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## GLADSTONE IN WEST DERBY HUNDRED: THE LIBERAL CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH-WEST LANCASHIRE IN 1868

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THE phrase "turning-point", so often used by historians, is I think justified as a description of the years between 1865 and 1870. For in that quinquennium changes occurred which in their full development were completely to alter the political and economic structure of Britain. The most important of these changes, and the one most relevant to this paper, was the passing of the Reform Act of 1867. This was surely comparable in importance with the more famous Great Reform Act of 1832: the earlier act enfranchised the middle classes and introduced the revolutionary principle that the British electoral system was not inviolable and sacrosanct, but could be altered by the will of parliament, and the act of 1867 began a new era in British history. By the enfranchisement of "£12 occupiers" in the county constituencies and all householders and "£10 lodgers" in the boroughs large sections of the lower-middle and working classes were for the first time, as Gladstone put it, brought "within the pale of the constitution".

After the first Reform Act the political parties had founded constituency associations and central offices so that they could more effectively capture the new voters; after 1867 it became increasingly obvious that to gain votes the parties had to democratise at least part of their structure. This new electoral technique was a new application of the ideas which had informed the 1867 act. But many who had accepted the act rejected the technique: some because they were reluctant democrats in any case, but others because it conflicted with the prejudices of middle-class voters, and of the landowners whose electoral influence had for so long been relied upon. In South-West Lancashire in 1868, the resolution of this conflict in a timorous and conservative way helped to defeat courageous and liberal ideas.

Another result of the act of 1867, though the connection is subtle and obscure, was the increase in the tendency of each party to unify its policy—to define it more closely and distinguish it more sharply from its opponent's. It is not merely a coincidence that in 1868, for the first time, all Liberal candidates were united in asking the electorate to approve a definite Liberal policy, the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, and that all Conservatives were united in calling for its rejection. A united Liberal policy had to be presented in a national campaign: those who ran Gladstone's personal struggle in South-West Lancashire realised that it must inspire the party's battle in the rest of Britain, and that Gladstone's speeches on the great topic must be printed and circulated to all constituencies. It is a paradox that in the election which is discussed in this paper those who grasped the need for a national campaign failed to see that the new electors, if their votes were to be gained, would have to be brought within the pale not only of the constitution but of the political parties too.

#### I GLADSTONE AND SOUTH LANCASHIRE

In 1861 increased parliamentary representation was given to the two largest county constituencies in Britain: the West Riding received two extra seats and South Lancashire one—so that it became a three-member constituency. W. E. Gladstone was invited by the South Lancashire Liberal Registration Association to contest the vacancy in his native county. But Gladstone, who had been member for the University of Oxford since 1847, declined to resign his seat. "I should surrender it under circumstances unfavourable to the constituency and likewise peculiar to the moment: among which I may mention these, that the Parliament is still young, and that at this time such a change would scarcely be expected by a widely scattered and at the same time a closely occupied body."<sup>(1)</sup> There is a hint in these words that Gladstone might accept another invitation when circumstances had changed. At the general election of 1865 Gladstone stood again for the university; but, expecting defeat because of the opposition of clerical graduates to his attack on the establishment of the Church of Ireland, he allowed himself to be nominated for South Lancashire also. And when he was defeated at Oxford it was to South Lancashire that he

<sup>(1)</sup> Liverpool Record Office, Melly Papers, 769, W. E. Gladstone to the Chairmen of the South Lancashire Liberal Registration Associations, 19 July 1861. All masters of arts were entitled to vote, and had to do so in person at Oxford till 1865, when postal voting was first permitted.

immediately turned; after a short campaign of five days he was elected third on the poll. Two Conservatives were above him and two Liberals and a Conservative below him.

## II LOCAL LIBERAL LEADERS

The constituency of South Lancashire consisted of the hundreds of West Derby and Salford. By the 1867 Reform Act it was divided; the hundred of Salford became South-East Lancashire and the hundred of West Derby South-West Lancashire. Each division was to return two members. South-West Lancashire comprised all land, save the boroughs of Wigan, Warrington and Liverpool, west of a line from the Snoter Stone at Hundred End on the Ribble estuary to Glazebrook on the Mersey.<sup>(2)</sup> It was mainly an urban constituency: its population was about 350,000, and it included the rising industrial towns of Bootle, Leigh, St. Helens and Widnes, and many built-up areas like Anfield, Old Swan, Wavertree and Toxteth Park which were extensions of Liverpool, in spirit and population "Liverpudlian", though they did not become part of the borough till 1895 or later. Of the 19,218 voters on the register in November 1868 the *Liverpool Mercury* calculated that 9,090 were Liverpool men with county tenures or inhabitants of the "out-townships" in the immediate vicinity of the borough. Liverpool was indeed the focal point of the constituency. It was on St. George's Plateau that the candidates were nominated in November 1868. The Liberal organisation in the division was controlled by a group of Liverpool men, most of whom were also prominent in the Liverpool Liberal Registration Association.

The chairman of the South-West Lancashire Liberal Registration Association was John Pemberton Heywood of Norris Green, the Liverpool banker and one of the richest commoners in Lancashire.<sup>(3)</sup> He had fought and lost South Lancashire in 1859 and he did not stand afterwards. In 1868 he had been withdrawn from public life for several years; he took no part in the detailed organisation of the campaign, and does not seem even to have presided over electoral meetings. But his very close friendship with the earl of Sefton—the greatest Whig landowner in the county—was of enormous value to the party: he was able to strengthen the earl's wavering support of the Liberal cause. The joint deputy chairmen were Thomas Dyson Hornby and

<sup>(2)</sup> A map of the parliamentary divisions of Lancashire is printed in J. J. Bagley, *A History of Lancashire with Maps and Pictures* (London, 1956), p. 45.

<sup>(3)</sup> When he died in 1877 he left personalty of £2,500,000.



Plate 20. JOHN PEMBERTON HEYWOOD  
Chairman of the South-West Lancashire Liberal Registration Association

William Rathbone. Rathbone resigned this position in July when he was adopted as candidate for the borough of Liverpool. Hornby was a member of the well-known Liverpool merchant family; he was chairman of the Union Marine Insurance Company and a prominent member of the Dock Board. He led the Whig group in the association and when the Liberal party split over Home Rule in 1886 he played an important part in founding the Liverpool Liberal Unionist Association. The leader of the Radical group in the association was Robert Trimble, a corn merchant, luminary of the Liverpool Liberation Society, author of two pamphlets denouncing Negro slavery and a partisan of the Northern cause in the Civil War. Almost every registration association had a solicitor as secretary; the secretary of the South-West Lancashire Liberal Registration Association, Alfred Billson, had been born in Leicester in 1839 and admitted solicitor in 1860. He was a close friend of George Melly and had acted as his agent in the Stoke-on-Trent election of February 1868, which Melly had won. Melly was the son of a Genevan, André Melly, who had founded the Liverpool firm of Melly, Romilly and Company, American merchants. After going to Rugby (as had Hornby) George Melly entered his father's firm in 1854.<sup>(4)</sup>

I have found no evidence that the association had a democratic or quasi-democratic constitution like that of a modern political party: the leaders seem to have been self-appointed, and not elected by the association's general membership, which is indeed never mentioned in the Melly Papers: in the hands of Hornby, Rathbone, Trimble, Billson and Melly lay the real power in the constituency Liberal organisation. There were district committees in the seven outer polling districts—Leigh, Newton, Ormskirk, Southport, St. Helens, Wigan and Warrington. But these committees' functions were severely circumscribed: they dealt only with such electoral tactics as canvassing and the registration of voters. Questions of policy and strategy were in theory decided by the central council, which seems to have been almost identical with the candidates' selection committee mentioned in several letters in the Melly Papers, and on this council the various districts were represented. But perhaps partly because members from outlying districts found it difficult to travel into Liverpool,<sup>(5)</sup> where council meetings were held, the council was usually content to delegate most of its functions to an executive committee consisting of the Liverpool group. With very little change of personnel the

<sup>(4)</sup> George Melly, *Recollections of Sixty Years, 1833-1893* (Coventry, 1893).

