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SCOTLAND AND THE LIBERAL PARTY 1880-1900

CHURCH, IRELAND AND EMPIRE

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Presented for M. Litt. Degree by Ian McLeod

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

a) The Rise of Scottish Liberalism:

Historians may dispute the importance for England and Wales of Parliamentary Reform in 1832: there is less room for dispute in the case of Scotland. There, it was, in Cockburn's words "giving us a political constitution for the first time"; it was more the creation than the reform of a system of political representation.

Throughout most of the 18th Century, Scotland was virtually a blank sheet so far as parliamentary politics was concerned. By the Act of Union, she had gained the right to send 45 MPs and 16 peers to the parliament at Westminster. Even under the best of circumstances, such small numbers were bound to have had only a limited influence. However, even this representation was debased and rendered worthless to the Scottish nation by the character of political activity in 18th Century Scotland.

This was the age of "Management" when single individuals or small oligarchies controlled the representation of most of the counties and burghs of Scotland in the fashion of private fiefdoms. Lord Bute, the Scot who so dominated the young George III, and was so hated by English politicians, drew a considerable part of his power from his firm control of Scotland's parliamentary representation. His successor to this role in Scotland, Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville, exerted an even wider and tighter grip on his nation's representation.

In 1784, Dundas was said to hold 22 of the 45 Scottish



M.P.s in his pocket and after the election of 1790, as many as 34 were subject, to some degree, to his control.<sup>1</sup> At the heart of this system was a spreading web of corruption, gerry-mandering and burgh-mongering, so complete and so venal as to reduce Scotland, politically, to "a string of rotten and pocket burghs".<sup>2</sup> Obviously, Scotland had long ceased to have any capacity for a national expression in parliament. On the other hand, by remaining isolated as a block of controlled votes, Scottish representation was kept outside of a "British" political system until "Reform". Hence, paradoxically, the corruption and control may well have preserved an opportunity for the growth of separate Scottish political institutions when popular representation came. Nevertheless, the greatest legacy of the management system was the enduring discredit attached to the party of the managers: the Tory party. By identifying themselves so closely with a cynical self-interested disregard of law and morality, the Scottish Tories effectively threw away their most essential image: the party of order and rectitude.

The dominant feature of the unreformed system of Scotland was its exclusiveness. If politics were corrupt, it was a corruption shared by very few. In 1823, there were fewer than 4,500 electors in the entire country, ignoring multiple voting.<sup>3</sup> The most unrepresentative conditions existed in the

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1. W. Ferguson Scotland - 1689 to Present Edinburgh 1968 pp. 241, 247

2. H. J. Hanham Elections and Party Management in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone London 1959 p. 155

3. M. Brock The Great Reform Act London 1973 p. 312

15 burgh constituencies consisting of Edinburgh and 14 groupings of the 66 royal burghs. These burgh groupings bore little resemblance to the reality of population in an industrializing Scotland: Glasgow had one-quarter of a member within the Clyde group while non-royal burghs like Greenock and Paisley had no representation at all. More importantly, there was no direct franchise in the burghs; by the Act of Union the choice of member rested exclusively with the members of the corporations. These bodies were the shame of Scotland; closed oligarchies beyond control who plundered the public purse at will and openly marketed parliamentary franchises.<sup>4</sup> The corporation of Edinburgh formed a constituency of 33 in a city with a population of 162,000. All told the entire burgh franchise of Scotland amounted to no more than 1,500.<sup>5</sup> The situation in the counties was different yet hardly an improvement. Whereas the size of English county electorates drove local magnates to avoid contests and their costs, Scottish counties were noted for their closed nature. Electorates ranged from 21 in Bute to 240 in Fife and Perthshire, and totalled for the country no more than 3,000. Unlike England, the franchise was not tied directly to land ownership but rather to "superiorities", rights originally tied to property but no longer so. Half of the county votes, including 20 of Bute's 21, were tied only to pieces of parchment which were

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4. Ferguson op. cit. p. 243

5. Brock op. cit. p. 31

openly brokered to the advantage of the managers. In this fashion, the Duke of Montrose controlled Dumbartonshire without holding any property there. Legal chicanery and mal-practice flourished with parchment votes: inventing fictitious ones and dividing others. Few counties were the "nomination" seats of a single magnate, though on one occasion, a candidate for Bute nominated, seconded and, because he was the sole voter present, elected himself.<sup>6</sup> The cement which held the system together was patronage: India was populated with the well-educated younger sons of Scots who could aid the managers.<sup>7</sup>

The "economical" reforms of the 1820's dried up much of this patronage and, as a result, as the 1830's approached, the old system in Scotland was falling into rapid decay. Agitation for reform in Scotland, especially in the Burghs, was less only than that in Birmingham.<sup>8</sup> The Reforms which eventually emerged in 1832 were far more revolutionary than those accorded to the other parts of the United Kingdom.

The English borough electorate had been expanded from 247,000 to 370,000, an increase of about 50% with the increase in the county franchise, 188,000 to 282,000, about the same; the Scottish burgh electorate swelled to 31,000, twenty times its former size while the county roll grew by a factor of eleven to 35,000.<sup>9</sup> These figures speak for themselves as to the impact of reform on Scotland.

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6. *ibid.* p. 31

7. *ibid.* p. 32

8. *ibid.* p. 168

9. *ibid.* p. 312

However, simple political reform was not the only revolutionary force at work in Scotland prior to 1832. Profound social changes were rapidly overtaking the old system. A middle class was not new to Scotland but:

never before .... could merchants, lawyers, professors and doctors preen themselves as "men in the middle ranks of life who generally constitute the majority of every free community."<sup>10</sup>

Yet this new "revolutionary" group found itself utterly denied a public voice at both the local and the national level. In England, the equivalent "new men" had found a system which allowed some expression and acceptance; in Scotland the only outlet was ingratiating with a manager.

The feelings of such men were fueled by the impact of the French Revolution on the mind of Scotland. Scotland, which had long possessed, in company with feudal institutions, an ancient tradition of equalitarian values, provided particularly rich soil for the doctrines of the revolution:

"A man's a man for a' that" embodied not only the age old unpolitical democracy of peasant Scotland but also the Rights of Man.<sup>11</sup>

No less potent was the fundamental democracy of the Calvinism so deeply imbued in Scotsmen.

No less important was the fact that Scotland was a

10. Ferguson op. cit. p. 244 quoting Caledonian Mercury Dec. 28, 1782

11. *ibid* p. 249

nation, not merely a region. The 18th Century is sometimes seen as the Golden Age of Scotland and, without doubt, names such as Adam, Smith, Hume and Watt all bear testimony to the explosion of creativity and learning that sprang from Scotland at this time. However, in the wake of the Act of Union in 1707, the lure of wealthy England was proving irresistible to ambitious young Scots like James Boswell, who tried to shed their tongue, culture and origins with almost indecent haste as they rushed south. The very name "Scotland" vanished as the intelligentsia eagerly embraced "North Britain". These trends began to ease only in the last years of the century as the social changes mentioned above created a growing middle class reading public in Scotland. The romances of Sir Walter Scott and the matchless evocations of the Scottish spirit created by Robert Burns had a profound effect and did much to popularize a new pride in nationhood.

Thus as the most articulate sections of the Scottish people were being roused to a state of self-confidence and national identity, political forces were providing them with a means of expression: parliamentary representation. The agents of reform, the Whig-Liberal party, were thus adopted by Scotland as national liberators:

the evil memory of the unreformed burgh corporations, the genuine national aspiration for a "Christian Democracy", the dissenters' distrust of authority and repression, the general adherence to free trade doctrines and the influential support of leading newspapers ....

continued to make Scottish Liberalism irresistible.<sup>12</sup>

The triumph of Liberalism was not, as in England, a phenomenon of the 1830's; it grew into a swelling tide as the years passed such that by the 1860's one party hegemony was almost complete. The opponents of the Liberal party were to win a majority in Scotland only once between 1832 and 1914.

The bond between Scotland and Liberalism clearly went much deeper than ideology. John Vincent has suggested that, in England, the man who voted Liberal was a man who belonged to a section of society that allowed him to identify with the great Victorian concept of "progress"; his vote was a declaration of his ambitions and his confidence in the future. Vincent, dealing with the social origins of Victorian Liberals, points out that those who saw themselves as having the most to gain from an advancing, unfettered society were those most inclined to vote Liberal.<sup>13</sup> This was undoubtedly equally true of many Scottish Liberals as well but, as Vincent notes, it is not adequate as an explanation for the particular strength of Liberalism north of the border:

**Socially, Irish and Scottish Liberals were rather more aristocratic and territorial than the English .... of the 71 Liberal M.P.s sitting for Scotland between 1859 and 1874, twenty-one had military connections, three were the patrons of livings, fifteen were related to the peerage and forty-three were large land owners or their**

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12. G. S. Pryde Scotland from 1603 to the Present Day  
Benn London 1934 p. 209

13. J. Vincent The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857-1868  
Penguin London 1972 p. 93-161

sons. What was involved at the Parliamentary level, in Scotland, was not any kind of revolt (radical) but a cultural and intellectual phenomenon, the devastating inroads made upon the traditional holders of wealth and power and land, the natural conservatives, by Liberal ideas.<sup>14</sup>

Scotland's political liberation of 1832 had taken a turn different from, yet not unrelated to, the liberation of Vincent's English social classes; Liberalism was Scotland's national declaration of reborn nationhood. Social factors were involved but national forces were the essential element. Toryism, the only alternative, stood irredeemably for the "Bad Old Days", hence unacceptable and unable to re-establish its appeal as it did in England. The Liberalism that the Scots brought to the British Liberal Party was unique: national without being nationalist, rigorous in its commitment to Liberal principles yet appealing to a very wide spectrum of the social order. Much of the source of that appeal could be found within the character and heritage of the Scots themselves:

a passion for the ideal and a sense of the obligation of men who deal with public affairs to build upon nothing less than principles of right .... I am a Liberal because I am a Scotchman.<sup>15</sup>

(b) Institutions in Victorian Scotland

To a large extent, the distinctive character of

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14. *ibid* p. 85

15. A. T. Innes R. Reid (ed.) Why I am a Liberal  
London n.d. p. 64

Scottish politics in the 19th Century stemmed from the separate character of independent Scottish institutions. Though the Act of Union had eliminated a Scottish parliament, the church, education and legal system of Scotland had all been left with an autonomous existence. Given that so much of the political controversy of the 19th Century centred on institutions, the fact that Scotland's were specifically Scottish helped create an independent Scottish political world. The Scottish radical A. Taylor Innes' description of Liberalism as "the praise of free institutions"<sup>16</sup> unconsciously touched the heart of the distinctiveness of his nation's Liberalism.

#### Presbyterianism

Presbyterianism was the single greatest driving force of 19th Century Scottish Liberalism, playing little direct role in political life, but providing "a silent and powerful impulse towards democracy."<sup>17</sup> The established church of Scotland, unlike that of England, was presbyterian in character, the episcopal church of Scotland representing only an insignificant minority. Scottish presbyterianism is Calvinist in origin, a stern faith brought and established by John Knox to root out the Catholicism of Scotland's population, monarchs and allies. While the Church of Scotland

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16. A. T. Innes Chapters of Reminiscence Hodder and Stoughton London 1913 p. 81

17. D. W. Unwin "Conservative Party Organization in Scotland" SHR 1965 p. 91 quoting Westminster Review 1888 p. 589



evolved through periods of near episcopalianism, unlike the Church of England, that classic masterpiece of English compromise, the Scottish church was born of a revolution - a faith imposed on the elite from below. This legacy of revolutionary fervor it never lost. The greater reluctance of the Scots to accommodate and adjust their principles was to be a continuing theme of Scottish political and ecclesiastical life in the 19th Century.

Presbyterianism was a creed that demanded much from the individual, no matter how high or low born. It delegated a strong role to the laity of the church through the kirk session and while it was never as democratic in practice as in theory, the implications were unmistakable. In the belief that it was wrong for a priest to interfere between a man and his God, the individual Scot was given a clear sense of his own responsibilities, self-reliance and independence from birth. In all ranks of Scottish society there existed a pride in the spirit which had moved Knox to refuse to recognize inside his church "ladies and gentlemen, only men and women".

In an age when religious dispute has almost faded as a subject of serious controversy, it is difficult to appreciate the seriousness, the passion and the crucial nature of the ecclesiastical controversies of 19th Century Scotland. It is even more difficult to appreciate them when it is remembered that the great mass of Scots were united in their commitment to the principles of Presbyterianism and agreed on most points of doctrine. Over 80% of the Scottish population

belonged to one of the three Presbyterian churches.<sup>18</sup> Yet from the 1840's until the turn of the century, the status and condition of the Scottish churches were a recurring source of controversy, division and political debate.

At the time of the Scottish rebirth of 1832, Presbyterianism was divided into two general groupings: one, by far the larger, belonged to the established Church of Scotland, the other comprised a number of small dissenting sects. As in England, the Evangelical movement swept through Scotland causing great soul-searching and upheaval within the leadership and the membership of the Kirk. The most serious dispute centred on the institution of lay patronage, sanctioned by the United Parliament of 1712. To the new movement, it represented a deviation from the ideals of Presbyterianism and a blot on the purity of the Scottish faith. Pressures built up in the 1830's and lines began to harden. The eventual result was the Great Disruption of 1843 when over 450 ministers, representing 40% of the Kirk membership withdrew from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to establish the Free Church of Scotland under the leadership of Dr. Thomas Chalmers. Given the religious character of 19th Century Scottish society, the importance of the Disruption cannot be over-emphasised.

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18. H. Pelling Social Geography of British Elections  
MacMillan London 1967 p. 375

In 1843, the Free Churchmen did not see themselves as dissenters in the sense of opposing the principle of an established national church. Chalmers wrote:

though we quit the Establishment, we go out on the Establishment principle; we quit a Viti-ated Establishment, but would rejoice in returning to a pure one .... we are not voluntaries.<sup>19</sup>

However, the secession eventually institutionalized itself and drifted towards the advocacy of disestablishment. This could only be accomplished by political action in the temporal authority of Parliament; thus the Disruption, by rending the very heart of Scottish society, may have been the greatest single event in the history of 19th Century Scotland.

#### Law

The second institution which gave meaning to the nationality of Scotland was her legal system. Scotland retained her own civil and criminal law after 1707 and, while some measure of assimilation took place, especially in criminal law, a fundamental sense of independence was retained. Scots law, in keeping with the rest of Western Europe but unlike English law which is based on tradition and precedent, is founded on Roman law. Scots Law is at once more logical, sterner and less humanistic in its approach to the ordering of society.

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19. Ferguson op. cit. p. 312

The most politically significant legal issue of Victorian Scotland was the problem of land law. Land, the rights of property versus the rights of the tenant, became a particular issue when the Highland Crofters, influenced by the Irish example, refused to submit to any further clearances in the 1880's. Scottish land law was almost feudal in character and exhibited a particularly stiff support of property rights, offering little or no security to tenants.

