen's Aid Society, also attended by Leader.

8 *S.I.*, 1.1.1863.

9 *S.I.*, 27.5.1863.

10 *S.T.*, 3.10.1863

11 *S.T.*, 30.5.1863.

12 Leader gives the number as 100. *S.I.*, 2.10.1863. Harrison as c. 150. *S.T.*, 3.10.1863.

13 Cf. Wemyss Reid's opinion that "in Lancashire and Yorkshire the bulk of the working classes were strongly pro-Northern in their sympathies". T. Wemyss Reid, *Life of the Rt. Hon. W.E. Forster*, Vol. 1, 1888, p. 337.

Temperance men were prominent among the middle class supporters of the North, The Rev. J. Guttridge and W.J. Clegg were leading members of the Sheffield Temperance Association. Leader remarked that "political teetotallers and Federal sympathisers are almost identical".¹ These men were the target of some of Roebuck's sharpest invective and they formed the core of the opposition to him in 1865. Their Federal sympathies reflected the strength of the temperance movement in the North, where the State of Maine had introduced prohibition. But they were also humanitarians who regarded the war as a crusade by the North to abolish the evil of slavery, just as they regarded temperance as a crusade to destroy an equally great social evil, Drink.

It is impossible to interpret English alignments in the American Civil War in terms of social class or economic interest. Sheffield did not suffer much distress as a result of the war. The recession in the light trades in 1862 was more than compensated for by the boom in heavy industry owing to armaments' orders.² The middle classes in Sheffield were divided between supporters and opponents of the Confederacy and workmen could be found to support the recognition of the South in May, 1863.³ The political parties in Sheffield were also divided. There were Liberals who supported the South, and there were Tories, such as W.C. Leng and Henry Harrison, who backed the North. It is more meaningful to say that men supported North or South according to the way they interpreted the war, and that, in some cases opinions altered as circumstances changed. The real significance of the war for Englishmen was that it awakened their political consciousness. Democracy was fighting for its life, and working men, especially, realized that the North had to win if they were to secure their political rights in England, because the defeat or failure of the North would have seriously damaged the principle of popular government. The success of the North helped to make possible further political change in England.

1 S.T., 10.6.1865.

2 The war also created a boom in Bradford industry. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

3 S.T., 30.5.1863.

CHAPTER VII

THE LIBERAL PARTY IN SHEFFIELD

1859 - 1864

In domestic politics these were years of calm. Events abroad which captured popular attention and economic prosperity enabled Palmerston to avoid grappling with difficult questions such as parliamentary reform. To judge by the comments in the press, he was popular in Sheffield.¹ "The strong point of Lord Palmerston's government has been its consistently Liberal foreign policy", Leader wrote in July, 1864.² He also supported Palmerston's measures to fortify the coast against foreign attack. "No doubt public economy is both wise and popular, but the country has shown that it does not consider the mere abstinence from spending money to be economy; and that it is aware that to refuse the outlay necessary for the supreme object of national security, would be penny-wise and pound foolish".³ Palmerston received an enthusiastic reception when he came to Sheffield in 1862 and was the only Liberal leader to visit the town in the period.

Although the Liberal party in Sheffield was controlled by the middle class leadership, the difference between middle and working class political aims still existed. In March, 1861, a meeting of working men was held to discuss parliamentary reform.⁴ The requisition contained 1,000 signatures and there was a good attendance. The course of the discussion shows clearly that their leaders were divided between those who saw the need for co-operation with the middle classes and those who believed, in the Chartist-Democrat tradition, that the working men must act alone to secure their political rights. Councillor Gill⁵ and Henry Titterton, table knife manufacturer, called upon the middle classes to help the workmen to secure a large measure of enfranchisement. Henry Richardson, on the other hand, thought that the working classes must and should act alone to claim their rights. Stephen Lister put the motion in favour of manhood suffrage, which was seconded by Samuel Jackson. Walter Ibbotson was in favour of a moderate extension of the franchise as a first step, but Ald. Saunders, the former Democrat, opposed this and urged the working classes to get up their own agitation to secure manhood suffrage. Motions for manhood suffrage, secret ballot and shorter parliaments were carried, and it was proposed to form a local reform association, though this did not materialize. The meeting is important because it illustrates the difficulties which stood in the way of middle class - working class co-operation on the reform question. The problem still remained, disagreement over the extent of reform which was necessary. Although in 1861 and for several more years parliamentary reform lay dormant as a political issue, when the question was revived, the difference between middle and working class political aspirations would once more be clear.

A more immediate challenge to the local Liberal leaders came in 1863 when an attempt was made to bring forward John Brown,⁶ the local industrialist, as a candidate at the next election. It was stated on the requisition that Brown's candidature was based "on commercial grounds only" and not on any connection with either political party. The Liberals, however, did not believe this and saw it as a Tory move to win one of the seats by using a local man who was widely respected for his personal integrity and generosity. Leader examined the requisition in detail and discovered that of the 58 people who had signed it, 38 had plumped for the Conservative candidate, Overend, and 7 had split with Overend in the election of 1857.⁷ What is more, most of them were local manufacturers who could exert a considerable amount of influence on Brown's behalf. Brown's politics were not widely known and there was a real danger that a Conservative might be returned on the pretext of a non-party candidature. Leader wrote that "Sheffield Liberalism has hitherto resisted effectually all the arts by which it has been assailed, whether of open assault or secret mining, and if it can now be subdued or toned down into the returning of a neutral, great will be the joy of the Carlton Club".⁸ The two local Conservative newspapers supported Brown, and both stressed that he was an independent and not a Tory candidate.⁹ Samuel

1 In 1858 there had been opposition to the Conspiracy to Murder Bill, upon which the Government was defeated, because it was felt that Palmerston was giving way to French pressure for a strengthening of the law of conspiracy. A public meeting resolved to petition against it. *S.L.R.*, 22.2.1858.

2 *S.I.*, 2.7.1864.

3 *S.I.*, 11.7.1863.

4 *S.I.*, 9.3.1861.

5 William Gill: licensed victualler; former Chartist leader; 1860 - 63 served in Town Council.

6 John Brown, 1816 - 96: son of a slater; 1861 - 62 Mayor; 1865 - 66 Master Cutler; 1867 Knighthood; Deputy Lieutenant of West Riding; 1870 - 79 Chairman of School Board.

7 *S.I.*, 18.8.1863.

8 *S.I.*, 22.8.1863.

9 *S.T.*, 26.9.1863. *S.D.T.*, 18.9.1863.

Harrison declared "Sheffield has too long been overridden and dictated to by party".¹ John Brown accepted the requisition on 12 September, 1863. Leader admitted that Brown was a successful manufacturer, but "there is no necessary connexion between making buffers and armour plates and filling a seat in Parliament".² In view of Brown's candidature, a meeting of the friends of Roebuck and Hadfield was held on 18 September, 1863.³ Thomas Dunn, the chairman, said that Brown was a Conservative and hoped "it will be found that the electors of Sheffield will again say, as they have ever said since the incorporation of the borough, that they belong to the great liberal party, are still for the onward movement - for liberating their fellow-countrymen". H.E. Hoole, Robert Leader, William Smith,⁴ Edward Bramley and Ald. Saunders spoke in support of Roebuck and Hadfield. J.W. Burns, however, asked the committee whether it endorsed Roebuck's "strange views upon the American question?" Dunn was forced to admit that he disagreed with Roebuck, but Michael Beal was quick to remind Burns that a large meeting had already endorsed Roebuck's opinions. Samuel Jackson declared that he would oppose Roebuck at the next election, for "if he ever had any Liberal opinions either they had left him or he had left them". But Jackson was alone in his opposition to Roebuck and must have left the meeting because it was reported that the proposition in support of the sitting members was carried unanimously.⁵ This is a clear indication that Roebuck's pro-Confederate sympathies certainly did not alienate him from the Liberal leadership in Sheffield.

The Liberals could always be relied upon to close their ranks when faced with a Tory challenge, but it soon became clear that the unity of the leadership, apparently so strong at the meeting of 18 September, was seriously threatened by personal animosities. In November, 1863, Thomas Dunn announced that he would not continue as joint chairman, with H.E. Hoole, of the Roebuck - Hadfield committee. Hoole, a close friend and adviser of George Hadfield, had never been popular and in 1858 had been the subject of "an unpleasant correspondence" between Dunn and Hadfield.⁶ Leader explained that it had been difficult to work with Hoole "on many grounds",⁷ but in the exhibition of the previous year, as an adjudicator of stove-grates, he had awarded medals to goods produced by his own firm which "caused severe imputations on H.E. Hoole".⁸ When aldermen were elected "he threatened an action but did not bring one" and resentment was caused by his selection as a magistrate without being nominated by the Town Council. To make matters worse "he admitted all that had been alleged against him as a juror" and "he declared that what he had done, he would do again". To Leader such conduct was "flagrantly dishonourable", and he believed that "men of character and influence would not attend any election committee of which Mr. H.E. Hoole should be one of the chairmen". Thomas Dunn, on the other hand, occupied "such a high position in public esteem" that he could not be set aside and a split would mean certain defeat, for "to be divided was to be defeated". The only solution was for Hoole to resign. But Hadfield had no intention of abandoning Hoole and he told Leader "I have read your letter with pain and regret the severity of your remarks".⁹ It was Dunn and not Hoole who resigned and the incident shows how divisive and politically important personal antipathies could be.

Interest in the reform question was briefly revived in 1864 when a private member, Edward Baines, introduced a moderate reform bill. In Sheffield Ald. Saunders presided over a meeting where "there was a somewhat numerous attendance, but a great lack of enthusiasm".¹⁰ Once again opinion was divided as to whether the working classes should compromise and accept a moderate extension of the franchise or whether they should insist on nothing less than manhood suffrage. The first course was recommended by John Wilson,¹¹ a working man who opposed trade unions,¹² George Gallimore and D. Robinson who advised that "the best way was to go on by degrees, the working classes acting unitedly with the middle classes; otherwise they would get nothing". But Ralph Skelton¹³ and Samuel Jackson insisted that the working classes should demand their rights and accept nothing less than manhood suffrage. Thomas Dunn estimated that Baines Bill would enfranchise

1 S.T., 26.9.1863.

2 S.T., 18.8.1863.

3 S.T., 19.9.1863.

4 William Smith, 1822 - 1901: solicitor; Anglican; 1884 Alderman.

5 S.T., 19.9.1863.

6 G. Hadfield, *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, MS., S.C.L., p. 195.

7 R. Leader to G. Hadfield, 21.11.1863. Leader MSS., S.C.L. L.C. 187.

8 A similar accusation had been made against him that, as Juror in stove grates in the Great Exhibition of 1851, he gave "medals to his own goods exhibited in other persons' names". "Anti-Humbug", *The Election of Aldermen*, Sheffield, 1857.

9 G. Hadfield to R. Leader, 24.11.1863, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

10 S.T., 19.4.1864.

11 John Wilson, 1822 - 90: grinder; attended People's College; 1874 elected to Town Council for Brightside; 1876 - 88 member of School Board; 1885 J.P.

12 See *The Sheffield Trades and Labour Council, 1858 - 1958*, Sheffield, 1958, p. 24.

13 Ralph Skelton, 1816 - 77: shovel maker; member of highway board and Attercliffe Burial Board; 1862 - 77 councillor for Attercliffe; a Wesleyan until 1868 when he joined the Methodist New Connexion; one of a group of politically active teetotalers in Attercliffe, which included Henry Titterton, Stephen Lister and William Fulford.

about 10,000 working men in Sheffield and he believed that to demand manhood suffrage at this stage would only damage the cause.¹ The manhood suffragists must have accepted this advice or left because the meeting decided unanimously to support Baines' Bill.² This indicated the extent to which the working classes were prepared to follow the middle class leadership. Baines' Bill came to nothing, but not before Gladstone had made one of the most important speeches in his career. The significance of his conversion to the principle of parliamentary reform, however moderate, was clearly seen. Leader wrote, "Mr. Gladstone has offered himself for the leadership of the party of progressive Liberalism . . . The man is ready. The hour will strike".³ Leader stressed the need for "spontaneous and simultaneous local action pervading the country and indicating that the people themselves have taken the matter in hand, and mean to persevere in it".⁴ Thomas Orton, a draper of Chapel Walk. wrote a letter to the *Sheffield Independent* in February, 1865, urging Sheffield to take action on the reform question as "monster reform meetings have again been held in Manchester and Leeds, and still Sheffield remains quiescent, ignoring the reform question altogether".⁵ It is unlikely that Liberals in Sheffield ignored the reform question. More probably they awaited a positive lead from inside Parliament.

There are some interesting insights into the workings of patronage in Leader's correspondence with Sir John Ramsden,⁶ M.P. for the West Riding. In November, 1860, Leader had consulted him as to "the best mode of placing before Lord Fitzwilliam the evils arising from there being only one Deputy Lieutenant resident in the whole Sheffield district and of making known to him the general wish for the appointment of two others". Ramsden was reluctant to become the means of approach, since it would immediately assume a political character, but he promised to act, especially as "you named Mr. Dunn as the gentleman whose appointment was especially desired".⁷ A memorial was duly sent to Lord Fitzwilliam through Ramsden, who intimated the wish for Dunn's appointment, which was important as "a counterpoise to Mr. Overend", the Conservative Deputy Lieutenant.⁸ Every effort was made to secure Dunn's appointment and the help was sought of John Parker, former M.P. for Sheffield and now one of the leading Liberals in the county. "I quite agree with you", Ramsden wrote, "in thinking that Mr. Parker's advice would carry great weight with Lord Fitzwilliam".⁹ But it was all to no avail because Dunn was not made a Deputy Lieutenant. In July, 1862, Ramsden was writing to Leader again on the question of patronage.¹⁰ He had sent in a recommendation, on Leader's advice, that a Treasury post be given to a certain Ashley, but since had received a letter from Dr. Gatty,¹¹ the vicar of Ecclesfield and an eminent local historian, stating that Ashley was unfit for the post and recommending a Mr. Ellis. The tone of the letter made it quite clear that Leader and not the Conservative Dr. Gatty, would have the last word. When Ramsden was involved in litigation with one of his tenants at Huddersfield in 1864-65, Leader printed a statement by Ramsden about the case in the *Sheffield Independent* and arranged for it to appear in the Barnsley newspaper.¹² Another instance of the working of patronage is provided by a letter from Roebuck asking William Fisher to name two persons to fill post office vacancies in Sheffield.¹³ Of far more importance was the attempt to make Sheffield an assize town. Lawyers, such as R.J. Gainsford, recognized the advantages to Sheffield and the prestige which would come from holding its own assizes. George Hadfield pressed Sheffield's case, a local pressure group was formed and there was close co-operation with Leeds to attain the common object.¹⁴ In fact, it was Leeds which became an assize town and it promised to support any future claim of Sheffield to this status.¹⁵

1 In 1857 Dunn had told Leader that he was prepared to support household suffrage in the boroughs and a £10 franchise in the counties and seat redistribution. T. Dunn to R. Leader, 14.5.1857, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 186.

2 S.I., 19.4.1864.

3 S.I., 14.5.1864.

4 S.I., 2.1.1865.

5 S.I., 4.2.1865.

6 John William Ramsden, 5th. Bt., 1831 - 1910: married a daughter and co-heiress of 12th Duke of Somerset; very large landowner (150,000 acres); 1853 - 57 M.P. for Taunton; 1857 - 59 Hythe; 1857 - 58 Under Secretary of State for War; 1859 - 65 M.P. for West Riding, 1868 - 74 Monmouth, 1880 - 85 East Division of West Riding, 1885 - 86 Osgoldcross Division.

7 Sir. J. Ramsden to R. Leader, 10.11.1860, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

8 Sir. J. Ramsden to R. Leader, 27.11.1860, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

9 Sir. J. Ramsden to R. Leader, 30.11.1860. Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

10 Sir. J. Ramsden to R. Leader, 17.7.1862, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

11 Alfred Gatty, 1813 - 1903: became Vicar of Ecclesfield in 1839; Conservative and High Churchman; local historian and writer.

12 Sir J. Ramsden to R. Leader, 28.5.1864, 31.5.1864, 10.4.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

13 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 7.6.1867, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

14 G. Hadfield to R. Leader, 26.9.1863, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

15 *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, p. 233.

The influence of Nonconformity upon the Liberal party in Sheffield was very strong. In March, 1864, Thomas Jessop¹ chaired a meeting of the friends of the Liberation Society.² The principal speaker was Carvell Williams of the Liberation Society who insisted that the Established Church would benefit from being free from state control. Robert Leader, a Congregationalist, moved a resolution in favour of complete religious equality in view of Disraeli's recent opposition to measures for this purpose; and he referred to the disabilities which Dissenters still faced with regard to church rates, declarations, endowed charities and graveyards. Therefore "it behoved the Liberals to take up the challenge and make it their business to return to Parliament men who would be true and staunch on the vital questions of civil and religious liberty". A motion for a local committee was also carried. It must be remembered that it was Roebuck's reaction to Gladstone's resolutions about the Irish Church which finally alienated a group of powerful middle class Liberals in 1868 and helped to bring about his defeat.

The Liberal party in Sheffield was controlled by a group of middle class Liberals and was very much a Liberalism of personal influence. Organization was confined to the Roebuck - Hadfield election committee and to the Reform Registration Association for the Southern Division of the West Riding. Formed in October, 1861, its main purpose was to attend to the electoral register for the new Division.³ Although there was little in the way of party organization, Liberals realized the importance of attention to the electoral register. Of course, at this time when the electorate was small,⁴ elaborate party machinery was not necessary; it was after 1867, when the electorate was greatly increased, that the Liberal party had slowly to adapt to the era of mass politics.

1 Thomas Jessop, 1804 - 87: steel manufacturer; 1862 Town Trustee; 1863 Master Cutler; 1864 - 65 Mayor; 1865 - 74 Alderman; Unitarian and member of Upper Chapel; founded Jessop Hospital.

2 *S.L.*, 3.3.1864.

3 *S.L.R.*, 21.10.1861. The President was J.W. Childers. Thomas Dunn was a Vice-President.

4 The electorate of Sheffield increased from 7,381 in January, 1860, (*S.L.R.*, 7.1.1860.) to over 9,000 in December, 1865, (*S.L.R.*, 21.12.1865.)

CHAPTER VIII

Sabbatarians and Teetotalers

Sabbatarianism and Teetotalism were not new issues, but it was in this period that they came to have a real political significance. It seems something of a paradox that men who believed in liberty should support measures such as *Somes' Sunday Closing Bill* and the *Permissive Bill* of Sir Wilfrid Lawson, the effect of which would have been to curtail personal liberty. Their justification was that the evil of drink was so great that the remedy had to be extreme and that individuals had to be protected against themselves. Not all Liberals accepted the need for such legislative coercion, but the temperance cause was important to a section of Liberals in Sheffield who sought to make it a real political issue in the election of 1865.

Sabbatarianism and temperance were bound up in the *Sunday Closing Bill* of 1863 which provoked a lively debate among the Liberals in Sheffield. A crowded meeting was held on 21 April, 1863, to discuss the question.¹ The bill was supported by the Vicar of Sheffield, the Rev. Canon Sale, not on teetotal grounds, nor primarily on sabbatarian grounds, but because he believed it to be in the best interests of the working classes. John Unwin,² a prominent teetotaler, argued that publicans had a right to a day of rest and that workmen would benefit from the closure of public houses on Sunday, a view which was shared by a working man, John W. Hooper. The two most outspoken opponents of the bill were Ald. Saunders and Michael Beal. Saunders insisted that the bill would not eliminate drunkenness — "the reform must be brought about by education". But a proposition in favour of the bill was carried by a large majority, a sign that the temperance men had succeeded in packing the meeting with their own supporters. The bill was supported by the *Sheffield Times*,³ but Leader did not like the measure. He thought it better to tackle the evil directly rather than "by suppressing indiscriminately the good and the bad, and interfering with freedom of action in a way that the country can never be expected to tolerate".⁴ Feeling against the bill ran high and a giant meeting was held in Paradise Square on 4 May, 1863, to petition against it.⁵ It is interesting that its most vocal opponents were former Chartists. Saunders once again insisted that education was the only remedy to the problem of drunkenness. Beal thought "there had already been too much of this meddling with the liberties of the working classes by certain little societies of philanthropists in this country". And Henry Wostenholm went even further: "if they were let alone for another 10 years those mischievous gentlemen (the teetotalers) would make in Sheffield a Russian association for the suppression of personal liberty". The supporters of the bill — W.J. Clegg, the Rev. Father Burke and W. Fawcett⁶ — were unable to make any impression on the meeting which carried a resolution against *Somes' Bill* by an immense majority.⁷ The meeting showed the extent of the opposition in Sheffield to such measures of legislative coercion and the resentment against teetotalers. The temperance men were angered not only by the rejection of the bill in the House of Commons, but also by Roebuck's comments on it. They interpreted his speech as a violent denunciation of temperance legislation as cant and hypocrisy. Roebuck later explained to Leader that what he had actually said was that "any one who voted for closing the public house of the poor man, and would not vote for closing the club of the rich, was a canting hypocrite".⁸ It was well known that Roebuck disliked such legislation and his remarks were bitterly resented by the teetotalers.

An important event in the history of the temperance cause was the foundation of the *Sheffield Temperance Association* in July, 1863.⁹ It was composed of those who had seceded from the *Temperance Association*. Its president, J.H. Barber,¹⁰ believed that "the cause of temperance languished in Sheffield, as in many other places", but it would be strengthened if temperance were linked with religion. The Association was supported by John Unwin, Dr. Beaumont and the Rev. Messrs. J.P. Campbell, J. Guttridge, J.D. Tetley and J. Battersby¹¹ who said "this was the first time a Christian temperance association had been formed in

1 *S.I.*, 22.4.1863.

2 John Unwin, 1811 - 95: member of Carver Street Wesleyan Methodist Chapel; treasurer and secretary of the Hallelujah Band.

3 *S.T.*, 25.4.1863.

4 *S.I.*, 25.4.1863.

5 *S.I.*, 5.5.1863.

6 William Fawcett, 1807 - 64: married daughter of James Dixon of Page Hall and entered family firm; Wesleyan Methodist; 1851 Alderman; 1855 Mayor.

7 *S.I.*, 5.5.1863.

8 J.A. Roebuck to R. Leader, 19.6.1865, *Leader MSS.*, S.C.L., L.C. 187

9 *S.I.*, 22.7.1863.

10 James Henry Barber, 1820 - 1902: b. London; 1843 came to Sheffield and commenced a career of almost fifty years with the *Sheffield Banking Co.*, George Street; member of the *Society of Friends*; J.P. See H.M. Doncaster, *James Henry Barber: a Family Memorial*, 2 vols., Sheffield, 1905.

11 J.D. Campbell was minister of Portmahon Baptist Chapel, J.D. Tetley was a Wesleyan Methodist and J. Battersby was vicar of St. Simon's.

Sheffield".¹ The cause of temperance in Sheffield was now linked directly with the Christian denominations. But progress was slow for lack of funds. At the annual meeting in April, 1867, the secretary, W.J. Clegg, "referred to the gratifying success which had attended the efforts of Mrs. Ward and Mr. Taylor, the two agents of the society, who were promulgating its principles by house to house visitations in some of the poorer districts", as a result of which 730 people had signed the pledge.² When assessing the success of the temperance cause among the working classes, account must be taken of the influence of ministers such as the Rev. Robert Stainton of Garden Street and the Rev. J.C. Calvert at Zion, Attercliffe.

Teetotalers in Sheffield gave strong support to Sir Wilfrid Lawson's Permissive Bill, which enabled 2/3 of a community to veto the sale of drink. In January, 1864, a meeting of the Temperance Society was held to support the measure.³ Dr Beaumont denounced intemperance as the root of all evil in society, and Dr F.R. Lees referred to "that great instrument of social redemption, the power to prohibit the liquor traffic". Other speakers included W.J. Clegg and J.H. Raper, the parliamentary agent of the United Kingdom Alliance. In May, 1864, 300 - 400 people attended a meeting to support the Permissive Bill.⁴ The resolution, moved by Ralph Skelton, was supported by S.L. Carleton of Maine, a State which operated prohibition. Carleton referred to Roebuck's speech a few days earlier, in which he had compared sabbatarians and teetotalers to two "muddy streams" which together were becoming a torrent.⁵ The speech was typical of Roebuck, outspoken and tactless, and it was bitterly resented by the teetotalers who were already smarting under the insult of being described as "canting hypocrites". It strengthened their determination to oppose Roebuck at the next election.

It is important not to exaggerate the influence of the teetotalers. None of the most influential leaders of the Liberal party in Sheffield was in favour of the Permissive Bill. Leader thought "advocacy instantly ceases when coercion begins" and "it is a great error on the part of the friends of temperance to attempt to promote their views by coercion".⁶ "The way to mar the success which we all desire for the cause of temperance is to mix it up with schemes of electoral intrigue and of legislative coercion," he wrote in 1865.⁷ The *Sheffield Times*, which had supported Some's Sunday Closing Bill, advised the supporters of the Permissive Bill "to turn their attention to less extreme measures if they wish to do anything, by means of legislation, towards lessening the evils of the drink traffic".⁸ Nor was W.C. Leng in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* in favour of the bill.⁹ The teetotalers, however, were not deterred in spite of Roebuck's personal triumph in the election of 1865. In February, 1866, Wilfrid Lawson addressed a large meeting, chaired by Councillor Searle.¹⁰ The case for legislative intervention was plainly stated by the Rev. J. Adams, a Wesleyan Methodist: "if the strong arm of the law could be legitimately applied to the destruction of cattle to prevent contagion, it could be justly, legitimately and properly applied to the destruction of the drinking system". It was because they believed so ardently in the cause and because they had increasing backing from the churches in the 1860's that the teetotalers came to be an important pressure group and temperance became a real political issue in the period.

The Election of 1865

The state of the Liberal party in Sheffield shortly before the election of 1865 is revealed in a letter which Leader wrote to Dunn, describing a long conversation he had had with Hadfield.¹¹ Hadfield made it clear that he had no intention of abandoning H.E. Hoole and, if necessary, he was prepared to fight alone. He was convinced that his own position was strong and that it was Roebuck's seat which was in danger. "The impression had been made upon Mr. Hadfield that Mr. Roebuck had seriously lost ground and I admitted he had made bitter opponents". Hadfield thought that John Brown would not stand and there might be no contest "unless the angry teetotalers should be bent upon assaulting Mr. Roebuck".¹² The opposition to Roebuck made it impossible for Leader and Dunn to insist on Hoole's resignation. Dunn told William Fisher

1 S.I., 22.7.1863.

2 S.I., 1.5.1867.

3 S.I., 23.1.1864.

4 S.I., 10.5.1864.

5 The muddy streams "had at last united their waters, and now they formed one foaming, muddy river, which it was difficult to stem, and very disagreeable to see and to smell". Quoted in R.E. Leader, *Life and Letters of J.A. Roebuck*, 1897, p. 295.

6 S.I., 8.1.1862.

7 S.I., 4.2.1865.

8 S.T., 12.3.1864.

9 S.D.T., 15.7.1865.

10 S.I., 27.2.1866.

11 R. Leader to T. Dunn, 21.4.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

12 *Ibid.*

"you are aware that I have no wish to resign the joint chairmanship of the Boro' Election Committee — the question is, can I retain it, consistently with my own character?".¹ Dunn found it impossible to work with Hoole, and on 15 May, 1865, he formally announced his retirement from the joint chairmanship, though he made it clear that he would continue to work for the re-election of Roebuck and Hadfield.² His place was taken by Ald. Fisher, a close friend of Roebuck. Roebuck was not insensitive to the growing opposition, and he reported that Hadfield "feels himself hampered by the opinions of certain of his friends, who are angry with me on account of my sayings and doings",³ which included the Permissive Bill, a speech about the aboriginal tribes of New Zealand⁴ and his support for the Confederacy in the American Civil War. Although Hadfield differed from Roebuck on all these questions, he considered their alliance made in 1863 to be still binding and wished it to continue, but both must be bound by the "decision of the people of Sheffield".⁵ Roebuck was not prepared for an expensive contest and was ready to withdraw if the people of Sheffield were dissatisfied with him. He believed that Hadfield "wishes for alliance, but he is frightened by the talk of his friends, and his statements are guarded in order that he may hereafter take the course which his interest may require".⁶ Roebuck was determined to face his constituents because "my cause I know is a good one, and I rather fancy I know how to deal with my fellow countrymen in public meeting assembled".⁷ Hadfield's manner had obviously annoyed him. "I was amused by the patronizing manner of Mr Hadfield towards me, and still more by his stating that he was sorry that the offence given and taken was upon great moral grounds. Just as if I had committed murder of theft, or was an habitual drunkard. However I suspect that he will find that he must play second fiddle".⁸ This and Dunn's refusal to work with Hoole is evidence of considerable friction within the election committee. The Conservatives were ready to exploit such weaknesses. The *Sheffield Times* noted in Sheffield "a gradual conversion to more sober and less violent political opinions . . . Chartism has died out, Radicals have become Liberals and many former Liberals have advanced a good distance towards moderate Conservatism".⁹ Although Brown declined to contest the seat because of ill health on 3 June, 1865,¹⁰ the threat to the Liberals was no less real. In Leader's words, "the disappointed animosity which has assailed Mr. Roebuck more especially, is still active".¹¹

A crowd of between 14,000 and 15,000 people listened to Roebuck and Hadfield in Paradise Square on 9 June, 1865.¹² Roebuck denied that he had sought to forward the interests of the Water Company at the expense of the town. His opposition to the Permissive Bill was based on his belief that it was an unequal bill which would have sown social dissension, and that temperance was not a matter for legislation. It was his opinion that white colonization inevitably led to the disappearance of the coloured man. As for America, he was "quite sure that if the South had been recognised great good would have been done". The attack upon Roebuck was launched by Michael Beal. He "wished to know upon what grounds Mr Roebuck voted for Lord Derby's Government after denouncing it on the hustings" in 1859? Roebuck's reply that there was more chance of a reform bill from Derby's Government than the Liberals prompted Beal to assert that "Mr Roebuck's explanation proves to me that he belongs to the Conservative ranks, and is not a supporter of Lord Palmerston". Beal mentioned the Galway contract, and referred to a speech Roebuck had made at Salisbury, in which he described the working classes, especially of his own constituency, as "drunkards, wife beaters and dog fanciers".¹³ Roebuck's answer was that he meant only a part of the working classes and that he had said it to illustrate the elevating influence of education. But the real issue which had alienated Beal was the question of the Water Company and he accused Roebuck of ignoring the wishes of the Town Council, especially in the case of the 25% price increase, and of siding with the Water Company throughout. D.A. Aitchison, a veterinary surgeon, questioned Roebuck about America, but Roebuck insisted that the interests of England would have been served if the American Republic had been divided. The Rev. J. Gutteridge criticized Roebuck's visit to Paris in 1862, the aim of which was to establish "a dynasty, a slave-ocracy in connection with the South". It is clear that the so-called "extermination speech" in the New

1 T. Dunn to Wm. Fisher, 24.4.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187

2 S.I., 16.5.1865.

3 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 12.5.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

4 See R.E. Leader, *Life and Letters of J.A. Roebuck*, 1897, p.300

5 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 12.5.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187

6 *Ibid.*

7 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 15.5.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

8 *Ibid*

9 S.T., 20.5.1865.

10 S.L.R., 3.6.1865.

11 S.I., 9.6.1865.

12 S.I., 10.6.1865.

13 The speech was given on 16 January, 1862. See Leader, *op. cit.*, pp. 294 - 295.

Zealand debate aroused much opposition. Guttridge objected to it and Isaac Ironside asked Roebuck if he believed that "robbery, murder and lying is a decree of Providence?".¹ Clearly Roebuck's meaning had been misinterpreted and words had been put into his mouth which he had never used. W.C. Leng, for instance, asked Roebuck whether he had said that "he found fault with the policy of the Government for not having actually and deliberately hastened and facilitated extermination?". This was an obvious distortion of Roebuck's opinion that it was impossible to prevent extermination of the coloured man, though it is clear that this view was not shared by all his constituents. Beal's resolution against Roebuck was opposed by Thomas Dunn, Ald. Fisher and William Harvey, and their amendment was carried by a large majority.² According to Leader's estimate, about 1/10 of the meeting voted for the original resolution, which meant that as many as 1,500 people voted against Roebuck. This sizeable opposition was composed of "the leading members of the Maine law and Permissive bill organisations in the town, the Federalist party and the opponents of the Water Company".³ As has been shown, most teetotallers were supporters of the North, and were antagonized by Roebuck's advocacy of the Confederate cause and his vehement opposition to the Permissive Bill. The position of Michael Beal was incongruous. He now found himself on the same side as those "little societies of philanthropists", the teetotallers, whom he criticized so bitterly two years earlier in the debate on Somes' Sunday Closing Bill. Moreover, one of the leading advocates of Confederate recognition in Sheffield, Beal was now politically allied with Federal sympathizers, such as the Rev. J. Guttridge and W.J. Clegg. The only coherence about the opposition was that it was directed against Roebuck. But Roebuck still had a great deal of popular support, as the vote at the meeting of 9 June clearly showed. His independence and forthright manner won him wide respect: "I leave my fate in your hands. I am not afraid of the result. I believe that I have done my duty honestly. I know I have done it fearlessly. I don't fear you. I don't fear anybody. What I think right I say. What I think right I do; and that is the only promise I make you".⁴

The disgruntled Liberals chose as their candidate J.W. Probyn, a Liberal of the Manchester School, who addressed a meeting of some 220 people on 14 June, 1865.⁵ Leader's report of the meeting makes possible an analysis of Roebuck's principal opponents. It was chaired by Isaac Ironside, who disliked Roebuck's conduct over the Water Company Bill and disagreed with his views about the inevitable disappearance of the coloured man in the face of white colonization. But it is unlikely that Ironside, whose political conduct was by now so unpredictable, added any strength to the opposition to Roebuck. Then there were the supporters of the Permissive Bill whom Roebuck had antagonized by his tactless and sarcastic speeches. This group included W.J. Clegg, D.T. Ingham,⁶ Hoyland⁷ and J. Unwin.⁸ Thirdly there were the opponents of the Water Bill, such as Beal, W.L. Humfrey, George A. Wood⁹ and Aitchison. Finally there were the Radicals, the supporters of manhood suffrage. A number of them were also teetotallers, including Councillors Searle¹⁰ and Skelton, Henry Titterton and Stephen Lister. These men drew their support from the working classes and it should be noted that Skelton, Titterton, Lister and Samuel Jackson had opposed the abolition of the highway boards in 1864 because they disliked the concentration of all local government authority in the hands of the Town Council which was dominated by the middle classes.¹¹ There were trade unionists, such as William Dronfield of the letter press printers, who disagreed with Roebuck's views about the American Civil War, and Nuttall of the same union who had supported Ironside's attempts to prosecute the supporters of Garibaldi in 1860. Some opposed Roebuck because of his attitude to the Permissive Bill, others because of his pro-Confederate sympathies and some because they believed that Roebuck was nothing but a Conservative. In Attercliffe Skelton, Titterton, Lister and Jackson formed a solid core of opposition to Roebuck. But the weakness of the opposition arose from the fact that it was based on an incongruous alliance; it was, as Leader pointed out, "the most discordant set that ever were drawn together by a common antipathy, aided by a common hope".¹² The opposition lacked real unity and, as was to appear, it lacked solid popular support.

1 Cf. Ironside's sympathy for those engaged in the Indian Mutiny, which made him unpopular in Sheffield. J. Salt, *Isaac Ironside and Education in the Sheffield Region in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Sheffield M.A. Thesis, 1960, p. 178.

2 *S.I.*, 10.6.1865.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Quoted in Leader, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

5 *S.I.*, 15.6.1865.

6 Dan Taylor Ingham, 1820 - 97: bookseller, stationer and printer; son of a Baptist minister and himself a lay pastor.

7 Samuel Hoyland, 1831 - 1902: horn merchant; member of Nether Congregational Chapel.

8 *S.I.*, 15.6.1865.

9 George A. Wood, 1809 - 84: pawnbroker; 1847 - 84 served in Town Council; 1871 - 84 Alderman; Baptist.

10 Richard Searle, 1823 - 95: currier and last maker; 1864 - 92 served in Town Council; 1874 - 91 Alderman.

11 *S.I.*, 5.7.1864.

12 *S.I.*, 20.6.1865.

Probyn's politics were moderate. He undertook to support a measure of reform such as Baines' Bill, the ballot and seat redistribution, but he would not support universal suffrage,¹ which could hardly have been very satisfactory to the Radicals. He stressed that he had been a supporter of the North in the American Civil War and a non-interventionist. He believed in a scrupulous regard for the rights of native races and was prepared to support local government control of licensing, which was not so radical as the Permissive Bill but which was nevertheless a bid for the support of the teetotallers. It was emphasized that Probyn's candidature was directed against Roebuck and not Hadfield.² Leader considered that Probyn "is sent to Sheffield to take advantage of two or three sectional offences given by an eminent man, and to adopt the weak line of talking amiably of the scheme of the teetotallers".³ No sooner had Probyn appeared than Leader was working to secure his withdrawal. He did this by showing that Probyn's candidature would be a threat to Hadfield rather than Roebuck. "In the event of Mr Probyn becoming at all strong," he told Hadfield, "it would give rise to new distributions of votes and you may easily see how Overend's 1,600 plumpers might be so disposed as to put you third on the poll".⁴ Moreover, Brown's candidature might revive and then the Tories would probably split their votes with one of the other candidates, but, as in 1852, very few would split with Hadfield and his seat would be jeopardized.⁵ Hadfield realized that the Tories in Sheffield disliked him more than they disliked Roebuck and that they had been anxious to remove him ever since his election in 1852. On 16 June, Hoole reported to Leader that Probyn's friends "say Mr Edward Smith, Mr Barber favour the movement, that they have letters from Mr John Bright, Mr Bazley, Mr Gilpin and many others approving."⁶ Leader's remarks had obviously made an impression on Hadfield because on the following day he informed Leader that both Bazley and Gilpin had given him satisfactory explanations about the Probyn candidature and Bazley had denied that he had written to anyone at Sheffield.⁷ The Manchester School, strongly pro-Federal in the American Civil War, would no doubt have been glad to see Roebuck defeated, but it is clear that pressure was put on Probyn to withdraw when it looked as though he would endanger Hadfield's seat rather than Roebuck's. As Edward Baines of Leeds wrote: "Mr Probyn is (I believe) an excellent man and he ought to be in parliament, but he ought not to disturb Mr Hadfield".⁸ So this threat to Roebuck had been removed by the influence of his ally, George Hadfield, with a little gentle prodding from Leader. Roebuck's position was even stronger than his opponents realized.

All the men of influence in the Liberal party in Sheffield stood by Roebuck. Some of them, such as Thomas Dunn, did not approve of all he had said and done, but they did not consider that there were sufficient grounds for rejecting a man who in the past had been a staunch Radical and a distinguished representative. The Hadfield alliance was of the greatest importance because it ensured that Hadfield's money would back Roebuck and that Hadfield's friends, such as H.E. Hoole, would support him. Roebuck also had the support of all those who disliked the teetotallers. His opposition to temperance legislation ensured the backing of the brewery interest. In June, 1865, Leader wrote to Bland, chairman of the Licensed Victuallers, about election expenses.⁹ Hadfield would pay his own share and "it devolves upon the Liberal electors to do the same for Mr Roebuck". The sum to be raised was between £700 and £800 and Leader asked for subscriptions from Brewers and Licensed Victuallers, adding that he hoped the largest brewers would not contribute less than £100 each. So Roebuck was not short of financial resources, but equally important was the support which he received precisely because he was opposed by the teetotallers. The weight of feeling in Sheffield against them was considerable and Roebuck was merely expressing a very popular opinion when he criticized their demands for legislative coercion. In fact, the temperance movement, although it was composed of very dedicated and zealous men, lacked a basis of solid popular support and therefore politicians who opposed its attempts at legislation were likely to gain greater political advantage than those who supported them. Roebuck's opinions on the American question did not weigh against him because there was strong support for Confederate recognition in Sheffield. Indeed, Roebuck even had the support of prominent pro-Northerners, such as Richard Otley¹⁰ and J.W. Burns.¹¹ The case against him over the Water Bill had never been strong, and it was even weaker after a letter from an active opponent of the bill, William Unwin, was read at a meeting on 6 July. Unwin wrote: "I feel bound, in simple justice to Mr Roebuck, to state that the charges against him are altogether untrue, and his conduct was such as not to afford the least ground of complaint. It is

1 S.I., 15.6.1865.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 R. Leader to G. Hadfield, 15.6.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

5 *Ibid.*

6 H.E. Hoole to R. Leader, 16.6.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

7 G. Hadfield to R. Leader 17.6.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

8 E. Baines to R. Leader, 20.6.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

9 R. Leader to J. Bland, 15.6.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

10 S.I., 30.6.1865.

11 S.I., 27.5.1865.

my intention to vote for Mr Roebuck and Mr Hadfield".¹ This finally doomed to failure the attempt of the opponents of the Water Company to blame Roebuck for their own incompetent handling of the opposition to the Water Company's bill in Parliament. Roebuck was very popular in Sheffield. A dry grinder from Attercliffe declared: "Sheffield will be Sheffield; and until Mr Roebuck sees fit to throw up his own cap, nobody can take it off his head whilst a single grinder is within ten yards of him".² Politically Roebuck was still a Radical, as a person he was outspoken and fearless, and these qualities appealed to the independent minded workmen of Sheffield who could forgive "Tear 'Em" for being blunt and tactless because they were blunt and tactless themselves. They admired his honesty and independence, and it would take more than a motley opposition of disgruntled teetotalers and opponents of the Water Company to shake their faith in him.

Leader summed up the state of politics at the end of June, 1865, when he wrote: "it is well known that the party most anxious to nominate Mr Brown are also eager to oust Mr Hadfield, while there is a party so bitterly opposed to Mr Roebuck, that they would vote for anything from a Tory to a Revolutionist, for the sake of attacking him".³ Probyn withdrew on 19 June,⁴ but Roebuck's opponents soon found another candidate, T. Campbell Foster, a barrister on the Northern circuit.⁵ At a meeting on 4 July, he said that he would support Lord Palmerston's Government and a £6 rating franchise which would give the vote to the old "potwallopers" and "scot and lot" men,⁶ which would hardly have been a particularly progressive measure.⁷ Foster was an opponent of the ballot. He was in favour of the spread of education, no religious teaching in the schools and the abolition of Church Rates with due regard for the interest of the Church. He supported self-government for mature colonies and did not believe that it was true "to say that the black man must be exterminated wherever the white man set his foot", which was designed to win over humanitarian support against Roebuck. Roebuck was contemptuous of Foster: he "thinks that standing for Sheffield will be a good advertisement — he could put one into *The Times* for less money; but then it would not be in accordance with etiquette".⁸ Roebuck's accusations that Foster was wishing to draw attention to himself merely for professional reasons⁹ angered Foster who proceeded to conduct a campaign of sarcastic abuse. On 5 July, before a crowd of 20,000 people, he intimated that Roebuck and Hadfield had not the courage to come and face him. Whereupon they arrived in the Square and heard Foster hurl insult after insult at Roebuck, especially over the Galway contract and the Water Bill.¹⁰ The fact that because of his position in the Square Roebuck was unable to reply to such palpable untruths, coupled with Foster's unsavoury manner and the behaviour of some hired roughs, who on the following evening tried to disrupt a Roebuck-Hadfield meeting in the Temperance Hall,¹¹ no doubt rallied much support for Roebuck and won over many fair-minded men to his side. Leader felt sure that "the people of Sheffield know too well the value of tried men to desert them for the first voluble declaimer who may cross their path".¹²

If Foster was no more than a "voluble declaimer", a more serious challenge to Roebuck and Hadfield came with the appearance of a fourth candidate, the Hon. James Frederick Stuart Wortley.¹³ Wortley was a Liberal, who had been a private secretary to Gladstone for four years. He wanted "to see the suffrage extended to a great extent, but not to a radical extent" so that it would be abused, though he refused to commit himself to any particular level of franchise extension.¹⁴ He opposed the ballot and talked of "an arrangement for a compromise" on the question of Church Rates. So Wortley's Liberalism was very moderate and herein lay the strength of his candidature. Because he came from the premier Conservative family in the district and because there was no Conservative in the field, he could count on the support of the Tories in Sheffield. "It is beyond dispute," wrote Samuel Harrison, "that there is a large and influential Conservative party in Sheffield", which was concerned to maintain the Church-State connection and "to prevent the lowering of the suffrage so as practically to place the whole power of electing representatives in the hands of the lower orders".¹⁵ Wortley's opposition to a radical extension of the franchise was in accordance

1 *S.I.*, 7.7.1865.

2 *S.I.*, 21.6.1865.

3 *S.I.*, 30.6.1865.

4 *S.I.*, 19.6.1865.

5 The son of a Leeds newspaper owner, Campbell Foster had been editor for a short time of the *Bradford Observer* before William Byles. F.G. Byles, *William Byles*, privately printed, 1932, p. 29.

6 *S.I.*, 5.7.1865.

7 Returns for Sheffield ordered by the Government in December, 1865, showed that a £6 rental franchise would add 17,000 to the present electorate, while a £6 rating franchise would add 4,800. *S.L.R.*, 21.12.1865.

8 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 3.7.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

9 *S.I.*, 5.7.1865.

10 *S.I.*, 6.7.1865.

11 *S.I.*, 7.7.1865.

12 *Ibid.*

13 J.F.S. Wortley, 1833 - 70: brother of Edward, 3rd. Baron and 1st. Earl of Wharnccliffe (1827 - 99).

14 *S.I.*, 10.7.1865.

15 *S.T.* 24.6.1865.

with this principle. Harrison declared: "We feel satisfied that Mr Wortley will obtain that general support of the Conservative party in Sheffield, if not on his own merits, at least on the ground that his principles are much to be preferred to those of Messrs. Roebuck and Hadfield. In the present state of parties in the town we have no hesitation in advising the Conservatives of Sheffield to vote for Wortley and Foster at the ensuing election".¹ W.C. Leng in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* also supported Wortley and Foster.² The Tories backed Foster because his politics were moderate and in the hope, which was justified, that his supporters would split their votes with Wortley rather than Hadfield whom the Conservatives especially disliked.³ Wortley also hoped to attract the support of lukewarm Liberals who considered Roebuck and Hadfield with their radical views about the franchise, the ballot and the outright abolition of Church Rates⁴ too advanced, as well as those disgruntled Liberals who disliked Roebuck. Foster's principal supporters were the Permissive Bill men, such as Clegg and Harrop, who backed him against Roebuck, even though Foster did not share their opinions, which made it look very much like "an opposition of mere spite".⁵ Roebuck's position was strong and, as the election approached, backed by the middle class Liberal leadership, the "public house interest" and a lavish expenditure of money,⁶ he must have been confident of success.

A crowd of between 30,000 and 40,000 people assembled at the Corn Exchange on nomination day.⁷ Roebuck was enthusiastically received when he declared: "what I have done, I intend to do; what I have been I intend to be". Hadfield expressed in a few words the Liberal creed: "Gentlemen, away with the past. There is nothing done while anything remains to be done. The progress hitherto is not to guide and govern the progress for the future". By contrast, Foster could not make himself heard by the crowd, and the show of hands was overwhelmingly in favour of Roebuck and Hadfield. On polling day Foster retired from the contest at 2 p.m., advising his supporters who had not voted to plump for Wortley. This made little difference and the result of the election was a great victory for Roebuck and Hadfield.⁸ The analysis of the voting shows that the Foster party, despite their protestations of support for Hadfield, split 1,108 out of 1,576 votes with Wortley, a ratio of 11 to 3 against Hadfield.⁹ So the vast majority of Foster's supporters preferred Wortley to Hadfield, which would suggest that they were Tories.¹⁰ So the Tory vote was made up substantially of 721 plumpers for Wortley and 1,108 splits between Wortley and Foster. The 2,694 split votes given to Roebuck and Hadfield showed that most Liberals remained loyal to the sitting members. Above all, the election was a personal triumph for Roebuck who had been given a vote of confidence by the electorate. Finally, it should be noted that the number of unpolled voters was 16%, compared with 12% in 1857,¹¹ due to the increase in the size of the electorate and perhaps to the brevity of the election campaign.

The election in the Southern Division of the West Riding is of great importance because it illustrates the problems facing the Liberals in counties where there was a marked political difference between the towns and the rural areas. In this newly created division it was clear that the contest would be very closely fought because of the nature of the balance between urban and rural areas. For this reason the Conservatives rejected a compromise and decided to contest both seats, nominating W.S. Stanhope¹² and Christopher Beckett Denison, the son of a former M.P. for the West Riding.¹³ The problem which faced the Liberals was that neither of their candidates, Sir John Ramsden or the Hon. Charles Fitzwilliam,¹⁴ was likely to command the necessary support from the urban areas,

1 S.T., 8.7.1865.

2 S.D.T., 12.7.1865.

3 E.g. S.T., 24.6.1865.

4 Wortley and Foster both talked of a compromise on this question. S.I., 11.7.1865.

5 S.I., 11.7.1865.

6 S.T., 15.7.1865.

7 S.I., 12.7.1865.

8	The voting was	ROEBUCK	3,410
		HADFIELD	3,348
		WORTLEY	2,626
		FOSTER	1,576

The following is an analysis of the voting:

R	H	F	W	R H	FR	FH	WR	WH	W F
97	118	153	721	2,694	32	272	513	208	1,108

S.I., 15.7.1865.

9 S.I., 17.7.1865.

10 Foster was nominated by Councillor Lomas and David Ward, both Tories. S.I., 12.7.1865.

11 S.I., 17.7.1865.

12 Walter Spencer Stanhope, 1827 - 1911: of Cannon Hall, Barnsley; 1872 - 80 M.P. for S.W.Riding; 1904 K.C.B.

13 S.I., 20.6.1865.

14 C.W. Fitzwilliam, 1826 - 94: brother of 6th. Earl.

because both were landowners. On 24 June, Fitzwilliam informed Leader of his intention to withdraw: "I suppose you are by this time aware of the course that I have adopted. I am sorry that I have felt forced to adopt that course but I am sure that I have, by retiring, best consulted the liberal interests of the Division".¹ In fact, Ramsden had refused to stand with Fitzwilliam because he would not have brought him the kind of support he needed and may have jeopardised his chances. H.F. Beaumont² was then selected as a colleague for Ramsden. J.W. Childers, president of the Reform Registration Association, reported to Dunn that "Fitzwilliam has withdrawn and Sir John Ramsden is ready to come forward with Beaumont if adopted on Monday".³ But Dunn obviously did not think that this would resolve the difficulty and he told Leader that it was "a very critical position of affairs".⁴ It certainly was, because at this moment Ramsden decided to withdraw. Sir Charles Wood, a former Whig minister and one of the leading Liberals in the county, thought it "mortifying" that all their work had been "thrown over at the last moment by the folly of our two candidates". So desperate were the Liberals that Wood was ready to support any two "presentable candidates" if they could be found, which he thought unlikely.⁵ However, John Parker did not agree with Leader's placing all the blame for this situation on Ramsden. "I don't think Ramsden was bound after the preference given to Fitzwilliam by reason of his own unpopularity⁶ to fight a very uphill battle and that too with a colleague who would not have brought the sort of support he needed".⁷ After all, Beaumont's "adhesion [to Liberalism] has been very short indeed and . . . his knowledge of political affairs is nil". The real problem about finding suitable Liberal candidates, Parker explained, was that "the sections of the Liberal party differ as to the extent they are willing to go on certain questions and that the town section will not allow the country candidate any open questions or any fair latitude of freedom". There would have been no trouble "if Ramsden had been treated in this respect in the same manner by the Towns as Crossley⁸ has been by the country party". Ramsden's politics were not sufficiently advanced for the urban Liberals. He was unpopular as a result of the Huddersfield tenant right case and, if he had stood, there was every likelihood of his being defeated. Parker believed that, if the urban Liberals were not prepared to support Ramsden, they ought to have "produced, nominated and paid for a candidate of their own opinions, as they were bound to do".⁹ It seems that the urban Liberals were reluctant to bring forward their own candidate because they were unwilling to pay the bill. But the whole question shows how difficult it was to find suitable Liberal county candidates.

While the Liberals were disorganized and without candidates, the Conservatives had begun their campaign. On 27 June, J. Jobson Smith¹⁰ chaired a meeting at the Angel Hotel, at which C.B. Denison spoke.¹¹ The Conservatives hoped that Denison would win the towns and Stanhope, a country gentleman from Barnsley, would carry the country districts. Certainly Denison's speech was the epitome of moderate Conservatism. He argued that "Conservatives are 'obstructive' only as opposed to the ultra party, who would destroy all that we reverence, all that we value and hold precious in our national constitution and our national church". With balances for property and intelligence, however, "there is nothing to prevent a large admission of the working classes within the pale of the electoral franchise". He supported the national church, education and non-interference in foreign policy. This was a very moderate position and was designed to attract lukewarm Liberals. An election committee was formed for the Sheffield district; of which the chairman was W.F. Dixon.¹² The prospect of a Conservative victory must have seemed very bright.

On 1 July, 1865, it was announced that the Liberal candidates would be Lord Milton¹³ and H.F. Beaumont.¹⁴ Lord Milton's ancestors had been staunch Liberals and the Fitzwilliam name was associated with sterling service to the West Riding, and his candidature would be backed by the extensive Fitzwilliam influence in the county. The drawbacks appeared to be that both he and Beaumont were very young, lacked political experience and Beaumont was only a recent convert to Liberal principles. At first Liberals were anything but confident. "If the young hounds have a mind

1 C.W. Fitzwilliam to R. Leader, 24.6.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

2 Henry Frederick Beaumont, 1833 - 1913: 1865 -74 M.P. for S.W.Riding; 1885 - 92 Colne Valley.

3 T. Dunn to R. Leader, no date, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187

4 *Ibid.*

5 Sir C. Wood to R. Leader, 27.6.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

6 A reference to the Huddersfield tenant right case.

7 J. Parker to R. Leader, 28.6.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

8 The Halifax manufacturer who was one of the candidates for the Northern division of the West Riding.

9 J. Parker to R. Leader, 28.6.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

10 J.J. Smith, 1800 - 78: stove grate manufacturer; 1848 J.P.; 1869 Church Burgess; 1870 Town Trustee; 1889 - 62 president of Chamber of Commerce; director of Sheffield Banking Co.; a Wesleyan who became an Anglican.

11 *S.I.*, 28.6.1865. Stanhope, unable to attend, was represented by his uncle, General Stanhope.

12 The rest of the committee were J.J. Smith and F.W. Bagshawe, vice chairmen; H. Watson, treasurer; S. Knight, solicitor. The chairman of the Denison - Stanhope committee for the whole Division was the Hon. F.S. Wortley, brother of J.F.S. Wortley.

13 Lord Milton, 1839 - 77: eldest son of W.T.S. Fitzwilliam, 6th. Earl. (1815 - 1902); had been an explorer.

14 *S.I.*, 1.7.1865.

to have a run by themselves, I have no objection and they will at all events learn something for another day", Parker wrote.¹ But very soon they were commanding respect and attention. Of the Conservative candidates Leader wrote: "they have no political wardrobe ready made, and if sent into Parliament they would meekly don any livery that it might suit the temporary expediency of Mr Disraeli to put upon them".² Milton and Beaumont were, in Dunn's words, "the men who will go forward and not backward".³

The Liberals won the election by a narrow majority. Below is an analysis of the voting:⁴

	AREA	No. OF VOTERS	VOTERS POLLED	MILTON	BEAUMONT	DENISON	STANHOPE	RESULT
1.	Barnsley	1098	908	512	480	391	426	L
2.	Dewsbury	1946	1606	1059	1009	561	537	L
3.	Dobcross	743	605	333	324	271	271	L
4.	Doncaster	1280	1017	465	433	564	528	C
5.	Goole	329	268	55	56	206	210	C
6.	Holmfirth	636	511	284	279	225	222	L
7.	Huddersfield	1913	1617	873	852	742	718	L
8.	Penistone	346	268	90	86	172	180	C
9.	Pontefract	936	719	334	308	425	408	C
10.	Rotherham	971	771	572	538	204	210	L
11.	Scissett	439	358	241	247	121	127	L
12.	Selby	604	468	142	136	333	327	C
13.	Sheffield	3015	2151	1301	1280	837	851	L
14.	Sherburn	290	238	18	18	220	215	C
15.	Snaith	324	251	22	20	229	229	C
16.	Tadcaster	285	223	59	57	164	156	C
17.	Thorne	589	438	205	195	243	236	C
18.	Wakefield	1688	1293	496	487	788	785	C
19.	Wath	471	379	197	170	188	183	SPLIT
	TOTAL	17903	14089	7258	6975	6884	6819	—

As had been expected, the rural areas presented the greatest problem for the Liberals. Although they won in Sheffield, Rotherham, Dewsbury and Huddersfield, they were defeated at Doncaster, Pontefract, Selby, Thorne and Wakefield. The Liberals owed their success to the size of the urban electorates and to the able management of their campaign and especially to the great efforts of the legal agent, R.J. Gainsford.⁵ The total Liberal expenses for the county election amounted to £8,964. 15s. 10d., of which Sheffield's share was £780. 0s. 10d.⁶ Of this the candidates paid £5,000, which meant that almost £4,000 had to be raised by subscription.⁷ On this matter Dunn explained to Leader: "I am sorry to say that on these occasions the Towns do not come up as they ought if they expect to have that voice in the selection of candidates which is most desirable".⁸ Leader sent £50,⁹ but his contribution to the Liberal victory both in the borough and the county was far greater than that. The *Independent* was widely read not only in Sheffield, but also in the county. "You report the speeches and proceedings of our division so much better than Mr Baines does", Miss Parker told Leader.¹⁰ Although he may not have been as powerful as his second cousin, Edward Baines, was at Leeds, Leader was without doubt one of the most influential men in the Liberal party in South Yorkshire.

1 J. Parker to R. Leader, 30.6.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

2 *S.I.*, 1.7.1865.

3 *S.I.*, 4.7.1865.

4 *Poll Book*, Wakefield, 1866.

5 Sir C. Wood to T. Dunn, 20.9.1865, H.F. Beaumont to T. Dunn, 21.9.1865, Dunn MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 2197.

6 Memo., Dunn MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 2197.

7 T. Dunn to R. Leader, 14.9.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

8 *Ibid.*

9 T. Dunn to R. Leader, 16.9.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

10 Miss E.C. Parker to R. Leader, 25.7.1865, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

CHAPTER IX

THE STRUGGLE FOR REFORM

1866 - 1867

When Palmerston died in October, 1865, it was clear that the years of political calm were at an end. The leaders of the Liberal party, Russell and Gladstone, were both committed to the introduction of a measure of parliamentary reform. The question was how extensive was it to be? The middle class Liberals in Sheffield envisaged a moderate measure such as Baines' Bill. Leader wrote: "Mr. Forster laid down the true principle when he said the working classes ought to have a fair but not a preponderance in the electoral system".¹ He supported reform partly because he wanted to see "the free expression in parliament of public opinion, in which men of all classes shall be fairly heard",² but also because it would be unsafe to withhold an extension of the franchise: "If we allow the Tory policy of aversion to change to prevail, conserve the old only because it is old, preserve anomalies on the plea that in the main we do very well in spite of them, we shall be acting in opposition to every dictate of reason and intelligence, and shall lay up in store the materials for future years of trouble".³

A really radical measure of reform, embodying manhood suffrage, would not have been a political possibility in an essentially conservative House of Commons, nor would the middle class Liberals have supported it since they had no wish to see the working classes gain a predominance in the political system. Moreover, the working classes were by no means unrepresented in the unreformed Parliament. Returns made by the Union Clerks in Sheffield to the Government in January, 1866, showed that 25% of the electorate was composed of artisans:⁴

DISTRICT	VOTERS	ARTISANS		%
Sheffield	3,748	909	nearly	25%
Brightside	1,319	358	about	27%
Attercliffe	331	127	"	38%
Ecclesall	2,545	522	"	20.51%
Nether Hallam	1,073	392	"	36.53%
Upper Hallam	120	8	"	6.66%
TOTAL	9,136	2,316		25.35%

All the signs were that Russell's Government would introduce a very moderate Reform Bill.

A meeting to consider the question of reform was held in February, 1866, and attended by about 400 people.⁵ The chairman, Ald. Saunders, urged that "what was wanted was a substantial and thorough Reform Bill, such as would satisfy the mass of the people for a century to come". Ralph Skelton "did not expect to get what he wanted - manhood suffrage, but he would be willing to take what he could get". Downing and Titterton were prepared to accept a £6 rental franchise. But Samuel Jackson moved an amendment in favour of manhood suffrage, which was supported by Samuel Plimsoll,⁶ though he made it clear that he would support

1 S.I., 6.1.1866.

2 S.I., 9.6.1866.

3 S.I., 6.1.1866

4 S.L.R., 8.1.1866.

5 S.I., 20.2.1866.

6 Samuel Plimsoll, 1824 - 98: came from a West Country family; father a revenue officer who came to Sheffield in 1838; educated at school of Samuel Eadon and People's College; became assistant to Thomas Birks (Mayor in 1850) at Old Pond Street Brewery of Thomas Rawson and Sons; honorary secretary of Sheffield Exhibition of 1851; a first attempt to make his fortune as a transporter of coal involved a struggle with Great Northern Railway and reduced him to abject poverty; helped by John Chambers of firm of Newton and Chambers, whose step-daughter he married in 1857; basis of his success was his invention for eliminating wastage in transferring coals on railways; with father-in-law's backing, built a coal delivery depot and inaugurated the system by which London was supplied with coal from South Yorkshire coalfields; 1865 contested Derby, for which he was elected M.P. in 1868; mounted campaign for shipping reform; attended Nether Chapel. See D. Masters, *The Plimsoll Mark*, 1955.

any measure as a first step. Lord Teynham,¹ who was Plimsoll's guest at Whiteley Wood Hall, said that he was prepared to support the Government measure. Only 4 votes were recorded for Jackson's amendment, which showed that most manhood suffragists were prepared to secure what they could get;² they were ready to compromise in a way the Chartists had always refused to do. Finally, it should be noted that none of the leading middle class Liberals attended this meeting, though they must have been well pleased with the outcome.

The Reform Bill, introduced by the Liberals, was so moderate that it received the approval of the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*. Leng wrote: "every statesman of mark is committed to the passing of some measure of Parliamentary Reform" and "we are persuaded that all that is necessary is for the Government to stake its existence and the duration of the present Parliament on the passing of the Bill, and then, notwithstanding the screeches of Mr. Horsman and the sarcasms of Mr. Lowe, we shall, before the grouse shooting begins, see it receive the Royal assent".³ Leader, of course, welcomed the bill,⁴ estimating that it would increase the electorate of Sheffield by about 70%.⁵ This would have meant that about 6,300 would have been enfranchised, a very mild and cautious measure indeed, which Leng welcomed as "a fair and honest measure, and as a concession which will satisfy the justice of the case for many years to come".⁶ He condemned the opposition to the bill, especially the arguments of Robert Lowe,⁷ and when it was defeated he concluded "the great argument put forward against the Reform Bill was an argument for class government".⁸ The *Sheffield Times* adopted the familiar Tory argument that there was an absence of popular enthusiasm for reform in the country: It "has been delayed so long, and it enlists so little sympathy from the people and from Parliament, that it is nearly certain that it will never pass into law during the present session. We are aware that an attempt is being made to get up an agitation in support of the Bill; but it is nevertheless true that it has fallen flat upon the country. There is neither outcry against it, nor in its favour".⁹

Although he admitted that an extension of the franchise was necessary,¹⁰ Samuel Harrison objected to the bill because it did not include a redistribution of seats,¹¹ and "to endeavour to carry out Parliamentary Reform piecemeal for the sake of avoiding opposition and of retaining office, is contemptible, unworthy and cowardly".¹² The most difficult charge for the Liberals to rebut was that of popular indifference to reform because it was partly true. Hadfield might tell Leader that "the country is rising",¹³ but there is no doubt that there was no popular agitation comparable to that which had swept the country in 1831 - 32. This was partly because the circumstances of economic crisis, which underlay the earlier agitation, were largely absent in the spring of 1866, and partly because the Reform Bill of 1866 was not of the stuff to inspire great popular feeling or indeed much excitement at all. Leader explained the absence of a real popular agitation by claiming that there was "a cordial acceptance of the government bill".¹⁴ While stressing that an intense agitation was unnecessary, he warned of the consequences if the bill were rejected: "let us have a dissolution on the reform question, and we may rely upon it that the great demonstration made by the election of 1831 would be emphatically repeated".¹⁵ He stressed how moderate the measure was: "it is a measure of compromises and compensations. It would in all probability avert for many years any further demand for a change".¹⁶ On 2 April, the Mayor, W.E. Laycock,¹⁷ chaired a meeting to support the bill.¹⁸ Leader reported that "the hall was crowded with a meeting representing the 'elite' of the working classes",¹⁹ which is not surprising since it was only the elite who would benefit from the bill. Thomas Dunn moved a resolution accepting it as "an honest and valuable measure" and he stressed the need to support it even though it did not go as far as some of them wished. The resolution was seconded by D. Robinson, a working man and a non-elect, who argued that the working classes were as good as any other class and as fitted to exercise the franchise. Hadfield and

1 Lord Teynham, 1798 - 1889: had been a Baptist minister in Bristol; succeeded to peerage on death of his elder brother in 1843; an advanced Liberal; a Vice-President of the Reform League.

2 *S.I.*, 20.2.1866.

3 *S.D.T.*, 17.3.1866.

4 *S.I.*, 14.3.1866.

5 *S.I.*, 13.3.1866.

6 *S.D.T.*, 28.4.1866.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *S.D.T.*, 26.6.1866.

9 *S.T.*, 31.3.1866.

10 *S.T.*, 5.5.1866.

11 This was done for tactical reasons so that M.P.'s whose seats might be disfranchised would not vote against it. A redistribution scheme would be introduced later.

12 *S.T.*, 7.4.1866.

13 G. Hadfield to R. Leader, 29.3.1866, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

14 *S.I.*, 3.4.1866.

15 *S.I.*, 7.4.1866.

16 *S.I.*, 2.6.1866.

17 William Edward Laycock, 1815 - 95: hair-seating manufacturer; 1866 Mayor; 1870 J.P.; Unitarian - member of Upper Chapel.

18 *S.I.*, 3.4.1866.

19 *Ibid.*

H.F. Beaumont supported the measure and Roebuck promised "I will steadily support it and, by the grace of God, we shall carry it". Despite its moderation, the bill caused a split in the parliamentary Liberal party and in June, 1866, its future seemed very black indeed as it was assailed by Conservatives and Adullamites. If, as seemed likely, the bill were to be defeated, the question for the Government to decide was whether to dissolve Parliament and fight a second general election within a year with all the expense and inconvenience it would cause,¹ or whether to resign and hand over power to the Conservatives. This question was discussed at a meeting in Paradise Square on 25 June, attended by between 5,000 and 6,000 people.² Samuel Plimsoll moved a resolution expressing confidence in Russell's Government, especially on the question of the Reform Bill, and urging them "to use every constitutional means to secure the passing of that bill in its integrity". Both Plimsoll and Leader favoured a dissolution in preference to handing over power to the Tories. "We owe a duty to Europe at large and to Liberalism all over the world to maintain in power the Government which has the confidence of Liberals generally", Leader declared. Lord Teynham, the Radical peer, said that he had no confidence in the present Parliament and he advised: "you should sustain the Government to the utmost, sustain it in dissolving Parliament, if without that dissolution it cannot pass a Reform Bill which shall give at least some measure of satisfaction to the people". The chairman of the meeting, Thomas Dunn, was worried about the form of the resolution, believing that it was not right to ask for a dissolution in the petition to Russell, since that power was vested in the Queen alone. Nevertheless, Plimsoll and Titterton secured the addition of a rider (against Dunn's advice), asking the ministers to advise a dissolution and the resolution was carried unanimously. The other speakers at this important meeting were Michael Beal, Ald. Saunders and R.J. Gainsford.³ The Liberals of Sheffield had made it quite clear that they favoured the bolder course of an early dissolution, with a meeting of Parliament in the autumn. However, after its defeat on Lord Dunkellin's motion, the Government decided to resign. Leader regretted this and wrote that "England and her Queen, as well as the nations of Europe, look with especial repugnance at the present time to a transfer of the official power of the country from the friends of freedom to the abettors of despotism".⁴

The defeat of the Liberal Reform Bill and the assumption of power by the Conservatives marks a real turning-point in the struggle for reform. Hitherto, Radicals, who supported manhood suffrage, had been divided into those who were prepared to compromise and accept Russell's bill and those who would not. Ernest Jones, a former Chartist leader, denounced the bill as inadequate and resigned from the Reform League because it supported it,⁵ and in Sheffield Samuel Jackson had refused to accept it. But the rejection of such a moderate scheme united Radicals behind a demand for the full programme of the Reform League, registered and residential manhood suffrage. The unwise refusal to grant a small measure of reform resulted in a demand for a far wider extension of the franchise. The power of the popular agitation was seen in the Hyde Park demonstration in late July, which Leader regarded as "an overwhelming, though peaceful vote".⁶ In Sheffield the determination of Radicals to accept nothing less than manhood suffrage was reflected in the formation of the Sheffield branch of the Reform League in July, 1866. This had its origins in a meeting of working men on 4 July, which had been called by the estate agent, Henry Horner, because similar meetings had taken place in other towns.⁷ Ralph Skelton was the chairman. Henry Titterton moved the following resolution: "That a House of Commons, elected by a fraction only of the adult male population of the United Kingdom, is a violation and mockery of the principles and intent of the constitution, and that the factious and class opposition offered by Tories and sham Liberals to the late moderate Reform Bill, together with the injurious and insulting language used towards the working classes, render it imperatively necessary for the great Liberal party throughout the country to unite in resolutely insisting upon the amendment of the representation of the people in Parliament being carried out to the full extent of resident, lodger or full manhood suffrage". The resolution was carried unanimously, but because the meeting was attended by only about 1,500, it was decided to adjourn until 9 July, but even then "the attendance was not nearly so large as might have been expected".⁸ Skelton expressed the feelings of all Radicals when he declared that "nothing short of a real, tangible and substantial measure of reform would satisfy them". He alluded to the absence of the leading Liberals in the town who ought to stand side by side with the working men "to endeavour to obtain for them what was their right and their due". The middle class Liberals did not support manhood suffrage and therefore did not attend such meetings. Once again, the gulf between middle and working class political aims was evident. Moreover, the comparatively sparse attendance suggested that popular feeling in Sheffield on the reform question was not running particularly high. Thomas

1 M.P.'s who stood to lose their seats by a Reform Bill would be unwilling to incur expense and theoretically the Government had a majority in the House of Commons.

2 *S.I.*, 26.6.1866.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *S.I.*, 27.6.1866.

5 See M.R. Dunsmore, *The Northern Department of the Reform League*, Sheffield M.A. Thesis, 1962, pp. 71 - 75. Jones rejoined the Reform League when the bill was defeated.

6 *S.I.*, 28.7.1866.

7 *S.I.*, 5.7.1866.

8 *S.I.*, 10.7.1866.