<sup>(5)</sup> Melly Papers, 2991, William Rathbone to Melly, 17 July 1868.

executive committee became Gladstone's election committee. Samuel G. Rathbone took the place of his brother, who henceforth was concerned almost exclusively with his own election campaign in the borough.

The Liverpool group of leaders seems to have been united throughout Gladstone's campaign in 1868. It is true that the preponderant part played by Melly in determining electoral strategy aroused the jealousy of Hornby. Melly's own election at Stoke-on-Trent in November was uncontested, and he was therefore able to devote all his energies to Gladstone's campaign. His nursing of Preston in the early 1860s<sup>(6)</sup> meant that his knowledge of electoral stratagems was unequalled—a fact admitted by Hornby—and gave his counsels great weight. Moreover, since he was the only member of the group who was an M.P., he alone could discuss Gladstone's campaign with the party leaders in London who concerned themselves with it. Several times Melly conferred with Lord Hartington and Brand, the Liberal chief whip, and then telegraphed their decision to Billson, who could only announce a *fait accompli* to the others. This led Hornby to complain at one point that Melly and Billson "treated everyone as if they were puppets".<sup>(7)</sup> But quarrels like this were unusual. Differences of principle—between, for example, Hornby and Trimble—were temporarily suppressed. And within the group the cabals, the cliques, the conflicts of personality which were endemic in the Liberal party on Liverpool Borough Council did not exist: partly because the group was much smaller, and perhaps partly because it was far more socially homogeneous than the Liberals on the council.

### III CHOOSING THE LIBERAL CANDIDATES

Lord Derby, who had been prime minister since 1866, resigned in February 1868 and Disraeli became prime minister for the first time. But his government did not last long. Gladstone, who had become the acknowledged leader of the Liberal party on Russell's retirement at Christmas 1867, declared in March 1868 that the time had come when the Church of Ireland must cease to exist as a church in alliance with the state. At the end of April two resolutions calling for the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland were carried by Gladstone in the Commons. Disraeli then announced that a

<sup>(6)</sup> H. A. Taylor, "Politics in Famine-Stricken Preston: An Examination of Liberal Party Management, 1861-1865", *TRANSACTIONS*, Vol. 107, pp. 121 *seq.*

<sup>(7)</sup> Melly Papers, 3020, Billson to Melly, 21 July 1868.

general election would take place in the autumn, under the new register of voters enfranchised by, and in the new constituencies created by, the Reform Act of 1867.

The Liberal associations of South-West and South-East Lancashire each began to strive to induce Gladstone to stand in its division. On 4 May William Rathbone, hoping to persuade Gladstone by a display of resolution, wrote to him, "It is understood that we intend to fight you for this division".<sup>(8)</sup> But the decision on Gladstone's constituency was not taken for several months yet, and it was not taken by Gladstone. It is indeed remarkable that, unlike Disraeli, Gladstone took very little part in the details of the electoral struggle. He tried to insist on a high standard of electoral morality; his ideas were the basis of the party's programme, and though he spoke only once outside his own constituency the reports of his great speeches within it were a powerful electoral influence in the country; but he appears to have done little of the arduous work of raising money or fitting candidates to constituencies. These tasks he entrusted to the Liberal whips, Brand and Glyn; and he left to Brand the decision on which constituency he should stand for, though he did express a desire for one of the South-Lancashire divisions.<sup>(9)</sup>

The choice was not a simple one. In 1865 Gladstone had been top of the poll in Salford hundred and fourth out of six in West Derby; had he gained the same proportion of votes in the former as he had in the latter he would not have been returned. Yet in 1868 there were reasons for believing that Gladstone would, or at least could, win if he stood for West Derby. Of the new voters enfranchised by the 1867 Reform Act more were expected to vote for Gladstone than for the Conservatives.<sup>(10)</sup> Far more important was the effect of his proposal to disestablish the Church of Ireland: it had alienated those Tories who had voted for him in 1865 out of respect for his person, but this loss was far outweighed by the support his plan gained for him among Dissenters and Catholics. In 1865 the Dissenters had been split between the two parties, and the Catholics had voted Conservative almost to a man: detesting Palmerston's foreign policy, which they regarded as inimical to the papacy, they had formed an uneasy electoral alliance with the ancient opponents

<sup>(8)</sup> British Museum, Gladstone Papers, Add. MS. 44415, ff. 10 *seq.*, William Rathbone to Gladstone, 4 May 1868.

<sup>(9)</sup> Melly Papers, 2999, William Rathbone to Melly, 15 July 1868. A. F. Thompson, "Gladstone's Whips and the General Election of 1868", *English Historical Review*, Vol. 63, p. 196.

<sup>(10)</sup> Gladstone Papers, Add. MS. 44415, ff. 261 *seq.*, William Rathbone to Gladstone, 7 July 1868.

of Catholic Emancipation and the modern opponents of the Maynooth Grant. As *Porcupine* said in July 1865: "The Tory wants to get into Parliament and makes a tool of the Catholic. The Ultramontane wants to damage the English Liberal Party, and simply makes a tool of the Tory". In 1868, however, it seemed that both Dissenters and Catholics were solidly determined to vote Liberal.

But if these factors were making West Derby fairly safe, would they not make Salford hundred even safer? And there were some, of whom Glyn was the spokesman, who believed that since Gladstone was bound to be strongly opposed by the Conservatives in either division, it would be wiser for him to avoid Lancashire altogether, and stand for an invulnerable constituency instead. Glyn therefore welcomed the action of the Liberals of Greenwich, who without seeking Gladstone's permission adopted him as candidate early in July, and announced that they would not withdraw his name even if he also stood elsewhere. His return for the "tea and shrimp borough" (as *Porcupine* called it) was certain, but even here a contest was inevitable, and Glyn attempted to improve the occasion by suggesting that Gladstone should avoid one altogether by standing for Kendal, where the influence of the Glyn family was so strong that Glyn's father had been returned unopposed for the previous twenty years.

At the same time, however, the Liberals of South-West Lancashire were advancing cogent arguments why their division should be chosen—arguments far more perceptive and forward-looking than Glyn's, far more aware of some of the new techniques of electioneering which the Reform Act of 1867 was making necessary. They argued that the party leader should regard himself not merely as a candidate in his own constituency, but primarily as an inspirer of his party nationally. They believed that if Gladstone, a Liverpool man, were to leave his native half of the county and go to the other because it seemed safer, or if, even worse, he were to quit Lancashire altogether for an impregnable seat, "his having left the place of his birth would be known all over England before the elections, and have a depressing effect on all the elections throughout the country". Gladstone's taking the bold course would show confidence in the success of Liberal ideas: it would "inspirit the constituencies generally".<sup>(11)</sup> Thus they were advocating a course rather similar to that which Gladstone was to take in 1879 in his first Midlothian Campaign: with the essential

<sup>(11)</sup> Melly Papers, 2999, William Rathbone to Melly, 15 July 1868. Gladstone Papers Add. MS. 44415, ff. 267 *seq.*, Billson to Gladstone, 8 July 1868.

difference that the risk of defeat was not considered to be great. They believed that Gladstone would win South-West Lancashire and of course—though they did not say so—Greenwich would still be available in case of defeat.