The pattern of land ownership in Scotland with all its social and political ramifications was a direct result of the Scottish law of entail which was much stricter than its English equivalent. In a measure designed to strengthen the power of the landowning classes, the Scottish Parliament of 1685 passed a statute that made primogeniture a first principle and the division of property difficult. The eventual result was a massive concentration of land ownership in the hands of a very few. In 1878, 68 persons owned 50% of the land in Scotland; 580 owned 75%<sup>20</sup>. A small group of great nobles, the Dukes of Argyll, Atholl, Buccleuch and Sutherland all possessed enormous holdings. Such highly visible power and privilege led to a strengthening of the sense of injustice and radicalism in Victorian Scotland.

Finally, because Scotland had her own system of

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20. Pelling op. cit. p. 373

justice based in Edinburgh, she had a highly influential organized body of professionals with a Scottish base. The legal profession, always a vital group in any society, was both Scottish in composition and Scottish in orientation. This was in contrast to Wales where the common legal system of Wales and England took the ambitious young lawyers of Wales to London.<sup>21</sup> While the profession as a whole had an old reputation for Toryism,<sup>22</sup> individual Scottish lawyers came to be the dominant element in the Scottish Liberal caucus after 1886. With the drift away of the old sources, military men, business men and the land, post-Home Rule Liberalism in Scotland became increasingly dependent on men of the law; and because they were nationally based, they may have taken a greater interest in and been more responsive to Scottish perceptions of issues.

### Education

Until the educational reforms of the late 19th Century, the system of education in Scotland was both markedly different from and generally superior to its English equivalent. The origins of Scottish education lie partly in Scotland's ancient equalitarian values but owe most to the force of the Presbyterian revolution. Knox and his followers considered education to be one of the fundamental duties of a godly

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21. K. O. Morgan Wales in British Politics University of Wales Press Cardiff 1963 p. 7

22. Unwin op. cit. p. 106

people. Children were "born ignorant of godliness" and needed teaching in the duties of life and eternity. The key to that goal lay in opening the scriptures, via literacy, to the common man; this would also have the result of securing the permanency of the revolution. It was not, however until 1696 that the state made a serious effort to transform Knox's dream of a school in every parish into a reality by placing a support tax on landowners.

While the true worth of the resulting system has been questioned, it is generally accepted that by the 18th century only Prussia, parts of Switzerland and America could rival the breadth of education in Scotland.<sup>23</sup> Most significantly, Scottish standards were far in advance of those of England. Even in 1850, over 30% of the English population was still illiterate compared to less than 10% in Scotland.<sup>24</sup> The key to the Scottish system was its philosophy of cherishing education in all and attempting to provide for the poor "lad o' pairts". In the rural lowland parishes, these ideals were close to realized; resulting in:

the construction of a literate peasant society . . . . that was not only able to read but apparently loved reading . . . . opening their intellectual horizons and thus breaking the mental cake of irrational custom.<sup>25</sup>

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23. T. C. Smout A History of the Scottish People 1560-1830 Collins 1969 p. 427

24. R. Shannon The Crisis of Imperialism 1865-1915 Hart - Davis Macgibbon, 1974 London p. 222

25. Smout op. cit. p. 432

However, the realities of the democratizing effects of the system should not be overemphasised:

The Scottish system of education made it possible for a few exceptionally gifted ploughboys to live in palaces and for an appreciable number to occupy manses, bank parlours and captain's cabins and to become members of clubs in India but it did little for the ordinary farmhand.<sup>26</sup>

The educational system was very much less successful in contending with the difficulties of remoteness (in the Highlands) and most importantly, with the swelling industrial burghs where conditions were little better than those in England.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the effects of the equalitarianism in the system were profound in a society of great inequalities. It is highly significant that all Scots seemed to take a patriotic pride in the virtues of the system.

The importance of the Scottish universities should not be overlooked. They provided, not only higher education of the highest international standards but also a prestigious focus for the social and intellectual elite of Scotland. As such, they formed a barrier against the forces of assimilation as well as strengthening the national feelings of the Scots.

It should be pointed out that while educational reform in England was all too often reduced to petty sectarian

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26. Hanham op. cit. p. 162

27. Smout op. cit. p. 450

squabbles, Scotland was free of this plague. United in the principles of Presbyterianism, Scots could turn their attention to genuine problems of education. Moreover, the traditional dedication to learning caused education to be a constant subject of interest, discussion and action amongst the political leadership of the country.<sup>28</sup>

Buttressed by these institutions Scottish society managed to retain its own character. Curiously, it combined social and economic disparities that were greater than those of England with a spirit of openness and recognition of merit that allowed these divisions to be more easily surmounted. Most of the aristocracy had absorbed some degree of Anglicization and a few had alienated themselves into absenteeism on the Irish pattern. However, even here the Scottish identity flourished:

The Scottish aristocrat may be and generally is especially tenacious of his rights and privileges and so far is the natural ally of the English aristocrat; but something in the very air of his country gives him a reverence for intellect, a sense of fundamental human equality and an admiration for those qualities which make men wise rather than those which make them stagnate.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand the degree of Anglicization in the upper ranks bred a distrust amongst the middle and lower classes that was based not merely on social differences but, much more potently, on nationalism. Class conflict in Scotland has always derived a special tinge of bitterness from the

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28. see especially Rosebery MSS; Bryce MSS passim

29. E. T. Raymond The Man of Promise Fisher Unwin London 1923 p.39



merging of social and patriotic identities.

Scottish institutions directed the course of Scottish Liberalism in the 19th Century so long as Liberalism stayed true to its fundamental Mid-Victorian commitment to institutional reform. So long as that remained so, the politics of Scotland would remain distinctly Scottish. Disestablishment was a Scottish issue in the way that 'the 8-hour day' could never be.

c) The Victorian Scottish Liberal Party:

National Dominance:

The outstanding feature of the Liberal Party in Scotland was its position of extraordinary dominance between 1832 and 1914. In the first reformed election the Whigs won 43 of Scotland's new total of 53 seats, setting a pattern of victory that would last over 60 years. Later in the century, John Buchan was not unjustified in considering his choice of Toryism as one of rebellion against the 'Establishment'.<sup>30</sup>

In 1841, a limited Tory recovery reduced the Liberals to 30 seats. However, Peel's failure to understand the prickly state of Scottish church politics on the eve of Disruption and his consequent rejection of the desire to loosen

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30. J. A. Smith John Buchan Rubert Hart Davis, London, 1965 p. 181

the bonds of the national church from the state led both to the church breakup and to the end of any hope of extending Conservative strength in Scotland.

Support for the Liberals grew steadily over the next two decades until by 1865 they held 41 seats. The formal creation of the Liberal Party under Gladstone's leadership in 1868 ensured that Scotland would turn towards Liberalism with an even greater devotion than before. In 1869, after redistribution had awarded Scotland an additional 7 seats, the Liberals were rewarded with 53 of 60 Scottish members.

1874 brought the first favourable turn for Toryism since 1841. Scotland, like the rest of the United Kingdom, turned sharply against the Liberals, reducing their numbers to 40. The Conservatives were utterly taken aback by their victories, having bothered to contest only one half of the Scottish constituencies. As a result, even in this election, the popular vote for the Liberals remained over 70%.<sup>31</sup> Despite an improved organization instigated by Disraeli, the Tory gains of 1874 were wiped out by the tide of Gladstone's Midlothian crusade which returned the Liberals to their strength of 1869. The Liberals maintained this position in 1885, taking 62 seats (the redistribution of 1884 gave Scotland 72 seats), despite severe internal division. Ominously, however, the Liberal share of the popular vote fell almost 7% from the 1880 level of 72.8%.<sup>32</sup>

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31. Unwin op. cit. p. 94

32. *ibid.* p. 94

As in the rest of the United Kingdom, 1886 marked a great turning point. The Gladstonian Liberals won only 43 Scottish seats and 55% of the popular vote, the Liberal Unionists winning 17 seats and the Conservatives 12.<sup>33</sup> The Liberals recovered only mildly in 1892 to 50 seats and 56%.<sup>34</sup> Though badly reduced from the heyday of 1885, the Liberals still retained a sizeable majority of seats in Scotland. Even this was threatened, however, in 1895, when the Liberals, without Gladstone, were reduced to 39 seats compared with the Unionists. Bottom was touched in 1900 when the Khaki election deprived Scottish Liberalism of its majority of seats (34 of 72) and reduced its popular share to 51.2%.<sup>35</sup> The Liberal recovery of 1906 was particularly spectacular in Scotland: 58 (plus 2 Labour) of 72 seats and 57.6% (3.7% Labour).<sup>36</sup> Most significantly, Scotland did not return to the Unionists in 1910; in fact, in January 1910 the Liberal representation was increased to 59 (2 Labour) and the Tories regained only 1.4%.<sup>37</sup> of the popular vote. The only change in December 1910 was the shift of one Liberal seat to Labour.

The chief result of the overwhelming Liberal strength before 1886 was the virtual elimination of inter-party politics. Political activity and struggle was kept within

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33. *ibid.* p. 94

34. *ibid.* p. 94

35. *ibid.* p. 94

36. *ibid.* p. 94

37. *ibid.* p. 94

the national party. Aiding this practice was the oligarchical nature of party structure that, by putting a premium on social position, kept the party from becoming ideological. While rank counted, the party stayed very open to general participation; thus problems were absorbed and dealt with. In those places where Tories never stood, and this included a great number of the burgh seats, the sole political arena was the local Liberal Association. The Liberalism of Scotland was so secure that it "had a unique air of permanence".<sup>38</sup> Thus the battle over Disestablishment was not so much between Tory and Liberal as between differing strains of Liberalism.

#### Issues: Religion, Society and Nationalism

By far the most important issue for Victorian Scottish politics was the Scottish church. The Disruption and the eventual division of religious Scotland made it inevitable that the state and secular politics would soon be deeply involved. In the English context, Cobden had said: "Dissent is the soul of Liberalism". The foremost leader of Liberal Scotland in the mid-century was Duncan McLaren who, as a leading member of the United Presbyterian Church (as the pre-1843 dissenters became after an amalgamation in 1847), organized his brand of Liberalism with the overriding object of forcing the disestablishment of the church of Scotland. However, while the dissent -

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38. Hanham op. cit. p. 156

establishment split in Scotland tended to follow Liberal-Conservative lines in politics, these were much less certain than in England.

The preferences of the religious leadership were, by contrast, very clear. In the university voting of 1868, the ministers of religion voted as follows:

	Liberal	Conservative
Church of Scotland	67	1,221
Free Church	607	33
U. P. Church	474	1
Episcopalians	4	78
Others	<u>360</u>	<u>35</u>
	1,512	1,368 <sup>39</sup>

Yet given the fact that the Liberals won 82% of the total vote in Scotland in 1869,<sup>40</sup> it is obvious that this hardly reflected the loyalties of the laity. As the front line troops of a threatened institution, the Establishment clergy sought the security of the Conservative Party with its unflinching support of the existing order on either side of the Tweed. While the Liberal Party was not to support Disestablishment officially until 1892, the ties between the Liberals and Dissent were too obvious not to have had an effect. Nevertheless, without doubt, a very large body of churchmen continued to vote Liberal until the 1880's. While it is difficult to be certain on the point, it seems

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39. Vincent op. cit. p. 86

40. J. Morley Life of Gladstone MacMillan London 1903 Vol. II p251

probable that there existed qualities within the general philosophy of Presbyterianism that went beyond disestablishment quarrels and promoted Liberalism in Scotland. As a presbyterian, the Scottish churchman was much closer to the faith and principles of the English dissenters, the bulwark of English Liberalism, than to Anglicanism.

The last quarter of the century saw the climax of politico-religious disputes. Theoretically, the major points of controversy between the Free Church and the kirk should have been eliminated by Disraeli's Patronage Act of 1874 which erased the hated Act of 1712. Yet, partly out of its ingrained nature, the conflict continued and, indeed, grew. English politicians were always baffled by Scottish church controversy: Peel's ignorance had touched off the Disruption; Joseph Chamberlain, the great English Dissenter, could not understand the source of the Scottish dispute,<sup>41</sup> Gladstone, though he appreciated it better, could see no solution.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps it was the deep devotion to high principle that Scottish Liberals spoke of so warmly that forced the issue on when it might have been resolved. The result was that in the early 1880's a swelling movement for the disestablishment of the kirk, allied to secular radicalism, began to overshadow the growing problem of Ireland and to tear the Scottish Liberal Party apart.

It is just as important to note what did not interest

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41. Innes Chapters ... op. cit. p. 151

42. Morley op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 471

the Scottish Liberal as what did. The most striking gap throughout the 19th Century and well into the 20th was a marked indifference to ideas or programmes of social reform. In 1894, R. B. Haldane was under no illusions as to the attractiveness of his own Fabian ideas to his own countrymen: "I have not a high opinion of my Scot as a social reformer."<sup>43</sup> The record well supports Haldane's judgement. The social conditions of Scotland had always been worse than in the wealthier society of England. In 1861, one third of the population lived in one room dwellings.<sup>44</sup> In the 1840's, Glasgow had been described as: "possibly the filthiest and unhealthiest of all British towns".<sup>45</sup> Yet, there was little in the way of a Scottish equivalent of Edward Chadwick's "drain-pipe mania". It is significant that the author of the immensely influential 'Self-Help', Samuel Smiles, was a Scot. Those who did concern themselves with poverty in Scotland tended to downgrade hygiene and material conditions in favour of the 'moral' aspect of impoverishment. It was regarded as both a sin and a crime to be poor, a philosophy which infected the Scottish Poor Law even more than the English counterpart. No really sustained efforts to attack matters of public health were initiated in Scotland until the 1860's. As a result, Scotland retained the worst living conditions in the United Kingdom throughout the 19th Century.

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43. Haldane to A. J. Balfour Dec. 23/1894, Haldane MSS 5904

44. Ferguson op. cit. p. 300

45. *ibid.* p. 300

The attitudes of Scottish Liberals well reflected the national prejudices:

On the whole the Liberals were devotees of Manchester and exponents of that remorseless economic creed. They tended to be institutional reformers with scant regard for social legislation and such badly needed reforms as factory legislation were championed by Tories rather than Liberals.<sup>46</sup>

This tendency of Liberalism was to be increasingly highlighted as social and working class interests came into the forefront of politics in the last years of the century. Scottish Liberalism was notoriously slow to encourage working class candidates; in 1906, the Scottish Liberal Party refused to acknowledge the Gladstone-MacDonald compact and by open opposition to Labour kept its Scottish representation to two or three until World War I. In 1918, Scottish Liberals overwhelmingly sided with Lloyd George. The heart of the ancient Liberal creed of fierce individualism came to rest in Scotland.