Orton believed that a few meetings would "rouse up the old reform spirit in Sheffield",¹ and Titterton urged the formation of a political organization in the town to aid the carrying of a good bill which would include "residential, manhood and lodger suffrage". As a result of this meeting a Sheffield branch of the Reform League was founded in July, 1866, and Samuel Plimsoll became its president.² The branch convened a large working class reform meeting on 6 August, the purpose of which was, in Plimsoll's words, "to show that the people were not so indifferent to reform as they were charged by the Tories to be".³ A resolution, proposed by Skelton, censuring the conduct of the Government over the Hyde Park meeting, was carried unanimously and J.C. Fillingham explained that the Reform League "would secure their rights; it would yet knock off all the trammels that bound them to the present state of things; it would pass through Parliament that measure of concession to their rights which they ought to have". Councillor Woodcock⁴ urged the working classes to "speak out in one determined voice and demand their rights, and tell Lord Derby and his colleagues that they would be political slaves no longer". Councillor Nadin⁵ and Henry Titterton spoke in support of the League's efforts to secure reform based on manhood suffrage and vote by ballot. Finally, the meeting was addressed by Edmond Beales, barrister and President of the National Reform League, who exposed the irregularities and the injustice of the present system, denouncing the House of Commons as "an exclusive, oligarchical, unconstitutional assembly — more really representing the House of Peers than the people — an assembly devoted to the interests of the landocracy and the plutocracy — and like all other usurpers, bitterly hostile to all who oppose its usurpation".⁶

An interesting insight into the position in which the Sheffield branch of the Reform League stood in relation to the moderate middle class Liberal leadership is provided by a speech which Thomas Orton, the draper of Chapel Walk, made at a meeting of the Rotherham branch of the Reform League on 5 January, 1867.⁷ The purpose of the meeting was to advertise the forthcoming demonstration which the Sheffield branch had organized. "In Sheffield," Orton observed, "the middle classes held themselves entirely aloof from their movement, saying they intended to go too far. The League, however, meant to go on without the middle class. He had conversed with the veteran reformer, Mr. Thomas Dunn, and invited him to attend the demonstration. Mr. Dunn said if he did so it would be for the purpose of moving an amendment on any resolution proposed which embodied manhood suffrage. He (Mr. Orton) was certain that Mr. Dunn would be defeated and that a resolution embodying manhood suffrage would be carried in Sheffield by a large majority".⁸ So the Reform League in Sheffield not only had the problem of rousing "the old reform spirit", but it also had to contend with middle class hostility to its programme. Leader agreed with Dunn about manhood suffrage: "we have not been able to see our way to the adoption of this proposal".⁹ The middle class Liberals stayed away from the great reform demonstration of 21 January, 1867.

Such demonstrations had already been held in other towns and their purpose was to put pressure on the Conservative Government to introduce a really comprehensive measure of reform in the forthcoming session. The demonstration began with a procession of such length that it took five minutes to pass a given point.¹⁰ The Park Temperance Society and three bands took part, but the only evidence of trade union participation was the banner of the Amalgamated Tailors' Society. Orton explained this absence of trade union involvement by saying that when asked to take part, the trade union leaders had said "it was impossible to get the men in one mind on the subject".¹¹ It must be remembered at this time the trade unions were concerned with vital questions affecting their future and there was a long tradition of reluctance on the part of the unions in Sheffield to involve themselves as bodies in political matters. Leader remarked "the members of societies which are essentially non-political declined to recognise in the present state of affairs any sufficient reason to go beyond their proper province".¹² Such feeling was particularly strong among the old craft unions, which predominated in Sheffield, and it is interesting that the one society which did take part in the demonstration was one of the new, politically-conscious amalgamated unions. So the Reform League in Sheffield had neither official trade union support nor the backing of the middle class Liberals. Yet despite this and the extreme winter cold, the crowd in the Haymarket was so large that three platforms were erected at which meetings

1 *Ibid.*

2 *S.I.*, 7.8.1866.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Thomas Woodcock: herbalist; represented Park Ward 1861 - 82.

5 Joseph Nadin, 1823 - 98: medical botanist of Shalesmoor; represented St. Philip's Ward 1858 - 61, 1864 - 98.

6 *S.I.*, 7.8.1866.

7 *S.I.*, 7.1.1867.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *S.I.*, 22.1.1867.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 *S.I.*, 23.1.1867.

were held simultaneously.¹ On the first platform Councillor Hibberd² presided and 6,000 – 7,000 people attended. Nadin, in moving a resolution in favour of registered and residential manhood suffrage and the ballot, insisted that the middle classes had not kept their promises and he asked: "Where were the great reformers of the present day? Where were the local reformers? Were they there?" Downing stressed that "manhood suffrage was the only correct principle of the future" and the resolution was carried unanimously. Williams then put a motion of confidence in Russell, Gladstone, Bright, Mill, Hughes, Fawcett and Beales. By contrast, he considered that Roebuck was not a reformer. Since the meeting of 2 April, 1866, at which he had promised to support the Liberal Reform Bill, Roebuck had not been politically active. Severe illness had caused him to miss most of the debates, and those who already disliked him attributed his absence to that fact that he was not a sincere reformer. He had no liking for the Liberal leaders, Russell and Gladstone. In March, 1866, he strongly denied a rumour that he was on the point of moving a vote of confidence in Russell: "this would indeed be a wonder, confidence in Earl Russell indeed! I have none either in his head or his heart – and I think I know him well – weak, narrow-minded, obstinate and vindictive, he is no hero of mine".³ Such opinions were hardly likely to enhance Roebuck's popularity with Liberals in Sheffield. Moreover, there seemed to be some truth in the view that Roebuck was nothing but a Tory in disguise when Leng hastened to defend him against the charge of feigning illness for political reasons and when he accepted an invitation to convalesce at Endcliffe Hall, the home of John Brown.⁴

By contrast, Ernest Jones, the former Chartist leader, was introduced to the meeting as "the most earnest reformer that England had yet produced."⁵ Jones had left the Reform League when it supported the Reform Bill of 1866, but he had re-joined and now spoke cautiously of it. The "Reform Bill was good as far as it went, but it had one terrible fault – it was too little". Yet the Tories had defeated it; they had "made us overstay the dinner hour, and the longer they make us wait, the larger is the meal they will have to give us". Not only were the working classes fitted for the franchise but they had one other great advantage: "we are the many, we have the numbers and numbers are invincible, and to be invincible they need but to be organised, organised, organised, organised, and the rights of the people will be secured". Ralph Skelton presided at the second platform and referred to the absence of Roebuck and other "gentlemen who professed to be reformers". Orton, an honorary secretary of the Sheffield branch of the Reform League, stressed that they would no longer compromise with the moderate reformers. The Cattle Plague Compensation Bill⁶ showed that the House of Commons was not a fair representation of the people, as Roebuck had claimed it was. He said that the Sheffield branch of the Reform League had about 300 members, whereas it should have nearer 3,000.⁷ Of course this was the number of paid-up members; those working men who supported the League's programme numbered many more. Underlying the demand for manhood suffrage was the idea, expressed by Henry Titterton, that a man "ought to have a vote not because he rented a certain kind of house, but because he was a man". This premise that "in asking for manhood suffrage and vote by ballot they were asking for no favour, but *the birthright of every man*"⁸ was a feature of all radical reform movements since the Constitutional Society of 1791:

Samuel Plimsoll presided at the evening meeting. A defender of trade unions, he gave the reasons why he supported reform: "It is because I wish to heal the breach which is daily widening between men and masters, it is because I think working men fully as fit for the franchise as those who have it, it is because I want a more decorous and useful Parliament, it is because I sympathise with the feeling of the masses who claim to assist in making the laws which govern them, and it is because I believe that good and wise legislation will be more easily attainable in a reformed Parliament".⁹ Lord Teynham spoke and E.A. Leatham,¹⁰ former M.P. for Huddersfield, made the very important point that "there is not the smallest danger of any measure passing through the small sieve of Parliament which shall be one whit too large for the emergency". He thought that "the next great harvest of reforms will spring from working class enfranchisement", particularly national education and reform of the Poor Law. "It is time we ceased to be a bundle of classes and became a united nation". Speaking of Roebuck, Nadin insisted that he "was not the same man he was in 1832. It would have been a capital thing if his name had been changed to Joseph, and then he could

1 S.I., 22.1.1867.

2 Emmanuel Hibberd, 1821 - 72: coal merchant; represented Ecclesall 1866 - 69, St. Philip's 1870 - 72.

3 J.A. Roebuck to R. Leader, 28.3.1866, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

4 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 20.7.1866, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

5 S.I., 22.1.1867

6 Cf. Wm. Fisher to R. Leader, 9.6.1866: the behaviour of Parliament over the Cattle Plague "has made me very desirous of seeing some considerable change in the county constituencies before I die". Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

7 S.I., 22.1.1867.

8 Italics inserted. The words of a Mr. Bailey on the third platform, at which Councillor Woodcock presided. S.I., 22.1.1867.

9 S.I., 22.1.1867.

10 Edward Aldam Leatham, 1828 - 1900: member of a West Riding banking family; M.P. for Huddersfield 1859 - 65 and 1868 - 86; 1869 introduced a Ballot Bill.

have worn the coat of many colours".¹

Indeed, one of the most striking features of the great reform demonstration at Sheffield was that it revealed the extent of Radical dissatisfaction with Roebuck. The Mayor, John Webster, himself a Conservative, thought that Roebuck was a Tory,² and wanted him to be appointed Chief Commissioner of the enquiry into trade unionism in Sheffield.³ More significantly, Roebuck noticed that Thomas Dunn's attitude to him had altered: "of late he has been taken by some crotchet — some madness I was going to say, and his whole manner and conduct as regards me is so peculiar that I am compelled to conclude not only that he is no longer my friend but to believe him in his heart almost my enemy".⁴ The Conservatives were quick to drive a wedge between Roebuck and his supporters and the Mayor told him that Dunn and the Whigs had supported him only for party advantage and that "in their hearts they hated and do hate you". It was a mark of the extent of the breach when Roebuck was half-convinced that this was true.⁵

In March, 1867, the Conservative Government introduced a Reform Bill which provided for rated residential suffrage with a number of safeguards, including fancy franchises and dual voting. The *Sheffield Times* explained: "in conceding household suffrage, it is therefore necessary to guard it so that it shall not issue in a pure democracy. We can trust the present Government that it is not about to give us a John Bright Reform Bill".⁶ But Leader thought that the bill was a "complicated and dishonest measure",⁷ as did the Sheffield branch of the Reform League. A large number of working men attended a meeting on 27 March.⁸ Samuel Plimsoll argued that the bill should not be allowed to go into committee and ought to be rejected since it had five radical defects — dual voting, an illusory reduction of the franchise, the omission of a lodger franchise, too high a county franchise and an inadequate seat redistribution scheme. Councillor Hibberd moved a resolution in favour of "household suffrage, pure and simple, together with a lodger franchise". Although he asserted the justice of manhood suffrage and vote by ballot, Hibberd moved that "under the circumstances" they would be prepared to support such a bill. The motion was carried and it is interesting that the Reform League was prepared to compromise and accept less than manhood suffrage, despite Orton's statement at the reform demonstration that there could be no compromise with the moderate reformers. Of great importance was the influence of Samuel Plimsoll, whose approach to the problem was essentially pragmatic and political. Clearly the most that could be hoped for from the House of Commons was household suffrage, and the Reform League could make a far bigger political contribution by supporting it and thereby strengthening the hands of John Bright and the Radicals in Parliament than by stubbornly holding out for the unattainable, manhood suffrage. The Rev. Henry Tarrant of the Wicker Congregational Chapel called for "a free household suffrage without any restrictions" to mend class legislation and corruption. The meeting also condemned Roebuck's insulting attacks on Gladstone, the mention of whose name brought forth loud and prolonged cheering. Nadin contrasted the efforts of Gladstone and Bright with those of Roebuck: "all that he had done could be written on a piece of paper the size of sixpence". There is no doubt that Roebuck had gone out of his way to insult and belittle Gladstone, whose attitude he had described as "pettifogging". As early as 1867 Gladstone was regarded by most Liberals as an able and outstanding statesman and in the country no blame was attached to him for the defeat of the 1866 Reform Bill, although it is clear that his handling of the Commons might have been more tactful. He was trusted and popular and Roebuck's words were bitterly resented.

The central feature of the Conservative Reform Bill as it stood at the end of March, 1867, was the personal payment of rates. This excluded all those occupiers who compounded for their rates so that the owners rather than the householders paid the rates on a number of houses. It was this personal payment principle, itself a safeguard against a too radical extension of the suffrage, which Gladstone was determined to abolish. First, he attempted to replace it by a fixed-line franchise but he was defeated by the opposition of 52 Liberals, the Tea Room revolt, on 8 April. Then, on 12 April, he moved an amendment to the bill to enfranchise occupiers whether they or the owners paid the rates.⁹ Roebuck was by this time committed to supporting Disraeli and the personal payment principle. When this position was criticized by the *Sheffield Independent*, he wrote indignantly to Fisher: "assuredly at this time of my life I am not about to take Mr. Leader for my guide and philosopher".¹⁰ He declared boldly, "come what may I shall pursue the course I think right, utterly careless of what the Whig party of Sheffield or any party may think of my acts". He was unable to see how the "democratic party" could call the bill "a sham" since it would enfranchise 26,000 new voters in Sheffield. In any case, R. Jackson¹¹

1 *S.I.*, 22.1.1867.

2 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 17.3.1867, *Leader MSS.*, S.C.L., L.C. 187.

3 Roebuck was a member of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, but wisely had no connection with the Sheffield enquiry.

4 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 17.3.1867, *Leader MSS.*, S.C.L., L.C. 187.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *S.T.*, 9.3.1867.

7 *S.I.*, 23.3.1867.

8 *S.I.*, 28.3.1867.

9 M. Cowling, 1867, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution*, Cambridge, 1967, p. 194 seq.

10 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 12.4.1867, *Leader MSS.*, S.C.L., L.C. 187.

11 Robert Jackson, 1807 - 73: partner in firm of Spear and Jackson, Aetna Works; a founder of Chamber of Commerce (President in 1863); 1858 Mayor; 1859 and 1865 Alderman; 1858 and 1859 Master Cutler; a Unitarian, a member of Upper Chapel and brother-in-law of Thomas Jessop.)

"seems to think that the party who are offended with me is small and insignificant". With reference to Gladstone's amendment upon which he was to speak that evening, Roebuck said: "I think I shall be able to make it apparent that Gladstone and Bright have by their loud and interminable talk entirely bewildered themselves, mystified the subject and puzzled and somewhat disgusted the public. I shall I suppose again incur the wrath of Mr. Leader."¹ Fisher obviously thought Roebuck's course unwise and he sent a number of telegrams, but Roebuck was adamant. "My most decided conviction was that my country's interest would best be served by voting against Mr. Gladstone".² Roebuck showed how limited his Radicalism had become when he argued that Gladstone's amendment, if carried, would have resulted in "pure and simple household suffrage". He was confident that the bill would be carried as it stood. As for Gladstone and Bright, "the result will show how wildly and falsely they have declaimed in order to bamboozle the public".³ Like the other Liberals who voted against Gladstone's amendment,⁴ Roebuck feared that the consequence of a rejection of Disraeli's Bill would be a more radical measure, "a John Bright Reform Bill" embodying household suffrage, pure and simple. Hadfield, on the other hand, supported Gladstone and it is clear that Roebuck's conduct caused him no little anxiety. "You know", he told Leader, "how very delicate a matter it is for me to discuss or speak of differences between us but I am often questioned".⁵

By Easter, 1867, it was clear that the stumbling block to the achievement of household suffrage was the personal payment principle. What was needed was pressure outside Parliament to show that the bill in its present state was not acceptable to popular opinion. This was the purpose of the Hyde Park meeting of 5 and 6 May, which had its counterpart in the meeting convened by the Sheffield branch of the Reform League in Paradise Square.⁶ The size of this meeting and the unprecedented step of reading news bulletins on the Hyde Park meeting is evidence of great interest in the reform question and shows how untrue it is to suggest that Sheffield remained largely indifferent to reform. The chairman, Samuel Plimsoll, referred to the absence of Thomas Dunn and his friends, but this was to be expected at a meeting convened by the Reform League. Plimsoll stressed that the bill should be opposed because of the compound householders clause. Ralph Skelton stressed the injustice of the compounding system, although in Sheffield it was no problem because there were very few compound householders. Indeed, what is most striking about the Sheffield reform meeting of 6 May is the evidence which it provides of working class co-operation. Although the personal payment principle did not affect working men in Sheffield, they were conscious that it would prevent the enfranchisement of many working men in other towns and so they refused to accept Disraeli's Bill. In the words of a Mr. Wilkinson, "though they might be complimented by the expectation that several thousands of Sheffield's hard-working sons would be placed on the roll of the franchise, yet they must remember at the same time that there were hundreds of thousands of their fellow-men, equally honest, intelligent and consistent, to whom the privilege was attempted to be denied".⁷ The meeting also condemned Roebuck's conduct. Nadin moved a resolution calling for his resignation and pledging "themselves to a man to do their utmost at the next election to secure the return of some gentleman in his place who more accurately represents their wishes, their opinions and their character". Thomas Orton and Samuel Jackson contrasted the 'service of the two members when they thanked Hadfield "for the noble manner in which he had represented the people of Sheffield", and the meeting ended with cheers for Gladstone, Bright, Beales and Plimsoll, and groans for Roebuck.⁸ Leader, who had viewed Roebuck's recent political conduct with disquiet, commented "we hope it is not too late for Mr. Roebuck to repair the mischief that he has done".⁹

Disraeli was determined to find a lasting and permanent solution to the reform problem which would bring prestige to the Conservative party. So on 17 May he accepted an amendment which abolished the practice of compounding for rates and practically conceded household suffrage. He had gone this far because he saw very real political advantages for the Conservatives. The *Sheffield Times* declared: "this is, indeed, one of the chief recommendations of the Bill, and one of the principal grounds of justification for proposing so wide an extension of the franchise — that it will settle the question permanently, that it will leave little or no scope for agitation and that it will immensely widen the area of Conservatism".¹⁰ Two months later, it added rather ruefully "in reference to the franchise, it has about it all the elements of finality; for there is hardly a 'lower deep' possible than the household suffrage which it will introduce".¹¹ Leng was not so resigned. He was

1 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 12.4.1867, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

2 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 14.4.1867, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

3 *Ibid.*

4 It was defeated by 310 votes to 280 and Hadfield informed Leader that "it was said there were 37 Liberals in the majority and 5 Conservatives in the minority". G. Hadfield to R. Leader, 14.4.1867, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

5 G. Hadfield to R. Leader, 4.5.1867, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

6 *S.I.*, 7.5.1867.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 *S.I.*, 18.5.1867.

10 *S.T.*, 18.5.1867.

11 *S.T.*, 20.7.1867.

highly critical of Disraeli's political manoeuvring and wrote: "last year the Conservatives declined to so much as wet their great toes in the sea of Reform; this year they are gasping and panting among the rollers after having been tumbled headlong in . . . Now they discover to their horror that if there is a revolutionary party they are that party of revolution".¹ Leader, who considered Disraeli to be "an alien in heart and a charlatan in character", had recognized as early as January, 1867, that "there is nothing too revolutionary for him to do if he could but find a party to follow him".² He believed that Disraeli had forfeited all trust and henceforth would be "of no more value than the stick of a discharged rocket".³ "Neither the Tories, whom he has tricked into the queer position of exulting in carrying household suffrage, nor the Liberals, who see taken at once and without due preparation a step that they would have divided over the next thirty years, will put their trust in him".⁴ As it emerged, the bill was far more radical than any measure the Liberals might have carried. Such a measure would probably have split the party and would have encountered Conservative opposition in the House of Lords.⁵ The Conservative party accepted it because it offered a tangible prize — the re-establishment of the Conservatives as a serious political alternative to the Liberals, which they had not been since 1846. Leader protested "the bill is a revolution which nobody has proposed, but into which Parliament has stumbled".⁶ Disraeli had allowed himself to be pushed by Radical pressure inside and outside Parliament into a position which offered potential political advantage. The vindication of his policy would come in 1874.

Several features of the struggle for reform in Sheffield must be stressed. Firstly, the popular agitation was conducted by the local branch of the Reform League without support from the middle class Liberal leadership and without official trade union backing. The most dynamic personality was Samuel Plimsoll who brought to the cause both his boundless energy, later to be employed in the crusade for improving the condition of seamen, and a pragmatic approach. Secondly, the popularity of Gladstone in 1866 and 1867 is noteworthy. Thirdly, there was the steady decline in the prestige and popularity of Roebuck through his attacks on Gladstone and his support for Disraeli which caused him to change his opinions on the rate-paying clauses when Disraeli accepted Hodgkinson's amendment. Nevertheless, he blithely told Fisher that he had been right all the time: "how completely my policy has succeeded! We have now a more liberal bill than has ever been proposed and that bill will be carried. I always said the Whigs never could or would carry any reform and this statement which I made in 1859 has proved true to the letter — what does Mr. Leader say now?"⁷ Finally, Roebuck incurred severe criticism in Sheffield by opposing Laing's scheme to make the six largest towns three member constituencies.⁸ He explained that his action arose out of a desire not to lose the Reform Bill. In any case, Laing's motion was defeated and Sheffield was not given a third seat. This may have been as a result of the adverse publicity which Sheffield received as a result of the trade outrages enquiry,⁹ but it was also due to a general indifference about the matter. Dunn told Hadfield "that so far as I know, there is not in Sheffield any strong feeling in favour of a 3rd. member".¹⁰ Hadfield's exhortation to "meet I beseech you and let Sheffield be Sheffield as our old fathers, if restored to us, would approve"¹¹ went unheeded. No doubt, Sheffield Liberals realized that because the electors could give only two votes the third seat would be won by the Conservatives, as happened in other towns until the introduction of the Birmingham caucus system. So it was hardly fair to blame Roebuck for opposing a measure they themselves were indifferent about. Lastly, the effect of the 1867 Reform Act was to treble the electorate of Sheffield:¹²

DISTRICT	PRESENT VOTERS	NEW VOTERS
Sheffield	3,748	13,000
Brightside	1,310	5,000
Attercliffe	331	1,200
Ecclesall	2,455	6,000 — 6,500
Nether Hallam	1,073	2,500
Upper Hallam	120	—
TOTAL	9,136	27,700 — 28,200

1 S.D.T., 18.5.1867.

2 S.I., 1.1.1867.

3 S.I., 25.5.1867.

4 *Ibid.*

5 It was carried through the Lords mainly because of the influence of Lord Derby.

6 S.I., 1.6.1867.

7 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 7.6.1867, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

8 R.E. Leader, *Life and Letters of J.A. Roebuck*, 1897, pp. 314 - 315.

9 Robert Stainton certainly thought that this was the reason. S.I., 9.7.1867.

10 T. Dunn to R. Leader, 19.6.1867, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

11 G. Hadfield to R. Leader, 20.6.1867, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

12 S.T., 25.7.1868. These figures are approximate and should be treated with caution. There are discrepancies with the figures given in S.L.R., 8.1.1866, for Brightside and Ecclesall. It is probable that the figures in S.L.R., 8.1.1866, are correct and a mistake in printing has occurred since the figures above do not add up to 9,136. Yet the table is useful for showing the approximate increase.

This was indeed a significant admission of the "democratic element" and its direct political consequences can be seen in the election of 1868.

CHAPTER X

THE ELECTION OF 1868

It is hard to imagine two men less alike than the members of Parliament for Sheffield. George Hadfield, who was now 81 years of age, was popular and well-respected. He had been a consistent Liberal all his life and had served the constituency quietly and diligently since 1852. His relations with Roebuck had never been completely smooth and lately he had been embarrassed by Roebuck's support for Disraeli and by his vindictive attacks upon the leader of the Liberal party. Unlike Roebuck, he was acceptable to sabbatarians and teetotallers. As early as 1857 William Fisher had complained of his narrowness on the Sunday question,¹ and in 1869 he was to vote for Sir Wilfrid Lawson's Temperance Bill.² Hadfield was a staunch Congregationalist who had given freely for chapel building. In October, 1866, the Congregational Union of England and Wales had held its yearly meeting in Sheffield and Hadfield had urged the building of five new chapels.³ In political matters he was strongly influenced by his close friend, H.E. Hoole, whose standing in the Liberal party in Sheffield was not high, but who was important because Hadfield's position was so strong. Though he did not like Hadfield very much, Roebuck recognized the advantages of the joint election committee. While the alliance remained, many potential opponents of Roebuck might allow their regard for Hadfield to outweigh their dislike of his colleague, and even more important Hadfield's wealth would be available to sustain Roebuck's candidature. Hadfield's manner was quiet and dignified, while Roebuck was fiery and unpredictable. Although he had won a great personal triumph in the election of 1865, many Liberals resented Roebuck's conduct in 1867 when he had consistently supported Disraeli and had attacked Gladstone far more bitterly than any Conservative.

At the same time many working men disliked Roebuck's conduct as a member of the Royal Commission investigating trade unions. They believed that far from conducting his enquiries impartially, he had acted like a prosecuting attorney in his examination of witnesses. The future of trade unions was a vital political issue to the newly enfranchised artisans and they were determined to be represented by men who would present their case fully and fairly in Parliament. Roebuck's conduct as a member of the Royal Commission suggested that he was hostile to trade unions, an impression which seemed to be confirmed by a lecture on "Capital and Labour" which he delivered at the request of the Chamber of Industry on 27 January, 1868.⁴ He dwelt upon the faults of Labour, but said nothing about Capital. The whole address was highly critical of trade unions and Roebuck even went so far as to compare the union rules limiting apprenticeship to infanticide. As a result a vote of thanks to him was defeated and Leader remarked "we can scarcely flatter ourselves that his teaching left behind it any salutary impression".⁵ In fact, the lecture did incalculable harm because it did not give a true impression of Roebuck's position on this vital question, in which he had a genuine interest. In March, 1868, for example, he told Fisher about a pamphlet he had read, explaining a means of reconciling interests in the coal mines, but which might be applied to industry in Sheffield.⁶ He wrote: "it would be to me a source of great and unmixed pleasure could I see some such means adopted to reconcile interests which are now too often considered hostile to each other".⁷ He repeatedly asserted that he was not opposed to the principle of trade unionism,⁸ and his examination of witnesses before the Royal Commission was probably no more than an over-zealous attempt to reach the truth. Yet there is no doubt that Roebuck had become unacceptable to the majority of working men in Sheffield. They looked upon his support for Disraeli and his attacks upon Gladstone as a betrayal of Liberalism, and considered him unsound on what was for them the most important question of the day, the future of trade unions. The *Sheffield Times* thought that "no one can have failed to observe that as Mr. Roebuck has become older he has also become wiser, if wisdom consists in discarding Radicalism and in becoming more Conservative in his tone and opinions".⁹

The opposition to Roebuck was greatly strengthened by the addition of a number of influential middle class Liberals and Nonconformist ministers who were finally alienated by Roebuck's attitude to the Irish Church policy of Gladstone. In March, 1868, Gladstone introduced a number of resolutions to disestablish and disendow the Established Church in Ireland. Between 3,000 and 4,000 people attended a

1 Quoted in R.E. Leader, *Life and Letters of J.A. Roebuck*, 1897, p. 266.

2 G. Hadfield, *The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield*, MS., S.C.L., p. 267.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 245.

4 *S.I.*, 28.1.1868.

5 *S.I.*, 1.2.1868.

6 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 15.3.1868, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Eg.*, *S.I.*, 14.7.1868.

9 *S.T.*, 1.2.1868.

meeting to support his policy, convened by the Sheffield branch of the Reform League on 26 March, 1868.¹ A prominent part in the meeting was taken by Nonconformist ministers, such as J.P. Gledstone, Robert Stainton and David Loxton who said that "the Irish Church was the foulest blot to be found upon the flag of any civilised nation". The Rev. William Sharman of Bradford, formerly of Sheffield, went further and spoke of the position of the Established Church in England. The resolution was supported by the Radicals, Hibberd and Nadin, and by Robert Leader whose presence was seen by Plimsoll as a sign that "the old Liberal party had got some life in them". Leader believed that on this vital question there could be no compromise: "there was no Tea-room and no Cave² for them on this occasion". The Rev. Giles Hester of Cemetery Road Baptist Church condemned the Irish Church as "a social grievance, a political blunder, a religious scandal, an encroachment on justice and an insult to Irish honour". Roebuck, however, did not share these sentiments. In January, 1868, he had told the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce that "when they talk about the wrongs of Ireland, what amazing nonsense they do talk. Are there any wrongs of Ireland? I want to know what they are?".³ These were indeed strange words for a man who had begun his political career as the champion of the Irish and who had once advised them to dissolve the Union since an English Parliament would never be sympathetic to their grievances.⁴ In the past he had denounced the injustice of the Irish Church, but now his opinions had changed. He told Fisher that he would support Gladstone's resolutions because "I oppose the Irish establishment as I would any other establishment",⁵ but having said this he proceeded to defend the existence of the Irish Church. He argued that it was not the grievance it was made out to be to the farmer or landlord and it ensured "a resident gentleman" in every parish. Even more important was its value as a "political engine" to preserve the Union by acting as a bond to keep the Irish Protestants loyal and "the Union is absolutely necessary for the well-being of Imperial England". Catholics and Dissenters would not benefit financially because disestablishment would mean the end of the Maynooth Grant and the *Regium Donum*. Finally, Roebuck maintained that Gladstone's resolutions were nothing but a bid for power: "though I shall vote for the resolutions I shall do so, hoping no good from such open flagrant selfishness, such utter disregard of political honour, such shameless flouting at decency and truth". He believed that the aim behind them was mere "party aggrandizement" and he declared "I have no faith in the leaders of this movement and I shall say so".⁶ No Conservative could have presented a stronger case for the maintenance of the Established Church in Ireland. Once again, Roebuck was impugning the motives of Gladstone, "the great leader of the people", as Stainton described him.⁷ The Liberals of Sheffield did not agree with Roebuck. At a meeting on 1 April, attended by 7,000 – 8,000 people, William Fisher⁸ moved the resolution against the Irish Church, and it was seconded by R.J. Gainsford, a Roman Catholic.⁹ Gainsford's words were almost prophetic: "any man who did not support Mr. Gladstone, any man who went into a cave of any sort, ought to be told by his constituents to bid good-bye to Parliament for the future". Thomas Dunn, an Anglican who thought that "the Established Church of Ireland was a great and manifest wrong", supported Gladstone's resolutions as "an acceptable message of peace to Ireland". So did the Rev. John Lettis Short, minister of Upper Chapel, who considered the matter so important that he had broken his rule of confining his activities to his spiritual duties. The proposition was carried unanimously and it was resolved that a petition be sent to Roebuck for presentation.¹⁰ On the following day, Roebuck told Fisher that he did not consider Gladstone's change of opinions¹¹ had been "honest", but his attitude was such as to make anyone who differed from him appear dishonest.¹² Since Oxford rejected him in 1865, he "has been guided by vindictive spite and to gratify that spite, and to satisfy his ambition, he recklessly endangers the very safety of the state".¹³ In the debate on Gladstone's resolutions in the House of Commons, Roebuck criticized Gladstone's policy as "unstatesmanlike" and, although he voted for them, no one was in any doubt that he disliked them.

His defence of the Irish Church and his attack on Gladstone provoked a speedy response. Leader, who had disapproved of his political conduct in the previous year and who could not have been insensitive to the growing body of opposition to Roebuck among the working classes, asked that a meeting of the joint

1 *S.I.*, 27.3.1868.

2 *I.e.* the "Cave" where the "Adullamites" took refuge in 1866.

3 *S.I.*, 25.1.1868.

4 Leader, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

5 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 30.3.1868, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *S.I.*, 27.3.1868.

8 He was a Unitarian, but his wife was a Roman Catholic.

9 *S.I.*, 2.4.1868.

10 *Ibid.*

11 He had started his political career as a High Tory.

12 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 2.4.1868, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

13 *Ibid.*

election committee be held to consider Roebuck's speech on the Irish Church. The prospect of this did not dismay Roebuck who did not think that he had lost the confidence of the electors.¹ As for Leader, "he views my conduct from a point which is not that of the electors, he has strong sectarian opinions which he believes I ought on all occasions to support". He thought his recent speech "well-timed, useful, true and honest" and he felt sure that "my constituents, putting themselves above the low and pitiful interests of party and sect, will believe that one who has been faithful so long, who has been so often right is not now to be degraded and disgraced because he has not yielded to the wretched impulses of a narrow minded bigotry".² He wrote privately to Fisher: "I can see in all that Leader does a strong vindictiveness. He never liked me because he saw that I was beyond, aye, above his influence and that I was not in any case sectarian".³ But Roebuck could hardly argue that Thomas Dunn, his other principal opponent, was influenced by sectarian motives because Dunn was a member of the Church of England. He had remarked upon Dunn's growing hostility towards him in the previous year and he now attributed the opposition of Dunn and Leader to political ambition: "he and Dunn fancy that they ought to rule and keep entirely to themselves the liberal members for Sheffield".⁴ In the case of Dunn, he even believed that it was because he had gone to other friends' houses, instead of Dunn's. He believed that Leader wanted to subject rather than reject him because if his successor were returned through money (and he was confident that "it will not be by acting upon the mental influences that any man will oust me from Sheffield"), Leader would be unable to dominate him. He predicted also that "two influences will be used against me that Leader and Dunn dread, first money, next the trades unions combinations".⁵ Roebuck also accused Leader of personal ambition: he "envies the position of Neddy Baines,⁶ and wants to represent the town he daily enlightens".⁷ He claimed that to this end Leader had been intriguing among "the leaders of the ultra democrats of the working men". There is no reason to suppose that Leader had any such ambition, but Roebuck wondered whether "any good would follow from an anonymous note to the *Telegraph* darkly hinting at the facts of the ambition of the *Independent* editor?".⁸ Roebuck realized who his opponents were and where his weaknesses lay: "that which on the present occasion gives my enemies power is my conduct respecting Trades Unions".⁹ To this was added the opposition of the teetotalers who "hate me because my efforts have been a stumbling block in their way". In March, 1868, Roebuck had once again angered sabbatarians and teetotalers by his vehement denunciation of the Sunday Liquor Traffic Bill.¹⁰ This core of opposition was immeasurably strengthened by the alienation of a number of influential middle class Liberals and Nonconformist ministers. They provided a leadership and Leader's opposition to Roebuck meant that he was now forced to rely on the Conservative *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*. This completed the identification of Roebuck with Conservatism. The opposition to him was an amalgam of middle and working class Liberals on the broad ground of Roebuck's betrayal of Liberalism and it was impossible to stigmatize it as class opposition, simply as working class opposition on account of Roebuck's alleged opposition to trade unions.

It is important to put the middle class opposition in proper perspective. The majority of Roebuck's election committee continued to support him, but his principal opponents, Leader and Dunn, were probably the two most influential men in the Liberal party in Sheffield. Dunn was highly esteemed as a consistent Liberal and Leader controlled not only the most important, but the only Liberal, newspaper in the town. Their opposition cannot be dismissed as sectarian bias. Leader certainly was a staunch Congregationalist, but Dunn was an Anglican. In any case, the Irish Church was an indefensible and unmitigated injustice, as Leng, himself an Anglican, admitted: "we are not concerned for the Irish Church. We have never defended it. Its disestablishment is simply a question of time and manner".¹¹ Even Disraeli, who now defended the Irish Church for political reasons to show that Conservatism stood for the maintenance of Church and State, had in the past opposed it. Other middle class Liberals, such as Fisher and Hoole, could hardly have approved of Roebuck's defence of the Irish Church and yet they continued to support him. This would suggest that Dunn and Leader were already dissatisfied with Roebuck and that his speech on Gladstone's resolutions finally alienated them. They had viewed his political conduct in the previous year with disapproval and they now decided that they could no longer support a man who they thought was nothing more than a Conservative and a supporter of Disraeli. This, rather than frustrated ambition or injured pride, was their reason for opposing Roebuck. On the Irish Church question, his conduct was nothing "less than bitter war against the Liberal party and the

1 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher and H.E. Hoole, 6.4.1868, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187

2 *Ibid.*

3 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 6.4.1868, Leader MSS., S.C.L. L.C. 187.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 Leader's second cousin, Edward Baines, M.P. for Leeds and owner-editor of the *Leeds Mercury*. The predominant figure in Leeds Liberalism.

7 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 8.4.1868, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

8 *Ibid.*

9 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 25.6.1868, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

10 *S.I.*, 19.3.1868. Fisher gave evidence to the committee on the bill against further restriction. J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 5.6.1868, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

11 *S.D.T.*, 19.3.1868.

Liberal chief".¹ Leader believed that "if the Liberal party in Sheffield are still Liberal, if they are not prepared to let Mr. Roebuck, with whip and spur, ride them right into the Tory ranks, and fall in line there behind Mr. Disraeli, they must unhorse him".² But Roebuck's position was strong. He had the support of the majority of the Roebuck - Hadfield election committee and, above all, he had the alliance with Hadfield. He told Hoole in June, 1868, that "I had found Mr. Hadfield and Mr. Hadfield's friends hitherto loyal (perhaps this was not quite accurate but let that pass) and that so long as I found that loyalty to continue, Mr. Hadfield would not find me wanting".³ While Roebuck and Hadfield stood together, the opposition to Roebuck was hampered because it had no quarrel with Hadfield. The opposition would be immeasurably strengthened if Hadfield could be detached from Roebuck because Hadfield's wealth and popularity could then be used against Roebuck instead of for him. In such circumstances Roebuck would have no chance. But to the end Hadfield refused to dissolve the alliance by which he considered himself bound. This made the task of unhorsing Roebuck much more difficult.

The working class Liberals took the initiative in bringing forward an alternative candidate. After some deliberation, their choice fell on the Nottingham manufacturer, A.J. Mundella.⁴ He was well known for the work he had done to settle industrial disputes by means of boards of arbitration and he had lectured on this subject in Sheffield in October, 1867.⁵ He was a supporter of trade unions and in politics a follower of Gladstone. So he was acceptable to the middle and the working class Liberals.⁶ On 15 June, 1868, he received a letter from William Dronfield, the honorary secretary of the working men of Sheffield, representing the Reform League and the Organized Trades.⁷ An interview with Dronfield and others followed and Mundella agreed to stand if he was acceptable to the Liberals of Sheffield. He stressed that if he did so it would be as the "working men's candidate" and he had no wish to endanger Hadfield's seat. Leader remarked that "the working class element is strong in the movement" to bring forward Mundella.⁸ However, it was not long before Mundella was sounding the middle class opponents of Roebuck. "I shall only be too glad to have the counsel and assistance of men like yourself and the old Liberal leaders," he told Leader.⁹ He had informed the committee of the Organized Trades and the Reform League that "nothing would induce me to risk the chance of a Tory slipping in, and that unless it was shown to me in the most clear and unmistakable manner that the majority of Liberals were favourable to my candidature I would have nothing to do with it". As if to allay any fears Leader might have, he emphasized that he would not endanger Hadfield's position nor would he have any "coquetting with Tories" and "no Broadheadism should be associated with my name".¹⁰ Samuel Plimsoll introduced Mundella at a meeting on 29 June.¹¹ Plimsoll, who was himself contesting Derby, said that Roebuck's attacks on Gladstone had been resented by the working classes who had decided to seek a representative whose opinions and feelings are more in harmony with their own". Mundella insisted that the working men had the right to return one member for Sheffield and they should return members pledged to support Gladstone: "supporting Mr. Gladstone means sincerity in legislation, earnestness, conscience, honour; it means everything identified with the future goodness and greatness of the country". He said that the Liberals had made the Reform Bill of 1867 what it was, but changes and improvements were still needed. He repudiated any idea of finality and thought the franchise would be extended further "when the mind of the British people is prepared by an improved system of education". He stressed the need for a State system of education, including technical education. He supported the ballot, the disestablishment of the Irish Church, the abolition of church rates, the removal of restrictions on Dissenters in the universities and a reduction in taxation. Although he supported the principle of trade unionism, he was against any form of outrage or unlawful coercion. By means of boards of arbitration, he believed that it was possible "for masters and workmen to work harmoniously together". Although he favoured temperance, he was not prepared to support a prohibitive Maine Law. So Mundella was acceptable to the working class Liberals who sought legal recognition of trade unions and who, like the middle class opponents of Roebuck, were looking for a representative who would be a consistent supporter

1 *S.I.*, 4.7.1868.

2 *Ibid.*

3 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 25.6.1868, Leader MSS., S.C.L. L.C. 187.

4 Anthony John Mundella, 1825 - 97: his father an Italian emigre, his mother a framework knitter in Leicester; attended Church of England school; at age of 11 apprenticed to a stockinger; 1848 a partner in a Nottingham firm, Hine and Mundella, a model factory (9 hr. day), progressive and benevolent; 1856 a Councillor in Nottingham; vice-chairman of local Liberal party; prominent in Volunteer Movement; 1860 established an Arbitration Board to settle strike among framework knitters and in 1868 he arbitrated in South Lancashire miners' strike; M.P. for Sheffield 1868 - 97; 1880 - 85 Vice President of the Council; 1886, 1892 - 94 President of the Board of Trade. See W.H.G. Armytage, *A.J. Mundella, 1825 - 97: the Liberal background to the Labour movement*, 1951.

5 *S.L.R.*, 21.10.1867. In July, 1867, the Chamber of Industry and Board of Arbitration was formed in Sheffield. Michael Beal was president and George Fox secretary. *S.L.R.*, 15.7.1867.

6 In this respect he was a better choice than Ernest Jones who was also considered by the working class Liberals.

7 Mundella's own account. *S.I.*, 30.6.1868.

8 *S.I.*, 25.6.1868.

9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 27.6.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *S.I.*, 30.6.1868.

of Gladstone, whom they all saw as the great hope for the future. Josiah Downing, a butcher of Shalesmoor, put the motion in support of Mundella and it was seconded by William Dronfield who said that "he and others with whom he was associated had not formerly considered it within their province to take any great interest in political matters; but the time was now come when, as citizens and as working men, they considered they were bound to take their share in the selection of a candidate and to work to secure his return". The motion was carried unanimously, as was a motion of Joseph Nadin and the Rev. Robert Stainton to co-operate with Hadfield's committee to secure the return of Hadfield and Mundella.¹

The appearance of Mundella prompted a meeting of the Roebuck — Hadfield election committee on 30 June.² Ald. Fisher was in the chair and about sixty people attended. Roebuck tried to defend himself against the four principal accusations which had been levelled against him. He had supported Russell's ministry and then the Tory Reform Bill because he considered it a good measure. As for his conduct towards Gladstone, he opposed the principle of his proposals about the Irish Church because the Irish people would not benefit financially from them. "I do not have any objection to work with Mr. Gladstone, but I do not see anything so wonderful in Mr. Gladstone's endeavours". He denied that he had acted as a prosecuting attorney in the examination of witnesses before the Trade Union Commission, and he had opposed the Sunday Closing Bill because he believed that restriction had gone far enough. Then Thomas Dunn criticized Roebuck's political conduct since 1859: "he should be concealing the fact if he were not to say that he did not look at the acts of Mr. Roebuck of late years with the confidence with which he regarded them up to 1858". Dunn mentioned his vote for Lord Derby in 1859, his Austrian speech, his visit to "that man in France", his view of the American Civil War, his conduct towards Gladstone, especially over the Irish Church question, and his hostile examination of witnesses before the Trade Union Commission. Dunn underlined the esteem in which Gladstone was held when he said: "to the perfect confidence of the Liberal party he believed William Gladstone had attained in such a measure as no other statesman of the day had attained". Roebuck's reply was that he was not, nor would he ever be, a party man and he insisted that Gladstone's was "not a statesman-like course", for "don't . . . consider the Irish Church all blackness. There are bright spots upon it". At the conclusion of the meeting, Ald. Fisher, Mark Firth³ and William Smith declared their support for Roebuck; letters had been read from the former Democrats, Ald. Saunders and Ald. Crowther,⁴ in support of Roebuck and Hadfield, and Roebuck also received the backing of John Wilson, a grinder by trade but a vehement opponent of trade unionism.⁵ Mundella thought that "under the guise of great candour and an irrepressible desire to speak the truth, he deals with all the questions affecting himself with the greatest disingenuousness."⁶ Hadfield's position was somewhat delicate, Mundella thought, but he was sure that "you will, with them [Dunn and J.H. Barber], indicate the course which is right and honest". But whatever happened, "one thing is quite plain, — there is little hope, with the attitude Mr. Roebuck assumes, of reconciling Masters and Workmen in Sheffield".⁷

The alliance between Roebuck and Hadfield was by no means secure. On 3 July, Roebuck was telling Fisher about a communication he had received from Hadfield as a result of which "with any feeling of regard to my own dignity my belief is that I can never form any alliance with Mr. Hadfield after this".⁸ He felt "relieved of an incubus in being separated from Hadfield". Roebuck realized the importance of the alliance with Hadfield and he probably resented the strength of his colleague's position, upon which his own chances of re-election so much depended. Hadfield's rather moralistic manner did not suit him and "to see Hoole is as good as a comedy".⁹ However, it seems that a misunderstanding had occurred for Hoole hastened to assure Roebuck that Hadfield "was still my warm friend and hoped that our alliance would continue — that he knew nothing of Mr. Mundella and that he did not wish for any other colleague than myself."¹⁰ But Roebuck certainly formed the impression that Hoole was in favour of maintaining the alliance because to do otherwise might endanger Hadfield's health which was poor as a result of the recent death of his wife.¹¹ Roebuck was almost certainly over-estimating the strength of his own position; he needed Hadfield more than Hadfield needed him. Nor did he fully realize how unpopular he was with Liberals in the House of Commons. On 6 July, he told Fisher: "I find everybody here shocked at the idea of opposition to me".¹² He must have been speaking to Tories because this was certainly not the opinion which Mundella formed from consulting

1 *Ibid.*

2 *S.I.*, 1.7.1868.

3 Mark Firth, 1819 - 80: steel manufacturer — from humble beginnings, with his father and brother, built up firm of Thomas Firth & Sons; served in Town Council 1855 - 58, 1874 - 80; 1875 Mayor; generous benefactor — gave Firth Park, Almshouses and Firth College; member of the Methodist New Connexion.

4 William Crowther: grocer; represented St. George's 1849 - 55 and 1856 - 71.

5 *S.I.*, 1.7.1868.

6 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 1.7.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

7 *Ibid.*

8 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 3.7.1868, Leader MSS., S.C.L. L.C. 187.

9 *Ibid.*

10 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 4.7.1868, Leader MSS., S.C.L. L.C. 187.

11 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 6.7.1868, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

12 *Ibid.*

the leading members of the Liberal party. "One and all", he told Leader, "without a single exception, expressed their great satisfaction at the course Sheffield was taking, and urged upon me, in the most forcible manner, not to desert the Liberals who were opposed to Mr. Roebuck, but to give Sheffield the opportunity of pronouncing in favour of consistent Liberalism".¹ A number of prominent Liberals had "declared they would rather see half a dozen Tories returned than Roebuck", and all assured him that, if returned, Roebuck would not be "anything but a source of weakness, and the only parties who have expressed any desire for his return are members who sit on the Government side of the House".² Men³ who sat with Roebuck on the Trade Union Commission said that he "will be the greatest obstacle to a proper solution of the Capital and Labour question".⁴ At the same time, there was anxiety about Hadfield's position and Glyn, one of the Liberal Whips, was anxious that Hadfield should sever his connection with Roebuck.⁵ Mundella believed that "Hoole is at the bottom of it. I gathered when I was last in town that Mr. Hoole's influence with Mr. Hadfield would be used as far as possible for Mr. Roebuck".⁶ Not only might such identification with the unpopular Roebuck endanger his seat, but it would make the task of ousting Roebuck doubly difficult. Mundella told Leader plainly: "I am not at all anxious for a contest with Mr. Roebuck, backed by the Tories and Victuallers and strengthened by Mr. Hadfield's purse".⁷ Yet Mundella was receiving encouragement from various quarters. Two Nottingham magistrates, Arthur Wells and W. Vickers, who had many friends in Sheffield, had offered to go and support his candidature.⁸ He had spoken to Mark Firth's brother-in-law: "he is a good Liberal but regards his brother's politics as Tory", which helps to explain Mark Firth's support for Roebuck. Mundella also asked Leader "would Samuel Morley's influence be of any service hereafter? If so, I am sure he would do anything he could to serve me".⁹

On the morning of 13 July, a meeting of the Roebuck - Hadfield committee was held.¹⁰ The committee refused to separate the candidates and Leader reported that "those of us who were in the minority made our bow and retired from the meeting". Leader and Dunn were now in open opposition to Roebuck whom Leader described as "the pet of the Tories" and the "coadjutor" of Disraeli.¹¹ Later in the day Roebuck and Hadfield addressed a large meeting in Paradise Square.¹² Amid confusion and interruptions, Hoole and Firth put a resolution in favour of the joint candidature of Roebuck and Hadfield. To counter this, a Mr. Mellers moved an amendment for a separate vote on the two members, because, despite Roebuck's insistence that he was a supporter of trade unions, "I have found him opposing the best wishes and interests of the working men." Josiah Downing said "I have found him on many occasions the dead enemy to liberty and to progress" and he mentioned his opposition to Kossuth, Garibaldi and the cause of liberty in Poland. Downing believed that his attitude to the Water Company Bill and his lecture on Capital and Labour showed that "this worthy representative of ours has always latterly studied the interest, not of the working men, but the interest of the capitalists". William Dronfield thought that Roebuck had taken "a very unfair course upon the Royal Commission". Leader spoke of Roebuck's opposition to Gladstone: "there never was a man so thoroughly radical and liberal at the head of the politics of this country as is Mr. Gladstone", and Roebuck, "the great orator of the Tory party", was a thorn in his side. There is no doubt that the majority of the meeting was hostile to Roebuck. John Wilson and Ald. Saunders, who attempted to speak on his behalf, were shouted down and the amendment was carried. But there was confusion and misunderstanding about the voting on a Leader - Dronfield motion against Roebuck. The Mayor declared that the vote was for Roebuck but there is no doubt that this was incorrect and the majority was in fact against him. The meeting had shown quite clearly that it did not endorse the decision of the Roebuck - Hadfield election committee to proceed with a joint candidature, though it gave unanimous support to Hadfield himself.¹³

Since the working class Liberals were chiefly antagonized by Roebuck's attitude to the labour question, the opposition to him could easily assume the form of a "class" opposition. This Mundella was anxious to avoid. He told Leader: "I cannot prosecute this contest if I am to be left entirely in the hands of certain parties . . . I will not be brought out solely under the auspices of the 'Trades Unions' ".¹⁴ He hoped that

1 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 5.7.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Probably a reference to Frederic Harrison and Thomas Hughes.

4 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 5.7.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 *Ibid.*

6 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 13.7.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

7 *Ibid.*

8 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 10.7.1868, Mundella MSS. S.U.L.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *S.I.*, 14.7.1868.

11 *S.I.*, 13.7.1868.

12 *S.I.*, 14.7.1868.

13 *Ibid.*

14 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 19.7.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

Dunn, Leader, Askham¹ and "as many as possible of that type" would support him at the meeting on the following day to disprove the Tory charge that "it is Broadheadism that is opposed to Mr. Roebuck, that Sheffield cares nothing about Imperial questions such as Reform, the Irish Church, etc., only about the right of Trade Unions to do wrong" and to show clearly that the opposition was due to "the inconstancy of Mr. Roebuck".² The main issue was to be Roebuck's betrayal of Liberal principles, not his alleged opposition to trade unions. Leader explained: "Mr. Mundella was first invited to stand by the representatives of the trades unions, and his candidature has been warmly accepted by those of the old Liberal party who are dissatisfied with the conduct of Mr. Roebuck in respect to the Irish Church, his opposition to Mr. Gladstone and on other matters".³ At the meeting on 20 July, which Dunn said was the largest held in Paradise Square since Brougham came to Sheffield in 1830, Mundella stressed how much they owed to Gladstone and Bright and asked "is it better that I should do homage to the patriots of my country, or that I should coquette with English Tories, Austrian despotism, French imperialism and American slavery?"⁴ The resolution to adopt Mundella was put by John Askham who said that they needed to "find a man who shall not be a 'tear 'em' in the midst of us, but a 'heal 'em'. We have had 'Tear 'em' long enough; we want somebody who, like Mr. Mundella, will heal the breach in our social community". This underlines how important the capital and labour question was in the election of 1868 not only to the working classes, but also to middle class Liberals such as Askham and Dunn. Dunn, a colliery owner, supported Mundella "because however much we employers of labour may endeavour to shut our eyes to the fact, the time is coming when what I conceive to be a great national question, the relations between employers and employed, will in all seriousness have to be gone into, and with a full determination to do justice to each".⁵ There was a general feeling that Mundella was the kind of man who could help to settle this vexed question. John Stuart Mill had told him that "my practical acquaintance with the social questions I have interested myself in is rated highly, (I fear too highly), by Mr. Gladstone and other earnest friends of progress" and Glyn, the Liberal Whip, said that "Mr. Gladstone was much pleased and very desirous for my success".⁶

Every effort was made to detach Hadfield from Roebuck. At the meeting on 20 July, a resolution regretting Hadfield's alliance with Roebuck was carried unanimously.⁷ J. Abel Smith⁸ had tried to persuade Hadfield to sever his connection with Roebuck, but the trouble was, in Mundella's opinion, that "poor Mr. Hadfield has been under real pressure from Mr. Hoole and gentlemen of his class and his way of thinking".⁹ On 30 July, Hadfield announced that he had no intention of severing his connection with Roebuck.¹⁰ Mundella agreed with Dunn that "if his name was coupled with mine by our Committee and Mr. Hoole should induce him to repudiate the connection, no influence we might use would induce the warmest part of our supporters to give their votes to Mr. Hadfield. We must go on, I think, in avowed opposition to Mr. Roebuck, and, later on, Mr. Hadfield may see the necessity of changing his ally".¹¹ In fact, throughout the contest, Hadfield consistently stood by his colleague.

By this time, one of Roebuck's most powerful allies in Sheffield was W.C. Leng, editor of the Conservative *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*. From being a bitter opponent of Roebuck in 1865, Leng now spoke of him as "a man of unimpeachable honour, high spirit and brilliant courage."¹² Roebuck had indeed become the "pet" of the Tories. But the *Telegraph* did not stop at support for Roebuck; it conducted a campaign of slanderous abuse against Mundella. He was vilified as a foreigner and a bad employer and emissaries were used to prejudice the Sheffield workmen against him.¹³ Mundella, however, was confident that "when I again appear before the electors I shall have no difficulty in breaking down such a miserable web of falsehood and sophistry as they have woven".¹⁴ His own workmen in Nottingham were so angered by the articles in the *Telegraph* that they held a meeting "for the purpose of denouncing these attacks and of publicly declaring them to be without foundation".¹⁵ At a meeting on 24 August, William Dronfield read a letter from

1 John Askham: cutlery manufacturer.

2 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 19.7.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

3 *S.I.*, 21.7.1868.

4 *Ibid.*

5 On the occasion of Mundella's lecture on "Education". *S.I.*, 22.9.1868.

6 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 24.7.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

7 *S.I.*, 21.7.1868.

8 Leeman had told Mundella that Abel Smith's position as trustee for the Duke of Norfolk gave him great influence in Sheffield. Mundella asked: "Can this be so? I am the last man to ask or receive any ducal favours, and I thought Sheffield free from territorial influence". A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 24.7.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *S.I.*, 31.7.1868.

11 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 21.8.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

12 *S.D.T.*, 25.8.1868.

13 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 7.8.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

14 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 10.8.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

15 J.S. Gilpin to R. Leader, 11.8.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

the Organized Trades of Nottingham which stated: "we are sure no employer can stand higher in the estimation of workmen than does Mr. Mundella".¹ The Nottingham manufacturers wrote: "we unhesitatingly say that the insinuations which have been made respecting Mr. Mundella's relations towards his employees are the reverse of the truth".² It was well known that Mundella was a model employer and the campaign of calumny utterly failed in its object to discredit him. This most scurrilous campaign in the history of Sheffield did Roebuck no good at all. It proved that Leng was prepared to go to any lengths to break the hold of the Liberal party on the representation of Sheffield.³ Mundella disposed of the accusations before a large audience in Paradise Square on 24 August, and he promised "if I go to Parliament, I shall not keep one set of opinions for the hustings and another for the House of Commons".⁴ Robert Stainton, another target for Leng's invective, moved a resolution expressing "entire confidence in Mr. Mundella's political and personal character", which was carried with only one dissident, a drunken Nottingham "lamb",⁵ who had been sent to disrupt the meeting, but instead had been a source of great amusement.⁶ Mundella believed that "Roebuck's spirit seems to have infected his friends, — Leng, Wilson, Dodworth⁷ *et hoc genus omnes*, all breathe his bitter personal malice. They seem to have no politics".⁸ But Mundella had little to fear from this kind of campaign.

Mundella enjoyed the support of most trade unionists in Sheffield. On 3 September, a meeting of the Organized Trades resolved to support him.⁹ Robert Stainton chaired a meeting of builders on 20 October, which was attended by two of the national trade union leaders, Applegarth and Connolly, who had clashed with Roebuck during the hearings of the Royal Commission and who remarked that "Mr. Roebuck reminded him of nothing so much as a vinegar cruet whenever he spoke".¹⁰ With only one dissident, the meeting pledged itself to support Mundella and Hadfield. In addition, Mundella's candidature had the full backing of the large, London - based amalgamated unions and the Reform League. In October, 1868, George Howell, secretary of the Reform League, noted: "At Sheffield our delegates¹¹ have done what the local agents could not do, viz. unite the numerous trades into one committee for electoral purposes".¹² The importance of the Reform League contribution to the election of 1868 was not widely realized at the time, but Leng was in no doubt that "Mr. Roebuck has not had to fight Mr. Mundella only. He has had to fight a great organisation, whose agitators and whose funds were drawn from every part of the kingdom".¹³ Apart from its agents, the Reform League sent speakers such as Lloyd Jones, former Chartist, and Robert Applegarth, who spoke at a working men's meeting chaired by Leader on 13 November.¹⁴ The Reform League was probably responsible also for inviting Goldwin Smith to lecture on "The Duties of Electors in the Coming Struggle" on 14 October.¹⁵ Sheffield was on Howell's list of special constituencies, to which special attention had to be devoted, because on the outcome of such contests the future of trade unions and the labour movement depended.

It appears that Mundella could also count on the support of the shopkeepers. On 27 August, he told Leader that he had been assured that "the principal shopkeepers in Sheffield were with us", including two of the largest shops in the town, Cockaynes and Goode and Sons.¹⁶ Their support was important because, with a little effort, a number of them might be persuaded to join the Committee and "once there, they are not likely to be influenced by the employers". Thus "a good stroke of policy might be effected and the Union element on the Committee be considerably diluted".¹⁷ The union element was also diluted by the sabbatarians and teetotallers who were old opponents of Roebuck. Even during this campaign he had offended the sabbatarians by his remarks on the use of the Sabbath.¹⁸ On 10 September, at a meeting

1 *S.I.*, 25.8.1868. William Smith, corresponding secretary of the Nottingham branch of the Reform League, considered that the working men of Nottingham were unanimous in their support for Mundella. Wm. Smith to H.J. Wilson, 26.7.1868, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6009.A.

2 Nottingham Manufacturers to Editor of *Sheffield Independent*, 21.8.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

3 "Personality rather than policy seemed to be the basis on which an anti-Liberal party could be organized in Sheffield". K.G. March, *The Life and Career of Sir William Christopher Leng 1825 - 1902*, Sheffield M.A. Thesis, 1966, p.62.

4 *S.I.*, 25.8.1868.

5 A "lamb" was a supporter of Sir Robert Clifton, Mundella's political opponent in Nottingham, which was notorious for electoral violence and corruption.

6 *S.I.*, 25.8.1868.

7 James Dodworth, 1820 - 76: palette knife maker.

8 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 6.9.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

9 *S.L.R.*, 3.9.1868.

10 *S.I.*, 21.10.1868.

11 The agents were Hales and Mottershead.

12 Quoted in R. Harrison, *Before the Socialists*, 1965, p. 167.

13 *S.D.T.*, 18.11.1868.

14 *S.I.*, 14.11.1868.

15 *S.I.*, 15.10.1868.

16 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 27.8.1868, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *S.I.*, 27.10.1868.

under the chairmanship of Abraham Sharman,¹ the temperance societies of Sheffield resolved to support Hadfield and Mundella.² W.J. Clegg, a prominent teetotaler, was one of the legal agents of the Mundella Committee.

The depth of the Liberal split prompted Samuel Harrison to write: "The position is more hopeful than it has been for a long time past. The Liberal or Radical party is split up beyond recovery . . . The opportunity is thus favourable for the election of candidates who will support the constitution of the country and the supremacy of the Queen".³ This meant the maintenance of the Church - State connection both in England and Ireland. In May, 1868, J.G.A. Creswick chaired a meeting to support the Irish Church.⁴ The language used at this meeting was extremely severe. T.H. Thompson of Dublin declared that "a dead level of equality was impossible - it could never be that Protestant truth and Popish ignorance, superstition and falsehood should be on a level". A few weeks later, the Protestant Defence League was formed in Sheffield,⁵ with the avowed object of preserving the Established Church in Ireland.⁶ It was supported not only by Anglicans, such as Dr. Sale, the Vicar of Sheffield, but also by Dissenters, such as the Rev. Brewin Grant⁷ and John Chapman.⁸ Brewin Grant firmly believed that "there was a union between the English Liberation Society and the Romish priests",⁹ while Chapman, secretary of the Sheffield branch of the Protestant Defence League, was prepared to "sacrifice his denominational principles and help to fight the battles of Protestantism".¹⁰ Leader dismissed the League as nothing but a Tory clique.¹¹ Clearly the Tories were going to fight the election on the twin slogans, "Church and State" and "No Popery".¹² Their candidate was E. Plumer Price, a barrister, who entered the contest on 26 September.¹³ Price said that he would support the legalized protection of trade union funds and the legal enforcement of the payment of subscriptions in arrears.¹⁴ He was also in favour of compulsory education.¹⁵ But the basis of his candidature was the maintenance of the Established Church in Ireland. In the Southern Division of the West Riding, Milton and Beaumont contested the election on a Gladstonian Liberal platform,¹⁶ but the Conservative candidates, Stanhope and Starkey,¹⁷ supported the Irish Church, while insisting that "the Conservatives were really the friends of progress".¹⁸

Samuel Harrison, editor of the *Sheffield Times* and a prominent member of the Protestant Defence League, wrote in September, 1868: "No doubt many of the supporters of the Protestant candidate will give their other vote to Mr. Roebuck, and we cannot complain of such a course being adopted. It will be no small triumph if even one constitutional candidate be returned for a borough which has hitherto been such a stronghold of Radicalism".¹⁹ Shortly before the election, he advised Conservatives in Sheffield to give their second vote to Roebuck,²⁰ an indication that Harrison regarded Roebuck as a Tory in everything but name. W.C. Leng did not emphasize the Church - State issue nor did he attempt to defend the Irish Church. He admired Roebuck's strong line on the trade union question. Roebuck also had the support of the main employers in Sheffield who were either Tories or had strong Tory leanings. To them Roebuck was sound on the capital and labour question, while Mundella appeared as the trade union candidate. Because Roebuck enjoyed the support of the employers, it was decided that he should canvass the workmen in the works. On 13 October, he addressed Mark Firth's workmen at the Norfolk Works, but met with total failure as the show of hands was for Mundella.²¹ Ironically, the former Democrat, Henry Wostenholm, found himself alone in trying to raise three cheers for Roebuck. Roebuck also addressed meetings at the Sheaf Works, (F.T. Mappin), the Washington Works (George Wostenholm) and the Cyclops workers (Charles Cammell) in the Cutlers' Hall, where an attempt was made to pack the meeting and when that failed the gas was cut off and the lights

1 Abraham Sharman, 1802 - 85: grocer and draper; expelled from Wesleyans for his reform sympathies and became a leading member of Hanover Street U.M. Free Church.

2 *S.I.*, 12.9.1868.

3 *S.T.*, 18.7.1868.

4 *S.I.*, 29.5.1868.

5 *S.I.*, 20.6.1868.

6 *S.I.*, 1.10.1868.

7 Brewin Grant, 1821 - 92: educated at Highbury College and University of Glasgow; debated on several occasions with the atheist Charles Bradlaugh; 1858 minister of Cemetery Road Congregational Chapel; 1868 struck off list of Congregational ministers because of his opposition to Gladstone's Irish Church policy; 1870 joined Church of England; 1875 appointed to St. Paul's, Bethnal Green.

8 *S.I.*, 1.10.1868.

9 *S.I.*, 29.5.1868.

10 *S.I.*, 1.10.1868.

11 *S.I.*, 20.6.1868.

12 This was still a live issue. F.J.S. Foljambe said that all Dissenters "must rally round the evangelical party in the Church; and save us from Priestly dominion". F.J.S. Foljambe to R. Leader, 25.5.1867, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187

13 *S.I.*, 26.9.1868.

14 *S.I.*, 1.10.1868.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *S.I.*, 17.11.1868.

17 L.R. Starkey had trade connections in Huddersfield.

18 *S.I.*, 4.11.1868.

19 *S.T.*, 19.9.1868.

20 *S.T.*, 31.10.1868.

21 *S.I.*, 14.10.1868.

went out.¹ The meeting of Rodgers' workmen was probably also packed,² and at Vickers' Works Roebuck suffered another defeat.³ Leader regarded the canvass as an attempt to exert "undue influence" and he declared "Mr. Roebuck's attempt to get hold of the men through the masters has proved as complete a failure as such a device deserved to be".⁴ The works' canvass is important because it showed that the leading employers in Sheffield backed Roebuck and were therefore Tories or at least very lukewarm Liberals. This would seem to justify Leng's assertion that Roebuck was supported by "nearly every man of social standing and commercial weight within this town of Sheffield".⁵ From the reception which Roebuck received it was clear that the workmen were overwhelmingly against him and were ready to say so in the presence of their employers. It also revealed how weak Roebuck's position was when his supporters had to resort to packing meetings and turning out the lights.

Roebuck could count on the backing of the Drink trade. On 12 November, a meeting of the Sheffield Licensed Victuallers, chaired by Robert Younge, declared its overwhelming support for Roebuck and Price.⁶ Several days later, there occurred what Leader described as "one of the most disreputable meetings ever held in Sheffield".⁷ This was a meeting of about 100 wine and beersellers, which was attended by William Broadhead, the instigator of the Sheffield outrages and the former landlord of the Royal George, Carver Street. H.E. Hoole tried to persuade the meeting to support Hadfield, which was rather a forlorn hope in view of Hadfield's sympathy for the activities of the teetotallers. J. Bland of the Brunswick Hotel, Old Haymarket, spoke in support of Roebuck and Price. The supporters of Mundella and Hadfield were shouted down and the meeting resolved to support Roebuck and Price in the forthcoming election.⁸ Indeed, according to the *Sheffield Times*, the Licensed Victuallers subscribed £250 towards Price's election expenses,⁹ and no doubt their contribution to Roebuck's campaign was equally generous.

Mundella did not have the support of all trade unionists in Sheffield. On 5 November, a meeting of trade union "delegates" was held at the Grapes Inn, Trippet Lane.¹⁰ It appears that a series of questions had been put to the four candidates respecting the legal enforcement of the payment of union subscriptions in arrears. It is remarkable that trade unionists were thinking about this at a time when trade unions themselves were not recognized before the law. At the meeting William Broadhead spoke in support of Price who had furnished the most satisfactory reply. Mundella had refused to give a written endorsement of his views on this question and Broadhead considered that Mundella had insulted him during the campaign. He said that if he gave a second vote it would be to Roebuck. This is most important because it showed that some trade unionists did not regard Roebuck as an enemy of trade unions. Broadhead, who more than anyone else had suffered from the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, clearly had no grudge against Roebuck nor does he appear to have shared the view, widely prevalent among working men, that Roebuck had not acted impartially. He must have believed that Roebuck, although he had bitterly denounced the abuses of trade unions, would not stand in the way of legal recognition and the legal enforcement of the payment of subscriptions in arrears. It might be suggested that Broadhead's support for Price and Roebuck is evidence of Tory sympathies among a section of the working men. But this explanation is inadequate because Broadhead himself stated that "he did not approve of trades' unions mixing up in politics".¹¹ The question is why did Broadhead and the majority of the meeting consider that Price and Roebuck would represent their interests better than Mundella? Broadhead put it bluntly: "I am afraid that Mr. Mundella would be more the representative of the London trades than that of the Sheffield trades". Mitchell of the edgetool forgers, who chaired the meeting, "charged the officers of the organised trades with attempting to sell the interests of the local trades to the national trades".¹² This is evidence of a real tension within the trade union movement between the large, London-based highly organized amalgamated unions and the small local craft unions, such as those in the light trades in Sheffield. Some workmen were aware of this, but their importance must not be overestimated. According to the *Sheffield Independent*, the meeting of 5 November was attended by about 50 "delegates" most of whom were probably self-elected.¹³ It is likely that only a very small group of workmen shared Broadhead's views. A saw-handle maker wrote in a letter to the *Independent* that "I am glad to inform you, on good

1 S.I., 17.10.1868.

2 S.I., 20.10.1868.

3 S.I., 21.10.1868.

4 *Ibid.*

5 S.D.T., 25.8.1868.

6 300 out of c.600 Licensed Victuallers attended. S.I., 13.11.1868.

7 S.I., 16.11.1868.

8 *Ibid.*

9 S.T., 14.11.1868.

10 S.I., 6.11.1868.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 S.I., 10.11.1868.

authority, that Mr. Mundella has the hearty support of $\frac{3}{4}$ of our trade".¹ Such evidence must be treated with caution, but this would suggest that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the saw handle makers did not support Mundella, not an insignificant minority, though it cannot be assumed that they were all supporters of Price and Roebuck. Moreover, if indeed they were delegates, Broadhead and Mitchell represented a section at least of two of the most powerful of the local unions, the saw grinders and the edgetool forgers,² which would be most likely to resent the domination of the labour movement by the amalgamated unions. Lack of evidence makes firm conclusions impossible, but the opposition to Mundella, though no doubt confined to a small group of workmen in the staple trades, cannot be dismissed as completely unimportant. But Broadhead's support could not have strengthened Roebuck's position because in the public mind it linked Roebuck with disreputable unionism. Leader wrote: "we have Broadheadism, Toryism, hostility to everything Liberal, united to support Roebuck and Price".³ Roebuck was now identified with Broadheadism, which all respectable trade unionists shunned, and with Toryism, which could always be relied upon to strengthen the determination of the Liberals. Mundella's canvass was carried out entirely by volunteers.⁴

Voting took place on 17 November, 1868, and the result was a victory for Hadfield and Mundella.⁵ The following summary was compiled from the Check Clerk's List by W.J. Clegg:⁶

WARDS	RH	RP	RM	HM	HP	MP	R	H	M	P	Total Polled	Total Voters
St. Peter's	418	500	10	820	6	22	155	11	98	32	2072	2942
St. George's	470	622	12	1397	19	49	160	6	82	34	2851	3765
St. Philip's	326	326	10	948	4	20	121	7	99	14	1875	2478
Park	382	334	6	1194	8	25	165	12	79	15	2220	3050
Ecclesall	827	1306	11	2203	22	74	260	17	139	87	4946	6484
Brightside	431	503	9	1907	14	36	190	15	144	28	3277	4827
Attercliffe	162	276	5	888	1	33	44	21	78	12	1520	2204
Nether Hallam	448	623	5	1373	12	36	141	7	63	27	2735	3936
Heeley District	70	79	2	201	1	12	20	4	7	7	403	
Upper Hallam	51	55	0	65	0	6	13	3	8	5	206	269
TOTAL	3585	4624	70	10996	87	313	1269	103	797	261	22105	29955

Hadfield topped the poll by 2,500 votes, a remarkable tribute to his personal popularity since he had taken no part in the election. Of the 14,793 votes he received, 10,996 were split with Mundella. Leader thought that "the loyalty of Mr. Mundella and the true Liberals has saved Mr. Hadfield from the consequences of the most flagrant mistake that ever a candidate made".⁷ It is clear that the bulk of Liberal voters voted for Hadfield and Mundella, rather than Hadfield and Roebuck, since the number of split votes for Hadfield and Roebuck was 3,585 against 10,996 for Hadfield and Mundella. Also, in the working class districts, such as the Park, Brightside, Attercliffe and Nether Hallam, the voting was heavily in favour of Hadfield and Mundella. The Conservatives threw all their weight behind Roebuck. Of the 9,571 votes he received, 5,893 were either plumpers or splits with Price who received only 261 plumpers. Leader declared: "hopeless of an honest success they have tried cajolery, money, the pressure of employers, Broadheadism and yet have miserably failed".⁸ Roebuck was defeated by almost 3,000 votes. The borough election had a definite effect on the voting in the Sheffield district of the South West Riding election. The following table, drawn up by R.J. Gainsford, gives the returns at five o'clock on polling day.⁹

1 *Ibid.*

2 S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, Liverpool, 1959, p.143.

3 *S.J.*, 14.11.1868.

4 *S.J.*, 10.10.1868.

5 The voting was:

Hadfield	14,793
Mundella	12,212
Roebuck	9,571
Price	5,272

6 *S.J.*, 27.11.1868. There are slight discrepancies with the official totals given above, but the table is still very useful.