These arguments convinced Gladstone and one of the most influential Liberals in South-East Lancashire, Hugh Mason, who vainly attempted to persuade his colleagues.<sup>(12)</sup> But they did not immediately convince Brand. He wanted to meet Gladstone's desire to stand for South-West Lancashire, and he saw that Gladstone's doing so would raise party morale nationally. At first, however, he did not think that Gladstone's chances of winning the seat were as great as the West Derby Liberals thought. His standing for West Derby would greatly stimulate the Conservatives there; they would attempt to encourage their party nationally by showing that they were resolved to defeat Gladstone. A really determined campaign might soon make nonsense of the optimism of Rathbone and Billson. And whatever advantages might be the result of Gladstone's standing, and despite the fact that Greenwich would still be available as a refuge, Brand did not think that Gladstone should be asked to fight in West Derby unless there was a good chance of his winning. So before he would declare for South-West Lancashire Brand required the local leaders' forecasts to be supported by concrete statistical evidence that a majority of voters was likely to vote for Gladstone.

The district committees in South-West Lancashire were conducting an energetic canvass of the new and old voters in July, and this was supplemented by a "requisition", a circular, with postage prepaid for reply, sent out to all those likely to be on the new electoral register, and asking them to indicate on the returnable sheet whether they would vote for Gladstone if he stood.<sup>(13)</sup> The canvass books and the replies to the requisition gave a favourable prognosis; and though Rathbone suggested that Brand should meet and take the advice of forty or fifty skilled party workers from West Derby hundred, "many of them caring far more for Mr. Gladstone and the cause than where he stands for", and should then make his final decision,<sup>(14)</sup> Brand did not think this necessary. He decided in favour of South-West Lancashire and wrote to tell Gladstone so on 1 August. On 8 August another circular was sent out to those who had signed the requisition, telling them that Gladstone had decided

<sup>(12)</sup> Melly Papers, 3033, Billson to Melly, 13 July 1868.

<sup>(13)</sup> Gladstone Papers, Add. MS. 44415, ff. 261 *seq.*, William Rathbone to Gladstone, 7 July 1868.

<sup>(14)</sup> Melly Papers, 3031, Billson to Melly, N.D.

to stand and asking them to support the second Liberal candidate, Henry Riversdale Grenfell, who had been adopted since the first circular had been sent, and whose excellence as a colleague had helped to persuade Brand that Gladstone should stand.

For though Billson was confident in June that Gladstone would win if he stood by himself, it was felt that his chances would be even better if there were a second Liberal candidate of the right kind, and since the Liberal leaders in South-West Lancashire felt sure that eventually it would be decided that Gladstone should stand, a search for a running-mate began in June. If Gladstone stood alone it would not be certain that all Liberal voters would "plump" for him: instead of merely using one of their two votes the "weak voters and ignorant men" might use their second vote in favour of a Conservative.<sup>(15)</sup> This splitting, so dangerous to Gladstone, would be prevented by a second Liberal candidate. But one of the right type would do far more than this: a Whig, a moderate, colleague would attract to himself and to Gladstone support which otherwise would probably have gone entirely to the Conservatives. After 1865 Gladstone's views on the Irish question were so advanced that some right-wing Liberals in South-West Lancashire did not know whether to support him or not. The group was small, and its own votes, Rathbone thought, insignificant;<sup>(16)</sup> but it did include the earl of Sefton. Therefore though a Whig candidate would attract the votes of the "half-and-half" men and would help to persuade them to give their other votes to Gladstone, far more important would be his aid in inducing the earl to use his money and his electoral influence over his many tenant farmers in the Liberal cause.

Early in the summer of 1868 it was apparent that the earl shared the reluctance of many of the great Whig landowners to support the party in the forthcoming election. He refused to vote for Gladstone's resolutions on the Irish Church; his apparent failure to instruct his steward to send a list of his tenants to Billson, who wanted it for the canvassers, suggested that he might be unwilling to order his tenants to vote Liberal; and Billson thought that he could not be asked to contribute even £100 to the election fund.<sup>(17)</sup> It seemed obvious that a candidate from the earl's family would be most likely to conciliate him; Rathbone, Hornby, Trimble and Billson were at first all agreed that a Molyneux would make the best

<sup>(15)</sup> Gladstone Papers, Add. MS. 44194, ff. 64 *seq.*, Brand to Gladstone, 1 August 1868.

<sup>(16)</sup> Melly Papers, 2994, William Rathbone to Melly, N.D.

<sup>(17)</sup> *Ibid.*, 3039, Billson to Melly, 1 July 1868; 3033, Billson to Melly, 13 July 1868; 3021, Billson to Melly, 15 July 1868.

candidate. But of course the circumstances which made a Molyneux desirable also made him unobtainable: when the earl's brother was approached and declared his determination to stay in the army and go with his regiment to India, the earl refused to attempt to persuade him or any other member of his family, even though Melly and Lord Hartington went in person to ask.<sup>(18)</sup> It was thought that a Cavendish would be the second-best candidate; had one been persuaded to stand he might have mollified the earl. Several Whiggish men were indeed willing to stand; none of them, however, was closely related to the earl or likely to win his support for other reasons.

Meanwhile Grenfell, who since 1862 had been M.P. for Stoke, and thus Melly's colleague, was because of his Whiggery and lack of the common touch becoming more and more unpopular with his working-class constituents and the local Liberal leaders. One of these wrote to Melly in June that "with the exception of a few—a very few—all I speak to wish he would take himself off to some other constituency".<sup>(19)</sup> He did; in the summer of 1868 the Stoke-on-Trent Liberals delayed his re-adoption, on specious grounds, until Grenfell realised his unpopularity and went to St. Ives, where his position as a wealthy merchant of tin and copper ores ensured his adoption as candidate.

Then someone—almost certainly Melly—thought that Grenfell would make a good colleague for Gladstone. He was a Whig, and therefore likely to attract the moderate vote. He had associations with Lancashire, and these associations were likely to make him acceptable, if anyone would be, to the earl of Sefton. His mother was the daughter of the second earl of Sefton—the then earl's grandfather; he was thus the earl's cousin, and he was also his close friend. The first task, however, was to persuade Grenfell to stand. When first approached by Melly he refused, declaring that "I cannot wish for a change because of all the places I ever was in I think St. Ives the best".<sup>(20)</sup> But the party leaders did not despair; Glyn was asked to persuade Grenfell and eventually he succeeded.

Meanwhile the earl was seen by Lord Hartington; he would not give his immediate approval to Grenfell's candidature but so far relaxed his previous hostility as to agree to consider the question for a week. Immediately a campaign was begun to exert the maximum pressure on him. The leaders in West Derby

<sup>(18)</sup> *Ibid.*, 3011, Hornby to Melly, 17 July 1868; 2990, William Rathbone to Melly, 17 July 1868; 3114, Melly to Alfred Steinthal, 3 August 1868.

<sup>(19)</sup> *Ibid.*, 3084, J. Bebbington to Billson, 17 June 1868.