While the Scottish Liberals belonged to the so-called 'Celtic Fringe' of the late Victorian party, they did not behave as a 'national front' in the fashion of the Irish and, to a lesser degree, the Welsh. Rising nationalism in the latter half of the 19th Century led to the eventual adoption of the idea of Scottish Home Rule but outright separatism was never a significant force. Rosebery's entry into politics in 1880 was directly connected to what he and many others perceived as the inexcusable neglect of Scotland by

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46. Ferguson op. cit. p. 303



the Westminster Parliament. His efforts resulted in the not wholly satisfactory establishment of a Secretary of State for Scotland as a member of the Cabinet. His attitude reflected a widely shared sentiment:

I confess I think Scotland is as usual treated abominably. Justice for Ireland means everything done for her even to the payment of the natives' debts. Justice to Scotland means insulting neglect. I leave for Scotland next week with a view to blowing up a prison or shooting a policeman ....<sup>47</sup> (May 1882)

Despite these feelings, and for all the Scottish group's expanded influence in a shrunken Liberal Party there was little effort made to use it to push through national legislation.

The Scots did not have the nationalism of the sort that bound the Irish and Welsh together; they did not see themselves as "a people rightfully struggling to be free". Scotland did not regard herself as an oppressed minority; on the contrary, she firmly regarded herself as a full-fledged, if unappreciated, partner of England in a larger whole. No alien church or institution served as a focus for national discontent. However, though the conditions required for a genuine national liberation movement were lacking, the Scots nursed strong grievances over the way they felt that their particular interests were repeatedly passed over.

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47. R. R. James Rosebary Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1963 p. 130

While many Scottish Liberals pushed hard for Scottish Home Rule, the existing fact of 'Home Rule' within the party organization served to weaken Scotland's influence, not strengthen it. The Welsh, who were fully integrated into English Liberal bodies such as the NLF, sent well-drilled phalanxes of delegates to party conventions ready to swing their weight to secure a top position for Wales on the Liberal programme. Scotland, with its independent Scottish Liberal Association, sent only observers to these gatherings which effectively set the priorities for the entire British party whether the Scots liked it or not. So long as a single British legislature was the source of all measures for Scotland, it was a weakness for the Scots to stand aloof.

### Organization

Scottish Liberalism was characterized by an almost family atmosphere. Scotland is a small country with the bulk of her population packed together in a central belt. In the 19th Century, her society was closely knit together amongst its leading groups by the universities, the church, the bar, the press and kinship.<sup>48</sup> National identity allowed for a feeling of unity and sympathy for fellow Scots. Liberal burgh associations had a wide base and included most of the leading men of the community. A strong spirit of public duty permeated through the local officialdom of Scotland

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48. Hanham op. cit. p. 165

and corruption was almost unheard of.<sup>49</sup> The remarkable degree of closeness of personal relations within the Scottish Liberal leadership meant that it was possible for MPs to shift from constituency to constituency if not at first successful. T. R. Buchanan sat successively for Haddingtonshire, Edinburgh West, Aberdeenshire East and East Perthshire. However, in spite of this, the local associations were extremely jealous of their rights to select their own candidates. Local men usually carried an advantage for selection over outsiders, partly for personal reasons and partly because attention to and understanding of local matters counted for a great deal at the polls. Buchanan lost Aberdeenshire East in 1900 partly because he had been so remiss in caring for local interests.<sup>50</sup> Given this qualification, it remains true that the essential requirement for consideration remained either membership in the 'national family' or sponsorship by a family 'elder'. A hint of the intimate feelings existing between family members, even those at odds with each other, can be gleaned from the warning that Lord Rosebery sent to his ally and friend Ronald Munro-Ferguson, who had written attacking the leadership of Campbell-Bannerman:

Remember that he is thoroughly straight, a friend of yours, a Scot and do not be hasty to despair of him or even criticise him.<sup>51</sup>

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49. Vincent op. cit. p. 85n

50. J. W. Crombie to Bryce, Oct. 1900, Bryce MSS Box 21

51. Rosebery to Ferguson, March 14, 1899, Rosebery MSS 10019

Most of the leading Liberals were close personal friends and Scottish MPs in London tended to draw their friendships from within the caucus.<sup>52</sup> This kind of atmosphere meant that quarrels between different groups of Liberals could usually be 'kept in the family'.

Built on this family atmosphere, the structure of the Mid-Victorian Scottish Liberal Party was autonomous, well-connected and yet nationally unorganized in any formal sense. The basic units were the county and burgh associations which, though more broadly based than the English counterparts, usually consented to domination by a local oligarchy. In the counties, this could mean the influence of a single landowning family such as the Sinclairs in Caithness and the Elliots in Roxburghshire. The burgh associations, while more open, also tended to leave leadership to a select few. This partiality for oligarchy facilitated the development of a network of personal ties across Scotland that substituted for organization. Radicalism was absorbed into this system and as a result Scotland had none of the extra-party campaigns such as the National Education League that grew up in England. The one real national power in pre-1880 Scotland was the chief Liberal Whip, W. P. Adam. A Scot, Adam came to control most of the party funds and consequently was able to exert an influence on local associations that was unheard of in England.

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52. R. Farquharson In and Out of Parliament Hodder and Stoughton 1911 London

The unexpected Tory revival of 1874 shocked the Liberals; Adam concluded that the situation required the establishment of the bones of national organization. In 1876, he opened a first office in Edinburgh. Soon after, a separate office was established in Glasgow to deal with the more Tory West. The Edinburgh eastern association was professedly non-militant, existing only to

giving information and advice at elections ....  
not in any way to interfere with the independent actions of the various Liberal associations from which it is formed.<sup>53</sup>

One Liberal M.P. was happy that it did not seek "to interfere with internal constituencies nor in any way attempting to raise agitation in the country".<sup>54</sup> In contrast, the Western Association took on a radical and activist complexion, thus establishing a division between East and West in Liberalism that was to become permanent. A. L. Brown, a prominent radical, saw the purpose of the new organizations very differently from the 'moderates' quoted above: they were to "let the people's representatives know what the country really wanted, for their members sometimes needed education quite as much as the electors."<sup>55</sup>

However, all such differences were overwhelmed by the tide of enthusiasm and unity touched off by Gladstone's

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53. quoted in: J. G. Kellas "The Liberal Party in Scotland", Scottish Historical Review, 1965 p. 3

54. D. C. Savage "Scottish Politics 1885-86" S.H.R. 1961 p. 119

55. Kellas op. cit. p. 7

crusade in Midlothian. Significantly, the Midlothian campaign was kept tightly in the hands of Adam, Rosebery and A. Craig-Sellar, pillars of the Eastern group. Taking advantage of the situation, Rosebery helped engineer a merger of East and West, over the suspicions of the Western radicals, into a single Scottish Liberal Association. The Western doubts were justified; though greater in population, the West obtained only parity on the SLA Council and found the Executive Council, which was the real source of power, top-heavy with Whiggish Liberals. Resentful, the radicals organized across Scotland to pass resolutions in favour of disestablishment, land reform, temperance and other radical causes but these were all ignored by the SLA leadership. Lord Elgin, the chairman of the Association repeatedly emphasized that the SLA was not to deal with policy matters and in 1884, in response to rising disorder, was forced to rule out virtually all topical debate.

### Leadership

For all its importance to the British Liberal cause, Scotland failed to produce any notable leaders until the last two decades of the 19th Century. Indeed, during the Mid-Century, the Scottish caucus was notorious for the low quality of its members. From 1835 until 1880, when Gladstone won Midlothian, not a single Scottish M.P. served in any British Cabinet. Scotland's voice fell by default to Scottish peers such as the Earl of Aberdeen

and the Duke of Argyll.

As well as failing to produce British political figures, Scotland was also notably short of any 'national' leadership. The only figure to emerge who used his nationality and advocacy of Scotland's interest to rise to political significance was Rosebery. However, Rosebery's success was much more a personal achievement rather than the result of the marshalling of any particular Scottish force. Significantly, Rosebery's advocacy of Scottish interests fell rapidly away once he had risen to the forefront of the British Cabinet.

A Rosebery in the part of a Scottish Liberal was different from a Rosebery as Prime Minister and it has been the re-occurring misfortune for the advancement of purely Scottish questions that Scotsmen have turned their attention to non-Scottish politics on entering government office.<sup>56</sup>

The late 19th Century saw a shift from this bleak image as there came a rush of Scots into the leading ranks of the Liberal Party. In 1884, Campbell-Bannerman was the first full-blooded Scottish M.P. to reach high ministerial rank. He was joined by Bryce in 1892 along with English imports Asquith and Trevelyan. Marjoribanks was elevated by Rosebery in 1894. Not surprisingly, it was Campbell-Bannerman who gave the Scottish Liberals their greatest taste of power. Haldane, Sinclair,

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56. *ibid.* p. 14

R. T. Reid and Lord Elgin were all brought into the government of 1905. So obvious was the Caledonian invasion of the ministries of 1905 that a disgruntled English office-seeker wrote of "the wiles of the lowland clans and very low indeed".<sup>57</sup> Between 1880 and 1905, Scotland could claim three Prime Ministers: Rosebery, Balfour and Campbell-Bannerman; and many Scots would have claimed a fourth: Gladstone.

While this pattern of Scottish individual success is undoubted, its impact on Scottish interests is questionable. The Scots never regarded their successes as signalling the triumph of any particular Scottish question. They took successes as personal not national triumphs since they always assumed that they were acting in an essentially British arena in which their opportunities were on the same footing as anyone else's.

While Liberal Scotland did not adopt nationalist leaders, she certainly did adopt leaders. One figure stood out above all others in the moulding of the Scottish political mind in the latter half of the 19th Century: William Gladstone. While held in reverence by Liberals throughout the United Kingdom, he held a special appeal for the Scots. The spectacular triumph of Midlothian seemed to confirm an emotional tide that had been building in Scotland since the 1860's. That triumph served to inspire an entire generation of young Scottish Liberals and

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57. J. Wilson C-B Constable, London 1973 p. 461



in particular, to lay the foundations of the Liberal  
 bastion of East Scotland.<sup>58</sup>

In many Scottish homes, the Grand Old Man achieved  
 the status of a household God. This was particularly so  
 on the East Coast where a cult of the G.O.M. grew up to  
 be invested with near religious significance.<sup>59</sup> Mary  
 Gladstone provided a portrait of the extraordinary passion  
 that Mr. Gladstone aroused in Edinburgh even in the ebb  
 year of 1885:

As we drove to Edinburgh you would think it  
 was the first time it ever happened, the seven  
 miles of road with its frantic little groups,  
 the decorated cottages, the carriages,  
 bicycles, traps of all descriptions lining  
 the way, the gradual increase of people as you  
 get nearer Edinburgh, the crowds in the streets,  
 the eager faces cranning every window, high and  
 low; it is all exactly the same as before.<sup>60</sup>

This passionate devotion is made all the more remarkable  
 by Gladstone's indisputable background: upper class  
 English, High Anglican, Oxford. One of the most remark-  
 able aspects of a remarkable man was that his personal  
 character seemed quite distinct from these influences. To  
 rephrase the famous description, he was English in all but  
 the essentials. As a speaker, a politician and as a man  
 he was the reincarnation of his Scottish ancestors. The  
 impassioned rhetoric, the blazing eyes and the moral

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58. T. Shaw Letters to Isobel Cassell, London 1921  
 p. 78-79

59. James, op. cit. p. 325; Unwin, op. cit., p. 95

60. James op. cit. p. 174

fervour that transfixed all who came to hear him were drawn straight from the Scottish Reformation. His personal appeal, strong to English non-conformity, went straight to the heart of the Scottish character. His genius was in seizing the Presbyterian conscience of Scotland and exhorting it to stand by its highest principles of morality and right.

In the words of one of his Scottish contemporaries, his was:

a pilgrimage to men drilled in Christian doctrine (who) were moved not to admiration alone and a swaying of the mind but to a deeper sense of the responsibility of the individual citizen as a sharer, however humble, in his country's destiny.<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, his own vision of the purpose of liberalism, the reform and freeing of society's institutions, matched the emphasis of Scottish Liberals. Gladstone's influence in Scotland was founded on an insistence on treating his audience as rational individuals whose moral judgement could and should be trusted, a fundamental equalitarianism that touched a deep chord in Scotland. Perhaps most importantly, he maintained the twin qualities of romanticism and hard-headed rationality, a union which baffled and angered many in England but which displayed a remarkably accurate reflection of the Scottish genius.

Therefore it is not surprising that Scottish Liberalism

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61. Shaw op. cit. p. 78

became a particular source of support for Gladstone and retained his imprint long after it had begun to fade in the rest of Britain. A thoughtful Scottish Tory, John Buchan, could write of the appeal of Gladstonian Liberalism to Scotland:

it came as naturally as Toryism to a Highland laird. There was something of the ancient Scots jealousy of England, the rich and by repute, conservative neighbour; a wholesome dislike of snobbery; a partiality for plain folk .... some suspicion of denationalized lairds with Episcopal proclivities; a distrust of exotic cleverness (Mr. Disraeli); a traditional love of oratory especially when it smacked of the pulpit (Mr. Gladstone).<sup>62</sup>

However, as Buchan rightly pointed out, the example of Gladstone was too often taken by Scottish Liberals into:

self-righteousness, the constant assertion that you are better and more tender-hearted than your neighbours, the cultivation of emotions at high tension.<sup>63</sup>

Thus Scottish Liberalism could and did become stale, becoming its own worst enemy, denying entry to new men, new ideas in the face of a changing world; and eventually falling away to irrelevance.

#### Opposition to Liberalism

The history of Conservatism in Scotland in the 19th Century after reform falls naturally into two periods,

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62. Smith op. cit. p. 181

63. ibid. p. 181

dividing on the Home Rule split of 1886. Prior to that date Toryism was weak if not pathetic in character, fatalistically accepting a total Liberal hegemony in Scotland with little heart to dispute it. At best, Scottish Tories could be sure of only half a dozen safe county seats controlled by the influence of Tory lairds. In this way, Cameron of Locheil held Invernessshire, Lord Elcho held Haddingtonshire and the Earl of Galloway, Wigtownshire. The most obvious example was Bute where the Duke of Hamilton's grip was assured by 450 certain tenant votes on Arran.<sup>64</sup> Besides these isolated Old Tory Lairds, the party had influence only within a small upper class urban minority and the official and legal classes of Edinburgh. The adherence of the latter group, so disliked in Scotland, was only a further debit for the Conservatives.<sup>65</sup> Even the strength in the counties was underutilized: from a combination of extreme snobbery and defeatism sympathetic lairds often refused to stir to the activity of securing votes. In 1874 in Elgin, the sitting Tory M.P., a Col. Grant, refused to lower himself to campaign or even to speak.<sup>66</sup> The Tory victories of that year came by default when the lowland tenantry rebelled against the Liberal Establishment after a series of bad harvests. In 1868 only 21 of 56 seats were contested.