7 *S.J.*, 18.11.1868.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *S.J.*, 26.11.1868. These figures are not exact. The official return was:

Milton	8,110
Beaumont	7,943
Stanhope	7,935
Starkey	7,621

DISTRICT	MILTON	BEAUMONT	STANHOPE	STARKEY	RESULT
Barnsley	746	705	686	581	L
Dewsbury	1128	1138	794	804	L
Dobcross	416	417	408	407	L
Doncaster	632	605	672	632	SPLIT
Holmfirth	529	519	384	380	L
Huddersfield	1137	1163	979	1007	L
Penistone	100	96	302	279	C
Rotherham	872	808	386	332	L
Scisset	348	357	207	189	L
Sheffield	998	968	1236	1191	C
Thorne	183	181	362	351	C
Wakefield	718	713	1231	1213	C
Wath	315	283	283	225	SPLIT
TOTAL	8122	7953	7930	7591	-

In the Sheffield district, where the Liberals had a majority of 429 in 1865, the Conservatives won by a majority of 193. The split among the Liberals at Sheffield led to a lack of co-operation and therefore inadequate preparations for the county election.¹ Also the Conservative majority may have been the product of a reaction to the defeat of Roebuck. However, over the whole Division, Milton and Beaumont just managed to retain their seats by a majority of 8 votes, which showed that in the Southern Division of the West Riding Liberal and Conservative strength was almost evenly balanced.

1 S.D.T., 29.10.1868.

PART THREE

1869 – 1880

CHAPTER XI

The National Scene

The success which the Liberal party enjoyed in the election of 1868 was both a source of strength and a source of weakness. Its majority in the House of Commons enabled the Government to put through a number of much needed and very valuable reforms. Yet as invariably happened when the Liberals were not faced by a strong Conservative challenge, division and dissension soon appeared in the Liberal ranks. There was a split between the moderate Liberals who were generally satisfied with Gladstone's Government and the Radicals who were antagonized by what the Government had done and annoyed by what it had failed to do. These Radicals were often militant Nonconformists bitterly offended by the Education Act of 1870 which they considered strengthened the role of the Church of England in the field of education and equally disappointed by the unsympathetic attitude of the Liberal Government to Church Disestablishment, the Permissive Bill and the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, for which Nonconformists agitated with the deepest fervour. Indeed, the feeling that they had been slighted by the Government from which they had expected so much bred an independent and intransigent radicalism which undoubtedly weakened the Liberal party. Moreover, the Liberals were slower than the Conservatives to understand the implications of the Reform Act of 1867. An electorate greatly increased in size demanded a higher degree of organization which the Conservatives were quick to supply under the able direction of John Gorst, who became Conservative party agent in 1870. Conservative Working Men's Clubs were set up and the National Union of Conservative Associations founded. The Liberals, on the other hand, had no comparable organization and as a result found themselves in the election of 1874 faced with a superior organization in the big towns from which the party derived most of its strength.

The Liberal defeat in 1874 is not hard to understand. The Government had alienated powerful groups – the Nonconformists by the Education Act, the Drink interest by the Licensing Act, trade unions by the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which made peaceful picketing illegal, Irish landlords by the Irish Land Act and vested interests by the reforms of the army, civil service and universities. Equally important, in these years the Liberal party lost many lukewarm middle class Liberals who had supported Palmerston but who disliked Gladstone and what they considered to be the weak foreign policy of the Government. This swing to the Conservatives was marked in middle class constituencies and especially suburbia.¹ The election of 1874 showed that the alliance between Gladstone and the Nonconformists, hitherto his most reliable supporters, was broken and before he could hope to return to power that alliance must be rebuilt. Secondly, it was clear that the organization of the Liberal party in the constituencies must be immeasurably improved and that Liberals of all shades of opinion, moderates and radicals, must learn to work together and sink their differences.

It required a great cause, a great moral crusade to revive the alliance between Gladstone and the Nonconformists and to bring the Nonconformists back to the Liberal banner. In 1868 the cause had been the Irish Church but in 1876 the Nonconformist conscience was roused by an issue of foreign policy, the Bulgarian Atrocities. British public opinion was outraged by the massacre of some twelve thousand Bulgarians by Turkish irregulars in May, 1876. At once a spontaneous agitation sprang up directed against the Turkish Government and which aimed to secure freedom for the subject races of the Porte. The agitation was also directed against Beaconsfield and the Conservatives who sought to play down the importance of the atrocities because they were an embarrassment to the Government in its policy of upholding the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire as a barrier to Russia in the Near East. Beaconsfield sought to pursue the traditional Palmerstonian foreign policy, based on friendship with Turkey and hostility to Russia. But the promoters and supporters of the Bulgarian Atrocities agitation, who were mainly Nonconformists and High Church Anglicans,² believed in a moral approach to foreign policy rather than in an opportunist defence of supposed British interests. To them national diplomacy should be guided by the same moral standards of right and wrong as influenced the behaviour of any individual. They considered that Britain had a duty to provide Europe with a moral leadership. Gladstone shared these views and he became the figure-head of the agitation. To him it was evidence of "a virtuous passion"³ in the country, a clear indication that the masses were capable of a righteous indignation and a moral earnestness. By placing himself at the head of the agitation

1 H. J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management: Politics in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone*, 1959, pp. 225-227.

2 R. T. Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, 1876*, 1963, p. 60.

3 Agatha Ramm ed., *The Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville 1876-86*, 2 Vols., Oxford, 1962, p. 3.

Gladstone restored the confidence of the Nonconformists in himself and in Liberalism as the political expression of the Nonconformist conscience.

Yet Beaconsfield's position was strong when the indignation provoked by the atrocities had abated. He was pursuing the traditional foreign policy and he could claim that his sole concern was the defence of British interests in the Mediterranean and India against the encroachments of Russia. Russophobia was deeply ingrained in the British mind and Gladstone and the opponents of the Turkish Empire in Europe could easily be branded by the Conservative press as "Friends of the Foreigner", especially after war broke out between Russia and Turkey in April, 1877. The fact that Beaconsfield was prepared to give up the principle of Turkish territorial integrity at the Congress of Berlin in order to win a diplomatic success, did not much matter because he could claim that everything he did was in the best interests of Britain. His policy undoubtedly attracted many middle class ex-Palmerstonians, while the "Jingo" cry was not without its attractions to the masses. It is doubtful that Beaconsfield ever seriously considered going to war with Russia in defence of Turkey; more probably his diplomacy in 1878, which culminated in the Congress of Berlin, was an ostentatious exercise in Palmerstonian brinkmanship. Certainly he caught the popular imagination, though he never enjoyed the trust which Palmerston had inspired. The importance of the Eastern crisis was not that it weakened the Conservative Government but that it provided an issue upon which zealous Liberals, and the Nonconformists were the most zealous of all, could unite. It was not to Hartington but to Gladstone that this revitalized Liberal party looked for leadership. At the same time Gladstone welcomed the improved electoral organization of the Liberal party, based on the model of the Birmingham Liberal Association, which was helping to educate the party and to give it a broader basis by placing local management ostensibly in the hands of a Council popularly elected by ward branches. In practice, though, real power lay with the smaller Executive Committee but the system had the advantage of making every Liberal feel that he was playing some part in running the party and that there was a democratic organization by which the party was conducted in the large constituencies. Liberal Associations were formed in many of the larger towns and in May, 1877, Gladstone was present at the inauguration of the National Liberal Federation in Birmingham. This arose partly out of the need to unify the new Liberal organization but even more because at the time of the Eastern crisis Liberals felt the need for a channel through which they might express their opinions. In fact, the National Liberal Federation had its headquarters in Birmingham and was dominated by the Birmingham Liberals and especially Joseph Chamberlain. Through it, he sought to refashion the Liberal party into a radical party by "dishing" the Whigs. But the great barrier was Gladstone, unquestionably the leader of the Liberal party in the country, and Gladstone had no intention of "dishing" the Whigs. Indeed, when he became Prime Minister in 1880, he packed his Cabinet with Whig aristocrats. He remained essentially opposed to the aims of the Radicals, just as he was always opposed to most of the aims of the Nonconformists, but neither could do without him, because a Liberal party without Gladstone was unthinkable.

This fact was underlined by Gladstone's Midlothian campaigns of 1879 and 1880, when he became the first statesman ever to "stump" the country. Beaconsfield's Government and especially its foreign policy was on trial and the whole country was summoned to act as jury. Gladstone denounced the unjust and immoral wars in Afghanistan and South Africa which had proved costly failures and stressed that under the Conservatives national expenditure had soared. The Liberal case was strengthened by the industrial and agricultural depression of 1875-79, caused mainly by foreign competition, but which probably cost the Conservatives a large number of votes.¹ Certainly many farmers, who had hitherto been staunch Conservatives, supported the Liberals because they were more likely to be sympathetic to the programme of the Farmers' Alliance which aimed at reform of the game and land laws. Liberal organization was good, while that of the Conservatives was far less efficient than it had been in 1874.² The record of the Government's domestic legislation was poor. The Irish were bitterly offended by Beaconsfield's description of Home Rule as "worse than pestilence and famine."³ Liberals were united in their determination to defeat the Government and they succeeded, making conspicuous gains in the provinces, Wales and Scotland and securing a majority over Conservatives and Home Rulers combined. But the triumph had hardly concealed the great weakness in the position of the Liberal party. Progress and onward movement was the very essence of Liberalism and yet the Liberal party in 1880 had hardly a notion as a party of where it was going.

1 T. Lloyd, *The General Election of 1880*, Oxford, 1968, p. 58.

2 Hanham, *op. cit.*, pp. 230, 363.

3 Quoted in Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

The election of 1880 had been fought on the past record of the Conservative Government, not on what the Liberals would offer in the future. So Gladstone presided over an increasingly uneasy alliance of Whigs and Radicals, each with their own ideas about the direction in which the Liberal party should go.

Sheffield : Economy and Society, 1869-1880

In the decade 1871-1881 the population of Sheffield increased from 240,000 to 284,600.¹ Of this increase of 44,600, 40,200 was the result of a natural increase, while 4,400 was the result of migration. This makes an interesting comparison with the previous decade when the figures had been 28,100 and 26,600. The increase in population was now quite definitely the result of a natural increase of the existing population, and this trend was continued in the next decade.² Some progress was made in the field of public health after the full extent of the problem had been revealed in a series of articles in the *Sheffield Independent* in January and February, 1872.³ A Medical Officer of Health was appointed in the same year and between 1875 and 1885 a programme of street improvements was carried out by the Town Council.⁴ From 1877 the Town Council undertook to pave all main roads, an indication of just how backward Sheffield was in civic development. The Artisans Dwelling Act of 1875 resulted in an enquiry by a sub-committee of the Town Council but no action followed. Some progress was made towards purer food as prosecutions were conducted against adulteration. Yet Sheffield's municipal achievement in the 1870's was very slight indeed.

Sheffield did not possess the sense of civic pride which distinguished other towns in this period. The town was fortunate to possess a benefactor as generous as Mark Firth who gave a park in 1875 and a College in 1879. But apart from such individual philanthropy there was an almost total absence of civic sense. A. J. Mundella wrote to Robert Leader in October, 1871:

"I see a pretty state of things in your Municipality. Everything is mean, petty and narrow in the extreme. What a contrast to Leeds! Sheffield would do well to spend half a million in Improvements. A better Town Hall might be followed by better Town Councillors, and more public spirit. . . . I wish you would preach the duty of the wealthy intellects of Sheffield taking their share in the elevation of the Town."⁵

The quality of the Town Council was little better than it had been in the 1860's. This can be seen by the manner in which it attempted once again to purchase the Gas and Water Companies. In 1869 Ald. Saunders reported in favour of applying for the compulsory purchase by the Corporation of the works of the Gas Company, despite the fact that the Company was fulfilling its contract to the town. In September, 1869, the Town Council resolved by a vote of 28 to 4 to purchase the Gas works.⁶ The directors of the Gas Company refused to discuss the question and a bill for compulsory purchase was framed. But the time was inopportune. The Company was fulfilling a contract which Parliament had ratified several years earlier and, as Leader maintained,⁷ could not be forced to sell. The campaign failed, the bill was rejected by the parliamentary committee and the Corporation was saddled with debts which it could not legally defray out of the rates. At the same time the Town Council abandoned a bill to purchase the Water works because at that moment it "would be a very bad bargain to the town."⁸ The Mayor, Thomas Moore, a brewer and prominent Conservative, accused Mundella of bad faith and double dealing over the Gas Bill,⁹ which was quite unfair because Mundella had done all he could to secure the Companies for the town.¹⁰ Moore's remarks were an

1 S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, Liverpool, 1959, pp. 89-91.

2 1881-91: 37.6 natural increase; 2.2 migration. *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

4 J. M. Furness, *Record of the Municipal Affairs in Sheffield 1843-93*, Sheffield, 1893, pp. 190-194.

5 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 15.10. 1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

6 Furness, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-160.

7 *S.I.*, 16. 10. 1869.

8 *S.I.*, 17. 12. 1873.

9 *S.I.*, 26.4.1870. Thomas Moore to A.J. Mundella, 5.5.1870, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

10 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 22.4.1870, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

attempt to shift the blame for the failure of the scheme. Mundella wrote to Leader in April, 1870, "I could not realise that there were such men holding important offices, who were so narrow and contracted in their views as I found your Mayor, Town Clerk [John Yeomans] and others in Sheffield. How a town of such magnitude can be content with such local rulers I am at a loss to understand".¹ No doubt politics lay behind this squabble. The Conservatives, who dominated the Town Council, saw an opportunity to attack Mundella and they were encouraged by W. C. Leng, whom Mundella described as "the evil genius of Sheffield."² Leng sought to exploit municipal affairs for political purposes and Mundella realized this: "the reckless advocacy of falsehood and immorality on the part of the *Telegraph* and the low tone of the majority in the Municipal Offices must be doing great harm."³ And so it was, because it discouraged the more respectable citizens from entering the Town Council, where they might become involved in petty squabbles and be a target for personal attacks.

The reason Sheffield lagged so far behind Birmingham in civic sense and mission was that Sheffield lacked a true civic leadership. Perhaps there was no one with sufficient wealth to "go for the internal and external Improvement of the Town."⁴ In February, 1876, Ald. Carr "admitted that Birmingham was stepping out boldly in the improvement of artisans' and labourers' dwellings; but Birmingham was a generation or two before Sheffield. Birmingham had made her riches years ago, but Sheffield had only commenced during the last generation."⁵ This was no doubt true but there was no man in Sheffield with the energy, organizing ability and breadth of vision of Joseph Chamberlain to implement a civic gospel, had one existed. In Birmingham it had been Nonconformist ministers, such as George Dawson and R.W. Dale who had given a religious meaning to Birmingham's awakening civic sense. Dale wrote in 1884: "The gracious words of Christ, 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto Me' will be addressed not only to those who with their own hands fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and cared for the sick, but to those who supported a municipal policy which lessened the miseries of the wretched and added brightness to the life of the desolate."⁶

In Sheffield, however, the structure of organized religion differed markedly from Birmingham. In Birmingham Unitarianism was very strong and Unitarians were in the van of social and political progress. In Sheffield, however, most of the prominent gentlemen who attended Upper Chapel were either Conservatives or were fast going over to Conservatism in this period. Thomas Jessop, a local benefactor, had been a moderate Liberal in the 1860's but in the 1870's he was a firm supporter of Roebuck and so strong was his support for Beaconsfield's foreign policy that he was mentioned as a possible Conservative candidate for Sheffield in 1879, though he declined to stand because of his age.⁷ It is interesting that the sons of two highly distinguished Liberal Unitarians, William Fisher and Edward Bramley, became Conservatives. William Fisher, Junr., was a personal friend of Roebuck and he continued to support Roebuck and therefore the Tories throughout the 1870's. Herbert Bramley, a moderate Liberal, joined the Conservatives because he was in sympathy with the Government's foreign policy. Of course, it was not simply a matter of foreign policy. In the altered political circumstances of the 1870's, these men were finding in Conservatism a more congenial political creed. Under Gladstone the Liberal party was far less "safe" and predictable than it had been in the days of Palmerston, and men of their social position and outlook wanted a "safe" party. In Sheffield, as will appear, this was true of the middle classes in general. T. R. Gainsford, whose father, R. J. Gainsford, had been a prominent Liberal, and who was one of the leading Conservatives in Sheffield, told H. J. Wilson, a Radical, that "changes should be made slowly and carefully and never without real necessity."⁸ This middle class defection from the Liberal ranks deprived Sheffield Liberalism of its natural leadership and explains why Liberals worked so hard to bolster up such men as F. T. Mappin and William Smith who remained loyal. This is not to suggest that the Liberal party in Sheffield was any the less active for their absence, perhaps the contrary, but it lacked leaders with the necessary wealth and social prestige to give it the breadth of vision which it attained in Birmingham.

1 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 15.4.1870, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 1.7.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

3 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 7.11.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *S.l.*, 8.2.1876, quoted in Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 103 footnote.

6 Quoted in A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, 1963, p. 203.

7 *S.l.*, 9.12.1879.

8 T. R. Gainsford to H. J. Wilson, 1.8.1873, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5910.

Asa Briggs has remarked that "where Unitarianism was weak in the nineteenth century, Liberalism lacked a social cutting edge."¹ Certainly, the Unitarian contribution to Liberalism in Sheffield, once so great in the days of Thomas Asline Ward and William Fisher, Senr., had dwindled to very little by the 1870's. Quakerism was not as strong in Sheffield as it was in Birmingham and Friends, such as J. H. Barber and Daniel Doncaster, were withdrawing from the political scene in this period.² Sheffield differed from Birmingham also in that in the former Methodism was very strong. But while the Methodists were very numerous, they were also very divided. There were Wesleyan Methodists, New Connexion Methodists, Primitive Methodists, United Free Church Methodists and Wesleyan Reform Union Methodists. Though a large number of active workers in the Liberal party attended Methodist chapels, the upper social stratum of Methodism remained either aloof from politics or was Conservative. One of the advantages of selecting S. D. Waddy as a Liberal candidate was his standing among the Wesleyan Methodists but H. J. Wilson, secretary of the Sheffield Liberal Association, complained to him in May, 1879, "I have been a little disappointed that since we had the good fortune to secure you as a candidate we have not had so many Wesleyans flocking to the standard as might have been expected."³ S. M. Johnson, a partner and son-in-law of the confectioner, George Bassett, told Leader that "of the Wesleyans of his circuit, Carver Street and Fulwood Road, not one in twenty is a Liberal."⁴ Churchmen, with the notable exceptions of Mappin and Smith, tended to be Conservatives, the more so because advanced Liberalism meant Church Disestablishment, and it is interesting that Liberation was agitated less by Liberals after 1875 when the emphasis was on a unified Liberal party in Sheffield. Congregationalists, though not especially numerous in Sheffield, provided the backbone and the dynamic of the party. The two most important Liberals in Sheffield in the 1870's were both Congregationalists. Robert Leader, proprietor of the *Sheffield Independent*, which he edited until 1877 when he passed it on to his sons, John Daniel and Robert Eadon Leader, was the political manager and wire-puller *par excellence*. H. J. Wilson was the agitator, a man who would take up and champion every good cause. A friend of Chamberlain, he was deeply influenced by Birmingham Liberalism, and it was through him that Chamberlain was able to exercise such an influence on the course of Liberalism in Sheffield in the 1870's. But though Sheffield might have been influenced by Birmingham, it was never dominated by it.

The period saw a great improvement in educational facilities in Sheffield. In the field of elementary education the School Board, established in 1870, did a great deal of valuable work and from the first the town's leading citizens and benefactors, irrespective of denomination or politics, took a keen interest in it. Sir John Brown served as chairman and Mark Firth as vice-chairman from 1870 to 1879 and the first School Board included such distinguished men as Charles Wardlow, Skelton Cole, Charles Doncaster, William Fisher and Robert Thomas Eaton. There was much work to be done, as enquiries in 1870 showed that less than half the children of school age were in fact attending school.⁵ But by 1874 9,000 children had been accommodated in new schools and between 1873 and 1892 the total number of schoolchildren increased from 35,000 to 61,000, of whom almost 35,000 attended Board schools, and the proportion of children attending school was higher than in most other industrial towns.⁶ Not only did the School Board greatly extend the educational facilities in Sheffield, establishing in 1880 a Central High School for children from elementary schools with Board Scholarships, but at a time when education was beset by such great stumbling blocks as the question of religious teaching and the payment of fees out of the local rates in denominational schools, which so antagonized Nonconformists because most denominational schools were Anglican, the Sheffield School Board steered a moderate and tactful course, seeking to do its work without deliberately offending sectarian susceptibilities. The result was that, for the most part, Sheffield was spared the acrimonious battles over education, such as occurred in Birmingham. Mundella believed that "the Sheffield Board has worked the Act [Education Act, 1870] fairly and beneficially, and until some change has been made by the legislature it cannot be better administered even though all the Board were Nonconformists."⁷ Roebuck

1 Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

2 E.g. J. H. Barber to R. Leader, 6.12.1873, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188: "I am satisfied on reflection that politics are not my duty". Barber and Daniel Doncaster declined to be on the Executive of the Liberal Association, though in Doncaster's case age was probably the main reason. Daniel Doncaster to R. Leader, 27.3.1876, J.H. Barber to H.J. Wilson, 30.3.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5890.

3 H.J. Wilson to S.D. Waddy, 21.5.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., MD. 5936.

4 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 12.4.1878, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

5 Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

6 *Ibid.* See also J.H. Bingham, *The Sheffield School Board, 1870 - 1903*, Sheffield, 1949.

7 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 30.10.1873, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

was also swift to praise the work of the Board: "it is my strong belief that you in Sheffield will soon feel the benefit of the noble work that has been done by your local Board of Education, whose efforts deserve and I hope will receive the thanks of your fellow citizens."¹ The University Extension movement was also enthusiastically received in Sheffield. The scheme, which was largely the work of James Stuart of Cambridge, was especially designed to provide working men and women with opportunities to receive university education.² A Committee was formed on 10 December, 1873, of which Samuel Earnshaw, an assistant minister at the Parish Church and a distinguished mathematician, became the honorary secretary.³ On 18 January, 1875, University Extension was inaugurated at a meeting presided over by Mark Firth.⁴ There is evidence of considerable working class interest in the movement. The Sheffield Trades Council was represented at the meeting by Messrs. Cawthorn, Wrigley and Turner, and on 6 March it was announced in the *Sheffield Independent* that the Scissor Grinders' Union had resolved to purchase tickets for the Political Economy course for all youths in the trade between the ages of eighteen and twenty one, though it seems that few working class students attended the lectures.⁵ In 1879, through the generosity of Mark Firth, the movement was housed in an impressive building, Firth College.⁶ There was interest too in female education in this period. In February, 1877, Mrs. Grey, founder of the London Girls' Public Day School Company and honorary secretary of the Women's Education Union, addressed a meeting, largely composed of ladies but which was also attended by the Rev. Messrs. Earnshaw and Moore Ede,⁷ Skelton Cole, H. Stephenson, F. Otter, J.D. Leader and H. Ashington.⁸ In the following year, the Sheffield Girls' High School was founded.

Industry in Sheffield enjoyed very mixed fortunes in the years between 1870 and 1880. In the light trades there was a boom from 1870 - 73, followed by a severe depression which lasted until 1879. This was caused by the erection of tariff barriers against British goods and by increased foreign competition. Heavy industry, because of the large capital investment involved, probably suffered more in the depression. By April, 1874, nearly half of the furnaces in Sheffield were idle and by 1878 some wage rates had fallen by as much as 75%.⁹ The gloomy picture can be traced in the reports on the state of trade published in the *Sheffield Independent*:

- 1874: "it would be incorrect to describe 1874 as a year of severe commercial distress, but it has been a year of small profits, languishing trade, and declining prices."¹⁰
- 1875: "it has not only been a year of scant work and small profits, but of heavy disasters and constantly diminishing trade."¹¹
- January 1877: "an outbreak of war will probably sink us to lower depths of depression than we have experienced for years, and entail severe suffering and privation."¹²
- January 1878: "it is long since we entered upon a new year with gloomier prospects. There is small reason to hope that the new year will be commercially prosperous."¹³
- December 1878: "prices and wages are still declining."¹⁴

Finally, by December, 1879, the tide seemed to have turned and it was reported "in spite of one of the worst harvests on record, and other powerful adverse influences, a real and substantial revival of trade has at length set in."¹⁵ According to Mundella, the distress was "almost entirely confined to the heavy trades,"¹⁶

1 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 24.2.1876, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.
2 Josephine Butler to H.J. Wilson, 12.4.1873, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6009 A.
3 Circular, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6009 A.
4 *S.I.*, 18.1.1875.
5 Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
6 The Trustees included R. Leader, J.H. Barber and J.W. Pye-Smith. *S.L.R.*, 20.5.1879.
7 The Rev. W. Moore Ede was an unsuccessful applicant for the office of Principal of Firth College in 1879.
8 *S.I.*, 20.2.1877.
9 Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 164.
10 *S.L.R.*, 31.12.1874.
11 *S.L.R.*, 30.12.1875.
12 *S.L.R.*, 1.1.1877.
13 *S.L.R.*, 1.1.1878.
14 *S.L.R.*, 31.12.1878.
15 *S.L.R.*, 31.12.1879.
16 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 15.3.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

and distress does seem to have been particularly great in the East End.¹ Unemployment meant that families had either to leave the district or, as more often happened, two or even three families lived in the same house.² Thus empty houses provide a gauge of the areas where unemployment was most severe. In April, 1879, H. J. Wilson calculated that of the total of 4,280 empty houses in the borough, 2,600 were in Brightside and Attercliffe.³ The depression does not appear to have had any direct impact on politics. Protection was not a political issue in this period, although perhaps some Conservatives would have liked to make it one. In September 1879, the Mayor, Ald. Ward, asked "whether it was right to allow foreign productions to come into the country free, whilst English goods could only be sent out by the payment of a most terrific duty" and wondered whether "the time had now come when this country should seriously take to heart the desirability of taxing to some extent the productions of foreign countries."⁴ But the challenge was not taken up. Moreover, the success of C. S. Wortley in the election of 1880, shows that in Sheffield at least the Conservative Government was not held responsible for the depression.

1 Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

2 Thomas Collinson to H.J. Wilson, 26.4.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5971.

3 Pencil note. *Ibid.*

4 *S.l.*, 8.9.1879.

So many Nonconformists supported Gladstone in 1868 because he apparently embodied their own approach to politics, which they saw as a great moral and sacred duty. "He stands almost alone," wrote Leader, "amongst statesmen in the intense moral earnestness which he throws into his task, in his absorbing passion for political truth, in the depth of his sympathy with human nature, in his profound reverence for Christianity, and his desire to permeate the atmosphere of political life with its spirit."¹ Gladstone's moral and earnest approach contrasted sharply with the devious political opportunism of Disraeli, of whom Leader wrote, "it is the utter rootlessness of his political character which explains the superficial impression he makes upon the national mind of England."² Moreover, Nonconformists believed that because they were among the staunchest of his supporters, Gladstone would fulfil their aims and that indeed the policy of the Liberal Government would be framed in the Nonconformist mould. Nonconformists wanted complete religious and social equality. Leader put it thus:

"What English Nonconformity has been struggling for during these two centuries past, consciously or unconsciously, has been to assert the inherent right of the human intellect to the most absolute freedom and the most perfect development of its capacities and powers, and to attain the practical realisation, in fullest completeness, of political, social and moral justice as between man and man."³

Nonconformists were encouraged by the Disestablishment of the Irish Church which many fondly believed would be the prelude to disestablishment in England. They thought that the Liberal party, being the party of progress, would not hesitate to take the logical step towards complete religious equality. But they overestimated their own importance to the Liberal Government and the extent to which the Liberal Government was prepared to go to conciliate them. Gladstone himself was a High Churchman and as such was never completely in sympathy with Nonconformist aims. Equally important, the Liberal Government and indeed the Liberal party in the House of Commons was essentially aristocratic,⁴ being composed mostly of landowners who were usually patrons of livings, and as committed as the Conservatives to upholding the privileged position of the Established Church. So, even had he wished to do so, Gladstone could not have carried his party on a Nonconformist programme. Mundella commented in January, 1871, that "aristocratic influence is too strong as yet for Gladstone to resist"⁵ and he told H. J. Wilson in October, 1875, that "in the last Parliament Gladstone's majority would have gone to the winds if he had touched the English Church as the Whig county members would all have voted against him."⁶ Only the extension of household suffrage in the counties would break down what has been called the "massive and homogeneous landed right wing"⁷ of the Liberal party.

But the difficulties which Gladstone faced in the House of Commons were not really appreciated by Nonconformists in the country. They felt slighted. Even the moderate Leader wrote in January, 1872, that "it is undeniable that the Nonconformists, as Liberal partisans, have not been considered on many occasions in proportion to their true value."⁸ The great stumbling block, of course, was the Education Act of 1870 which seemed to be concerned to bolster up denominational schools and, since most denominational schools were Anglican, therefore the Anglican Establishment. Indeed Nonconformists described the 25th Clause of the Act, which enabled School Boards to pay the fees of needy children in denominational schools out of the local rates, as a new Church rate. Nonconformists became divided into moderates and militants. In Sheffield prominent Liberals, such as Robert Leader and the Rev. Robert Stainton, continued to support the Government, and accepted the Education Act, despite its faults, as a sound basis for a system of national education. They believed that the Government was doing valuable work and therefore, Stainton thought, "it was the bounden duty of every true Englishman to sustain the hands of those who were endeavouring to lead the van of progress."⁹ They agreed with Mundella that "we shall never see a more thoroughly liberal and honest Government."¹⁰ These men, along with others such as John Askham, J.W. Pye-Smith and

1 *S.I.*, 30.9.1871.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *S.I.*, 20.5.1871.

4 J. Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party, 1857-1868*, 1966, p. 3. Of 456 Liberal M.P.'s sitting between 1859 and 1874, 198 were large landowners with a gross annual rental of over £2,000, and 49 were gentlemen of leisure.

5 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 1.1.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

6 A. J. Mundella to H. J. Wilson, 6.10.1875, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

7 Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

8 *S.I.*, 27.1.1872.

9 *S.I.*, 12.9.1871.

10 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 25.5.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

Alfred Allott, represented the older Liberal leadership. The militants, on the other hand, were "new" men who had not previously played a leading part in Sheffield politics. They opposed the Government because it was unsound on Nonconformist questions and they opposed the older Liberal leaders, partly because they did not think them radical enough, even more perhaps because they resented their influence and especially the influence of Robert Leader. The militants were led by H. J. Wilson,¹ a partner with his brother in the Sheffield Smelting Company and a man of undoubted energy and indomitable spirit. H. J. Wilson was a true representative of militant Nonconformity, an ardent supporter of unsectarian education, disestablishment, the Permissive Bill and the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. At the same time, he was concerned to inject into Sheffield Liberalism a much more radical and advanced spirit and this inevitably brought him into conflict with the older Liberal leaders. The direct result was a split in the Liberal party in Sheffield and defeat for one of the Liberal candidates in the election of 1874.

The division within the Liberal party can be seen in the large number of agitations which aimed to influence Government policy. In January, 1872, Leader listed the following: Education, anti-State Church, Permissive Bill, repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, abolition of the Income Tax, the Ballot, reform of the Marriage Law, women's suffrage and household county suffrage and Home Rule in Ireland.² These agitations often embarrassed the Government and frightened away many moderate middle class Liberals who were alarmed because the Liberal party no longer appeared "safe". "There is no use concealing from ourselves," Mundella told Leader in March, 1872, "that a strong reaction has set in against Liberal opinions. The vagaries of Dilke, Fawcett and Harcourt on one side, and the unreasonableness of the League [National Education League] and Miall's friends on the other have frightened the timid Liberals into inactivity or worse, and driven the Ultras into a state of distrust and discontent."³ The defection of middle class Palmerstonians to the Conservative ranks was taking place throughout the 1870's and Mundella noted in January, 1873, that "the middle classes are everywhere becoming more and more Ecclesiastical and Conservative".⁴ The Liberal defeat in 1874 was a salutary lesson because it showed the militant Nonconformists that they could not direct the policy of the Liberal party and that Liberal divisions only strengthened the Conservatives. Secondly, it showed that if the Nonconformists were to exercise any real influence in the Liberal party in future they must go in for a much broader programme which would attract the working classes, who hitherto had not been particularly sympathetic to what they considered to be at best hobby horses, at worst narrow sectarian aims. So it was that H. J. Wilson was prepared after 1874 to come to terms with the older Liberal leadership and to co-operate in establishing a more popular Liberal Association with a broader programme. Liberalism in Sheffield emerged strengthened and more vigorous after its years of division.

1 Henry Joseph Wilson, 1833-1914: son of a successful Nottingham spinner who in 1846 had moved to Sheffield to take over Sheffield Smelting Works which had been run by his wife's family, the Reads, an established Nonconformist family in Attercliffe; educated at Dissenters' School, Taunton, and University College; managed his father's leased estate at Newlands until 1867 when he became a partner with his brother, John Wycliffe, in Sheffield Smelting Co.; 1859 married Charlotte Cowan; 1876 - 87 member of School Board, 1884 chairman; 1885 - 1912 M.P. for Holmfirth; 1893 member of Royal Commission on Opium Traffic (wrote a dissentient Minority Report); opposed Boer War. See W.S. Fowler, *A Study in Radicalism and Dissent: the Life and Times of H.J. Wilson, 1833 - 1914*, 1961.

2 *S.I.*, 27.1.1872. There were others such as Anti-Vaccinationists and Republicans.

3 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 2.3.1872, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

4 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 29.1.1873, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

CHAPTER XII

THE EDUCATION QUESTION

It was clear that as a result of the increase in the size of the electorate, as a large number of working men were enfranchised in the boroughs, some system of national education must supersede the voluntary system which had proved inadequate, as educational standards in other countries were much superior. It was important to educate the artisans so that they would be able to exercise the franchise intelligently and because an educated working class would enable England to keep pace with her economic competitors. But the establishment of a national system of education was a complex problem. Earlier attempts had failed because no agreement had been reached about the status of denominational schools or what kind of religious teaching, if any, should be given in new schools established by the State. So insurmountable had the problem appeared that for twenty years the education question had lain dormant and, what education there was, was provided by voluntary bodies, subsidised by State grants. But so inadequate was educational provision under the voluntary system that by 1870 the problem could be shelved no longer.

Public attention was focused on the education question by the National Education League, which was founded in Birmingham in February, 1869, in which the leading figures were George Dixon, George Dawson, Joseph Chamberlain and R. W. Dale. The League aimed at a national system of education which would be universal, compulsory, free and unsectarian. But although this was the declared policy of the League, members differed as to their interpretation of it. Mundella wrote in September, 1869:

"I am a member of the League, but not in agreement with them in detail. I don't believe we can afford to set aside existing agencies in England. I am not in favour of free schools, and I am sure the word 'secular' will not go down at present. . . . I want the Education, I want enough schools, and sufficient pressure to bring the children to them; but I really don't care how this is accomplished if it is done in fairness to all classes and all creeds".¹

The division was over the interpretation of the word "unsectarian". To moderates, such as Mundella, it meant undenominational, that is religious teaching in the new schools not embodying the creed or catechism of any particular denomination. To men such as George Dawson, it meant secular,² the exclusion of the Bible from the schools, because they believed that it was not the function of the State to teach religion and in any case this could not be done from an undenominational standpoint. However, the programme of the League, if it became the basis of the new system, was bound to undermine the existing denominational system. This led to the formation of the National Education Union, the aim of which was to secure "the primary education of every child by judiciously supplementing the present denominational system of national education".³ As the majority of denominational schools were Anglican,⁴ the principal supporters of the Union were Churchmen, while Nonconformists tended to support the League. Both societies were concerned to "educate" the public on the question. Mundella wrote that they "have furnished most important evidence of the necessity for further legislation, and they have aroused the public mind on the subject and stirred up great local activity in their own neighbourhoods."⁵ In a few months the National Education League had branches in London and seventeen towns.⁶ A branch was established in Sheffield in June, 1869,⁷ while the principles of the National Education Union were upheld by the Vicar of Sheffield, Canon Sale.⁸

1 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 20.9.1869, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 J. W. Adamson, *English Education, 1789 - 1902*, Cambridge, 1930, p. 350.

3 Quoted *ibid.*, p. 352.

4 In Sheffield, in August, 1870, there were 39 Church of England day schools, 8 Wesleyan, 4 Nonconformist, 6 Roman Catholic, 1 Jewish. J. H. Bingham, *The Sheffield School Board, 1870 - 1903*, Sheffield, 1949, p. 289.

5 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 3.1.1869, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

6 Adamson, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

7 *S.L.R.*, 16.6.1869.

8 *S.l.*, 12.11.1870.

On 17 January, 1870, a meeting was held in the Temperance Hall to support the principles of the National Education League.¹ The League was represented by A. J. Mundella and the Rev. Charles Vince of Birmingham. The first resolution was moved by Robert Leader "that in the opinion of this meeting, the state of national education in this country calls for immediate action on the part of the Government." Leader had himself once been a voluntaryist but he now believed that "denominational education had not done enough, and that what it had done was not good enough." Leader believed in the essential principles of the League, though not in every detail.² The resolution was seconded by the Conservative journalist, W. C. Leng,³ who declared that he was in favour of compulsory education. Mundella considered that education was the "most important question of this generation" and he was in favour of "a pure, unsectarian education which gives no preference to any dogma, or to any creed" and which would be compulsory.⁴ Then the Rev. C. Short, a Baptist, moved "that the scheme proposed by the National Education League is the one which should be adopted to secure the education of every child in the kingdom." The motion was seconded by Alfred Allott who called for "secular education tempered by the highest Christian morality." Speaking on behalf of the League, the Rev. C. Vince said that "to educate the people was of such immense importance to the power, permanence and progress of the nation, that it must be secured", irrespective of sectarian differences, cost or the liberty of the parent. J. C. Fillingham contrasted the aims of the League and the Union: "the Union proposed to accomplish its object by the extension of the existing denominational system, whilst the League had inscribed upon its banner, 'Educate the people, must be national, compulsory, unsectarian and free.'" William Dronfield mentioned that in Sheffield one trade union, the wool-shear forgers, had become members of the League and had promised an annual donation.⁵

The Education Bill, which W. E. Forster introduced on 17 February, 1870, provided for the establishment of School Boards to supplement the existing denominational system, which was to be maintained by public money and could be extended. The bill was an attempt to graft a national system onto the existing system and had this advantage, that it sought to make use of facilities already provided by voluntary effort and charity. It appeared, therefore, to strengthen the denominational system. Attendance was not made compulsory, nor was the establishment of School Boards, and the kind of religious teaching was to be decided upon by the Boards. This meant that in Board schools where denominationalists were in a majority, religious teaching might be sectarian. Moreover, members of School Boards were to be appointed by Town and Parish Councils. Nonconformists disliked the measure; Chamberlain explained to Gladstone in March, 1870: "the Dissenters object to this measure, which they conceive will hand over the education of this country to the Church of England — entirely in many parts of the Kingdom, especially in agricultural districts."⁶ It appears, however, that Sheffield was slow to be roused on the question. On 4 March, 1870, a letter appeared in the *Sheffield Independent* which declared:

"I am much surprised at the apathy of the people of Sheffield in the matter of education. At this particular juncture in our national affairs it appears to me that the inhabitants of this town care very little about how the uneducated and neglected children of the country are dealt with. The Nonconformist ministers are surely asleep or they would be agitating the necessity of free and unsectarian education. Why don't they unite together and hold meetings in various parts of the town, and try to rouse the attention of the people to the great benefits which Christianity and this country would receive from a compulsory but unsectarian education? The amount of money received in Sheffield towards advancing the claims of the Education League is ridiculously small — a disgrace to the town."⁷

Notice must have been taken of this anonymous letter, because on 11 March, a meeting of Nonconformist ministers and laymen was held in Mount Zion Chapel to consider the Education Bill "as it bears upon the religious liberties of the people."⁸ The Rev. C. Short presided and there was a good attendance. The following objections were raised against the Education Bill as it stood:

1 *S.I.*, 18.1.1870.

2 Leader did not believe in free education. *S.I.*, 19.2.1870.

3 Leng wrote that "England has no other option than to educate her millions or fall from her high position". *S.D.T.*, 1.1.1870.

4 *S.I.*, 18.1.1870.

5 *S.I.*, 18.1.1870.

6 Quoted in J. L. Garvin: *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, 1932, Vol. 1, p. 112.

7 *S.I.*, 5.3.1870.

8 *S.I.*, 12.3.1870.

- (i) the power given to local boards to decide what, if any, religious teaching there was to be in schools they built or managed.
- (ii) the power to grant money out of the rates to support denominational schools.
- (iii) the power to H. M. Inspectors to enquire into the religious education given in schools.
- (iv) the lack of an adequate conscience clause for denominational schools.

The (v) point summed up the Nonconformist position; they insisted that in all rate-aided schools, instruction should be completely undenominational. They were particularly strong against support out of the local rates for denominational education:¹ "these proposals go to establish a new form of religious taxation not less objectionable than church rates."²

The Bill was discussed in a large meeting convened by the Sheffield branch of the National Education League on 25 April, 1870.³ The Rev. J. P. Gledstone, minister of Queen Street Congregational Chapel, moved a resolution to the effect that no amendments to the bill could be satisfactory "in reference to the religious difficulty, which do not provide that no creed, catechism, or tenet peculiar to any sect shall be taught in schools under the management of school boards, or receiving grants from local rates." Also there should be easy provision for non-attendance at religious teaching in all Government-aided schools. The question of religious teaching in the Board Schools was a difficult one. It is clear that the vast majority of the meeting was in favour of reading the Bible in the schools and accepted, as the Rev. G. Knight, Unitarian minister of Upperthorpe Chapel, put it, that there was "a great difference between Bible teaching and the teaching of merely theological dogma and doctrine." A motion, put by Jonathan Taylor, a printer and an extreme radical,⁴ and seconded by a Mr. Weston, to exclude the Bible from "the rate and nationally-aided schools", with special classes for denominational teaching, was supported by about six people, while the original resolution was carried by an immense majority.⁵ The supporters of "secular" education were clearly not very numerous in Sheffield in April, 1870. The general belief was that education without religious instruction was incomplete. A. J. Mundella believed that the main defect of the Bill was the right vested in School Boards to "determine the religious teaching which shall be given in these schools." He also objected to the power given to School Boards to make grants out of the local rates to denominational schools, the lack of adequate compulsion to attend schools⁶ and the inadequate conscience clause in denominational schools.⁷ Robert Leader moved a resolution in favour of school boards in all districts and compulsory attendance at schools, which was seconded by Alfred Allott.⁸

It is interesting that an attempt was made by some clergy and Nonconformist ministers in Sheffield to find a basis of "united action" with regard to "the religious education difficulty." A small meeting was held on 24 May, 1870,⁹ at which the chairman, Samuel Earnshaw, explained that "united action" had already been accepted in Nottingham, Leicester, Derby and Hull, and that Forster, Mundella and Cowper-Temple were anxious that representatives from Sheffield and Birmingham should form part of a deputation to Gladstone before the Government put forward its amendments to the Education Bill. A link with the other towns was provided by the Rev. J. B. Paton of Nottingham, formerly minister of the Wicker Congregational Chapel, who had suggested that the meeting should be held. The meeting accepted the resolution passed in Nottingham that "this meeting assents to Mr. Forster's proposal to allow existing schools to be sustained and managed as they are at present" but with a time-table conscience clause.¹⁰ In the Board schools the Bible was to be read but no creeds were to be taught. The Rev. S. Earnshaw, the Rev. J. Hargreaves and the Rev. R. Stainton were appointed as a deputation to wait upon Gladstone. No Roman Catholics attended the meeting, nor did the Rev. David Loxton, minister of Mount Zion Chapel,

1 Leader declared "the fact must be clearly understood that the English people, as thoroughly as the Americans, disapprove of the payment of public rates for denominational uses". *S.I.*, 5.3.1870.

2 *S.I.*, 12.3.1870.

3 *S.I.*, 26.4.1870.

4 *E.g.* in September, 1871, when Mundella addressed his constituents, he attacked Mundella's vote for the Royal dowry and seconded a resolution for the abolition of the House of Lords. *S.I.*, 12.9.1871.

5 *S.I.*, 26.4.1870.

6 School Boards could compel attendance, if they wished.

7 *S.I.*, 26.4.1870.

8 Allott declared that "education to be effective must be compulsory".

9 *S.I.*, 25.5.1870.

10 *I.e.* religious instruction to be given at a set time in the time-table from which children could be absent.

who was a strict voluntaryist and not in favour of a state system of national education.¹

The Government's amendments to the Education Bill were considered in a meeting of the Sheffield branch of the National Education League on 13 June, 1870.² The chairman, Michael Beal, thought the proposed amendments "very unsatisfactory and meagre" because they failed to make education compulsory and the form of religious teaching was still to be determined by the School Boards. A motion, put by the Rev. J. P. Gledstone and E. Hibberd, that the amendments were "entirely inadequate and unsatisfactory" was carried by a majority of 21 to 4. The mood of the meeting was very determined and G. W. Knox's amendment against postponing legislation if the principal deficiencies of the Bill were not remedied was defeated by 19 votes to 8. The Government did make some concessions under pressure. School Boards were to be elected by the ratepayers and a time-table conscience clause was to operate in denominational schools. Most important of all was the Cowper-Temple clause which provided that religious teaching in Board schools was to be given without reference to any creed or catechism. This satisfied moderates who wanted the Bible taught in the new schools but who were unwilling to leave the question to the discretion of School Boards. Leader advised "let us accept the new changes in the spirit in which they are given, and then press for the completion of the original programme, not for the introduction of concessions that the boldest dare not have asked at the outset of the agitation".³ Though he would like to have seen attendance made compulsory, Mundella was satisfied: "the Bill will now pass," he told Leader; "it is much better than at the first and I regard it as a great and important measure."⁴

The Cowper-Temple clause did not satisfy those who believed that it was not the function of the State to teach religion, which should be left to voluntary effort, and who wanted to solve the problem by excluding the Bible from the Board schools. This was the substance of the motion introduced into the House of Commons by Henry Richard, M.P. for Merthyr Tydfil and a prominent leader of militant Nonconformity. This alarmed the supporters of Bible teaching in the new schools. Leader wrote: "the secularist party is clearly getting the upper hand in the councils of the League".⁵ H. J. Wilson, who does not appear to have taken a prominent part in the meetings of the Sheffield branch of the National Education League,⁶ wrote "imploping" Mundella to vote for Richard's motion.⁷ Mundella's reply was not sympathetic: "I am utterly opposed to anything that would force the consciences of my fellow men, but I believe the expulsion of the Scriptures from the Schools would disgust the great mass of the population and bring liberation into contempt Pray be patient with your member and believe me that I have only to find the slightest attempt at sectarian teaching or proselytism in the new schools to stir me into action at once."⁸

Mundella told Leader that the attitude of Miall,⁹ Richard and the League was "most irritating and impractical".¹⁰ The measure was, he believed, a good one and "why, from fear and jealousy, anyone should desire to cripple existing schools and exclude Bible explanation from the new schools I cannot understand."¹¹ However, there was support for the exclusion of the Bible from the Board schools within the Sheffield branch of the League. At the meeting of 25 April, Jonathan Taylor, who was one of the Sheffield representatives on the Executive Committee of the National Education League, put a motion to this effect which had been seconded by G. Weston,¹² though only about six people had supported it. William Dronfield, a leading member of the Sheffield branch, told H.J. Wilson in December, 1871, "your views entirely agree with mine in reference to religious teaching. I ignore altogether this purely secular notion, and do not agree with those who are its advocates. But with you I would leave the religious instruction with voluntary Christian effort of which I think the various denominations are quite equal to impart in the Sunday Schools and by other agencies."¹³ It was not

1 *S.I.*, 25.5.1870.

2 *S.I.*, 14.6.1870.

3 *S.I.*, 17.6.1870.

4 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 2.7.1870, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 *S.I.*, 17.6.1870.

6 He is not mentioned in reports of meetings, nor was he a member of the Executive elected in October, 1870. In March, 1871, he described himself as "an unknown man". H.J. Wilson to J.C. Calvert, 15.3.1871, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

7 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 26.6.1870, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 A. J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 20.6.1870, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

9 Miall was a leader of the Liberation Society.

10 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 24.7.1870, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *S.I.*, 26.4.1870.

13 Wm. Dronfield to H. J. Wilson, 28.12.1871, "H.J. Wilson's Political Activities Cuttings", Vol. 1, S.C.L.

that those who wished to exclude the Bible from the Board schools did not believe that religious teaching was an integral part of a child's education, but rather that such teaching could not be properly imparted by schoolmasters and should be undertaken by persons properly qualified to do so, at stated times outside the school time-table. This view was not accepted by those who wanted to see Bible teaching firmly set within the new system and who saw its exclusion as a very extreme step, which could not at that time be justified. There is little doubt that in Sheffield the supporters of Bible exclusion were in a minority.

Indeed, it does not seem that the education question aroused the keen interest in Sheffield which it evoked in other places. At the annual meeting of the Sheffield branch of the National Education League, the secretary, G. W. Knox declared:

"The committee were ashamed to have to say that the branch had not met with that support in Sheffield which it had hoped to have derived, and that they had been unable notwithstanding all the means which had been adopted to that end, to arouse the bulk of the gentry and manufacturing population to a sense of the part they ought to play in the work which the League was formed to accomplish."¹

In October, 1870, the Sheffield branch numbered 1,029 members, and only 25% of the funds could be sent to the Birmingham Executive.² Possibly this comparative lack of success, which Knox himself admitted, explains the interesting intervention by Birmingham in the affairs of the Sheffield branch. The Committee of the Birmingham branch of the National Education League "suggested" that the secretary, G. W. Knox, should resign and the reason given was that it had heard that he did not agree with "free" education, which was a vital part of the League's programme.³ As a protest, the Sheffield Executive⁴ resigned, for as the president, William Bragge,⁵ explained "the Executive and Officers considered themselves deprived of freedom of action and protested against the usurpation of authority by the Birmingham Committee."⁶ He added "we cease absolutely to pay allegiance to the National Education League". This might well have been the end of the Sheffield branch had not Dronfield speedily introduced a motion to accept the offer of Jesse Collings to visit Sheffield and explain the matter. But Leader was in no doubt about what lay behind the intervention of "their high mightinesses the dictators at Birmingham."⁷

"This branch has not attained great success as a raiser of money, and Birmingham measures branches by a money standard; but it has evoked great enthusiasm, has got up large meetings and long petitions, and done a great deal of cheap work. The reason of the failure of the League in Sheffield is that people here who have money to give don't like the principles of a League which demands from its officers unquestioned acceptance of all its dogmas."⁸

A meeting was held on 20 April, attended by about twenty four members, to hear the explanation of Jesse Collings.⁹ A letter was read from Knox in which he stated that a number of officers of the League did not endorse the whole programme and claimed that nearly all of the late Sheffield Executive agreed with him on the "free" education question and, in any case, his views had been known for a year. In reply, Collings stressed that the Birmingham Committee had never attempted to demand Knox's resignation but they believed it to be in the best interests of the League. He then proceeded to read extracts from Knox's speeches which, he said, "showed that Mr. Knox was more at home with the denominationalists on the education question, and had uttered sentiments directly at variance with the principles of the League with respect to religious teaching."¹⁰ This, of course, was shifting ground and more than ever convinced Leader that the "free" question was just a pretext for removing Knox whose "lively independence" they disliked.¹¹ There is no doubt that Knox had done much good work¹² but the Birmingham Committee obviously felt that he was not sufficiently "sound" on the League programme, and that this was a serious weakness especially in view of the comparative

1 S.I., 5.10.1870.

2 S.I., 5.10.1870.

3 S.I., 1.4.1871.

4 Wm. Bragge, Rev. Messrs. J. Lettis Short and J. P. Gledstone, F. T. Mappin, Dr. Griffiths, Councillors Beal, Allott, Aitchison, Crighton, Hall, Nadin, Robertshaw; C. Wardlow, G.W. Knox, W. Baker, S. Bacon, H. Cook, J. Downing, Wm. Dronfield, G. Fox, J. Frith, D. Grant, J.J. Gratton and B. Langley formed the Committee elected on 4 October, 1870. S.I., 5.10.1870.

5 William Bragge, 1822 - 84; b. Birmingham; engineer and antiquary; a director of John Brown and Co.; 1871 Master Cutler; returned to Birmingham in 1876.

6 S.I., 1.4.1871.

7 S.I., 4.4.1871.

8 *Ibid.*

9 S.I., 21.4.1871.

10 *Ibid.*

11 "Men are appreciated in proportion to their docility". S.I., 22.4.1871.

12 S.I., 5.10.1870.

lack of success of the League in Sheffield. Moreover, the question clearly reflected tensions within the Sheffield branch itself. The meeting of 20 April carried a motion justifying the action of the Birmingham Committee and accepting the resignation of the Sheffield Executive, although very few members attended the meeting. The Executive of the Sheffield branch, which was appointed on 27 April, had a very different look. Gone were the men of real influence and position within the town, such as William Bragge, F.T. Mappin, Alfred Allott, C. Wardlow, W. Baker, Batty Langley and the Rev. Messrs. J. Lettis Short and J. P. Gledstone.¹ Indeed, of the old Executive there remained only Michael Beal, William Dronfield, Josiah Downing and Councillors Hall and Nadin.² The new president, Councillor Hibberd, had not even been a member of the old Executive. It is noticeable that a larger number of working men sat on the new Executive, such as D. Stables, M. Pryor and John Muscroft. By its interference, Birmingham might have made sure that the Sheffield branch would in future take a less independent line and look more to Birmingham for leadership, but by driving away the men of influence and position it removed what little interest remained³ and it is not surprising that hereafter little more was heard of it.

The main opposition to the Education Act of 1870 was centred in the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee,⁴ which had its origins in a meeting of ministers and laymen held in Mount Zion School in February, 1872.⁵ Modelled on the Central Nonconformist Committee which had been established in Birmingham, its purpose was to "watch public events in their bearing upon the position and rights of Nonconformists," and to "take such action thereon as may from time to time be deemed expedient," but it was directed especially against the "objectionable provisions" of the Education Act. It was an instrument of militant Nonconformist agitation. At a meeting held on 27 February, 1872, and chaired by John Wycliffe Wilson, brother of H. J. Wilson, it was decided that the Committee should consist of representative members (each Nonconformist congregation in the town was to send three delegates) and personal members.⁶ The Churches were to pay 5/- and personal members 1/-.

The new Committee soon turned its attention to that provision in the Education Act which most offended Nonconformists, the 25th clause which enabled School Boards to pay the fees of needy children in denominational schools out of the rates, a power which the Sheffield School Board exercised under the 9th bye-law. On 22 April, 1872, the Nonconformist Committee resolved "that in the opinion of this Committee the payment of fees out of rates for the education of poor children in denominational schools is a violation of the principle of religious equality, and should be strenuously resisted by Nonconformists."⁷ A memorial to this effect was presented to the School Board on 25 April by a deputation consisting of the Rev. Messrs. J. Calvert, J. P. Gledstone, G. Knight, T.D. Crothers, Giles Hester and Messrs. R. Leader, J. W. Wilson, H. J. Wilson, G. W. Knox, S. Bacon, and Batty Langley.⁸ Leader explained that they represented a Nonconformist Committee, "composed of men who have spontaneously associated themselves together to watch public events." Owing to lack of time, only 180 signatures accompanied the memorial, but this made little difference because the reply from the Law Clerk of the Board, published several weeks later, was very emphatic: "The Bye-Law leaves them no discretion but to remit the fees or pay them (as the case may be) where the parent is unable to pay."⁹ This pushed the extremists into action and on 14 May the Executive recommended the General Committee to memorialise the Town Council to withhold moneys for the payment of fees in denominational schools,¹⁰ as had been done in Birmingham,¹¹ but it seems that more moderate counsels prevailed and this was not done. Indeed, by this time the Nonconformist Committee was causing concern to more moderate Liberals. Mundella, who admitted the injustice of the 25th clause,¹²

- 1 *S.I.*, 5.10.1870.
- 2 The new Executive was E. Hibberd, president, Wm. Dronfield and Wm. Camsell joint Secretaries, M. Beal treasurer; Councillors Hall and Nadin, J. Downing, D. Stables, J.M. Fenton, H. Titterton, M. Pryor, J. Taylor, G. Weston, J. Austin, Ernest Hill and John Muscroft.
- 3 Only about 15 people attended the meeting on 27 April. *S.I.*, 28.4.1871.
- 4 The source for much of what follows is the Minute Books of the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 5 Circular, dated 23.2.1872, issued by the Rev. Messrs. J.P. Gledstone, T.D. Crothers (Methodist New Connexion), J.M. Stephens and S. Wright (U. M. Free Church).
- 6 Minute Book, 27.2.1872.
- 7 Minute Book, 22.4.1872.
- 8 *S.I.*, 26.4.1872.
- 9 *S.I.*, 11.5.1872.
- 10 Minute Book, 14.5.1872.
- 11 In February, 1872, the Birmingham Town Council refused, by a majority of 30, to levy the School Rate which it was legally bound to do. A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, 1963, p. 224.
- 12 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 6.3.1872, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

thought "the Nonconformist Committee will give us some trouble. Wilson is of the ultra-rabid Birmingham type, and unless they take Trevelyan's advice and hark back a little they will simply end in miserable failure, inflicting no doubt considerable damage on the Liberal Party".¹ The militants, however, were not easily discouraged and on 4 June, 1872, they organized a large meeting "to protest against the payment of fees from the rates to Sectarian schools."² Their objections were clearly stated by the chairman of the Committee, J. W. Wilson: "as lovers of consistency and of truth, they protested against the use of public money for teaching different and contradictory creeds, as Nonconformists, they protested against the use of public money for teaching any religious opinions whatever".³ It was a matter of conscience. The Rev. J. Calvert declared: "the jurisdiction of the country ended where a man's conscience began conscience ought to be free, conscience must be free, and conscience shall be free." The Rev. John Jenkyn Brown of Birmingham, whom Mundella described as "a miserable imitation of Dale, without his power or acuteness,"⁴ raised the question of religious teaching in the rate-aided schools, declaring that "unsectarianism" was a "base mixture" and "the only thing which a State could teach was secular knowledge, and that religion could be only taught by Christian parents or by Christian communities".⁵ This view was underlined by the Rev. T. D. Crothers who "hoped soon to see a national system of education which would confine itself strictly to secular teaching." The moderate Nonconformist position was represented by Alfred Allott, a member of the School Board, and Robert Leader, both of whom believed that, although the Act had defects, yet great good could come of it if patience and forbearance were allowed to prevail, and in any case, as Samuel Hoyland pointed out, it was better that children should be educated in any school in preference to being left uneducated. Leader "held with Mr. Holden,⁶ and would rather press on the education, though the first draughts from the well of 1870 might be somewhat turbid, and trust to the efforts being made to render the water ere long bright and clean."⁷ Of course, the question of the payment of fees in sectarian schools was a matter of principle, for the sums of money involved were not great. An investigation was carried out by the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee in November, 1872, when it was found that the School Board had paid denominational fees to the amount of £4. 9s. 1d., which had been divided among 15 Anglican, 3 Roman Catholic and 1 Wesleyan school, so that the Anglicans had received £3. 11s. 0d., the Roman Catholics 16s. 7d. and the Wesleyans 1s. 6d.⁸ Speaking in November, 1873, Allott declared "I don't think the total paid up to the present time amounts to £100."⁹ That the problem was not so great in Sheffield as elsewhere was owing to the moderation and good sense of the School Board and this made it difficult for the militant Nonconformists to run a successful agitation against a grievance which in Sheffield seemed more apparent than real.

It was not long before the moderate Dissenters felt that they could no longer support the Nonconformist Committee. Mundella was writing to Leader in June, 1872, that "the Nonconformist Committee has taken quite the corner I expected and with such inflammable elements as you have in Sheffield a conflagration sooner or later seems inevitable. H. J. Wilson writes me letters of a very strange character ridiculing all who do not agree with him."¹⁰ The breach came over the question of whether or not the Bible should be read in the new schools. On 1 July, 1872, H. J. Wilson put the following motion, which formed the fifth resolution of the Manchester Conference, "that this Conference is of the opinion that in any national system of education the School Board and the State should make provision solely for the Secular instruction which all children may receive in common and that the responsibility of the religious education of each district should be thrown upon voluntary effort."¹¹ The motion was carried by a majority of 13 votes to 8, whereupon Alfred Allott promptly

1 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 25.5.1872, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 *S.I.*, 5.6.1872.

3 *Ibid.*

4 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 6.6.1872, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 *S.I.*, 5.6.1872.

6 Isaac Holden of Keighley, a Wesleyan Methodist and late Liberal candidate for the Northern Division of the West Riding, who also spoke at the meeting.

7 *S.I.*, 5.6.1872.

8 Minute Book, 22.11.1872.

9 *S.I.*, 12.11.1873.

10 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 18.6.1872, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

11 Minute Book, 1.7.1872.

resigned and Robert Leader, G. W. Knox, A. Sharman, W. Atkinson and the Rev. Robert Stainton all left the room.¹ Within the next few weeks, the resignations of the Rev. Messrs. Bushell and Green were also received.² This split was not unexpected since, as has been shown, Nonconformists had been divided as to whether or not religious teaching should be provided by the State.³

Having lost the moderates, the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee was now free to take an extreme and intransigent line on the education question. On 28 November, 1872, they were advised by the Secretary of the Birmingham Education League not to pay any part of the rate devoted to education because this might be used to pay fees in denominational schools.⁴ "By a considerable majority", it was resolved "that this Committee hereby approves the convictions of those who feel unable to pay the School Rate and resolves to engage counsel to defend those members who may be summoned for non-payment."⁵ A few summonses for non-payment of rates did take place. F. P. Rawson, cutlery manufacturer and G. W. Sharman, grocer, were distrained and the goods sold by auction.⁶ The Rev. Giles Hester of Cemetery Road Baptist Church was summoned but a friend stepped in and paid the rate and on 26 February, 1873, D. T. Ingham, stationer, was summoned.⁷ G. W. Sharman held out until September, 1875, when he wrote to H. J. Wilson: "I do not regret the course taken hitherto, but am inclined to think it would be better now to pay the rate."⁸ But it was not until December, 1876, that Wilson agreed to pay. He wrote: "under the altered circumstances of the Education question — the Act of last session — and the change of Administration, I do not think it needful to refuse longer to pay the part of the Poor Rate to which I have objected of late years."⁹ It seems, however, that only a few Nonconformists were involved in this extreme form of protest against the 25th clause.

In 1873 the Government proposed to amend the Education Act by transferring the duty of paying school fees for poor children in sectarian schools from the School Boards to the Boards of Guardians, and by making such payment obligatory. The Committee, however, found this quite unsatisfactory and registered its disapproval of the Government: "this Committee, believing that the support of Denominational schools out of public funds virtually involves the creation of a new Church Establishment, are reluctantly led to the conviction that the Government, by thus renewing their sanction of this mischievous system, have forfeited their claims to the confidence of all Nonconformists who believe that the only sound basis of a national system of education is the separation of the secular from the religious element in public elementary schools."¹⁰ The Committee had similar objections to Sandon's Education Bill of 1876, which they believed strengthened the position of denominational schools. The Bill made attendance at school compulsory but compulsory powers could be exercised in districts where there were none but sectarian schools and sectarian schools could get "largely increased grants from public funds,"¹¹ thus diminishing the necessity for voluntary subscriptions. Moreover, it enabled Town Councils and Boards of Guardians to "delegate their powers to irresponsible Committees who may consist largely, or even exclusively, of the supporters of denominational schools." The Bill took away from School Boards the power to pay fees in sectarian schools and poor parents who did not want Board schools now had to apply to the Guardians. But fees in denominational schools could still be paid out of the public rates. There can be little doubt that the purpose of the Bill was to strengthen denominational schools and the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee drew up a petition in favour of Henry Richard's amendment that "the principle of universal compulsion in Education cannot be applied without great injustice, unless provision be made for placing public

1 Minute Book, 1.7.1872.

2 Minute Book, 22.7.1872, 10.8.1872.

3 In 1872 there was a long correspondence on this subject. H. J. Wilson and the Rev. Samuel Wright were for, and Adam Wood, a deacon of Queen Street Chapel, was against excluding the Bible from the Board schools. *S.I.*, *passim*.

4 Minute Book, 28.11.1872.

5 Minute Book, 28.11.1872.

6 Rawson's goods were bought by his friends and returned to him.

7 *S.I.*, 27.2.1873.

8 G.W. Sharman to H.J. Wilson, 11.9.1875, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6013. George Woodcock Sharman was a keen temperance reformer and a member of Oak Street Methodist Chapel.

9 H. J. Wilson to Thos. Collinson, 11.12.1876, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

10 Minute Book, 28.6.1873.

11 Minute Book, 26.6.1876.

elementary schools under public management.”¹ Mundella fought hard against the Bill² and told Leader that the Government “rather take pleasure than otherwise in insulting the feelings and susceptibilities of Nonconformists.”³ He believed that “the elements of contention are undoubtedly introduced into the elections of Guardians, and the parents will be brought into indirect contact with pauperism”.⁴ The Act undoubtedly had the effect of reducing the fees paid out of the rates in sectarian schools because it discouraged parents from applying for them. It was degrading to have to ask the Guardians to pay them and so indirectly the problem was reduced, even though theoretically fees could still be paid out of the rates. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Nonconformist Committee protested strongly when, despite the alteration in the law, the School Board proposed to deal with cases of needy children as before.⁵ On 21 December, 1876, the School Board decided by a majority of 10 to 3⁶ on “a system of joint action between the Board and the Guardians,”⁷ because, as the Churchman, Thomas Moore, put it, they believed “that indigent parents ought not to be taken before the Guardians to apply for the payment of school fees.” The problem was resolved by a compromise. In March, 1877, a General Order from the Local Government Board enabled the Guardians to appoint an enquiry officer to deal with applications from non-pauper parents for school fees in denominational schools.⁸

It would be wrong to suggest that large numbers of Nonconformists were actively involved in the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee, for attendances at meetings were very small. Rather it was a pressure group, consisting of a few earnest and zealous men who were concerned to watch over Nonconformist interests. As has been shown, the Education question was the issue which most concerned them, but not exclusively so, as appears from a study of the Constitution.⁹

Objects – General: the complete legislative and administrative adoption of the principles of religious equality.

- Special:
- (i) disestablishment and disendowment of State Churches.
 - (ii) repeal of the 25th clause of the Education Act.
 - (iii) repeal or amendment of such other legislative enactments as sanction the taxation of the community for the propagation of sectarian opinions.
 - (iv) the refusal of State aid to new denominational schools, and its withdrawal as early as practicable from all schools under denominational management.
 - (v) separation of the secular and the religious instruction in Board Schools. School Boards to provide facilities for the voluntary supply of religious teaching by religious persons.
 - (vi) the amendment of those provisions of the Endowed Schools Acts, which give an unfair advantage to the Established Church and permit national endowments to be used for teaching sectarian dogmas.
 - (vii) the absolute removal of all sectarian restrictions on the enjoyment of the offices and emoluments of the National Universities.

“The Committee¹⁰ seeks to carry out its purposes by means of Lectures¹¹ – Public Meetings – the distribution of Literature – Petitions to Parliament – Memorials to central or local authorities – and such other plans as may be decided upon.”¹²

- 1 *Ibid.*
- 2 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 30.7.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 3 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 4.8.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 4 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 8.8.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 5 Minute Book, 18.12.1876. A report in *S.D.T.*, 19.12.1876, said that of 1,000 scholars whose school pence was remitted, c. 600 attended denominational schools.
- 6 Charles Doncaster, Wm. Rolley and H.J. Wilson were in the minority. *S.I.*, 22.12.1876.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *S.I.*, 30.3.1877.
- 9 Accepted 4.8.1874. Minute Book.
- 10 The officers for 1874 - 75 were:
- | | | |
|-----------|---|------------------|
| Chairman | – | J. W. Wilson |
| Treasurer | – | Councillor Bacon |
| Hon. Sec. | – | Rev. W. Lenwood. |
- Executive:
- | | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Rev. J. Calvert | T. Fenton |
| “ R. Chew | D. T. Ingham |
| “ G. Hester | J. Muscroft |
| “ G. Knight | T. Nicholson |
| “ T. Rider | F.P. Rawson |
| “ J.M. Stephens | G.W. Sharman |
| “ J. Wenn | H.J. Wilson |
- 11 Course of lectures by Henry Vincent. Minute Book, 24.10.1873.
- 12 Minute Book, 4.8.1874.

The Committee had close links with the Liberation Society. In September, 1872, it accepted an invitation from the Birmingham Liberation Society and the Central Nonconformist Committee to attend a Conference in Birmingham to discuss Miall's proposed motion on disestablishment.¹ In September, 1875, it resolved to co-operate with the Sheffield branch of the Liberation Society to arrange a working men's meeting which was held on 7 December, 1875,² and in May, 1877, it contributed 30/- each towards the expenses of two delegates to attend the Triennial Conference of the Liberation Society.³ In April, 1877, it drew up a petition against the Government Burials Bill, declaring that "no arrangement will be satisfactory which does not allow the free use of the parochial graveyards to all persons with or without such religious services as they may desire, unhampered by any sectarian restrictions."⁴ The Committee did not confine its attention to purely Nonconformist matters. It was undecided as to whether to become involved as a body in the election of 1874, and it appears that no decision on the question was reached, though the members were probably almost all supporters of Chamberlain.⁵ However, in February, 1875, when the question of who should succeed Gladstone in the leadership of the Liberal party was being discussed, the Committee unanimously resolved that it "cannot recommend either Lord Hartington or Mr. Forster as the leader of the Liberal Party."⁶ In Sheffield there was a direct connection between Militant Nonconformity and advanced radicalism. It is noticeable, for instance, that a number of the leading members of the Nonconformist Committee were active in forming the Sheffield Reform Association, which was concerned to inject into Sheffield Liberalism a much more advanced and radical spirit. Moreover, just as the Sheffield Reform Association merged into the Sheffield Liberal Association for the sake of Liberal union, in October, 1877, its counterpart, the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee resolved "that it is undesirable at present for this Committee to carry on active operations."⁷ The future lay not with the pursuit of what appeared to many to be narrow sectarian aims by small pressure groups but in a broader and more popular Liberal organization and programme.

1 Minute Book, 23.9.1872.

2 Minute Book, 22.9.1875.

3 Minute Book, 16.4.1877.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Minute Book, 10.12.1873. For involvement F. P. Rawson and D. T. Ingham, against Rev. Messrs. J.M. Stephens and J. Fisher.

6 Minute Book, 1.2.1875.

7 Minute Book, 4.10.1877.

Church and State. The Liberation Society in Sheffield.