<sup>(20)</sup> *Ibid.*, 3072, Grenfell to Melly, N.D.



Plate 21. THOMAS DYSON HORNBY

Deputy-chairman of the South-West Lancashire Liberal Registration Association.

wrote to Heywood to ask him to use his great influence with the earl. The latter replied to Heywood that he regarded even Grenfell's brand of Whiggery as too advanced: that "unless Grenfell moderates his platform he will not add to Liberal strength". The hint was obvious; Hornby immediately made it clear that the party leaders would have to persuade Grenfell to affirm his principles so softly that the earl would find him acceptable. At the same time Lord Hartington, Lord Granville and Lord Clarendon strove to obtain Sefton's support. The earl gradually weakened; at the end of July a deputation consisting of Brand, William Rathbone, Hornby, Trimble and Billson saw Grenfell and the earl of Sefton and settled that Grenfell was to be Gladstone's colleague.<sup>(21)</sup>

The candidacy of Grenfell was greatly welcomed by the Liberals of West Derby hundred; opinion was general that he was the best possible candidate: "better than a sucking Molyneux"; and having "all the advantages of a Molyneux *with brains*", as Trimble put it. Indeed at the beginning of August Grenfell seemed to be about to accomplish all that a perfect candidate could. The earl of Sefton, "whose money goes twice as far as anyone else's", gave £2,000 to the election fund, and promised his electoral influence; Billson rapturously declared that he believed both candidates would win by 1,000 votes, 700 being under the influence of the earl of Sefton.<sup>(22)</sup>

#### IV THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The earl of Sefton was the most important landowner on the Liberal side, and the only Protestant landowner with significant electoral influence who used it in the Liberal interest. Conversely, it seems that only one Roman Catholic landowner of consequence would not use his: he was Sir Robert Gerard, who had been a staunch Conservative in 1865, sitting on platforms where popery was denounced. But even he promised benevolent neutrality in 1868: he offered to allow his tenants to vote as they pleased, and 49 out of the 50 were expected to vote Liberal.<sup>(23)</sup>

Most of the other Catholic landowners promised to use their influence over their tenants, Catholic and Protestant, but they did so only after being coaxed and handled with finesse, for the days of their anti-liberalism were too recent for them to come forward easily. Gladstone refused to write to Lady Scarisbrick

<sup>(21)</sup> *Ibid.*, 3008, Heywood to Melly, 25 July 1868: 3007, Hornby to Melly, 26 July 1868: 3114, Melby to Alfred Steintal, 3 August 1868.

<sup>(22)</sup> *Ibid.*, 3020, Billson to Melly, 21 July 1868: 3023, Billson to Melly, 23 July 1868: 3024, Billson to Melly, 15 August 1868.

<sup>(23)</sup> *Ibid.*, 3027, Billson to Melly, 13 August 1868.

to ask for her aid, on the grounds that it would be "too barefaced", but Welby Pugin, who had helped to design Scarisbrick Hall and was a friend of the family, was approached in Ramsgate and wrote, while Billson himself went to see "our old friend with the lovely leg" and after treating her with sympathy and tact secured the votes of her 320 tenants.<sup>(24)</sup> The weightiest part in the campaign, however, was played by Thomas Weld-Blundell of Ince Blundell, the only Roman Catholic of consequence to have supported Gladstone in 1865. In July he approached William Rathbone and declared, "It is impossible but that we should beat their heads off". He offered to invite the Catholic landowners of the division—Miss Stapleton-Bretherton, Lady Scarisbrick, and Major Anderton—to dine at Ince Blundell early in August so that Gladstone might meet them and show that he valued their support.<sup>(25)</sup> His plan was accepted and was successful. But the Liberals were careful to keep their liaison with the Catholic landowners secret: any hint of it might have alienated the Dissenters whose solid support the Liberals were gaining.

For the Nonconformists, though they welcomed the proposal to disestablish the Church of Ireland, were sometimes prone to fear that popery might be encouraged as a result, and in particular did the large colony of Welsh Dissenters in Liverpool need reassuring: public opinion, wrote S. G. Rathbone in May, "needs enlightening and particularly among the thousands of Welshmen here and in Wales whose dread of Catholicism renders them a little shaky about the Irish Church".<sup>(26)</sup> Special efforts were made to make them firmer. The Welsh Reform Association was founded in Liverpool in March 1868 to press for disestablishment in England, Ireland and Wales and to bring the Liverpool Welsh colony into the Liberal camp; its president was William Williams, one of the local Welsh builders, a Calvinist Methodist, the first Welshman to become a borough councillor, and partisan of the Channel Tunnel project. Williams was brought onto Gladstone's election committee to represent the Welsh.<sup>(27)</sup> In June John Bright came to address the Welsh Reform Association in the Amphitheatre, and his speech—on the need for disestablishment, and the lack of encouragement

<sup>(24)</sup> *Ibid.*, 3048, Billson to Melly, 8 May 1868: 3043, Billson to Melly, 31 May 1868.

<sup>(25)</sup> Gladstone Papers, Add. MS. 44415, ff. 288 *seq.*, William Rathbone to Gladstone, 21 July 1868.

<sup>(26)</sup> Melly Papers, 3005, Samuel G. Rathbone to Melly, 12 May 1868.

<sup>(27)</sup> J. R. Jones, *The Welsh Builder on Merseyside* (Liverpool, 1946), pp. 150 *seq.* Porcupine referred to him as the "Jerry-builders' friend". *Liverpool Mercury*, 5 August 1868.

it would afford for popery—was translated into Welsh. And in July Brand, at Melly's suggestion, sent the association a special message of encouragement.

But this cossetting of sympathetic voters would be useless unless their names appeared on the electoral register. Before 1832 there were no official lists of voters; after that year the larger electorates resulting from the Reform Act made them necessary, and parish or township overseers were given the task of composing them from claims which intending electors had to submit. Any claimant or voter could object to any name on the list. Objectors and those they objected to argued their case in special courts consisting of "revising barristers", who could award costs against "frivolous" objectors or claimants. The burden of seeing that he was on the register rested on the individual voter. The procedure for making and defending claims was complicated and costly; at the very least a defending claimant would lose a day's wages in attendance at the barristers' court. From the first all save a small minority of voters were unwilling to take the trouble unless they were encouraged. Soon after 1832 both political parties realised the enormous advantages that would lie in helping and encouraging sympathisers to acquire and retain places on the register, and in eliminating from it as many of their rivals' supporters as possible: the constituency organisations of the parties—constitutional associations and Liberal registration associations—were founded specifically for this purpose. The registration agents who were in charge of this work were usually paid officials—the ancestors of the professional election agents of today. The registration agent for both the Liverpool and South-West Lancashire Registration Associations was William Brumfitt; he had originally been a barber in Old Hall Street and had acquired much political knowledge through his customers' conversations, knowledge which he had turned to account in 1852 when he became Liberal agent.