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64. Hanham op. cit. p. 160

65. Unwin op. cit. p. 106

66. B. Crapster "Scotland and the Conservative Party in 1876" Journal of Modern History 1957 p. 357

Native Scottish leadership was non-existent. The nominal leaders, the Dukes of Buccleuch and Richmond, Lennox and Gordon were discredited figureheads. The only real leader was Lord Salisbury through his family connections with the Balfours, the Earl of Galloway and Campbell of Blythwood. An investigation sent out in 1876 by an dissatisfied Disraeli could find no lever to act on other than increased stimulation of the lairds; hardly a promising idea.<sup>67</sup>

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67. *ibid.* p. 360

**CHARTER 2**

Impending Crises: 1880-85

Impending Crises: 1880-85

a) Loss of The Whigs:

The years of the second Gladstone government proved an anticlimax to the excitement of Midlothian. The essentially negative character of the victory of 1880, the rejection of 'Beaconsfieldism', had left the Liberal victors with little clear idea of a programme to follow. Given this climate of vulnerable aimlessness, exemplified by the Bradlaugh affair, the new government stood utterly unprepared for the sudden onslaught of events from Ireland. The Kilmainham crisis of 1882 was followed by the tragic catastrophe of Phoenix Park. Elsewhere, the ignominy of Majuba in South Africa and the Gordon affair assaulted the Liberals on other flanks. The government's reaction to these events, added to the nature of its one notable achievement, the Reform Bill of 1884, made it increasingly difficult for the traditional 'right' of the Liberal Party to maintain its allegiance.

The breadth of the party in Scotland, with its traditional hold on much of the social elite of the country, made the effect of this growing ideological dissatisfaction particularly acute. The resignation of the Duke of Argyll in 1881 over the Irish Land Bill was only the best-publicized instance of a much more general movement. Long before 1886, Scottish Liberalism had lost much of the wealth, social power and influence that had supported the old Victorian 'national' party.

Disaffection, in earnest, can probably be dated from the Bulgarian Agitations of the late 1870's. Gladstone's rhetoric had struck many of the remaining Whigs as unseemly, dangerous and, even, unpatriotic. The Earl of Minto was probably typical in his reactions as a powerful but doubting Scottish Whig:

I am quite out of humour with the factious conduct of the opposition. I am little inclined to make efforts or sacrifice for their comfort.<sup>1</sup>

Minto's family, the Elliots, who dominated the Liberal interest in Roxburghshire were, on the whole, also increasingly disenchanted with the party of their traditional loyalties:

Sir Walter Elliot's hesitation to pledge (for Minto's son, Arthur) is natural enough in a man who approves of Beaconsfield's Eastern policy and disapproves of disestablishment. In fact, he wants the opposition to make up their minds as to what their policy is to be .... to show their hand - which is precisely what the Liberals under the inspiration of the expediency men of the party are determined not to do.<sup>2</sup>

Another Roxburghshire Whig had more tangible reasons to be wary of Gladstone's crusade:

William Scott .... would require to know what Arthur Elliot's views on Eastern Affairs are - because, he added very characteristically: "I have a good deal of money in Turkish securities".<sup>3</sup>

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1. Minto to A. Elliot Feb. 4, 1878 Elliot MSS  
Box 5 no. 32
  2. Minto to A. Elliot Oct. 12, 1878 Elliot MSS  
Box 5 no. 32
  3. Minto to A. Elliot Oct. 16, 1878 Elliot MSS  
Box 5 no. 32



Minto's own disaffection was such that he was very reluctant to give any support even to his own son as a Liberal candidate:

.... if the elections were made to depend on the approval of Gladstonian foreign policies.<sup>4</sup>

The attitude of the Roxburghshire Whigs was a reflection of a general pattern throughout Scotland: unease, doubts, reassessments. James Bryce wrote to Gladstone in disparaging terms of:

.... the so-called Gentry, the military and the new rich men of places like Glasgow whose opinion is no better than "West End Society".<sup>5</sup>

Those who were not put off by 'Bulgaria' were soon affronted by Gladstone's Irish land measures. Sir Alexander Gordon, the second son of the 4th Earl of Aberdeen, who had, in fact, joined the Liberals over 'Bulgaria', followed the Duke of Argyll out of Liberalism in the first year of the new government. By 1882 he had abandoned all his political responsibilities as the M.P. for Aberdeenshire East:

Sir A. Gordon will take no part in organization or in assisting the local association .... there is a danger of the association falling to pieces as the members are disheartened by the apathy of their leaders.<sup>6</sup>

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4. Minto to A. Elliot Nov. 10, 1878 Elliot MSS  
Box 5 no. 32
  5. Bryce to Gladstone Sept. 22, 1877 Bryce MSS 10
  6. J. P. McDougall to Rosebery March 8, 1882 Rosebery  
MSS 10042

It is a measure of the continuing importance of the Whig element in the counties that the situation had to be saved by appealing to the Earl of Aberdeen, a Rosebery-like young Whig, to take charge of the local situation.

b) The Crofter Revolt:

Revolt within the Liberal monolith of Scotland was also building up from the other wing of the party, most seriously from the Crofters of the Highland counties. More than a century of continuing injustice at the hands of the lairds and a compliant kirk had finally pushed the remaining Highland population to the brink of open rebellion by the early 1880's. The shock of the 'Battle of the Braes' on Skye in 1882 suddenly focused national attention on the Highlanders' grievances. A royal commission reported in 1883 strongly in favour of the crofters but an unhearing Liberal government in London took no notice, allowing tensions to mount still higher. 1882 had seen the foundation of the Highland Land League led by Angus Sutherland who commended to the League the example of the Irish league. Important support came from the Glasgow-based radical newspaper, The North British Daily Mail, then under the editorship of the radical Liberal M.P., Sir Charles Cameron. A tour of Skye by the American radical Henry George added further fuel to an already threatening situation.

Until this time, the Highland seats had been held

as the pocket fiefdoms of the lairds: Cameron of Lochiel in Invernessshire, Sir Alexander Matheson in Ross and Cromarty and the Dukes of Argyll and Sutherland in those counties. Until the Act of 1884, few crofters had had the vote, thus preserving the security of the old order; but even before reform the ground had begun to stir. James Patten McDougall, Rosebery's chief political operative in Scotland, reported as early as 1882:

I have word that a large section of the party in Argyllshire are determined not to have Lord Colin (M.P. and son of the Duke) again.<sup>7</sup>

Argyll's resignation over the Irish land measures had done little to brighten his already tarnished reputation as a landlord. Lord Colin's voting record was not illiberal but his very patchy attendance did not say much for his political dedication. Though McDougall's sympathy was naturally with the Establishment, he was clear-sighted enough to grasp the significance of the dispute and to keep Rosebery in touch with both sides. He forwarded a passionately worded letter from an Inverness solicitor and Liberal agent whom McDougall described as: "the best known solicitor of the North of Scotland".

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7. J. P. McDougall to Rosebery April 7, 1882 Rosebery MSS 10042

The Skye business (Battle of the Braes) means a great deal. The crofters must be protected against eviction and arbitrary increase of rent .... The people of the north won't stand it .... The rapacity of the lairds .... a man has a right to live in his native land.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, McDougall, as a conservatively-minded Liberal, could not but take the Land League at its word and see the dark shadow of Ireland passing into Scotland:

It seems as if from what one is hearing from the Highlands as if the scenes of agitation and excess might be shifted there from across the channel from Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

However, despite the fever of opinion, the absence of electoral reform in August, 1884, meant that a laird, albeit, a young and liberally-minded one, Ronald Munro-Ferguson, could win a by-election in Ross and Cromarty in a virtual walkover. However, since the expected Reform Bill was to increase the Ross and Cromarty electorate ten-fold, change was inevitable and imminent.

The franchise reform of 1884 was indeed to have its greatest effect in the Highlands. In the Lowland rural counties the electorate was expanded by a factor of roughly two or three. This was not without effect: Haddington was turned from a Tory seat into a very safe Liberal one and Berwickshire, which had voted Tory in 1874 and only 59% Liberal in 1880, was turned into an

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8. W. Burns to McDougall May 10, 1882 Rosebery MSS 10042

9. J. P. McDougall to C. B. Oct. 24, 1884 C.B. MSS 41232

impregnable Liberal fortress: 75% Liberal in 1885 and Liberal until 1918. The increase was somewhat higher in the industrial areas: usually more than trebled. However, none of these compared with the revolution effected in the Highlands. Argyll was only trebled but Invernessshire had a five-fold increase; Sutherland, eight-fold; and Ross, ten-fold.

Just as important for Scotland was the accompanying redistribution. As a nation, Scotland's representation was increased by 12 seats to 72. The new seats were concentrated in the industrial West and while Liberal headquarters viewed this reapportionment as a certain boost for the Liberals<sup>10</sup>, it was to have less favourable repercussions in the long run given the basic weakness of Liberalism in the West and the concentration of the radical section of the party along the Clyde. McDougall was well aware of the probable outcome of electoral reform and feared the creation of an unmistakably crofter-dominated Western Isles constituency.<sup>11</sup> The redistribution ended the nightmare of the triple seat of Glasgow and, in the eyes of the Establishment, created the blessing of the end of the need for a caucus-like organization in the city; but the urban redistribution in Glasgow and Edinburgh was to create new and no less difficult problems.

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10. McDougall to Rosebery Jan. 12, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10042

11. *ibid.*

Rosebery was kept in close touch with the developing situation in the Highlands not only through McDougall's reports but also through his new friend, Ferguson, now running for re-election. Ferguson was a particularly valuable observer being a young and genuinely progressive-minded Highland laird. If such a candidate were to go down, the Highland results would be devastating indeed. As early as March 1885, Ferguson was sounding warnings of the gravity of the situation. He was finding that even his forthright stand in favour of peasant proprietorship was making little impact on his constituents.<sup>12</sup> By July, a note of real desperation was creeping into his reports. Despite a desire 'to take up an advanced position on the Land Question', it seemed a futile exercise in the face of the wave of radical agrarianism sweeping the Northern counties.<sup>13</sup> His worries increased in late August when it became known that the Liberal Association in Inverness Burghs had sent an invitation to Joseph Chamberlain, then at the height of his reputation as the 'enfant terrible' of radicalism, to address a meeting in Inverness; an invitation which Chamberlain had accepted. True, as Ferguson realised, the Burgh Association wanted Chamberlain's backing chiefly for their disestablishment campaign against the sitting Whiggish M.P., R. B. Findlay, as much as for the crofters' cause. Nevertheless, Ferguson could well realize the

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12. Ferguson to Rosebery March 9, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10017

13. Ferguson to Rosebery Muly 20, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10017

effect of such an event on the already explosive political condition of the Highlands.<sup>14</sup> He made contact with Chamberlain to urge restraint:

It entirely depends on the class of speech Chamberlain makes whether he will do good or harm .... I heard from him a couple of days ago - he asked for my last speech - so I took the opportunity of letting him know that what we now really needed was guidance from the leaders of the party.<sup>15</sup>

Ferguson's efforts were futile. Chamberlain's Inverness address of Sept. 18, 1885, which his biographer has described as "his most passionate speech of the campaign"<sup>16</sup>, struck out strongly for the crofter's cause, throwing the weight of English radicalism behind an Irish settlement for the Highlands. The very appearance of Chamberlain, who, at that time threatened to overshadow Gladstone, as the dominant star of the Liberal campaign, was sufficient to raise the Highland cause into a national issue. Although, it has been suggested that the crofter legislation was the direct result of the election of the crofter M.P.'s and Gladstone's desperate need to secure their votes for the Home Rule Bill<sup>17</sup>, the effect of Chamberlain's 'blessing' on the crofters' public image should not be minimized.

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14. Ferguson to Rosebery Aug. 22, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10017
15. Ferguson to Rosebery Aug. 31, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10017
16. J. L. Garvin Life of Joseph Chamberlain MacMillan, London 1933 Vol. 2 p. 68
17. M. Barker Gladstone and Radicalism Harvester, Brighton 1975 p. 48

Ross and Cromarty was not the only seat where a laird found himself in difficulty. Lord Colin Campbell had retired from the Argyll seat but his father had found another candidate, Sir William Mackinnon, to represent the family interest:

the party is awkwardly placed in Argyll at the moment .... Mackinnon professes to be a Liberal .... but stands as an 'independent' to please Liberals and Tories alike and to beat the crofter candidates .... the Tories will not oppose him.<sup>18</sup>

Despite evident uneasiness, the Liberal Establishment members like McDougall faced with the unpalatable alternative of crofter insurgency, continued to back Mackinnon, but this position became increasingly untenable:

Mackinnon is alarming the general run of Liberals by his ill-disguised Toryism .... it is very difficult to believe in his Liberalism .... more of a Tory than anything else.<sup>19</sup>

In the final month of the campaign, a desperate 'moderate' Liberal from Argyll wrote to Rosebery begging for an opinion on the impossible choice between:

1. Mr. Mackinnon: who calling himself an independent is admittedly the nominee of the Duke of Argyll and Col. Malcolm.
2. Mr. McFarlane M.P.: an ex-Parnellite (sat for Irish seat 1880-85) with advanced Liberal views, a Roman Catholic, tho' that does not bother me ....