It appeared to many Nonconformists that on such questions as Education the great stumbling block was the privileged position of the Church of England. As long as there was an Established Church there could never be complete religious equality. Nonconformist grievances were very real. The rates which they paid could be used for the support of Anglican schools and all kinds of difficulties and restrictions surrounded the burial of Nonconformists in parochial graveyards. They were encouraged by the Disestablishment of the Irish Church and by the University Tests Act, which fully opened the Universities to Dissenters, but Nonconformists were dissatisfied with the record of the Liberal Government. "In Ecclesiastical matters," Alfred Illingworth believed, "our leaders (except Bright) have followed a Tory and Church policy."¹ The root of militant Nonconformity, therefore, was hostility to the privileged position of the Established Church and through the Liberation Society they agitated for an end to the connection between Church and State, not because they disliked the Church as a spiritual institution but because, as Henry Vincent explained, they wanted complete religious equality.²

A branch of the Liberation Society was active in Sheffield in this period. Prominent among the Liberationists was the Rev. David Loxton of Mount Zion Chapel. At a meeting to support Miall's motion for the disestablishment and disendowment of the English and Scottish Churches in April, 1871, he maintained that the property of the Church was national property and therefore could be disposed of by the nation.³ He argued that "prestige should not be given to one form of religion, and a stigma should not be placed upon others", and that the Church - State connection was bad because it "developed a tendency to Popery, and made clergymen think they were better men than Dissenting ministers because they were what were called successors of the Apostles." Moreover, he believed that Disestablishment would soon lead to "a united Protestantism." The Rev. J. P. Gledstone of Queen Street Chapel added that "if the 7 m. of Roman Catholics in Ireland had a claim upon the consideration of the Government, the 10 m. of Dissenters in England had a right to have their views met on the question."⁴ It is interesting to note that many of the speakers at Liberation Society meetings in Sheffield were Congregationalists. The secretary of the branch was the Rev. J. Fisher⁵ of Howard Street Chapel and also prominent were H. J. and J. W. Wilson,⁶ Batty Langley⁷ and the Rev. Messrs. J. Calvert,⁸ R. Stainton⁹ and T. W. Holmes.¹⁰ Like the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee, its activity and energy derived from the individuals involved rather than from numbers, and it is probable that attendances at meetings were quite small.¹¹

The problem was that Liberation was not a burning social issue which could arouse great mass indignation and give rise to a popular agitation. However, attempts were made to extend the middle class base of the Society and to stimulate working class interest in Disestablishment. In January, 1872, for example, H. J. Wilson chaired a meeting of working men to establish a branch of the "Working Men's Committee to promote the separation of Church and State", formed in London.¹² George Potter and George Howell attended as a deputation from the Committee and the Liberation Society was represented by its travelling secretary, a Mr. Andrews. George Potter's arguments for Disestablishment are interesting because they were directed at a specifically working class audience. He argued that the Church of England was not the Church of the people, since not 1/3 of the population belonged to it, and introduced an element of class antagonism when he maintained that "the clergy had always been against the people" and "now it was the people against the Church and the publicans."¹³ Howell added that "if the Legislature saw that Church property had not been faithfully and honestly applied to the purposes for which it was

1 Alfred Illingworth to H.J. Wilson, 27.11.1874, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6011.

2 Lecture in Sheffield, *S.I.*, 18.9.1872.

3 *S.I.*, 26.4.1871.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *S.I.*, 29.5.1872. John Fisher, d. 1913: a working man who entered the Congregational ministry; 1875 left Sheffield to take up a paid post in the Liberation Society; 1877 a secretary of Society, a position he held for thirty years.

6 *S.I.*, 29.5.1872.

7 Batty Langley, 1834 - 1914: timber merchant; 1892 Mayor; 1894 - 1909 M.P. for Attercliffe.

8 *S.I.*, 29.5.1872.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *S.I.*, 24.3.1876, *S.I.*, 10.1.1878. T. W. Holmes, 1836 - 1915: 1872 - 1912 pastor of Tabernacle Chapel.

11 *E.g.*, at the meeting in April, 1871, "there was a large attendance, though the room was not full". *S.I.*, 26.4.1871. The audience at the Church - State discussion between the Rev. S.G. Potter (Anglican) and the Rev. J.H. Gordon (Baptist) was not large. *S.I.*, 18 and 19. 4. 1871.

12 *S.I.*, 16.1.1872.

13 *S.I.*, 16.1.1872.

first given, they had a right to re-distribute it." It will be seen that these were much more radical arguments than those put forward by the Rev. David Loxton, because they were designed to appeal to the working classes. On the motion of Josiah Downing and J. Mosley a Sheffield Working Men's Committee was formed, consisting of T. Cowen, W. Woodcock, E. Green, J. Mosley, E. Barker, J. Muscroft and J. Hardy.¹ But although there were a number of working class Liberals who were also keen Liberationists, such as Edward Memmott, William Rolley, John Hardy and John Muscroft,² there is no evidence that the working classes as a whole were ever much interested in the question of Disestablishment. These men represented the elite of the working classes, they attended the Chapels, and shared the Nonconformist dislike of the privileged position of the Church. The mass of the working classes, however, were relatively unaffected by organized religion and therefore the status of the Established Church was of little concern to them. Indeed, it has been suggested that the poorer members of the working classes, if they attended a place of worship at all, attended the services of the Church of England rather than the Nonconformist Chapels.³ Certainly, it is clear that there was as much working class support for the maintenance of the Established Church as could be mobilised against it. At the meeting of 15 January, 1872, for instance, both Potter and Howell spoke amidst great uproar and frequent interruptions, and it was reported that during Howell's speech "a tremendous uproar arose, the greater part of the audience hissing and booing most vociferously."⁴ An amendment condemning the Liberation Society was put by John Raynes and the Rev. Mr. Good of St. John's and supported by Councillor Elliott, a Methodist and leading Conservative. However, it was reported that the amendment was lost, although earlier it had been said that the "greater part" of the audience was booing Howell.⁵ This would indicate that their booing was for something unconnected with his speech, which seems unlikely, or they changed their minds very quickly. The problem illustrates how difficult it is to measure the relative strengths of parties from newspaper reports and the need to treat with some scepticism such phrases as "by a considerable majority."⁶

What is clear is that there was a nucleus of working class support for the Established Church which could be used to counterbalance the efforts of the Liberationists. This was realized by such men as William Odom,⁷ who in February, 1875, openly challenged the views of the Liberationists at a Disestablishment meeting held by the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee.⁸ To counterbalance the Liberation Society, Odom, with the aid of such men as Arthur Thomas, a solicitor for whom Odom had worked for ten years and a leading Conservative, and a working man, Benjamin Fletcher, founded the Working Men's Church Defence and Reform Association.⁹ The Association was undoubtedly formed to uphold the Established Church but because many Anglicans were Conservatives, it could, of course, have political implications. Mundella was in no doubt that "Church Defence in Sheffield means neither more nor less than a Tory candidature at the next election. It is a plain electioneering machinery to counteract your Liberal Association."¹⁰ This was a little extreme but Church Defence did provide a rallying point for those who believed that the Liberals aimed at attacking existing institutions. In this respect, the Liberation Society was a real embarrassment to the Liberal Party because it made the extremists more extreme and it antagonized the moderates, especially those who were members of the Church of England.

1 *Ibid.*

2 John Hardy, 1826 - 80, a railway spring fitter and Primitive Methodist, chaired a meeting of working men to discuss Disestablishment in December, 1875, at which Memmott, Potter, Muscroft and Rolley spoke. *S.I.*, 8.12.1875. Also a meeting in February, 1876, to reply to the defence of the Establishment by 5 working men, at which Memmott, Muscroft, Rolley and Joseph Arch of the Agricultural Labourers' Union spoke. *S.I.*, 2.2.1876.

3 E. R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, 1957, pp. 141 - 142: "it is probable that the more working class Nonconformist denominations . . . had more of the superior, respectable, politically-minded working men than the parish churches, and that the latter had more of the indiscriminate poor."

4 *S.I.*, 16.1.1872.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

7 William Odom, 1846 - 1933: ordained in 1877; 1879 vicar of St. Simon's; 1888 vicar of Heeley; 1916 Canon; distinguished local historian. See also W. Odom, *Fifty Years of Sheffield Church Life, 1866 - 1916*, Sheffield, 1917.

8 *S.I.*, 17.2.1875. The meeting was chaired by Charles Castle, a deacon of Queen Street Chapel, a veteran of the Indian Mutiny and a business associate of Batty Langley.

9 Circular, 9.4.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5890.

10 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 27.1.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

Indeed, the need for Liberal unity after the shock defeat of 1874 explains in part the apparent decline of Liberation in the later 1870's. It was of vital importance to the Liberal party in Sheffield that middle class Liberals, such as F. T. Mappin and William Smith, who were both members of the Church of England, should not go over to the Conservatives as so many of their class had done. Mappin was thought to be a lukewarm Liberal¹ and Mundella was convinced that both he and Smith were worried about the Church question.² So the Disestablishment question had to be put into the background. F. P. Rawson told H. J. Wilson that Leader was satisfied about not being on the committee of the Liberation Society as "he was thoroughly opposed to the wild scheme of agitation resolved upon by the London Committee and supported by our local friends."³ Like other points in the militant Nonconformist programme, such as the Permissive Bill, Liberation had to take second place to Liberal unity. Gladstone referred to the sacrifice which the Nonconformists were making when he told a meeting at Marylebone in April, 1880, that "they are putting their own views into the shade in order that they may not interfere with the success of the cause in which they believe their particular idea is included and absorbed."⁴ The Bulgarian Atrocities and the foreign policy of Beaconsfield's Government provided a cause upon which not only Nonconformists but Liberals in general could unite. It provided a far broader basis for the Liberal party than what seemed to many to be the narrow sectarianism of militant Nonconformity. The retirement of Edward Miall deprived Liberation of its greatest leader and spokesman in the House of Commons. In Sheffield the departure of the Rev. John Fisher to London in 1875 meant that the local branch lost a most active and energetic secretary. From 1875 to 1880 the local branch was far less active than it had been between 1869 and 1874, though its decline must not be overstated. It continued to hold meetings⁵ but they were much fewer and the excitement was less intense than in the years of Liberal division.

1 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 30.12.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 2.11.1875, Mundella MSS., S.U.L. Clerical influence on Mappin (who in early life had been a Nonconformist and had attended Queen Street Chapel), A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 7.12.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

3 F. P. Rawson to H. J. Wilson, 5.10.1875, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5889. Frederick Percy Rawson, 1843 - 1909: cutlery manufacturer; Baptist; chairman of the Sheffield branch of the Liberation Society.

4 Quoted in H. J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management: Politics in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone*, 1959, p. 124.

5 *E.g. S.I.*, 2.2.1876, 24.3.1876, 18.4.1877 when the Rev. Enoch Mellor of Halifax lectured and 10.1.1878 when Edward Jenkins, M.P., spoke.

CHAPTER XIV

SOCIAL QUESTIONS

"With you I should be glad to see the town roused about any good thing and if it cannot be got up on the Permissive Bill, well then go in for a furore on the Repeal of the C.D.A.,¹ Church and State, or something else".²

The Drink Question

Another facet of militant Nonconformity was the agitation carried on by the United Kingdom Alliance for the Permissive Bill, introduced into the House of Commons year after year by Sir Wilfrid Lawson, and which would have empowered a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority of ratepayers to exclude the drink traffic from any district. The Sheffield Auxiliary of the United Kingdom Alliance was very active, holding two large meetings in the space of three months in 1870 to support the Permissive Bill.³ Their faith in the benefits of local option, as it was called, was unbounded and the Rev. H.H. Wright went so far as to say that "if the public houses were closed, there would be little necessity for an Education Bill".⁴ The Sheffield Auxiliary, like the Nonconformist Committee and the Liberation Society, was a pressure group which derived its strength not from numbers but from the individuals associated with it. Some, such as the Rev. Messrs. Calvert and Gledstone, Batty Langley, Henry Joseph and John Wycliffe Wilson were also members of the Nonconformist Committee and the Liberation Society, and the fact that they were all Congregationalists is yet another indication that Congregationalism provided the backbone of militant Nonconformity in Sheffield. It is clear that most of the prominent members of the Alliance⁵ were Nonconformists and Liberals⁶ and this of course tended to make the Drink question more of a political issue since the Drink interest was predominantly Anglican and Conservative.

Pressure from teetotalers and an increasing social awareness of the evils arising from drunkenness, forced the Liberal Government to deal with the question. It did so with some trepidation because the Trade was opposed to any legislative interference with hours of business and the Government was reluctant to make an enemy of so powerful and wealthy an interest. Shortly after the Licensing Bill to restrict hours of opening had been introduced in 1871, it was condemned by a large meeting of brewers and licensed victuallers in Sheffield.⁷ "The Brewers and Publicans are behaving like madmen," Mundella told Leader, "and I have had several letters equivalent to notices to quit. Among others a friendly warning from Birks⁸ that no man will sit again for Sheffield who supports the bill."⁹ Mundella was convinced that if an election took place at that time either he or Hadfield or possibly both of them would be defeated,¹⁰ an indication of the potential political importance of the Trade. However, Mundella was determined to support the second reading of the Bill with a view to amendment and he told Leader: "I have faith enough in the energy and devotion of my friends in Sheffield who care for National morality that they will be able to counteract the influence of the drink seller."¹¹

But the teetotalers were not particularly enthusiastic about the measure, as can be seen from the Conference held to discuss the Bill on 1 May, 1871.¹² J.H. Barber did not attend and in a letter to the meeting expressed his disapproval of the Licensing Bill. He then presided over a large meeting to support the Permissive Bill held on the same day.¹³ At the Conference support for the Bill was rather lukewarm.

1 The Contagious Diseases Acts.

2 Rev. J. Thornley (United Methodist Free Church) to H.J. Wilson, 15.1.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L. M.D. 6011.

3 *S.I.*, 5.3.1870, 25.5.1870.

4 *S.I.*, 5.3.1870.

5 Other prominent members of the Alliance in Sheffield were J.H. Barber, William Sissons, the Rev. Messrs. R. Stainton, George Barrans, S. Chorlton, Richard Green, J. Lyth, W. Price, J. Thornley; Councillors Searle, Shipman, Tozer, Hadfield; William Cobby, R.H. Holden and Charles Wardlow. *S.I.*, 25.5.1870, handbill in "H.J. Wilson's Political Activities Cuttings", Vol. 1, S.C.L.

6 Though not exclusively so, e.g. Rev. Messrs. H.H. Wright and S.G. Potter, and the steel manufacturer, Edward Tozer.

7 *S.I.*, 25.4.1871.

8 Probably E.V. Birks, 1840 - 74, of Thomas Rawson, Pond Street Brewery.

9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 25.4.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

10 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 5.5.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

11 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 25.4.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

12 *S.I.*, 2.5.1871. The Conference was called by, amongst others, Sir John Brown and Canon Sale. The Rev. H.H. Wright was in the chair.

13 *S.I.*, 2.5.1871. A petition drawn up shortly afterwards carried 37,000 signatures. *S.L.R.*, 16.5.1871.

A motion¹ was carried rejoicing that "one of the greatest and most urgent social reforms of the age" was about to be accomplished, but at the same time resolutions were unanimously carried specifying the weaknesses of the bill,² such as the proposal to grant a ten years' tenure of all existing licences, and stating that the Permissive Bill would have been a better measure.³ It seems, however, that the meeting was disposed to agree with the Rev. J. Flather that the present bill, amended in committee, "would go quite as far as the country was prepared to go at present",⁴ and they were prepared to support it as a first step towards a solution of the Drink question.

On the same day, a very large meeting was held in Paradise Square to consider the Licensing Bill.⁵ The *Independent's* description of the meeting as being "decidedly anti-teetotal" was an understatement for so violent was the opposition to the Bill, mobilized by the Trade, that not only were the supporters of the Bill prevented from speaking but for their own safety they were forced to take refuge in Tenter Street Police Station and W.J. Clegg, against whom the anger of the mob was particularly aroused, had to make his escape in a hansom cab.⁶ The meeting, as Leader pointed out, "showed the result of vigorous efforts by men who considered their property to be endangered to avert that danger by the popular vote".⁷ The Drink interest possessed the money necessary to organize a mob who could be easily induced to see the teetotallers as a small group of narrow-minded bigots concerned to curtail the liberties of working men. The speakers at the meeting stressed that the bill would interfere with the liberty of the individual, and that, as Michael Beal said, "you cannot make people sober by Act of Parliament". It is interesting that all but two of the speakers against the Bill were Conservatives. Of the two Liberals, Michael Beal had always been an opponent of legislative interference with the Drink question and was not associated with the Nonconformist wing of the Liberal party in Sheffield, while Thomas Orton, like Beal a vigorous opponent of compulsory vaccination,⁸ and who had worked hard for Mundella's return in 1868, did not play a leading part in the affairs of the Liberal party in Sheffield in the 1870's. Other speakers were all Conservatives, such as J.W. Burns, Alfred Jackson, F.W. Hoole and Councillor Harvey, who in the 1850's had been a Democrat and a supporter of Isaac Ironside. The supporters of the Bill, H.J. Wilson, Batty Langley and W.J. Clegg were shouted down, and resolutions against the Bill were carried by immense majorities.⁹ Leader was right in thinking that "Mr. Bruce's bill, between vehement opposition and lukewarm support, will probably be lost",¹⁰ for the Government did indeed withdraw its Bill.¹¹ But it was clear that another measure would have to be introduced next session¹² and in any case the damage had been done. The Drink interest was mobilized against the Liberal Government and determined to resist any attack on its privileges. Mundella, who in May, 1871, voted for the Permissive Bill in order to put pressure on the Drink Trade to accept "a good system of licensing",¹³ was worried about his position in Sheffield. "Your local affairs are in a fearfully bad way", he told Leader, "and my opposition to Church and Beer will conduce to the strengthening of my enemies".¹⁴ This so-called "Beer and Bible" alliance was to be of considerable political importance in the election of 1874.

The Licensing question played an important part in the municipal elections in November, 1871. The Drink interest nominated eight candidates to represent the Trade, and the following table shows the results.¹⁵

NAME	OCCUPATION	RESULT
THOMAS BERRY	BREWER	BOTTOM OF POLL IN ECCLESALL
ROBERT BUDD	BREWER	ELECTED IN NETHER HALLAM
CHARLES HASLEHURST GREAVES	BREWER	ELECTED IN PARK
WILLIAM PARSONS JEFFERSON	BREWER'S AGENT	ELECTED IN NETHER HALLAM
ALFRED JACKSON	EX-PUBLICAN	DEFEATED IN BRIGHTSIDE
JOHN TYRER	PUBLICAN	DEFEATED IN BRIGHTSIDE
THOMAS YODAN	BEERSELLER	DEFEATED IN ATTERCLIFFE
JOSEPH BINNEY	PUBLICANS' SOLICITOR	ELECTED IN NETHER HALLAM

1 Put by the Rev. Messrs. J.B. Draper and J.S. Workman.

2 Put by the Rev. R. Stainton and H.J. Wilson.

3 Put by the Rev. Messrs. J. Hargreaves and S.G. Potter.

4 *S.I.*, 2.5.1871.

5 *S.I.*, 2.5.1871.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

8 See meeting of Sheffield Non-Compulsory Vaccination Society in April, 1872. Compulsory vaccination was seen as a violation of individual liberty. *S.I.*, 6.4.1872.

9 *S.I.*, 2.5.1871.

10 *Ibid.*

11 Mundella thought that it had "behaved ill" in doing so. A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 17.5.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

12 Leader referred to "the growing demand for a limitation of the liquor traffic", *S.I.*, 2.5.1871.

13 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 25.5.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L. Mundella objected to prohibition.

14 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 10.5.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

15 This table has been compiled from a handbill in "H.J. Wilson's Political Activities Cuttings", Vol. 1. S.C.L. and J.M. Furness, *Record of the Municipal Affairs in Sheffield 1843 - 93*, Sheffield, 1893, p. 40.

It will be seen that four out of the eight candidates were successful and that success came in two wards, Nether Hallam and the Park. They did particularly well in Nether Hallam, where Binney, Budd and Jefferson were returned 2nd, 3rd and 4th respectively. This must have been especially gratifying to the Drink interest because in the contest W.J. Clegg, the leading spokesman of the United Kingdom Alliance in Sheffield, was defeated. Greaves came second in the poll in the Park but in the other wards the Trade was unsuccessful. Jackson and Tyrer were decisively beaten in Brightside, where they encountered the opposition of such influential members of the Alliance as H.J. Wilson and R.H. Holden. In Attercliffe, Thomas Youdan had little chance against Ralph Skelton, who had represented the ward since 1862 and who was a zealous teetotaler, and he polled 609 votes to Skelton's 855.¹ Finally, in Ecclesall, Thomas Berry was soundly defeated. Nevertheless, the Trade could be well satisfied with the outcome of the municipal elections and Mundella was quick to realize the broader political implications. The Government was trapped between the violent opposition of the publicans and the Permissive bill supporters who refused to be "reasonable".²

Another petition in favour of the Permissive Bill was drawn up in May, 1872. It was signed by 42 clergymen of the Church of England and by 68 out of 72 ministers representing the other denominations in the town, as can be seen from the following table.³

DENOMINATION	TOTAL IN TOWN	SIGNED	REFUSED
Baptists	4	4	0
Independents	9	7	2
Jew Reader	1	1	0
Methodist N. Connexion	10	9	1
Presbyterians	1	1	0
Primitive Methodists	8	8	0
Roman Catholics	11	11	0
Unitarians	2	1	1
U. Methodist Free Church	8	8	0
Wesleyans	18	18	0
TOTAL	72	68	4

The Licensing Bill, which the Government introduced in 1872, was met with determined opposition from the Trade. At a large meeting in July,⁴ Thomas Moore denounced it as "a great encroachment upon their privileges" and Alfred Jackson blamed the United Kingdom Alliance, which he thought "the most intolerant set of bigots in this country", "continually agitating the country on the liquor question".⁵ It is clear that the speakers regarded the measure as the thin end of the teetotal wedge and that they saw the temperance men as real enemies, "fanatics", whose efforts, if unchecked, would deprive them of their livelihood. Michael Beal urged that the Bill was unfair to those who had invested vast capital in the trade under the previous encouragement of the Government. The Trade in Sheffield also disliked the proposal that public houses should remain open one hour longer in London which meant that "Sheffield and other large towns were left altogether in the cold."⁶ To strengthen their opposition to a Bill which they considered to be contrary to their interests, the publicans were at great pains to attract working class support. It was argued that the Bill would hit working men who were on night work and would prevent them from gaining refreshment on Sundays when many of them went into the country. Another attempt to whip up working class support for the Trade was made in October, 1872, when Ald. Harvey chaired a meeting "opposed to the licensing restrictions put upon the town by the borough justices", which was attended by the celebrated prize-fighter, Jem Mace.⁷ Of course, the subject was one upon which the less thoughtful part of the working classes could easily be aroused by the wealthy and locally influential publicans and the size of the protest meetings in July and August, 1872,⁸ together with the 20,800 signatures

1 Furness, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

2 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 22.11.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

3 *S.I.*, 21.5.1872.

4 *S.I.*, 2.7.1872.

5 *Ibid.*

6 The words of J.W. Burns, *S.I.*, 2.7.1872.

7 *S.I.*, 29.10.1872.

8 The *Independent* reported the attendances at between 10,000 and 12,000 people.

appended to the petition against the Bill,¹ suggests that the Trade had strong support in its campaign against legislative interference. On the other hand, there were many working men, "respectable" artisans, who were not open to public house influence. Such were George Levesley, table-blade grinder, and James Holmes, mason, who were prevented from speaking in favour of the Bill at the meeting in July.² Moreover, the publicans' case against the Bill was weakened by the fact that it was hard to argue that so "moderate and tentative"³ a measure as Bruce's Bill was really detrimental to their interests or an attack upon their privileges. Even W.C. Leng, usually so ready to exploit any anti-Liberal standpoint, appealed for moderation and asked that the Act be given a fair trial.⁴ Mundella believed that if the publicans were left alone, "they will gradually settle down to the conviction that the Act was good for them".⁵ As soon appeared, this was much too sanguine a view, for the Drink interest was deeply antagonized by the measure. In October, 1872, for example, a meeting of licensed victuallers and brewers passed resolutions demanding the repeal or a great modification of the Act.⁶ In the election of 1874, the Trade backed the Conservatives with a zeal greater than any it displayed before or since and in return Disraeli's Government amended the Act slightly, in itself an indication that the interest had over-estimated the importance of the measure. Nevertheless, the Licensing Act of 1872 had this great political importance that it alienated and set in active opposition a powerful and wealthy vested interest, which greatly contributed to the Liberal defeat in 1874. The situation was made worse by the fact that the teetotallers were equally irreconcilable. They simply would not allow the matter to rest. In the municipal contest in Brightside in 1872, H.J. Wilson called upon Batty Langley to take a bold line on the liquor question and to stop trying to please everybody.⁷ "You have no policy and no election cry and no enthusiasm", he complained. But continued agitation merely provoked the publicans and strengthened the Conservatives. Leader summed up the effect of it in November, 1874; when commenting upon a meeting of the Sheffield Auxiliary addressed by Sir Wilfrid Lawson, he wrote: "the riders of hobbies have ridden down Liberalism".⁸

Mention must be made of the Public Home Movement,⁹ an interesting experiment started by the Rev. John Fisher of Howard Street in 1873. Public Homes were self-supporting institutions combining "all the advantages the ordinary Public House is supposed to afford without these two great evils — drunkenness and gambling".¹⁰ In November, 1873, Stag Home, Pea Croft, was opened. It was not merely a club but also a Sick and Funeral Society which had 85 members in 1875 - 76 and a Saving Club which had deposits of £120. It sought to provide all the facilities and benefits which Public Houses supplied at the time. H.J. Wilson took a keen interest in the movement, as did intelligent working men such as John Muscroft and Henry Grafton. It seems, however, that the success of the venture was reduced by the location of Pea Croft which was described as "extremely unfavourable either to temperance work or to cultivating habits of reading and study".¹¹ Nevertheless the Stag Home is important because it shows that temperance men were sincerely anxious to do something positive to elevate the moral condition of the working classes and to provide them with an alternative to the Public House.

The Contagious Diseases Acts

The Contagious Diseases Acts, which had been passed in 1864, provided for the registration and periodical examination of prostitutes in seaports and garrison towns. At first, little notice was taken of them, but gradually a storm of protest was raised against what amounted to a state regulation of vice. Two main objections were levelled against the Acts. They degraded women¹² and infringed the liberty of the individual by conferring powers upon the police which were open to abuse. Secondly, they recognized prostitution as a "necessary" evil and, in effect, encouraged vice. The offence which they gave to the moral sensibilities of religious men and women overcame any utilitarian arguments put forward in their favour and the campaign against them steadily gained momentum in the 1870's, though the Acts were not repealed until 1886. This delay was partly due to the support given to the Acts by military and naval officials, who believed that they ensured a healthy army and navy¹³ but perhaps even more to the emotive nature of the subject, which was considered too indelicate for respectable men and especially women to discuss. Josephine Butler, who led

1 S.I., 2.7.1872.

2 *Ibid.*

3 S.I., 10.8.1872.

4 S.D.T., 21.10.1872.

5 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 30.1.1873, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

6 S.I., 18.10.1872.

7 H.J. Wilson to B. Langley, 26.10.1872, "not sent but the substance said", Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D.6011.

8 S.I., 12.11.1874.

9 This short account is based on the Annual Report of the Stag Home, Pea Croft, 1875 - 76, Wilson, MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6013.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 Cf. in this connection a meeting held in Sheffield in January, 1874, to support Jacob Bright's Bill to remove the electoral disabilities of women, at which Josephine Butler spoke. S.I., 17.1.1874.

13 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 18.6.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

the campaign against the Acts, was right when she told a Sheffield meeting in April, 1871, that "all that was needed to expose the iniquity and foulness of the Acts was to throw the light of public discussion upon them",¹ but the problem was that the public was unwilling to discuss such a "nasty" subject. "Public opinion is not sufficiently formed to make the Press and Parliament look seriously into the question", Mundella told H.J. Wilson. "Ignorance and prejudice meet me on all hands amongst the "comfortable classes". And the literary men can hardly find words hard enough to express their contempt for us".²

Mundella and Wilson were both earnest opponents of the Acts. Mundella was a member of the Commission set up in 1871 to investigate their working, while Wilson worked tirelessly both at the local and the national level to organize an agitation to demand repeal. In Sheffield, he was assisted by his wife, Charlotte Cowan, and by such earnest repealers as J.H. Barber and the Rev. Messrs. Gledstone and Stainton. A large meeting was held in April, 1871, at which the Acts were denounced as "immoral, unjust, unconstitutional, and fraught with danger to the community at large, especially to the working classes" and a committee was established.³ In May of the same year it was reported in the *Independent* that petitions carrying nearly 20,000 signatures had already been sent to Parliament.⁴ In 1872 the Northern Counties League for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts was organized at a meeting in Sheffield and H.J. Wilson was appointed Honorary Secretary. Repeal of the Acts was the cause to which he devoted most attention because he was scandalized by the immorality which they encouraged and because he considered that such legislation created a dangerous precedent, the scope of which might be extended. When attempts were made to introduce the system into the United States, Wilson and the Rev. J.P. Gledstone, who had by this time taken up a pastorate in London, made a trip to America as a deputation from the British, Continental and General Federation for the Abolition of Government Regulation of Prostitution.⁵ They visited New York, Washington, Baltimore, Boston and Philadelphia, made 150 calls and held 25 meetings.⁶ At the same time they secured support for their campaign from such men as Neal Dow and William Lloyd Garrison.⁷ Thus the campaign assumed international scope and in the following year Frederick C. Banks told Henry and Charlotte Wilson that "the influence of English Repeal work is now felt all over the globe where similar laws are in force or threatened . . . the cause is progressing wonderfully everywhere."⁸ Banks, who was secretary of the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, was quick to acknowledge H.J. Wilson's contribution to the work, describing him as "one of the most earnest and self-sacrificing of our co-workers."⁹ It seems that in Sheffield public opinion, so far as it expressed itself on the subject, was in favour of repeal. At the meeting in April, 1871, Dr. J.C. Hall, who attempted to defend the Acts on medical grounds, was unable to secure a hearing.¹⁰ In this period only one meeting was held in Sheffield in support of the Acts in January, 1876, when Dr. Hall presided and John Edley Taylor spoke.¹¹ Some weeks later his arguments were refuted by Dr. Nevens of Liverpool in a meeting chaired by J.H. Barber.¹²

The agitation for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts was of considerable political importance because it widened the gulf between the extreme Radicals and the Liberal Government. The Government had little sympathy with repeal and Wilson complained bitterly to Mundella in December, 1872, that "the Cabinet rejoices in the agitation no doubt because it absorbs the labours of those who would otherwise be working for other reforms which are equally distasteful to Whigs and Aristocrats."¹³ No action followed the Royal Commission of 1871 partly because the agitation was in its infancy,¹⁴ more perhaps because of the support for the Acts from the military and naval interests in the House of Commons. The refusal of the Government to deal with the question angered the advanced Radicals and served to make them even more "irreconcilable", so much so that they did not care whether the Government stood or fell. In January, 1872, the Rev. John Jenkyn Brown wrote as follows to H.J. Wilson: "I am sure we shall do nothing until we make it clear at

1 *S.I.*, 13.4.1871.

2 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 29.12.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

3 *S.I.*, 13.4.1871. Others present included the Rev. Dr. Sale, the Rev. J. Hargreaves, T.W. Rodgers, J.W. Wilson, B. Langley and W.J. Clegg.

4 *S.I.*, 6.5.1871.

5 There is much material relating to Wilson's visit to the U.S.A. in Wilson MSS., S.C.L.

6 Report in Wilson MSS., S.C.L. M.D. 2540.

7 Garrison, in a letter to H.J. Wilson, 29.5.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 2542, described the Acts as "specious but Satanic devices to popularize licentiousness and hold out special inducements for its indulgence".

8 F.C. Banks to H.J. and C. Wilson, June 1877, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6009.A.

9 F.C. Banks to H.J. Wilson, 7.7.1875, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6009.A.

10 *S.I.*, 13.4.1871.

11 *S.I.*, 20.1.1876.

12 *S.I.*, 9.2.1876.

13 H.J. Wilson to A.J. Mundella, 31.12.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L. M.D. 6008.

14 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 29.12.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L. M.D. 6008.

two or three elections that we mean, and are able to destroy the parliamentary prospects of some at all events — especially some of the liberal party. For the most part those who are concerned in this agitation are liberals, but I should be prepared to allow a Tory to go in rather than a liberal, if he would go against us in this question . . . I have more and more faith in moral principles and less in liberal professionalism . . . I believe that the ministry is utterly inaccessible to moral considerations, but even they will feel the exclusion of a few of their members from Parliament.”¹

The extreme Radicals were determined to make the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts a real political issue and this embarrassed the Government and the more moderate Liberals who did not see it as such a pressing question. Even the advanced Joseph Chamberlain, although he admitted that the Acts were wrong, considered that there were other and far more important reforms² which should come first.³ Leader, an opponent of the Acts, disliked the part played in the agitation by “lady orators”⁴ and, as will appear, his criticism of Charlotte Wilson’s involvement in the campaign helped to widen the split between himself and Wilson. To some Liberals, no doubt, the agitation seemed to be yet another hobby horse, like unsectarian education, temperance and liberation, which led to disunity and dissipated Liberal strength. The defeat of 1874 shocked the advanced Liberals into the realization that, if the Liberals were to return to office, these questions must be allowed to recede into the background.

1 J.J. Brown to H.J. Wilson, 1.1.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

2 *E.g.* universal establishment of free schools, separation of Church and State, land law reform and legislation for prevention of drunkenness.

3 J. Chamberlain to H.J. Wilson, 10.4.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L. M.D. 5890.

4 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 2.11.1875, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.: “I have an old aversion - prejudice, perhaps - to lady orators and I should be very sorry to see it become a usage among us for them to occupy political, or social and religious platforms”. Leader obviously had not followed the C.D.A. question closely, for he asked Wilson for an idea of Stansfeld’s views. R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 13.11.1875, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

CHAPTER XV

The Labour Laws

The dislike which a number of the manufacturing class in Sheffield felt towards Mundella rested on the feeling, which Mundella worked so hard to dispel, that the interests of employer and workmen were mutually antagonistic. The masters had backed Roebuck in 1868 and they did not easily forget that Mundella had owed his election to working class support. He was, therefore, the representative of the working classes or more specifically, as they believed, of the trade unions. They found it hard to accept that he could look after the interests of trade unions and of employers at the same time, because they did not believe that these were identical. So the circumstances of Mundella's election in 1868 and his standing with the men helps to explain why so many manufacturers in Sheffield moved, via their support of Roebuck, away from Liberalism and towards Toryism in the 1870's. In the light trades there were few large employers and little distinction between master and man, but this did not apply to the steel industry with its large capital outlay and vast labour force. A working man had little hope of becoming a steel manufacturer, so that the gulf between employer and employed was not only economic but social and this prompted Mundella to remark that "the separation of classes in Sheffield is wider than in any other place I ever knew".¹ It was because Mundella's hold on the employers was so tenuous and "precarious"² that Leader was concerned to put forward a local man, Alfred Allott, whose business connections would attract middle class support, as the second Liberal candidate in 1874. Thus the intervention of Chamberlain who, like Mundella, drew his support from the working classes was politically disastrous because it caused the employers to rally solidly behind Roebuck.

Yet Mundella's high standing with the working classes in Sheffield ensured that at least the most politically conscious and articulate section of the working classes supported the Liberal party and accepted the Liberal leadership in Sheffield. Just as the employers were alienated by Mundella's regard for working class interests, so the men were grateful for his efforts. They trusted Mundella and because they trusted him, they trusted the Liberal party. The Trades' Union Bill of 1869, which gave legal protection to Union funds, owed much to Mundella and in the following year he was pressing for a Royal Commission to investigate payment by Truck which he regarded as a "cruel and vicious system."³ When the Trades' Union Bill was introduced in 1871, he told Leader: "I feel bound to fight for the most liberal measure that can be obtained, and really it will place Trade Unions on a very different footing to the old law."⁴ But although the funds of unions were given legal protection, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, passed at the same time, made peaceful picketing illegal so that strike action within the law was virtually impossible. Mundella sympathized with the men and believed that the Act had emerged in such an obnoxious form because "the Employers in the House went over to the Tories."⁵ A letter was read from Mundella to a meeting held to promote the repeal of the Act, chaired by George Austin of the railway spring makers, in which he stated: "I have, however, every reason to believe that the Government would support any measure restoring the Act to the condition it was in before it was sent to the Lords."⁶ The Master and Servant Act, which made the non-fulfilment of a contract a criminal offence in the case of the employee only, was an equally serious grievance. Giving evidence before a Royal Commission, the ex-stipendiary magistrate of Sheffield, J.E. Davis, stated that 405 cases under the Act had been brought in 1871, 582 in 1872 and 579 in 1873, the rise being an index of increasing prosperity in trade.⁷ "Substantially, all the cases were by employers against employed "and Davis was of the opinion that the Act should be made a civil one only.

In Sheffield, however, the Liberal party did not appear to suffer from the failure of the Government to allay the discontent to which the Labour Laws gave rise. In large measure this was due to the popularity of Mundella among the working classes and his close links with the labour movement both in Sheffield and at the national level. It was also due to the strength of trade unionism in Sheffield which could not be ignored even by the employers. At a meeting of workmen in the engineering trades in November, 1871, for example, it was stated that "the Nine Hours movement in Sheffield was an accomplished fact."⁸ Moreover, prominent trade unionists, such as William Rolley of the steel melters, played an important part in the deliberations of the Liberal party in Sheffield. Finally, the alternative was a Conservative party to which most of the employers belonged and whose candidate was Roebuck who was widely believed to be an opponent of trade unionism. In March, 1873, for instance, Roebuck attacked the leaders of the South Wales unions at a Foresters'

- 1 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 3.11.1875, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 2 R. Leader to Sir Charles Reed, 18.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 3 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 15.7.1870, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 4 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 1.4.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 5 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 20.6.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 6 *S.I.*, 26.4.1872. A letter from Samuel Crompton was also read.
- 7 *S.I.*, 16.10.1874.
- 8 *S.I.*, 9.11.1871. Attended by delegates from Newcastle and Manchester.

Banquet held in the Cutlers' Hall, which so incensed trade unionists that they organised a meeting of protest, attended by Thomas Halliday and W. Brown, President and Vice-President respectively of the Amalgamated Society of Miners.¹ Lloyd Jones accused Roebuck of engendering "strife and division between class and class" and declared that "if ever a number of words was put together with the intention of damaging trades unions it was done by Mr. Roebuck."² So that section of the working classes which was associated with the trade unions, the elite, the most respectable and politically articulate part of the working classes, remained loyal to the Liberal party, despite the Criminal Law Amendment Act and the poor record of the Government on working class questions.

Liberal Divisions

H.J. Wilson was anxious to make Sheffield Liberalism much more vigorous and radical, so that it would provide the machinery to agitate the great questions, such as Education, Liberation, the Permissive Bill and the Contagious Diseases Acts. He wanted a party that would shape public opinion and really lead, instead of being led by other places. Above all, he was convinced that the Liberal party must be ready for the next election with a thoroughly radical candidate who would arouse popular enthusiasm, as it was obvious that Hadfield's advanced age would prevent him from standing again. Wilson told W.J. Clegg that the candidate must be "utterly opposed" to the Contagious Diseases Acts: "I am as clear on that as on the new Church Rate or on Temperance".³ Of course, a candidate was not easy to find because it was hard to discover a candidate who was sound on all questions. S.D. Waddy, son of the famous principal of Wesley College, was approached but Wilson objected that his views on religious equality and disestablishment differed from the "out and out dissenters' view",⁴ which, he told Clegg, was "fatal to any candidate from my point of view."⁵ Another possibility was Edward Jenkins whose views were acceptable except on the question of the Permissive Bill which he was unable to support in its integrity.⁶ In searching for a candidate, Wilson was in close contact with the Central Nonconformist Committee in Birmingham. Of Jenkins, it gave the following reference: "a first rate fellow - Takes our platform all through. He has rather too many crotchets however to make a successful candidate".⁷

It is not surprising that Wilson's action brought him into direct opposition with the older Liberal leadership and especially with Robert Leader, who after the death of Thomas Dunn in 1871, exercised most influence in the Liberal party in Sheffield. Wilson no doubt resented Leader's influence, but he also disliked him because he believed that he allowed political expediency to outweigh political principle, "a political trickster; a mountebank who will jump on any winning horse."⁸ They differed about the exclusion of the Bible from the Board Schools, upon which question Leader resigned from the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee. A few weeks later a printed circular, signed by H.J. Wilson, was issued, expressing doubts "as to his [Leader's] sympathy with decided and outspoken Nonconformist opinions."⁹ Leader was not in favour of the Permissive Bill and disliked the style of the agitation for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.¹⁰ Wilson considered that Leader's moderate position was the product of political cowardice, and that he was working to sabotage his efforts. "I am not pausing of course," he wrote to the Rev. J. Calvert, "to state incidents, some not published, proving his trickery, duplicity and animus towards myself or towards movements I have participated in and supported."¹¹ Wilson especially resented his criticism of his wife's part in the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Leader had described her as a "woman meddling with a subject too nasty to be touched",¹² and Wilson, rather too hastily, interpreted his words as suggesting that Charlotte was "a nasty indecent meddling woman."¹³ Partly the differences between Wilson and Leader were the product of a clash of two equally resolute personalities, but more it represented the challenge to moderate Liberalism from an advanced political radicalism, re-enforced by militant Nonconformity, and the history of the Liberal party

1 S.J., 28.3.1873. This meeting was described as "crowded and excited".

2 *Ibid.*

3 H.J. Wilson to W.J. Clegg, 17.5.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

4 H.J. Wilson to W.J. Clegg, 17.6.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

5 H.J. Wilson to W.J. Clegg, 5.6.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

6 Rev. J. Thornley to H.J. Wilson, June 1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

7 Central Nonconformist Committee to H.J. Wilson, no date but May or June 1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

8 H.J. Wilson to Rev. J. Calvert, 25.11.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

9 Dated 28.6.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

10 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 12.2.1873, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

11 H.J. Wilson to Rev. J. Calvert, 25.11.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

12 H.J. Wilson to A.J. Mundella, 21.10.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008

13 *Ibid.*

in Sheffield between 1872 and 1874 was essentially a power struggle between the old leadership, striving to maintain its predominance, and the new, striving to exert itself. Between the two wings of the party stood Mundella, realizing the dangers of division and trying with little success to maintain unity. In October, 1872, for example, he wrote as follows to H.J. Wilson: "I wish you would go with those who are not quite up to your mark as far as they go. We must do this or the enemy (who is never disunited) will gain by our want of cohesion. Pray do not give me Roebuck for a colleague."¹ Such warnings were to prove of little avail.

H.J. Wilson was anxious to unite the middle class Radicals, most of whom were militant Nonconformists, and the working class Liberals behind an acceptable candidate. In December, 1872, a committee of the whole of the trades of Sheffield was formed to act with the Sheffield Trades Council to support a candidate "that shall, to such committee, appear best able to represent their interests in Parliament."² Frederick Maxse, a Radical who had taken a deep interest in the condition of the agricultural labourers,³ appeared to be a likely candidate and, when he visited Sheffield, it was arranged for a number of leading trade unionists, such as Michael Prior, Edward Memmott, Henry Cutts and George Fox, to meet him.⁴ J.W. Wilson realized the importance of a middle class - working class political alliance. He wrote to his brother: "if the middle class Radicals (alas how few!) can agree with the united Trades on a man, the prospect would be very embarrassing for the Bank Street party."⁵ But J.W. Wilson believed that Maxse would not be acceptable to the religious public, whose views had to be taken into account.

The opponents of the Leader faction in Sheffield became united not so much behind a candidate of their own, but by opposition to Leader's own nominee, Alfred Allott. Allott was very much a self-made man, an accountant and a successful businessman. He was well-respected locally, a member of the School Board and of the Town Council, and a prominent Congregationalist. The *Telegraph* described him with obvious political bias as "so sleek and so smug — so compact and so circumspect an example of an able financier and a comfortable Christian . . . upon him dividends descend like dew upon Mount Hermon."⁶ On Nonconformist questions, he was moderate, though he was a strict Sabbatarian,⁷ and he supported Gladstone's Government. He was a good candidate in the political situation which then existed in Sheffield, because he would secure the support of many moderates who would not vote for an outsider and another Radical. What was needed was a man who would complement Mundella by attracting middle class votes and Leader pushed Allott's candidature with such insistence because he realized that two Radicals relying on support from the same section of the electorate, the lower middle and working classes, were unlikely to be successful.

The advanced Radicals opposed Allott because they considered that he was no more than Leader's "catspaw".⁸ J.P. Gledstone went so far as to assert that, if Allott were returned, "Mr. Leader will be the most influential member of the House of Commons."⁹ His candidature seemed yet another example of dictation by the Bank Street regime, and Mundella told Leader that "seeing what strange diversities of opinion, and what bitter local differences exist in the Liberal party in Sheffield, it seems to me that it will require great tact and discretion to make the nomination of a local man appear to be the work of the whole Liberal party".¹⁰ Even more serious was the opposition to Allott from the militant Nonconformists. "He certainly is not sound upon our great principles of religious equality" and "not true upon the Education question," Gledstone told Wilson.¹¹ Wilson himself believed that in the last resort Allott would "worship the Cabinet and turn the cold shoulder to Miall and Lawson and call them 'extreme men', though 'well meaning.'" ¹² The Rev. George Knight, Unitarian minister of Uppertorpe Chapel, said that if Allott became a candidate he would stump the town against him¹³ and Percy Rawson and Charles Castle, a deacon of Queen Street, were equally "firm" against him.¹⁴ The militant Nonconformists were determined to have a candidate who was sound on their programme and an advanced Radical.

In order to carry this into effect and to strengthen their position, the Radicals resolved to form a Reform Association, established at a meeting in March, 1873.¹⁵ Its basis was a printed address to the Liberals of Leeds and

1 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 15.10.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L. M.D. 6008.

2 M. Prior to H.J. Wilson, 4.12.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5930.

3 F. Maxse to H.J. Wilson, 1.12.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

4 Wm. Dronfield to H.J. Wilson, 20.11.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

5 J.W. Wilson to H.J. Wilson, 2.1.1873, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5930.

6 *S.D.T.*, 23.11.1872.

7 Present at a meeting convened by the Central Association for Stopping the Sale of Intoxicating Liquors on Sundays. *S.I.*, 7.12.1871. Opposed to opening museums on Sundays. *S.I.*, 18.12.1873.

8 H.J. Wilson to Rev. J. Calvert, 3.1.1873, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5930.

9 Rev. J.P. Gledstone to J.W. Wilson, 30.12.1872. Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5930.

10 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 15.12.1872, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

11 Rev. J.P. Gledstone to H.J. Wilson, 2.1.1873, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5930.

12 H.J. Wilson to J.W. Wilson, 4.12.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

13 *Ibid.* This followed a meeting of Mundella's Committee on 3 December, to which H.J. Wilson was appointed.

14 H.J. Wilson to Rev. J. Calvert, 3.1.1873, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5930.

15 *S.I.*, 27.3.1873.

Elsewhere, dated 11 November, 1872, and signed by George Tatham.¹ It began with a definition of Liberalism and Conservatism: "I hold Liberalism to be 'good government for the people, and by the people', whilst Conservatism means 'good government for the people, but without the people' being consulted or having any powers of control." Tatham argued that the old Liberal party could now be dissolved because its work was done and he declared "let those who wish for further progress form an Advanced Party," the programme of which should be:

- (i) civil and religious equality.
- (ii) economy — reduction of Army and Navy expenses.
- (iii) repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts
- (iv) the Permissive Bill
- "perhaps" (v) no further centralization.

The pamphlet was widely circulated amongst Radicals in Sheffield and, with some additions, formed the basis of the programme of the Sheffield Reform Association,² though to avoid splits, it was made optional whether members supported the whole programme. The Association was an amalgam of militant Nonconformists such as the Wilsons, F.P. Rawson, D.T. Ingham, G.W. Sharman and the Rev. John Fisher, and working class Liberals such as Edward Memmott, Michael Prior and William Rolley.³ It is clear that one of the principal aims of the Association was to run a suitable candidate at the next election. The name of Joseph Chamberlain had already been suggested to H.J. Wilson by R.F. Martineau and the leading wire-puller of Birmingham Liberalism, Frank Schnadhorst,⁴ as well as by Edward Miall.⁵ Chamberlain was invited to address two large meetings of the Association, held in May and September, 1873.⁶ Both provided excellent platforms for him to express his political views and to become known to the constituency, and at both meetings strong hopes were expressed that Chamberlain would contest Sheffield.

The formation of the Sheffield Reform Association alarmed the more moderate Liberals who resolved to make an effort to heal the division. Accordingly, at a joint meeting of Mundella's Committee and the Sheffield Reform Association, it was resolved to form a Liberal Union.⁷ Below is a list of the committee, together with Wilson's remarks about each member.⁸

ALLOTT		CASTLE	
LEADER		MEMMOTT	
CRIGHTON	"These 9 will	ROLLEY	"These 6 are
PAUL	go hard for	DOWNING	reliable for
TAYLOR	Allott".	FISHER	Radicalism".
CLEGG		WILSON	
PYE-SMITH	Crighton	MOORE	"I have no opinion
HOVEY		WOOD, ALD.	about these 2".
STANTON			
SKELTON	"These 3 are in favour	BARBER	"These will go
BEAL	of Radicalism but	DRONFIELD	for Allott
LANGLEY	would rather not 'split' ".	FOX	I think".

Mundella was anxious to "get Mappin and all Liberals in accord as to the Liberal Union",⁹ but the

1 Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

2 The programme was: "a reduction of the county franchise and the approximate equalisation of representation to population; international arbitration; reduction of national expenditure; abolition of the laws of primogeniture and entail; revision of the laws relating to the transfer and tenure of land; abolition of the game laws; shorter parliaments; the recognition of the right of the ratepayers to limit or extinguish the liquor traffic (amended to ratepayers' control of the drink traffic); disestablishment and disendowment of State Churches; universal establishment of School Boards and compulsory attendance of children; repeal of the 25th. clause of the Education Act; recognition of the right of women (being householders) to the parliamentary franchise; repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act and the Contagious Diseases Acts; generally the support of any movement calculated to promote the social and political elevation of the people". *S.I.*, 27.3.1873.

3 William Rolley, 1839 - 1912: organized trade unionism in steel trade, secretary of Sheffield United Steel Melters' Association; active in formation of Sheffield Trades Council; 1874 president of Trade Union Congress held in Sheffield; member of United Methodist Free Church; served on School Board, 1876 - 78; became a Liberal Unionist, afterwards Conservative agent for Barnard Castle and later Richmond; supported Chamberlain over Tariff Reform. Rolley and Memmott, a file hardener, had close links with militant Nonconformity.

4 F. Schnadhorst to H.J. Wilson, 19.3.1873, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6009A. Pencil note by H.J. Wilson that Schnadhorst had been first to suggest Chamberlain to him at an election in Bath.

5 E. Miall to H.J. Wilson, 28.3.1873, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

6 *S.I.*, 15.5.1873, 24.9.1873.

7 *S.I.*, 23.4.1873.

8 Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 1.5.1873, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

Liberal Union was a failure because neither side was prepared to give way on the question of who should be the candidate. The Leader faction was determined that it should be Allott and the Wilson party was as firmly opposed to him. Wilson blamed Leader, Allott and Stainton for the impending split,¹ and he told Leader bluntly "in my opinion the feeling about Mr. Allott originates with, if it is not almost confined to, yourself and Mr. Stainton."² But the split was the result of more than this. It represented a basic disagreement between the moderates and the Radicals and a struggle between the old and the new Liberal leadership in Sheffield.

The Election of 1874

To many Liberals it seemed that Chamberlain was a much stronger candidate than Allott, but from the outset Chamberlain's position was never as strong as his supporters thought. This was mainly because he did not attract the kind of support which the Liberals needed if they were to retain the second seat. He did not appeal to the moderate middle class voters who found his advanced radicalism alarming. The result was that both he and Mundella relied on the same section of the electorate and so it was impossible for them both to be successful.

Allott was supported by the old Liberal leadership, by such men as Robert Leader, John Askham, William Paul and J.W. Pye-Smith. He was a good candidate because he was a local man and in politics he was regarded as being more moderate than Chamberlain. He was a supporter of Gladstone's Government, which Chamberlain had vehemently assailed,³ and he was in favour of Bible teaching in Board Schools, while Chamberlain, the leading figure in the National Education League,⁴ stood for secular education, leaving religious teaching to voluntary effort.⁵ At the same time, Allott supported disestablishment of the Church of England and household suffrage in the counties,⁶ though on the Drink question he wished to remain "unpledged".⁷ He was also a strict Sabbatarian. His business connections would attract support from the commercial class, and he would be supported by moderate Dissenters. Mundella believed that he "would carry the larger portion of the middle classes and the religious part of the community."⁸ Middle class votes were urgently needed to counteract the influence of the Church and Publicans, and because the middle classes in Sheffield were moving more and more away from Liberalism, "out of dislike," as Mundella put it, "to the attitude of the artisan class."⁹ He added: "I think this distrust of the workman has more to do with Liberal defeats than Toryism, Teetotalism or the 25th Clause."¹⁰ Mundella was convinced that this middle class dislike of the working classes was very real in Sheffield and he told Leader with reference to the forthcoming Trade Union Congress in January, 1874, which was held in Sheffield: "I am afraid the Sheffield middle class are very antagonistic to them, and will resent my appearance amongst them."¹¹ The Catholic vote had also to be taken into account and Mundella admitted to H.J. Wilson that, although Chamberlain would be "an excellent fighting candidate", "his League views will provoke the united and bitter hostility of Churchmen, Catholics and many moderate Liberals and you must not forget what a large Catholic element there is in Sheffield which was entirely on the Liberal side last election."¹² Allott's views on education were much more moderate and palatable to Churchmen and Catholics who were concerned about the future of denominational schools. Moreover, Allott would be supported by those Liberals who disliked what they considered to be outside interference. As Leader expressed it: "we know well how little Birmingham would yield to be taken under the fostering care of Sheffield, and Sheffield will not like to wear Birmingham leading-strings."¹³ Much ill feeling had been caused by the intervention of Birmingham in the affairs of the local branch of the National Education League and the established Liberal leadership was determined that Sheffield would not become an appendage of Birmingham. "To ignore all local excellence in favour of what may be imported, is incompatible with the self-respect a great

1 H.J. Wilson to R. Leader, 7.8.1873, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

2 H.J. Wilson to R. Leader, 14.8.1873, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

3 *S.I.*, 26.1.1874.

4 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 16.12.1873, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.: "he is master of the League rather than the League of him."

5 *S.I.*, 13.1.1874.

6 *S.I.*, 12.11.1873.

7 *S.I.*, 10.12.1873.

8 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 1.12.1873, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 5.10.1873, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

10 *Ibid.*

11 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 31.12.1873, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

12 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 18.12.1873, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

13 *S.I.*, 26.1.1874.

constituency ought to entertain for itself,"¹ Leader declared.

Although in all these respects Allott's candidature had much to commend it, it was hard to create much popular enthusiasm for it. Allott was widely regarded as a rather colourless personality whose political opinions had "a sort of ready-made clothes kind of cut about them".² Partly no doubt he suffered from petty local jealousies which any successful local man would have encountered. A letter in the *Telegraph*, for example, described him as a "moneyed mediocrity".³ Certainly, he did not possess Chamberlain's presence and his ability as a popular orator. Many Liberals regarded him, for this reason, as the nominee of the Leader faction and so Allott became the focus for all the hostility felt towards Leader. The *Sheffield Post*,⁴ which supported Chamberlain, expressed it as follows: "It is true that many people are opposed to Mr. Allott because they are tired of the Bank - street regime. The old wire-pullers should apply to themselves the same arguments that they apply to Mr. Hadfield. They have held office long - they are out of date - they may safely retire upon their laurels, and leave the electors to select their own man. For many years, one or two men have pulled the wires, and the puppets have played their little parts . . . the burgesses are about wearied of the Bank - street band - it plays out of tune with the times. Let the old Whig 'managers' who profess to have the borough representation in their pocket, realise the fact that their day is gone, and that a better and a braver class of leaders are needed for the battles of to-day."⁵

Of course, Leader saw the political advantages of Allott's candidature and the need to attract middle class votes, but these were hardly arguments which could be used in the pages of the *Independent* to justify Allott's candidature. They smacked too much of political expediency. So Leader's main argument was that it was better to elect a local man than an outsider,⁶ a hollow and unconvincing line which merely gave credence to the view that he was backing Allott to strengthen his own influence. The accusation of wire-pulling could not be refuted because, as a fighting candidate, Allott was so patently inferior to Chamberlain. John Daniel Leader told his father "you are the Allott party. Without your energy the whole thing would collapse,"⁷ and he added: "it is the duty of the *Independent* to serve the Liberal party and not to split it up. The newspaper ought to be in accord with the advanced liberals of the day, not fomenting dissension which but for our support would never be able to show its head." Robert Eadon Leader also tried to persuade his father against pushing the Allott candidature further. "Your experience and energy and influence are very great, but you cannot unaided force upon the constituency a man upon whom everybody looks askance as a member of Parliament however much they may respect him in his proper sphere."⁸ Leader replied: "if Mr. Allott and his leading friends were to adopt Chamberlain, I very much doubt whether they could carry the party for him",⁹ a clear indication that there existed in Sheffield a solid body of moderate Liberals who would not support Chamberlain, which became even more apparent after the withdrawal of Allott from the contest on 29 January.

At the same time Allott could not have been successful without the support of the working class Liberals and the middle class Radical Nonconformists who backed Chamberlain. Mundella wrote to Leader: "I do not wonder at your anxiety about Cutts and the Unionists and the Nonconformist Ministers. I gather that the former are irrevocably gone over to Chamberlain. How can Mr. Allott win without them? The latter will go I expect on Chamberlain's vigorous and bitter exposition of his Nonconformist views."¹⁰ Chamberlain's supporters consisted of three main groups. There were the working class Liberals and trade unionists, such as William Rolley, Henry Cutts, Edward Memmott and Michael Prior, who were firmly behind Chamberlain. The Trades Council Executive on 12 December resolved to support him by a majority of 10 to 2 and this was confirmed at a general meeting by 19 votes to 1.¹¹ The working class Liberals were attracted by his advanced political radicalism, which included universal suffrage,¹² and by his call for "free labour" and "free land". He explained to a large meeting in Paradise Square on 1 January: "by free labour I mean the most absolute freedom of combination; the most absolute right of working men to unite to secure the best remuneration for their labour",¹³ which included freedom from restrict-

1 *S.I.*, 4.12.1873.

2 J.D. Leader to R. Leader, 3.1.1874, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

3 *S.D.T.*, 13.12.1873.

4 *Sheffield Post*, edited by R.H. Dunbar and H.H. Murphy, was published twice weekly between 1873 and 1887.

5 *S.P.*, 13.12.1873.

6 *S.I.*, 26.1.1874.

7 J.D. Leader to R. Leader, 3.1.1874, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

8 R.E. Leader to R. Leader, 3.1.1874, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

9 R. Leader to J.D. and R.E. Leader, 4.1.1874, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

10 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 31.12.1873, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

11 *S.P.*, 13.12.1873; *S.D.T.*, 18.12.1873.

12 *S.I.*, 2.1.1874.

13 *Ibid*

ive laws, extension of the principle of arbitration and workmen's compensation. "Free land" to be achieved by the abolition of primogeniture, repeal of the laws of entail, revision of the laws affecting appropriation of commons, full tenant right and abolition of the game laws, was an issue in which the working class Liberals were especially interested at a time when the agricultural labourers were struggling to improve their lot by union action.¹ Some time afterwards, for example, Edward Memmott wrote to H.J. Wilson: "we hope the day is not far distant when the Land Laws shall be so modified as shall make it unlawful for any man whether he be Lord or Squire so to lock up the land as to prevent the working classes of England from drawing that amount of sustenance from it which it was designed by Providence to give."² Chamberlain's political creed seemed to embody the political and social aspirations of the working classes: "our end is the enfranchisement of the whole people, the relief from every unnecessary restriction upon liberty, devised by priest or politician, the removal of every obstacle to the free development of the nation, the repeal of the last hindrance to its continued social, political, religious and intellectual progress and advancement."³ Chamberlain saw himself as a working class candidate: "I am a working man's representative if I am anything, and it is to ensure fair consideration for their claims that I chiefly care to enter Parliament."⁴

The second main group of his supporters were the middle class Radical Nonconformists, such as H.J. Wilson whom Chamberlain described as "the real head and prime mover,"⁵ J.W. Wilson, Charles Castle, F. Percy Rawson, the Rev. Isaiah Parton, D.T. Ingham and the Rev. John Fisher. They supported him because he was an advanced Radical and because he supported the militant Nonconformist programme. He was the leading figure in the National Education League, the aim of which was to secure a compulsory and free system of undenominational education. He was in favour of Disestablishment and the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts.⁶ He favoured popular control of the Drink traffic, but he disliked the Permissive Bill⁷ and thought it "an imperfect measure"⁸ which gave no opportunity for a middle course and no compensation to the drink interests. But the fact that he was unsound on the Permissive Bill does not appear to have seriously weakened his position. Chamberlain had the backing of the machinery of the National Education League, which Mundella thought "will overrun the constituency with hard agents on Chamberlain's behalf."⁹ Certainly William Harris, the election agent of the League, took a keen interest in the election. He sent to Sheffield an experienced Birmingham political organizer, J. Paynter Allen¹⁰ who worked from the Reform Club in Paradise Square. On 10 January, he reported to H.J. Wilson that he had seen Odger¹¹ who "promises to try to organise the bootmakers in our favour,"¹² though at present he could do little with William Dronfield. On 26 January, Harris was asking Wilson whether it was worth sending a certain Hogan to Sheffield "who has immense influence with your Irish voters. He will want paying well but if you think it necessary I will see to that. His strength will be with the extreme Home Rulers."¹³ The Irish vote, though never vital, was important. At a meeting of the Sheffield Home Rule Confederation Association on 6 January, it had been estimated that of the 37,000 electors in the borough 3,500 were Irishmen¹⁴ and it was worth some effort and money to secure their votes. But there is no doubt that the success of the Birmingham agents was limited because the Liberal party in Sheffield did not possess the necessary organization and machinery to operate the Birmingham system of electioneering.

The third group of Chamberlain's supporters comprised men such as Michael Beal, Joseph Nadin, D.A. Aitchison, Josiah Downing and Henry Horner, all of whom had been active in Sheffield politics in the 1860's and before. They were independent Radicals, not members of the working class and not connected with militant Dissent. Nadin, Downing and Horner had been leading members of the Reform League in Sheffield, while Beal had been a Chartist leader in the 1840's. Josiah Downing appears to have had republican sympathies, for he chaired a meeting addressed by George Odger in June, 1872.¹⁵

1 Cf. a meeting of Sheffield Reform Association on 23 May, 1873, addressed by Joseph Arch, president and founder of Agricultural Labourers' Union, for which a collection was taken. *S.I.*, 24.5.1873.

2 E. Memmott to H.J. Wilson, 19.1.1875, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5889.

3 *S.I.*, 2.1.1874.

4 J. Chamberlain to H.J. Wilson, 25.12.1873, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

5 J. Chamberlain to H.J. Wilson, 16.1.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

6 *S.I.*, 2.1.1874.

7 J. Chamberlain to H.J. Wilson, 25.12.1873, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

8 *S.I.*, 2.1.1874.

9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 31.12.1873, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

10 Wm. Harris to H.J. Wilson, 12.12.1873, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

11 George Odger was by this time a Republican lecturer.

12 J.P. Allen to H.J. Wilson, 10.1.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

13 Wm. Harris to H.J. Wilson, 26.1.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

14 *S.I.*, 7.1.1874.

15 *S.I.*, 20.6.1872. There was a Republican Club in Sheffield (W. Garbutt president), but it does not appear to have been politically important.

They all belonged to the lower middle class¹ and, although they had played an active part in Liberal politics for a number of years, they were not members of the established Liberal leadership in Sheffield. They had as much cause to resent the Bank Street influence as H.J. Wilson and the "new" Liberal leaders who were striving to assert themselves. The attitude of the old Liberal leadership towards them can be seen from Leader's opinion of Nadin expressed several years later when a new alderman had to be chosen: "Nadin is inflated with ambition and pleads long service and assiduity. On the other hand some of us want to raise the bench from its degradation — a state of things that would be aggravated by electing Nadin."² But, quite apart from these considerations, the independent Radicals would have supported Chamberlain because his political views were more in accord with their own than those of Allott.

As the election approached, it became clear that if the Liberals were to have any chance of retaining the second seat, either Allott or Chamberlain must withdraw. Various suggestions were made as to how the problem should be solved. W.J. Clegg suggested a test ballot of about 2,000 voters to determine who should retire,³ and Allott himself suggested that the choice of candidate should be decided by arbitration.⁴ This, however, the supporters of Chamberlain refused. They preferred a test vote in a public meeting, which Chamberlain was almost bound to win because he was the popular candidate. Allott's supporters were reluctantly forced to agree to a test vote because the election was imminent.⁵ Accordingly, on 29 January, the largest meeting that could be remembered in Paradise Square assembled to choose between Chamberlain and Allott,⁶ and the majority for Chamberlain was overwhelming, the hands being "thick as autumnal leaves in Vallombrosa." Allott withdrew and Chamberlain and Mundella were the Liberal candidates for Sheffield. Many of Allott's supporters were disgruntled and regarded the test as imperfect. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Leader made a plea for union: "the duty of 'Liberal union' compels us to sink every personal consideration, and for the good of the great cause we have at heart loyally to support Mr. Chamberlain."⁷ On the next day, he could not resist admitting that "we do not pretend to agree with Mr. Chamberlain so much as we do with Mr. Mundella or with Mr. Allott."⁸ However, it does seem that Leader worked genuinely for Liberal union. His son recounts that, after the test vote, he persuaded William Paul of Attercliffe, who had been chairman of Allott's committee,⁹ to vote for Chamberlain after he had declared that he would vote for Roebuck.¹⁰ However, as the result of the election showed, a large number of Allott's supporters remained unreconciled to the Chamberlain candidature.

This was a situation which the Conservative party in Sheffield could exploit and they were ready with their candidate, John Arthur Roebuck, who had been defeated in 1868. Though he continued to describe himself as a Radical, Roebuck had long severed his connections with the Liberal party. As early as April, 1869, he was mentioned as a possible Conservative candidate for Marylebone¹¹ and Mundella declared that: "his hatred for Liberals and Liberalism is now so pronounced and undisguised that his presence in the House as member for Sheffield would undoubtedly be considered a great Conservative triumph."¹² The day after he entered the contest, a meeting of the local Conservative Working Men's Association pledged its support for him "inasmuch as Mr. Roebuck's political opinions agreed so closely with those held by the Conservative party."¹³ His friends had ensured that his opinions were well known to the constituency by arranging for him to address two public meetings in March, 1871, and January, 1872.¹⁴ He stressed his independence from party ties and his dislike of Gladstone who, he said, possessed "that sort of feminine vindictiveness that always runs with a weak-minded man."¹⁵ He condemned Irish Church Disestablishment and the Irish Land Act¹⁶ and the use of Royal Warrant to abolish the purchase of commissions in the army,¹⁷ and he referred to the "assaults" being made from all sides upon the Constitution

1 Beal was a watchmaker, Nadin a medical botanist, Aitchison a veterinary surgeon, Downing a butcher and Horner an estate agent.

2 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 21.4.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

3 W.J. Clegg to H.J. Wilson, 26.1.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

4 An umpire (Bright suggested) and each side to select an M.P. Letter (dated 14 January) in *S.I.*, 26.1.1874.

5 *S.I.*, 27.1.1874.

6 *S.I.*, 30.1.1874.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *S.I.*, 31.1.1874.

9 Wm. Harris to H.J. Wilson, 12.12.1873, Wilson MSS., S.U.L. William Paul, d.1877: engraver and a deacon of Zion Congregational Chapel.

10 *Memoir of Robert Leader*, S.C.L., p. 28.

11 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 24.4.1869, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

12 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 13.9.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

13 *S.I.*, 29.1.1874.

14 *S.I.*, 15.3.1871, 18.1.1872.

15 *S.I.*, 18.1.1872.

16 *S.I.*, 15.3.1871.

17 *S.I.*, 18.1.1872.

"which had been built up by the wisdom and gallantry of ages."¹ He was opposed to Church Disestablishment and the Permissive Bill, and in favour of Bible teaching in schools and the opening of Museums on Sunday.² He supported the abolition of the income tax and improved facilities for the transfer of land but was against the payment of M.P.'s.³ He would extend the franchise to agricultural labourers when they were sufficiently educated to use it properly, and to unmarried women.⁴ On the trade union question, Roebuck was vague and cautious. He declared: "I shall insist upon the reconsideration of the whole laws respecting labour and capital and master and servants,"⁵ and he claimed to support the principle of trade unionism. On 2 February, 1874, he said: "there ought to be an equality, and that is the reason why I go in for trades unions; but when they combine together, and get the power in their hands, then let justice be their motto."⁶ However, this probably made little impression upon trade unionists who remembered that at the last election Roebuck had stood as the representative of the employers.⁷

Since 1868, the Conservative party in Sheffield had made great efforts to secure working class support. In December, 1869, the Sheffield Working Men's Conservative Association was inaugurated at a meeting attended by, it was claimed, about 500 working men.⁸ Rowland Winn, M.P. for North Lincolnshire, claimed that more than 1,000 working men had been associated with it in the year since it had been started, an estimate corrected by the chairman, F.S. Wortley, to 2,000. Of course, "association" did not mean membership. Even more striking were some of the sentiments expressed which seemed totally out of place at a meeting of working men. Reuben Hallam, one of the originators⁹ of the institution, declared that "Liberalism was a cheat invented in order that false cowards might sit safe in power, and lord it uncontrolled above their betters," while B. Huntsman "pointed out certain evils which he apprehended would result from the injurious rise of Trades' Unions."¹⁰ This tends to suggest that the Conservative working men were unconnected with trade unionism. Nevertheless, they were numerous enough to be politically important and the Working Men's Association was a real source of strength to the Conservative party in Sheffield.

Roebuck was also supported by most of the leading manufacturers in Sheffield, by men such as Sir John Brown, Mark Firth, George Wostenholm, Thomas Jessop and William Fisher. Some, such as Firth, Fisher and Jessop, had been Liberals in the 1860's but had supported Roebuck in 1868 and were by this time staunch Conservatives. As wealthy employers of labour, they had great influence in the town and, as public benefactors, they were greatly respected. Roebuck benefited from the drift towards Conservatism among the middle class generally which was a feature of the 1870's. Also, he enjoyed the support of the *Telegraph*, edited by W.C. Leng, the circulation of which, according to the journalist, C.W. Ellis, who reported on the Sheffield newspapers in September, 1874,¹¹ was three to four times greater than that of the *Independent*. "There can be no doubt," he explained, "that the bolder attitude assumed by the management of the *Telegraph*, the firmer tone of the leading articles, the promptitude in taking up a popular question, and generally the vigorous conduct of the paper are among the chief elements of the success that has been obtained. The attitude of the *Telegraph* in the Broadhead matter, and the support given to Mr. Roebuck have doubtless attracted the support of the higher and more cultivated classes, and the Roebuck support in 1868 especially drew to it public house patronage."¹² It is not surprising that the circulation of the *Telegraph* was much higher than that of the *Independent*, because the newspaper reading or rather buying public¹³ would comprise a large number of "the higher and more cultivated

1 *Ibid.*

2 *S.I.*, 30.1.1874.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *S.I.*, 30.1.1874.

6 *S.I.*, 3.2.1874.

7 *Cf.* his attacks on leaders of South Wales unions at Foresters' Banquet on 10 March, 1873. Too much credence cannot be attached to evidence such as a letter which appeared in *S.D.T.*, 3.1.1874, from a "Sheffield Grinder", who had opposed Roebuck at the last election, but who now declared: "I prefer a tried man to an untried one. I believe now that if Mr. Roebuck had fair play he would find good work to do in the Commons". It may be that such union support as Roebuck received came (as in 1868) from the local craft unions, while the London-based amalgamated unions backed Mundella and Chamberlain. *Cf.* mass meeting of trade unionists on 3 February, at which Applegarth spoke. *S.I.*, 4.2.1874.

8 *S.I.*, 3.12.1869.

9 The other two were Vernon Blackburn and Castleton.

10 *S.I.*, 3.12.1869.

11 C.W. Ellis was commissioned by H.J. Wilson to make a report with a view to the founding of a third morning newspaper in Sheffield. 12.9.1874, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5999. Wilson had for some time felt that there was a need for a newspaper which would represent the views of advanced Radicalism, but the project was not taken up. The problem was not confined to Sheffield. A. Illingworth to H.J. Wilson, 28.5.1875, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6000: "except Manchester, Newcastle, Huddersfield I know of scarcely a town where the press is not afflicted with the prevailing languor".

12 Report by C.W. Ellis, 12.9.1874, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5999.

13 Circulation is not an absolutely accurate guide to influence because a large number of people may have had access to one copy.

classes" who would tend to be Conservative and therefore would read a Conservative newspaper, though there can be no doubt about the extensive influence of the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*.