On 4 May William Rathbone wrote to Gladstone: "We have decided to fight the battle in the registration courts in such a way as if to make it evidently decided there".<sup>(28)</sup> So from then until the publication of the overseers' lists on 20 July the district committees were, under Brumfitt's guidance, canvassing the electorate, making sure that every potential voter with Liberal sympathies submitted a claim to his township overseer. During August and early September the local workers were still striving by persuading all those Liberal candidates who had

<sup>(28)</sup> Gladstone Papers, Add. MS. 44415, ff. 10 *seq.*, William Rathbone to Gladstone, 4 May 1868.

been objected to by the Conservative Association to defend their claims in the revising barristers' courts. These were held in the middle of September in Liverpool and each of the seven outer polling districts. For consideration in them both the Conservatives and Liberals prepared large lists of objections: the former objected to 3,768 names, the latter to 3,959.<sup>(29)</sup> In most of the outer polling districts the Liberals expected to be in a minority at the polls; they submitted more objections there than the Tories. In the Liverpool "out-districts" the Liberals expected a large majority; here they objected to 500 fewer than the Tories did.

That party objections were made wholesale to people well qualified for the franchise was alleged by the witnesses at the 1864 Select Committee on the Registration of Voters. Many objections in West Derby hundred were obviously unfair: even so strongly Liberal a paper as the *Mercury* admitted so, and protested against the practice. It is true that Brumfitt and his Conservative rival, Bennett, concluded an agreement to abstain from "frivolous" objections—those for which the revising barristers would normally have allowed costs to the claimants when disallowing the objections—and, despite a Conservative accusation that the Liberals broke this agreement, both sides adhered to it. It was in their financial interest to do so. But in most places the revising barristers regarded as "frivolous" only the most flagrantly partial objections. Many which were technically *bona fide* were in fact very unfair: only quibbling legal arguments could be adduced in their favour, but even when they were disallowed by the barristers, costs were not usually given against the objectors. The party objections in South-West Lancashire were in this category. The parties' efforts were internecine: many objections would be disallowed because of their rivals' counter-objections in court. But some objections were bound to slip through and men would be unfairly disfranchised as a result. Both sides no doubt disliked the practice in principle; when their rivals adopted it even strongly moral men like William Rathbone had to agree to it in self-defence.

Both sides, however, were acutely shocked when the revising barristers' court opened in Liverpool. The presiding barrister, who was allowed considerable latitude in his interpretation of the very complex electoral law, decided that costs would be awarded to all voters and claimants against whom objections that could not be maintained had been entered. Immediately both parties widened the scope of their agreement to include objections previously regarded as *bona fide* and withdrew all

<sup>(29)</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 15 September 1868.

their objections in the out-townships of Liverpool. Nevertheless, as a result of their work the Liberals claimed a net gain of 923 voters in the registration courts, and since the Conservative *Courier* did not deny their claim it may be judged correct. Brumfitt said that he was prepared to stake his professional reputation on it.<sup>(30)</sup>

It was on the costs of registration and cognate matters of organisation that the £8,200 subscribed for the Liberal election fund seems to have been spent. There are, unfortunately, very few references in the Melly Papers, and none in the Gladstone Papers, to the spending of this money: the details were almost certainly lost when Sir Alfred Billson's papers were destroyed on his death. We do know, however, that the payment of canvassers was general until the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act of 1883 made voluntary party workers necessary, and it is clear from one or two hints in the Melly Papers that canvassers were paid in South-West Lancashire: for example, "Brumfitt and I will go over and make arrangements with W. Roscoe [Lord Sefton's steward at Kirkby] and his nephew, an active young joiner or something. The y.j. had £2 2s. 0d. last Election, and might have a £10 this, to be responsible for the 150 votes".<sup>(31)</sup> If similar sums were given to the scores of canvassers and local agents the party employed, the amount expended must have been considerable. Almost as great must have been expenditure on vehicles to carry voters to the poll. There was only one polling station in each of the eight districts and voters from outlying places demanded transport as a right. Eighteen omnibuses and thirty-two other conveyances were employed in the Ormskirk district alone, and no less than 285 in the out-townships of Liverpool. In addition, railway fares were almost certainly paid to several hundred out-voters from many parts of Britain, to enable them to come to South-West Lancashire to vote.<sup>(32)</sup>

Though there was a great deal of corruption in other constituencies it is quite certain that no money was spent on bribery in South-West Lancashire: that it was used by either side was categorically denied by party leaders and newspapers. Details of expenditure were usually kept from candidates in the 1850s and 1860s and Billson's axiom was, "The candidate must know nothing of expenses".<sup>(33)</sup> But with his immense personal

<sup>(30)</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 October 1868.

<sup>(31)</sup> Melly Papers, 3021, Billson to Melly, 15 July 1868.

<sup>(32)</sup> Gladstone Papers, Add. MS. 44416, ff. 240 *seq.*, Memorandum of Melly and Billson. Out-voters were those that lived outside a constituency but had tenures within it entitling them to vote.

<sup>(33)</sup> Melly Papers, 3065, Billson to Melly, 20 April 1868.

authority Gladstone would have been able to insist on a high standard of electoral morality in his own constituency. In any case the constituency was so large that bribery on a worthwhile scale would have been prohibitively costly. Even so, the Liberal campaign was far more expensive than those of today, though less so than one of those that took place in 1880. The £8,200 seems to have been fully spent; 7,461 electors voted for Gladstone and 7,010 for Grenfell. Taking the higher number as the divisor we see that the Liberals paid over £1 2s. for every voter they won. The Conservatives paid £1 17s. per vote in North Leicestershire in 1880, and less than 1s. 6d. on a national average in 1951.<sup>(34)</sup>

The party leaders had agreed to warn each other when their candidates' campaigns were to begin; thus each would be certain that a march would not be stolen on it, and to save money and energy the start was delayed till the beginning of October. Further details of the agreement were settled by Billson and the Conservative secretary, Anderson, in an atmosphere of almost operatic secrecy, on the shores of Loughrigg Tarn when both were on holiday in the Lake District: Billson believed "It is far better that all arrangements should be between him and me, and not between Committees or any members of them".<sup>(35)</sup> Thus the registration and most of the canvassing were completed when Gladstone and Grenfell began their personal campaigns. Their election addresses were issued on 9 October, and in the six weeks that followed Gladstone made thirteen speeches within the constituency, and one outside it at Preston, on the need to disestablish the Irish Church and on the iniquity of the Conservatives, the party of "monopoly" and profligate finance. Gladstone's campaign in South-West Lancashire in 1868 was the first attempt by a statesman to inspire and lead his party's struggle in the rest of Britain: his election address and his speeches were planned to attract votes not only locally but also in Britain as a whole: they set the keynote for the Liberal campaign nationally. Some of the credit for this innovation in British politics should be given to Rathbone and his colleagues who urged this policy on Gladstone in the summer of 1868. They were responsible, too, for persuading Gladstone to make additional speeches at the end of the campaign when he wished to relax. These additions, however, were made for local reasons: the Liberal leaders in West Derby hundred became increasingly uncertain of his victory as the campaign drew to its close. They

<sup>(34)</sup> R. T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties* (London, 1955), p. 164; D. E. Butler, *The British General Election of 1951*, (London 1952), pp. 139, 251.

<sup>(35)</sup> Melly Papers, 3030, Billson to George Melly, N.D.

were still doubtful just before the poll, and when Gladstone and Grenfell were defeated by their opponents—Charles Turner and Richard Cross—by 261 and 737 votes respectively, only Gladstone was very surprised. He had set his heart on victory and his defeat was a great blow.