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18. McDougall to Rosebery Sept. 12, 1885 Rosebery  
MSS 10042

19. McDougall to Rosebery Sept. 22, 1885 Rosebery  
MSS 10042



3. Mr. McCaig: a banker from Oban with advanced Liberal views on some questions; doubtless a worthy man but having a very questionable knowledge of Her Majesty's English.<sup>20</sup>

It is a measure of the natural conservatism of the Liberal Establishment of Edinburgh in 1885, that even in these circumstances, McDougall could not bring himself to disown Mackinnon; indeed, he went so far as to ask Rosebery to speak on behalf of the Duke's man so visibly in trouble. By polling day, the only hope left for Mackinnon was an Atlantic storm to prevent the crofters of Tyree and Coll from travelling to the poll in Oban.<sup>21</sup>

In Sutherland, the Marquess of Stafford, son of the Duke of Sutherland, the owner of virtually the entire county, was also struggling for his political life, in this case against the head of the land league, Angus Sutherland. Rosebery received a letter from another 'moderate' Liberal begging his aid for Stafford against the radical 'horror':

(Lord Stafford) has been fighting splendidly all summer .... however, he is closely beset and his opponent is a man whose return would be so serious a matter that the success of Lord Stafford is of the greatest consequence to the party. This man, Angus Sutherland, is an intimate of Henry George, an associate of the Irish Nationalists and an advocate of the adoption of Irish methods by crofters.<sup>22</sup>

In spite of the communications, the Liberal Establishment

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20. Dennistoun to Rosebery Nov. 2, 1885 Rosebery  
MSS 10084
21. McDougall to Rosebery Nov. 28, 1885 Rosebery  
MSS 10042
22. Macdonald to Rosebery Nov. 9, 1885 Rosebery  
MSS 10084

was slow to realize the Highland danger: at the August SLA executive meeting, the crofter issue failed even to appear on the agenda.<sup>23</sup>

c) Disestablishment:

The crofters remained, however, essentially a very localized issue. Much more widespread and, hence, more critical, to the Liberal Party was the church dispute. No single event, in itself, touched it off. The 1870's and 1880's had seen a gradual but steady development in disestablishment spirit in the Scottish dissenting churches. Until 1885, the Liberal Party, drawing support from both the dissenters and the churchmen, had been able to accommodate and bind both sides into a single political group. However, an increasing level of intolerance, chiefly on the part of the leaders of the dissenting churches, was jeopardizing this. Allied to Scottish radical politicians like Sir Charles Cameron and John Dick Peddie, the church leaders were increasingly looking towards a political showdown at the polls. The first stage of the challenge was to be a demand for pledges from all Scottish Liberal candidates to support disestablishment backed by the threat of intervention by alternative disestablishment Liberals. As those Liberals least inclined towards disestablishment tended to belong to the traditional 'right' of the party, in some cases the dispute soon widened to a more general struggle:

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23. D. W. Crowley "The Crofters' Party 1885-92"  
Scottish Historical Review" Vol. 35 p. 116

The Church Question is producing a great deal of disturbance (in Aberdeen) but it will not affect the elections. There is more trouble from Radical as opposed to moderate Liberals than from the Church question.<sup>24</sup>

Battles for association and nomination control went on in all parts of Scotland but with particular force in the new urban seats or in those constituencies where sitting M.P.s were strongly identified with one side or the other. Those, who, like Campbell-Bannerman, had successfully maintained a neutral position on the issue could face the election without fear of subversion. However, R. B. Finlay in Inverness Burghs, who was expressly opposed to disestablishment, found himself facing a disestablishment Liberal and disowned by his own association:

Committee and Council of the Association are not adequately representative of the Liberal party in the burghs. They are too much U.P. church and disestablishment ... now substantially Mr. McLaren's committee.<sup>25</sup>

Though contests did tend to have a broad ideological character, the Disestablishment party did not content themselves with opposing only 'Whigs'. Peter McLagan, a long time radical leader of the temperance faction of the party, found himself under threat for his doubts over disestablishment:

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24. Sir James Donaldson to Rosebery Nov. 8, 1885  
Rosebery MSS 10014

25. William Burns to Rosebery Aug. 24, 1885 Rosebery  
MSS 10083

Mr. McLagan issued his manifesto refusing to vote for Disestablishment, a strong opposition to his return is being organized .... I have great respect for Mr. McLagan ... but unless he retracts I must join with other dissenters in opposing him.<sup>26</sup>

McLagan saw himself caught in a squeeze as the Disestablishers pushed forward their plan:

It seems I am to be opposed at two extremes, the Tories at one end and the disestablishers at the other .... The disestablishers are determined to make West Lothian a battle ground .... they are trying to get as many Liberal members as possible to promise that they will support a disestablishment bill introduced by a responsible government (and claim a majority to Gladstone!)<sup>27</sup>

The Disestablishers had the bit between their teeth and they were no longer prepared to be deflected by the lack of interest of the Liberal leadership:

Some very decided steps must be taken at once to prevent the breakup of the Liberal party in Scotland on the question of Disestablishment .... The disinclination of leaders to allow it to be brought forward (is an) injustice ... our claims ignored ... give the electors the opportunity to decide this question.<sup>28</sup>

By September, there was still considerable dispute over the ultimate impact of the religious controversy. McDougall felt that with luck all might be well:

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26. James Steel to Rosebery July 31, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10083

27. Peter McLagan to Rosebery Aug. 13, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10083

28. Steel to Rosebery July 31, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10083

The Diestablishers are looking forward to Mr. Chamberlain's visit and if they do not get much encouragement from him the question might not give much trouble in the meantime.<sup>29</sup>

But Sir John Leng, editor of the Dundee Advertiser was not so hopeful:

It is a pity that the church question has been forced so much .... The new electors are much more interested in the land, Drink, Taxation, questions and most of them are only concerned about Disestablishment so far as it involves voluntary assessments. At the same time, the agitation for Disestablishment is so irreconcilable that there will be no peace for the Liberal Party until this question is settled.<sup>30</sup>

The controversy however, exploded at the October 16 meeting of the Scottish Liberal Association in Perth. G. W. T. Omond, an SLA member, offered this description of that event:

Taylor Innes took great pains to get as many of his own people made delegates as possible .... the church Liberals refused to come (resulting) in an overwhelming majority of strong disestablishment men .... Campbell-Bannerman and Mr. Duff saw (Innes) and argued for nearly an hour .... to no use .... Sir John Balfour and Lord Elgin called in .... to no purpose.<sup>31</sup>

The disestablishers seized their chance and passed, by an overwhelming majority (415-7), a resolution calling for the Disestablishment of the Church of Scotland.

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29. McDougall to Rosebery Sept. 12, 1885 Rosebery  
MSS 10042

30. Sir John Leng to Rosebery Sept. 11, 1885 Rosebery  
MSS 10083

31. G. Omond to Rosebery Oct. 22, 1885 Rosebery  
MSS 10084

As a direct result, Lord Fife resigned as Vice-President of the SLA and his action was mirrored in the gross dismay of the Liberals' Church supporters. It was a measure of Gladstone's authority in Scotland that all Liberals instinctively turned towards him to await his judgement of the Perth decision. Brought to the brink of open rebellion, the churchmen began to unite with Tories in the formation of Church Defence Associations throughout Scotland.<sup>32</sup> Their demand of Gladstone was simple; to declare that:

He won't support Dr. Cameron's resolution and that he will not regard the Perth resolution as representative of the Liberal Party throughout Scotland.<sup>33</sup>

A Liberal Churchman wrote to Rosebery:

(I hope that) the leaders of the Liberal Party (will not take) the opinions or votes of the Scotch members as indicating the opinion of the people of Scotland .... (if so there will be) no difficulty in supporting candidates like Mr. Buchanan who are pledged to vote for Dr. Cameron's resolution or candidates like Mr. Haldane .... who declare themselves in favour of Disestablishment.<sup>34</sup>

Douglas Crawford reported from Lamarkshire North

East:

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32. *ibid.*

33. McDougall to Rosebery Oct. 27, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084

34. Mackintosh to Rosebery Oct. 27, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084

The Disestablishment question has recently become very dangerous in N. E. Lanark. The Churchmen who are numerous and first rate Liberals are in a discouraged and threatening humour .... bring the matter under W. G.'s notice .... a considerable number of strong disestablishment men who with difficulty accepted a candidate who did not go straight for disestablishment .... the attitude of the Liberal Churchman will be mainly decided by William Gladstone's utterances in this question.<sup>35</sup>

The Scottish leadership was of the opinion that the best course for Gladstone in this situation was to declare the question unsettled and therefore 'unripe' for any action:

The truth is that a majority of Liberals in Scotland are in favour of Disestablishment but of that majority, a majority are quite willing to wait until our leaders take it up.<sup>36</sup>

If Mr. Gladstone agreed to hold that a majority of Scottish Liberals voting for Cameron's resolution did not - ipso facto - declare the voice of Scotland on the question, they could vote for any Liberal candidate even the strongest Dis-establisher.<sup>37</sup>

The spectre of electoral disaster was facing the Party as Omond made clear:

The danger is that if Mr. Gladstone says one word more than he has said we shall run the risk of losing some seats: e.g. the West Division of Edinburgh.<sup>38</sup>

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35. D. Drawford to Rosebery Nov. 1, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084
36. Omond to Rosebery Oct. 22, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084
37. Omond to Rosebery Oct. 28, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084
38. Omond to Rosebery Oct. 22, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084

Taylor Innes and his party are doing all they can to press the matter at any cost to the party.<sup>39</sup>

On November 11, with all of Scotland expectant, Gladstone addressed a packed meeting in the Free Church Hall of Edinburgh. His judgement was unequivocal: Disestablishment had divided Scotland bitterly and hence had no claim as a 'national' demand. In view of the potential and real harm that it was doing to the party it would have to be postponed indefinitely. With the carpet so completely pulled out from beneath them, the radicals were livid with frustration and the church party was just as equally delighted and "completely satisfied".<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, much of the damage was irreparable. Many traditionally Liberal churchmen had already deserted to Toryism and many more had retreated into abstentionism. The Church Defense Associations lived on and with them lay much of the root structure of Liberal Unionism.

d) The Irish Vote:

There was a very considerable second 'religious' factor in the election of 1885 in Scotland: the impact of the Parnell directive on the large Irish Catholic community. Until Parnell delivered his orders to his followers on November 21, it had remained uncertain which line he would take. The uncertainty left the traditionally

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39. Omond to Rosebery Oct. 28, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084

40. McDougall to Rosebery Nov. 11, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10042



Liberal Irish voters of Scotland in a state of limbo, though, even by October, the movement towards supporting the Tories was evident at the grassroots:

the Irish vote is still free .... a good number of Irishmen have expressed themselves willing to vote for me but I cannot depend upon them or the priest may exert his influence on them .... there are 2000 (Irish) voters (in Linlithgowshire) .... a goodly number for my opponent to begin with if they all go for him as the Irish are doing in some other places for the Conservative candidate.<sup>41</sup>

In the aftermath of the election, Donald Crawford in Lanark North East, had little doubt as to the effect the directive had had in his, one of the most heavily Catholic constituencies in Scotland:<sup>42</sup>

Out of 10,814 electors, about 3,000 are Irish of whom 800-900 are Orange, the remainder Roman Catholic. These went solid against me except a mere sprinkling of Roman Catholics .... The iron screw was applied mercilessly.<sup>43</sup>

It can be said with some confidence that three Scottish seats, Lanark North-West (25% Catholic), Kilmarnock Burghs (18% Catholic) and Dumbartonshire (13% Catholic)<sup>44</sup> were lost to the Liberals because of the Irish vote although in Kilmarnock Burghs this was only made possible by a divided

41. Mclagan to Rosebery Oct. 14, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084

42. Catholic population figures given in M. Kinnear The British Voter Batsford, London, 1968 p. 130

43. Crawford to Rosebery Dec. 2, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084

44. Kinnear, op. cit. p. 130

Liberal vote. Viscount Dalrymple, one of the Kilmarnock Liberals, feared the effect of the Irish vote there as soon as the directive was announced.<sup>45</sup> It is also possible that the narrow victory of the Tories in Wigtownshire (50.5% to 49.5%) could have been caused by the 6.5% Catholic population. Similar conditions may have had the same effect in neighbouring Kirkcudbrightshire.

e) New Blood: Rise of Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman:

The events of 1880-1885 had had a notable effect on the leadership of the Scottish party. The structure and organization of the party was in one way, simple and strong. It gave great weight to an inner circle, a kind of Scottish Liberal Establishment comprising the social and political elite, though of considerable ideological breadth. The role of the central leadership had been enhanced in 1881, when, under the particular pressure of Rosebery, the party machines of East and West had been merged into a single SLA. The more radical West lost its autonomy within the new organization whose general direction was dominated by the 'moderate' forces of the East. The weight of the elite was increased by the growing personal achievements of its members, principally Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman.

Prior to 1880, the preeminent Liberal Scotsmen had

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45. Dalrymple to Rosebery Nov. 25, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084

been the Duke of Argyll and W. P. Adam. Argyll's eloquence and stature had given him an unrivaled position in Scotland of the 1860's and 70's but by 1880, he, like the other Whigs, had been diminished to the status of an awkward anachronism. Adam's influence, as Chief Liberal Whip, had been immense but concerned for the most part with organization from within. The rise of Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman was of a very different character.

Rosebery had first come to prominence in 1880 when he served as Gladstone's host and chief stage-manager for the Midlothian campaigns. It was Rosebery's good fortune that the unrivaled excitement and glamour of the crusade should have come to be linked with a county in which he was the predominant Liberal territorial influence in opposition to the very powerful Tory interest of Buccleuch. His meteoric rise was triggered by the events of Midlothian and sustained by his personal abilities especially an almost unrivaled eloquence; but it gained most from his personal campaign to establish himself as Scotland's champion. There exists an enormous body of evidence testifying to Rosebery's extraordinary appeal in Scotland.

J. M. Barrie's is perhaps the most graphic:

Mr. Gladstone is the only other man who can make so many Scotsmen take to politics as if it were the Highland Fling .... Once when Lord Rosebery was fixing an Edinburgh audience to the delirious point, an old man in the hall shouted out, "I dinna hear a word he says but its grand, its grand!"<sup>46</sup>

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46. James, op. cit. p. 161

By 1885, visiting English Liberals were stunned by the reception that Scotland gave him. An astonished Eddie Hamilton wrote in his diary after his first day in a Rosebery-besotted Edinburgh:

One realized for the first time the immensity of the position which he holds in Scotland. I doubt if there is any parallel for it.<sup>47</sup>

The passionate devotion accorded to Rosebery cannot be divorced from the rising nationalist feelings abroad in Scotland in the 1880's. While Gladstone regarded him in the same light as Derby, a welcome recruit to aristocratic Liberalism, Rosebery made it clear that his interest in entering the government<sup>47a</sup> had been linked to the securing of Scotland's interests.

Though I do not in any sense pretend to represent Scotland or to assert that Scotland will be seriously outraged if you do not appoint a Scottish Lord of the Treasury, yet I would venture to remind you that 'many a little makes a mickle', that Scotland is the backbone of the Liberal party and that if I am rightly informed there is some discontent as to her treatment.<sup>48</sup>

Revising Disraeli's famous phrase, he had expanded on this discontent to the House of Lords:

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47. *ibid.* p. 161

47a. He took office in 1881 as a junior minister in the Home Office with special responsibility for Scotland.

48. Marquess Crewe Life of Lord Rosebery Murray, London 1931 p. 142 Rosebery to Gladstone May 18, 1882

The words 'Home Rule' have begun to be distinctly and loudly mentioned in Scotland .... I believe the people of Scotland at the present moment are mumbling the dry bones of political neglect and munching the remainder biscuit of Irish legislation.<sup>49</sup>

Exasperated by Gladstone's lack of interest in the establishment of a Scottish secretary of state, Rosebery resigned in early June, 1882. Scotland did not fail to identify Rosebery's frustration with his country's, thus elevating him into the position of a unique national symbol. Therefore when Gladstone finally saw his way to opening up a cabinet position for Rosebery as Lord Privy Seal in March 1885, all Scotland identified Rosebery's progress as a national victory. Douglas Crawford's comment on the event was probably typical: "For Scotland, we surely need a friend at court."<sup>50</sup>

Generating much less public attention but perhaps more important with the party caucus was the promotion of Campbell-Bannerman to the difficult post of Chief Secretary for Ireland (not in the Cabinet). Campbell-Bannerman was the first Scottish commoner to reach a significant ministerial post since the Great Reform Bill. Moreover, he was, quintessentially, a man of the Liberal caucus, undramatic, relatively unheralded, unquestionably a Scot but perhaps the most highly respected Liberal M.P. from Scotland.