Roebuck was also supported by the Drink interest which was bitterly hostile to the Liberals as a result of the Licensing Act of 1872, although it must be remembered that in previous elections the Trade had supported Roebuck because of his dislike of teetotallers and his opposition to the Permissive Bill. The difference was that in 1874 it was more determined and militant than it ever had been before or would be again. In November, 1872, Mundella wrote to Leader: "it is 'War to the Knife' with the Publicans. They are irreconcilables and can only be thrashed into acquiescence in reasonable restrictions."¹ And in May, 1873, he declared, "I understand the publicans have a splendid organisation and plenty of money."² The publicans were formidable enemies not only because of their financial resources but also because of their local influence with that less thinking and "respectable" section of the working classes which frequented public houses. At a meeting of the Trade on 29 January, Ald. Moore and George Skinner, secretary of the Licensed Victuallers' Association, urged support for Roebuck who, in the words of R. Bradley, was "the only candidate representing and defending the legitimate interests of the trade, in which the rights, privileges and interests of the people are so deeply concerned."³ The meeting, which was a large one, unanimously pledged its support for Roebuck and its determination to plump for him. Not surprisingly, as Roebuck was, in the words of W.J. Clegg, "the accepted candidate of the liquor traffickers," the temperance societies in Sheffield, including the United Kingdom Alliance, declared their support for Mundella and Chamberlain.⁴

The result of the election, held on 4 February, was a triumph for the Conservatives as Roebuck topped the poll with over 14,000 votes⁵ and Chamberlain was decisively beaten. In explaining the defeat Leader declared: "there can be no doubt that the brewing and licensed victuallers' interest exercised a very important influence on the election."⁶ Charles Boler, a working man, suggested to H.J. Wilson that a working men's meeting should be held to refuse support to the publicans or the public houses" in consequence of the dead stand the Publicans have made against the best interests of the working classes."⁷ and a few days later he wrote: "I take this opportunity of urging upon you at this juncture to support the opening of Clubs for working men and also allow drink to be consumed by those who require it."⁸ This would enable the Liberals to take advantage of the present "strong feeling" against the publicans. This was, however, an idea which did not appeal to H.J. Wilson.

But the "Beer and Bible Alliance", about which so much was made at the time not only in Sheffield but throughout the country, is insufficient to explain the Liberal defeat. The truth was that a large number of moderate Liberals refused to support Chamberlain and either voted for Roebuck or plumped for Mundella. This was a direct result of the Liberal divisions and the choice of Chamberlain as the second Liberal candidate. To run Mundella and Chamberlain together was politically unwise because both were primarily working class candidates and the other classes, such as the manufacturers and tradesmen, objected to what seemed "working class domination."⁹ The result was that compared with 1868 the total Liberal poll was reduced by over 2,000 from 26,990 to 24,532, although in 1874 3,611 more votes were polled.¹⁰ Leader was convinced that "if Mr. Allott and Mr. Mundella had been the candidates they would have polled more votes than Mr. Hadfield did in 1868, i.e. 15,000 or over, while Roebuck would have got 500 or perhaps 1,000 less than he did."¹¹ The question hinged on how the supporters of Allott had given their votes. Leader firmly maintained that they had been loyal to Chamberlain: "from the best means of observation, we are certain that Mr. Chamberlain was loyally supported by the great bulk of those who would have preferred to vote for Mr. Allott. Of course there was some sectional alienation, as there would have been had the test vote been against Mr. Chamberlain."¹² The supporters of Chamberlain, however, were convinced that this "sectional alienation" was extensive. Chamberlain himself calculated that between two and three thousand voters either voted for Roebuck or plumped for Mundella.¹³ Chamberlain was furious and he told Wilson "there is only

1 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 7.11.1872, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 9.5.1873, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

3 *S.I.*, 30.1.1874.

4 *S.I.*, 31.1.1874.

5 The voting was:

Roebuck	14,193
Mundella	12,858
Chamberlain	11,053
Allott	621

S.I., 5.2.1874.

Allott was nominated without his knowledge and consent by supporters of Roebuck, but the Mayor ruled that he was too late to withdraw and the nomination must stand. *S.I.*, 2.2.1874.

6 *S.I.*, 5.2.1874.

7 C. Boler to H.J. Wilson, 9.2.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

8 C. Boler to H.J. Wilson, 12.2.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L. Boler was attempting to form a club at Heeley.

9 *S.I.*, 9.2.1874.

10 *Ibid.*

11 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 6.2.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

12 *S.I.*, 7.2.1874.

13 J. Chamberlain to H.J. Wilson, 28.10.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

one thing which will ever bring me to Sheffield again as a candidate — and that is Mr. Allott's offering himself. He has behaved like a 'cad' all through, without a spark of nobleness or generosity — and I hope my friends will never give him their support under any circumstances."¹ Mundella warned Leader that "you will have some trouble with H.J. Wilson and his party. Chamberlain is furious against Mr. Allott, and vows he will oppose him again at all risks. He takes his defeat badly and writes to me in a spirit of bitterness and revenge."² The Conservative position in 1874 was immeasurably strengthened by the fact that there was no second Conservative candidate, so that Conservative strength could be concentrated on Roebuck. It does seem, however, that Chamberlain's supporters had a case and that many of the moderate middle class Liberals who would have voted for Allott were antagonized by the advanced Radicals' thrusting Chamberlain on the party. J.H. Barber, when asked to subscribe to the joint expenses of Mundella and Chamberlain, refused and confessed that "as the contest proceeded my opinion in reference to Mr. Chamberlain became very decided, and I plumped for Mr. Mundella."³ Sydney Smith, a sharebroker, likewise declined and stated, "I think the extreme Radical Party in Sheffield are doing great mischief to the Liberal Party as a whole."⁴ In short, Chamberlain was the wrong candidate in the circumstances because what was needed was a moderate rather than an extreme man. Events proved that "Allott's position was much stronger than anyone imagined; while they showed that Chamberlain was much weaker than his friends supposed."⁵

As has been shown, the period 1868 - 74 saw a gradual defection of lukewarm middle class Liberals to the Conservative party, the result of Liberal divisions and fear of advanced radicalism, a process which in Sheffield was no doubt hastened by the Chamberlain candidature, for it was to Roebuck and not Mundella that they turned. Mundella told Leader, "I cannot forget how completely I was deserted during the recent contest by scores whose absence proved the weakness of their attachment to political principle."⁶ The Liberal problem in Sheffield, he believed, "all comes from the attachment of the employer class to Roebuck, and their enmity to the workmen"⁷ and he referred to "the Fishers, the Jessops and the wretched Whigs who have forsaken their principles."⁸ The Whig defection, first noticeable in 1868, was underlined in 1874, and it continued throughout the 1870's, seriously impairing the strength of the Liberal party in Sheffield. For this the advanced Radicals must take some of the blame. By their "wild and crotchety agitation,"⁹ by their refusal to compromise, they had driven the moderates or many of them to Toryism in their quest for a "safe" party. They did not regret doing this in the slightest. At a Radical Demonstration held in Sheffield in March, 1874, Chamberlain declared: "I think it is an advantage that their [Whigs] desertion has left us free, free to appeal to the great majority of the people of this country with a broad, comprehensive scheme of Radical reform, no longer trammelled by the necessity of compromise, the purchase of which are not worth the sacrifice at which they are obtained If the Whigs will not adopt the Radical policy, we will not adopt the Whigs as our future allies We are a majority of the Liberal party; we are its strength and its backbone I look for the formation of a new Liberal — of a new Radical party."¹⁰

This was what the advanced Radicals had been trying to do since 1868, to refashion the Liberal party on advanced lines. But they had failed to cement the twin pillars of advanced Liberalism, militant Dissent and the working classes. As Chamberlain declared, "I hold that the first condition of success is a more cordial, a more thorough union between the Nonconformists as a body and the working classes."¹¹ He believed that the working classes had no sympathy "with merely sectarian aims," while the Nonconformists had shown little interest in the claims of the agricultural labourers and the urban artisans, and there was even a danger that the Tories might bid for working class support. Certainly, hitherto, militant Nonconformist aims had overshadowed other aspects of the radical programme and Chamberlain declared: "I want them to be as much opposed to class prejudice, as they are already to caste supremacy."¹² The Radical party needed a broader programme with fewer crotchets and they needed to settle their differences with those who, though not so advanced, would support them up to a point. Thus, Chamberlain

1 J. Chamberlain to H.J. Wilson, 9.2.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

2 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 9.2.1874, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.: "almost everybody I meet rejoices at his discomfiture."

3 J.H. Barber to H.J. Wilson, 7.5.1874, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5924.

4 S. Smith to H.J. Wilson, 19.6.1874, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5924.

5 J.D. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 11.2.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

6 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 7.2.1874, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

7 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 3.4.1874, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 *Ibid.*

9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 3.3.1874, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

10 *S.I.*, 20.3.1874.

11 *S.I.*, 20.3.1874. In February, 1874, Chamberlain had told the Congregational minister, Henry Allon, that there was a need for "a declaration of policy calculated to arouse the hearty enthusiasm of the Nonconformists and working classes." A. Peel, *Letters to a Victorian Editor*, 1929, p. 43.

12 *S.I.*, 20.3.1874.

was advising H.J. Wilson in September, 1874, to "go boldly to Leader and talk the position over with him," with a view to settlement on the basis of a mutually agreeable candidate.¹ The Liberals in Sheffield needed to unite and, above all, to "secure a more perfect organisation."² Chamberlain suggested to H.J. Wilson that "you should take steps, in concert with Mr. Allott's friends, to form a great representative Liberal organisation for the Borough, and in attempting this, I do not think you could improve upon the practice which obtains in Birmingham."³ The defeat in 1874 taught the Liberals the importance of union and the need for organisation, and the mood was right for the re-establishment of Liberal union and the formation of the Sheffield Liberal Association.

The South West Riding, 1868 - 74.

In the election of 1868 the Liberal candidates for the Southern Division of the West Riding, Milton and Beaumont, had been defeated in the Sheffield district, although they narrowly managed to retain their seats in the Division as a whole. The defeat in Sheffield was due to Whig defection as a result of Roebuck's defeat in the borough election. A meeting of the South West Riding Registration Association in April, 1870, expressed regret "that owing to the unfortunate contest between Roebuck and Mundella some old friends seemed to have left the camp and placed us at the general election in a minority instead of giving us the great majority they gave us before."⁴ Ever since it was first contested in 1865 the S.W. Riding had been a marginal constituency and the Liberals could ill afford to lose such wealthy and influential men as William Fisher, the chairman of Roebuck's election committee. Thomas Dunn wrote to Leader, "I suppose there is not any hope of the latter [Fisher]; at any rate, not for some time. His refusing to continue his subscription arises either from his having turned quite round as to his politics or from motives I don't like to contemplate."⁵ In addition to the political defection of the Whigs, the Liberals were deprived of the services of Thomas Dunn and R.J. Gainsford through death, two men who had been most influential in the county.

At the same time as the Liberal party lost men of influence and wealth, the Fitzwilliam influence was at a low ebb. "What a pity it is that the Fitzwilliams are such nonentities," declared Mundella.⁶ "I have the poorest opinion of Lord Fitzwilliam's tact and judgment. He ought to be coached as to his duty. I consider the state of affairs in the West Riding as critical in the highest degree."⁷ Mundella regarded him as "a wretched Liberal,"⁸ distinguished only by "his hunting proclivities." His son, Lord Milton, one of the members for the S.W. Riding, was, Mundella thought, "a sound Liberal" but "slow and timid",⁹ and muddled in his thoughts: "poor little Milton seems to get more and more ridiculous. I am very sorry for this, as it is damaging to the Liberal cause."¹⁰ Milton's health was very poor and in June, 1872, he resigned his seat.¹¹ The Liberals decided, against the advice of Leader¹² and F.T. Mappin,¹³ to postpone a contest "in the hope that the confidence of the Public in the present Government may be in some measure restored before such an event is inevitable".¹⁴ But this step had the effect of giving the Conservatives a foothold in the Division, at the same time as they were improving their organisation. As early as December, 1869, for example, Rowland Winn reported that Conservative Working Men's Associations had been formed in other areas of the Southern Division besides Sheffield and that it was hoped shortly to form a central union.¹⁵ The Liberals had no such organisation.

When these circumstances are taken into account, together with the swing to Conservatism, the so-called "Conservative reaction", it is not surprising that the Liberals were unsuccessful in the S.W. Riding in 1874. Both seats were captured by the Conservatives,¹⁶ and the majority was quite considerable, with an increased vote for the Conservatives compared with 1868.¹⁷ Once again, the Conservatives

1 J. Chamberlain to H.J. Wilson, 4.9.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L. Chamberlain suggested Alfred Illingworth.

2 J. Chamberlain to H.J. Wilson, 11.2.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

3 J. Chamberlain to H.J. Wilson, 28.10.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

4 J.W. Foljambe to R. Leader, 15.4.1870, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

5 T. Dunn to R. Leader, 14.5.1869, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 187.

6 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 9.2.1870, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

7 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 28.11.1871, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 29.4.1872, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 2.5.1869, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

10 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 20.5.1870, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

11 *S.L.R.*, 25.6.1872.

12 J.W. Foljambe to R. Leader, 18.5.1872, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

13 F.T. Mappin to R. Leader, 25.5.1872, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

14 J.W. Foljambe to R. Leader, 18.5.1872, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

15 *S.I.*, 3.12.1869.

16 The voting was:

Stanhope	9,705
Starkey	9,639
Leatham	8,265
Beaumont	8,148

S.I., 12.2.1874.

17 *S.I.*, 12.2.1874.

did well in Sheffield; they claimed that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Sheffield county electors voted for them,¹ further evidence of the middle class defection to Toryism. Shortly after the election Mundella told Leader that "Leatham² has had some talk with me about the West Riding. He says unless something can be done to improve the Liberal position in Sheffield all attempts to recover the seats are hopeless. He gives a deplorable account of the Sheffield district. He says at the recent election the ballot boxes were returned stuffed with Tory votes. He believes the majority was 2,000 in Sheffield alone."³ The task facing the Liberals in the county was no less great than that in the borough and in both the key to success was seen to be an improved organization and a united party.

1 *Ibid.*

2 William Henry Leatham, 1815 - 89: member of the West Riding banking family, elder brother of E.A. Leatham and brother-in-law of John Bright; a Quaker who joined C. of E. in 1843; 1859, 1865 - 68 M.P. for Wakefield; 1880 - 85 M.P. for S.W. Riding.

3 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 3.4.1874, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SHEFFIELD LIBERAL ASSOCIATION, 1875 - 79.

It was clear to Liberals of all shades of opinion in Sheffield that if the Liberal party was to regain the influence which it had lost between 1869 and 1874, union and organization were necessary. They had been defeated in 1874 because they were hopelessly divided and because the Conservatives had a superior organization. The direction of the Liberal party was in the hands of a few "managers" who chose candidates, the old leadership which Wilson and the advanced Radicals had challenged between 1872 and 1874. This leadership of personal influence had worked well enough in the 1860's, but it lacked a truly popular base and therefore was ill-suited to an era of popular politics, of household suffrage and a mass electorate. Liberals were hardly likely to be very enthusiastic about a party in the running of which they played no part. What was needed in Sheffield was to democratize the Liberal party, to create a popular organization on the Birmingham model,¹ so that every Liberal could feel that he had some say in the running of the party and especially in the choice of parliamentary candidates. Equally, it would allow Liberals of all shades of opinion to express their views without splitting the party and more importantly it would provide the machinery for efficient ward canvassing to exploit the full Liberal potential. Such an organization would whip up interest and create enthusiasm which was sadly lacking. John Muscroft, a working man, was convinced that "some such organisation as the one at Birmingham is absolutely necessary if we are to [do] anything at all in Sheffield" and he added "it is quite certain to me that unless some revival of political interest is brought about, Sheffield will do itself the honour of electing as its representative a man who has shown up very badly as a politician but who will have the honour of entertaining Royalty — building an hospital and giving a Park."² F.C. Blackburn, the agent of the National Education League, reported to Francis Adams on the same lines. As to Chamberlain's candidature "there seems very little interest manifested at present. Roebuck is still the favourite and it is said no one has a chance while he lives."³ In the event of an early election, Blackburn believed that Mark Firth would probably be successful: "Firth would vote Tory, but he is so popular his politics would hardly be looked at."⁴ So the lack of political interest in Sheffield was, as always, damaging the Liberals, the party of movement and progress, and helping the Conservatives whose position was already strong.

The Liberals also had to arrest the drift towards Toryism among the middle classes in Sheffield, which had been steadily taking place since 1868. Mundella was encouraged by the attendance of William Smith and F.T. Mappin⁵ at his annual address to his constituents in August, 1875,⁶ to think that "I stand better than heretofore with the middle class of the constituency,"⁷ and he stressed to Leader "the more we can commit this class of men the better."⁸ To do this the Liberals must have a unified party and a settled organization and even then men such as Mappin and Smith needed coaxing patiently as they were naturally reluctant "to break through the traditions of their order."⁹ Here again Mundella was referring to that "separation of classes" in Sheffield, the hostility of the middle classes to the workmen. With regard to the proposed Association he advised Leader not to be disheartened but to push on with its formation: "The swells will come in hereafter when we have made it a success. No Association can influence or bind them. This is not the case with the working men and the lower middle class; they are loyal to their party and to their friends. Let us only get enough of them and we shall soon have our share of the upper crust, and if not we must do without them . . . I say go on, we shall carry

1 J. Chamberlain to H.J. Wilson, 15.10.1875, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5889.

2 J. Muscroft to H.J. Wilson, 14.6.1875, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5889. The reference was to Mark Firth.

3 F.C. Blackburn to F. Adams, 13.9.1875, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5889.

4 Ibi

5 Frederick Thorpe Mappin, 1821 - 1910: a senior partner in firm of Thos. Turton & Sons, Sheaf Works, 1855 Master Cutler; 1877 Mayor; 1880 - 85 M.P. for E. Retford; 1885 - 1906 M.P. for Hallamshire; 1886 Bt.; 1905 Pro-Chancellor of Sheffield University; generous benefactor.

Cf. A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 13.8.1874, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.: "I don't think he will go out of his way to render us a service. I wish he would show up at our meetings."

6 S.I., 19.8.1875.

7 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 12.9.1875, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 12.9.1875, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 3.11.1875, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

them last of all, but shall carry them."¹

A really large, popular and representative organization would ensure working class support. "We must trust to the democracy," Mundella believed. "They are hearty, unselfish, enthusiastic and what is more, numerous."² They must be allowed to play a part in the running of the Liberal party.

Of course union had to precede organization and this was facilitated by the announcement in October, 1875, that Allott had declined to be a candidate at a future election.³ Chamberlain's Committee had made it clear some months earlier that he was prepared to stand down, if Allott would also, in favour of a candidate to be jointly selected.⁴ Allott's withdrawal removed the last obstacle to union which both sides desired.⁵ On 23 October a provisional committee⁶ was formed which called the meeting of 15 December, 1875, to inaugurate the formation of the Sheffield Liberal Association.⁷ The meeting in the Albert Hall was described as "large and influential" and it was addressed by the leader of the Liberal party, the Marquis of Hartington, James Stansfeld, Henry Richard, S.D. Waddy and A.J. Mundella. The chairman, Robert Leader, announced that the aim of the new Association was "to combine all the Liberals of all shades in the borough, and all stations in life, from the most opulent manufacturer to the humblest artisan."⁸ They had found a common basis of agreement in their wish to secure Liberal representation in the borough and the county and to promote Liberal principles in Government, legislation and administration, while leaving open questions to be agitated by the various pressure groups. In a sense, this was to put the pressure groups in their place and to prevent them from being a source of division by their attempts to "capture" the Liberal party. Hartington underlined this point when he said that there was no "reason why various sections and shades of Liberals should not work together in a common political organisation," provided that no section attempted to govern the whole party.⁹ James Stansfeld stressed that "variety and fecundity of progressive thought, which is the characteristic of the Liberal party, is our glory and our strength" and, as if to correct a monolithic view of the party, he warned that union could only be achieved "upon the totality and the individuality and the variety of the Liberal party."¹⁰ The meeting was a success and no one was more pleased than Leader who commented "a deep, earnest sense of the necessity for union, pervades all sections of the Liberal party."¹¹

The Constitution and Laws of the Sheffield Liberal Association were adopted on 25 January, 1876.¹² It consisted of an Executive Committee and a Council which alone had power to choose parliamentary candidates. The Council comprised representatives elected at ward meetings of Liberals in the proportion of one representative for every 200 electors on the electoral roll for the ward, 50 representatives elected at the Annual General Meeting, ten members of the Executive Committee and the Officers of the Association, elected annually by the Council. The Executive Committee consisted of the Officers, 2 members elected annually by each ward at public meetings and 10 members elected by the Council. The democratic spirit pervaded the rules of the Association but it is clear that actual working class participation was not very great. H.J. Wilson calculated that of the 202 representatives elected by public ward meetings of Liberals in March, 1876, no more than 45 were working men and this figure was probably too high since it included what H.J. Wilson called $\frac{1}{2}$ working men and those about whose status he may not have been too sure.¹³ Clearly, the predominance was on the side of the middle and lower middle classes, and it seems that Wilson was anxious to correct this somewhat through the 50 representatives to be elected by the Annual General Meeting. Leader appears to have been against this and he told Wilson: "if therefore I might counsel it would be not to interfere in the nominations to any great extent. It seems anomalous having made the profession of submitting frankly to the ward meetings, to make a decided effort to give a preponderance to one element, on the ground that the Wards have made a mistake."¹⁴ A circular of nominations for election to the Council by the Annual General Meeting in

1 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 2.11.1875, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 11.10.1875, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

3 A. Allott to J. Askham, 6.10.1875, accepted with regret at a Committee meeting on 26 October, *S.I.*, 27.10.1875.

4 In January, 1875. Not accepted and withdrawn on 28 May. *S.I.*, 29.5.1875.

5 But cf. J. Lacon to H.J. Wilson, 26.10.1875, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5889: "union is desirable but it may be purchased at too high a price."

6 It comprised J.H. Barber, F.T. Mappin, Wm. Smith, W.J. Clegg, R. Leader, H.J. Wilson, M. Beal, B. Bagshawe, J.W. Wilson, J.D. Leader, the Rev. G. Knight, Wm. Rolley, J. Hardy and J. Pearson. Circular, Wilson MSS., S.U.L. *S.I.*, 16.12.1875.

7 *S.I.*, 16.12.1875.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *S.I.*, 16.12.1875.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 *S.I.*, 26.1.1876.

13 Circular, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

14 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 15.3.1876, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

April, 1877, contained the names of 106 persons who can be classified as follows:

Professional Men	...	...	...	...	15
Manufacturers	...	...	...	...	18
Working Men	...	...	...	...	24
Tradesmen	...	...	...	...	12
Others ¹	...	...	...	...	17
Occupations not listed ²	...	...	...	...	20
TOTAL					106

The middle class prevalence in the Liberal Council did not worry Mundella. "My own opinion is that the workmen prefer being led to leading themselves," he told H.J. Wilson, "and the other side know this so well that they get the use of every influential name they can to strengthen them. We are weakest on the Middle Class side."³ In the previous year he had told H.J. Wilson that "people who drive carriages as a rule go over to the Tories. It is therefore desirable to get some on our side to shame the deserters."⁴ Middle class participation was no doubt of the greatest importance, but it was no substitute for an Association functioning on a truly popular basis. It had not roused the enthusiasm and interest which had been expected. As early as January, 1877, Mundella was telling Leader that "we must do something to make it more effective than it is at present",⁵ and Leader himself commented that "the indifference of our friends, which I fear will give us a worse Council than the last, for this important year, is very trying."⁶

Nowhere was this indifference more acutely felt than in the wards where the real work of organisation had to be done, for a successful Association must be based on flourishing ward committees. As early as November, 1873, the Rev. Thomas Warren had stressed the need to organize a permanent Committee at Brightside "to work up this district, in the event of any election taking place, whether School Board, Municipal, or Parliamentary (borough or county) election" and "to instruct them in the intelligent use of their vote."⁷ After the Liberal defeat in 1874, which was partly the product of a total absence of organisation, G.W. Sharman asked "would it not be well for the Executive of the Reform Association to consider the advisability of establishing at least one Reform Club in each Ward?"⁸ Some action seems to have been taken by Chamberlain's supporters, for in February, 1875, a Reform Club was in existence in Brightside with temporary offices at Gower Street Baths,⁹ but a year later Thomas Warren was writing to H.J. Wilson: "A great deal will have to be done for the political education of the people in this district of the Ward before they will value and make use of their political privileges. With the aid of such an Association I anticipate a great change in time in the character of the voters here — so that I hope it may never again be true of this part of the Ward that in the time of an election a wretchedly small proportion of them go to the poll."¹⁰ Warren added "before long, though, I hope to be successful in forming a Working Men's Club (without the Beer, of course), the Committee of which will keep a close supervision of the Municipal and Parliamentary interests of the Ward."¹¹ In Brightside, the problem which faced the Liberals was not simply one of political indifference. In conversation with Leader a certain Mason had talked "much of the republican and sceptical element among the men imported into Brightside from the Staffordshire and other iron districts."¹² The depression in trade also weakened the Liberal position in Brightside where Thomas Collinson calculated in April, 1879, that there were about 1,600 empty houses.¹³ There were not many removals but two or even three families were crowded into one house.¹⁴ In the borough as a whole H.J. Wilson reckoned that there were as many as

- 1 Inc. clerks, warehousemen, 1 farmer and 1 market gardener, managers.
- 2 Inc. Rev. Messrs. J. Calvert, J. Roberts, C.C. Tyte; Charles Boler and William Dronfield. Circular, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D., 5971.
- 3 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 22.3.1878, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 4 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 8.2.1876, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 5 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 18.1.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 6 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 12.3.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 7 T. Warren to H.J. Wilson, 25.11.1873, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6011. Thomas Warren was a Congregational minister.
- 8 G.W. Sharman to H.J. Wilson, 6.2.1874, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 9 Circular, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5889. The initiative had come from William Rolley, Charles Castle, Robert Sykes, Paul Gill and Thomas Johnson. Circular, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 10 T. Warren to H.J. Wilson, 11.2.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5890.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 28.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 13 Thos. Collinson to H.J. Wilson, 26.4.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5971.
- 14 *Ibid.*

4,280 empty houses, located as follows:¹

Brightside	...	...	...	...	1,600
Ecclesall	...	...	...	...	760
Nether Hallam	...	...	...	...	720
Attercliffe	...	...	...	...	1,000
Sheffield	...	...	...	...	200
TOTAL					4,280

Empty houses, of course, affected the electoral register and necessitated canvassing and the careful compilation of poll books. In January, 1878, Leader was writing to Wilson: "I want to talk to you about preparing canvassing books. It seems to me we ought to be ready. I have no doubt Shaw is."² The Liberals were aware that their organization was poor and Leader told Wilson that "it seems to me we want a man to work in the wards by getting the people together and seeing that they organise themselves."³ In May, 1878, a Liberal agent, J.C. Whiteley, was appointed and his specimen report sheets for the period 13 May to 31 December, 1878, indicate work on routine matters.⁴ However, the task was a great one and little progress had been made by the time S.D. Waddy, who had been chosen as Liberal parliamentary candidate in April, 1878, came to investigate the state of ward organization. Waddy told H.J. Wilson that both he and Mundella considered organization, by which they meant a committee in each polling district and one member to every hundred electors, to be far more important than "mere public speechifying" and that "the mere temporary froth of a public meeting is of very little importance as compared with this steady and pervasive: canvassing and organization."⁵ He added "we have reason to believe that quietly and silyly but very effectively the Tories have been doing this very work to an extent and with a success that will try us when the actual votes are taken and when the shouting and booing are over on both sides."⁶ In reply to Waddy's enquiries, H.J. Wilson furnished the following analysis of the ward and branch committees:—⁷

LIST OF WARDS AND COMMITTEES OF LIBERAL ASSOCIATION

WARD	REMARKS ON WARD COMMITTEES	BRANCH COMMITTEES	REMARKS ON BRANCHES
St. Peter's	Inert, very.	None	Should be 3
St. Philip's	Almost as bad, they have an idea that money should be spent more freely.	None	
Park	Very fairly active	None yet	Soon might have them
St. George's	Good. In healthy state	3	This ward has had keen contests for T.C. which do good!
Ecclesall	Inert. Unsuitable secretary and they don't change him.	1	Little use; weak and not harmonious.
Brightside	Very fairly active	9	6 of them fairly efficient 3 are slow and inert.
Upper Hallam	A difficult ward but pretty well off for active men.	None	
Nether Hallam	Very fairly active	—	There were 10 but they profess to be re-org. just now.
Attercliffe	Fairly active	2	Pretty fair condition.

1. *Ibid.* Pencil note by H.J. Wilson.

2. R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 17.1.1878, Wilson MSS., S.U.L. J.C. Shaw was Conservative agent for Sheffield.

3. R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 9.2.1878, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

4. Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5890.

5. S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 15.5.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

6. *Ibid.*

7. H.J. Wilson to S.D. Waddy, 21.5.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

Wilson explained that this sub-division of wards into districts had taken place about a year earlier and added: "I am not going to contend that this state of things is by any means what it ought to be, but it is better than anything there has been before in Sheffield."¹ The picture was, however, a gloomy one. There were in existence in May, 1879, 15 branch committees, of which 4 were of little use. Waddy believed that 25 district committees were needed² and he was so concerned about the situation that he spent Whitsuntide trying to whip up some interest in the Wards. Charles Castle worked hard in the Park Ward preparing canvass books and he told Wilson in July, 1879, that "we shall soon have this ward in a complete state of organization" with volunteer canvassers to every fifty voters.³ Organization was totally inadequate in St. Peter's, St. Philip's and Ecclesall and there was what Wilson described as "a very odd state of affairs prevailing in Nether Hallam."⁴ He explained to Leader: "the branch which began as the Walkley Branch has enlarged itself, and now claims to be the Nether Hall Branch, ignoring the duly constituted Ward Committee of our Association, although, curiously enough, all the members, or nearly all, of the latter, seem to have assisted in their own effacement by joining the former."⁵ While Liberal organization in the wards was extremely defective, the Conservatives were improving their own organization under the direction of their agent, J.C. Shaw, whom Mundella described as "active, intriguing and irrepressible,"⁶ a man "of indomitable character."⁷ Shaw was a full-time paid agent and under his direction the Conservative organization in Sheffield was made very effective, especially in those wards where the Liberals were weak. In January, 1877, Leader wrote to Wilson that "the Conservatives have decided not to form a club but an Association. I am afraid the existing Clubs do their work sufficiently. I fancy St. Peter's is very much in their hands with Gainsford⁸ president."⁹ St. Peter's had been described by H.J. Wilson as "very inert" from the Liberal point of view. The Nether Hallam Conservative Club had already enrolled 234 members by the time it was opened by the Earl of Wharncliffe in May, 1876,¹⁰ and at its second annual meeting in February, 1878, W.R. Groves, a vice-president, declared that "the club had been the means of promoting to a very considerable extent the progress of Conservatism in Sheffield."¹¹ There was a flourishing Conservative Association at Ecclesall, and in October, 1877, the Sheffield Conservative Association established 14 District Committees.¹²

It was not merely in ward organization that the Liberals were deficient. Waddy discovered to his astonishment¹³ that no attention had been paid to the electoral register. Wilson admitted that with the exception of Brightside Ward where he got about 70 persons on the list, "nothing has been done since I have known Sheffield."¹⁴ Partly, this was because it was believed that the overseers did their duty well, but also because "it was a serious business to undertake."¹⁵ Waddy was convinced that some effort should be made and he told Wilson that "we shall have to find an industrious sharp fellow who may be trusted with this work and set him to it at a yearly salary."¹⁶ Certainly, the Liberals in Sheffield needed to develop a much more professional approach to the business of political organization. Mundella agreed with Waddy that the position with regard to the Registration of voters was "very unsatisfactory"¹⁷ and he warned Leader that "Skine and Shaw have been laying their heads together, and you may have a mine sprung upon you at the last moment: they may object to 2,000 or 3,000 of our voters, and retain a lot of their own that ought to be struck off."¹⁸ W.J. Clegg, a solicitor who also acted as Liberal election agent, retained a rather old-fashioned view of political organization, increasingly outdated by the methods of professional agents such as J.C. Shaw, when he insisted: "I don't see the necessity of the taking of any more action than we are taking at the present and Mr. Waddy does not understand that our Assistant Overseers are not political agents but *so far as they know* they insert every body who is entitled to be on the list of voters."¹⁹ He admitted that there were probably many removals owing

1 H.J. Wilson to S.D. Waddy, 21.5.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

2 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 25.5.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

3 C. Castle to H.J. Wilson, 1.7.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5934.

4 H.J. Wilson to R. Leader, 8.2.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 *Ibid.*

6 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 1.9.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

7 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 8.10.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 T.R. Gainsford, 1844 - 1910: son of R.J. Gainsford; coal owner; 1883 Alderman.

9 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 27.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

10 *S.I.*, 5.5.1876.

11 *S.I.*, 5.2.1878.

12 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 7.10.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

13 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 23.5.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

14 H.J. Wilson to S.D. Waddy, 21.5.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

15 *Ibid.* H.J. Wilson agreed it ought to be done.

16 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 23.5.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

17 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 23.5.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

18 *Ibid.* In September, 1878, Shaw reported a net Conservative gain of 78 at the revision for the Sheffield Division of S.W. Riding. *S.I.*, 28.9.1878.

19 W.J. Clegg to H.J. Wilson, 23.5.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936. Italics inserted.

to the state of trade but he believed that handbills urging Liberals to see that they were on the list would be sufficient.¹ These were hap-hazard tactics, totally unsuited to a mass electorate, and in marked contrast to the systematic and methodical approach of the Conservatives.

Of course, it was not simply that the Liberal approach to the task of organization was somewhat amateurish and antiquated. It was owing more to their lack of financial resources. Here the Conservatives had a great advantage because they could count on the support of the wealthy manufacturers and the Publicans.² The Liberals, however, with the exception of F.T. Mappin and this is one of the reasons why they were so anxious to keep him on their side, were not wealthy men and could not subscribe large sums to party funds. The difference between the two parties can be seen in the fact that the Liberal Association, unlike the Conservative Association, had a compulsory membership fee of 1s and Waddy believed that if they could afford to abolish this they might "enrol a thousand where we now count a hundred."³ Mundella told Waddy that one of the principal reasons why the Liberals did not do anything about Registration was that "we might stimulate our opponents to enter on a course in which their long purse would be too much for us."⁴ Nor was it simply a question of lack of financial resources. In July, 1879, Mundella was "sorry to hear that our Liberal Association is heavily in debt,"⁵ and in January, 1880, the secretary, H.J. Wilson, was forced to admit that "the Liberal Association has been insolvent for a long time, getting deeper and deeper yearly."⁶ He estimated that the financial position was as follows:⁷

Debts ⁸	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£480
Ordinary Expenditure for 1880	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£460
Superior Agent, other expenses	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£300
Assets	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Nil
SUM NEEDED								£1,240

Neither Mundella nor Waddy was wealthy enough to contribute substantially to the funds of the Association. In January, 1880, Mundella declared: "I have been awfully bled this last year, and I have just remitted £50 to Firth College. I must be careful, seeing what is before me".⁹ Waddy's resources were even smaller. Despite a sum of £1,100 supplied from party funds in London,¹⁰ he asked the Sheffield Liberals to contribute to his election,¹¹ which prompted Mundella to declare that "I don't believe he owns anything but his Life Insurance Policies,"¹² and that "he ought never to have been a candidate."¹³

Financial insolvency was a source of great weakness but perhaps more important in explaining the failure of the Liberals to develop a sound organization was the fact that union was not complete. Within the Association there were tensions which were at least potentially divisive. Referring to the annual meeting of the Association in January, 1877,¹⁴ Mundella promised to "get Mr. Morley to preach unity,"¹⁵ an indication that some disunity prevailed, which was also hinted at, somewhat obliquely, by Charles Castle who "held that the union of Liberals of all shades of opinion was not a sham — that that union was real; and *if not perfect* they would, in the future, endeavour to make it so."¹⁶ Samuel Morley, speaking at the meeting, stressed that they must not allow subsidiary questions to divide them.¹⁷ On the surface, the Liberal party was united but the tensions were clear enough. This can be seen from the state of municipal politics. As early as February, 1876, Chamberlain was urging that the new Liberal

1 *Ibid.*

2 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 23.1.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

3 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 25.5.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

4 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 25.5.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 28.7.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

6 H.J. Wilson to S.D. Waddy, 16.1.1880, not sent, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

7 H.J. Wilson to S.D. Waddy, 17.1.1880, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

8 Of which £170 was owed to him and £180 to Leader.

9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 11.1.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

10 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 19.1.1880, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

11 *Ibid.*

12 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 1.3.1880, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

13 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 5.3.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

14 *S.I.*, 31.1.1877.

15 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 18.1.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

16 *S.I.*, 31.1.1877. Italics inserted.

17 *Ibid.*

organization should be used in the municipal elections, as was done in Birmingham,¹ a view which was shared by S.D. Waddy. In April, 1879, he calculated that of 64 members of the Town Council,² 25 were Liberals, 32 were Conservatives and 7 he classified as "nondescripts".³ Of the 15 Aldermen, 10 were Conservatives, as was the Mayor. Waddy asked, "should we not therefore at once select most carefully for each Conservative seat some sound Liberal candidate whom we can conscientiously put forward as a first-rate municipal man?"⁴ Certainly, in view of the Conservative predominance in the Town Council, it may seem surprising that the Liberal Association did not intervene in municipal politics. It did not do so because it was felt that it might lead to divisions within the Liberal Ward Committees and therefore do more harm than good to the Association. In the Brightside election of November, 1876, for example, there was some trade union opposition to the candidature of the Unitarian manufacturer, Michael Hunter, who, it was alleged, "has always tried to grind down skilled workmen to the level of paupers, and would do it but for Trade Unions."⁵ H.J. Wilson did not accept these strictures on Hunter,⁶ but it can easily be imagined how difficult it would have been for the Association to intervene in the contest without provoking further discord. Moreover, the notion of "party" had never been important in municipal contests. Local questions and personal considerations had always had a greater influence on the outcome. Leader explained: "you see there [in the Town Council] an utter disregard of political lines. Mr. Mappin, Mr. Clegg and I⁷ usually concur. But we have such men as Beal, Nadin and Aitchison pitching into us and Gledhill, the Woodcocks, always voting with Moore and Harvey."⁸ The same applied to Richard Searle, Chairman of the Guardians, who "professes to be a Liberal but always goes with Tasker, Fairburn and Moore in the Town Council."⁹ The conception of a Liberal Whip was totally absent and Town Council business was conducted very much on a non-political basis and it may indicate that independent Radicals such as Beal, Nadin, Aitchison and Searle found the Conservatives more congenial than Mappin, Leader and Clegg, who represented the inner Liberal leadership of which they had never been part. Personal considerations, which marred so much of Sheffield municipal politics, were no doubt also important. It must be remembered too that, while the Sheffield Liberal Association officially sponsored candidates in the School Board Election of 1876, it took no part in that of 1879. In short, local elections and local issues were more likely to divide the Liberal party and more likely to weaken than to strengthen the Liberal Association. Mundella was convinced that great political advantage would be gained from a "liberal and enterprising municipal policy,"¹⁰ as had happened in Birmingham, because "there is more room for the exercise of this public spirit in Sheffield."¹¹ He believed that the Conservative, T.R. Gainsford, had been trying to emulate Chamberlain and, though hitherto unsuccessfully, Mundella was sure that "somebody will find a way to success and reputation some day."¹²

The National Liberal Federation, established at Birmingham in May, 1877,¹³ to co-ordinate the Liberal Associations and to provide "a new means of utterance"¹⁴ on the Eastern Question, seems to have caused some friction among the Liberals in Sheffield. Robert Leader, a member of the old Liberal leadership which had resented Chamberlain's candidature in 1874, disliked what he considered to be yet another attempt by Birmingham to dictate to Sheffield.¹⁵ He was anxious that the Sheffield representatives should vote not as individuals but should give the whole vote of Sheffield so that "this would countervail the predominance Birmingham would have by being the place of meeting."¹⁶ Mundella shared Leader's sceptical view of the Federation. "I agree with you as to Chamberlain's object," he wrote in June, 1877. "Birmingham is to pull the strings of the Liberal Boroughs, and the puppets are to dance in response to the wires."¹⁷ Chamberlain, he thought, was "a spoilt child, - vain, irritable,

1 J. Chamberlain to H.J. Wilson, 19.2.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5889.

2 Composed of the Mayor, 15 Aldermen and 48 Councillors.

3 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 21.4.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Handbill, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5890.

6 H.J. Wilson to J. Mallinson, 2.11.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5890. Mallinson was a razor blade grinder, "active and influential". Wm. Dronfield to H.J. Wilson, September 1873, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

7 Leader entered the Town Council in November, 1876, representing Ecclesall.

8 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 18.4.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

9 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 19.3.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

10 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 17.3.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L. Mundella was anxious that the town should control its own Gas, Water and Markets.

11 *Ibid.*

12 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 17.3.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

13 Delegates from nearly 100 Liberal Associations. The Sheffield delegates were R.E. Leader, G.H. Hovey, G.W. Knox, B. Langley and H.J. Wilson. *S.I.*, 1.6.1877.

14 *S.I.*, 2.6.1877.

15 *Cf.* his dislike of Birmingham interference in the affairs of the Sheffield branch of the National Education League.

16 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 3.6.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

17 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 5.6.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

and ambitious"¹ and he went on: "I altogether regret my connection with Birmingham. It is quite right to have your own Association, and to instruct your own representatives as to your views and wishes with regard to public questions as they arise, but what Chamberlain wants is to have a phalanx of marionettes, with the wires pulled by himself from Birmingham. I, at least, will not be one of these puppets, and I am sure you would not permit it."² Mundella told Leader that the Liberal Chief Whip, W.P. Adam, "does not at all relish the Federation, and is watching it suspiciously."³ He was convinced that Gladstone would see its true purpose. "Gladstone is by no means so simple as to fall in Chamberlain's trap. He does occasionally over-estimate men and credit them with higher motives than they merit, but this arises from the generosity and nobleness of his nature. He soon finds out the weaknesses of designing and pretentious people."⁴ Of course, Leader's attitude to the Federation was bound to create some tension with those Liberals whose connections with Birmingham were close. John Muscroft wrote to H.J. Wilson that "I am afraid we shall be out manoeuvred by Mr. Leader if we are not careful and watchful"⁵ and Wilson himself seems to have been disappointed at the small contribution Sheffield had made to the funds of the Federation. Leader was quick to point out that "Manchester is as tardy as Leeds and Sheffield to respond in funds to Birmingham"⁶. He and Mundella also resented what they considered to be interference by Chamberlain in the choice of a parliamentary candidate for Sheffield, which was the business of the Council of the Liberal Association. "As to Chamberlain," Mundella declared, "he is a born wire-puller and intriguer, and I suspect, from a conversation I had with him last night, that he has been at work in Sheffield and started this movement [to find a candidate]. He wants to have as many puppets as he can get in the House, in order that he may manipulate them. This is a general opinion, and his movements are watched with a good deal of jealousy."⁷ Indeed, nowhere can the tensions and frictions within the Sheffield Liberal Association be more clearly seen than in the search for a future Liberal candidate.

In choosing a candidate a number of considerations had to be taken into account. No candidate could succeed who offended the religious susceptibilities of the constituency. The Rev. John Fisher declared that "my native town is liberal politically but not religiously."⁸ One of the main problems were the "shilly-shally Wesleyans" whose political behaviour was unpredictable. A candidate who could attract Wesleyan support was a valuable asset. On the other hand, a man such as John Morley⁹ would have little chance in Sheffield because his religious views would be used against him. Fisher believed, however, that a candidate who was "the idol of the artisans can defy everything."¹⁰ The election of 1874 had shown that this was not so and that Mundella's colleague must attract support from other sections of the electorate. There is no doubt that "the working class and trades union element"¹¹ was very strong in Sheffield, though it is hard to agree with Henry Broadhurst, secretary of the Labour Representation League, that "the workmen are a preponderating power in the constituency."¹² This view assumes that all workmen voted Liberal, which was not the case. Yet a candidate who was not acceptable to the working classes could not be carried. Alfred Illingworth, though excellent in other respects, was not adopted because he was unsound on the Capital and Labour question. J. Carvell Williams of the Liberation Society told H.J. Wilson that "I have heard him express decided views on some of the questions at issue between employers and workmen, these views being adverse to the views of the latter."¹³ Illingworth would no doubt have attracted middle class Nonconformist support but the workmen would have gone against him. So while the working class section of the electorate could not carry a candidate single-handed, equally no candidate could be successful without working class support.

The division of Liberals into moderates and Radicals persisted after 1875, though neither side allowed a serious breach to occur. H.J. Wilson told Sir Charles Reed, who was being considered as a candidate, that "the Liberals and the Radicals are as sincerely resolved as they are openly promising to act together more cordially than has been the case in the past."¹⁴ Of course, the moderates did not

1 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 10.7.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 10.7.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

3 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 22.7.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

4 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 5.6.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 J. Muscroft to H.J. Wilson, 18.6.1877, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5931.

6 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 5.9.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

7 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 20.6.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 Rev. J. Fisher to H.J. Wilson, 18.8.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L. M.D. 5931. R. Leader to Sir Chas. Reed, 18.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.: "the religious element in our Constituency is very powerful."

9 Rev. J. Fisher to H.J. Wilson, 18.8.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5931.

10 *Ibid.*

11 H.J. Wilson to Sir Chas. Reed, 17.1.1877, not sent, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

12 H. Broadhurst to H.J. Wilson, 11.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5931.

13 J.C. Williams to H.J. Wilson, 28.12.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5931.

14 H.J. Wilson to Sir Chas Reed, 17.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L. Reed was a prominent member of the London School Board.

want an "extreme" candidate, while the Radicals wanted a "thoroughgoing man."¹ Leader was anxious to run Mappin, a wealthy manufacturer who represented the moderate wing of the Liberal party² and who was a member of the Church of England.³ His candidature had positive advantages. "If Mr. Mappin would throw himself into public life and be liberal with his purse in promoting organization, and in helping to establish clubs in all the outlying districts, he would render us the service of which we stand most in need," Mundella wrote. "However, he would either bring to us, or would neutralise, many of those timid but influential people who turn the scale at an election."⁴ Mappin's candidature might help to arrest the middle class defection to Toryism.⁵ But J.H. Barber did not consider Mappin a suitable choice. "His principles are very little known," he told Leader, "and many believe him to be the opposite of advanced. So unpronounced a man, a poor speaker, with slender personal following and with far less to excite personal enthusiasm than Mark Firth, would in my belief, have no chance of success."⁶ If he stood, an even greater danger was that "there would be a great probability of a very red Radical being run against him, perhaps instigated by the Tories, and the party of Liberals would be split up again."⁷ This would indeed indicate that the Liberal union was not as strong as it may have appeared and that there was a good deal of friction below the surface. Barber was sure that "however clear Mr. Leader may be of design to bring forward Mr. Mappin, the appearance of the latter as a Candidate will arouse and confirm the suspicions of those opposed to him and place the very existence of the Liberal Association in peril."⁸ H.J. Wilson demanded an assurance from Leader that he would carry out the Executive's wish that he would approach Sir Charles Reed as a likely candidate and he told him frankly: "it [the Liberal Association] is an authority before which all private preferences must give way, at least in the sense of its officers neutralizing its decisions."⁹ Leader denied that he had any such intention,¹⁰ but from Wilson's reaction to the letter Leader had written to Sir Charles Reed, it is clear that the Education question, which had divided moderates and Radicals, still rankled as late as 1877. Speaking of the Sheffield system of compromise, Leader wrote: "we feared the imputation of espousing the Birmingham notions and found it best to accept what had been done and go on to perfect the School Board system on moderate lines, not showing hostility to the denominational system."¹¹ With obvious annoyance, Wilson noted in pencil on the letter: "all this is a complete misapprehension of the course of Rolley and H.J. Wilson. They were moderate not for the sake of votes but of the weak and wealthy Liberals of our Association. They would have got more votes by a stronger policy."¹² This is just another indication that the unanimity implied by the Association's official sponsorship of candidates in the School Board Election of 1876 was illusory and it helps to explain why the Association decided to take no part in the contest for the School Board in 1879.

These complex negotiations raise a very interesting question. To what extent was the Liberal Association a democratic institution in practice and how far did real power remain in the hands of a few? The choice of parliamentary candidates was vested in the Council of the Association, but the real initiative came from the Executive and from two men in particular, Robert Leader and H.J. Wilson, President and Secretary respectively. They wrote the letters, sounded out and discussed the merits and shortcomings of possible candidates, and not always with reference to the other members of the Executive. In November, 1876, for instance, H.J. Wilson admitted in a letter to Lord Edward Cavendish that "I write simply as a private individual without the knowledge of our Liberal Executive."¹³ It has been seen how in the negotiations with Sir Charles Reed Wilson lectured Leader about officers "neutralizing" the decisions of the Executive.¹⁴ The proceedings which led up to the adoption of Waddy as Liberal candidate were conducted very much in secret or at least Wilson thought that they were. "With respect to Waddy," he told Leader, "I still think it is a mistake not to deal more frankly with the Executive. I don't believe in secret diplomacy."¹⁵ He wished "to act up to the spirit as well as the letter of our professions of

1 *Ibid.*

2 H.J. Wilson to F.T. Mappin, 27.3.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5890.

3 R. Leader to Sir Chas. Reed, 18.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L. Leader said that the Established Church in Sheffield was powerful.

4 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 2.2.1878, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 *Cf.* A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 8.4.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.: "I think there is no other town in England where the middle classes are so bigoted and exclusively Tory as Sheffield."

6 J.H. Barber to R. Leader, 5.7.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

7 *Ibid.*

8 J.H. Barber to H.J. Wilson, 27.2.1878, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

9 H.J. Wilson to R. Leader, 21.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

10 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 22.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

11 R. Leader to Sir Chas. Reed, 18.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

12 *Ibid.*

13 H.J. Wilson to Lord E. Cavendish, 29.11.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5931.

14 H.J. Wilson to R. Leader, 21.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

15 H.J. Wilson to R. Leader, 22.2.1878, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

having a free and democratic Association, and not personal government."¹ Leader denied that there had been any "secret diplomacy on my part or within my knowledge,"² but Barber explained that Leader "demurs to taking the Executive as a whole into his confidence, on the ground that there is a danger of some of them imprudently divulging what may be said, a danger which I see may exist."³ Waddy himself felt that negotiations were being conducted on too narrow a basis and he told Wilson plainly: "I cannot with self-respect make any arrangements whatever until I have in my hands a cordial invitation from your Liberal Council."⁴ When the Liberals had won the by-election caused by the death of Roebuck in 1879, Waddy suggested to H.J. Wilson that he should summon a meeting of a dozen friends to plan for the future and the Executive of the Liberal Association should then be summoned to adopt the proposals.⁵ All these examples indicate that the actual management of the Liberal party in Sheffield remained in the hands of a few. This is perhaps hardly surprising in view of the indifferent quality of the Council and the lack of interest shown in the Association, and considering that Leader, whose influence after 1875 was probably even greater than it had been before, had had many years experience as a party manager. In fact, what happened after 1875 was that the old Liberal leadership admitted to its ranks the "new" men, who had been striving to assert themselves between 1869 and 1874. In theory, the Liberal party in Sheffield was a democratic institution, but in practice real power remained in the hands of the inner Liberal leadership which ran the party and which was stronger because the democratic nature of the Association freed it from the imputation of being a clique. Moreover the Association was only in its infancy and it was to be expected that the initiative would come from those used to managing the party. As it became established, the democratic principle might be more effectively realized.

1 *Ibid.*

2 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 22.2.1878, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

3 J.H. Barber to H.J. Wilson, 26.2.1878, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

4 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 29.3.1878, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

5 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 6.1.1880, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

CHAPTER XVII

FOREIGN POLICY 1876 - 79.

"What is political party? There is no sacredness in it in itself. It is an instrument to be used for good ends, for ends higher than itself, and for my part I rejoice that a party exists in this country under the name of the Liberal Party, which has upon this occasion proved so true to its principles and its convictions, and which has been resolved, and is resolved, to exert itself to the uttermost in a great and holy cause."

(Gladstone at Bingley Hall on the occasion of the inauguration of the National Liberal Federation, 31 May, 1877.¹)

Foreign affairs, which occupied the public mind between 1876 and 1879, had a profound effect upon the development of both political parties in Sheffield. The Bulgarian Atrocities Agitation provided the Liberals with a great cause, behind which they could all unite in opposition to the pro-Turkish policy of Beaconsfield's Government, and it was in Sheffield that the idea of a National Conference on the Eastern Question arose. However, after the outbreak of war between Russia and Turkey in April, 1877, the political initiative was seized by the Conservatives who, through the *Telegraph* and their highly efficient organization, were able to exploit the popular dislike of Russia. They could claim that they were upholding the honour and interests of England, and denounce the Liberals, who stressed the need for close co-operation with Russia, as "Friends of the Foreigner."² Such a line brought the Conservatives great political advantage, so much so that Sheffield became known as "a very fuggleman of borough jingoism."³

In the first phase of the Eastern Crisis, which lasted from August, 1876, until April, 1877, the Liberals had the field very much to themselves as anti-Turkish feeling swept the country. In the early stages of the Bulgarian revolt, the Executive of the Sheffield Liberal Association expressed complete agreement with Lord Derby's principle of non-intervention and declared on 13 July: "we would gladly reconcile, if we could, the Porte and its insurgent subjects, but we have, as we conceive, no right and no wish to take part with one against the other in a purely internal quarrel."⁴ This impartial and diplomatic view of the situation was dramatically altered by reports in the *Daily News* of terrible atrocities committed by Turkish troops in their attempts to suppress the revolt. On 7 August, a report was printed giving horrifying details of the massacre of the inhabitants of Batak, which created a wave of anti-Turkish feeling. "Language fails to tell", wrote Leader in the *Independent*, "human lips absolutely refuse to utter the atrocities committed by the Bashi-Bazouks and the Circassians."⁵ These atrocities, he believed, "have made the presence of the Turk in Europe an unbearable offence" and "the time has come for recognizing the fact that Turkey in Europe is a standing pest that, in self-defence, must sooner or later be cleansed away,, and the sooner the better even for the Turks themselves, who, as we have indicated, are barred from ever placing themselves in harmonious relation with Christendom."⁶ This was a great moral issue, a matter of conscience, far above any diplomatic or political considerations. In Sheffield the protest movement was confined to Liberals, partly because they believed that moral principles rather than political expediency should dictate public policy, but more because the Agitation attacked the Conservative Government which had sought to play down the atrocities to enable it to continue to uphold Turkish power in the Near East, which it considered to be in the interests of England. Beaconsfield's dismissal of the atrocities as "coffee-house babble" and his seemingly flippant approach to the question shocked Liberals who were more than ever convinced that he was an opportunist, totally devoid of moral principle. Leader denounced the policy of the Government as "weak, dilatory, cruel, and attended with the most unfortunate results to the Bulgarians, to the Turks themselves, and to the position of England in the eyes of the world."⁷ Of course, given Beaconsfield's policy of maintaining Turkish territorial integrity, the Bulgarian atrocities were a great embarrassment, and all the Government could do was to wait for the anti-Turkish feeling to subside. They could not support the fight of the Christian peoples for freedom because the exclusion of Turkey from Europe would create a power-vacuum

1 *S.I.*, 1.6.1877.

2 *S.D.T.*, 23.12.1879.

3 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 21.4.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

4 *S.I.*, 14.7.1876. At a Council meeting on the previous day, Ald. Beal said that "England could not do better than keep scrupulously out of this quarrel." *S.I.*, 13.7.1876.

5 *S.I.*, 19.8.1876.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *S.I.*, 2.9.1876.

which they believed would be filled by England's traditional enemy, Russia. Thus the question became one of party politics and the Agitation was associated almost completely with the Liberal party. T.R. Gainsford, for example, declined to attend a meeting held in Sheffield on 5 September, to protest against the Bulgarian Atrocities, because of "some degree of political party feeling, which appears to me, most unfortunately, to have been imported into a subject upon which surely there ought to be but one mind amongst us all in the British Isles."¹ Sheffield Conservatives could not support a movement which condemned the policy of a Government which they supported. Like the Government, they could only wait and concede the initiative to the Liberals.

Mundella had been deeply interested in the question from the outset. As early as 2 July he had told Leader that "the Moslem rule is played out and the sooner it comes to an end the better"² and although he distrusted Russia, yet "if these poor Christians could drive the Turk out of Europe they should have my moral support in doing so."³ Mundella was one of a number of Liberal M.P.'s who, when the session closed, formed themselves into a committee to "watch the position of the Eastern Question."⁴ "The government by the Turks has never been anything else but organized brigandage, associated with obscene outrage, massacre and death," he told a meeting of his constituents on 4 September, and he urged them to "demand for those Christian provinces that they shall have freedom to govern themselves."⁵ Self-government for the Christian peoples became the keynote of the Agitation, which also demanded that England should sever all connection with Turkey. As Mundella put it at the protest meeting on 5 Sept.:

"It is impossible that these Christian provinces should ever be, by the consent or the connivance of the people and the Government of England, handed over to Turkish rule again . . . Have we come to this, that we have to apologize for these things, and ask our Government, in the interest of some balance of power that we know nothing of, to hand over these people to slavery again — to be the slaves of this wretched and corrupt people . . . Let our Government say, 'We have called into existence the new races to redress the crimes of the old.'"⁶ Such a denunciation of the conception of the "Balance of Power" recalled John Bright's arguments against the Crimean War twenty years earlier, which at the time few Liberals had accepted. Liberalism had matured so that moral considerations, questions of right and wrong, were more important than diplomatic or political advantage. Moreover, this new and totally un-Palmerstonian approach to foreign policy, which owed a great deal to Gladstone's emphasis on moral principle guiding public policy and to the "Nonconformist Conscience", caused Liberals to reject traditional axioms which had guided British foreign policy for the past century. One such idea was that if Turkey disappeared from Europe, Russia would dominate the Balkans and threaten British power in the Mediterranean and the route to India. But during the crisis, Liberals came increasingly to challenge the view which had hitherto been accepted without question. They saw that British interests would not be damaged by self-governing Balkan countries. Indeed, quite the opposite, free Balkan states would form a far more effective barrier to Russia than a corrupt and decayed Turkey-in-Europe. At a meeting in Sheffield on 11 September to support Lady Strangford's Bulgarian Relief Fund, Robert Leader expressed this opinion when he said that "he trusted they would see that fair land again inhabited by a free people, that they would be a Christian and a civilised people, and that in them might be found the best bulwark against Russian aggression and Eastern crime and tyranny."⁷ Future events were to prove this to be true. Under Gladstone's guidance the Liberal party had developed a new moralistic approach to foreign policy which was a distinct break with the Palmerstonian tradition. Palmerston's mantle was taken up by Beaconsfield who realized the political potential of a blatantly nationalistic foreign policy which attracted many middle class ex-Palmerstonians who were searching for a "safe" party. So it was that the middle class defection to Conservatism, a process which had been going on since 1868, was accelerated by the Eastern Crisis. More importantly, as will appear, Jingoism was to attract working class support in Sheffield and undermine the Liberal position in Sheffield so that in 1880 the borough returned a Conservative M.P.

Yet, while the memory of the Bulgarian Atrocities remained fresh in the public mind, the Conservatives had to keep quiet. The Liberals in Sheffield entered into the Agitation with great enthusiasm. The protest meeting of 5 September was "densely crowded" and Leader's resolution condemning the policy of the Government and calling for an autumn session of Parliament was carried unanimously.⁸ Liberals did not complain about the response to the Agitation in Sheffield and the Rev. Robert Stainton

1 S.I., 6.9.1876.

2 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 2.7.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

3 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, no date but late June 1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

4 Others were Holms, Ashley, Lawson, Richard, Jacob Bright, Fawcett, Herbert, Chesson. See R.T. Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, 1876*, 1963, p. 58.

5 S.I., 6.9.1876.

6 S.I., 6.9.1876.

7 S.I., 12.9.1876.

8 S.I., 6.9.1876.

declared that "he was glad to see the pulse of England touched as it had not been touched for an age."¹ Within four days £500 had been raised by the fund established on 5 September.² On 11 September, protest meetings against the Bulgarian Atrocities were held at Rotherham and Barnsley.³ But by far the most important contribution which the Liberal party in Sheffield made to the Agitation was the idea of a National Conference on the Eastern Question,⁴ which would at once sustain the Agitation and put pressure on the Government to abandon its support for Turkey. In late September, 1876, H.J. Wilson wrote to the President and Secretary of the Manchester Liberal Association that "the first outburst of feeling in all parts of the country in reference to the Turkish atrocities and the foreign policy of this country has been thoroughly spontaneous and unorganized but it seems to Mr. Leader, President of the Sheffield Liberal Association, and to myself, very important that it should be followed up by concerted action so as to secure the utmost unity of aim and purpose."⁵ It was clear that if the Agitation were to be kept at fever pitch and, if it were not, the initiative would be lost, some form of organization was needed, and it seemed to Wilson and Leader "that the best course to pursue is to arrange for a Representative Conference, Congress or Assembly somewhat like those which did such good service in Anti-Slavery and Anti-Corn Law days."⁶ Wilson invited the main Liberal Associations to send delegates to a meeting at the Victoria Hotel for an "interchange of opinion."⁷ The meeting was held on 30 September and was attended by 3 delegates from Darlington,⁸ which W.T. Stead had made an important centre of the Agitation through the influence of the *Northern Echo*, 3 from Leeds and 1 from Manchester.⁹ Mundella was enthusiastic about the idea. "I think your idea of a great National Conference on the Eastern Question a very good one," he told Leader. "Meetings seem to have done all that could have been expected of them, and further efforts ought to take the new form you have wisely indicated. A large representative Conference to be held in London (or in some central place in the country) would speak once for all, and speak unanimously,"¹⁰ and he was glad that "Sheffield has the honour of this movement."¹¹ Indeed, the initiative came very much from Sheffield. On 6 October, for example, T.N. Roberts, secretary of the Liberal Central Association, sent Benjamin Bagshawe a list of the names of the leading Liberals in London,¹² and on the next day, Mundella told Leader that "your idea of a National Conference seems to me to have taken hold of the public mind, and, if we have no Autumn Session, it will be the best means of keeping the Government up to the mark. The localities should, I think, appoint representatives, and request their members to attend the Conference."¹³

The National Conference, which the Liberals of Sheffield envisaged, aimed to sustain the Bulgarian Atrocities Agitation and to influence Government policy in favour of self-government for the Balkan Christians. In order to achieve these aims, it had to be held in London and it must, as far as possible, be a non-political demonstration. Clearly, it could not be a truly national Conference unless it was held in the capital and near the seat of Government. It was to be a "Parliament outside Parliament" and it could therefore meet nowhere but London. "If the Conference is to go on," Mundella declared, "it can only be worked from London, where a 'swell' must take the management."¹⁴ Equally, he was convinced that it must not be merely a Liberal meeting, which the Conservatives could easily dismiss as a party political manoeuvre. Several months later, when acting as chairman of the Committee which convened the Conference, Mundella underlined this when he said: "I don't intend that any Radicals shall speak if I can help it; I want to fire off the Bishops, the Parsons, the Peers, the Literati, etc., — not those who have been the actors heretofore, but a new set."¹⁵ Chamberlain, however, showed very little interest in a Conference on the lines suggested by the Sheffield Liberals. On 13 October, he advised H.J. Wilson to abandon the idea of a conference in London and rather hold a meeting in Sheffield with delegates from the various

1 *Ibid.*

2 *S.I.*, 9.9.1876.

3 *S.I.*, 12.9.1876.

4 At the annual meeting of the Sheffield Liberal Association in January, 1877, H.J. Wilson reported that "in October the idea originated in Sheffield of holding a great national conference in reference to the Eastern Question." *S.I.*, 31.1.1877.

5 H.J. Wilson to President and Secretary of Manchester Liberal Association, 25.9.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D.2588.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

8 One of these was the journalist, J.H. Bell. *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 4.10.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

11 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 6.10.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

12 T.N. Roberts to B. Bagshawe, 6.10.1876, Bagshawe MSS., S.C.L., 777(iv)

13 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 7.10.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

14 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 10.10.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

15 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 7.12.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

Liberal Associations throughout the country. "I believe that in this way you may cover Sheffield with glory and immensely strengthen your local influence and give importance to your Association in Sheffield."¹ This was just the opposite of what the Sheffield Liberals envisaged. Their aim was to influence public opinion and Government policy on the Eastern Question and not to strengthen their own influence or that of the Sheffield Liberal Association. Chamberlain, on the other hand, saw it as an opportunity for a great demonstration of the power of provincial Liberalism, which would be a forerunner of the National Liberal Federation, established in Birmingham in the following May. The Birmingham response to a national Conference on non-political lines was therefore cool. Chamberlain saw the broader implications of the movement for the Liberal party but the Sheffield Liberals were determined that the Conference should be not a political demonstration but an expression of national feeling on a great moral issue. Shortly before the Conference was held, Leader declared: "I am surprised at the idea of forming permanent societies. Surely this question like others is the proper work of our Liberal Association and we do not want to dissipate our means and our efforts upon multiplying machinery."² To the Sheffield Liberals it was a moral rather than a political question and they were disappointed at Birmingham's reaction. "Nothing seems to go down with Birmingham that is not of home manufacture," wrote Mundella. "I am sure we should have made the Conference a success. However, it may not be amiss to regard it as postponed for the present. Next time, I think we had better decide first, and consult our neighbours afterwards."³ On 18 October, he wrote gloomily to Leader: "I felt so confident that your mission to Birmingham would result in a decision in favour of a Conference that your telegram was a disappointment to me."⁴

It was, however, precisely the non-political aspect of the Conference which commended the idea to Gladstone. The Bulgarian Atrocities Agitation had restored Gladstone's faith in the capacity of the masses for right judgment by convincing him of the existence in the country of a "virtuous passion."⁵ Gladstone agreed with the Sheffield Liberals in seeing the question as a moral rather than a political issue and he welcomed the initiative from Sheffield. He told Leader that he felt "real interest" in the proposal and he invited him and any others to visit him and talk the matter over.⁶ Accordingly, Leader visited Gladstone at the end of October, 1876,⁷ and the *Independent* announced that the project for a National Conference on the Eastern Question, originated by the Sheffield Liberal Association, was likely to proceed.⁸

A Committee was established to convene the Conference, of which Mundella was the chairman.⁹ Robert and John Daniel Leader, H.J. Wilson, F.T. Mappin and the Rev. J. Flather were included on the list of conveners of the Conference, the aim of which was "pressing upon the Government to use their best endeavours to place themselves in frank and cordial relations with Russia and the other Great Powers, for the purpose of obtaining for the Christian populations of the European provinces of Turkey a release from the direct rule of the Porte, with proper guarantees for the freedom and safety of the non-Christian populations."¹⁰ It aimed also at preventing "a war in support of the integrity and independence of the Turkish Empire," which "would be injurious to the interests of England, opposed to the wishes of the English people, and an offence against the world."¹¹ Above all, pressure had to be exerted upon Beaconsfield himself to avert war with Russia on behalf of Turkey. James Bryce told Mundella's daughter that the worst feature of the crisis "is to see a vainglorious mountebank permitted to scatter about fire-brands from the highest place in England and apparently no indignation in the country at his behaviour."¹² The best means of securing self-government for the oppressed provinces was for England to co-operate with the Concert of Europe and more especially with Russia.¹³ This the Conservative Government had declined to do when in May, 1876, it had rejected the Berlin Memorandum, calling upon the Turks to reform. Beaconsfield was determined to act independently of the Concert of Europe and in his speech at the Guildhall, on 9 November, he underlined his policy of full support for Turkey. The question was what would England's position be in the event of a Russo-Turkish war? The *Independent* believed that "if unfortunately

1 J. Chamberlain to H.J. Wilson, 13.10.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 2588.

2 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 1.12.1876, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

3 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 14.10.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

4 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 18.10.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 Agatha Ramm ed., *The Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville 1876 - 1886*, 2 Vols. Oxford, 1962, p.3.

6 W.E. Gladstone to R. Leader, 18.10.1876, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

7 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 23.10.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 *S.I.*, 28.10.1876.

9 William Morris was treasurer and J.W. Probyn, George Howard and F.W. Chesson, hon. secs.

10 Printed letter, F.W. Chesson to H.J. Wilson, 6.11.1876, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 2587.

11 Circular, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 2587.

12 J. Bryce to Miss Mundella, 18.11.1876, Mundella MSS., Folio 1, S.U.L.

13 *S.I.*, 25.11.1876, 20.1.1877.

the 'Concert of Europe' should be disturbed, there is far less harm in letting Russia and Turkey fight it out than in joining the fray to help the authors of the Bulgarian massacres."¹ The determination felt by Liberals that the folly of the Crimean War should not be repeated, especially in view of the indefensible conduct of Turkey, gave a boost to the Conference movement. Leader was invited to speak,² but he decided not to go.³ Shortly before the Conference was held, Mundella was appealing for delegates from Sheffield: "can you not send 20 delegates from Sheffield to the Conference? Surely the Nonconformist Churches, the Trades Council, the Liberal Association, the Society of Friends, and others will do this."⁴ This may indicate that the response had not been as great as might have been expected considering the idea originated in Sheffield, though on the next day the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee resolved to pay the expenses of the Rev. W. Lenwood as delegate.⁵ However, Sheffield Liberals were agreed that the National Conference held in St. James's Hall on 8 December, 1876, was "a wonderful success"⁶ and the *Independent* described it as "one of the most remarkable tributes ever paid to the cause of national morality."⁷

The position of the Government in December, 1876, was stronger than at any time since the beginning of the Atrocities Agitation. As had been feared, the National Conference appeared a Liberal rather than a non-political demonstration because of the important part Gladstone played in it and because its aims were contrary to Conservative policy. Most of the speakers were Liberals and the movement had been organized by Liberals. Thus political party associations reduced its impact. Furthermore, Beaconsfield bought time by sending Lord Salisbury as British representative to a Conference of the Powers at Constantinople to discuss the Porte's relations with its subject peoples. But the Concert of Europe could not work because Turkey, assured of British support, refused to make any concessions and the Conference broke up on 22 January, 1877. Beaconsfield had not intended that it should work because he had no intention of co-operating with Russia, and the Constantinople Conference was nothing more than a token gesture designed to show that the crisis could not be solved by the Concert of Europe.

The Russian declaration of war against Turkey on 24 April, 1877, the logical consequence of the failure of the Constantinople Conference, greatly strengthened the hands of the Government because Russia now appeared the aggressor and the Conservatives could play upon the traditional fear and hatred of Russia. This marked the second phase of the Eastern crisis, in which the Government gradually regained the political initiative. The Liberals feared that Beaconsfield might exploit the latent Russophobia to justify a war against Russia in defence of Turkey and, in order to make his policy quite clear, Gladstone moved five Resolutions on the Eastern Question on 7 May, 1877. The Resolutions were to the effect that Turkey, having failed to fulfil her treaty obligations, had forfeited all claim to British support and that, by concerted European action, self-government should be secured for the Balkan provinces. Gladstone's policy, which was by no means accepted by the whole Liberal party in the House of Commons,⁸ was supported by the Liberals in Sheffield. On 2 May, a large meeting was held to support the resolutions.⁹ The chairman, Robert Leader, declared that their intention was "to speak to the Liberal chiefs, but they also wished to speak to Europe, that the nations of Europe might know what was the mind of the people of England." William Smith, one of the few influential members of the middle class in Sheffield who remained loyal to the Liberal party, said that "he believed that the majority of Lord Beaconsfield's party — and that unfortunately was the majority in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords — would at the slightest encouragement from him plunge England into a war with Russia to defend the Empire of the Turk with all its abominations."¹⁰ Smith added that Europe as a whole would not permit Russian aggrandisement. Several other speakers challenged what had been an accepted axiom of British foreign policy, that Russian policy in the Near East was expansionist. Professor Thorold Rogers, for example, "was disposed to believe it was the stupidity of other rulers which had made Russian diplomacy dangerous" and he even approved of Russia's abrogation of the Black Sea Clauses of the Treaty of Paris in 1871. Michael Beal said that he "hoped Russia had caught the spirit of progress and improvement as well as other countries, and said he was not afraid of Russia." The motion in support of Gladstone was carried with only 3 dissentients and a petition was accepted, which expressed hope of "the early and effectual

1 S.I., 25.11.1876.

2 J.W. Probyn, G. Howard and F.W. Chesson to R. Leader, 1.12.1876, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

3 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 1.12.1876, Wilson MSS., S.U.L. Leader gave no reason for his decision.