#### V WHY GLADSTONE WAS DEFEATED

In the general election of 1868 the Liberals gained a majority of 112 seats. Why was the leader of the party defeated in South-West Lancashire? One man, Hugh Shimmin, the editor of the widely read Liverpool Liberal weekly, *Porcupine*, had his answer immediately. It was the fault of the Liberal leaders in South-West Lancashire—"our snob Liberals . . . our genteel, Whiggish, feebly respectable nondescripts", who will "do nothing of themselves, and nothing must be done without their consent and patronage". And amongst them one man was preeminently to blame—the incompetent who had been chiefly responsible for the direction of Gladstone's campaign. "The only chance for the party, even to maintain ordinary political respectability, is to get rid of the snobbishness—the uppishness—the stand-offishness—the currant jellyism of the last few years which has all sprung from and has indeed been begot by—Mellyism!"<sup>(36)</sup> These philippics were copied by the *Daily Post* and the *Albion*, and became common form in Liverpool. But there was only a little truth in them. After electoral defeats "beaten sides are always unwilling to recognise the fact that the verdict has gone against them; their inevitable inclination is to blame their defeat on some inadequacy of their party organisation".<sup>(37)</sup> There were unprejudiced witnesses to the efficiency and industriousness of Melly and his colleagues. They may have been to some degree snobbish, but there is no evidence that any such sentiment affected their judgment of what was politically advisable: William Williams was readily coöpted to Gladstone's election committee; in Stoke-on-Trent Melly and Billson coöperated wholeheartedly with working men, with whom they were both popular. Shimmin's jealousy of those in power in the Liberal Association is apparent on every page of *Porcupine*: he believed that he was excluded from the "charmed circle" because of his humble origins and that the efficiency of the party would increase if he were admitted. In fact, he was ignored by the party leaders owing to his unreliability, his indiscretion, his prickly touchiness and the vituperativeness with

<sup>(36)</sup> *Porcupine*, 18 April 1868; 5 December 1868.

<sup>(37)</sup> R. T. McKenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

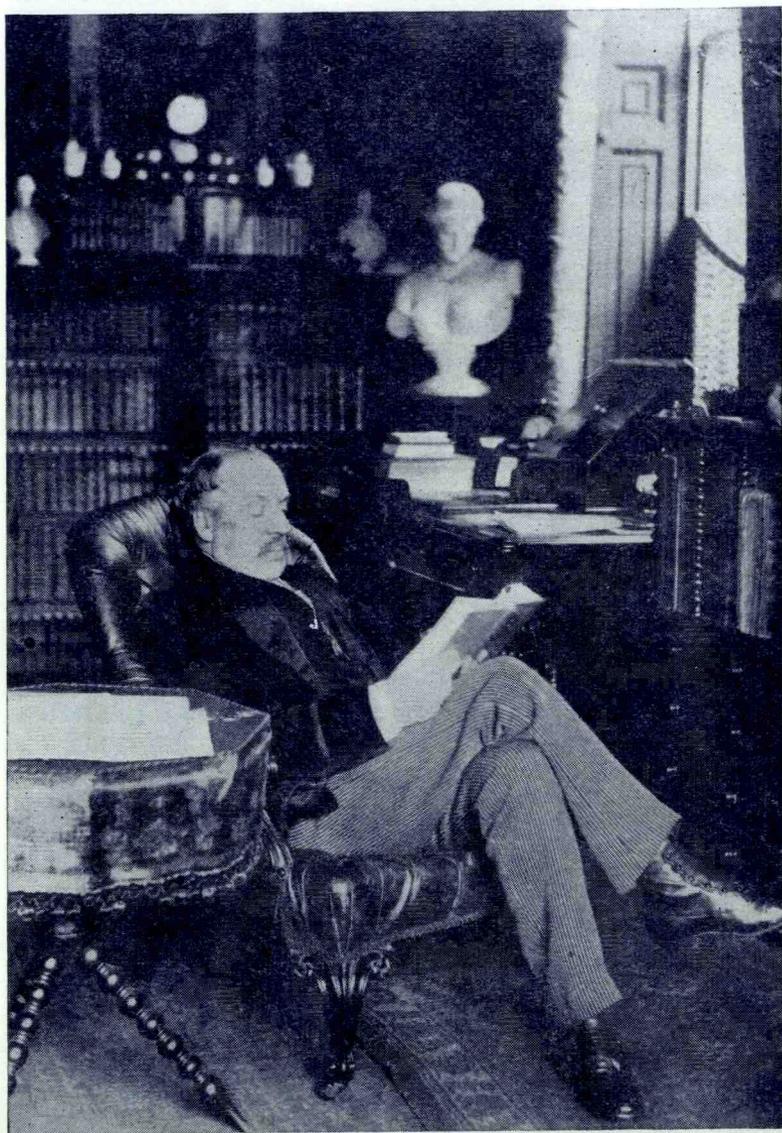


Plate 22. GEORGE MELLY

which he gave vent to his many hatreds—qualities which would have ruined the party had he been in power. “He is an incubus on our party—I wish he would go over to the other side.”<sup>(38)</sup>

Melly and Billson themselves prepared a memorandum for Gladstone on the causes of the defeat. Many reasons were adduced for the defection of 1,000 of the 8,453 electors who had promised in the requisition or the canvass, later, to vote for Gladstone. (If all had kept their promise Gladstone would of course have been returned with a huge majority.) Since the poll in South-West Lancashire was one of the last to be taken in England, Liberal morale suffered near polling-day from the dispiriting effect of the Liberal defeats in the rest of Lancashire. The very fact that Greenwich was available helped to cause that defeat against which it was an insurance; the Conservatives issued a circular purporting to come from an independent source and advising Liberals not to waste votes by giving them to a man whose seat in Parliament was already assured, and the Conservative ruse caused some defections.

Melly and Billson laid particular stress, however, on defects in the Liberal district organisation. Woods and Lancaster of Wigan were jealous of each other and quarrelled, Musgrove and Hill of Ormskirk were cocksure, Crosfield of Warrington had no previous experience of electioneering, and Joseph Evans of Newton seems to have been merely incompetent. So Newton promised 423 votes and polled 347, Ormskirk promised 708 and polled 599, and Warrington promised 250 and polled 189. Inefficient district committees had both issued over-sanguine lists of promises and allowed firm promises to be lost by the superior last-minute canvassing of the Conservatives. Some at least of these faults of organisation had been obvious to the Liberal leaders before the election, but they could do little to remedy them. The district committees were often content to leave strategy to the Liverpool group, but they insisted on tactics being reserved to them; registration and canvassing were largely in their hands. The leaders at the centre could cajole and advise; they could not command. “The only way to manage the out-districts is to encourage and support local action and this must be connected with some feeling of independence.”<sup>(39)</sup>

These defects of the district committees no doubt help to explain the defeat, but Melly and Billson laid excessive emphasis on them in their memorandum; they made the same mistake as

<sup>(38)</sup> Melly Papers, 3016, Billson to Melly, 29 November 1868.

<sup>(39)</sup> Gladstone Papers, Add. MS. 44416, ff. 240 *seq.*, Memorandum of Melly and Billson: ff. 261 *seq.*, Hornby to Gladstone, 27 November 1868.

Shimmin, though in a milder and more judicious form. Elsewhere, indeed, Melly and Billson admitted that defective organisation was not the major cause of defeat. Hornby pointed out that the Conservatives had to manage their district committees in the same way as the Liberals, and presumably with the same result, yet their committees were able to capture votes from many who had promised to vote Liberal. Moreover, though Melly and Billson had noticed some of the defects in the Liberal district organisation in the summer, <sup>(40)</sup> it is obvious from their optimism then that they did not expect defeat as a result of them. And the widespread swing towards the Right in nearly every constituency in southern Lancashire shows that some more general cause than faulty organisation must be sought. Moreover, the swing in southern Lancashire was exceptional. The area was comparable with the West Riding of Yorkshire, yet this, and the great boroughs within it, returned Liberals. A swing towards Liberalism was noticeable in all similar partly industrial areas in Britain. Why was southern Lancashire so different?