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49. *ibid.* p. 142

50. Crawford to Rosebery Feb. 12, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10082

In later years, these two leaders would provide poles of division with the Scottish party but even then as in 1885, the most significant fact was that both were secure and well-established members of the Liberal elite. Scottish Liberalism was never to see a thrust for leadership from any individual who stood outside of that inner circle.

f) Gaining a Nomination: Local Autonomy versus the Elite:

This is not to suggest that the centre was omnipotent. While the party did present a general image of concentric rings of influence, other factors, especially the traditional and jealously guarded autonomous strength of local associations considerably complicated this structure. The caucus, Whips and party officers tended to look to the central focus for guidance but individual M.P.s were very careful not to take their local supporters for granted. While this local strength was largely a carry-over from the hey-day of 'un-organized' Mid Victorian Scottish Liberalism, the Scotland of the 1880's still placed deep store in local communities, local issues and local relationships. The intra-party tension generated by the undefined boundaries of power between the elite and the associations added further complications to the problems of the Scottish Liberals in 1885.

In candidate selection, the final authority lay indisputably with the local associations and much of the enduring strength of Scottish Liberalism rested on the

autonomous strength of these bodies. Nonetheless, central figures retained a powerful influence in the recommendations and encouragement of particular individuals. In a very rough sense, Scottish M.P.'s fell into two groups, the local men and the 'carpetbaggers'. Not unnaturally, the constituency associations tended to be biased toward local nominees over outsiders but a word from W. P. Adam, Rosebery or Elgin in support of one of the latter could work wonders. To gain such respected sponsorship, a contender had to be a notable member of the Scottish social elite or of very evident political capabilities; or, best of all, both. The result was that the 'carpetbaggers' in Scotland tended also to represent the cream of the caucus membership.

Prior to 1886, the securing of a Scottish Liberal nomination was often equivalent to actual election. Therefore the task of gaining 'influence' or of proving a local interest was the chief task of any hopeful. In 1872, James Bryce had been forced to abandon all interest in a by-election for Wick Burghs when W. P. Adam declined to make any representation on his behalf to the association, declaring the decision to be the association's alone.<sup>51</sup> In 1880, Bryce was again thwarted by the force of local influence when the chairman of the Aberdeen Liberal Association, Dr. John Webster, decided to stand for the Aberdeen nomination which Bryce had coveted.<sup>52</sup>

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51. W. P. Adam to Bryce Jan. 1872 Bryce MSS Box 27

52. Bryce to Gladstone March 12, 1880 Bryce MSS 11

In 1881, a by-election for the safe Liberal seat of Elgin Burghs (in 1880 the first Tory to stand in forty years had received only 30% of the vote), produced another example of the forces at work for Liberal nominations. Three main contenders were considered: Alexander Asher, an unflamboyant but highly respected local lawyer; T. R. Buchanan, a peripatetic Liberal candidate, well placed in the higher echelons of the party; and A. Craig-Sellar, a young Anglo-Scottish scion who was a favorite of the SLA establishment. From Edinburgh, McDougall offered an assessment to Rosebery:

I can't think Buchanan has any claim or chance .... Asher's chance is thought best here .... leading men in the burghs had been writing to (Craig-Sellar) privately encouraging him ... I think Asher the likely man .... but it should be very hard on Sellar if he should have to give way.<sup>53</sup>

Buchanan evidently had a number of irons in the fire but McDougall was less than enthusiastic about his actions:

He has been invited by some Elgin shopkeepers who wish a commercial man !! .... The fact of his having gone north will not improve his chances in Haddington.<sup>54</sup>

With a glut of Liberals on hand, and little likelihood of a Tory standing at the poll, the Elgin Association contemplated throwing the choice to the voters by making

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53. McDougall to Rosebery July 2, 1881 Rosebery MSS 10042

54. McDougall to Rosebery July 2, 1881 Rosebery MSS 10042



no official nomination, a suggestion which horrified SLA headquarters.<sup>55</sup> It was a sacred Liberal tradition that disputes were to be kept 'within the family'. A compromise solution, a private ballot of local Liberals, was hit upon and from it Asher emerged victorious, probably largely on the basis of his local connections. It is evident that, in this case, little pressure was exerted from the national leadership and, in such circumstances, the natural advantages of the local man told.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that, if moved, the Liberal establishment could go a considerable distance in smoothing the way for a favoured protégé. In exceptional cases, central blessing was only a formality as when Adam suggested Arthur Elliot to his father, Lord Minto, as the Liberal candidate for the Elliot family-controlled seat of Roxburghshire. When the sons of prestigious Liberals had no family seat to turn to, the 'magic circle' was prepared to find an opening. Extraordinary effects were engaged to find a seat for Rosebery's particular protégé, Sir Thomas Gibson-Carmichael. It had been expected that he would inherit Rosebery's baliwick of Midlothian from Gladstone, but as 1885 drew closer it was increasingly evident that the GOM had no intentions of stepping down. Inquiries were made in Peebles and Selkirk where Sir Charles Tennant's future was uncertain but these were rebuffed.<sup>56</sup> By mid

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55. McDougall to Rosebery July 2, 1881 Rosebery MSS 10042

56. McDougall to Rosebery March 15, 1884 Rosebery MSS 10042

summer further interest in Peebles and Selkirk produced reports that Tennant would step down and that Gibson-Carmichael had been accepted.<sup>57</sup> This proved erroneous and Gibson-Carmichael was forced to remain on the sideline. Evidently in Midlothian he had proved to be a somewhat complacent contender<sup>58</sup> and this may have affected his fortunes in Peebles as well. Even Arthur Elliot had to be upbraided by his father when his reluctance to leave London, even to visit his prospective constituency, provoked serious mumblings of discontent within the normally docile local Liberals.<sup>59</sup>

Key seats received a constant flow of top candidates directly from the SLA. Dumbartonshire, one of the most marginal seats in the west, produced consistently hair-line results in the 19th Century culminating in a Tory victory by 9 votes in 1880. Only a first class Liberal candidate could hope to overcome the considerable local influence of Orr-Ewing, the sitting Tory M.P. McDougall had first canvassed the idea that Campbell-Bannerman might shift from his safe position in Stirling Burghs to fight the seat but the risk had seemed too great to take.<sup>60</sup> Eventually, R. T. Reid, a solid lowland Scot of great ability with a brilliant academic career behind him, and

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57. McDougall to Rosebery July 18, 1884 Rosebery MSS 10042; McDougall to Rosebery July 30, 1884 Rosebery MSS 10042

58. Rosebery to McDougall Feb. 27, 1884 Rosebery MSS 10042

59. Minto to Elliot Oct. 28, 1884 Elliot MSS Box 5 No. 32

60. McDougall to Rosebery July 5, 1883 Rosebery MSS 10083

already the sitting M.P. for an English riding, agreed to take on the risk. Reid lost and was succeeded as candidate in 1886 by Munro-Ferguson who also lost and was in turn followed by Capt. John Sinclair who finally won the county in 1892. None of these men were local but all but Ferguson were to be members of the Liberal Cabinet of 1905.

The willingness of the SLA establishment to promote their own was again demonstrated in August, 1885. Charles Lacaita, Edinburgh-born, but English-trained, wrote to Rosebery asking for help in gaining a vacancy in Scotland.<sup>61</sup> Gibson-Carmichael came to Lacaita's side as a guide to the corridors of Scottish influence:

Lacaita and I have been seeing various people about his standing for Leith. Cooper of the Scotsman seems anxious that he should and is willing to do what he can for him. Other people, however, object to him on account of his foreign sounding name and his not being well known in Scotland.<sup>62</sup>

Leith, however, came to nothing for Lacaita and he had to turn to the existing alternatives: Kirkcaldy: "no merit except cheapness and already swarming with more or less ineligible candidates besides Sir G. Campbell (the discredited sitting M.P.)"; Dundee, and Orkney and Shetland: "Tom tells me a Liberal candidate would have a very good chance .... not expensive but would require a certain

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61. C. Lacaita to Rosebery Aug. 14, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10083

62. T. Gibson-Carmichael to Rosebery Sept. 1, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10083

amount of keeping up".<sup>63</sup> Cost of campaigning was a very important factor and the individual candidate usually had to have some personal financial resources; Minto had put up a minimum of £1,000 towards Elliot's election in 1880. Consequently, when Lacaïta discovered the costs involved in transporting votes in an inland constituency he had to abandon Orkney and Shetland.<sup>64</sup> Gibson-Carmichael's next suggestion was extraordinary:

Hutcheson Division of Glasgow might suit him. Cooper thinks it might do very well. Perhaps you could introduce him to some Glasgow men. Tennant says he has no influence in that division.<sup>65</sup>

How it was considered that Black friars and Hutcheson, an entirely working class area, including the notorious slums of the Gorbals, in a Glasgow political situation boiling with Liberal civil war was a "suitable" place for Lacaïta is difficult to imagine. The idea never went far and on September 11, Sir John Leng came to the rescue by putting Lacaïta's name before the Dundee Association. Lacaïta was uneasy at facing such a difficult urban constituency:

I don't think I shall satisfy the radicals of Dundee and I am absolutely ignorant of the local subjects which interest them.<sup>66</sup>

While he continued to feel the stigma of being an outsider, his optimism grew:

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- 63. Lacaïta to Rosebery Sept. 3, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10083
  - 64. Lacaïta to Rosebery Sept. 9, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10083
  - 65. Gibson-Carmichael to Rosebery Sept. 9, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10083
  - 66. Lacaïta to Rosebery Sept. 11, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10083

I have a very good chance in Dundee if the feeling for having at least one local man is not too strong ....<sup>67</sup>

The 'Family' was called upon again when it seemed as if the intervention of a church candidate might jeopardize Lacaita's fortunes.

The church people seem to be persuading Lionel Ashly to come forward as a church candidate .... Leng is very anxious that I should write you to see (if you can dissuade him).<sup>68</sup>

Evidently, Ashly was prevailed upon to withdraw and Lacaita went on to win his seat.

#### Summary

Thus the years 1830--35 were marked by a steady deterioration in the strength and unity of Liberalism in Scotland. The integrity and breadth of that party had been based on a pattern of alliances and accommodations that permitted and maintained the coexistence of potentially conflicting interest groups. Toleration and compromise for the sake of mutually held higher ideals and goals were the cement that had held Scottish Liberalism together throughout the Mid-century. Those practices and tacit understandings began to disintegrate to be replaced by truculence

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67. Lacaita to Rosebery Oct. 9, 1885 Rosebery MSS  
10084

68. Lacaita to Rosebery Oct. 12, 1885 Rosebery MSS  
10084

and an avidity for open combat.

The changing nature of political issues in the latter part of the 19th century was the leading force behind this shift of attitude. Detached and non-national overseas issues such as Italy or Turkish atrocities were being replaced by the questions of Empire and of Ireland. The loss of Britain's position of overwhelming preeminence in the world at mid-century, as other European nations began to crowd into the field, affected the national outlook, making generosity and a Liberal spirit weaken in the face of patriotic demands. Domestically, the very success of British Liberalism and its reforms deprived it of the causes upon which its disparate elements had come together. With the middle propertied classes enfranchised and institutions freed, the logical advance of reform was towards questions that did not involve the self-interest of the propertied: a working class franchise, land reform, urban social problems.

Nonetheless, while this general trend was particularly visible in Scotland, with the sources of Liberal support in the propertied classes rapidly melting away retained only by habit or tradition, the actual pattern of events was considerably more confusing and complex. While the crofter's revolt provided the leading issue of radical challenge, its real significance is open to doubt.

Essentially a peasants' revolt in a remote corner of the country, it stood well apart from the mainstream of new political questions. Appealing to public sentiment it flashed briefly and brightly across the political skies only to vanish with equal rapidity. The demand for a showdown over the church issue seemed to arise out of a curious combination of an issue whose day was rapidly passing and a new spirit of politics that was in the process of emerging. Gladstone's skilful handling of the challenge diffused much of the immediate threat to the party but it could do little to stem the drift of loyalties of many Liberal supporters into an uneasy state of uncertainty, ripe for picking in the Unionist harvest of the future. However, even if the bulk of Scottish wealth and property were moving away from support of the Liberal party, it was an elite drawn from these groups which retained and, indeed, strengthened its control over the Liberal Party itself. The success of this Liberal elite in neutralizing the power of radical and caucus organizations in Scotland was partly fortuitous, with rise of outstanding figures of popular appeal such as Rosebery, partly due to the traditional role of the Scottish elite in the party reinforced by Gladstone's influence and partly due to a shrewd understanding of the need to respect and flatter jealously guarded autonomy in local associations which retained very significant prerogatives for themselves.

### **CHAPTER 3**

Storm Before the Tempest:  
The General Election of 1885



Storm Before the Tempest:  
The General Election of 1885:

"The election of 1885 is the most difficult to associate with one dominant issue."<sup>1</sup>

The pattern of political controversy in Scotland in 1885 was diverse, conflicting, almost chaotic. As ever, at the base of all political life lay the ancient tribal-political loyalties roused by Liberal evocations of the holy name of "Gladstone!" and by Tory appeals to "patriotism". Indisputably, the greatest issue of the campaign was Disestablishment, a disruptive force which, to some degree, tended to cut across these old party loyalties. Radical Liberals usually tacked proposals for temperance legislation, electoral and parliamentary reform, free education, land and tax reform on to the church themes. More traditional Liberals tended to confine themselves to the time-honoured points of foreign affairs and finance either ignoring disestablishment or declaring their open opposition. Tories tended to be less divided in the composition of their appeals, focusing on the defence of the church establishment and reinforcing with 'patriotic' foreign policy, military strength and sometimes a hint of 'imperialism'. Tory opposition to free education also meant opposition to secular education and as such gained support from the Catholic community, a support which was to aid the digestion of the Parnell directive. However, the frequency

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1. Pelling, op. cit, p. 15

with which Tory candidates, especially in the Clyde region, resorted to the most blatant appeals to religious prejudice must have greatly increased the task of Parnell's lieutenants. Besides these general characteristics, local questions continued to be of the first importance in Scotland. This was especially true of the mining areas, the fishing burghs of the North and East and the agricultural counties of the lowlands.

a) Intra-Liberal Conflict:

Glasgow and Edinburgh, the chief cities of Scotland, were both cockpits of the political battles of 1885. The shift from single multimembered burgh seats to a system of several single member seats had a deep effect in both cities, causing not just organizational difficulties but provoking ideological struggle within the dominant Liberal structure. No longer could 'right' and 'left' be teamed into a single compromise 'ticket'; each division was left with an all or nothing struggle between opposing factions. However, by polling day, each city presented a very different political situation. In Glasgow, after long and bitter nomination struggles in each of Glasgow's seven divisions, a solid phalanx of radicals stood as the Liberal standard bearers. In Edinburgh, it was the 'moderates' who triumphed in the four seats of the city, securing the Liberal nominations. In the former city, aside from some minor

"Labour' candidates, each division saw a straight Liberal-Tory struggle but, in Edinburgh, only one division had a strong Conservative entry and three had more than one Liberal standing.