4 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 3.12.1876, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

5 Minute Book, 4.12.1876, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

6 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 9.12.1876, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

7 S.I., 9.12.1876.

8 The Liberal leader, the Marquis of Hartington, disapproved of Gladstone's course. See P. Magnus, *Gladstone*, 1954, pp. 246-248.

9 S.I., 3.5.1877.

10 S.I., 3.5.1877. Cf. Thorold Rogers' remark that "the Government of Turkey was the most odious and execrable that existed under the canopy of heaven."

development of local liberty and practical self-government in the disturbed provinces of Turkey, without the imposition upon the people of any other foreign dominion."¹ The meeting is important as it illustrates the immense support for Gladstone among provincial Liberals. Gladstone expressed in terms of public policy their values and ideals. "Mr. Gladstone was never so great as when he was appealing to the English conscience, to its sympathy with right and duty, and to the obligations of honour," declared the Liberal intellectual, Thorold Rogers.² "Conscience" was especially acute among Nonconformists and many Sheffield Liberals were Nonconformists. A Conference of the Liberation Society, held in London at the same time as the Sheffield meeting, passed unanimous resolutions in favour of Gladstone and sent a deputation to present them.³ It was support of this kind which sustained Gladstone in the face of opposition from his own party in the Commons and from the Liberal leader, Lord Hartington. On 4 May, the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee, after resolving that "the time has come for our Government, in concert with the other European Powers, to exert its influence to obtain practical self-government for the disturbed provinces of Turkey, with freedom from foreign dominion," called upon Hartington and all the Liberals to support Gladstone and "the only sound policy in the present crisis," "foreseeing nothing but the utter disintegration of the Liberal Party should its Parliamentary leaders oppose its most profound convictions and *its most trusted statesman*."⁴ Hartington assured the Committee that he had given the resolution his "most careful consideration,"⁵ and it is likely that such pressure as this helped to avert what could have been a most serious Liberal split. In the event, Hartington remained loyal to Gladstone and the Resolutions were defeated by 253 to 354 votes.⁶ To Gladstone this indicated that the Liberal party in Parliament needed to be "educated" and this education must come from below. So it was that he attended the inauguration of the National Liberal Federation at Birmingham on 31 May, 1877. Ironically, while the Parliamentary Party was out of touch with Liberal feeling in the country, Gladstone was not concerned with the political implications of his Russophile policy, which might seriously compromise the Liberal party whenever Beaconsfield saw fit to exploit anti-Russian feeling. This had worried Granville and Hartington from the beginning and had made them reticent and unwilling to be associated with the Atrocities Agitation.

Before the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war, the Conservatives had kept very quiet in Sheffield, though they were no doubt greatly encouraged by a letter from Lord Fitzwilliam to Robert Leader which appeared in the *Independent* on 23 October, 1876.⁷ In it Fitzwilliam stressed the need to stand by the Government and its policy of checking Russian ambitions, and he condemned the language used by Gladstone in reference to the Eastern crisis. Mundella could dismiss it as "just what might be expected from a weak Whig nobleman ridden by a Tory wife,"⁸ but there is no doubt that the opinions of one of the foremost local landowners and political magnates would carry weight with those who feared Russia and who believed, in Roebuck's words, that "the Ministers of England are fighting the battle of England as Englishmen ought to fight it" and "they have at heart the interests of England, and when they consider that, they consider the interests of the world."⁹ This talk of British interests, which was akin to the ideology of imperialism, attracted support from moderate lukewarm Liberals who disliked Gladstone, as well as from those who had been hitherto politically uncommitted. Russophobia, moreover, was a source of strength which the Conservatives could tap after the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war, and it was prevalent among all classes in Sheffield and not least among the working classes. Benjamin Fletcher declared at a meeting held on 5 May, 1877, to support the Government, that "amongst the working classes there was a vast amount of Conservatism that was as yet undeveloped,"¹⁰ and it was towards those who were politically uncommitted that the Conservatives in Sheffield directed their campaign.

The Russian declaration of war against Turkey and the abatement of popular indignation aroused by the Bulgarian Atrocities, made a pro-Turkish policy for the first time politically defensible. It was even sensible if, as was widely believed, Russia's motives were expansionist and Russian expansion in the Near East was harmful to British interests. On the outbreak of war, the *Telegraph*, which was violently anti-Russian, declared that "every blow struck at the Turk is a blow for the reversal of Inkerman."¹¹ The first pro-Government meeting to be held in Sheffield took place on 5 May, 1877, at the new rooms

1 S.I., 3.5.1877.

2 *Ibid.*

3 S.I., 3.5.1877.

4 Minute Book, 4.5.1877. Italics inserted.

5 Hartington to J.W. Wilson, 7.5.1877, inserted in Minute Book of Sheffield Nonconformist Committee, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

6 Magnus, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

7 Fitzwilliam to R. Leader, 21.10.1876. S.I., 23.10.1876.

8 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 23.10.1876, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

9 Spoken at a banquet of the London Fishmongers' Company on 14 December, 1876. S.I., 16.12.1876.

10 S.I., 7.5.1877.

11 S.D.T., 24.4.1877.

of the Conservative Association in Norfolk Street and between 250 and 300 were present.¹ In putting the motion of confidence, Arthur Thomas, a solicitor and one of the most respected of local Conservatives, declared that "the Radical view which had been uttered from Sheffield was not the voice, and did not express the opinions of the town of Sheffield" and he asked, with reference no doubt to Gladstone's Resolutions, "who established England to be the sheriff's officer, executioner, and policeman of all the world?"² These words, intended to justify non-intervention in the Russo-Turkish war, were to sound strange in view of future Conservative imperial policy and worldwide commitment. Indeed, Mundella was convinced that British neutrality was maintained by the Liberals: "the Liberal Party has never done a greater service to the country than in influencing the Government and the nation in favour of neutrality. It would have done still better had it stimulated them to active interference which would have prevented war."³ Nevertheless, during 1877, the pro-Turkish feeling increased. On 10 May, at the annual meeting of the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Mutual Provident Society, Roebuck described the Turks as "a gentle, a prudent, and a sober people,"⁴ and in October, Leader was complaining of the "monstrous philo-Turkism" created by the Tories in Sheffield, the only consolation being, he told Wilson, that it "should stir up all the better elements of Liberalism."⁵

Anti-Russian feeling increased as the Russian armies approached Constantinople, to the point that British intervention in the war on the Turkish side seemed likely. On 20 December, 1877, Mundella considered that "we are drifting, and the position may become dangerous and lead to war."⁶ The Liberals saw their task now as influencing the Government and public opinion in favour of continued non-intervention and neutrality. They denied that "any danger to any single British interest has arisen, or is likely to arise,"⁷ and they stressed how damaging a war would be in the present state of trade.⁸ Mundella addressed a large meeting in Sheffield on 7 January, 1878, in favour of continued British neutrality in the Russo-Turkish war.⁹ However, it was widely believed that British interests in the Near East depended upon the maintenance of Turkey as a barrier to Russia and that at all costs the Russians must be prevented from occupying Constantinople and the Straits. Thus public opinion enabled Beaconsfield to overcome the opposition in his own Cabinet to a more vigorous policy from the Earl of Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary, and the Foreign Secretary, Lord Derby. Beaconsfield then proceeded, with the backing of a united Cabinet and Party, the Queen and a large and influential section of public opinion, to put pressure on Russia, to make it plain that Britain was prepared to go to war to prevent the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire. He asked Parliament for a war grant of £6M.

It was in this final phase of the Eastern crisis in the early months of 1878 that the extent of the support for the Government in Sheffield became really apparent. A meeting convened by the Liberal Association on 29 January, to consider the demand for a war grant, ended in a great Conservative triumph, when an amendment in favour of the policy of the Government was carried.¹⁰ H.J. Wilson had tried to put a motion against the vote of £6M, "believing that armed intervention in the East is unjustifiable", but he spoke amidst uproar and frequent interruptions and it was reported that "as he was finishing a part of the meeting was singing with unconcealed enjoyment 'Rule Britannia'."¹¹ The seconder, the Rev. J. Lewis, Wesleyan Methodist, was not even allowed to finish: "we are not going to war in support of fraud, and oppression, and wrong; we are not going to war to withhold from the subject races of Turkey the liberty, the dear liberty . . . (interruptions and 'Rule Britannia')."¹² Mundella described the news that a meeting in Sheffield had carried an amendment in favour of the Government as "the worst news that has reached me since I have been member for Sheffield. It is utterly discouraging to our side, and damaging to my influence on the Eastern Question."¹³ There is no doubt that in Sheffield the Conservatives beat the patriotic drum most effectively. They influenced public opinion through a highly efficient organization and by means of an influential and violently Russophobic newspaper, the *Telegraph*. Mundella believed that it supplied the current demand for "scandal and personalities" and that it was totally unscrupulous in its misrepresentation of events, so much so that "it has been more powerful for evil than all other Tory influences with which we have to contend

1 *S.I.*, 7.5.1877.

2 *S.I.*, 7.5.1877.

3 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 1.9.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

4 *S.I.*, 11.5.1877.

5 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 3.10.1877, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

6 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 20.12.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

7 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 30.12.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 22.12.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

9 *S.I.*, 8.1.1878, chaired by F.T. Mappin.

10 *S.I.*, 30.1.1878, attended by 8,000 - 10,000 people.

11 *S.I.*, 30.1.1878.

12 *Ibid.*

13 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 29.1.1878, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

in Sheffield."¹ "There is a very large anti-Russian feeling in Sheffield consequent upon the vigorous and persistent lying of the *Telegraph*,"² he told H.J. Wilson. The prevalence of anti-Russian and pro-Government feeling in Sheffield meant that electoral prospects for the Liberals were gloomy. "I think there is no doubt that Sheffield is in a bad way," Mundella remarked. "The old supporters of Roebuck now avow themselves Tories and have got Mark Firth as their Chairman. They have money, influence and organization, and if Beaconsfield should take advantage of the Anti-Russian feeling which he and his colleagues and Lying Press have provoked and dissolve Parliament, we shall have a fight of unusual bitterness and difficulty."³ Of course, in fanning anti-Russian feeling, the Conservatives could take advantage of a long tradition of Russophobia in Sheffield, the most conspicuous expression of which was the Urquhart movement during the Crimean War and the Foreign Affairs Committee established by Isaac Ironside. Hatred of Russia, often associated with sympathy for Poland, was deeply ingrained in the Sheffield mind and the Liberals trod very thin ice when they suggested co-operation with England's traditional enemy. The Liberals were ahead of their time in seeing that strong Balkan states would be a far more effective check to Russia than to bolster up a rotten and corrupt Ottoman Empire, but to many people at the time their plea for co-operation with, rather than opposition to, Russia savoured too much of friendship with the foreigner, and as the town was swept by a wave of Jingoism, there was little room for rational argument.

The support which the Conservative Government enjoyed in "Radical" Sheffield was of the greatest political importance. "Sheffield was the first large town in the United Kingdom to vote by so large a majority in favour of the Government. Sheffield was the first town to strike the key note, 'Rule Britannia', "declared W.R. Groves, vice-president of the Nether Hallam Conservative Club.⁴ At a meeting addressed by Roebuck in June, 1878, Mark Firth said that "Sheffield is one of the great towns which has supported the policy of the Government, and it has done so in a more decided manner than any other town."⁵ Mundella complained to Leader that "the Conservative meetings are numerous and enthusiastic in Sheffield" and he added "I don't hear of other Constituencies being affected by the war cry."⁶ Many reasons can be put forward to explain the success of the Conservative campaign. There was the strong anti-Russian tradition, fully exploited by efficient organization and the *Telegraph*. Important also was the influence of Roebuck who refused to believe in "that story of the Bulgarian atrocities,"⁷ stood by the Government throughout the crisis and at the request of the Queen was made a Privy Councillor to mark his "truly patriotic conduct".⁸ Of course, Roebuck had long been a Conservative in practice, as had his principal supporters in Sheffield, such as William Fisher, Thomas Jessop and Mark Firth, though there is no doubt that the Eastern crisis confirmed their transition and deepened their commitment to Toryism. In December, 1877, for example, James Stuart, the promoter of the University Extension movement, declined to become a Liberal candidate for Sheffield because it would probably lead to a break with Mark Firth and so wreck the scheme for Firth College. He explained to H.J. Wilson: "it is of importance to say that I am fully persuaded that Mr. Firth is a strong pro-Turk and in favour of war, and I have no doubt he means to take a strongly conservative side in politics henceforth, making that question an excuse."⁹ Mundella complained of the faithlessness to principle of the "Tory Unitarians" such as Fisher, Jessop, Bramley and Hunter,¹⁰ but it seems also from enquiries which Leader made that many Wesleyans were on the Turkish side.¹¹ It might be argued that the Whigs or Roebuckites, as they were variously described, were lost to Liberalism long before the Eastern crisis and this merely strengthened their attachment to Conservatism. With reference to Herbert Bramley, who had supported Chamberlain in 1874, Mundella noted as early as January, 1876, that he "seems to me always to be cynical and insincere. I quite believe him to be a friend of Leng's, and a very doubtful friend of ours,"¹² and several months earlier he had told Leader that "the sooner you regard Firth as hopeless for the Liberal Party the better."¹³ The problem for the Liberals was that

1 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 8.9.1878, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 30.1.1878, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

3 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 3.2.1878, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

4 *S.I.*, 5.2.1878.

5 *S.I.*, 18.6.1878.

6 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 15.2.1878, Mundella MSS., S.U.L. But on 20 February, a Conservative meeting ended in confusion and without result, "a decisive check". *S.I.*, 21.2.1878.

7 *S.I.*, 18.6.1878.

8 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 16.8.1878, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

9 J. Stuart to H.J. Wilson, 31.12.1877, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5931.

10 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 19.6.1878, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

11 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 4.4.1878, Wilson MSS., S.U.L. N.B. on 4 February, 1878, Mundella presented a petition from the Methodist New Connexion, South Street, against the vote of credit, *S.I.*, 5.2.1878.

12 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 27.1.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

13 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 1.8.1875, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

these men possessed the wealth and social prestige to influence public opinion in Sheffield in favour of a policy which was in itself more "popular" than the Liberal alternative, because the Conservatives could pose as upholders of the national honour, while branding their opponents as "Friends of the Foreigner."

This "popular" aspect of the Conservative campaign and the prestige which Beaconsfield gained when he successfully forced Russia, by an exercise in Palmerstonian brinkmanship, to agree to the revision of the Treaty of San Stefano, which had created a large independent Bulgaria stretching to the Aegean Sea and under Russian protection, attracted much working class support in Sheffield. Mundella complained that the working men "are demoralised by the sensational lies of the *Telegraph*, and the Conservative Association are working on them while the fever lasts."¹ William Smith was shocked by the "readiness with which the working classes join in any 'Jingo' cry."² Sheffield was swept by Jingoism, which in itself bred an uncritical and superficial approach to politics. At a Liberal meeting in August, 1878, when the prestige of the Government was at its zenith, Ald. R. Searle, who had had close contact with the working classes in Sheffield, having been a prominent member of the Reform League, underlined this very point when he "observed that of late years the working men of Sheffield had been going backward instead of forward."³ It did not matter that at the Congress of Berlin Beaconsfield in effect abandoned his principle of Turkish territorial integrity, or that England become involved in wars of "vulgar aggression"⁴ in Afghanistan and Zululand, or that domestic reform was neglected in favour of a "high foreign policy."⁵ Beaconsfield's foreign and imperial policy was glamorous but superficial. The Congress of Berlin was not the great success it appeared at the time and the *Independent* was correct when it observed that "Turkey, under the process of dismemberment, which Lord Beaconsfield calls consolidation, is rapidly falling to pieces, and we have before us not the prospect of 'peace with honour' but a series of complications compared with which the difficulties of the past are but as a children's puzzle."⁶ The wars in Afghanistan and South Africa brought England nothing but tarnished prestige and future problems. Yet in Sheffield the Liberals, whose approach to foreign policy was more mature and sound, could make little or no headway in face of the support for "Beaconsfieldism" among all classes of society. Mundella observed that "the way the Liberals are ignored in every public gathering is abominable, and has no parallel in any other town in England."⁷ The Liberal problem in Sheffield was summed up by the Baptist minister, Giles Hester, commenting on a Tory demonstration in June, 1879, at which the principal speaker was Lord Cranbrook.⁸ He thought that Cranbrook's speech had had an impact on the public, especially "the unthinking part:"⁹

"The masses are not swayed by sound logic so much as by plausible representations. . . . the tingle of the ear determines the judgement of the multitude more than any intelligent decision of the mind."¹⁰ He believed that "the party throughout the country is still in a disjointed state and there seems no master mind to gather up and concentrate the Liberal forces of the country," but even more serious was the position in Sheffield where "unless counteracting tendencies are brought to bear on the present state of things there may be danger to Liberal ideas."¹¹ The problem was that the Liberals, with an inadequate ward organization and an insolvent Association, were not strong enough to bring counteracting tendencies to bear. The Liberal position in Sheffield had been seriously weakened between 1876 and 1879 because of the support for Beaconsfield's foreign policy. Waddy predicted that "there will be no contest in the United Kingdom more important and interesting to the party and to the country than the battle at Sheffield."¹² As the time for an election approached, the Conservatives were confident that they would do well in Sheffield, and they "pointed to it as a radical borough soundly converted — 'a very fugleman of borough jingoism'." ¹³

1 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 3.3.1878, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 Wm. Smith to H.J. Wilson, 7.1.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5934.

3 *S.I.*, 20.8.1878.

4 *S.I.*, 28.11.1878.

5 Mundella's address to his constituents, 18.8.1879, *S.I.*, 19.8.1879.

6 *S.I.*, 14.9.1878.

7 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 6.9.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 *S.I.*, 6.6.1879. A reply to a Liberal meeting in April, 1879, addressed by Sir William Harcourt. *S.I.*, 17.4.1879.

9 Rev. G. Hester to H.J. Wilson, 16.6.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5934.
Giles Hester, 1829-1911: minister of Cemetery Road Baptist Church.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 21.4.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

13 *Ibid.*

THE ELECTIONS OF 1879 and 1880.

The strength of Conservatism in Sheffield can be clearly seen from a study of the elections of December, 1879, and April, 1880. Both elections were fought on the question of foreign policy and the past record of the Conservative Government, and since "Beaconsfieldism" had been very popular in Sheffield among all classes of society, it is not surprising that the Tories did well and even succeeded in winning one of the seats in the General Election of 1880. The task facing the Liberals was indeed very formidable in the face of a Conservative party which possessed a highly efficient organization, operated by J.C. Shaw, perhaps the ablest political agent of the day, an influential newspaper, wealth and social prestige, all of which enabled it to exploit to the full the current taste in Sheffield for Jingoism and imperialism. By contrast, the Liberals had an inadequate organization and a heavy debt, while the *Independent*, not the equal of the *Telegraph* in influence or circulation, advocated a foreign policy for which at best there was little sympathy in Sheffield and which at worst could be interpreted as truckling to England's enemies. The *Telegraph* was not slow to point out that "men who defend the Russian, the Afghan and the Zulu abroad, and who court the support of the Home Ruler, and accept 'hints from Clerkenwell' for domestic legislation, are not the men to be trusted again with the destinies of England in their keeping. Russian Despotism relies on the sympathy and the help of English 'Liberals'."¹ Such words were especially meaningful to a public which remembered the Urquhart movement and the Foreign Affairs Committee of Isaac Ironside. Russophobia was common to both, but the great difference was that "Beaconsfieldism" counted among its supporters the cream of Sheffield society, the men of wealth and influence; thus its political significance was far greater and, in any case, a frenzied and eccentric outburst of anti-Russian feeling cannot be compared with the support for Beaconsfield's foreign and imperial policy, though the tradition of Russophobia and the popularity which Palmerston's foreign policy of British interests before all else excited in Sheffield, no doubt help to explain it.

The Liberals had at least one advantage that when a by-election was necessitated by the death of John Arthur Roebuck on 30 November, 1879, they were ready with their candidate, S.D. Waddy, who was well known to the constituency. The son of the famous Dr. Waddy, former principal of Wesley College, Waddy was a barrister and had been M.P. for Barnstaple. A prominent Wesleyan Methodist, he was by this time completely sound on the Liberation question.² His campaign was based upon a complete rejection of the policy of the Government. "The mischief this Government has done will live long after it is dead, buried and gone," he told a meeting in the Albert Hall on 6 December, 1879.³ He stressed the "extravagant expenditure" of the Government, claiming that in 1879 "the ordinary expenditure only is 8½M in advance of the ordinary expenditure in the last year of Mr. Gladstone's Government,"⁴ and he dwelt upon the disasters in Afghanistan. About the future, Waddy said little; he stood for progress in education, Free Trade and "a more equal distribution of the electoral franchise and the voting power of the country."⁵ Essentially, however, the Liberals were content to fight the election on the record of the Government, and the *Independent* put the issue quite simply: "Is Sheffield for the Liberal or for the Conservative cause, for Gladstone or for Beaconsfield?"⁶ It was a question of " 'Reform, Retrenchment, Peace' against wicked wars, deceitful diplomacy, blundering finance, augmented taxes and trade-destroying perplexities."⁷

The Conservatives, on the other hand, did not have a predetermined candidate. They were anxious to have a local man,⁸ someone of wealth and prestige who would attract the support of the uncommitted voters. At the annual meeting of the Sheffield Conservative Association in November, 1879, H.E. Watson, whom the *Independent* described as "the most popular member of the party in Sheffield,"⁹ declared that "there is a large mass of electors in this town of no particular political bias, and when it came to a contest they would probably support the most popular man and the man who was most respected in the town."¹⁰

1 *S.D.T.*, 9.12.1879.

2 J.C. Williams to H.J. Wilson, 11.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5931

3 *S.I.*, 8.12.1879.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *S.I.*, 8.12.1879.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *S.I.*, 10.12.1879.

8 J.A. Roebuck to Wm. Fisher, 5.2.1879, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

9 *S.I.*, 13.3.1880.

10 *S.I.*, 14.11.1879.

This explains why strenuous efforts were made to persuade Mark Firth to become the Conservative candidate. Firth was held in great esteem for the time and money he had devoted to philanthropic and educational work and, as a leading Roebuckite, his candidature would have firmly cemented the Whig-Tory alliance in Sheffield, although this is perhaps academic since the Roebuckites had long been Tories in fact if not in name. On 6 December, Firth was visited at his residence, Oakbrook, by the Earl of Wharncliffe and Rowland Winn, a Conservative Whip,¹ but he declined to become a candidate,² probably because he did not feel fitted to be an M.P.³ It was reported that another Roebuckite, Thomas Jessop, was next asked but he too refused on the grounds of age.⁴ The Conservative choice finally fell upon C.S. Wortley, the 28 year old cousin of the Earl of Wharncliffe. At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Conservative Association on 8 December, he announced: "I come before you as a Liberal-Conservative,"⁵ though he made it clear that "I shall primarily in every question support the present Government." Like Roebuck, whose "independence" he promised to imitate, Wortley gave his full backing to Beaconsfield's foreign policy and argued that the wars in Afghanistan and South Africa were necessary. On domestic questions, he supported the maintenance of the connection between Church and State and was in favour of "secure" progress, with due regard for "the value of the historical continuity of our institutions."⁶ As to finance, he maintained that expenditure had been high and available revenue low. But like Waddy, Wortley was prepared to contest the election on the foreign policy of the Government, and he told his supporters: "the foreign policy of the country, I take it, is the great question upon which this and many other elections will turn."⁷

Wortley could count upon the support which Roebuck had enjoyed because, on 9 December, Roebuck's Executive Committee resolved to support his candidature.⁸ This marked a final and complete break with Liberalism by the Whigs in Sheffield, who had been moving towards Conservatism steadily since Mundella challenged Roebuck in 1868. Roebuck had relied upon the support of Conservatives, Publicans and what Mundella described as "all the timid politicians,"⁹ the erstwhile Liberals who distrusted Gladstone and were searching for a "safe" party, those who saw in Beaconsfield's foreign policy the Palmerstonian spirit, and in addition he had "a large working class following."¹⁰ Even so, not every Roebuckite supported Wortley. John Wilson, a grinder who opposed the principle of trade unionism and for this reason had supported Roebuck in 1868, and a member of the School Board since 1876,¹¹ declared himself in favour of Waddy and the policy of "Peace, Retrenchment and Reform."¹² But such returns to Liberalism appear to have been rare, though in Wilson's case it was probably Roebuck's "independence" and not his Toryism which he had admired.

Wortley had the support of most of the principal manufacturers in the town who had been by this time converted to Conservatism, usually by way of their adhesion to Roebuck. These included men such as Firth, Fisher and Jessop, upon whom the Conservatives had been working hard throughout the 1870's. What finally put their conversion to Toryism beyond any doubt was the great issue of foreign policy and their support for Beaconsfield. At the same time, this was accompanied by a political conversion, an aversion to radicalism and the search for political "safety." At a meeting on 18 December, 1879, chaired by Thomas Jessop, to support the foreign policy of the Government and called by the London Patriotic Association,¹³ B.P. Broomhead, a solicitor and the Tory wire-puller in Sheffield,¹⁴ declared: "The names of Firth, Fisher and Jessop were amongst the leaders of the national party in Sheffield — a party which should drive out of Sheffield, so far as its political power was concerned, that bastard Radicalism — the hybrid creature brought from between Birmingham and America. That was an ism which had no room for patriotism; and, as sure as they were there that night, it would never prosper in Sheffield."¹⁵

1 S.J., 8.12.1879.

2 S.J., 9.12.1879.

3 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 1.9.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L., described him as "lacking the most elementary knowledge of everything except what relates to his own business."

4 S.J., 9.12.1879.

5 *Ibid.* Charles Beilby Stuart Wortley, 1851 - 1926: barrister; M.P. for Sheffield 1880 - 85 and Hallam 1885 - 1916; 1885 - 86, 1886 - 92 Under Secretary of State for Home Dept.; 1891 Chairman of N.U. of Conservative Associations; 1916 created Lord Stuart of Wortley.

6 S.J., 9.12.1879.

7 *Ibid.*

8 S.J., 10.12.1879.

9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 23.1.1877, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

10 *Ibid.*

11 John Wilson was a member from 1876 to 1887 and described himself as an "Eclectic".

12 Letter in S.J., 19.12.1879.

13 A Sheffield branch was established on 6 January, 1880. S.J., 7.1.1880.

14 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 31.7.1875, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

15 S.J., 19.12.1879.

Wortley could count, therefore, on the support of "the wealth and influence of the constituency," re-inforced by the Wharnccliffe and Norfolk influence.¹ The importance of the latter is difficult to assess but it probably took the form not of direct intervention but of persuading the lukewarm and uncommitted to vote for Wortley as he enjoyed ducal support. Another powerful interest which backed Wortley was the Drink Trade, though it was not nearly so militant as it had been in 1874. Nonetheless conferences of the Licensed Victuallers' National Defence League and the Beer and Wine Trade National Defence League were held in Sheffield in January, 1877,² and several members of the Trade, such as Moore, Skinner and Jackson, were prominent local Conservatives. On 15 December, 1879, Ald. Moore presided over a meeting of the Drink trade which pledged its support for Wortley.³ Their support mattered because they were wealthy and could contribute to the costs of an election, but even more so because they could exercise an influence on their customers. As Moore put it, "there were about 1,500 of them and it was a poor do if they could not take eight or ten more voters besides themselves."⁴ In addition, the Conservatives had an excellent ward organisation⁵ and a highly competent agent, as well as the most influential newspaper in Sheffield, to conduct their campaign.

Yet the fact that Sheffield was thought by the Tories to be "a very fogleman of borough jingoism"⁶ strengthened the determination of Liberals to prove that this assumption was wrong and to expose the superficiality of "Beaconsfieldism". The Liberals knew that the fight would be hard but they were convinced that their cause was morally right. Spurred on by Gladstone's crusade against the foreign policy of the Government in the first Midlothian campaign of November, 1879, the party workers in Sheffield conducted the campaign with enthusiasm and an absolute belief that right was on their side. After the election, the Rev. J. Calvert analysed the Liberal strength: "May I call attention to a leading feature of character in the rank and file of the workers who won our recent victory. It is an undeniable fact that the bulk of them were men of religious principle, who judge of political questions from a moral standpoint. Moral principle has been the centre of our strength, and this fact ought to nerve us with heart and hope in the prospect of a future struggle. The most dangerous element in the policy of the present Government has been its utterly unchristian character. The quantity and quality of its moral principles has been a constant humiliation to those who believe that Bible laws are applicable alike to Governments and individuals."⁷

The importance of zealous party workers is shown in a letter of Mundella to Leader about a certain Rose: "this man Rose has no claim upon me, because I laid the stone of his Chapel some time ago, but I suppose he works extensively among the working men and will be a good worker at the Election when it comes."⁸ The moral arguments against "Beaconsfieldism" appealed especially to Non-conformists who believed that "Bible laws are applicable alike to Governments and individuals" and who disliked the crude bombast of jingoism and the "vulgar aggression" of the wars in Afghanistan and Zululand. The exception seems to have been the Wesleyan Methodists,⁹ in view of which Waddy's candidature assumed special importance. H.J. Wilson was disappointed at their response to Waddy,¹⁰ though the latter told him: "I believe the fact to be that the mass of them will be with us from all that I hear."¹¹ The leading Wesleyans, such as W.K. Peace and the confectioner George Bassett, had been Tories too long and, Waddy believed, "we shall never do any good with them. It is possible they may give me a vote but I doubt it."¹² From this point of view, Waddy was a wise selection, because if anyone could attract Wesleyan support, it was he. The problem was that Wesleyan Methodism was particularly strong among the middle classes, the very people who in the 1870's were defecting to Toryism. This, combined with the traditional links between Wesleyanism and Conservatism, made them the least reliable for Liberalism of all the Nonconformist sects in Sheffield.

The Irish vote in Sheffield was not as important as in some other Northern industrial towns because the Irish community was not very large. In 1861 the Irish-born amounted to 3.3% of the population and this had sunk to 1.2% by 1891.¹³ The *Independent* considered that the Irish electors "are

1 Quoted in *S.D.T.*, 19.12.1879, from *Whitehall Review*.

2 *S.I.*, 31.1.1877.

3 *S.I.*, 16.12.1879.

4 *S.I.*, 16.12.1879.

5 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 25.11.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L., with reference to the School Board election, "the Conservative organization is becoming more effective".

6 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 21.4.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

7 Letter read by H.J. Wilson at a meeting of Waddy's supporters on 5 February, 1880. *S.I.*, 6.2.1880.

8 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 25.11.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

9 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 12.4.1878, Wilson MSS., S.U.L. S.M. Johnson, a partner and son-in-law of George Bassett told him "of the Wesleyans of his circuit, Carver Street and Fulwood Road, not one in 20 is a Liberal."

10 H.J. Wilson to S.D. Waddy, 21.5.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936

11 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 25.5.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

12 *Ibid.*

13 S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, Liverpool, 1959, p. 91.

not a numerous, or in any sense a powerful body; and in an immense constituency like this, their small vote does not constitute a very important factor."¹ The political significance of the Irish vote was reduced by the division of the Home Rule party into moderates and extremists. The extremists, represented in Sheffield by such men as M.J. Dunn, Downey and Donovan, were supporters of Charles Stuart Parnell and against the "weak-kneed policy"² of Isaac Butt, who had started the Home Rule movement. Parnell was anxious to link the Home Rule party in the House of Commons directly with agrarian protest in Ireland and he was ready to use extreme methods because, as he told a Sheffield audience in September, 1877, "the Irish people had been conciliatory towards England, and they had got nothing by it; all that they had got had been obtained by a reverse course — not conciliation, but retaliation."³ At his annual address to his constituents in September, 1876, Mundella was faced with an amendment, put by Dunn and Donovan, that he had forfeited a pledge made during the election of 1874 to vote for Home Rule.⁴ Mundella denied that he had ever made such a pledge and he stressed: "I am not a Home Ruler in the sense of being wishful for a separation, and I never will give my consent to the separation of the two countries."⁵ Nevertheless, between 50 and 100 people voted for the amendment. The other and probably more numerous group were the moderate Home Rulers, led by John Barry, smoke inspector for the borough, who was physically ejected from the meeting of 13 September, 1877, by supporters of Parnell,⁶ and John Delaney, a leading member of the Sheffield Temperance Association.⁷ Mundella was anxious that the Liberals should harness their support; the problem was that Waddy had distinct and outspoken views against Home Rule. "Nothing can induce me to 'trim' or to coquet with these people," he told Leader.⁸ Mundella, however, considered that the Irish vote was not unimportant: "let Waddy confer with me and I will tell him how to deal with Home Rulers. I will not cringe, but I am not sure that they cannot largely influence the coming elections in towns like Sheffield. There is no need to be uncivil to them, and there is much that we can and ought to do for the Irish."⁹ In November, 1879, he wrote to Leader: "I see the Home Rulers are going against Waddy, I think it would be well not to notice this . . . I shall try and put Waddy right before the election."¹⁰ He must have succeeded because on 17 December, the Sheffield Irish Electoral Committee decided on complete support for Waddy.¹¹ The Home Rule Confederation resolved to send Arthur O'Connor and its secretary, W.J. Oliver, to Sheffield to help Barry and the Sheffield committee during the election.¹² Even more important, a "special £100" was supplied from Liberal party headquarters for the Sheffield Irish Committee.¹³ Obviously the Liberals were determined to secure as many Irish votes as possible because the contest was likely to be so close that even a few votes might make the difference between success and defeat. The Irish Committee decided to support Waddy partly because they believed that the Liberal party would do most for Ireland. "Lord Beaconsfield has been the persistent and never-tiring opponent of everything that could give liberty or advancement to Ireland," Justin M'Carthy, M.P., told a meeting of Irish voters in the Temperance Hall on 20 December, 1879.¹⁴ More specifically, enquiries by the Committee had shown that while Waddy "was prepared to vote that Irishmen should dispose of Irish business in Dublin," Wortley would vote for an enquiry only on condition that Irish "obstruction" in Parliament ceased and that similar legislation should be passed for England and Scotland, and that Waddy was in favour of sweeping changes in the land laws and electoral reform, to which Wortley was opposed.¹⁵ In fact, Barry declared, "not upon a single question did Mr. Wortley come up to the level of Irish popular opinion."¹⁶ Although Waddy secured the support of the moderates, it is extremely unlikely that the extremists voted for him and so it is impossible to say that he received the whole Irish vote. Moreover, to secure the moderate Home Rule votes Waddy had been forced to make certain promises which associated his candidature with Home Rule. This might have cost him as much support as he gained because the Irish community was not particularly

1 *S.I.*, 9.12.1879.

2 M.J. Dunn's words. *S.I.*, 14.9.1877.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *S.I.*, 5.9.1876.

5 *S.I.*, 5.9.1876.

6 *S.I.*, 14.9.1877.

7 *S.I.*, 26.3.1880.

8 S.D. Waddy to R. Leader, 12.12.1878, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 14.12.1878, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

10 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 21.11.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

11 *S.I.*, 18.12.1879.

12 *S.I.*, 18.12.1879.

13 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 8.1.1880, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 19.1.1880, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

14 *S.I.*, 22.12.1879.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

liked in Sheffield. The promises which Waddy made were moderate and stopped far short of Home Rule, as the Parnellites interpreted it. Nevertheless, they laid the Liberals open to the charge of courting the Home Rulers, accepting "hints from Clerkenwell",¹ "a bartering away of honour for the Fenian vote".² Like the support of the temperance movement, the Irish might be as much a source of weakness as strength to the Liberal party.

Waddy also received some outside assistance in his campaign. A sum of £1,000, in addition to the "special £100" for the Irish Committee, was supplied from Liberal headquarters, "entirely from private sources, viz friends to the Cause."³ Help was also sent from Birmingham. Schnadhorst sent Nuttall to Sheffield and told Wilson to "give him the largest and most difficult ward you have,"⁴ and other "strangers" who were involved in the election included Green, Haseldine and Hall.⁵ Mundella also played an important part in the campaign. Mundella was popular with those sections of the electorate, the lower middle and working classes, upon whose support the Liberals most depended. His links with the working classes were far closer than Waddy's. In fact, after the election, Broadhurst of the Labour Representation League told Mundella that he had heard that Waddy was not popular with working men — "he is too 'cocky' and off hand with them, does not answer their questions, and has not got hold of them, that Wortley would have gone in with a big majority if I had not gone down."⁶ Perhaps Broadhurst was not an impartial observer because he was anxious that a Labour candidate should contest Sheffield,⁷ though Mundella appears to have accepted his views about Waddy as being substantially correct.⁸ The election of 1874 had shown that a purely working class candidate could not be carried in association with Mundella, but at the same time the chosen candidate had to be acceptable to the working men. Waddy was fortunate that Mundella was able to use his great influence with them on his behalf.⁹ Mundella's links with the lower middle class were also valuable. For a number of years he had done good work for the Grocers' Association¹⁰ and in April, 1879, after attending a meeting, he reported to Leader: "I gauged the feeling of the tradesmen class, and found it entirely with us. I never returned from Sheffield more satisfied with the outlook than this time."¹¹ So Waddy had the benefit of Mundella's influence among the lower middle and working classes.

The election, which was held on 22 December, 1879, was the first straight fight between a Liberal and a Conservative in Sheffield. As there were no splits, the voting¹² gives a fair indication of the relative strengths of the two parties. The Liberals regained¹³ the seat but the majority was a mere 478 votes. The Conservatives were delighted because, as Wortley told his supporters: "we have shaken an ancient stronghold to its foundation and before long that stronghold will fall."¹⁴ Indeed, in view of the strength of Conservatism in Sheffield, the Liberals did very well to win. W.P. Adam, the Liberal Whip, thought the result was all the more commendable considering "with what tremendous energy and at what expense and with what organisation the Tories worked for victory in this election."¹⁵ The odds were certainly stacked against the Liberals. Waddy was opposed by a formidable coalition of Conservatives, Roebuckites and "many Liberals — far too large a number — who are still fascinated by the foreign policy of Lord Beaconsfield."¹⁶ The last were the greatest loss, men who now voted Tory because they disagreed with the Liberal view of foreign policy. On the other hand, hatred of "Beaconsfieldism" spurred the true Liberals to campaign with greater earnestness. The Conservatives had the backing of the Drink interest and the support of two minority groups, the Jews and the Tichbornites.¹⁷

1 S.D.T., 9.12.1879.

2 S.D.T., 23.12.1879.

3 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 11.12.1879, 12.12.1879, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

4 F. Schnadhorst to H.J. Wilson, 15.12.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5934.

5 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 6.1.1880, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

6 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 19.1.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

7 H. Broadhurst to H.J. Wilson, 11.1.1877, Wilson MSS., S.C.L. M.D. 5931.

8 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 19.1.1880. Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

9 E.g. on 17 December, Mundella addressed a meeting of working men. S.I., 18.12.1879

10 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 15.8.1874, Mundella MSS., S.U.L. "Mr. Wormall and the Grocers' Association are very grateful for my services."

11 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 18.4.1879. Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

12 The voting was:

Waddy	14,062
Wortley	13,584
Total Poll	27,839

Total Votes on Register . 39,270 S.I., 23.12.1879.

13 Counting Roebuck as a Conservative, though he continued to describe himself as an independent Radical.

14 S.I., 23.12.1879.

15 W.P. Adam to H.J. Wilson, 23.12.1879, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5934.

16 S.I., 23.12.1879.

17 The Tichbornites were followers of Dr. Kenealy who in 1875 had won an election at Stoke on Trent as a supporter of the Tichborne Claimant. He was president of the Magna Carta Association, which had a branch in Sheffield in Brightside Lane (W.R. Chudley corresponding secretary.)

The Jews had supported Beaconsfield's pro-Turkish policy because they had financial interests in the Ottoman Empire and because they were attracted by the flamboyance of imperialism. The Tichbornites supported the Government because it had issued a fiat for a Writ of Error in the case of the Tichborne Claimant.¹ The Liberal task was made harder by the timing of the election in "bull-week", the busiest week of the year in Sheffield, an old and imperfect register containing many "removals" owing to the depression, and by the excellence of the Conservative organisation, operated by J.C. Shaw, with unlimited financial resources which enabled paid agents and canvassers to be employed. Waddy was convinced that there was some corruption; he believed that 2,000 voters were personated.² It seems also that some pressure was placed upon the men to vote in accordance with their employers' wishes. Mundella mentioned a man alleged to have been discharged by Vickers' for voting for Waddy.³ Full use was made of the popularity and influence of the Wortley name and the walls of the town were daubed with jingoistic slogans.

The Liberals were not slow to learn from the narrowness of their victory. One lesson they already knew – the inadequacy of their organization. Mundella remarked, "our organization is wretchedly defective, and this must be remedied";⁴ in many districts the canvassing was "not half done."⁵ Early in January, 1880, Waddy urged that a house to house canvass of the whole borough should be begun at once, to get at the removals and to be able to purge the register at the next revision.⁶ Canvass books should be at once prepared and a paid agent and clerk engaged. The matter was especially urgent because "the new register, though somewhat better than the old, contains shoals of those 'removals' which were our peril last time and will be so again."⁷ Indeed Waddy believed that "the whole thing was in such a state of hopeless chaos when we began our battle that the marvel is that we won at all."⁸ "The fact is that our friends have been living in a 'fool's paradise'. They have thought that the battle could always be won in Liberal Sheffield by a struggle at the last and there has been little or no organization on either side. This cannot last. The other side have put things in order and we shall be beaten by superior discipline."⁹ The greatest obstacle to improved Liberal organization was the financial insolvency of the Liberal Association, which in January, 1880, owed debts amounting to £480 and had no assets.¹⁰ It could not afford to meet its expenditure for 1880, which was made up of £460 ordinary expenses and £300 for a superior agent, as well as contribute to the costs of Waddy's election.¹¹ Waddy was not a rich man and he believed that "the party ought to be prepared to contribute reasonably to the heavy and exceptional cost of the elections when they occur."¹² His request for assistance was ill-received. Wilson contemplated telling him that "Mr. Mundella never got helped from London to the extent of a shilling. So you are favoured, and he never got any help worth mentioning from Sheffield."¹³ On 19 January, Mundella wrote to Leader: "Your Expenses' Budget looks formidable. Surely, with the considerable sum I supplied from London, Mr. Waddy will pay the balance of his election?"¹⁴ However, it became quite apparent that Waddy did not possess the necessary financial resources to contest Sheffield. "Waddy tells me in confidence that he does not know where to raise the money to pay the expenses of the next contest, and is not sure that he will stand," reported Mundella. "From what I am told of his circumstances, he never ought to have been a candidate."¹⁵

It was not merely Waddy's financial limitations which gave rise to doubts about his suitability as a candidate. Broadhurst had told Mundella that Waddy was not popular with the working men¹⁶ and, although his candidature might have attracted Wesleyan Methodist support, Mundella was convinced that "we should have won easier with Mappin and held our position with greater strength."¹⁷ Mappin possessed wealth and social position in the town and his Liberalism had about it a moderation which

1 *The Englishman*. 3.1.1880, edited by Kenealy, copy in Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5971.

2 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 9.1.1880, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

3. A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 23.1.1880, Wilson MSS., S.U.L. But the letter has been summarized by Mary T. Mundella and the details omitted.

4 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 29.12.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 1.3.1880, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

6 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 6.1.1880. Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

7 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 6.1.1880, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 H.J. Wilson to S.D. Waddy, 16.1.1880, not sent, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

11 *Ibid.*

12 S.D. Waddy to H.J. Wilson, 19.1.1880, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

13 H.J. Wilson to S.D. Waddy, 26.1.1880, not sent, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5936.

14 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 19.1.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

15 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 5.3.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

16 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 19.1.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

17 *Ibid.*

would have appealed to the lukewarm middle class electors who, in the event, probably voted Tory. Mappin "had no record against him and would not have set up the backs of the Catholics,¹ the Publicans and the Church."² Moreover, Waddy's usefulness was reduced by what Mundella described as his "fussiness". "I expect Waddy will put himself (and us) into some trouble some day, with this fussiness of his. He is just the same in the House, and it really makes against him."³ An example of his fussiness and lack of tact is a letter which he wrote to the *Manchester Courier* on the subject of Home Rule. It antagonized the Irish and it was felt that it led to Home Rule pressure on Lord Ramsay and contributed to his defeat at Liverpool.⁴ Mundella was very annoyed — "keep Waddy out of print; he has made a mess of that Irish business after it had been beautifully settled," he told Leader.⁵ His cockiness and off-handed manner with working men⁶ provides a further instance of lack of political discretion. At the same time, it must be remembered that Mundella's criticisms of Waddy were to some extent coloured by his personal preference for Mappin as a candidate,⁷ and had Mappin stood, it is possible that the advanced Radicals might not have supported him.

As in the by-election, the issue before the electors at the General Election of 1880 was whether or not they approved of the foreign policy of the Government. In fact, the Conservatives were in a stronger position in the spring of 1880 than they had been in the previous December. Mundella remarked: "we shall have to work very hard. The populace are bitter with vaingloriousness and bombast, and I fear it is getting a firmer hold on them."⁸ The Conservatives were very confident. At the annual dinner of the Ecclesall Conservative Club in February, 1880, a letter was read from B.P. Broomhead in which he said that "the new national party in Sheffield, comprising, as it does, the Liberal-Conservatives and the Conservative-Liberals . . . with reasonable effort it will be strong enough at the next election to prevent the members for Sheffield being returned by the Birmingham caucus and the Home Rulers."⁹ Unlike the Liberals whose financial resources had been strained to the hilt by the by-election, the Conservatives had unlimited resources and an organization strengthened by the formation of the Junior Conservative Association,¹⁰ which, by harnessing the energies of young Conservatives, assured the party of a plentiful supply of enthusiastic workers. The Liberals, by contrast, were hampered by lingering doubts about the suitability of Waddy as a candidate, financial insolvency and insufficient time to improve their inadequate organization. The usefulness of the Junior Liberal Association¹¹ was reduced by dissension within. Benjamin Bagshawe, a solicitor and a member of a leading local family, withdrew on the grounds that the teetotallers were in a majority on the Executive, a complaint which Robert Eadon Leader thought groundless.¹² This is important because it showed that beneath the surface of an apparently united Liberal party there were tensions which seriously weakened it. The Liberals decided to conduct the election by means of a Committee of Three — H.J. Wilson, chairman, J.W. Pye-Smith and W.J. Clegg.¹³ J.C. Shaw acted as Wortley's legal agent and it was wisely resolved to run him alone, rather than in association with H.E. Watson, thus concentrating the entire Conservative strength on one candidate.¹⁴

It is not necessary to examine the issues in great detail as they were similar to those in the December election, that is foreign policy and the past record of Beaconsfield's Government. Wortley charged the Liberals with "want of patriotism" and refused to have anything to do with Home Rule,¹⁵ while Mundella described Afghanistan as "the greatest failure that ever disgraced an English Government", refuted Beaconsfield's assertion that the Liberals were attempting to enfeeble the colonies by a "policy of decomposition" and denounced his references to Ireland as "an appeal to race hatred."¹⁶ The Liberals denounced the profligate expenditure of the Government, which had turned a £6M surplus into a deficit amounting to £8,100,000.¹⁷ The Liberals were encouraged by a large meeting¹⁸ in Paradise

1 As early as 1872, when he was first mentioned as a possible candidate, Waddy had said: "I cannot conciliate the Papists." S.D. Waddy to W.J. Clegg, 6.6.1872, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6008.

2 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 19.1.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

3 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 6.3.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

4 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, no date but early February, 1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 *Ibid.*

6 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 19.1.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

7 *E.g.* A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 7.12.1876, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 16.2.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

9 *S.I.*, 24.2.1880.

10 *S.L.R.*, 9.2.1880. Knowles Binns president.

11 *S.L.R.*, 31.1.1880. Frank Mappin president.

12 R.E. Leader to B. Bagshawe, 4.2.1880, Bagshawe MSS., S.C.L., 778 (xiii).

13 J.W. Pye-Smith to H.J. Wilson, 5.3.1880, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

14 *S.I.*, 13.3.1880.

15 Election Address. *S.I.*, 20.3.1880.

16 *S.I.*, 15.3.1880.

17 *Ibid.* Waddy wrote a long pamphlet, entitled *Liberal and Conservative Finance*, published by Liberal headquarters.

18 "Never was the Square fuller".

Square on 20 March,¹ at which an amendment in favour of Wortley was defeated by more than two to one,² an indication of just how misleading the vote of a public meeting could be in an era of mass politics.

Beaconsfield's references to Home Rule as "worse than pestilence and famine" were no doubt sufficient to keep the Irish in Sheffield loyal to the Liberals, despite Waddy's injudicious letter to the *Manchester Courier*. On 22 March, John Delaney presided over a meeting of the Sheffield Irish Committee, at which it was carried unanimously "that this Committee resolve itself forthwith into an Election Committee, for the furtherance of the candidature of Messrs. Mundella and Waddy."³ A week later, a very large meeting of Irish electors pledged its unanimous support for Mundella and Waddy.⁴ Mundella made it clear in his Election Address that he was opposed to "any attempt having for its object 'the disintegration of the United Kingdom',"⁵ but this did not work against him. Even an extreme Home Ruler such as John Donovan admitted that "Home Rule was not now the question in this election. The only question that was at issue was that of Liberalism — which was more in keeping with the interests of the Irish people," although he added that "the Home Rule feeling was in the heart of every Irishman."⁶ C. Leonard declared that "though he himself was in favour of Home Rule, he was sure they would all be glad that Irishmen were no longer obliged to hamper Liberal candidates with Home Rule questions."⁷ In 1880 Home Rule was not the burning issue it had been in 1874 or would be in 1886. The Irish voted Liberal because they believed that the Liberal party would do more for the ills of Ireland than the Conservatives who had done nothing. On the other hand, Wortley could take advantage of what anti-Irish feeling there was in Sheffield.

Wortley also received support from what was perhaps an unexpected source. The railway workers, who were campaigning for change in the law concerning company liability for injury, were active in Sheffield. A special Sheffield edition of *The Railway Service Gazette and Weekly News* appeared on 27 March, which reported "in Sheffield the candidate we know of as favourable to the compensation movement is Mr. Wortley. Railway Servants will do well, therefore, to Plump for him."⁸ This announcement, almost certainly the product of some misunderstanding, may well have tilted the election in Wortley's favour as he defeated Waddy by a mere 40 votes.⁹

It is clear from the analysis of the voting that the split votes cost the Liberals the election. There were 844 split between Mundella and Wortley and 152 between Waddy and Wortley, in addition to 134 plumpers for Mundella. Without the split votes Wortley could not have won because his plumpers totalled 15,550, while 16,238 votes were cast for Mundella and Waddy. He therefore owed his election to the fact that it was a three-cornered fight because in a straight contest, such as the previous December, there were no splits. In December, 1879, the unpolled voters amounted to 11,431; in April, 1880, they were

- 1 S.I., 22.3.1880.
- 2 The *Independent* believed at least 4 to 1.
- 3 S.I., 23.3.1880.
- 4 S.I., 30.3.1880.
- 5 S.I., 13.3.1880.
- 6 S.I., 30.3.1880.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Copy in Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5971.

9	The voting was:	Mundella	17,217
		Wortley	16,546
		Waddy	16,506

Analysis:	Mundella and Waddy	16,238
	Mundella and Wortley	844
	Plumpers for Mundella	134
	Plumpers for Waddy	117
	Plumpers for Wortley	15,550
	Waddy and Wortley	152
	Spoilt Votes	63
	TOTAL	33,098

S.I., 2.4.1880.

9,696 and the size of the electorate had increased by 3,524.¹ The table below gives the pure Liberal and Conservative vote:

	1879	1880	GAIN
LIBERAL :	14,062	16,238	2,176
CONSERVATIVE:	13,584	15,550	1,966

This shows that the pure Liberal vote made a slight gain (210) over the Tories and that what cost them the election was not further Liberal defections to Toryism but rather split votes. The *Independent* considered that one vote cast for Wortley was a defection, though more accurately to split a vote between Liberal and Conservative was a contradiction. No doubt it represented the strong support for "Beaconsfieldism" in Sheffield. "There have been but too many, sadly too many instances of Liberals going over to the Tory side on the question of foreign policy. . . . the store of disaster and misfortune is not yet large enough, it seems, to stagger the faith of the supporters of imperialism in Sheffield."² The Conservatives worked very hard: "From lady district visitors, who dispensed spiritual consolation with strong recommendations to vote for Mr. Wortley, to customers who gave notice that their custom would cease if votes were not given according to their wishes - not to mention the screw put upon workmen by some employers . . . inmates of the workhouse, whose names happened to be on the register, patients from the Infirmary, and sick persons barely able to undergo the fatigue of a journey from their bed rooms to the polling stations, were brought to swell Mr. Wortley's ranks."³ Employers drove workmen to the polls in their carriages; both sides used cabs but "whilst the Liberals had not enough, the Conservatives laboured under the apparent disadvantage of having too many."⁴ The *Telegraph* was exultant and declared: "Yesterday's victory was the work of the Junior Conservatives, aided by young working men, whose unbought services were invaluable."⁵ Nonetheless the victory was a very narrow one and some Liberals were convinced that it had not been won honestly. The Attercliffe Liberal Council passed a resolution demanding a scrutiny⁶ and the forceful Charles Boler wrote to H.J. Wilson: "I thought you only required sufficient evidence to convince you that organized personation took place - you surely don't expect evidence to drop from the clouds - If you don't petition, you will regret it."⁷ Wilson also received a letter from Sargent Smith offering to subscribe 1 guinea to the expenses of a scrutiny.⁸ But such action could prove very costly and F.T. Mappin, now M.P. for East Retford, advised against it.⁹ Wilson concluded that the grounds were insufficient to warrant a scrutiny.¹⁰ However, the

1 The following tables show the number of electors in each district and the number of votes polled. S.I., 1 and 2.4.1880.

DECEMBER 1879		
District - Ward	No. of Electors	No. Polled
St. Peter's	3,081	1,990
St. Philip's	2,702	1,770
St. George's	4,271	2,246
The Park	3,374	3,015
Ecclesall	8,641	6,070
Brightside	7,411	5,288
Upper Hallam	324	266
Nether Hallam	5,798	3,426
Heeley		909
Attercliffe	3,688	2,859
TOTAL	39,270	27,839

APRIL 1880		
St. Peter's	3,324	2,249
St. Philip's	2,806	2,036
St. George's	4,648	3,479
The Park	3,673	2,646
Ecclesall	9,028	7,084
Brightside	8,388	6,639
Upper Hallam	340	286
Nether Hallam	6,570	5,345
Attercliffe	4,017	3,323
TOTAL	42,794	33,098

2 S.I., 2.4.1880.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.* The Conservatives probably had as many as 1,000.

5 S.D.T., 2.4.1880.

6 A. Fulford to H.J. Wilson, 16.4.1880, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

7 C. Boler to H.J. Wilson, 16.4.1880, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

8 S. Smith to H.J. Wilson, 20.4.1880, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

9 F.T. Mappin to H.J. Wilson, 6.4.1880, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

10 Note by H.J. Wilson, 4.1.1904, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

defeat did spur the Executive Committee of the Liberal Association to ask for the resignation of the Liberal agent, J.C. Whiteley, and to appoint Skinner in his place,¹ a tacit realization that Liberal organization in Sheffield had to be brought up to the level of that of the Tories.

It was a great blow to Liberalism in Sheffield that Wortley should succeed when "everywhere else the cause of Liberalism is in the ascendant."² But their disappointment was somewhat mollified by the great victory won by the Liberals in the Southern Division of the West Riding, where both seats had been occupied by the Tories since 1874. The Liberal candidates were H.W. Fitzwilliam and W.H. Leatham. Mundella was delighted that a Fitzwilliam was contesting the county, as he remembered that, in 1874, on the one occasion when a Fitzwilliam did not stand both seats were lost, which would seem to indicate that the Earl's influence operated only when a member of the family was a candidate. The fact that H.W. Fitzwilliam was standing was considered sufficient to sustain Leatham's candidature. As early as July, 1879, Mundella had written to Leader: "You cannot shake off Leatham for the S.W. Riding, and you must now make up your minds to fight with him, and make the best of him. I hope you will win one if not both seats. There is, happily, nothing against Leatham, and he may make a better fight than we expect with Fitzwilliam in association with him."³ As in the Sheffield borough election, foreign policy was the central issue of the election. H.W. Fitzwilliam accused the Conservative Government of involving England in "unnecessary wars and unnecessary expenditure" and he maintained that England's influence abroad "should be a moral one and that it is not alone by a display of arms that we seek to enforce our views upon foreign nations."⁴ Indeed, the Fitzwilliams had come round from a support for Beaconsfield's anti-Russian and pro-Turkish policy in the autumn of 1876⁵ to opposition to Conservative imperialism as manifested in Afghanistan and Zululand. Thus H.W. Fitzwilliam encountered opposition from supporters of "Beaconsfieldism" in the county, one of the most influential of whom was Alfred Gatty, Vicar of Ecclesfield and a distinguished local historian. A staunch Tory, Gatty declared: "I must own that I believe the Ministry have been right in their foreign policy."⁶ Domestic questions, on the other hand, were less important. The Liberals criticized the "weak and meagre Home Legislation" of the Government, and H.W. Fitzwilliam declared himself in favour of county franchise, reform of the Burial Laws, amendment of the land laws and the establishment of County Boards,⁷ and Leatham also supported an amendment of the Licensing Laws.⁸

The election, held on 9 April, 1880, resulted in a Liberal victory.⁹ The poll was remarkably high - 21,587 out of 23,239 on the register. The Liberal vote (10,970) was higher than that of the Conservatives (9,911) and plumpers and splits were not large enough to matter.¹⁰ Two main reasons can be put forward to explain the Liberal success. The agricultural depression of the late 1870's had undermined the farmers' faith in Toryism and it is probable that many farmers voted Liberal as a protest against worsening economic conditions, which the Conservatives, traditionally the party of the landed interest, had done nothing to alleviate.¹¹ If, as seems likely, this was so, the county forms a sharp contrast to the borough of Sheffield where the return of C.S. Wortley shows that the electors did not blame the Government for the depression. Secondly, the ballot enabled the farmers to vote according to their convictions without fear of landlord reprisals and eviction.¹² That this happened looks certain because

1 G. Ridge to H.J. Wilson, 4.6.1880, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5971.

2 *S.I.*, 12.4.1880.

3 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 10.7.1879, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

4 Election Address, *S.I.*, 7.4.1880. William Henry Wentworth Fitzwilliam, 1840 - 1920: 1868 - 74 M.P. for County Wicklow, 1880 - 85 S.W. Riding, 1888 - 92 Liberal Unionist for Doncaster.

5 *S.I.*, 23.10.1876.

6 A. Gatty to H.W. Fitzwilliam, 27.3.1880, published in *S.I.*, 31.3.1880.

7 Election Address, *S.I.*, 7.4.1880.

8 *Ibid.*

9 The voting was:

Fitzwilliam	11,385	
Leatham	11,181	
Stanhope	10,391	
Starkey	10,028	<i>S.I.</i> , 12.4.1880.

10 Analysis:

Plumpers for Fitzwilliam	84
Plumpers for Leatham	33
Plumpers for Stanhope	59
Plumpers for Starkey	21
Fitzwilliam and Leatham	10,970
Stanhope and Starkey	9,911
Fitzwilliam and Stanhope	284
Fitzwilliam and Starkey	47
Leatham and Stanhope	137
Leatham and Starkey	41
TOTAL	21,587

S.I., 12.4.1880.

11 *S.I.*, 13.4.1880.

12 *Ibid.*

CHAPTER XIX

THE NATIONAL SCENE

The election of 1880 was the culmination of Gladstone's great moral crusade against "Beaconsfieldism". It had been fought on the past record of the Conservative Government, which Gladstone had denounced so emphatically and eloquently in the Midlothian campaigns. Yet when he became Prime Minister, he was unsure about the future, in marked contrast to 1868 when he had taken office with a clear policy in mind. The Whig - Radical tensions within the party were reflected in the frequent and bitter disagreements within the Cabinet. In 1880 it was divided over Coercion for Ireland.¹ In February, 1882, Hartington wanted the expulsion from Parliament of the atheist Bradlaugh, a step which was opposed by Gladstone, Bright and Chamberlain.² But the most serious disagreements were over foreign policy and especially the invasion of Egypt, which resulted in Bright's resignation in August, 1882. In the parliamentary Liberal party Whig - Radical divisions were equally clear. The Whigs were alienated by what they considered to be attacks upon the rights of property. They saw the Irish Land Act of 1881 as the prelude to interference with landlords' rights in England, the kind of sweeping changes in the land laws for which the Radicals were agitating. The Whigs became convinced that it was, in Lord Dufferin's words, "towards a social rather than a political revolution that we are tending".³ The Radicals were dissatisfied with the lack of legislative achievement by the Gladstone ministry. Irish and imperial affairs, Whig inertia and the bitter and intransigent spirit of the House of Commons ensured that, with the exception of the extension of household suffrage to the counties and the Corrupt Practices Act, which limited election expenses, few measures of domestic importance were passed before the fall of the Government on a budget matter in June, 1885.

The Radicals resented the strength of the Whigs in the Cabinet and in the parliamentary party. Joseph Chamberlain was anxious to refashion the party on really radical lines. This was seen by Mundella as "a bid for the leadership by the Birmingham section."⁴ Many Gladstonians believed that Chamberlain was moved by personal ambition, but more accurately the purpose of the "Unauthorized Programme"⁵ was to redress the balance within the party and to obtain for the Radicals "a parliamentary status derived from a 'mandatory' verdict of a democratic electorate".⁶ This would ensure that the Liberal party would advance in a decidedly radical direction. Chamberlain's policy since the 1870's had been to co-operate with the Whigs so long as they were prepared to advance. He had no intention of deliberately provoking a split or "dishing" the Whigs. The Whigs were certainly alarmed by his Radicalism, but a split in the party was by no means inevitable.

There appeared to be more tension in the parliamentary Liberal party because Gladstone's leadership was less effective in the years 1880 - 85. In part this was due to ill health, but even more to the lack of a "mission". Gladstone was not really in sympathy with the aims of the Radicals. He needed some great moral issue, such as the Bulgarian Atrocities, upon which he could unite the party and through which he could work for a noble cause. Just as he had effectively united the party in the late 1870's in opposition to "Beaconsfieldism", so now a great moral crusade would elevate the Liberal party. As a result of the election of 1885 the 86 Irish Nationalists held the balance between the two parties, which necessitated some kind of political solution to the Irish problem. Gladstone was convinced that the only acceptable solution was Home Rule. But he encountered opposition to his policy from both the Right and the Left within the party. Some Whigs - Granville, Spencer, Harcourt, Kimberley and Ripon - did join the Cabinet in January, 1886, but the majority, led by Lord Hartington, were resolutely opposed to Home Rule. Like the Conservatives, they saw it as a breaking up of the Empire, a desertion of Protestantism and a surrender to Parnell. Joseph Chamberlain also opposed Home Rule. He had an ardent belief in the imperial idea and considered that Home Rule would weaken the Empire. Supporters of Gladstone, such as Mundella, interpreted his action in terms of personal ambition: "he hates Gladstone. He has no sense of gratitude or loyalty; he cannot serve or wait. He hopes this time to give the old man a mortal stab."⁷ But there is no doubt that Chamberlain believed sincerely in the Empire. Also, he regarded Home Rule as a side issue which might divert Liberalism from what he saw as its true course, the carrying out of radical social reform. The direct result of the Liberal split was that the Home Rule Bill was defeated in the Commons by 30 votes, with 93 Liberals voting against it. In the ensuing election the electorate pronounced against Home Rule, returning a Conservative and Unionist majority of 118.

1 The Lords Selborne, Argyll and Hartington were in favour of Coercion. Gladstone, Bright and Chamberlain were against it. A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 26.11.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 W. L. Arnstein, *The Bradlaugh Case*, Oxford, 1965, p. 132.

3 Quoted in D. Southgate, *The Passing of the Whigs 1832 - 86*, 1962, p. 376.

4 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 27.5.1885, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 This included popular county government, land for labourers, the protection of the poor in commons and endowments, free education and a revision of taxation.

6 Southgate, *op. cit.*, p. 396.

7 A.J. Mundella to R.E. Leader, 13.5.1886, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

Sheffield: Economy and Society

In the decade 1881 - 91 there was a slowing down in the rate of population growth in Sheffield, the increase of just over 39,000 being the lowest since the years 1841 - 51.¹

Townships	1801	1821	1831	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881
Sheffield	31,314	42,157	59,011	67,967	83,447	87,718	91,358	91,805
Ecclesall	5,362	9,113	14,279	20,003	24,552	38,771	49,674	58,788
Brightside	4,030	6,615	8,968	10,089	12,042	29,818	48,556	56,721
Attercliffe	2,281	3,172	3,741	4,156	4,873	7,464	16,574	26,968
Nether Hallam	1,974	3,200	4,658	7,275	8,897	19,758	31,810	38,868
Upper Hallam	764	1,018	1,035	1,396	1,499	1,643	1,974	2,515
Heeley	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8,745
TOTAL	45,725	65,275	91,702	110,886	135,310	185,172	239,946	284,410

The following table, compiled from the Census, shows the distribution of population in the town in 1881.²

Townships	Males	Females	1881 Total	1871 Total	Increase	1881 Houses Inhbtd.	1881 Uninhabited	1881 Building
Sheffield	45,870	45,935	91,805	91,358	447	18,682	1,702	46
Ecclesall	27,523	31,265	58,788	49,674	9,114	11,911	716	94
Brightside	29,114	27,607	56,721	48,556	8,165	11,560	921	152
Attercliffe	13,866	13,102	26,968	16,574	10,394	5,328	790	45
Nether Hallam	19,167	19,701	38,868	27,950	10,918	7,724	795	63
Upper Hallam	1,162	1,353	2,515	1,974	541	574	72	6
Heeley	4,422	4,323	8,745	3,860	4,885	1,714	254	22
TOTAL	141,124	143,286	284,410	239,946	44,464	57,493	5,250	428

There is some evidence in the fall in the Crude Death-rate (per 1,000 population) from 24.2 in the period 1876-80 to 21.6 in the years 1880-85³ that the town was becoming a slightly healthier place in which to live, but the mortality rate was still above the national average.⁴ The survey of December, 1883, compared with previous surveys, showed an improvement in conditions in working class areas, and most significantly that the unhealthy areas "no longer extended over the whole of the working class residential quarters, but had been driven back to a few districts only: the Crofts, Smithfield, Cotton Mill Walk, Pond Hill, the Park, Westbar and Green Lane."⁵ The programme of street widening and paving, begun by the Town Council in the late 1870's, continued, but the most tangible sign of an increasing health-consciousness was a new sewage works built in 1886 at a cost of £195,000.⁶ But this was only a beginning and much remained to be done in the way of sanitary improvements.

1 *S.L.R.*, 3.4.1881.

2 *Ibid.*

3 S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, Liverpool, 1959, p. 99.

4 *Ibid.* Taking 100 as an index, Sheffield stood at 124 in 1874 and 110 in 1886.

5 Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 95

Together with improved living conditions, it seems that workmen in full employment were enjoying a better standard of living, as can be seen from the steady growth of the co-operative movement and the increased deposits in the Sheffield Savings' Bank.¹ John Wilson told a House of Lords Select Committee on Sweating in 1889: "I believe the workmen as a whole were never better fed, better clothed or better housed than they are at present; and that is exemplified by an improved death-rate more than anything else."²

Between 1880 and 1883 there was a distinct improvement in both the light and heavy trades. In December, 1880, the *Independent* reported that "considerable advances have been made during the year towards a more healthy and prosperous condition of trade",³ and a year later it was even more optimistic: "we have more than recovered from the long and wearying depression in regard to the bulk of our trade; we are, in fact, shooting far ahead of what the town has ever done before".⁴ Early in 1883, prospects were good: "provided nothing happens to interfere with the ordinary course of events, we anticipate a fairly prosperous year",⁵ but trade proved disappointing and in January, 1884, there was little to look forward to but "another year of languishing trade, small profits and low wages".⁶ So severe was the depression that in November, 1884, "upwards of 10,000 people in Sheffield were in receipt of parish relief".⁷ The year 1885 was "the slackest of the present decade",⁸ and the prospects for 1886 were equally black. The effect of the depression was to stimulate interest among local manufacturers in Reciprocity or Fair Trade, but it was not a major political issue and there is no evidence that the employers convinced the working men in any large numbers that they would benefit by the abandonment of Free Trade. More important was that it produced an increasing demand for direct political representation among the most politically articulate workmen, though they remained loyal to the Liberal party and were anxious not to cause division. But there is no doubt that economic distress contributed to the growing working class political consciousness.

1 *Ibid.*, p. 109. These rose from £356,000 in 1860 to £1,161,000 in 1890, with a high proportion of artisans among the depositors.

2 Quoted in Pollard, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107 footnote.

3 *S.I.*, 28.12.1880.

4 *S.I.*, 31.12.1881.

5 *S.I.*, 1.1.1883.

6 *S.I.*, 1.1.1884.

7 *S.L.R.*, 26.11.1884.

8 *S.I.*, 31.12.1885.

THE LIBERAL PARTY IN SHEFFIELD

1880 – 85

In contrast to Liberalism, Conservatism in Sheffield drew most of its strength from the middle classes. Mundella was convinced that the declining influence of the Liberal party in the town and the strength of Toryism and Jingoism was "due to the ignorance and brutality of the middle class."¹ "The natural leaders of Liberalism (the middle class) have very largely deserted the working men and instead of strengthening and upholding political truth, they are the ardent advocates and dupes of the worst form of Toryism,"² he complained to Robert Eadon Leader in January, 1886. He told H. J. Wilson: "I have a poor opinion of Tories generally, but there are honest traditional Tories for whom I have a respect. Your Sheffield Tory however is as a rule a snob. He is ignorant, vulgar, purseproud and anxious to toady the Tory Peers and Squires who condescend to patronise him. Moreover, he thinks it is not respectable to be on the side of the people."³ Allowing for political bias, this description of Sheffield Toryism – bombastic, jingoistic and snobbish – seems substantially correct.

The *Independent* declared that "the Democratic Toryism of Lord Randolph Churchill is the popular creed of Sheffield Tories"⁴ and it was certainly no co-incidence that it was at the Sheffield Conference of the National Union of Conservative Associations that Churchill was re-elected chairman, a triumph over the growing opposition to him within his own party.⁵ In 1885 he was strongly urged to contest one of the Divisions, a request which he declined as he was already committed elsewhere. The central feature of "Tory Democracy" was political opportunism and this was certainly a keynote of Sheffield Toryism under the direction of W. C. Leng, whom Mundella described as "an accomplished blackguard, – a finished master of envenomed scurrility."⁶ Leng was the real power behind the scenes in the '80's, as he had been in the '70's. Through the *Telegraph* he manipulated opinion in the town and beyond with such effect that "the Tories regard it as their ablest ally in the Provinces, and regard the *Yorkshire Post* and all such party papers as very inferior in influence and effectiveness,"⁷ and Mundella admitted with regret that "I constantly hear our own organ contrasted most unfavourably by the editors of Liberal newspapers and by Liberal M.P's."⁸ Why was the *Telegraph* so influential? In part, it was owing to Leng's outstanding ability which produced journalism which the *Independent* could not match (and which prompted Mundella to muse, "I wish our old friend Leader was 30 years younger,"⁹) but more because the *Telegraph* appealed to the most influential class. As Mundella explained: "Leng's outrageous lying and brag has told upon an ignorant and bigoted middle class. He has fooled them to the top of their bent. They like his vulgar flattery and impudent swagger, and they have completely surrendered themselves to his wiles: as a consequence, we are inferior to them in mendacity, influence and wealth, and they are superior to us in organization, and probably in numbers."¹⁰

Leng's brand of Conservatism, with its bounce and swagger, appealed to the snobbery of the Sheffield middle class so that "Sheffield is the metropolis of every exaggeration, of Toryism, Jingoism, Reciprocity, and every new phrase that the *Telegraph* can devise finds a following of fools to shout for it, to pay and organize for it. We must keep the working men right or the Constituency will become a laughing stock."¹¹ But it was not only the middle classes who read the *Telegraph*. Its sensational tone had an appeal among the workmen. "There is a taste amongst the working men for highly-spiced reading, and it has pandered to it and profited by it,"¹² Mundella observed.