It was an area where there were many Roman Catholics. From the voters amongst them the Liberals had hopes which were not disappointed: only Sir Robert Gerard's fifty tenants found it impossible to break their Tory habits and voted for Turner and Cross; they "voted as the Tories they are and not as Catholics and the refusal of Mr. Moubert the Steward to do more than vote for you left the Tenants free to vote as they always have done".<sup>(41)</sup> Yet the Liberals lost more than they gained by the presence of so many Catholics. Some were Englishmen whose families had not become Protestant at the Reformation, but many—perhaps a majority—were Irish immigrants. They lived in the industrial towns, close together in tightly-knit communities; many were poor, ignorant and dirty; they were said to be more drunken and feckless than Englishmen; they were certainly prepared to work for less. Thus though the proximity of a large Catholic minority in southern Lancashire made many Protestants far more bigoted than they would otherwise have been, their prejudice was particularly aroused by, and directed against, the Irish; and though anti-Irish feeling was diffused among all classes, it amounted to obsessional hatred in many members of the lower-middle and working classes because of their economic fears. Thus it was from these classes that the ordinary members of the Orange movement in

<sup>(40)</sup> Melly Papers, 3022, Billson to Melly, 17 July 1868.

<sup>(41)</sup> Gladstone Papers, Add. MS. 44416, ff. 240 *seq.*, Memorandum of Melly and Billson.

Liverpool were drawn. It seems, too, that at this time most of those members who had any positive religious beliefs were evangelical Anglicans and that few were Dissenters. The spiritual leader of the movement was an evangelical Anglican clergyman, Canon Hugh M'Neile, vicar of St. Paul's, Toxteth, and—significantly—an Ulsterman. He was a brilliant orator with many imitators among the evangelical Anglican clergy of Liverpool and district.

The formal structure of Orange societies was, it is probable, confined to Liverpool, where most of the Irish were; but Orange sentiments were held by very many people throughout south Lancashire. By extreme Protestants Liberalism was associated with concessions to Catholicism and Catholic Ireland. The result was that they invariably voted Conservative, even when, as in 1865, the Catholics did as well. And of course Gladstone's proposal to disestablish the Church of Ireland meant that in 1868 the extreme Protestants were determined to defeat him. The Liberals were over-optimistic in the summer because they underrated the effect an all-out appeal to Protestant bigotry would have on moderate voters: "The fact is I think that fanaticism in Lancashire is mainly amongst the well-to-do known people—the mass have less of it and more enthusiasm for great men and I think we shall be able to show a good case".<sup>(42)</sup> That this was true of fewer people than Rathbone thought was the main cause of Gladstone's defeat; Mrs. Melly had correctly interpreted the mood of the constituency in the spring: "I don't think you Radical dissenters have a notion how strong the Protestant feeling is in England and I'm afraid there are not enough Catholics even in south Lancashire to carry Gladstone".<sup>(43)</sup>

The keynote of the Orange campaign was struck by M'Neile in a sermon preached in St. Paul's, Toxteth: "It is impossible to disestablish the Church of Ireland except by the vote of a recreant senate and an apostate nation".<sup>(44)</sup> Thenceforth Orangemen were particularly prominent at all Conservative meetings, applauding anti-Popish sentiments with rounds of "Kentish fire". A group of Orangemen forged 1,000 tickets for Bright's meeting at the Amphitheatre in June; they were discovered before entering but their obvious aim was to disrupt the meeting. The resounding Conservative victory in Liverpool was largely due to the Orange lodges; in South-West Lancashire their direct influence was greatest in the out-townships of

<sup>(42)</sup> Melly Papers, 2999, William Rathbone to Melly, 15 July 1868.

<sup>(43)</sup> *Ibid.*, 3258, Mrs. Melly to George Melly, N.D.

<sup>(44)</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 23 May 1868.

Liverpool but Orangeism was strong in the industrial towns of the area too; and in the agricultural districts of the constituency many Anglican clergymen were ardent Conservatives even more adept than the Tory landlords in exploiting anti-Catholic prejudice and winning votes from the Liberals. "We have suffered more from the personal entreaties and arguments of the clergy than even the canvassing of the stewards."<sup>(45)</sup> In Kirkby sixty tenants of the earl of Sefton, who had of course promised to vote Liberal, in fact voted Conservative because of the vicar's exhortations. In Sefton the rector gained votes for the Conservatives by forging circulars purporting to come from the Liberal candidates and seriously misrepresenting their views.<sup>(46)</sup>

Thus in February 1869 Billson summarised the causes of Gladstone's defeat: "I cannot but be sensible that one of the causes of the defection of the requisitionists was a real, however mistaken, fluctuation of opinion, caused by the declamations of the clergy and the misrepresentations of speakers and newspapers in the period between July and November;" and T. Milner Gibson, the Cobdenite who had himself been defeated at Ashton-under-Lyne by the same causes, wrote to Gladstone that in South-West Lancashire "the anti-Irish feeling and religious bigotry seem to have told fearfully".<sup>(47)</sup>

Where the Liberals' district organisation was most efficient the disparity in numbers between promises and actual votes was less because the lists of promises were not too optimistic and the Conservatives effected fewer conversions. Kirkpatrick of Leigh was the epitome of efficiency: his district promised 497 and polled 486. In the Liverpool out-townships, which were under the particular care of Melly and Billson, 3,851 promises were received and 3,721 men voted for Gladstone.<sup>(48)</sup> But the powerful instrument of religious prejudice with which the Conservatives exploited any weakness in the Liberal district committees was itself strengthened by organisations to which the Liberals in South-West Lancashire had as yet no counterparts—the Conservative working-men's associations in the industrial towns.

The Reform Act of 1867 enfranchised nearly all working men in the boroughs by giving the vote to all householders and

<sup>(45)</sup> Gladstone Papers, Add. MS. 44416, ff. 265 *seq.*, Billson to Gladstone, 28 November 1868.

<sup>(46)</sup> Melly Papers, 3018, Billson to Melly, 26 November 1868; *Liverpool Mercury*, 27 November 1868.

<sup>(47)</sup> Gladstone Papers, Add. MS. 44419, ff. 79 *seq.*, Billson to Gladstone, 19 February 1869; Add. MS. 44416, ff. 253 *seq.*, T. M. Gibson to Gladstone, 26 November 1868.

<sup>(48)</sup> *Ibid.*: Add. MS. 44416, ff. 240 *seq.*, Memorandum of Melly and Billson.

"£10 lodgers"; in the county constituencies the electorate received a large influx of artisans and lower middle-class voters by the enfranchisement of £12 occupiers. Disraeli soon realised the enormous advantages of cultivating these voters. "In the inarticulate mass of the English populace which (the Tory leaders had hitherto) held at arm's length (Disraeli) discerned the Conservative working man as the sculptor perceives the angel prisoned in the block of marble."<sup>(49)</sup> He therefore caused Conservative working-men's associations to be founded in many of the towns of England—particularly the towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire—soon after the passing of the Reform Act. There was one in St. Helens in July 1868;<sup>(50)</sup> the Liverpool Association seems to have been founded in the spring of 1867 and was certainly active in Liverpool and the out-townships during the election. The Lancashire associations at least were extremely Orangeist in outlook and membership.