Glasgow:

The powerful religious divisions that ran through Glaswegian society dominated the political struggles in that city. The high visibility of a large Catholic population fueled a mood of fierce Prebyterianism that was bolstered by strong ties with Ulster and Orangeism. Presbyterianism, itself, was deeply driven by the strength of the Dissenting churches, their membership outnumbering that of the Establishment. Feeling permeated through all sections of society, Sabbatarianism being strong even amongst the working classes and on the Trades Council.<sup>2</sup>

In this atmosphere, the Church issue made the struggle for control of the new divisional associations particularly fierce. The breadth of view of traditional Scottish Liberalism was vanishing as a new spirit of intolerance became more and more dominant. The whip hand in the city was held by the middle class radicals who had dominated the old West of Scotland Liberal Association and were now determined to require future Liberal Candidates to be pledged to their

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2. John R. McCaffrey<sup>F.</sup> "Liberals in Glasgow 1885-86"  
Ph.D. thesis Univ. of Glasgow 1970 p. 112

association's view. As a result, the leading candidate for the St. Rollox division was cast aside when he refused to pledge for Disestablishment.<sup>3</sup> The College Division association, the only one with significant churchmen membership turned the tables when they forced the arch-Disestablisher, Dr. Cameron, to trim his sails.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, however, the almost fanatical zeal of the radicals drove 'moderate' Liberals out of the party into Church Defence Associations pledged to oppose Disestablishment Liberals and eventually into Liberal Unionism.

As late as three weeks before the poll, up to 17 Liberal candidates were prepared to stand in the 7 divisions. With the significant Tory strength in Glasgow, the result could have been disastrous. In the event, all but one of the extra Liberals were induced to withdraw. While this preserved the nominal solidarity of Glasgow Liberalism, it also effectively denied 'moderate' Liberals a Liberal option and steered them a good way closer to open union with the Conservatives.

The drift of moderate Liberals was aided by the strength of general radicalism on the Clyde. It was not by chance that Joseph Chamberlain opened his unauthorized campaign in Glasgow.

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3. *ibid.* p. 87

4. *ibid.* p. 103-4

Scottish radicalism, especially in Glasgow and its region (had been) profoundly stirred by Henry George and by Irish Agrarian Movement and was ready for democratic pronouncement.<sup>5</sup>

Chamberlain's speech did not disappoint the radicals and many in Scotland soon followed Russell in Bridgeton who identified himself as "an advanced radical and a follower of Mr. Chamberlain."<sup>6</sup>

Conversely, when Goschen came to Glasgow in October to address the disaffected Liberals of the Church Defence Association he concentrated not so much on Disestablishment as on the evil influence of Chamberlain.

Considerable attention was paid to the crofters issue by the radical Liberals. It had the attraction of appealing to the radical instincts of the second rank merchants who formed the bulk of the group while being remote enough not to threaten their own immediate interests. However, this changed in the later stages of the campaign when social radicals like Shaw Maxwell, who was soon to join Keir Hardie in founding a Scottish Labour Party, tried to commit the party by resolution not only to rural land reform but to urban reform as well.<sup>7</sup>

Shaw-Maxwell and three others in Glasgow divisions made up one of the most significant novelties of the campaign: the entry of the first truly independent Labour

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5. Garvin op. cit. p. 66 (Vol. II)

6. McCaffrey op. cit. p. 96

7. *ibid.* p. 125

candidates in British political history. The intellectual revival of 'socialism' of the 1880's was partly responsible but more important was the serious depression then gripping the Clyde. Between 1883 and 1885, shipping launched on the Clyde had fallen from 419,000 tons to 183,000 tons. Seven out of ten of the men of Whiteinch and Partick, shipbuilding areas, were reported to be out of work. Falling wages with resulting strikes in the coal and textile industries aggravated the situation.<sup>8</sup> Socialism was not the only beneficiary of the depression. Tariff Reform also began to emerge as an issue. The Glasgow Trades Council went as far as to say that: "no trade unionist could be a free trader."<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the determining factors in Glasgow were probably still religious. Within the Liberal party, the 'religious question' was Disestablishment and was conducted on a high intellectual plane. To the Tories, however, 'religion' meant an appeal to the bigotry of popular Protestantism. They easily combined a "defence of the church" appeal with "defence of Protestantism", a combination which neatly linked Irish and Liberals together in unholy alliance. Maughan, the Conservative candidate for Blackfriars and Hutchesontown and a leading Orangeman spoke of "our common Christianity, opposing and exposing Romanism or any other form of error."<sup>10</sup> Liberal and Labour candidates often found themselves heckled by the rawest forms of

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8. *ibid.* p. 148

9. *ibid.* p. 133

10. *ibid.* p. 111

prejudice.

In spite of this, Parnell's directive and education question had put the Tories and Irish together. Not surprisingly, the Nationalists had to work very hard to induce Irish voters to support the Tory candidates but Irish journals found it possible to find praise even for Maughan.<sup>11</sup> This was important, for Black friars along with Bridgeton were probably the two ridings most heavily influenced by the Irish vote. In 1885, Irish Home Rule emerged in only these two divisions.

The result in Glasgow was a clear sweep for the Liberals but their success was deceptive. The strength of Liberal dominance was at an end. Five divisions gave the Conservatives better than 40% of the vote, and in two, Bridgeton and St. Rollox, the Liberal margin was less than 2%. City-wide, the Liberals received 53%, the Tories 43% and Labour 4%. In 1880, the Liberals had taken 75.5%. No doubt special circumstances of 1885 told in the Tories' favour: the Labour intervention, the internal Liberal split on the church and Parnell's directive but, nonetheless, for a party that had all but been shut out of politics for over half a century, the Conservatives had done remarkably well.

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11. *ibid.* p. 168

Edinburgh:

In contrast to the brawling turmoil on the Clyde, politics in Edinburgh were almost decorous. Furthermore, after the Liberal association struggles, the upper hand in Edinburgh was held by the antidisestablishment Liberals, the 'moderates'. The weakness of Eastern Scottish Toryism meant that only two divisions would have Conservative candidates and only one strong enough, in Edinburgh West, to force the Liberals to forego the luxury of multiple candidacies. In the other three city seats, the 'official' Liberals were unmistakable 'moderates' and as such provoked radical disestablisher intervention. The 'official' Liberal in Edinburgh East, G. J. Goschen, was a Liberal in name only: he left the party long before the Home Rule Bill, voting against Jesse Collings' motion and he later joined Salisbury's ministry in 1887 as Chancellor of the Exchequer. In Edinburgh South, Sir George Harrison, an old municipal official, exemplified a Liberalism some twenty years out of date. John Wilson, in Edinburgh Central, a merchant and municipal politician, was an outspoken opponent of disestablishment. The independent Liberals were a motley crew thrown up either by ad hoc committees or by their own initiative with little sign of a common stance between them. B. F. Costello, Goschen's only opponent, was an English radical who had failed to secure a seat in Glasgow largely because he was a Roman Catholic. J. H. Renton, who stood against Wilson, seems to have been an ill-



supported, self-appointed disestablisher of little talent. A second radical opposing Wilson in Central, A. W. Black, though pro-disestablishment, made most of his running on working class social issues. Sir Thomas Raleigh, in Edinburgh South, was the most impressive of the 'independents' and hence, the most successful.

The moderates' general line was to say as little of substance as possible. Goschen's opening address was a masterpiece of bland non-committal clichés: a plea for an end to doctrinaire politics, a pledge of support for Gladstone and an offer of his experience to the service of the community.<sup>12</sup> Harrison said much the same sort of thing: stressing his record as Lord Provost, the need for "broad-minded men", his business credentials, the need for a business sense in government, and his support for Garibaldi and European Liberalism in years past.<sup>13</sup>

In these two divisions, the radicals, as the sole opposition, threw up a wide range of direct attacks and specific points. Costello characterized Goschen as the candidate of "the Kirk and Beer", his essential defect being, according to Costello, "He distrusts the people". In contrast, Costello made a point of identifying himself with the proposals of Joseph Chamberlain.<sup>14</sup>

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12. Scotsman Oct. 6, 1885

13. ibid. Oct. 7, 1885

14. Scotsman Oct. 5, 1885

Raleigh, taking aim at the benign but bewildered Harrison, demanded a new robust Liberalism in the place of empty words and ageing individuals and stated the need for "men committed to religious equality to overcome the forces of Toryism."<sup>15</sup> As even the sympathetic Scotsman acknowledged, Harrison's age and suitability did not inspire confidence.<sup>16</sup>

Central Division provided the most interesting contest in Edinburgh. Wilson was strongly attacked not only for his attitude to disestablishment but also for his reluctance to pledge himself on the temperance issue. The constituency contained a number of breweries and he was accused of fishing for the employees' votes. Wilson retorted by disparaging political enthusiasts in general and by adopting a moderate line accepting the need for some control of liquor and ignoring the church question as much as possible.<sup>17</sup> Wilson's opponents, Renton and Black, provided an interesting contrast in Liberal Radicalism: Renton took an orthodox drink and disestablishment line while Black focused on the new social questions. A strong Irish community which resulted in frequently reported heckling at meetings, elicited commitments to 'justice for Ireland' from both Radicals.<sup>18</sup> Wilson, who would not go beyond 'local government for Ireland', declaring that the Irish should obey the laws as Scotsmen did,

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15. *ibid.* Oct. 9, 1885

16. *ibid.* Nov. 12, 1885

17. Scotsman Oct. 16, 1885

18. *ibid.* Oct. 16, 1885; Nov. 13, 1885

suffered particular abuse.<sup>19</sup> Renton began to fade once Gladstone's pronouncement on the church had removed his prime reason for standing and this allowed Black to improve his position. Speaking for the most part at factory gates Black emphasized the need for new housing, sanitary reforms, employer's liability acts and an improving of the conditions of working people. "The crofters are unfortunate but townsmen more so." (Nov. 11)<sup>20</sup>

All three repeatedly spoke of the "Grand Old Man" and this underlined his larger influence in Edinburgh than in Glasgow. In part this was due to his physical presence in Midlothian but equally to his more natural affinity to the Liberalism of the East of Scotland. Significantly, none of the Edinburgh radicals followed the line of the Glasgow-dominated National Liberal Federation of Scotland which had repudiated Gladstone in the wake of the Free Church Hall speech, though, admittedly, none withdrew either.

The radical challenge was soundly defeated at the polls in Edinburgh. Goschen and Harrison, though hardly inspiring Liberal candidates, both coasted in with 70% and 60% respectively. Wilson's 41% becomes comparable when the Tory vote of 23% is considered. Buchanan's low total of 59% in Edinburgh West over only Tory opposition was a

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19. *ibid.* Nov. 13, 1885

20. *ibid.* Nov. 11, 1885; Nov. 12, 1885; Nov. 13, 1885

reflection of the strength of Toryism in the urban middle classes. In spite of an open party split at the polls Edinburgh Liberalism managed to remain considerably less embittered than its Glasgow equivalent. The 1885 results confirmed both the strength of the Liberal vote in Edinburgh and its essentially conservative sympathies.

St. Andrews:

One of the key contests in the disestablishment dispute occurred in St. Andrews Burghs. It attracted major attention in the press and was regarded as a sort of plebiscite on the issue. The sitting M.P., Stephen Williamson, though Fife-born, was a Liverpool ship-owner; and a leading radical disestablisher. In 1885, he found himself opposed, in what should have been a very safe seat, by an alternative Liberal pledged to the defense of the Church: Sir Robert Anstruther, an influential local landowner and the Lord Lieutenant of Fife. Anstruther was typical of the Scottish Whigs and, not surprisingly, he was to join the Liberal Unionist group in 1886. The Anstruther influence can be measured by the fact that Sir Robert's son took over the seat in 1886 and held it for the Unionists until a by-election in 1903, another Anstruther winning back the seat for the Conservatives against the tide of 1906.

Williamson was initially uninhibited in proclaiming his allegiance to the cause of disestablishment. Speaking

at Cupar on Sept. 19, he condemned all state churches, supported "religious equality" and demanded "disestablishment now".<sup>21</sup> However, the entry of Anstruther caused Williamson to begin to temper his remarks though he described the intervention as a Tory plot: "ardent Tories are at the bottom of the conflict."<sup>22</sup> Anstruther's plan was to cast himself in the role of the reluctant "safe" local man come to save the community from the wild outsider: "It is impossible to accept these opinions (Williamson's) as typical of the majority of this constituency".<sup>23</sup> Regarding his own credentials as a Liberal, Anstruther described himself as "an old and loyal Liberal who had fought for and rejoiced in reform."<sup>24</sup>

It is evident that the latter stages of the campaign became quite nasty. Like many of the East Coast seats, St. Andrews had a large interest in fishing questions, the chief of these being the damage done by trawlers to the equipment of the inshoremen.<sup>25</sup> Anstruther's supporters planted a story that Williamson's shipping interests included a fleet of the hated trawlers. As a result, Williamson had to take considerable time to denounce these

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21. Scotsman Sept. 20, 1885

22. *ibid.* Nov. 10, 1885

23. *ibid.* Nov. 11, 1885

24. *ibid.* Nov. 11, 1885

25. *ibid.* Nov. 11, 1885 (see also Nov. 7, 1885 for similar issue in Montrose Burghs; Nov. 18, 1885 for Elgin and Nairn)

stories as fabrications.<sup>26</sup> He retaliated by making a great deal of Anstruther's personal health forcing Anstruther to admit that he was not in the best of shape but it is unlikely that Williamson's tactics did him much good.

After Gladstone's attempt to defuse the church question, the Scotsman took Anstruther to task for not withdrawing in deference to the G.O.M.<sup>27</sup> This call was to balance the Scotsman's demand for the withdrawal of radical interventions. Anstruther, however, believed he was gaining the upper hand and chose to force matters on. Although Williamson may have agreed with the NLFS decision to reject Gladstone's advice, he found it necessary to bow to his leader's authority and drop the church question.<sup>28</sup>

The final result of the poll on December 7 was an extraordinary tie of 1256 votes each. Months later, Anstruther was declared the winner, just in time to join the Home Rule revolt. The course of the campaign in St. Andrews and the results were clear evidence of the weakness of the disestablishment cause on the East Coast.