1 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 23.5.1885, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 A.J. Mundella to R. E. Leader, 4.1.1886, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C.188.

3 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 15.9.1881, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

4 *S.I.*, 5.7.1884.

5 It is interesting that C. S. Wortley, the Conservative M.P. for Sheffield, opposed Lord Randolph Churchill's re-election. *S.I.*, 5.7.1884.

6 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 14.4.1881, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

7 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 31.5.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 1.8.1884, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5932.

9 *Ibid.*

10 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 12.7.1882, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

11 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 15.9.1881, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

12 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 3.12.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

Through the *Telegraph*, Leng controlled local Conservatism. Mundella believed that real power rested not with men such as H. E. Watson but with him. Watson had told him that "it was not their policy to bring out two Tory candidates, but he could not tell what might happen," all of which convinced Mundella that "the decision rests with Leng and Co., and not with him."¹ Leng's influence was far-reaching: "the fact is, Leng and Co., pull the strings for the Cutlers' Company, the Chamber of Commerce etc. and work their institutions in the interests of the Tories."² This was of course the real strength of Conservatism in Sheffield – it was supported by men of high social standing and of wealth. They were ready not only to give money but to work themselves to improve organization. At the annual meeting of the Junior Conservative Association in October, 1882, the president, Samuel Roberts, Junr., said: "I wish especially to mention the work which Mr. Huntsman has organized and is carrying on at Attercliffe, in Brightside and in Darnall."³ The Junior Conservative Association was particularly energetic in the work of canvassing, registration⁴ and the organization of lectures and meetings. The Liberal agent, J. C. Skinner, was forced to admit that the Liberals were "not near so well organized as our opponents" and he attributed this to the fact that the leading Tories set an example and that "there is now a permanent Tory committee at nearly every public house,"⁵ an indication of how important to the Conservatives was the support of the Drink interest. Skinner complained that he had not got what Porrett, the Conservative agent, had – "three paid and efficient assistants continually employed – the active interest of the leaders of the party with few exceptions and nearly every publican and public house in the borough."⁶ Samuel Roberts was able to report in October, 1882, that due to the efforts of the secretaries, Muir Wilson and Peirce Dix, and the Executive Committee of the Junior Conservative Association, "the town has been divided into polling districts, each with its branch of the Sheffield Conservative Association with their staff of officers."⁷ In addition, there was the National Catholic Conservative Association, the first branch of which was established in Sheffield in August, 1882, on the assumption that "the Liberalism of the present day is so permeated with and levelled down to Radicalism that a Liberal Catholic Association would be an enigma and absolutely unworkable" and that "the normal natural instinct of Catholicity is Conservatism plain and simple."⁸ The circular announcing its formation declared that it would attend to registration of Catholics. So the Conservative organization in Sheffield was very thorough and presented a real challenge to the Liberal party.

Indeed, it presented a challenge which Sheffield Liberals were not altogether prepared to meet. Within the Sheffield Liberal Association there were frequent differences of opinion and tensions, a revival of the old division between moderates and extremists, although neither section was prepared to go so far as to split the party and to repeat the mistakes of 1874. Among the leadership, the moderate Liberals were represented by the Leader family, while the Radicals looked to H. J. Wilson. The relations between Robert Leader, the elder statesman of Sheffield Liberalism, and H. J. Wilson, representative of the "new leadership" of the '70's, had never been completely smooth, though Wilson had come to realize that the Radicals could not do without the moderate Liberals and therefore disagreements must never be allowed to become open divisions. However differences of opinion were no less real. As early as February, 1881, for example, Wilson was writing to W. J. Clegg: "I want to consult you and Mr. Castle, privately, on the very 'strained' relations between Mr. Leader and myself, not personally I hope, for I will not allow it to be personal, but important I think in the interests of the 'party'."⁹ Leader and Wilson disagreed about Irish policy and Bradlaugh and especially about the invasion of Egypt and later of the Sudan. This resembled what had happened between 1868 and 1874 and what always seemed to happen when the Liberals were in office – the moderates supported the Government without question but the Radicals were at times highly critical of Government policy. In Sheffield, Radicalism was still closely linked with militant Nonconformity and especially teetotalism, which Mundella considered a weakness: "I wish our own friends were more united and better organized," he remarked in February, 1884, "but this can never be till there is more toleration. I think the Temperance question has been

1 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 15.2.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 26.8.1885, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

3 *S.I.*, 14.10.1882.

4 *E.g.* St. George's Ward, where a number of lodgers were put on the list. *S.I.*, 14.10.1882.

5 J.C. Skinner to H.J. Wilson, 8.3.1884, Wilson MSS., S.U.L. John Crossland Skinner, b. 1850: educated Milk Street School; Liberal agent in Sheffield 1880 – 1920; member of Carver Street Wesleyan Methodist Chapel.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *S.I.*, 14.10.1882.

8 Circular, 16.8.1882. G. Waterton Prest Organizing Secretary. Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5911.

9 H.J. Wilson to W.J. Clegg, 23.2.1881, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

pushed to extremes and has done harm not only to the Liberal cause but to the Temperance cause also."¹ H. J. Wilson did not see it in this light, believing that the Radicals and teetotalers were being shunted, a view which he expressed in a draft letter to Leader, which however was never sent:

"You can do nothing if you cannot get up some enthusiasm, and the backbone of the Liberal Party is more and more teetotal and philanthropic in its sympathies . . . if this present minority is going to ignore these truths and to think that the Nonconformists and Radicals and Teetotalers who won the elections in 1880 will be satisfied with killing the Egyptians and attending to Electric Lighting and Bankruptcy Bills, I am afraid they will ere long be repeating the history of 1873 - 74."²

H. J. Wilson believed that, just as the Radical section of the party was insufficiently represented in the Government, so at the local level insufficient regard was being paid to Radical views. The temperance question was a particularly thorny issue and Robert Leader's attitude as a magistrate to licensing was especially resented. Wilson told him plainly:

"I feel bound to warn you that politically you are greatly increasing our difficulties by irritating our best friends. While you are doing so much for the drink-shops at the Town Hall, half the fighting strength of our party is spending its best energies in this Temperance Mission, and in the other half not one single person will say that the public houses you are labouring to save would not be better left to the Mayor's policy of restriction and suppression."³

Yet Wilson was not prepared to push teetotalism to the point where it might produce a schism in the party. Although he was very concerned about the drink question in the new Sheffield Reform Club, opened in January, 1885 and wanted those members who wished to consume alcohol to make special arrangements among themselves and be specially registered,⁴ he accepted the decision of a large majority of members to "appoint a sub-committee for regulating the supply of alcoholic beverages,"⁵ in preference to his own rule and agreed to serve on the Committee of the Reform Club.⁶ So although Teetotalism was no longer an issue to divide the party, nevertheless it could still give rise to tensions beneath the surface.

It is clear that some of the Radicals were impatient with the President of the Liberal Association, Robert Leader. His moderate politics, lack of sympathy with teetotalism and what seemed at times his rather dictatorial behaviour often annoyed them. F. P. Rawson, who had long believed that the Leaders had "by their incapacity and lack of courage made a really good radical paper necessary",⁷ urged that the sub-committee should consider interviewing George Dixon with a view to adopting him as a candidate. "Of course," he added, "Leader will oppose it and be nasty about it too but we must do something."⁸ Although the connections between Sheffield and Birmingham Radicalism were not so close as they had been in the 1870's, Leader shared Mundella's dislike of the Birmingham Liberals. "These people want everything for themselves and give nothing in return,"⁹ he complained when faced with a request from Schnadhorst to attend a demonstration, after his own suggestion to hold a National Liberal Federation meeting in Sheffield had not been taken up. But Radical dissatisfaction with Leader reached its height early in 1885 when the problems of organization, posed by the division of Sheffield into five single-member constituencies, were being discussed. It was a question of whether there should be a strong central authority (as the labour leaders and others who wished to run a working class candidate wanted) or "Home Rule", that is complete control of their own affairs by the five Divisions.¹⁰ H. J. Wilson believed that "the difficulty and ill feeling there has been is attributable entirely to his [R. Leader's] impatience, bad tactics and desire to dictate."¹¹

1 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 15.2.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 H. J. Wilson to R. Leader, 13.12.1882, not sent, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

3 H. J. Wilson to R. Leader, 20.9.1882, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

4 H. J. Wilson to G. W. Knox, 11.1.1885, not sent, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5908.

5 *S.L.*, 13.1.1885.

6 H. J. Wilson to G. W. Knox, 23.1.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5908. George Walter Knox, b. 1842: B.Sc. Univ. of London; accountant; married a daughter of H. O. Wills of Bristol.

7 F. P. Rawson to H. J. Wilson, 28.2.1881, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6009 A.

8 F. P. Rawson to H. J. Wilson, 19.6.1883, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5938.

9 A. J. Mundella to H. J. Wilson, 15.8.1884, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5932.

10 H. J. Wilson to Hon. B. Coleridge, 2.2.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5940.

11 *Ibid.*

While the underlying divisions between moderates and Radicals persisted, so too did local, almost parochial, tensions, often between Radicals themselves. They can be clearly seen in Brightside, the ward in which H. J. Wilson took most interest and where Liberal unity was not enforced by a strong Tory challenge. In October, 1881, George Ridge commented to H. J. Wilson: "I do wish you could do something to unite us again in Brightside as we are getting more disunited day by day."¹ Ironically, Ridge was probably the man who did most in the next few years to disunite the party in Brightside. He opposed the candidature of Edwin Richmond in the municipal contest of 1883 and, when Richmond was adopted, he wrote menacingly to J. C. Skinner: "the 1 November may find that the Liberals will not have it their own way" and he warned of a possible Radical candidate for the borough. He added: "I have not yet forgotten the attack the same party made upon one of the best men who ever contested Sheffield, viz. Chamberlain, and it seems to me that same spirit is alive still."² Although Ridge did not adhere to his intention to have nothing further to do with the Liberal party in Sheffield,³ he maintained that the split occasioned by the adoption of Richmond had done harm in Brightside. "Had the Council not been split upon Richmond we should have been stronger than we are today and more united,"⁴ he insisted in July, 1885. But by this time Ridge had found another cause for complaint — he objected to what he described as "wire-pulling" not only in Brightside but elsewhere. He told H. J. Wilson: "I also know that by all means possible three or four men are making every effort to hinder Rolley for the Central."⁵ He took exception to the way offices in the Brightside Liberal Association were filled up. "I am sorry," he wrote to the honorary secretary, T. B. Senior, "that your Committee should do all you can to annoy and offend Brightside men — why has John Wilson been shunted and others and Batty Langley who does no work brought in? I have over and over protested against outside interference. With Hunter⁶ to oppose we ought to be united."⁷ Although Senior considered Ridge to be "essentially a rebel,"⁸ whose "vanity is wounded, so he is going about damaging to the utmost of his ability the Brightside Liberal Association and its officers,"⁹ he was forced to admit that "he has a following who think as he does and are as inconsistent."¹⁰ It seems that exclusion from office underlay their criticism of wire-pulling. "I do think," Ridge informed H. J. Wilson, "you have shown to me that if possible you mean to crush me politically . . . it appears to me the leaders of the party in Brightside only want myself and others to be their drudges."¹¹ The disgruntled Liberals in the ward included Radicals such as Field, Hall, Hildick and Snowdon and even John Wilson considered that "in the management of our various institutions, Town Councils, School Boards and other elective bodies 'there was in my opinion more string pulling than was generally imagined.'"¹²

It is probable that the election of November, 1885, and the return of Mundella for Brightside, helped to heal the wounds and restore unity. Ridge was most apologetic and promised H. J. Wilson "I will never again break up the Liberal Party."¹³ But Ridge seems to have been a born rebel and to the surprise of Wilson, who was by this time M.P. for Holmfirth, at a meeting of the Council of the Brightside Liberal Association on 13 March, 1886, convened to discuss a Guardians' Election, he put a resolution, which was supported by Foster, Senior and H. J. Wilson's son Oliver C. Wilson, expressing regret at Mundella's votes on the House of Lords (Labouchere's motion) and Welsh Disestablishment.¹⁴ Mundella's votes were quite understandable for, as H. J. Wilson explained to Senior, "the ministers of the Crown are in an entirely different position."¹⁵ Of course, it would be wrong to read too much into these incidents or to suggest that the Liberal party was ever in danger of losing its hold over Brightside where, as will appear, its organization was better than in some of the other Wards. But a detailed survey of the history of the party in Brightside between 1880 and 1886 reveals tensions, rivalries and even potential divisions which could not but undermine the strength of the party and reduce its total political impact.

- 1 G. Ridge to H.J. Wilson, 18.10.1881, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5972. Ridge was a joiners' tools manufacturer.
- 2 G. Ridge to J.C. Skinner, 2.10.1883, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5972.
- 3 *Ibid.* Cf. G. Ridge to H.J. Wilson, 19.2.1884, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5972, couched in conciliatory terms.
- 4 G. Ridge to H.J. Wilson, 14.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5975.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Michael Hunter, 1821-98: manufacturer; Unitarian — member of Upper Chapel; 1881-82 Mayor; Hunter announced he would contest Brightside at the parliamentary election, but withdrew.
- 7 G. Ridge to T.B. Senior, 2.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5975.
- 8 Memo. by T.B. Senior, 11.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5975.
- 9 T.B. Senior to H.J. Wilson, 11.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5975.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 G. Ridge to H.J. Wilson, 2.10.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5975.
- 12 J. Wilson to H.J. Wilson, 22.9.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5975, referring to a discussion in Brightside Liberal Club.
- 13 G. Ridge to H.J. Wilson, 19.11.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5975.
- 14 O.C. Wilson to H.J. Wilson, 21.3.1886, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5976.
- 15 H.J. Wilson to T.B. Senior, 22.3.1886, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5976.

The period was also marked by the emergence of three new pressure groups within the Sheffield Liberal party. The most important in terms of influence and future importance was the Sheffield Labour Association, established in 1883, "the objects being to promote the return of qualified Working Men to Parliament, School Board, Town Council and other representative bodies."¹ It was officered by the most respected and politically articulate working men – Edward Memmott, William Rolley, Joseph Mallinson and Stuart Uttley, all of whom were Liberals. An indication of the influence of the Labour Association was that on the death of the chairman of the School Board, Charles Doncaster, in December, 1884, the nominee of the Association, W. H. Smith, was elected in his place, over two other candidates nominated by other members of the Board.² Yet, influential as it was, the Labour Association accepted without question the decisions of the elected divisional Liberal Associations. Much more intransigent, but of far less importance was the Central Radical Club in Paradise Square, founded in December, 1883, the aims of which included manhood suffrage, the abolition of the House of Lords, Home Rule and Land Nationalisation.³ Closely linked to the Central Radical Club, but a separate body, was the Working Men's Radical Association which, according to a Mr. Hillard, numbered about two hundred members in February, 1884.⁴ Its aims were similar to those of the Central Radical Club and in local politics it co-operated closely with it. However, the small numbers of people attending the meetings (for instance a meeting of the Working Men's Radical Association in June, 1884, chaired by Edward Carpenter and at which the Marxist H. M. Hyndman, founder of the Democratic Federation, spoke, attracted an audience of between fifty and one hundred people⁵) and the small number of votes recorded for their candidate, Mervyn Hawkes, in the Central Division in November, 1885, in defiance of the Liberal Association, would suggest that they were politically unimportant. But these pressure groups were nonetheless potential sources of weakness. In Mundella's words, "the action of these small, separate Associations, may become not only embarrassing, but mischievous. The leaders, however well-meaning, are ignorant and new to their work, and they will require very patient handling, and much tact and temper."⁶ At the same time, the leaders had to be as sympathetic as possible with Liberals whose views differed from their own, for, as Mundella also realized, "unless we make the Liberal Party catholic so as to comprehend all shades of Liberalism, we shall simply put the Tories in power for the next ten years."⁷

Sheffield Liberals were at any rate aware of their own weaknesses and of the strength of the Conservatives. "Sheffield must do something to save its own soul or else be content to fall a prey to Toryism," Mundella told H. J. Wilson in November, 1880. "It is twelve years today since I was first elected. What a fine Radical Constituency it was then and what a contrast now."⁸ Mundella never ceased to urge the need for improved organization: "I believe more and more in organization, and less and less in public meetings,"⁹ he told Leader. Organization included creating enthusiasm for the party, especially among the socially influential and wealthy middle classes, in addition to the more mechanical work such as registration. It was in the former work that the Liberals lagged behind the Conservatives, at least before 1884.

Unlike the Tories, the leading Liberals were reluctant to take part in meetings which seemed non-political but which were of the greatest value in stimulating interest. Mundella observed: "I may be mistaken, but I think I do as much for the Liberal Party in Sheffield when I strengthen my hold on the Constituency by attending non-political meetings, as when I give a purely political address. The fact is, nothing will atone for lack of organisation, and I fear it is in this that the Tories are beating us in Sheffield. They have unlimited funds, and they make great local effort in the way of public-house meetings, clubs, suppers, etc., which our friends, for various reasons, will not condescend to do."¹⁰

- 1 Circular, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 2 J.H. Bingham, *The Sheffield School Board, 1870 - 1903*, Sheffield, 1949, p. 20.
- 3 Handbill, December, 1883, in "H.J. Wilson's Political Activities Cuttings", S.C.L.
- 4 *S.I.*, 29.2.1884.
- 5 *S.I.*, 3.6.1884.
- 6 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 30.1.1885, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 7 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 7.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 8 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 17.11.1880, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 25.2.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 10 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 15.3.1882, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

The most obvious example of this was the failure of the Junior Liberal Association. While Wortley was elected in 1880 largely owing to the efforts of the Junior Conservatives, W. Graville, the honorary secretary of the Junior Liberals, was forced to admit that "the appeals to the members to render assistance as workers during the election in March, were not so readily responded to as they expected, and as was needed," and Robert Eadon Leader put it more bluntly: "there was not the enthusiasm there should have been, nor was there the organisation which was desirable and necessary."¹ The Junior Liberal Association numbered 520 members in January, 1881,² but by the end of 1883 it is clear that it had become almost defunct because Mundella suggested that the Hon. Bernard Coleridge be invited to address the Junior Liberals, "with a view to the revival of that organization."³ This was all the more serious as the Junior Conservative Association was "in a thriving and prosperous condition"⁴ and "in every good Liberal town it is the Juniors that are doing the work. I am told they had much to do with the success at Ipswich,"⁵ Mundella observed.

Leader was most discouraged by the very poor attendance at the St. Philip's Ward meeting in January, 1883, to elect representatives to the Council of the Sheffield Liberal Association. "There we had to talk to less than 100 where there was room for 500. It is a great mistake to have an insignificant meeting in a big place."⁶ Even allowing for the fact that St. Philip's was a Tory Ward, such a low attendance reflects the state of Liberal organization in Sheffield in 1883, though the Liberal agent, J.C. Skinner, always optimistic, thought that "the Association is rapidly growing in favour as the Ward meetings on the whole have been extremely well attended with few exceptions, far better than the year before."⁷ However, other evidence does not altogether support Skinner's optimism. In March, 1884, for example, he told H.J. Wilson that "there is now considerably more [organization] than at any previous period since I have had any connection with the Association (6 years) as volunteer or otherwise, except whilst the last election was in progress,"⁸ whereas a few days earlier Mundella reported to Leader: "Merrill has been with me to-night. He is very pessimistic, says we have no organization and hints that we shall lose both seats."⁹

Yet it is clear that from 1884 Liberal organization did improve steadily. This can be attributed partly to the fresh interest stimulated by the choice of the Hon. Bernard Coleridge as the second parliamentary candidate. Coleridge, a thorough Radical, was far more popular with the working men than Waddy, and his candidature re-invigorated the party, so much so that Ald. Leader was able to declare at a meeting of the Council of the Sheffield Liberal Association in May, 1884, that: "the reports furnished ample indications that more work was being now done amongst the Liberals in Sheffield than for some years past."¹⁰ Percy Rawson, always a critical observer, informed Mundella several months later that "there is much reason to be satisfied with the improvement in our local organization."¹¹ The improved organization was reflected in the financial condition of the Sheffield Liberal Association. In March, 1881, H.J. Wilson reported a balance on the right side: "they were in a better position by more than £200 at the end of 1880 than they were at the end of 1879," due "to large and handsome subscriptions from their friends."¹² But 1880 was an extraordinary year in that it was easier to raise money during election times and the friends who had given generously could not be called upon to do so every year. In February, 1882, H. J. Wilson reported a debt of £162. 9s. 2d., which had risen by the following year to £256. 15s. 2d.¹³ But in 1884 there seemed to be a big improvement. The following figures are extracted from the Subscription Cash Book:¹⁴

- 1 Annual Meeting, *S.I.*, 1.2.1881.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 26.12.1883, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 4 Annual Meeting, *S.I.*, 14.10.1882.
- 5 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 26.12.1883, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 6 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 24.1.1883, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 7 J.C. Skinner to H.J. Wilson, 26.1.1883, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 8 J.C. Skinner to H.J. Wilson, 8.3.1884, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 25.2.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 10 *S.I.*, 23.5.1884.
- 11 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 22.9.1884, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5932.
- 12 Annual General Meeting, *S.I.*, 11.3.1881.
- 13 Annual General Meeting, *S.I.*, 15.2.1883.
- 14 Subscription Cash Book, 1884, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5923.

Robert Leader	...	...	...	...	£200.	0.	0.
F. T. Mappin	...	...	...	...	£100.	0.	0.
J.D. and R.E. Leader	...	...	...	...	30.	0.	0.
Samuel Osborn	...	...	...	...	25.	5.	0.
Thos. Turner	...	...	...	...	20.	0.	0.
W.J. Clegg	...	...	...	...	10.	10.	0.
J.C. and W.E. Clegg	...	...	...	...	8.	8.	0.
Abraham Sharman	...	...	...	...	5.	0.	0.
TOTAL					£399.	3.	0.
					<hr/>		
Total Subs for 1884	...	...	...	...	£656.	14.	9.
Tickets for Public Meetings	...	...	...	...	£53.	5.	6.
Cash Receipts for Newspapers	...	...	...	...	£11.	0.	0½d.
					<hr/>		
Total Receipts for 1884	...	...	...	...	£721.	0.	3½d.

It will be seen that well over half of the total receipts consisted of subscriptions from ten men, but the fact that over £250 was raised from a large number of small subscribers, most of whom gave only a few shillings, taken in conjunction with what would seem to be large receipts from tickets sold for public meetings, points to a revival of interest in the Liberal Association and therefore a much healthier financial position in 1884. Unfortunately this is the only year for which a Cash Book survives but it is clear that the finances of the Sheffield Liberal Association were stronger in 1884 than in any year since 1880.

In registration, which was the main task of the Liberal agent, J.C. Skinner, the Liberals appear to have held their own. The Conservatives made a definite gain in the revision of October, 1880, successfully objecting to 1,018 Liberal voters against 405 Liberal objections, sustaining 448 claims against 627 by the Liberals and having 71 lodger claims allowed against 28 by the Liberals.¹ But in September, 1881, the total Liberal gain was 621 against 195 by the Tories,² and a year later the Conservatives placed the Liberal gain at 291.³ The number of parliamentary voters was as follows:⁴

1880	42,402
1881	43,352
1882	43,336
1883	43,297
1884	44,496

The greatest Liberal success occurred in the South West Riding revision in October, 1881, when the Sheffield district accounted for 117 out of a total Liberal gain of 171 and in Sheffield the Conservative gain stood at 0.⁵ The Liberal position in the Sheffield district of the S. W. Riding appears to have improved steadily for they netted a gain of 77 in September, 1883.⁶ Such progress in a strongly Tory district shows that J.C. Skinner was a most efficient registration agent and it shows also that the Liberals at last considered attention to the register as a vital part of the work of organization.

The revitalization of Liberal organization co-incided with the appointment of H. J. Wilson as election agent in place of J. W. Pye Smith, who was forced to retire through ill health.⁷ Mundella was sure that Wilson was the best choice as "he will work like a horse, and will perfect the machinery better than any agent we can obtain."⁸ "I feel, and have long felt that in Sheffield the Liberal Party wants a General to organize a victory,"⁹ he told Wilson. Of Wilson's ability as an organizer there was no doubt — "there isn't an H.J.W. in every division, which is a good deal the reason why all the

1 *S.L.R.*, 1.10.1880.

2 *S.L.R.*, 19.9.1881.

3 *S.L.R.*, 20.9.1882.

4 Compiled from *S.L.R.*

5 *S.I.*, 15.10.1881.

6 *S.L.R.*, 27.9.1883.

7 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 30.7.1884, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5932. John William Pye-Smith, 1841-95: educated Mill Hill; 1880 Alderman; 1886 Mayor; 1887 Town Clerk.

8 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 27.6.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

9 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 30.7.1884, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5932.

others are behind Brightside,"¹ Skinner remarked a few months later. The only danger was, as Mundella saw, that he might be too extreme for some Liberals and he asked Leader: "will H.J.W. be too difficult for some of our friends? Will he offend people, or keep people away?"² Mundella was thinking especially of the moderates, who always seemed to be in danger of drifting towards Conservatism but who were valuable for their wealth, although it should be noted that none of the large subscribers to the funds of the Liberal Association in 1884 could be described as a lukewarm Liberal,³ but more for their social prestige. While they remained attached, however loosely, to the party, Liberalism remained respectable – it was not altogether a lower class political party. Mundella stressed: "The first difficulty will be to secure the timid politicians. Unhappily, owing to social and other influences they are a very large class in Sheffield and require delicate handling. There are so many men of the William Smith and Stephenson type to say nothing of the Hunters and others who possess influence and who are difficult to get to the front."⁴

At the same time, the selection of Coleridge was an indication that the party could not afford to pander to the moderates, as it had attempted to do over Waddy, at the expense of working class support, which was by now the backbone of the party. Mundella realized that they must be humoured and if at all possible kept in the Liberal fold, but at the same time "our real strength after all must be with the working men."⁵

The division of Sheffield into five single-member constituencies brought about a decentralization of Liberal organization. Reference has already been made to the debate as to whether there should be a strong central authority or "home rule", for the five Associations. The labour leaders urged the former,⁶ believing that it was the best way of securing a working class candidature, but the difficulties of interfering with local autonomy were too formidable and likely to give rise to ill feeling and divisions, and it is clear that H. J. Wilson preferred decentralization: "you have quite converted me to the view that Local Option is the preferable indeed the only solution of the difficulty of the selection of candidates,"⁷ wrote Coleridge. All power resided with the Divisional Associations, each of which sent two representatives to form the Executive Committee of the Sheffield United Liberal Committee,⁸ the purpose of which was to conduct registration⁹ and to "take steps when occasion requires to initiate common action or consultation of the Five Divisions". This plan was adopted in preference to a scheme for the formation of a Sheffield Liberal Federation, a more centralized power structure.¹⁰ Although this scheme of organization antagonized some Liberals who were excluded from power, such as Ridge and his supporters in Brightside and the members of the Central Radical Club in the Central Division, local autonomy produced some solid advantages. It has been remarked that Sheffield was an amalgam of separate and relatively distinct communities¹¹ within which local spirit ran high. Local men wanted to control local affairs – Ridge protested strongly, for example, against what he considered to be "outside interference"¹² in Brightside. A centralized structure of organisation was more productive of division than one in which local autonomy was recognized.

The decentralization of Liberal organization and the move towards local autonomy was assisted by the formation of Liberal Clubs in the Wards. Liberals fully appreciated the importance of these clubs. As J. W. Pye-Smith observed in a letter read at the opening of the Attercliffe Liberal Club in July, 1881: "a good strong club in every ward is a thing the Liberal cause very much needs in Sheffield, and I hope those that exist will be increased in vigour, and where they don't exist, that they will soon be brought into being through the good example of Attercliffe."¹³ In the same

- 1 J. C. Skinner to H.J. Wilson, 26.3.1885, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 2 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 27.6.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 3 Cf. Mundella's opinion of Mappin: "as staunch, broad and sensible a liberal as any on our side. No man has ever ripened faster into a sound politician than he has". A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 5.8.1883, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 4 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 30.7.1884, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5932.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 H.J. Wilson to Hon. B. Coleridge, 2.2.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5940.
- 7 Hon. B. Coleridge to H.J. Wilson, 11.2.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5940.
- 8 Minutes of meeting of 5 Liberal Associations (Brightside, Attercliffe, Central, Ecclesall and Hallam), Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5893.
- 9 J.C. Skinner secretary and registration agent (salary £175 p.a.).
- 10 Draft scheme, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5941.
- 11 A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, 1963, p. 34.
- 12 G. Ridge to T.B. Senior, 2.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5975.
- 13 *S.I.*, 20.7.1881.

year a Liberal Club was formed in Nether Hallam¹ and one was established at Heeley in December, 1884.² These clubs differed from the Sheffield Reform Club, where subscriptions were high³ so that it was in effect a gentleman's club, "entirely social and not in any way politically aggressive,"⁴ and were intended to attract working men and to stimulate political interest. There is no doubt that they were especially effective in Brightside and Attercliffe, in the former even providing a place where discontent could be expressed about the Brightside Liberal Association. But they also had a localizing influence on politics – they focussed attention on local affairs and no doubt the members considered themselves the properly qualified people to decide what should be done in their areas.

More important than the clubs in stimulating local interest was the growing tendency for politics to creep into local elections, which had hitherto been non-political. H. J. Wilson observed in April, 1881, that "our recent local affairs have indicated an increasing tendency towards making local elections (parochial and others) more political than formerly, with Liberal success in Attercliffe and Brightside and defeat in some other districts."⁵ Politics had always figured in School Board elections and, although there was no official Liberal intervention in 1882 or 1885, as there had been in 1876, Liberals took a keen interest in the contests and in 1882 the "Church and Conservative Eight" were backed by the Sheffield Conservative and Constitutional Central Municipal Association.⁶ But politics were now the dominant factor in other local contests – Guardians, Burial Board and Town Council elections, which in the past had been fought on purely local electioneering issues. Such a development necessitated an improvement in local organization, especially in those Wards where Liberalism was weak. In March, 1882, Batty Langley urged the burgesses of St. Philip's to "redeem its character" since "all their municipal contests were now fought on party lines."⁷ Just as bad from the Liberal point of view was St. Peter's, which W. J. Clegg described as "one of the deadest wards in the town," although he felt sure it contained many Liberals who, he hoped, "would be before long stirred up and brought together in organised form." He believed the Liberal problem was the result of lethargy and he wanted "to see more interest taken by the residents of the ward in municipal questions."⁸ Both these wards, however, remained Tory strongholds throughout the period. In November, 1883, the Conservatives triumphed in St. Peter's and St. Philip's, where their organization was strongest, but also gained seats in Ecclesall and Nether Hallam,⁹ giving them 36 seats in the Town Council to 28 held by Liberals. The results prompted Mundella to remark:— "if Sheffield Liberals will not do better in the way of organisation, they will have to pass under the yoke. I am losing heart in them, – they are so lacking in tolerance and comprehensiveness."¹⁰ Even worse was to come as Liberal organization was at its nadir in the early months of 1884. A vacancy arose in Ecclesall and, after some deliberation,¹¹ R. E. Leader decided to contest it for the Liberals, despite "the not very satisfactory Committee that at present exists in Ecclesall."¹² Ecclesall was a marginal ward, not quite a Tory stronghold but on the way to being so. The result was disastrous for the Liberals as R. E. Leader was defeated by 564 votes¹³ and the fact that 4,000¹⁴ did not vote would suggest a lack of political interest in Ecclesall. Mundella rightly regarded the result as a sign that "Sheffield is in a very bad way, especially that we are beaten by money and superior organization."¹⁵ In a letter to R. E. Leader his tone was even more depressed: "everybody gives me very bad accounts of the state of politics in Sheffield. Schnadhorst is the last croaker. I am really sick of it. It is very hard work to advocate principles which are not backed up by the Constituency. I feel it a personal reflection that I have done

- 1 S.L.R., 10.2.1881.
- 2 S.L.R., 9.12.1884.
- 3 269 members, enrolled by January 1885, paid entrance fees totalling £880. 5s. 6d. S.L., 13.1.1885.
- 4 *Ibid.* Mappin's words.
- 5 H.J. Wilson to S.D. Waddy, 23.4.1881, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5937.
- 6 S.L., 24.11.1882: "the Tory Association with the multitudinous name".
- 7 S.L., 23.3.1882.
- 8 There was "a moderate attendance" at this meeting to elect representatives to the Council of the Liberal Association. S.L., 1.2.1881.
- 9 S.L., 2.11.1883.
- 10 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 21.11.1883, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 11 R. Leader advised against it. R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 2.7.1884, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 12 R.E. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 23.1.1884, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 1317.
- 13 W.W. Harrison (Conservative) 3,386, R.E. Leader (Liberal) 2,822.
- 14 J.C. Skinner to H.J. Wilson, 11.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5911.
- 15 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 8.2.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

so little to keep Sheffield true to its old politics, and I am willing others should try their hands."¹

However, 1884 was a turning-point and Liberal organization began slowly to improve. This was reflected in the better results which the Liberals obtained in the municipal elections. The Liberals were triumphant in Brightside, Attercliffe and the Park and even succeeded in winning a seat in St. Philip's, so that there were now 34 Conservatives and 30 Liberals in the Town Council.² "I think," J.C. Skinner wrote to H.J. Wilson, "the large Polls made on Saturday are largely due to our improved organization which worked well in the Park, Attercliffe, Neepsend and Grimesthorpe and I think if Burngreave had been as well up as Neepsend the majority in Brightside would have been still larger."³ But he was equally quick to point out that "our organization also in some districts needs earnest attention — such as St. Philip's and Burngreave."⁴ Of course, the municipal elections could be used to gauge the relative strengths of the parties only when large polls were recorded. Skinner warned: "The municipal elections are very little to judge by, except in the Attercliffe and Brightside Divisions, where, especially in Attercliffe, the large totals polled last November shew a certain Liberal majority. In the Central, the aggregate numbers polled for the same years, have been so small as to leave future results altogether uncertain. In Ecclesall, Leader polled 2,800 against Harrison's 3,300 leaving 4,000 unpolled. In Hallam — 1883 — Muir Wilson⁵ got 2,400 against Bartlett 1,700 (leaving 4,000 who did not vote), but Bartlett was very unpopular and there was little organization. The improvement in organization shewed last November in the Park and Attercliffe which polled larger aggregate numbers than ever previously and better results may be expected in consequence of improved organization in both Hallam and Ecclesall."⁶

The intrusion of politics into municipal elections in the 1880's forced Liberals to come to grips with the problem of organization at its roots — the polling district. Directives from above were useless unless men could be found to devote time to canvassing and organizing meetings at the local level and it was here that Sheffield Liberalism found its real vitality. Decentralization tapped this even more and, although much still remained to be done, the prospects of Sheffield Liberalism were much brighter at the beginning of 1885 than they had been twelve months earlier.

1 A.J. Mundella to R.E. Leader, 20.2.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 *S.I.*, 3.11.1884.

3 J.C. Skinner to H.J. Wilson, 4.11.1884, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Arnold Muir Wilson, 1857 - 1909: solicitor; secretary of Junior Conservative Association; took a keen interest (as did R.E. Leader) in Sheffield Amateur Parliament.

6 J.C. Skinner to H.J. Wilson, 11.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5911.

THE SHEFFIELD LIBERALS AND GOVERNMENT POLICY, 1880 - 85Domestic Questions

The domestic issue which caused the Government most trouble in these years was the case of Charles Bradlaugh. An advocate of secularism, republicanism and birth control, he was elected for Northampton in 1880. The Conservatives, given the lead by Lord Randolph Churchill who denounced Bradlaugh as "an avowed Atheist and a professedly disloyal person,"¹ decided to block his entry to the House of Commons and attempted to discredit Liberalism by identifying it with atheism.² Thus the root of the question was not religious scruples but political advantage. The young Tories, the Fourth Party as they became known, saw it as a means not only of attacking Gladstone but of capturing the Conservative leadership in the Commons from the indecisive Northcote.

In Sheffield, as elsewhere, the Liberals, with one notable exception, supported the Government in its efforts to enable Bradlaugh to take his seat, while making it quite clear that they had no sympathy whatsoever with his personal opinions. In Mundella's words, "I thoroughly detest the man's opinions on religious matters, but I regard it as unconstitutional and unwise to attempt to keep him out of the House."³ Equally, they were convinced that politics dictated the Conservative position: "no doubt the Tories hope to identify the Liberal party with Bradlaugh and Atheism . . . it is not Christians who are opposing in this case; it is tricky politicians, who would use any stick that came to hand to beat the Government with."⁴

The only prominent Liberal in Sheffield who did not support the Government over Bradlaugh was the draper, G. H. Hovey. At a meeting of the Council of the Sheffield Liberal Association in May, 1881, he voted against doing anything for Bradlaugh whom he described as "an enemy to society."⁵ But he appears to have been alone in this view because subsequent Liberal Council meetings passed resolutions in support of Government policy.⁶ It is clear, however, that many Liberals found the question most distasteful and it is probable that the Liberal Association did not call a meeting on the subject, as H. J. Wilson obviously wished,⁷ because Leader and other leading Liberals disliked any mention of it. But those Liberals who did speak out made it clear that they had no sympathy with Bradlaugh's religious and other views. H. J. Wilson, speaking at a meeting "of persons who think civil and religious liberty have been violated by the House of Commons in refusing admission to Mr. Bradlaugh", held four days after he had been confined in the Clock Tower for refusing to withdraw from the House, maintained that it was purely a political question: Bradlaugh "was the pivot on which the question of liberty turned."⁸ He was the duly elected M.P. for Northampton and "the opposition came from a spirit of intolerance and of injustice, which seemed to be so rampant in the House of Commons."⁹ That Bradlaugh's own views were not part of the issue is shown by the fact that prominent Nonconformists — H.J. Wilson and the Rev. J. Bailey of the Glossop Road Baptist Church — spoke at the meeting in favour of Bradlaugh's admission to the Commons.

Even more active in their support for Bradlaugh were a number of Liberals who, though prominent Radicals, were certainly not part of the Liberal leadership. They included John Wilson, an opponent of trade unions in the 1860's, who had continued to support Roebuck after 1868 but had not, like almost every other Roebuckite, transferred his allegiance to Wortley in 1879; instead he had condemned Tory imperialism. Another supporter of Bradlaugh was Jonathan Taylor, an ultra Radical, who favoured Land Nationalisation and who was the leading figure in the foundation of the Central Radical Club. A branch was established in Sheffield of the League for the Defence of Constitutional Rights, which was supported

1 Quoted in W. L. Arnstein, *The Bradlaugh Case*, Oxford, 1965, p. 44.

2 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 10.5.1881, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

3 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 28.6.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

4 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 10.5.1881, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 *S.I.*, 31.5.1881. George Henry Hovey, 1831-97: draper; served on School Board 1888-90.

6 *S.I.*, 10.8.1881, 16.2.1882.

7 *S.I.*, 29.6.1880.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

also by the veteran Chartist, Michael Beal, who had always resisted the attempts of teetotallers to curtail individual liberty and by George Ridge of Brightside. Ridge was convinced that much of the hostility to Bradlaugh was the result of his attacks on perpetual pensions.¹ Edward Carpenter, the socialist, attended a branch meeting in July, 1881,² though it is impossible to discover whether he had any active connection with the movement.³ The meetings which the Branch held were always well attended,⁴ an indication of solid working class support for Bradlaugh. The meetings also attracted middle class Liberals such as Charles Harding Firth⁵ and Charles Castle.⁶ Bradlaugh himself made fairly frequent visits to Sheffield,⁷ which he probably would not have done had he been unpopular. Indeed, so deep was their belief in the cause that four members of the Sheffield Branch of the League for the Defence of Constitutional Rights – John Wilson, George Ridge, J.A. Swift and Langton – went to Northampton on 27 February, 1882, to campaign for the re-election of Bradlaugh after he had been expelled from Parliament.⁸

The Bradlaugh case also helped to bring to a head the dissatisfaction felt by Sheffield Liberals with the political position of the Fitzwilliams. H. W. Fitzwilliam, one of the Liberal members for the South West Riding, was opposed to the Affirmation Bill, which would have enabled Bradlaugh to affirm rather than swear the Oath of Allegiance. After the Bill had been defeated by three votes in the House of Commons, a large meeting of the Council of the Sheffield Liberal Association was called to discuss the question.⁹ It was clear that Fitzwilliam's opposition to the Bill was seen by Liberals as yet another proof that, in Percy Rawson's words, "he was out of sympathy with this great constituency with regard to many questions that had been brought forward."¹⁰ Like many Whigs, the Fitzwilliams were finding it increasingly difficult even to keep up a semblance of loyalty to Gladstone. The year before, for example, Earl Fitzwilliam had condemned the Government's Irish policy on the very day before the Phoenix Park murders.¹¹ The Fitzwilliams were appalled by the lack of "resolute government"¹² in Ireland, the lack of coercion and the failure to defend property rights, and the truckling to Atheism implicit in the Affirmation Bill. In these respects, they were out of sympathy with Sheffield Liberals and on the Affirmation Bill the only Liberal to support H. W. Fitzwilliam was G. H. Hovey, who expressed "dissent from the general feelings of Liberals on this question,"¹³ no doubt because of his dislike of Bradlaugh.

Indeed, so opposed was H. W. Fitzwilliam to the general trend of Liberal policy that he wrote to Benjamin Bagshawe, himself a very moderate Liberal: "I do feel that it is impossible for me to continue to give a steady support to Mr. Gladstone after the legislation of the past few years."¹⁴ The Fitzwilliams had been tolerated for so long because of their influence in South Yorkshire where, prior to the Reform Act of 1884, the Tories were very strong. As Mundella put it, "if we had not one Fitzwilliam we should have two Tories."¹⁵ The Liberals needed the Fitzwilliams and Mundella was at pains to warn Percy Rawson about the dangers of driving them "into the opposite camp."¹⁶ But, while he had more time for Whigs than most other Radicals had, Mundella was exasperated by the Fitzwilliams: "my contempt for those Fitzwilliams is more than I can tell you. They invariably do the wrong thing. Ever since I have been M.P. for Sheffield they have been a disintegrating force."¹⁷

The movement of the Fitzwilliams towards Toryism was accelerated during 1884. On 23 July, 1884, H. W. Fitzwilliam announced his retirement as Liberal member for the South West Riding.¹⁸ A few months later there was an interesting correspondence between Earl Fitzwilliam and W. Spencer Stanhope, the Tory who had been defeated by H. W. Fitzwilliam in 1880. This shows quite clearly that Fitzwilliam was moving towards a *rapprochement* with the Tories in the county. Stanhope knew how to play upon his fears of the Radical section of the Liberal party.

1 S.I., 8.2.1883.

2 S.I., 4.7.1881.

3 Probably not, as Bradlaugh was an opponent of socialism.

4 E.g. S.I., 4.7.1881, 8.2.1883.

5 Charles Harding Firth, 1857 - 1936: historian; 1883 moved to Oxford; 1904 - 25 Regius Professor of Modern History; 1922 Knighthood.

6 S.I., 4.7.1881.

7 S.I., 4.7.1881, 8.2.1883.

8 S.I., 3.3.1882.

9 S.I., 18.5.1883.

10 *Ibid.*

11 S.L.R., 5.5.1882.

12 The expression was used by Lord Salisbury.

13 S.I., 18.5.1883.

14 H. W. Fitzwilliam to B. Bagshawe, 2.8.1884, Bagshawe MSS., S.C.L., 778 (ii).

15 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 22.5.1883, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

16 *Ibid.*

17 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 3.12.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

18 S.L.R., 23.7.1884.

"The great advance of Radical tyranny," he wrote in October, 1884, "the attacks upon property and religion, and the mis-management of affairs at home and abroad by the present Government must have rapidly widened the interval between the followers of the policy of Earl Russell and Lord Palmerston and those who uphold the Birmingham Caucus."¹

It seems that Lord Fitzwilliam was disposed to support Stanhope as a possible candidate in the next county election and that an alliance with the Tories had already been worked out by the early months of 1885. In January, Stanhope wrote: "I think I may add that the views I expressed in my last letter as to the policy of giving Conservative support to liberals of moderate constitutional opinions in opposition to extreme politicians are shared by the leading conservatives."² But by this time the Liberals had dismissed the Fitzwilliams as nothing but Tories. As to Lord Fitzwilliam, Mundella declared, "I constantly look for his avowal of Toryism. I am a little surprised he has not made it before."³ He did not have to wait long, for in the election of November, 1885, the Fitzwilliams backed the Tories and Captain Fitzwilliam opposed F. T. Mappin in Hallamshire.

Before 1885, the loss of the Fitzwilliam influence would have been disastrous to the Liberals because they needed "the prestige of the Fitzwilliam name"⁴ to defeat the Tories in the county. But the Third Reform Act, by extending household suffrage to the county and dividing the South West Riding into six single member constituencies, destroyed the Fitzwilliam influence which could only operate over a restricted electorate, composed mainly of tenant farmers. In effect, the Act strengthened the Liberal position to such an extent that in 1885 and 1886 they succeeded in winning all six Divisions in South Yorkshire.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the Franchise question was a political issue of paramount importance. Benjamin Bagshawe informed the Liberal Whip, Lord Richard Grosvenor, that, in the villages near Sheffield, Liberals cared little about Egypt and foreign policy ("the people have absolute faith in the statesmanship of Mr. Gladstone") but intensely about the franchise question and the obstructive tactics of the House of Lords.⁵ The Whigs and Tories were anxious that a scheme of Redistribution should accompany the Franchise Bill rather than have it worked out by a more "democratic" House of Commons, and they blocked the Franchise Bill throughout the summer and autumn of 1884. The Sheffield Liberals demonstrated their support for the Government at a meeting in March, when the resolution was carried "by the grandest show of hands ever seen in Paradise Square"⁶ and at a Reform Demonstration held in the Drill Hall on 26 July, at which Mundella, Coleridge and Lord Edward Cavendish spoke,⁷ and the expenses of which totalled more than £70.⁸ The Liberals saw the extension of household suffrage to the counties as the prelude to further reforms and especially reform of the land laws. So the landlords seemed to be faced not only by a political but a social revolution, the beginnings of which they had seen in the Irish Land Act of 1881. The land law reformers did not conceal their demands; at a meeting of the Park Ward branch of the Sheffield Liberal Association in January, 1882, for example, Joseph Arch called for measures to facilitate the sale and transfer of land, including the abolition of entail and primogeniture, tenant right and eventual tenant ownership of a portion of the land.⁹ These suggestions alone must have alarmed landlords without the demands of ultra Radicals for Land Nationalisation, and it is easy to understand why great landowners such as the Fitzwilliams, faced with the loss of political and social power, gravitated towards Toryism and away from Liberalism, which seemed to threaten the sanctity of property. Equally, in the counties the Liberals could expect the support of the newly enfranchised agricultural labourers and of the tenant farmers who, now freed from electoral pressure by landlords, looked to Liberalism to accomplish the much needed reforms of the land laws.

Conservatism became even more closely identified with the landlord interest and property in general when leading Tory landlords such as James Lowther and Henry Chaplin advocated Fair Trade or Reciprocity, a return to a modified form of Protection. In agriculture, the *Independent* was convinced that "the success of Reciprocity means the restoration of the Corn Laws",¹⁰ and in Sheffield

1 W. S. Stanhope to Lord Fitzwilliam, 18.10.1884, Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., S.C.L., T. 19.

2 W. S. Stanhope to Lord Fitzwilliam, 23.1.1885, Wentworth Woodhouse MSS., S.C.L., T.21.

3 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 23.5.1885, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

4 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 17.9.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 B. Bagshawe to Lord R. Grosvenor, 21.6.1884, Bagshawe MSS., S.C.L., 778 (ii).

6 *S.I.*, 31.3.1884.

7 *S.L.R.*, 26.7.1884.

8 Copy, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

9 *S.I.*, 13.1.1882.

10 *S.I.*, 9.7.1881.

the Liberals were opposed to any departure from the principles of Free Trade. However, the "Reciprocity Craze" found support among some Sheffield Tories who believed, with Sir John Brown, that "the so-called Free Trade theory will no longer save us in the altered circumstances in which we find ourselves."¹ Other prominent industrialists such as George H. Cammell and David Ward supported the National Fair Trade League, a branch of which was established in Sheffield in September, 1881.² The movement was confined to Tories despite the plea of the secretary, J. Hardy, "that the question should be kept clear of party politics, as it was one affecting the commercial prosperity of the country."³ The Fair Trade cry was taken up by W. C. Leng in the *Telegraph* and no doubt attained some popularity in certain Conservative circles in Sheffield and two of the Conservative candidates in 1885, Ashmead Bartlett and Howard Vincent championed it, but not all Tories in Sheffield supported it. In his annual address, in January, 1882, Wortley declared unequivocally: "I cannot be a party to any departure from the principles of Free Trade."⁴ Moreover, although they may have convinced themselves that Reciprocity was a good idea, the Fair Traders appear to have had little success in convincing anyone else. At Walkley, in May, 1884, for example, in a Fair Trade meeting addressed by Henry Turner, the Protectionists were defeated by 23 votes to 20.⁵ The location is significant – Walkley was a predominantly working class area and it seems certain that Reciprocity made little headway among the working classes in Sheffield, and Free Trade lecturers, such as Charles Harding Firth,⁶ had little difficulty in convincing them that for them prosperity was best secured through adherence to Free Trade. From a political point of view, it did not matter what issue confirmed Tories took up; the question was: could they convert the uncommitted electors and those with vague attachments to Liberalism? It is clear, however, that they did not succeed in doing this with Fair Trade and the Liberals had little to worry about on this score. "The Fair Trade 'duffers', as you rightly call them," Mundella told Leader, "are more ridiculous than mischievous, and I think we may regard them with contempt, but it is deplorable that our leading citizens in Sheffield should be such political ignoramuses as they have shewn themselves in these latter days."⁷ To Mundella it was yet another middle class aberration, a further proof of their unfitness for social or political leadership in Sheffield.

Social questions were not in the forefront of politics in these years but Liberals continued to take a keen interest in them without seeking to impose them upon the Liberal party as a whole. Agitation was continued by the separate organizations – the Liberation Society, the United Kingdom Alliance and the Society for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts – within the Liberal party, but these were not the burning issues they had been in the 1870's, because, if the Liberal party were to be held together, they simply could not be pressed too hard. Yet the social conscience of Liberalism remained very acute, and on those questions where politics was not involved, Liberals were joined by Conservatives such as W. C. Leng and Arthur Thomas. Both took an interest in the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade,⁸ and Leng spoke at a meeting to protest against the treatment of Jews in Russia.⁹ The Sunday Closing movement was still well supported in Sheffield; it presented a petition in August, 1882, signed by 26,000 people, including 8 magistrates, 32 aldermen and town councillors and 100 clergy and Nonconformist ministers.¹⁰ With the exception of the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which reached a successful conclusion in 1886, these campaigns were conducted in the 1880's less with a view to direct political action and more with the aim of influencing public opinion, thereby preparing the way for generally accepted reform. Such was also the case with W. T. Stead's campaign for "Social Purity" which received hearty support in Sheffield,¹¹ especially from the Wilsons who worked hard in every good cause. But these questions had no political effect upon Liberalism in Sheffield or upon the policy of the Government at this time.

1 Letter published in *S.I.*, 5.10.1881.

2 *S.I.*, 7.9.1881.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *S.I.*, 6.1.1882.

5 *S.L.R.*, 15.5.1884.

6 *E.g.* his lecture on "The Fair Trade Programme" to the St. George's Ward Liberal Association. *S.L.R.*, 22.11.1881.

7 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 17.9.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 *E.g.* a meeting addressed by Henry Richard and chaired by the Archbishop of York. *S.I.*, 9.12.1881.

9 *S.I.*, 17.2.1882.

10 *S.I.*, 12.8.1882.

11 *S.L.R.*, 28.7.1885, 14.10.1885.

The Empire

Imperial affairs posed a great problem for the Liberal party in the 1880's. On the one hand, the Government was entrusted with the duty of maintaining British interests and of solving some of the problems created by Beaconsfield's foreign and imperial policy, especially in South Africa, Afghanistan and Egypt. At the same time, imperialism was distasteful to many Liberals, particularly Radicals. Their ideas on foreign policy were based on a belief in nationalism and that England should not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries — the "Little England" spirit of John Bright and, above all, that foreign policy should be guided by moral principles. H. J. Wilson declared at a meeting to support the independence of the Transvaal in February, 1881, that "he had yet to learn that that which was morally wrong in private life was right for them to do as a nation."¹ To such Liberals the whole conception of imperialism was anathema. There were other Liberals who realized that Britain had commitments in various parts of the world, for good or ill, which she simply could not afford to abandon and responsibilities which could not be neglected. Gladstone's Government tried to steer a middle course between the demands made by the Tories that national honour be upheld and the non-interventionism of the "Peace Radicals". But imperial questions not only alienated those electors who believed the Tory accusations that the Liberals always neglected vital British interests overseas, but even more important divided the Liberals themselves.

Jingoism had been an important element in Sheffield Toryism since the 1870's and it was cleverly exploited by Leng and by speakers such as E. Ashmead Bartlett, whom the *Independent* described as "a sort of youthful Urquhart."² Their brash and bombastic appeals to British honour and prestige were remarkably successful. After they had organized a successful meeting to protest against the Government's evacuation of Candahar in March, 1881, Mundella wrote: "I am ashamed of Sheffield allowing itself to be befooled by Leng and Ashmead Bartlett."³ Leng's tactics could be quite unscrupulous. While he complained bitterly about the withdrawal from Afghanistan,⁴ a year later when the Government decided to crush Arabi Bey's revolt in Egypt, he told the Junior Conservative Association that "a most generous nationality had risen in arms and had been stifled in their own blood."⁵ So the Government was wrong, as far as Leng was concerned, whether it withdrew, as it did in South Africa and Afghanistan, or took firm and decisive action as it did at Tel-el-Kebir.

It was, however, in Egypt that Gladstone's ministry encountered its most serious problems because the decision to occupy Egypt split the Liberal party. The need to protect the British investment in the Suez Canal and the refusal of the French to accept the consequences of their responsibilities under the Dual Control forced the Government to act alone and to invade Egypt. In Sheffield, the party was split between those Liberals who supported the Government but agreed with Mundella, who told Leader: "I shall be glad when we are well out of this Egyptian business. I am clear we could not have avoided it, but, after all, it is a 'hateful necessity' and the work is not congenial to us,"⁶ and those who were opposed to any kind of intervention. The first group was represented by the Leaders and the *Independent* and the second by H. J. Wilson. Wilson considered "the tone of the *Independent* is very deplorable; so little argument and so much contempt for the 'Peace Radicals' "⁷ He wrote a letter to the paper, which appeared on the 29 July, 1882, in which he described the war in Egypt as "unjustifiable" and in which he protested against "the manner in which you have for the last ten days assailed and misrepresented all Liberals who do not agree with your views on the Egyptian question," especially Henry Richard, Alfred Illingworth and Wilfrid Lawson. In reply, the editors, J. D. and R. E. Leader declared "we think them mistaken in their attitude on this question."⁸ It is impossible to discover the numerical strengths of the supporters and opponents of the Egyptian policy as evidence is contradictory. John Daniel Leader believed that "so far as I can gather the party here as elsewhere is all but unanimous in favour of the Government,"⁹ but H. J. Wilson was equally sure that "the thanks I have received for my letter convince me that if the party is to be kept together my letter was required."¹⁰ No serious split, however, developed in the Liberal party in Sheffield, partly because the

1 *S.I.*, 23.2.1881.

2 *S.I.*, 24.3.1881. Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, 1849 - 1902: barrister; prominent in the Patriotic Association; 1880 - 85 M.P. for Eye (Suffolk), 1885 - 1902 Ecclesall; 1885 - 86, 1886 - 92 Civil Lord of the Admiralty; 1892 Knighthood; 1900 served in South Africa.

3 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 26.3.1881, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

4 *S.D.T.*, 24.3.1881.

5 *S.I.*, 14.10.1882.

6 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 3.9.1882, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

7 H. J. Wilson to R. Leader, 21.7.1882, not sent, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

8 *S.I.*, 29.7.1882.

9 J. D. Leader to H. J. Wilson, 27.7.1882, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6009 B.

10 H.J. Wilson to J. D. Leader, August 1882, not sent, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6009 B.

"Peace Radicals" were in a minority, as they were in the party as a whole. This can be seen from an interesting letter from the Rev. C. H. Collyns, an Anglican and secretary of the British Temperance League,¹ to H. J. Wilson in September, 1882: "Mrs. Howard of Castle Howard writes to me in mighty indignation against the whole war business and says what I believe to be true that Gladstone by his great power and popularity has blinded folk. It is melancholy but then you know the Liberal Party has never really been a *peace* party. All that we have ever done has been to inoculate the party a bit."²

The "Peace Radicals", therefore, were not sufficiently numerous to effect any change in Government policy on Egypt; indeed, H. J. Wilson believed that its Egyptian policy had strengthened its position: "the Government is becoming more popular because it is now approved by so many Jingoos".³ But the main reason why no serious split occurred in the party was that all Liberals were determined to avoid one. Robert Leader reminded Wilson that "the greater the difficulties of our chiefs the stronger should be our support",⁴ and the fact that Wilson contented himself with expressing disagreement and made no attempt to organize an agitation to secure the evacuation of Egypt, as he would almost certainly have done ten years earlier, and that a number of letters which he wrote on the subject were not sent, shows quite clearly that he considered Liberal unity of prime importance.

The difficulties in the Sudan in 1884 and 1885 were a direct result of the British occupation of Egypt. When a revolt broke out in the Sudan under the inspiration of a religious leader, the Mahdi, the Government was faced with the choice of either reconquering it or evacuating some stranded Egyptian garrisons. It decided upon the latter course and entrusted the task to General Gordon, whom Mundella described as "brave as a Paladin, and as devout as a Puritan, but, I suspect — a little? — mad."⁵ For his part, Gladstone disliked any kind of involvement in the Sudan, though he believed that Britain had responsibilities there which could not be shirked. The Government's policy was defended in the *Independent* but it was by no means unanimously supported by Sheffield Liberals. J. H. Barber, the Friend who had long since ceased to play a prominent part in local politics, spoke out against it at the annual meeting of the Sheffield Liberal Association in March, 1884.⁶ On the same day he wrote to H. J. Wilson: "what in the world we have to do in the Sudan, I cannot imagine we seem to me to go on from one crime to another."⁷ Equally loud in their condemnation of Government policy were H. J. Wilson and William Rolley, vice-president of the Sheffield Labour Representation Association.⁸ The policy of the Government in the Sudan was defended by Robert Leader, the Rev. Dr. Cocker and the Congregational minister, the Rev. T. W. Holmes.⁹ The Liberal outcry against intervention in the Sudan was bound to subside, as the Government's aims were strictly defensive. However, because the Government had decided to withdraw from the Sudan rather than reconquer it, it was open to attacks from Jingoos who argued that national honour was at stake. A Conservative meeting in Sheffield in February, 1884, denounced Liberal policy as "vacillating and unstatesmanlike" and "not maintaining the national honour and prestige."¹⁰ The Jingoos could muster plenty of support because the Mayor deemed that an amendment in support of the Government, put by Henry Rowley and T. Shaw of the Central Radical Club, was lost by as many as ten to one.¹¹

It is hard to determine how far the foreign and imperial policy of the Government cost the Liberal party votes in Sheffield. J. C. Skinner told Wilson that his nine paid canvassers reported that many voters said they did not intend to vote Liberal any more — "foreign policy of late Government having changed their opinions."¹² But, as will appear, in the election of November, 1885, the Liberals polled more votes than the Tories, although they only managed to win two seats. Had the constituency

1 Its headquarters had been moved from Rochdale to Sheffield in September, 1880. *S.L.R.*, 15.9.1880.

2 Rev. C. H. Collyns to H. J. Wilson, 4.9.1882, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 6012.

3 H. J. Wilson to R. Leader, 8.9.1882, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

4 R. Leader to H. J. Wilson, 8.8.1882, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

5 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 11.5.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

6 *S.L.*, 19.3.1884.

7 J. H. Barber to H. J. Wilson, 18.3.1884, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

8 *S.L.*, 22.2.1884.

9 *S.L.*, 19.3.1884.

10 *S.L.*, 15.2.1884.

11 *Ibid.*

12 J. C. Skinner to H. J. Wilson, 11.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5911.

been undivided, they would have won both seats,¹ thus improving on their performance in 1880. This would not indicate a marked loss of support in the years 1880 - 85. It suggests rather that those who blamed the Government for the mismanagement of the Sudanese campaign and the death of Gordon were already Tories and would not have voted Liberal in any case. The large scale defections from the Liberal ranks had already taken place by 1880. So the true significance of the Government's imperial policy was that it helped to produce tensions within the Liberal party itself which threatened Liberal unity.

Ireland

The true importance of the Irish question in Sheffield politics lay in the influence which the Irish voters could exercise in an election. The Irish themselves certainly believed that they held the balance, as the two parties were almost equal in strength. At a meeting of the Irish Nationalist Society in July, 1884, Michael Conway said "he did not know any constituency in Great Britain where the Irish vote was such a potent factor as it was at Sheffield."² The Irish were mainly concentrated in the Central Division and numbered about 800 voters, who were of considerable importance because of poor Liberal organization in the Central.³ Their electoral importance lay not so much in numbers as in the fact that they constituted a block vote under the control of the Irish Parliamentary party. They could be relied upon to vote as instructed by the Irish leadership. They had links with Liberalism; Mundella and Waddy had been supported by the Irish vote in 1880. One of their leaders, Dr. T. O'Meara, a Radical, strove to maintain the connection. Speaking at the annual meeting of the Sheffield Liberal Association in March, 1884, he referred to the St. Patrick's Day meeting, at which Joseph Biggar, M.P., called upon the Irishmen of Sheffield to vote against Mundella at the next election, but O'Meara "was confident that, as was the case at Liverpool, the Irish of this town would be found at the proper time on the side of reform and Liberalism."⁴

If the Irish were to vote Tory, it could be nothing more than a political manoeuvre to embarrass the Liberals because the Conservatives in Sheffield made it quite clear that they had no sympathy with Irish problems. In January, 1881, C. S. Wortley, who in 1879 and 1880 had studiously refused to make any concessions to win Irish support, told his constituents: "whatever is done with Ireland in the way of remedial legislation - I for one do not deny that such is necessary - some measure of effective coercion should precede"⁵ However, when the Government did attempt remedial legislation, he branded it as "spoiling the fractious child".⁶ The circular of the National Catholic Conservative Association, founded in Sheffield in August, 1882, claimed that "it is to the Conservative party that Ireland can confidently look henceforth for beneficent legislation, but not for outlandish, subversive measures."⁷ But it was precisely these - Home Rule⁸ and the establishment of an Irish peasant proprietary⁹ that the Irish wanted and they could hardly expect to get them from the Tories, who condemned such moderate measures as Gladstone's Government introduced. At a meeting¹⁰ held a few days after the murder of Lord Frederick Cavendish in Phoenix Park, Arthur Thomas attacked the whole Irish policy of the Government, which sought to end the land war in Ireland by the abandonment of coercion and a pact with the Irish leaders, the "Kilmainham system." The differences between the attitudes of the two parties were summed up by the *Independent*: "The issue now is between a policy of conciliation and a policy of exasperation. The Liberals have separated themselves, we hope finally, from the policy of coercion: while the Conservatives are pledging themselves to fresh developments of the Bismarckian system of blood and iron."¹¹

1 S.I., 26.11.1885.

2 S.I., 15.7.1884.

3 J. C. Skinner to H. J. Wilson, 11.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5911.

4 S.I., 19.3.1884.

5 S.I., 4.1.1881.

6 S.I., 6.1.1882.

7 Circular, 16.8.1882, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5911.

8 E.g. Sheffield branch of the Home Rule Confederation. S.I., 23.12.1880.

9 E.g. Sheffield branch of the National Land League of Great Britain. S.I., 13.7.1881.

10 S.I., 10.5.1882.

11 S.I., 6.5.1882.

Politically, the Conservatives were in a strong position insisting on a policy of "resolute government."¹ They could play upon the deep-seated English dislike of the Irish. At a large meeting in Paradise Square in July, 1882, called to discuss Egypt² and Ireland, they succeeded in defeating by a small majority a Liberal amendment expressing confidence in Gladstone's Government.³ Moreover, they could quote the strictures upon Irish policy of the great local Whig landowner, Earl Fitzwilliam.⁴ Fitzwilliam's estates in County Wicklow comprised 91,748 acres, valued at £47,854.⁵ He was a benevolent landlord both in Ireland, where Parnell had praised the conditions on his estates and his tenants had refused to join the Land League,⁶ as well as on the Wentworth estates where tenants had cause to thank him in January, 1882, for remitting the ½ year rent.⁷ Nevertheless, he was appalled by the Land League, the aim of which (the Rev. Father Macdonald told a meeting of the Sheffield branch of the National Land League of Great Britain in July, 1881) was to "root the Irish farmer in the soil."⁸ This was to be achieved by agrarian warfare against Irish landlordism,⁹ which meant an attack upon property rights which landlords, however progressive they were, could not tolerate. In December, 1881, Fitzwilliam subscribed £1,000, a measure of his concern, to the funds of the Irish Property Defence Association,¹⁰ which, he explained in a letter to the Magistrates of the West Riding, aimed "to protect honest tenants from the terrible losses and sufferings caused to them by the newly-invented system of Boycotting "and to force "dishonest tenants" to pay rent by bidding for property which others, under the threat of Land League reprisals, would fear to buy."¹¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that he denounced the "Kilmainham Treaty", which the Government concluded with the very men who had encouraged the land war, and by which they promised to use their influence to bring it to an end, in return for an Arrears' Bill, clearing the arrears of debt before the Land Act came into operation, and an end to Coercion.¹² To many people, this savoured of a surrender to outrage and illegalism. In fact, it put an end to these and made possible a political and constitutional settlement of Irish problems.

The Liberals in Sheffield supported the Government's Irish policy and some Radicals, such as H. J. Wilson, were a good deal ahead of it. In February, 1881, Mundella complained that "friends like yourself seem unwilling either to trust us or to give us time to carry out our work."¹³ Wilson commented in the margin: "I have not expressed any 'mistrust', but extreme regret that the Ministry has not adhered to its promises that redress of wrongs should go before or along with repression."¹⁴ Wilson had expressed his views several months earlier at a large meeting convened by the Anti-Coercion Association, at which T. P. O'Connor, M.P., spoke.¹⁵ A resolution was unanimously adopted expressing "strongest approbation of the conduct of that section of the Cabinet which has resisted the Tory clamour for coercion." But even more interesting is the attitude of the Sheffield Radicals to the Irish land question. Wilson condemned the Irish land system and a motion was put by William Rolley and John Wilson in favour of radical land reform: "without injustice to the existing interests, [to] make the tillers of the soil also owners of the soil."¹⁶ But not all Liberals shared Wilson's faith in the Irish. Leader wrote: "You spoke the other day of our Irish as of a good sort. I am afraid you are mistaken. You see they are bringing that O'Donnell."¹⁷ It seems to me that when they speak us fair they are utterly unreliable and are quite as likely as not to go against us. It is neither right in itself nor good policy to restrain our abhorrence of Irish crimes."¹⁸

In the event, Leader proved quite correct about the political unreliability of the Irish, as was seen in the election of November, 1885, when, under orders from Parnell, they voted against the Liberals in Sheffield.

- 1 Including Coercion.
- 2 It concentrated on Ireland because the bombardment of Alexandria made it impossible for the Conservatives to accuse the Government of not upholding "England's honour".
- 3 *S.I.*, 12.7.1882. The Liberals claimed confusion over the vote.
- 4 *S.L.R.*, 5.5.1882.
- 5 *S.I.*, 18.6.1881.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *S.L.R.*, 17.1.1882.
- 8 *S.I.*, 13.7.1881.
- 9 *S.I.*, 4.11.1881.
- 10 *S.I.*, 9.12.1881.
- 11 *S.I.*, 2.1.1882.
- 12 *S.L.R.*, 5.5.1882.
- 13 A. J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 14.2.1881, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *S.I.*, 4.12.1880.
- 16 *S.I.*, 4.12.1880.
- 17 Probably to the St. Patrick's Day celebrations.
- 18 R. Leader to H.J. Wilson, 7.3.1883, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

THE ELECTIONS OF 1885 and 1886

The defeat in 1880 had shown that if the Liberals were to win back the seat they had lost, a more popular candidate than S. D. Waddy had to be found. The support which he secured from the Wesleyans and the moderate Liberals was more than counterbalanced by his failure with the working men. Indeed, far from gaining in popularity, he "seemed to lose his hold the more, the more speeches he made."¹ His off-hand treatment of the workmen and his inability to excite enthusiasm made him an unsuitable candidate for Sheffield. Mappin confided to H. J. Wilson that he had "always considered the selection unwise",² and it is clear that, with the exception of W. J. Clegg, the rest of the Liberal leadership in Sheffield agreed with him that another candidate should be chosen,³ as they were "unable to find now that Mr. Waddy's name evokes that general satisfaction for which they have hoped."⁴ Waddy sensed this: "it is impossible for me to have any doubt as to the state of feeling amongst some of the party. I am sure that if you are to win you must be hearty and united,"⁵ he told Wilson in April, 1881. He realized that the Liberals would be "more united on some other candidate",⁶ but their tardiness in reaching a decision about the future annoyed Waddy and he wrote angrily to W. J. Clegg: "it is impossible for me to stand for a place where the leaders of the party are opposed to me."⁷ As a result, he severed his connections with Sheffield and in the following year was elected M.P. for Edinburgh with the support of H. J. Wilson's wife's family, the Cowans.⁸

Waddy's successor, the Hon. Bernard Coleridge was a far stronger candidate. Unlike Waddy who had to think of his own career, Coleridge could afford to devote all his time to politics. As he explained to H. J. Wilson, "many lawyers don't mind fighting a losing battle in order to have a 'claim upon the party'. My ambition is in no way professional."⁹ Moreover, Coleridge could afford to pay for his election and, in contrast to Waddy who had little money of his own, would not make heavy financial demands upon the party. His father, for example, promised him £1,000 towards the cost of the election.¹⁰ His popular appeal was far greater than that of Waddy; while Waddy was fussy and cocky, which caused Mundella to regard him as a humbug,¹¹ Coleridge was "quiet, incisive and logical,"¹² young and a good speaker. These qualities, coupled with his thorough Radicalism (Percy Rawson described him as "the nearest representative to Mr. Chamberlain he had ever met"¹³) made him acceptable to the working classes. He believed in manhood suffrage,¹⁴ radical reform of the land laws, reform of county government, popular control of the Drink traffic and, although he was married to a daughter of the Bishop of Oxford, who was also his uncle,¹⁵ the liberation of religion from State control and patronage.¹⁶ As he made clear to the Labour Representation Association, he would not support the payment of M.P.'s, though he approved of working men in Parliament.¹⁷

1 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 19.4.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

2 F. T. Mappin to H. J. Wilson, 4.5.1881, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5937.

3 The question was discussed by R. Leader, F. T. Mappin, Wm. Smith, J. W. Pye-Smith, H. J. Wilson and W. J. Clegg. H. J. Wilson to S. D. Waddy, 28.5.1881, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5937.

4 Note by R. Leader, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5937.

5 S.D. Waddy to H. J. Wilson, 28.4.1881, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5937.

6 S. D. Waddy to R. E. Leader, no date but late June 1881, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

7 S. D. Waddy to W. J. Clegg, 5.10.1881, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5937.

8 The Cowans were paper manufacturers and very influential in Edinburgh politics. See J. Cowan to H.J. Wilson, 28.10.1882, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5937.

9 Hon. B. Coleridge to H. J. Wilson, 10.4.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5940. Bernard Coleridge, 1851-1927: barrister, son of the Lord Chief Justice; 1885-94 M.P. for Attarcliffe; 1894 succeeded to the peerage; 1907-23 Judge of High Court of Justice (King's Bench).