Gladstone attempted to win the working-class voters for Liberalism not by special organisations that flattered them but by oratorical appeals to their moral sense: he did not share Disraeli's interest in the technique of party organisation. Brand and Glyn did; but in the absence of Gladstone's support they were not strong enough to force the foundation of working-class associations when they were opposed by other Liberal leaders—from whom, indeed, Glyn kept secret his relations with Beales' Reform League, which coöperated with him in 1868. Thus there was from the Central Liberal Registration Association no pressure on the constituency parties to form Liberal working men's associations. The initiative had to come from the local leaders. In Birmingham William Harris democratised the Liberal Association, giving at least nominal control of it to working-class voters and laying the foundations of the caucus system which was to be so powerfully manipulated by Chamberlain and Schnadhorst.<sup>(51)</sup> In South-West Lancashire, however, the leaders did nothing. Was their failure the result of the snobbery of which Shimmin accused them? It seems probable that in fact the emotion which restrained them was fear:<sup>(52)</sup> the setting up of a working men's Liberal association might convince Lord Sefton and the middle-class Liberals that the party would become Radical, and these Whigs might decide to vote Conservative as a result.

<sup>(49)</sup> *The Times*, 18 April 1883, quoted in R. T. McKenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>(50)</sup> T. C. Barker and J. R. Harris, *St. Helens: A Merseyside Town in the Industrial Revolution* (Liverpool, 1954) p. 473.

<sup>(51)</sup> M. Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties*, (London, 1902), Vol. I, p. 161.

<sup>(52)</sup> Melly Papers, 2994, William Rathbone to George Melly, N.D.

It seems certain that the Liberals lost more than they gained by their timorous decision. The Conservative leaders had ensured that the party's working-class organs were merely a "handmaid to the party"; their constitution prevented their ever having any control of the policy, structure or electoral strategy of the party. Similar safeguards might, in Lancashire, have allayed the fears of the Whigs. In any case, we have seen that Lord Sefton's influence over his tenants did not always cause them to vote Liberal, and had the Liberals catered for working men as the Conservatives did, the middle-class voters scared off as a result would surely have been outnumbered by the working men gained. For there is no doubt that in Liverpool and the industrial towns of South-West Lancashire many artisans and working men hovering between the two parties were drawn into the Conservative camp by the working men's associations—by their opinions' being asked for, by the presence of their representatives on the same platforms as the local leaders of the party, who listened with apparent interest and approval to the speeches of Conservative butchers and carpenters. Nationally the Liberal failure to set up working men's associations in 1868 did not matter, for the majority was huge; in South-West Lancashire it helped, even if only slightly, to turn the scale against Gladstone. Here we may agree with Shimmin that the Liberals missed a splendid opportunity. They were not to take it till 1873, when the Liverpool Liberal Working Men's Association was founded.

When the debate on the causes of his defeat was over Gladstone had one consolation: the Liberal candidates in South-East Lancashire had lost by larger majorities than he and Grenfell: the heavier defeat in what had previously been a Liberal stronghold is surely to be attributed to Gladstone's superlative skill as a campaigner. And nationally his stand in South-West Lancashire achieved what Rathbone and his colleagues had predicted for it: it raised morale in all constituencies, while the lateness of the poll in West Derby hundred meant that it dispirited none. Brand aptly summarised the struggle: "You are in the position of a great general who has achieved a grand victory at great sacrifice".<sup>(53)</sup>

#### NOTE

After this paper was completed Dr. H. J. Hanham's book *Elections and Party Management: Politics in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone* was published in October 1959. This is a masterly

<sup>(53)</sup> E. F. Rathbone, *William Rathbone, A Memoir* (London, 1905) p. 215; A. F. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

survey of the local and national party organisations and the techniques of electioneering between the reform bills of 1867 and 1884; there is a long chapter on most of the Lancashire elections of 1868, the four or five pages on the contest in South-West Lancashire being based mainly on the Melly Papers. On the election Dr. Hanham's conclusions and mine are similar—though he does not mention the Liberal failure to found a working-men's association—and it is interesting to note that the unrepresentative character, which on negative evidence I attributed to the South-West Lancashire Liberal Registration Association, was typical of such organisations: Dr. Hanham speaks of them as "self-perpetuating oligarchies". However, he corrects my account in one particular at least. I gave too much credit to Disraeli in the formation of Conservative working men's associations; these were principally the work of a group of young Conservatives in London.

## APPENDIX

Below is an exact transcription of document 3066 in the Melly Papers. The total of the first column is £5,200 (including £250 subscribed by Heywood for the expenses of registration), of the second £2,800, and of the third £215. If we assume that when the list was compiled not all this promised £8,215 had in fact been collected then the rather cryptic figures at the bottom left-hand corner make sense. "Say 8,200" is Billson's estimate of the final total, of which £6,545 had actually been given by 21 August: perhaps £4,750 by the men in the first column, £1,300 by the donors of £100 each, £350 by those at the bottom of column two, and £145 by those in the third column.

Most Confidential.

Subscription List for South West Lancashire Election 1868.

The Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P.—H. R. Grenfell, Esq., M.P.

		William Langton			
		Esq	£100	H. Crossfield	25
A friend (Croxteth)	£2000	Francis Hollins Esq	100	J. R. Jeffery	25
		George Mayall Esq	100	B. Rathbone Esq	25
		David Gamble Esq	100		
		George Holt Esq	100		
		R. D. Holt Esq	100		
		A. Holt Esq	100		
		P. H. Holt Esq	100		
J. P. Heywood					
	Esq	P. H. Rathbone Esq	100		
Register	„ 250	W. J. Lamport Esq	100		
		F. G. Prange Esq	100	Thomas Kirkpatrick	
				Esq	20
		J. Evans Esq Newton	100	Wm. Crossfield Jnr	
				Esq	20
		T. Evans Esq Newton	100	C. S. Parker Esq	20
				Hyslop Maxwell	20
		J. Lancaster	100		
		R. Alison	100		
		J. C. Brown	100		

	A. J. Brown	100		
	Weld Blundell	100		
	T. A. Hope	100	Samuel Peck Esq	10
James H. Macrae			Henry J. Cook Esq	10
Esq	£250		James Still Esq	10
Benjamin H. Jones			W. C. Miller Esq	10
Esq	250		Dr. Craven	10
J. C. Ewart Esq	250			
T. D. Hornby Esq	250			
Robertson Gladstone				
Esq	250	Robert Trimble Esq	50	
S. G. Rathbone Esq	250			
Thomas Brocklebank				
Esq	250			
Sir Thomas Birch	200			
	Richard Johnson Esq	50		
	Jacob G. Brown Esq	50		
	Charles J. Forget Esq	50		
	James Aiken Esq	50		
	T. G. Blain Esq	50		
	J. J. Stitt Esq	50	John Rogers Esq	5
	W. Crosfield	50	H. Middlehurst Esq	5
	J. Crosfield	50		
	Sam Bright	50		
	J. A. Picton	50		
	A. Kelso	50		
	E. Keith	50		
4750	Messrs. Pilkington	50		
1300	T. Holden	50		
350	McCorquodale	50		
145	W. Moore	50		
—	Say 8200			
6545	—21 August—	Holbrook Gaskell	50	