10 Hon. B. Coleridge to H. J. Wilson, 20.4.1884, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5939.

11 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 22.2.1884, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

12 *S.I.*, 17.4.1884.

13 *S.I.*, 30.1.1884. Chamberlain suggested Coleridge as a candidate. J. Chamberlain to H. J. Wilson, 27.12.1883, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

14 Reply to a deputation from the Central Radical Club. *S.I.*, 22.2.1884.

15 Hon. B. Coleridge to H. J. Wilson, 21.1.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5940.

16 *S.I.*, 21.2.1884.

17 *S.I.*, 22.2.1884.

Coleridge's popularity among the working classes can be seen from the support his candidature received from the Labour Association¹ and the Central Radical Club.² It is interesting, however, that at a Council meeting of the Sheffield Liberal Association in February, 1884, a Mr. Hillard of the Working Men's Radical Association expressed the hope "that on some future occasion the Liberal Association would seriously consider the question of having as a candidate one who would directly represent the working classes,"³ as the constituency was largely composed of working men. This foreshadowed the attempts made some twelve months later to secure a working class candidate in the Central. But Coleridge was selected with the working class electors very much in view. He was, in Charles Castle's words, "just the man to go to the working classes in this town, and they were the class to whom they must go."⁴ The Liberals had to make up ground lost by Waddy's candidature and Conservative organization, but W. E. Clegg "was quite sure that a great many of the working men who had gone over to the Conservative side, not because of their political convictions, but upon other grounds, as soon as they saw and heard him would turn round."⁵ But from another point of view, Coleridge lacked some of Waddy's advantages. He was not politically acceptable, because of his Radicalism, to the lukewarm middle class Liberals. When, for example, it was suggested that he might contest Ecclesall, C. T. Skelton explained: "the Liberals of Ecclesall would rejoice in having Mr. Coleridge as a candidate but it was known that Mr. W. Smith and Mr. H. Stephenson would not support him."⁶ But the selection of Coleridge as second Liberal candidate showed that the real strength of the party lay with the working classes and that Liberals were not prepared to jeopardize this, as they had done in 1880, to please the moderates, however much they may have wanted to keep them in the party. There was no place for them in a popular, radical Liberal party and, unless it was popular and radical, it had no future in Sheffield.

The working class leadership was anxious to secure direct labour representation and when Sheffield received five members under the Redistribution scheme, they endeavoured to secure the nomination of at least one working class candidate. Their choice fell upon William Rolley, who was nominated in the "radical labour interest" at a meeting of the joint committees of the Labour Association, the Central Radical Club and the Working Men's Radical Association on 6 March, 1885⁷. Rolley's nomination excited very little enthusiasm among the middle class Liberal leadership and Mundella anticipated all kinds of difficulties. Rolley "can do nothing," he told Leader, "unless somebody finds him money. I doubt whether Sheffield workmen will do this."⁸ However, the labour leaders were receiving encouragement from H. J. Wilson, obviously without Mundella's knowledge, because he felt "sure he has in no way encouraged the action of the Labour party in Sheffield."⁹ In fact, Wilson promised Stuart Uttley, secretary of the Labour Association, that "in the event of Mr. Rolley being adopted as a candidate by the Liberal Association of any of the five divisions, I shall be glad to contribute one fifth part of the Election expenses"¹⁰ and, if elected, "I will contribute towards his maintenance."¹¹ It is clear that most middle class Liberals disliked Rolley's candidature. W. J. Davis, a working man, wrote:

"For myself I confess that the labour party has met with scant encouragement from the liberals excepting from yourself and a few others. Notwithstanding I am of the opinion that all will turn out satisfactorily if the liberals will trust the workingmen to a moderate extent. If on the other hand an overbearing policy is persisted in I fear an unfortunate estrangement the consequences of which may be disappointing to both parties."¹²

1 *Ibid.*

2 Jesse Halliwell to H. J. Wilson, 6.3.1884, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

3 *S.I.*, 29.2.1884.

4 *S.I.*, 30.1.1884.

5 *S.I.*, 29.2.1884.

6 C. T. Skelton to H. J. Wilson, 19.4.1885, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

Charles Thomas Skelton, 1833-1913: spade and shovel manufacturer; served in Town Council for more than 30 years; 1894-95 Mayor; 1897 Knighthood; member of the United Methodist Free Church.

7 *S.I.*, 7.3.1885.

8 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 7.3.1885, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

9 *Ibid.*

10 His share not to exceed £124.

11 H. J. Wilson to S. Uttley, 6.4.1885, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

12 W. J. Davis to H. J. Wilson, 9.3.1885, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

Why was there such opposition to Rolley's candidature? Of course, direct labour representation was a novel conception and it was to be expected that many Liberals would be suspicious of it at first. Also the manner in which the candidature was put forward savoured of dictating to the democratically elected Liberal Association. H. J. Wilson regretted that the Labour Association, the Radical Club and the Working Men's Radical Association "have done a good deal to alienate the sympathies of other sections of the Party of Progress, by combining together in an attitude which seemed to the other sections one of hostility, if not defiance."¹ Moreover, it could be argued that the workingmen themselves were not united behind Rolley's candidature. As early as April, 1885, the Labour Association had quarrelled with the Radical Club and the Working Men's Radical Association.² The difference was that the Labour Association was prepared to work in close co-operation with and accept the decisions of the Liberal Association of the Central Division; they were, as Wilson informed Coleridge, "perfectly loyal to Mundella and yourself," though they considered they were entitled to the third seat.³ The other two bodies, which Wilson described as cliques,⁴ thereby implying that their influence was not great, were much more intransigent. As one of their leaders, Dr. Hardwicke, stated: "they wanted a Radical — not a Whig, or even a moderate Liberal."⁵ They were determined to carry their candidate, Mervyn Hawkes,⁶ with or without the Liberal Association of the Central Division. Indeed, for them "the question was whether the Liberal caucus should rule eternally as a despotic tyrant."⁷ But the effect of the action of these irreconcilables was to undermine Rolley's candidature. He explained the position to Stuart Uttley: "In respect to our position in Sheffield, as a labour association, seeking for direct representation in Parliament, it appears to me that circumstances for the present are not altogether favourable to such an end, in fact those from whom we expected our chief support have so far forgotten the first principles of labour representation as to sink altogether that aspect of the question, and simply concern themselves in striving to gain some ascendancy over the other organizations in the town."⁸ Although such bodies as the Central Radical Club, the Working Men's Radical Association and the Sheffield Labour and Democratic Federation, numbered few members⁹ and had a very limited influence, their defiant and intransigent conduct discredited, if it did not divide, the labour movement. They refused to support Rolley and chose instead Jonathan Taylor.¹⁰ After he had withdrawn,¹¹ they backed Mervyn Hawkes, a radical journalist. Their actions not only torpedoed Rolley's candidature but created further difficulties in the Central for the Liberal party.

The Central Division was a marginal seat in which the Liberals had a chance of success, despite the imperfection of their organization. It was, J. C. Skinner reported, well behind Ecclesall and Hallam but "may pull together if its chairman¹² pushes it."¹³ The real problem was that "it is almost without party leaders."¹⁴ By contrast, the Conservative position was very strong, especially in St. Philip's and St. Peter's, which the *Telegraph* described as the "key-stone" of the Central Division and "which has over and over again in municipal contests exhibited its consistency on the Conservative side."¹⁵ In Howard Vincent, described by Dilke as "the greatest ass out of the House,"¹⁶ the Conservatives had a candidate in the Ashmead Bartlett vein, ideally suited to appeal to the Jingoistic sentiments of Sheffield Toryism. In addition, the Liberals had to contend with the vagaries of the Irish electors.

In these circumstances the choice of candidate was all important. The man chosen was Samuel Plimsoll, who had been president of the Sheffield branch of the Reform League and later, as M.P. for Derby, had led the fight to improve the conditions of merchant seamen. As a veteran Radical, he was acceptable to the majority of the working men, who were influenced by the Labour

1 H. J. Wilson to S. Uttley, 6.4.1885, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

2 H. J. Wilson to Hon. B. Coleridge, 13.4.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5940.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *S.I.*, 24.7.1885.

6 B. 1860, a Radical journalist, who had opposed the return of Ashmead Bartlett at Eye.

7 *S.I.*, 24.8.1885.

8 Wm. Rolley to S. Uttley, 17.8.1885, published in *S.I.*, 19.8.1885.

9 Less than 100 people attended a joint meeting on 22 August. *S.I.*, 24.8.1885.

10 *S.I.*, 19.5.1885.

11 *S.I.*, 14.7.1885.

12 Percy Rawson.

13 J.C. Skinner to H.J. Wilson, 11.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5911.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *S.D.T.*, 9.4.1885.

16 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 23.4.1885, Mundella MSS., S.U.L. Charles Edward Howard Vincent, 1849-1908: after military career, became a barrister; 1878-84 Director of Criminal Investigations, Metropolitan Police; 1885-1908 M.P. for Central Division; 1891 a founder of United Empire Trade League; 1895 Chairman of National Union of Conservative Associations; 1896 Knighthood; 1899-1902 served in South Africa.

Association, which, in Stuart Uttley's words, "numbered amongst its members the most earnest and the most influential of those connected with the various trades unions."¹ The Labour leaders supported Plimsoll partly out of respect for him and loyalty to the Liberal party, partly because Rolley had no chance of success. Rolley withdrew on 18 August, 1885, when Plimsoll agreed to become the candidate,² and for the moment the idea of direct labour representation was shelved. "Trade had been so long depressed," Rolley observed, "that circumstances did not seem altogether favourable for the development of their principles."³ But the Labour Association had made it clear that on a future occasion they expected the promotion of at least one working class candidate.

The ultra Radicals in the Central, however, refused to support Plimsoll and described his candidature as a "miserable and contemptible conspiracy."⁴ For them it was not a case of securing a working class candidate, since Hawkes was a journalist by profession, nor is there any reason to believe that Hawkes was any more radical than Plimsoll. Rather it was a matter of rivalry, a refusal to accept the decisions of the Liberal Association. The leaders of the Central Radical Club — Jonathan Taylor and Dr. Hardwicke — were not working men, though they drew such support as they received from the working classes, but middle class ultra Radicals who were excluded from the official Liberal leadership and whose power they sought to challenge at whatever cost. Hawkes himself wanted to resign — "he felt that he had no sort of right to come there and divide the party" — but they refused to accept his resignation and made it clear that they intended to run their own candidate in the Central.⁵ They also ignored a letter from Bradlaugh advising them, as a minority, to accept the Plimsoll candidature.⁶

It cannot be said that the actions of these few disgruntled Liberals were directly responsible for the Liberal defeat in the Central.⁷ However, elections cannot be interpreted purely in numerical terms. The behaviour of the ultras and the loss of the Irish vote, which the *Independent* considered vital,⁸ had their effect in a division where the Conservatives were already strong with "such hotbeds of Toryism as St. Peter's and St. Philip's Wards."⁹ Moreover, the Liberals were badly organized in the Central, as Skinner had been forced to admit.¹⁰

The Liberals were undecided about their chances in Ecclesall. "What do you say as to Mappin standing for Ecclesall?" Mundella asked. "Is it not hopeless? After the recent Municipal contests in that ward, I fear he has no chance."¹¹ Mundella was referring to the severe defeat which R. E. Leader had suffered in Ecclesall in 1884, but Skinner pointed out that this was nothing to judge by since 4,000 votes were unpolled and Liberal organization in Ecclesall was "fairly good."¹² Ecclesall contained a large number of lukewarm Liberals who needed special handling and who would not support a Radical candidate. It was known, for example, that William Smith and Henry Stephenson would not support Coleridge as a candidate for Ecclesall.¹³ Benjamin Bagshawe, himself a very moderate Liberal, described the type of candidate needed: "If a man like Goschen could be obtained to fight Ecclesall I believe he would win easily. Could Goschen be asked to stand? If he would do so, his influence over the non-descript politicians of Sheffield would be greatly to the advantage of Liberalism."¹⁴

The choice of candidate was far from easy and Mundella told Leader: "I am assured that, on both sides nothing is so scarce as good candidates."¹⁵ In Ecclesall, the Liberals chose Cyril Dodd, a barrister and a grandson of a former Vicar of Sheffield, Dr. Sutton.¹⁶ It became clear that Skinner had been over-optimistic and that Ecclesall was indeed "a Tory stronghold."¹⁷ In the election, Ashmead Bartlett, the ultra Jingo who had been cultivating Sheffield for a number of years, secured a comfortable majority of 692, which was a pure Conservative majority as there were no Liberal divisions and no Irish defection as in the Central.

- 1 *S.I.*, 26.8.1885.
- 2 *S.I.*, 19.8.1885.
- 3 *S.I.*, 26.8.1885.
- 4 *S.I.*, 24.8.1885.
- 5 *S.I.*, 17.9.1885.
- 6 C. Bradlaugh to G. Barber, 6.10.1885, published in *S.I.*, 15.10.1885.
- 7 The voting was: Vincent 4,633 — Plimsoll 3,484 — Hawkes 140.
- 8 *S.I.*, 26.11.1885.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 J.C. Skinner to H.J. Wilson, 11.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5911.
- 11 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 2.3.1885, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 12 J.C. Skinner to H.J. Wilson, 11.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5911.
- 13 C.T. Skelton to H.J. Wilson, 19.4.1885, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 14 B. Bagshawe to H.J. Wilson, 2.2.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5940.
- 15 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 27.5.1885, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 16 *S.L.R.*, 20.7.1885.
- 17 *S.I.*, 26.11.1885. The voting was: Ashmead Bartlett - 4,182 — Dodd - 3,490.

In Hallam, where the sitting member, C. S. Wortley, was the Conservative candidate, Liberal prospects were so bleak that R. E. Leader had great difficulty in finding a candidate. Neither Mundella¹ nor Coleridge² was prepared to oppose Wortley. Indeed, Mundella was thinking about an agreement with the Tories: "I should let Wortley alone – (I am told that there is no chance in the Hallams) – but do so on condition that they leave us alone in Brightside, and, if possible, Attercliffe."³ Coleridge told H.J. Wilson that he was determined to contest Attercliffe despite R. E. Leader's appeal to "my honour, my patriotism, my loyalty and every other conceivable thing to fight Wortley in Hallam."⁴ The Liberals finally chose Sir Charles Warren, an eminent soldier, who, because the seat was such a forlorn hope, received assistance from the Liberal Whip, Lord Richard Grosvenor, towards his election expenses.⁵ As was expected, the Liberals lost, but Wortley's majority was limited to 609,⁶ owing perhaps to his inability as a platform orator.⁷

The real strength of Liberalism, indeed, lay in the working class areas and especially in Brightside and Attercliffe. Here the Tories had no chance. In Brightside, where Mundella was the Liberal candidate, they tried in vain to foment division by encouraging Michael Hunter, the Unitarian manufacturer, to stand as an independent.⁸ Mundella wrote: "I dare say Hunter is not so stupid as he seems. He is, to my mind, the very worst-mannered man I ever met. I am sure everything will be done by the Tories to encourage his weaknesses and to excite his ambition. They hate me."⁹ Hunter, however, could not be induced at this moment to play the Tory game and he withdrew. The election also appears to have healed the wounds caused by Ridge's criticisms of the Brightside Liberal Association. The Tories put one of their strongest candidates in the field, Lord Edmund Talbot, brother of the Duke of Norfolk, but Mundella won easily with a majority of 1,234 votes.¹⁰ In Attercliffe, Coleridge secured a majority of 1,258 over the banker, E. Brodie Hoare.¹¹

The election showed that the Liberals were strong in the east end of the town but, while "the success of Liberalism in previous contests has been largely due to the help of Liberals residing in the east end of the town,"¹² this strength could no longer be used, now that the constituency was divided, to counteract Conservative majorities in the middle class areas of the west. Indeed, counting the votes for the five divisions, the Liberals had an overall majority – 19,776 against 19,594 – so that, as was the case at Leeds, the Liberals would have won both seats in the old undivided constituency,¹³ the *Independent* argued. The size of the poll is evidence of much political interest. The following table shows the relative strengths of the parties, as well as the percentage poll.¹⁴

Division	% Voters		% Poll		
	Libs. %	Tories	Libs. %	Tories	Total %
Central	41 with Hawkes 43	57	35 with Hawkes 36	47	83
Ecclesall	45	55	39	47	86
Hallam	45	55	40	48	88
Brightside	57	43	49	37	86
Attercliffe	57	43	50	37	87

- 1 A. J. Mundella to R. E. Leader, 31.3.1885, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.
- 2 Hon. B. Coleridge to R. E. Leader, 19.4.1885, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.
- 3 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 27.4.1885, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 4 Hon. B. Coleridge to H.J. Wilson, 22.4.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5940.
- 5 R.E. Leader to Francis Wyllie, Liberal Central Office, 21.12.1885, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.
- 6 The voting was: Wortley - 3,764 – Warren - 3,155.
- 7 "Wortley is a very poor talker". A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 27.4.1885, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 8 M. Hunter to H.J. Wilson, 2.12.1884, Wilson MSS., S.U.L., declaring that he would stand "unless a good Sheffield man is brought forward."
- 9 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 21.1.1885, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 10 The voting was: Mundella - 4,616 – Talbot - 3,382.
- 11 The voting was: Coleridge - 4,891 – Hoare - 3,633.
- 12 *S.L.*, 26.11.1885.
- 13 *S.L.*, 26.11.1885.
- 14 Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5914.

The Conservatives did especially well in the Central, a clear 11% ahead of the Liberals, in the Division which had the lowest poll (83%). Indeed, in the event, the Liberals proved stronger in Ecclesall and Hallam, which would seem to vindicate Skinner's contention that they were better organized in these wards than in the Central.¹ However, the result was that the Tories now had a majority of the seats in Sheffield.

If Redistribution had the effect of damaging the electoral prospects of the Liberals in the borough of Sheffield, it had the very opposite effect in the county. The extension of household suffrage to the counties increased the number of voters in the West Riding from 73,218 to 210,142 and in the Southern Division from 27,431 to 92,694.² The Southern division was divided into six single member constituencies. So the size of the electorate and the representation was trebled, and the result was to swing the electoral balance completely in favour of the Liberals. The Sheffield district, for instance, where the Tories had always been very strong,³ became part of the Hallamshire Division, which included such districts as Stannington and Loxley, Chapeltown, Stocksbridge, Ecclesfield, Intake and Wadsley Bridge, where, to judge by the letters of support for F. T. Mappin,⁴ and the size of his majority over Charles Fitzwilliam (2,003), the Liberals were in a majority. The Liberals won all six seats,⁵ with landslide victories in Barnsley, Rotherham and Holmfirth. These compensated to some extent for the disappointments in Sheffield, where Mundella believed that the Liberal position was not irreparable: "Sheffield is surrounded with a broad belt of Liberal constituencies. Surely we shall now do something to reclaim it to its old allegiance? I can never believe but that this could be done."⁶

At the moment when the Liberals were thinking how to improve their position in Sheffield, the party was plunged into crisis by the announcement of Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule for Ireland. In January, 1886, Mundella, President of the Board of Trade, thought that there "never was such an impasse. It seems like a vicious circle from which there is no escape."⁷ The bulk of the Liberal party in Sheffield, however, loyally supported Gladstone and regarded the Home Rule Bill as "a grand, constructive and statesmanlike effort to solve that difficulty for the benefit of both nations, under existing conditions."⁸ On 28 April, 1886, a Liberal meeting was held to support Gladstone's policy which, though "the attendance was not so large as might reasonably have been expected," "was eminently satisfactory as showing that amongst the bulk of the Liberal Party in Sheffield there is no difference of opinion in regard to Mr. Gladstone's proposals."⁹ The Radicals, such as Charles Castle,¹⁰ F. P. Rawson¹¹ and H. J. Wilson were enthusiastically on Gladstone's side and Wilson expressed "the deepest grief and disappointment at the attitude Mr. Chamberlain took up."¹² The Home Rule Bill also received support from the Labour League and Rolley declared at a meeting on 20 May: "in their desire to have the management of their own affairs they (the Irish) had his heartiest sympathy and his most cordial co-operation."¹³ The Liberals were greatly encouraged by the success of Stuart Uttley, who won a municipal contest by twelve votes in that hotbed of Toryism, St. Philip's, on 28 April,¹⁴ which gave a fillip not only to the principle of labour representation, but also to Home Rule.¹⁵

1 J.C. Skinner to H.J. Wilson, 11.7.1885, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5911.

2 *Barnsley Chronicle*, 7.11.1885.

3 The Sheffield district comprised 2,613 voters. *Barnsley Chronicle*, 7.11.1885.

4 *Passim* in Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5913.

5	The voting was:	Doncaster:	W.S. Shirley (L)	—	5,680
			Hon. A.E. Gathorne Hardy (C)	—	4,700
		Barnsley:	C.S. Kenny (L)	—	6,705
			B.C. Wentworth (C)	—	2,722
		Normanton:	B. Pickard (L)	—	5,608
			Col. Charlesworth (C)	—	3,706
		Rotherham:	A. H. Dyke Acland (L)	—	6,301
			Major Hoole (C)	—	2,257
		Hallamshire:	F. T. Mappin (L)	—	6,454
			Capt. Fitzwilliam (C)	—	4,451
		Holmfirth:	H. J. Wilson (L)	—	6,208
			Col. Legge (C)	—	3,164

6 A. J. Mundella to R. E. Leader, 12.12.1885, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

7 A. J. Mundella to R. E. Leader, 7.1.1886, Leader MSS., S.C.L., L.C. 188.

8 *S.I.*, 10.4.1886.

9 *S.I.*, 29.4.1886.

10 C. Castle to H. J. Wilson, 9.4.1886, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5911.

11 F. P. Rawson to H. J. Wilson, 9.4.1886, Wilson MSS., S.C.L., M.D. 5911.

12 *S.I.*, 29.4.1886.

13 *S.I.*, 21.5.1886. Rolley later changed his mind about Home Rule.

14 *S.I.*, 29.4.1886.

15 *Ibid.*

There was, however, an important section of Liberals who refused to accept Home Rule because they believed that it would lead to the destruction of the union of England and Ireland. The Liberal Unionists were led, significantly, by those moderate middle class Liberals who had long been drifting towards Conservatism. They included J. H. Barber, the Quaker who had ceased some years earlier to play any active part in Liberal politics, Michael Hunter, who had almost opposed Mundella in Brightside in the election of the previous year, and the Anglicans, William Smith, Henry Stephenson and Benjamin Bagshawe.¹ For these men, all of whom were prominent and highly respected, Home Rule was the final straw. They could no longer follow Gladstone and with their departure the middle class defection from Liberalism, which had begun in 1868, was complete. For the moment, they scrupulously held aloof from the Tories. At a meeting of the Ecclesall branch of the Primrose League in May, 1886, for example, letters were read from Henry Stephenson, Michael Hunter and William Smith, expressing opposition to the Home Rule Bill but declining to appear at a Conservative meeting.² The question was how numerous were the Liberal Unionists in Sheffield? Commenting on a meeting in June, 1886, to further the candidature of the Liberal Unionist, F. W. Maude,³ at which Lord Hartington spoke, the *Independent* believed that Tories "formed the greater bulk of the audience," while "the apostate Liberals might all have found seats in an ordinary first-class railway carriage."⁴ But the results of the election were to show that although the Liberal Unionists in Sheffield may not have been very vocal, they were far from being an insignificant minority.

The Conservatives in Sheffield were, of course, resolutely opposed to Home Rule.⁵ "The very integrity of the empire itself was threatened at this moment,"⁶ the Duke of Norfolk told a meeting to inaugurate the Primrose League in Sheffield. The Primrose League was an important new development in Conservative organization. Habitations were formed in each of the five Divisions with a General Habitation, of which the Duchess of Norfolk was Dame President and W. C. Leng, Ruling Counsellor. Surrounded by a medieval aura, its aims were, in the Hon. Claude Hay's words, "to maintain religion, the estates of the realm and the Imperial ascendancy of the British Empire."⁷ It was lent prestige by the patronage of the Duke of Norfolk, and Ashmead Bartlett "knew no man in high position who devoted himself so actively to the Conservative cause before the late elections as the Duke of Norfolk."⁸ The second aspect about the Primrose League which is of interest, is that it made a special attempt to attract ladies because, as Samuel Roberts, Junr., told the Hallam Habitation, of "the undoubted influence which many ladies possessed in political matters."⁹ "In municipal elections ladies were important factors, and he thought that should be equally the case in Parliamentary matters",¹⁰ Muir Wilson declared. The Liberals replied to this by setting up the Sheffield Women's Liberal Association, which formed committees to work in the five Divisions.¹¹ These developments were a reflection of the growing interest which women were taking in politics, an interest which was to culminate in the demand for female emancipation.

After the defeat of the Home Rule Bill on 8 June, the Liberals had almost a month to prepare for the election and this time there were no disagreements about candidates. The sitting members, Mundella and Coleridge, contested Brightside and Attercliffe, where the Liberal Unionists ran their only candidate, F. W. Maude. In the Central all Liberals were agreed upon the candidature of Joshua Hawkins of Bedford, a former newspaper proprietor, who was supported by the Council of the Central Liberal Association and by the Central Radical Club.¹² The demands, which the working classes had made for direct labour representation, were recognized by the nomination of T. R. Threlfall of Southport, president of the Trades Congress, as Liberal candidate in Hallam¹³ and of William Owen of Hanley, also a working man, in Ecclesall,¹⁴ though their chances of success in these wards were slim indeed.

- 1 *S.I.*, 29.6.1886. Bagshawe acted as Liberal Unionist agent for Hallamshire & Doncaster Divs. 1885-1905.
- 2 *S.I.*, 27.5.1886.
- 3 F. W. Maude was secretary of the Liberal Unionist Committee.
- 4 *S.I.*, 29.6.1886.
- 5 *E.g.* Conservative meeting chaired by Sir Henry Watson. *S.I.*, 20.4.1886.
- 6 *S.I.*, 18.2.1886.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *S.I.*, 20.5.1886.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *S.I.*, 21.5.1886.
- 12 *S.I.*, 18.6.1886.
- 13 *S.I.*, 19.6.1886.
- 14 *S.I.*, 28.6.1886.

The following table compares the results of the election of 6 July, 1886, with those of the previous November:

VOTING / COMPARISON

Division/Cand.	1885			1886			
	Lib.	Cons.	Maj.	Lib.	Cons.	Maj.	+ -
Attercliffe: Coleridge Hoare Maude	4,891	3,633	1,258	4,365	2,958	1,407	+
Brightside: Mundella Talbot	4,616	3,382	1,234	4,280	3,398	882	-
Central: Vincent Plimsoll Hawkes Hawkins	3,484 140	4,633	1,149	3,326	4,522	1,196	+
Ecclesall: Bartlett Dodd Owen	3,490	4,182	692	2,688	3,930	1,242	+
Hallam: Wortley Warren Threlfall	3,155	3,764	609	2,612	3,381	769	+
TOTALS:	19,776	19,594	182	17,271	18,189	918	+

The most noticeable feature is that in each Division fewer votes were polled than in November, 1885. The size of the electorate was precisely the same (45,722) but in July, 1886, only 35,789 votes were polled against 39,361 in November, 1885. Moreover, the Liberals lost more votes than did the Conservatives, for, while the total Tory vote fell from 19,594 to 18,189, that of the Liberals fell from 19,776 to 17,271, so that the overall Liberal majority of 182 in the previous November became a Conservative majority of 918 in July, 1886. The Liberals polled 2,505 fewer votes, compared with 1,405 fewer for the Tories. To explain this, the *Independent* declared "there have been more Liberal abstentions than we anticipated and in some of the divisions not much enthusiasm was shown for work."¹ Allowing for deaths and removals, which could have been quite numerous as trade was very bad, it is clear that a fairly large number of Liberals abstained because they were unwilling to support Home Rule. In one Division only, the Central, did the Tories receive "a large number of dissentient Liberal votes." Skinner had calculated that the Irish vote numbered 891 and the secretary of the Irish National League informed him that they had polled between 600 and 700 votes for Vincent in November, 1885.² With Irish support, Vincent had polled 4,633, but he managed to poll 4,522 votes without Irish support in July, 1886. Taking 309 as his real majority,³ in November, he increased it to 1,196, in July. Clearly, a fairly large number of dissentient Liberals had voted Tory in the Central, in order to prevent Hawkins being carried with Irish support.

The Irish vote made the Central a special Division. In the other wards, it is clear that while a large number of Liberal Unionists abstained, they did not vote Tory. In Ecclesall, for example, the *Independent* reported that Ashmead Bartlett had been supported by Unionists, such as J. H. Barber and William Smith,⁴ but this support was not translated into votes. Ashmead Bartlett's majority in November of 692 was increased to 1,242, because 802 Liberals did not vote (compared with 252 Tories). Similarly, in Brightside, the Tory vote remained almost constant but Mundella lost 336 votes,

1 S.I., 7.7.1886.

2 J.C. Skinner to H.J. Wilson, 1.6.1886, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

3 This figure is approximate, calculated as follows:

4,633	votes for Vincent
700	- Irish vote (approx.)
3,624	- Liberal vote (Plimsoll) Hawkes
309	majority

4 S.I., 7.7.1886.

though here removals may have been as important as Liberal abstentions. Yet in Brightside and Ecclesall it was not a case of a Tory gain but rather a Liberal loss.

Hallam is interesting because here both the Liberals and the Tories lost a large number of votes. Threlfall polled 543 votes fewer than Sir Charles Warren, which might be attributed to middle class dislike of a labour candidate or abstentions due to Home Rule, but this was evened out by Wortley's loss of 383 votes which is hard to explain. Possibly, some working men, who had previously voted for Wortley, switched their allegiance to the labour candidate or perhaps it was due to over-confidence on the Conservative side.

In Attercliffe, Coleridge succeeded in increasing his majority from 1,258 to 1,407, not because he gained more votes (indeed he lost 526) but because the Liberal Unionist,¹ F. W. Maude, polled 675 fewer than the Conservative, Brodie Hoare, in the previous November. In the county, Liberal Unionist candidates were run in three of the five Divisions contested.² The evidence would suggest that, as was the case at Attercliffe, the Tories were somewhat reluctant to support Unionists. In Rotherham, A.H.D. Acland polled 1,146 fewer votes than in November and, assuming that a fairly large proportion of these were given to the Unionist candidate, F.J.S. Foljambe, this would suggest that he received about half of the Tory votes given for Major Hoole in the previous November. The exception was Doncaster but there the candidate was the Hon. H. Fitzwilliam and the Fitzwilliams were by this time regarded as Tories. In Barnsley and Normanton, the Liberal majorities were reduced, the Tory vote remained more or less constant, which would point to a considerable number of Liberal abstentions.

The reduced Liberal polls in the borough of Sheffield and surrounding districts, therefore, can be explained only in terms of the existence of a not inconsiderable body of Liberal Unionists who abstained but, with the exception of the Central Division where circumstances were special, did not vote Tory. It could be argued that in Ecclesall, for instance, they did not need to vote Tory, as abstention was sufficient to ensure a Liberal defeat in what was already a Tory stronghold, but the Central shows that they were prepared to vote Conservative in order to ensure the defeat of a Home Ruler. Either way, the Liberal Unionists could only help the Tories and damage the Liberal party.

1 At this time they were labelled Paper Unionists.

2 F.T. Mappin unopposed in Hallamshire. Elsewhere:

Rotherham:	A.H.D. Acland (L)	—	5,155
	F.J.S. Foljambe (PU)	—	2,070
Normanton:	B. Pickard (L)	—	4,771
	Col. Charlesworth (C)	—	3,724
Barnsley:	C.S. Kenny (L)	—	5,425
	B.C. Wentworth (C)	—	2,917
Holmfirth:	H.J. Wilson (L)	—	5,322
	W. Armitage (PU)	—	2,780
Doncaster:	W.S. Shirley (L)	—	5,060
	Hon. H. Fitzwilliam (PU)	—	4,792

CONCLUSION

Leeds Liberalism has been described as "a major political force in Britain"¹ in the 1880's. Its Liberal Association took a keen interest in the National Liberal Federation, of which James Kitson of Leeds was president from 1884 to 1890.² By contrast, the Liberal party in Sheffield had been on the defensive since the 1870's and the really decisive date for Sheffield Liberalism was not 1876³ or 1886, but 1868 when the rejection of Roebuck marked the beginning of the middle class defection to Toryism, which continued steadily throughout the next decade.

The repudiation of Roebuck by the progressive Liberals was resented by many moderate middle class ex-Palmerstonians, "timid politicians", who shared Roebuck's dislike of Gladstone and were alarmed by the direction in which the Liberal party was moving under his leadership. They feared far-reaching constitutional change, which Gladstone's policy to disestablish the Irish Church seemed to herald. Toryism was congenial to them not only politically, but also socially, because it was at this time that the social and economic gulf between the middle and working classes in Sheffield was becoming particularly marked. In the light trades there had never been a clear distinction between master and workman, but this was not the case in the rapidly growing steel industry, where there was not merely an economic but a very real social gap between the workmen and the masters and managers. Brightside and Attercliffe became almost exclusively working class residential areas, while the middle classes lived in the pleasant suburbs such as Endcliffe, Fulwood and Nether Edge, at a considerable distance from the centre of industry. The "separation of classes"⁴ introduced an element of snobbery in that it was "not respectable to be on the side of the people"⁵ in politics. The employers who supported Roebuck in 1868 did so because they regarded him as their candidate, while Mundella was the representative of the trade unions. The two forces of Capital and Labour were at enmity, or so it seemed to many of the middle classes who were alarmed by the rise of Organized Labour. This economic and social distrust of the workmen caused many of the middle classes to turn to Conservatism, a process which was not confined to Sheffield. It has been remarked that "the business vote as a whole had been Liberal in the mid-Victorian period. In the big cities it clearly began tipping towards the Conservatives from 1868."⁶ What is distinctive about Sheffield is that the middle class defection was on a large scale and presented very serious political problems for the Liberals at an early date. In Leeds, by contrast, the middle class movement towards Toryism in the residential areas north of the River Aire does not appear to have been marked until the 1880's.⁷

The year 1868 saw the end of an era for the Liberal party in Sheffield which had begun with the election of Roebuck in 1849. The direction and control of the party was in the hands of a group of middle class Liberals, whose influence was based upon their social standing in the town and upon the able journalism of Robert Leader in the *Sheffield Independent*. This Liberal leadership, composed mainly of Nonconformists, was similar to that which controlled Bradford Liberalism — Forbes, Salt, Milligan, Law and Byles — which had "the paramount share in the selection of candidates for the party".⁸ Personal influence was sufficient because, when the electorate was small, an elaborate and professional organization was unnecessary. Within this group there were personal antipathies, such as Dunn's dislike of H. E. Hoole, as well as political differences of opinion. There were disagreements about education between the voluntaryists and the supporters of a state system (which also reflected tensions between Congregationalists and Unitarians) and about the extent of parliamentary reform that was necessary. But these were not serious enough to cause a schism and there were many more questions upon which Liberals were agreed. They were as one in their support for the Crimean War, the China War and the cause of liberty and nationalism in Italy and Poland, and they were staunch Palmerstonians. The bitter antagonism between the Chartists and the moderate Liberals, a legacy of the 1840's, ended with the disappearance of the Democrats in 1854. This threat to the middle class political predominance in Sheffield, which had seemed real enough several years earlier, did not materialize as the Democratic party was torn by internal divisions and was unable to sustain its advanced Radicalism in a period of political calm. Economic prosperity returned and this helped to encourage an indifference to political change. The attendance at a reform meeting in December, 1858, was most disappointing⁹ and Leader observed that "for a long period we have never known a dulness so general and long

1 A.W. Roberts, "Leeds Liberalism and Late-Victorian Politics", *Northern History*, Vol. 5, 1970, p. 136.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 138 - 139.

3 R.T. Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation 1876*, 1963, argues that 1876 was the really decisive year for the Liberal party at the national level.

4 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 3.11.1875, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 A.J. Mundella to H.J. Wilson, 15.9.1881, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.

6 P.F. Clarke, "Electoral Sociology of Modern Britain", *History*, Vol. 57, 1972, p. 48.

7 Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

8 A. Miell, *Life of Edward Miell*, 1884, p. 276.

9 *S.I.*, 11.12.1858.

continued".¹ In contrast to the Chartists, the working class leadership which emerged in the 1860's was much more conciliatory and ready for political compromise. The Reform Leaguers in Sheffield were prepared to support household suffrage in 1867 and William Dronfield co-operated closely with the middle class opponents of Roebuck in the election of 1868. With the exception of the abortive opposition to Roebuck in 1865, the years 1849 to 1868 were a period of strength and success for the Liberal party in Sheffield.

The election of 1868 split the middle class Liberals into the supporters of Gladstone, those who believed, with Samuel Plimsoll, that "we stand upon the threshold of a glorious political day, — its bright dawn is even now about us",² and those who feared the form further change might take. To them the Conservative party appeared "safer"; it could be relied upon not to undermine the Constitution which had, in Roebuck's words, "been built up by the wisdom and gallantry of ages".³ They feared the growth of trade unions and disliked the way the Liberal party appeared to bow to Irish illegalism, English Radicalism and later Russian imperialism. For these reasons many middle class ex-Palmerstonians moved, by way of support for Roebuck, towards Toryism in the next decade. They included most of the principal employers, such as Firth, Jessop and Fisher. In addition, the Drink Trade continued to support Roebuck and became further alienated from Liberalism after the Licensing Act of 1872. The majority of the men of wealth and social position in Sheffield moved gradually towards Toryism, which ensured a plentiful supply of money to spend on organization and elections, as well as the means of exercising political influence — pressure of employers upon workmen, customers upon tradesmen, landlords upon tenants and publicans upon the public house element.

The middle class defection to Toryism was accelerated by divisions in the Liberal party caused by the militant Nonconformist revolt. In Sheffield this was closely connected with the emergence of an advanced Radicalism and with it a "new" leadership, represented by the Wilsons, striving to assert itself, and impatient of the Leader influence. The Radical Nonconformists succeeded in securing the nomination of their candidate, Joseph Chamberlain, in 1874, but the effect of it was to frighten the moderates and let in Roebuck and the Tories.⁴ Leader was probably right in thinking that Allott, a moderate in politics and a well-respected local businessman, would have attracted support from the commercial classes and from those moderates who would not vote for an advanced Radical such as Chamberlain. Allott might have significantly arrested the middle class drift towards Conservatism. The Liberals learnt the lesson of 1874 and they hoped the nomination of S.D. Waddy would attract middle class votes. But by 1879 it was too late.

After the outbreak of the Russo-Turkish war in April, 1877, the Tories in Sheffield seized the political initiative by successfully exploiting the strong Russophobe tradition. There was a great deal of support for Beaconsfield's foreign policy among all classes in Sheffield, upon which the Tories were swift to capitalize. The leading Tories were ready not only to give money for, but also actively to assist in, the work of organization. With a very able agent, J.C. Shaw, public house committees and ward clubs, the Tories developed a highly efficient organization, in marked contrast to the Sheffield Liberal Association which failed to arouse much interest at ward level and was heavily in debt.⁵ Jingoism was exploited to the full by W.C. Leng in the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, which had a circulation and influence in the 1870's which the *Sheffield Independent* could not match.⁶ In April, 1880, Mundella admitted "there is no escaping the conclusion that Leng has grown to be a power in the Constituency, and that worse results will follow unless he is grappled with and beaten".⁷

The middle class defection to Toryism was largely complete by 1880. In 1886 the Liberal Unionists tended to abstain rather than vote Conservative except in the Central Division where the Irish vote was strong. Home Rule cost the Liberals the support of a number of influential men — J.H. Barber, William Smith, Benjamin Bagshawe and Henry Stephenson — whom up to that time the Liberals had just managed to keep in the fold. It has been said that "after 1886 the working class vote was the last best hope of Liberalism"⁸ and certainly in Sheffield the Liberal party relied heavily, if not predominantly, on working class support in Brightside and Attercliffe. The future of Liberalism in Sheffield depended upon continued

1 *S.I.*, 1.1.1859.

2 *S.I.*, 27.3.1868.

3 *S.I.*, 18.1.1872.

4 In Leeds an extreme temperance candidate was nominated, which resulted in the defeat of Edward Baines and the election of a Conservative. A.W. Roberts, "Leeds Liberalism and Late-Victorian Politics", *Northern History*, Vol. 5, 1970, p. 132.

5 Cf. expenses for the elections of 1879 and 1880:

	1879	1880
Liberals	£1,939	£2,542
Conservatives	£3,794	£4,026

S.L.R., 23.2.1880, 1.4.1880.

6 In this respect Sheffield differed from Leeds where the *Leeds Mercury* continued to exercise great influence. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

7 A.J. Mundella to R. Leader, 20.4.1880, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

8 P.F. Clarke, "Electoral Sociology of Modern Britain", *History*, Vol. 57, 1972, p. 49.

working class support and this was recognized in the election of 1886 by the selection of Threlfall and Owen as Lib.-Labs. in Hallam and Ecclesall. The effect of Re-distribution was to weaken the Liberal position because no longer could the large Liberal majorities in the east end of the town offset the Toryism of the west.¹ As a result, the Central, Ecclesall and Hallam became Tory strongholds.

The influence of Nonconformity was the most striking feature of Liberalism in Sheffield in the years 1849 to 1886. Indeed, from the 1790's Dissent had exercised a potent influence on all reform movements, political and humanitarian. The humanitarian reform tradition, of which the most important expression was the Anti-Slavery crusade, underlay the moral reform movements of the second half of the nineteenth century. These included temperance and sabbatarianism closely linked together in the Sunday Closing movement, the agitation for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts and W.T. Stead's campaign for Social Purity, all of which found enthusiastic support in Sheffield. And that support was not confined to the middle classes, for, as Brian Harrison has shown, organizations such as the temperance movement were "pan-class".² Also, in Sheffield, there was a long tradition of co-operation on moral questions, in which politics were not involved, with evangelical Churchmen. Dr. Sale took a keen interest in the Sunday Closing movement and the agitation for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, and Arthur Thomas was a leading member of the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade.

Resentment at the privileged position of the Established Church was at the root of Nonconformist grievances, but it is clear that in Sheffield there was an absence of tension between Anglicans and Dissenters. This was due in part to the Evangelical character of the Church in Sheffield, where High Churchism never gained a foothold. Nonconformists gave hearty support to Vicar Sutton when he refused to admit Mr. Trevor to his pulpit, and they did not criticize the Church as a spiritual institution. It is also apparent that the Church in Sheffield was very strong, as can be seen from the "religious census" taken by the *Sheffield Independent* in November, 1881:³

DENOMINATIONS	Places of Worship	Sittings	PRESENT			TOTAL
			Morning	Afternoon	Evening	
Established Church	50	32,501	13,385	2,028	18,739	34,152
Wesleyan	29	14,942	5,065	—	6,825	11,890
Independent	22	11,248	3,012	—	4,714	7,726
United Methodist	15	8,178	2,850	—	4,296	7,146
Roman Catholic	6	2,965	3,852	—	1,871	5,723
Primitive Methodist	25	8,604	1,890	96	4,285	6,271
Salvation Army	4	2,800	579	1,381	2,155	4,115
Baptist	6	3,200	1,205	—	2,001	3,206
New Connexion	12	5,342	1,034	—	1,692	2,726
Wesleyan Reform	15	3,720	785	—	1,649	2,434
Unitarian	2	1,100	421	—	767	1,188
Presbyterian	2	540	230	—	253	483
Minor Denominations	11	1,760	886	—	1,230	2,116
TOTAL	199	96,900	35,194	3,505	50,477	89,176

Out of a total of 89,176 attendances at a place of worship, 34,152 were at Anglican Churches, of which there were 50, while 55,024 were recorded at the 149 Non-Established Churches.⁴ Moreover, there were no major changes from 1851 except "a significant loss of the Wesleyans to other Methodists and the rise of the Salvation Army".⁵ There was a thriving Anglican community and it was not confined to the middle classes. The Working Men's Church Defence and Reform Association could muster as many, if not more, workmen to defend the Establishment as the Liberation Society could bring to vote for Disestablishment. The majority of Anglicans in Sheffield were inclined towards Conservatism, as were many Wesleyans. The candidature of S.D. Waddy did not seem materially to arrest this. The strong Tory bias of Anglicans and

1 The situation was similar in Leeds. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

2 B. Harrison, *Drink and The Victorians. The Temperance Question in England 1815 - 1872*, 1971, p. 27.

3 *S.L.R.*, 20.11.1881.

4 The figures must be treated with caution because it is impossible to say how many people attended more than once and how many were present at the services of more than one denomination.

5 S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, Liverpool, 1959, p. 117.

Wesleyans, who together accounted for over half the Church-going population in Sheffield, as well as the Catholics, many of whom no doubt joined the National Catholic Conservative Association, provided Conservatism with a religious base at least as strong as that which Nonconformity gave to Liberalism.

The impact of Nonconformity was reduced by lack of unity. The Methodists were divided into no fewer than five churches. The hostility between Independents and Unitarians, much of it the product of long years of legal strife for possession of chapels, was apparent in their disagreements about education. Most Congregationalists were voluntarists, while many Unitarians supported a state system of education in the 1850's. In Sheffield, Unitarians, unlike the Congregationalists, were not prominent teetotalers or sabbatarians. A number of Unitarians who had been moderate Liberals in the 1850's and 1860's, such as William Fisher, Thomas Jessop and Robert Jackson, moved after 1868 towards Toryism by way of support for Roebuck. They were members of established Upper Chapel families and in the first half of the nineteenth century Unitarians such as Thomas Asline Ward, William Fisher, Senr., and Edward Bramley had been prominent in the Liberal leadership. The Unitarian defection to Toryism in Sheffield is in marked contrast to Birmingham where the main Unitarian families provided the core of the Liberal leadership in the 1870's. It is also noticeable that no Nonconformist minister in Sheffield achieved the national repute of Dale, Dawson or Crosskey. Nonconformity in Sheffield was prevented from becoming too militant by the influence of moderates such as Robert Leader, J.W. Pye-Smith, Alfred Allott and the Rev. Robert Stainton, and, though its influence upon Liberalism was very great, Sheffield was spared the type of bitter sectarian conflict such as occurred in Birmingham over the education question.

So many Nonconformists were Liberals because it was the broad aim of Liberalism to secure complete civil and religious equality. Liberalism meant progress and advancement, from which Dissenters stood to benefit because of the civil disabilities they suffered. In Chamberlain's words, Liberalism stood for "the relief from every unnecessary restriction upon liberty, devised by priest or politician, the removal of every obstacle to the free development of the nation, the repeal of the last hindrance to its continued social, political, religious and intellectual progress and advancement".¹ Change, progress, onward movement was the essence of Liberalism. While the Tories stressed "the value of the historical continuity of our institutions",² the Liberals were not concerned with the past. Hadfield declared: "Away with the past. There is nothing done while anything remains to be done. The progress hitherto is not to guide and govern the progress for the future".³ Liberalism and Nonconformity aimed to achieve complete individual liberty. Robert Leader expressed it thus: "What English Nonconformity has been struggling for during these two centuries past, consciously or unconsciously, has been to assert the inherent right of the human intellect to the most absolute freedom and the most perfect development of its capacities and powers, and to attain the practical realisation, in fullest completeness, of political, social and moral justice as between man and man".⁴ If Liberal Nonconformists looked back at all, it was to Oliver Cromwell and the Commonwealth. In the 1850's and 1860's most Liberals believed that the liberty of the individual was best secured by keeping State interference to a minimum. There was a universal dread of centralization and centralizing legislation, which stemmed from a resentment of the aristocracy's control of government. In time, the older Liberals in Sheffield saw the necessity for state intervention in certain spheres. Robert Leader had been a strict voluntarist, but by 1870 he admitted the need for a State system of education because "denominational education had not done enough, and what it had done was not good enough".⁵ Of course, a section of Liberals, sabbatarians and teetotalers, demanded legislation, though they tended to regard it as symbolic, an expression of public morality, rather than something to be rigidly enforced. Temperance advocates, however, had a positive conception of the role of the State, a belief that it had a duty to protect people against their worst impulses and that compulsion was sometimes needed to make possible perfect individual liberty, which was impossible without physical well-being and moral contentment.

Liberals believed that England was entrusted with a sacred task, that it had a "mission" to encourage liberal movements and liberal institutions abroad. They were sincere in their sympathy for oppressed nationalities, such as Hungary, Poland and Italy, which were struggling for freedom. A number of Liberals regarded the Confederacy in the same light, believing that the North was treating the South as Russia treated Poland, though this view was not shared by those Liberals who saw the American Civil War as an anti-slavery crusade. These men were steeped in the humanitarian reform tradition and were abolitionists and often teetotalers also. Nor was this view shared by those Liberals who saw the war as a vindication of democratic principles.

In the 1850's Russophobia was very strong and Sheffield Liberals were unanimous in their support for the Crimean War. However, twenty years later when Beaconsfield tried to pursue the traditional anti-Russian and pro-Turkish policy in the Near East, Liberals condemned it as opportunist and immoral. They believed that

1 S.I., 2.1.1874.

2 C.B.S. Wortley's words. S.I., 9.12.1879.

3 S.I., 12.7.1865.

4 S.I., 20.5.1871.

5 S.I., 18.1.1870.

England should co-operate with the Concert of Europe and particularly Russia, her old enemy, to secure self-government for the Balkan States. They repudiated diplomatic and political considerations (though it was a far sounder policy which the Liberals were advocating than to prop up a rotten Ottoman Empire) and insisted that moral considerations, questions of right and wrong, should govern foreign policy. A nation should behave like any individual; H.J. Wilson said "he had yet to learn that that which was morally wrong in private life was right for them to do as a nation".¹ This moralistic view of foreign policy owed much to Gladstone, but it was also a product of the impact upon Liberalism of the Non-conformist Conscience. Yet it presented the Liberals with serious political problems. Sheffield was probably the most important centre of the Urquhart movement, which affected a section of the working classes, and the Tories could exploit the Russophobe tradition which it had helped to nurture. Jingoism, though superficial, was nonetheless vote-catching, and it was easy, in the aftermath of the glamour of Beaconsfield's imperial policy, to accuse the Liberals of failing to uphold British honour and neglecting vital interests abroad. But the Liberals were not deterred by the fact that their foreign policy had less "popular" appeal. With Gladstone they believed that political party was "an instrument to be used for good ends, for ends higher than itself."² No better example could be found of the influence of Nonconformity upon the development of Liberalism than the belief, expressed by the Rev. J.C. Calvert, that "Bible laws are applicable alike to Governments and individuals".³

Sheffield Liberalism was not affected to any great extent by outside influences. In the 1850's the Manchester School did not make much impact. Roebuck disliked the Manchester reformers and although Hadfield's links with them were close, it must be remembered that he belonged to a prominent Sheffield family. The National Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association achieved very little success in Sheffield and Sheffield Liberals rejected Bright's views of the Crimean and China Wars. Edward Smith, who supported Cobden and Bright and upheld the doctrines of the Peace Society, found it impossible to continue to play an active part in Sheffield politics in the 1850's. While the Manchester School was strongly pro-Federal in the American Civil War, in Sheffield there was a good deal of support for the Confederacy. The Manchester-based National Reform Union, which was strong in Bradford,⁴ does not appear to have been active in Sheffield. However, the influence of the Manchester School can be detected in the emphasis Sheffield Liberals placed upon national economy and in the interest which they took in the Freehold Land movement.

In the 1870's the militant Nonconformists in Sheffield were closely associated with Birmingham and the influence of Birmingham can be clearly seen in the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee, the Sheffield Reform Association and the Chamberlain candidature, as well as in the formation of the Sheffield Liberal Association. But Sheffield differed markedly from Birmingham in that Sheffield Liberalism never found expression in civic pride or the formulation of a civic gospel.⁵ Moreover, there was opposition in Sheffield to what was seen as excessive interference by Birmingham. Birmingham's intervention in the affairs of the Sheffield Branch of the National Education League caused much resentment and to many Liberals the Chamberlain candidature savoured of Birmingham dictation. Leader and Mundella both disliked Chamberlain,⁶ and the National Liberal Federation. As was the case at Leeds,⁷ the bulk of the Liberal leadership supported Gladstone over Home Rule in 1886 and H.J. Wilson, whose links with Birmingham Liberalism had been very close, expressed great regret at the course Chamberlain had taken on the question.

The individual who exercised most influence upon Liberalism in Sheffield in this period was Robert Leader. Describing a meeting in December, 1873, to support the candidature of Alfred Allott, the *Sheffield Post* declared: "there is not another gentleman on that platform who knows more of the ins and outs of Liberal tactics in Sheffield for the last decade. He knows all the secrets of the party, and they don't know all his — which is a great advantage."⁸ Leader was active in Sheffield politics from the Reform Act of 1832 until his death in 1885. He was editor of the *Sheffield Independent* for over forty years and president of the Sheffield Liberal Association from 1875 until 1885. He was unequalled in his grasp of the Sheffield political situation. He realized the implications for the Liberal party of the middle class defection to Toryism and that defection might possibly have been arrested had the Radicals accepted Allott or Mappin as candidates, as Leader suggested. His son described him as a man of "unfailing activity, earnestness of purpose and

1 *S.I.*, 23.2.1881.

2 *S.I.*, 1.6.1877.

3 *S.I.*, 6.2.1880.

4 D.G. Wright, *Politics and Opinion in Nineteenth Century Bradford, 1832 - 1880, (With special reference to Parliamentary elections)*, Leeds Ph.D. Thesis, 1966, p. 661.

5 What signs there were of an awakening civic consciousness in Sheffield in the 1870's came from men such as Firth and Jessop whose politics were Tory.

6 As did T. Wemyss Reid, editor of the *Leeds Mercury*, because of his attacks on Gladstone at Sheffield in 1874. A.W. Roberts, "Leeds Liberalism and Late-Victorian Politics", *Northern History*, Vol. 5, 1970, p. 143. With reference to the Bradford Caucus, Reid wrote: "experience shows that the result of the elections of associations of this description is to place power almost entirely in the hands of a small body of active men, for the most part holding extreme views on political questions". T. Wemyss Reid, *Life of the Rt. Hon. W.E. Forster*, 1888, Vol. 2, p. 207.

7 Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

8 *S.P.*, 13.12.1873.

unimpeachable integrity",¹ with a stern countenance, yet generous and warm-hearted. A.J. Mundella valued his friendship very highly. The *Sheffield Illustrated* considered that "his inexhaustible energy, his rare capacity for work, his untiring perseverance, his clear knowledge of what he aimed at, and his determination to have it, made him invaluable as a party leader".² On his death, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* said that "looked at from whatever point of view, regarded in the light of a friend or an opponent, he was a man who played for half a century an important part in the history of his native town, and whose work and character loom large in the eyes of his fellows".³

In 1886 the prospects for the Liberal party in Sheffield were not bright. The Tories held three of the five seats. They had a most influential newspaper, plenty of money and excellent organisation. Toryism had captured "Radical" Sheffield and its future was assured because it was now unassailably the party of the rich and influential. At all costs the Liberals had to keep the support of the working classes.

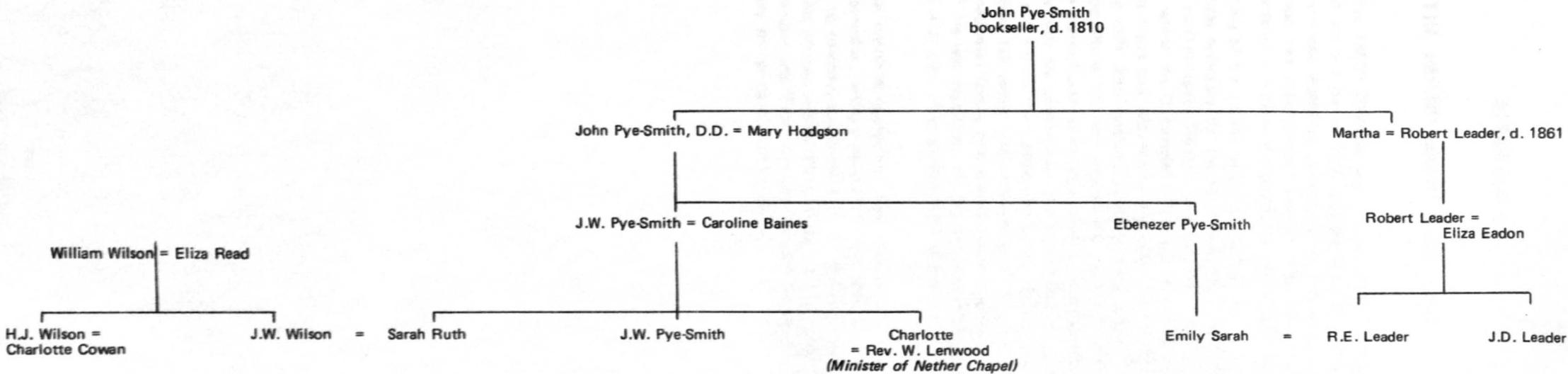
1 R.E. Leader, *Memoir of Robert Leader*, S.C.L., p. 2.

2 *Sheffield Illustrated*, Vol. 2, p. 118.

3 Quoted in W. Odom, *Hallamshire Worthies*, Sheffield, 1926, p. 15.

APPENDIX A

THE PYE-SMITH, LEADER AND WILSON FAMILIES¹



¹ Footnote This has been compiled to show the family connections of three of the leading Liberal families in Sheffield. It is not, of course, a complete family tree,

APPENDIX B

THE IMPROVEMENT BILL, 1858

There is no doubt that in the 1850's Sheffield was a very unhealthy place in which to live, Disease had been rife in the town in the autumn of 1857 and attention was fixed on sanitary conditions; the *Sheffield Times* commented: "Increased attention to sanitary regulations is a lesson brought home to us by every sickly season".¹ An important attempt was made in 1858 to introduce an Improvement Bill and the great opposition which it encountered illustrates the problems facing sanitary reformers in this period.

On 5 May, 1858, at a meeting of the Improvement Commissioners, it was resolved, by a majority of 15 to 7, that an Improvement Bill was necessary for the town.² Robert Leader spoke in favour of the bill which was strongly opposed by the ex-Democrats, Ironside and Saunders, who argued that it was unnecessary. Their objections, substantially those which the Democrats had raised against the Improvement Bill of 1851, are contained in a report read by Saunders and adopted by the Sheffield Highway Board on 2 June;³ it argued that "the bill will do away with time-honoured vestries, where the ratepayers have complete and effective control over the yearly expenditure, and will enlarge the powers of the corporation, which body, to a considerable extent, is beyond the control and supervision of the burgesses, and already proved to be ineffective where important improvements are concerned." The report stressed that Improvement should be left to the owners of property and not fall on the ratepayers, whose rates were already high enough. Finally, it considered that the proposed bill would give excessive powers to police and magistrates. Leader argued that the bill was not concerned with laying new streets, as its opponents implied, but with the very serious problem of sewage disposal.⁴ He was supported by the veteran sanitary reformer, Dr. G. C. Holland, William Harvey, Ald. F. Hoole⁵ and Ald. Carr. A guarantee fund was founded to meet the cost of the proposed measure.

But the bill met with almost universal opposition. The vestries and Highway Boards rejected it⁶ and in the municipal elections in November, sanitary reformers were defeated in every contest.⁷ The vestries and Highway Boards were unwilling to sanction any diminution of their authority, while the majority of the ratepayers opposed the bill, partly, no doubt, because they feared for their property rights, partly because it would increase the rates. On 9 November, the Town Council resolved to abandon the Improvement Bill.⁸ Sheffield was not yet prepared to pay the price of public health.

1 *S.I.*, 25.12.1857

2 *S.I.*, 8.5.1858

3 *S.I.*, 5.6.1858

4 *S.I.*, 19.6.1858

5 Brother of H. E. Hoole.

6 *S.L.R.*, passim

7 *S.I.*, 6.11.1858

8 *S.L.R.*, 9.11.1858

APPENDIX C

SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS, 1878-1885

The three elections for the Sheffield School Board which took place between 1870 and 1879 were fought on denominational lines, the candidates standing as representatives of particular combinations. This was encouraged by the cumulative system of voting, which gave to each voter a block of votes equivalent to the number of members to be elected. Since votes might be given to one candidate or split, this meant that the most 'popular' candidate did not top the poll, so that a man might be elected to the Board though his supporters might be few. In fact the entire Board was elected by a minority of the burgesses. In 1870 there were 15,453 voters and in 1879 the number had dwindled to 13,132 out of a total of 48,000 burgesses.² In the election of 1876 the Liberal Association suggested a scheme of voting to secure the election of its candidates³ and the Conservative party organisation was active in 1879.⁴ But denominational and political considerations, important though they were, did not affect the quality of the Sheffield School Board to which its achievements bear ample testimony.

Study of the analysis of the election of 1870, published in the *Sheffield Independent* on 30 November, 1870, shows how the cumulative vote worked in practice. M. J. Ellison, a Roman Catholic and the steward of the Duke of Norfolk's estate in Sheffield, topped the poll with a total of 17,057 votes, but of these 13,485 were plumpers, as indication that most Roman Catholic voters gave him all their 25 votes. It seems that the Primitive Methodists solidly supported R. W. Holden, a cattle dealer, who received 5,580 plumpers out of a total of 9,303. On the Board there were 4 Churchmen, 1 United Methodist Free Churchman, 3 Wesleyans, 1 New Connexion Methodist, 1 Primitive Methodist, 1 Friend, 2 Unitarians, 1 Independent and 1 Roman Catholic. Three successful candidates, Alfred Allott, R. T. Eadon and Charles Wardlow had been supported by the National Education League.⁵ The denominationalists were in a majority but this did not prevent them from carrying out the Act with fairness and tact.

A denominational majority on the School Board meant a sympathetic attitude to denominational schools⁶ and an enforcement of the 25th Clause of the Education Act. The militant Nonconformists were determined to secure a majority in the election due to be held in 1873, although Mundella was unable to see "what possible advantage can accrue to Education or to Nonconformity from a virulent contest."⁷ However, on 20 August, 1873, the Sheffield Nonconformist Committee resolved "that it is desirable in the prospect of a School Board election to put forth a number of candidates in the interests of a National system of unsectarian education."⁸ A sub-committee was established,⁹ which conferred with the Sheffield Reform Association, the Trades' Council and the National Education League, and at a joint meeting eight candidates were selected, the so-called "Undenominational Eight".¹⁰ These were Alfred Allott, Batty Langley, H. J. Wilson, Charles Doncaster, Thomas Fenton, R. W. Holden, William Rolley and the Rev. Isaiah Parton.¹¹ The policy of the "Undenominational Eight" was moderate: they favoured Bible teaching in the Board Schools, more unsectarian schools and "the gradual absorption of denominational schools",¹³ and it seemed as though they would be successful, because William Fisher, a member of the old Board, and S. H. Burrows, another prominent candidate, were also in favour of undenominational education.¹⁴ But their hopes were frustrated because, owing to a confusion over nominations, no election took place on 20 November, 1873, and the existing Board re-elected itself for a further three years,¹⁵ amidst a storm of protest.¹⁶

- 1 Exceptions were John Wilson, an Eclectic, elected in 1876, and Jonathan Taylor, Undenominationalist, elected in 1879.
- 2 *S.I.*, 24.11.1879
- 3 *S.I.*, 1.11.1879
- 4 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 25.11.1879 Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 5 *S.I.*, 11.11.1870
- 6 Cf. Michael Beal's demand in 1870 for "a School Board who would put down denominationalism" *S.I.*, 12.11.1870
- 7 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader, 30.10.1873, Mundella MSS., S.U.L.
- 8 Minute Book, 20.8.1873, Wilson MSS., S.U.L.
- 9 Consisting of H. J. Wilson, D. T. Ingham and the Rev. Messrs. J. Fisher, R. Chew, W. Peppercorn, J.M. Stephens and G. Knight. Minute Book, 24.10.1873.
- 10 *S.I.*, 1.11.1872
- 11 Allott, Langley, Wilson and Parton were Congregationalists, Doncaster a Friend, Fenton and Rolley Methodist Free Churchmen and Holden a Primitive Methodist.
- 13 *S.I.*, 24.11.1873.
- 14 *Ibid*
- 15 See J. H. Bingham, *The Sheffield School Board, 1870-1903*, Sheffield, 1949, pp 10-13.
- 16 Minute Book of Sheffield Nonconformist Committee, 1.12.1873.

The School Board election of 1876 is of particular interest because of the active intervention of the Liberal Association. It suggested a scheme of voting in the wards to ensure the return of its selected candidates. It was based on giving the candidates blocks of five votes. The three special candidates of the Association were Batty Langley, William Rolley and H. J. Wilson, who owed their return to the scheme. Almost two thirds of the total number of votes H. J. Wilson received were in blocks of five. Other candidates supported by the Association were Mark Firth, Charles Doncaster and Skelton Cole. But two of its candidates, William Fisher and R. W. Holden, were not returned because, Leader believed, of the apathy of the burgesses.¹ Three members of the old Board who offered themselves for re-election were not returned, and several candidates owed their return to the support of comparatively few burgesses. Leader was pleased with the outcome of the election: "the new Board, as a whole, will be quite as Liberal and quite as competent to superintend the work of education as the old one. The balance of advantage, therefore, lies slightly on the side of undenominational teaching, and as such we regard the result with satisfaction. It shows that the reactionary policy which led to the clerical revolt and the nomination of clerical candidates failed to command general sympathy."² On the new Board there were 4 Churchmen, 2 Wesleyans, 1 Methodist New Connexion, 1 Wesleyan Reformer, 1 Methodist Free Churchman, 1 Roman Catholic, 1 Baptist, 1 Friend, 2 Independents and 1 Eclectic.

The Liberal Association did not take any part in the adoption or support of candidates in the School Board election of 1879,³ though Liberals were keenly interested in it. Leader thought the result "gratifying", although the success of Alfred Taylor was an indication that the Conservative organisation was becoming more effective.⁴ The successful candidates, with their denominations, were:

Batty Langley,	Independent	20,112
S. H. Burrows	Wesleyan Reformer	14,937
Jonathan Taylor	Undenominationalist	13,978
John Wilson	Eclectic	13,403
H. J. Wilson	Independent	13,224
Canon Blakeney	C. of England	13,167
A. Taylor	C. of England	12,681
M. J. Ellison	Roman Catholic	12,219
C. Doncaster	S. of Friends	11,469
S. Cole	Wesleyan	11,339
E. Tozer	C. of England	10,867
R. W. Holden	Primitive Methodist	9,612
H. Stephenson	C. of England	9,023
J. Newbould	C. of England	9,019
H. M. Shera	Wesleyan	8,263

The analysis⁵ shows that two candidates, Ellison and J. Taylor, owed their election to plumpers. Ellison had 10,890 plumpers out of 12,219 votes so that nearly 5/6 of his total represented the votes of 728 burgesses. It is also noticeable that the Anglican candidates received large blocks of 3 votes, which would suggest that the Anglican-Conservative vote was split among the five candidates equally in blocks of three, similar to the scheme adopted by the Liberal Association in 1876.

The School Board elections of 1882 and 1885 show how in the 1880's the political spirit became more and more infused unto local matters. In 1882 the "Church and Conservative Eight"⁶ contested the election on a programme "strongly opposed to a Classical Education being paid for out of the rates" and which "will support a policy of supplementing, not supplanting, the present existing Voluntary Schools."⁷ The reference to "Classical Education" was a blow struck at the Central Schools, established by the previous Board on which the denominationalists were in a minority, and which provided higher education for intelligent children from Board schools. But in the election the undenominationalists secured a majority.⁸ The supporters of unsectarian education cast their votes in blocks of three for the five unsectarian candidates — Mrs. S. R. Wilson, J. D. Leader, C. Doncaster, H. J. Wilson and W. E. Clegg, all on whom were elected. Of the "Church and Conservative Eight" Joseph Mellows, Benjamin Fletcher, S. H. Ward (whose candidature was also backed by the Drink interest), the Rev. James Gilmore and John Newton Coombe were elected, which, with the Catholic member, the Rev. Luke Burke, placed the denominationalists in a minority of 6 to 9.

In the School Board election of 1885 the Conservative and Church party were successful and the majority was exactly reversed. Their success illustrates the strength of Conservatism and the sophistication of its organisation, because, with the exception of the Rev. Luke Burke, most of whose votes were plumpers, the denominationalists polled most voters.⁹

1 *S.I.*, 28.11.1876

2 *S.I.*, 23.11.1876

3 *S.I.*, 1.11.1879

4 A. J. Mundella to R. Leader 25.11.1879 Mundella MSS., S.U.L.

5 *S.L.R.*

6 Comprising J. Mellows, B. Fletcher, Rev. J. Gilmore, M. J. Ellison, S. H. Ward, J. N. Combe, J. Binney and A. G. Winnill

7 *S.I.*, 14.11.1882

8 *S.I.*, 23.11.1882. 16,056 ratepayers voted (49,118 on list) Cf when 13, 132 voted (48,000 on list)

9 *S.L.R.*

APPENDIX D

SHEFFIELD LIBERAL ASSOCIATION

OBJECTS

- 1st.— To secure the Liberal representation of the Borough.
- 2nd.—To assist in obtaining the return of Liberal Members for the County.
- 3rd.—To promote the adoption of Liberal principles in the Government of the country.

CONSTITUTION AND LAWS MEMBERS

I.—The Members of this Association shall consist: Firstly, of all Liberals who are subscribers of one shilling per annum or upwards to the funds of the Association, and, Secondly, of representatives elected as hereinafter described. A declaration of adhesion to the objects and organization of the Association shall be signed by all persons wishing to become Members, and by all Members of the Council and Committees. If any representative refuses, or neglects when asked, to sign such declaration, his election shall be void.

GENERAL MEETINGS

II.—An Annual General Meeting of the Association for the transaction of general business, shall be held at such period as shall be fixed by the Executive Committee; and a Special General Meeting shall be convened by the vote of the Executive Committee, or when required, by a notice signed by not less than forty Members of the Association. Such annual or special General Meetings shall be called by advertisement, or circular, or both.

COUNCIL

III.—The Council shall consist: Firstly, of representatives elected at Public Ward Meetings of Liberals (*), in the proportion of one representative for every 200 electors on the Parliamentary lists for the respective wards (+); Secondly, of fifty representatives elected at the (†) Annual General Meeting of the Association; Thirdly, of the ten Members of the Executive Committee elected under Rule V; and, Fourthly, of the officers elected under Rule IV.

OFFICERS

IV.—The Officers of the Association shall be a President, four Vice-Presidents, Treasurer, and Honorary Secretary, to be elected at the first meeting of the Council in each year.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

V.—The Executive Committee shall consist: First, of the officers elected under Rule IV. Second, of two Members elected annually by each ward, at public ward meetings of Liberals from the representatives then elected to the Council. Third, of ten Members elected by the Council (//)

WARD COMMITTEES

VI.—There shall be a Committee for each ward, consisting, Firstly, of the representatives of that ward on the Council; and secondly of such other Members of the Council as may be ratepayers or residents in that ward.

FUNCTIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND COUNCIL

VII.—The general business of the Association shall be conducted by the Executive Committee, but any subject may be transferred from its decision to that of the Council, on the requirement of not less than one-third of the Members present; and the choice of Parliamentary Candidates for the Borough shall be made by the Council only.

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

VIII.—A meeting of the Council shall be called by the Executive, to consider any special subject, on receipt by the Secretary of a requisition signed by not less than twenty of its Members.

* *By this arrangement the Liberals of Sheffield as a body are recognised as the constituency of the Liberal Association. All Liberals are invited to take part in these meetings, whether personal members of the association or not, while any who may not be satisfied with the proceedings of the Association may promote the election of those in whom they have confidence.*

+ *The number of members elected under this clause in 1876 was 202; in 1877, it was 206, owing to the growth of the borough.*

† *It is the object of this provision to secure the assistance of many active and useful adherents of the Liberal party, who may fail to secure election in the Ward meetings, either by accident or from not being sufficiently known.*

// *A similar explanation to that in the last preceding note applies to this addition of ten members to the Committee*

MODE OF CALLING WARD MEETINGS

IX.—All Ward Meetings for the purpose of electing Members of the Committees of this Association shall be called by Advertisements and such other means as the various Ward Committees may deem necessary.

ALTERATIONS

X.—No alteration shall be made in these laws except at an annual or specific General Meeting, and notice of any alteration shall be given at least seven clear days before such Meeting, and the notice shall be inserted in the advertisement or circular calling such Meeting.

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