#### Kilmarnock Burghs:

The leadership of the Disestablishment party was put

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26. *ibid.* Nov. 11, 1885

27. *ibid.* Nov. 12, 1885

28. *ibid.* Nov. 20, 1885

under serious pressure in 1885. Cameron in Glasgow College was forced to retreat in the face of Church strength in the local association. Peddie in Kilmarnock Burghs was placed in even more difficult straits. The constituency's history was in itself disturbing with a long record of multiple Liberal candidacies and a Tory vote in 1880 just short of 30%. A large Irish community was a further unsettling factor. Therefore the entry of Viscount Dalrymple, son of the Earl of Stair, as a Liberal Church candidate was a threat not only to Peddie but to the Liberal grip on the Burghs. After Gladstone's speech of Nov. 11, the Scotsman, reflecting Liberal headquarter's opinion, demanded that Dalrymple withdraw<sup>29</sup> but he declined, as he explained somewhat petulantly to Rosebery:

"The Scotsman has been very hard on my candidature. The fact is that Mr. Dick Peddie has made so many enemies among his constituents that there was a danger of their allying themselves with the Tories to get him out. Under the circumstances I come forward and we have succeeded in getting the Tory to retire so that in any case the seat I trust will not be lost to the party.<sup>30</sup>

However, at the last moment a strong Tory re-entered causing the distressed Dalrymple to write pathetically to Rosebery of "the mean trick of the Tories in running a man at the 11th hour".<sup>31</sup> Grudgingly he acknowledged

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29. *ibid.* Nov. 12, 1885

30. Dalrymple to Rosebery Nov. 12, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084

31. Dalrymple to Rosebery Nov. 25, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084

the growing possibility of a Tory victory through the Liberal split:

I shall succeed; but if any influence is brought to bear in Dick Peddie's favour (a reference to Trevelyan's intention to speak for Peddie) which may more nearly equalize the Liberal vote between him and myself there is just a chance that with the Irish vote the strongest of the Tories may succeed.<sup>32</sup>

Rosebery's reply was scathing:

I can see no reason for (your candidature after Gladstone's speech) I have always been anxious that you should enter Parliament but you must not disguise from yourself that if a Tory gets in for Kilmarnock, it will be you who are to blame.<sup>33</sup>

On December 1, the worst duly occurred when the Tory with 41% was able to slip by Peddie (39%) and Dalrymple (20%).

#### Perth:

It was even more common for Liberal M.P.'s who opposed disestablishment to find themselves facing opposing candidates of their own party. The most notable of those challenged was C. S. Parker, English-born, who had become the particular target of attacks by Disestablishment leaders like Peddie and Cameron. Parker

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32. Dalrymple to Rosebery Nov. 25, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084

33. Rosebery to Dalrymple Nov. 27, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084



belonged to the 'moderate' wing but much of his past voting record had been progressive. His 'sin' was his open contempt for the radical nostrums of temperance and disestablishment. The onslaught in Perth prior to Gladstone's intervention was such that Parker was forced to adopt a very low profile. The Edinburgh statement was greeted with open relief by Parker who eagerly joined his leader in dismissing the issue as now irrelevant. Instead, he suggested that it be put off until an open debate in Parliament could help educate the country.<sup>34</sup> Eventually he went some distance towards the radicals on the issue but his radical opponent, McDougall, stayed in the lists. Parker retained the seat with 44.5% of the vote with his opponents, the radical and the Tory, dividing the remainder.

#### Elgin and Nairn

A contest with a somewhat different character was that of Elgin and Nairn. Here, there seemed to be a convergence of the church issue with the land agitation of the Highlands. The sitting M.P., Sir George Grant, was a leading local laird of markedly Whiggish views. Grant found himself opposed not only by a Tory, but also by a strong radical, John Anderson. The three way nature of the race was particularly ominous:

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34. Scotsman Nov. 10, 1885

Elgin and Nairn has always been a difficult one for Liberals to win owing to the influence the Duke of Richmond and the curious fact that the farmers there are Conservatives and many of the Liberals will support their church regardless of party.<sup>35</sup>

Anderson campaigned aggressively on the claim that he "had been brought forth by the Advanced Liberals" of Elgin to represent "true Liberalism". He attacked Grant not only over the church issue but also on the need for "sweeping land law reform", "drastic crofter legislation" and "free education".<sup>36</sup> This onslaught was very worrying to Grant:

I am very apprehensive as to the result - the Tories are very confident here; and we have not the time to break down the first impression which Anderson has made among the new voters and fishermen.<sup>37</sup>

Grant's fears were well founded for he barely survived a close three way division of the vote taking 35% of the vote to the Tory's 34% and Anderson's 31%. Grant joined the Liberal Unionists in 1886 but was later defeated at the polls by Anderson standing as a Gladstonian.

#### The Highlands:

Grant's near defeat was a part of the general agrarian revolt that swept the lairds out of the representation of

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35. Lord Fife to Rosebery Oct. 25, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084

36. Scotsman Nov. 19, 1885

37. G. Grant to Rosebery Nov. 27, 1885 Rosebery MSS 10084

the northern counties in 1885. The first Highland declaration, Sutherland on Nov. 28, was deceptive. Lord Stafford, despite his family's poor record as land-owners, was pulled through by his genuine popularity and "leaguish" views on land reform and defeated Angus Sutherland by 1701 votes to 1058. However, the axe began to fall on December 2 when the crofter candidate, Macdonald, trounced Ferguson in Rossshire 4942-2925. Ferguson remarked bitterly to Rosebery of "nearly 1900 illiterates (who) polled against us", predicting accurately the loss of the remainder of the Highlands to the crofters.<sup>38</sup> Invernessshire, Wick Burghs soon followed suit and Macfarlane obtained a modest majority over Mackinnon in Argyll. Caithness turned to Dr. G. B. Clark, a socialist and associate of Hyndman and Keir Hardie.

#### Defeat of Disestablishment:

Apart from the crofter candidates, there were sixteen constituencies in Scotland where Liberals opposed each other or where Labour candidates entered from the left. The Liberals were fortunate that most of these conflicts occurred in areas where the Liberal strength was great enough to permit the luxury. Only Kilmarnock Burghs, not surprisingly, being a western seat, was lost through a Liberal split although Elgin almost followed suit. The

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38. Ferguson to Rosebery Dec. 3, 1885 Rosebery MSS  
10017

chief result of these contests was a clear victory for the antidisestablishment Liberals. Disestablishers won only three seats in head-on clashes: Montrose Burghs, Mid Lanark and Aberdeenshire West. Of the three sitting Disestablishment M.P.'s to be opposed, Peddie, Williamson and Farquharson, only the latter in Aberdeenshire West survived. None of the challenged M.P.'s opposed to Disestablishment was defeated. Though the relative strength of the radicals was to increase within a truncated Liberal Party after 1886, the results of 1885 convincingly denied them any claim to national popular support for their campaign. That was precisely the opposite of the result obtained by the crofters.

#### b) Tory-Liberal Conflict

Even in those seats with straight Tory-Liberal battles, there existed differences of emphasis between various shades of Liberals. In the countryside, the clash of contemporary politics often seemed very far away with elections resembling ancient ritual combats between Tory and Whig lairds.

#### Berwickshire

In Berwickshire, Edward Marjoribanks, the son of Lord Tweedmouth faced the Tory candidate, Colonel O. M. Home. Home's programme, classically Tory, called for

"conservative principles" believing that "they are those of true Liberalism". By them, there would be "no wrecking of great institutions, foremost the Established churches of England and Scotland". Home mocked Liberal disarray, promised aid to fisherman, a strengthened military, Imperial Federation and an end to "the neglect of British interests in foreign affairs".<sup>39</sup> Marjoribanks countered in equally orthodox fashion vigorously waving the banner of 'Gladstone', calling upon Liberals to unite and following Gladstone's lead in dismissing the Church issue.<sup>40</sup> From beginning to end, the contest was marked by a tone of complete civility consistent with a game between gentlemen. The results, however, due to the new county franchise were not of a traditional pattern and gave the Liberals 75% of the poll transforming a vulnerable seat into a rock solid bastion.

#### Perthshire West

In another county constituency, Perthshire West, where Sir Donald Currie, faced another Tory colonel, Col. H. E. Moray, the son of a local laird, the contest was somewhat more uproarious. Although Currie was to cross the aisle in 1886, he was not a 'Goschen'. He vigorously defended Liberal policies in foreign affairs, free trade, and

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39. Scotsman Nov. 11, 1885

40. Ibid. Nov. 18, 1885

parliamentary reform and advocated disestablishment, temperance reform and crofter legislation.<sup>41</sup> Currie's defection in 1886 was influenced by his parents' Ulster origins, his age, 61, and his position as the head of P. and O. Lines of Greenock. Moray took the standard Tory position of Church and patriotism and bitterly condemned the idea of free education.<sup>42</sup> Currie did not fail to point out Moray's record as M.P. between 1878 and 1880 which included a regular series of votes against parliamentary reform. Moray suffered regular harassment from hecklers who charged his family with extortionate rents. Currie tried hard in the days after Gladstone's Edinburgh speech to dismiss the church issue as a 'red herring' of the Tories.<sup>43</sup> Perthshire's strong Tory tradition was reflected in Currie's moderate victory: 53% to 47%. By contrast, in the Eastern division of the county where the influence of the Tory lairds was less, the Liberals won 65%.

c) General Election Results

The British result of the election was a half-victory for the Liberals. They fell from the overall majority gained in 1880 to precisely one half of the representation of the House of Commons in 1885, exactly

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41. *ibid.* Nov. 9, 1885

42. *ibid.* Nov. 9, 1885; Nov. 13, 1885

43. *ibid.* Nov. 18, 1885

balancing the Conservative and Irish groupings.

Scotland, however, remained true to her tradition as a rock-solid Liberal bastion: once again, Liberals represented almost 90% of the constituencies; and due to redistribution, this meant an increase in actual numbers. Though the Liberal share of the popular vote did fall considerably from 72.8% to 63.7% (+2.4%crofter)<sup>44</sup>, it must be noted that only 5 Liberals were acclaimed in 1885 compared to 12 in 1880. The Tory gains in Glasgow were notable but were easily balanced by Liberal gains in the counties.

Taken overall, the outstanding conclusion emerging from the results of 1885 was the continuing weakness of the Scottish Conservatives. In only 19 of 70 seats (not counting university seats) did the Tory vote exceed 45%. Even of the 9 seats in fact won by the Tories, only four produced more than a marginal win. The Kilmarnock win came only by a fortunate split, Wigtown and Kirkcudbrightshire were both won by margins of 1% and Dumbarton by only 2%. Without the good fortune of open Liberal conflicts and the gift of the Parnell directive, the Scottish Tories could well have found themselves reduced to a single first class compartment by 1885.

1885 also reinforced the old traditional division of Scotland into politically distinct East and West regions. In

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44. Unwin op. cit. p. 94

1880, 5 of 7 Tory seats had been in the South-West (laird-held Invernessshire and Haddingtonshire being the exceptions). However, in 1885, all 8 Tory seats were in the South west region as were 10 of the 11 seats where defeated Conservatives received over 45% of the vote and 6 of the 7 who got over 40%. Even the two exceptions to this uniformity, Perthshire West and Argyll lay on the fringes of the region.

Leaving aside the Highland counties as a special case, Liberal strength was greatest in the Eastern Burghs and the urban working-class and mining seats. Hawick Burghs, Elgin Burghs, Stirling Burghs, Fife West and Clackmannan and Kinross all returned unopposed Liberals. Liberals divided the entire vote in St. Andrews Burghs, Edinburgh East and Edinburgh South. Individually, or collectively, Liberals took over 75% of the vote in Montrose Burghs (89%), Aberdeen North (85%), Kirkcaldy Burghs (83%), Dundee (81%), Forfarshire (77%), Edinburgh Central (77%), Aberdeen South (76%), and Berwickshire (75%). All sixteen constituencies listed above were in the East. Only 3 Western seats gave Liberals more than 60% of the vote: Glasgow Camlachie (69%), Glasgow Blackfriars (61%), and Midlanark (65%) whereas only one Eastern seat, the Tory middle class Edinburgh West, produced less than 60%.



Summary:

The election of 1885 did not have any single dominant focus, but in Scotland the disestablishment question and its ramifications tended to predominate. The redistribution of 1885 had a particular effect in the major cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. The introduction of single member seats forced an end to traditional ideological compromise slates in multi-member seats and led to bitter struggles for control of the new divisional nominations between party factions. This bitterness was particularly strong in Glasgow where the radical disestablishers emerged triumphant. Moderates were successful in holding Edinburgh but were all but completely alienated in Glasgow, laying the groundwork for the future strength of Liberal Unionism in the West of Scotland.

In those seats where radical and moderate Liberals confronted each other at the polls over the church issue, two things were made clear: firstly, that intervention could play into the hands of the Tories by allowing them to go up the middle between a split vote and secondly, that Scottish voters had little enthusiasm on the whole for the disestablishment cause.

The polling results of 1885 on the surface seemed only to reinforce Scotland's position as an overwhelming bastion of Liberal strength. However, hidden beneath the figures,

lay the beginning of the future breakup of the party due to the increasing factionalism and alienation of traditional sources of support. The emergence of the Irish Home Rule issue would only serve to complete a process begun long before 1886.

## CHAPTER 4

The Irish Home Rule Crisis: 1886

The Irish Home Rule Crisis: 1886

It is curious that an election so little concerned with Ireland should have had its result so rapidly and overwhelmingly superseded by the Home Rule Crisis. From the moment of the Hawarden Kite, December 17, 1885, the Irish question was to supersede all other concerns of British politics. The result of the 1885 elections had given Parnell the position that he had worked for: the holding of the balance of power. Of course, the Irish were only in a position to influence the political balance, not to dictate terms to an unwilling House of Commons. Consequently, the shock of events that followed would not have been so great had it not been for the progress of one mind, that of Mr. Gladstone.

a) Scottish Attitudes Towards Ireland

While the Irish question was not a 'Scottish issue' like Church disestablishment, it clearly had a distinctive impact north of the border. A peculiar relationship had always existed between Scotland and Ireland. Both the Scots and the Irish were minority nations within the United Kingdom yet there was never any great sense of kinship in the face of the 'predominant partner'. As Campbell-Bannerman acknowledged:

My countrymen have no interest in the (Irish) question beyond a wish to see the disloyal people put down .... there is no love lost between the two peoples.<sup>1</sup>

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1. J. A. Spender Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman  
Hodder and Stoughton, London 1923 Vol. 1 p. 64

Of all the factors underlying this lack of sympathy, the most serious was religion. A Scotland reared in the tradition of Calvin could see only the worst in a nation dominated by an intense Roman Catholicism. Nonetheless, this ill-feeling might well have remained dormant had it not been for the demon of Ulster. Historically, the Irish protestants of Ulster were the descendants of Presbyterian Scots and, like fossils, they had preserved all the intolerance and bigotry of centuries long past. While many Scots found the Ulstermen distasteful at best (Rosebery said: "I do not believe in the blood-thirsty theologians who are found with the Shorter Catechism in one hand and a revolver in the other.")<sup>2</sup>, the strength of the Orange bond across the North Channel could not be denied. Munro-Ferguson, an eminently liberal-minded Scot had this brought home to him when on a journey through Ulster. A Belfast editor, who, though congenial, impressed Ferguson as being "as violent as any Orangeman", said "There will be fighting .... there will be no amalgamation, Belfast is Scotch and will remain so." Ferguson himself observed: "I can understand the West of Scotland going more Unionist than the East. Yesterday we could see Wigtown, Ayr and the Clyde much as we see the Lothians from Raith. The people are certainly very Scotch."<sup>3</sup> For their part, Scots, especially in the

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2. Crewe op. cit. p. 280, June 17, 1886

3. Ferguson to Rosebery Aug. 17, 1891 Rosebery MSS 10018

West, were often closely related by blood to Ulstermen e.g. Ulster-born Lord Kelvin. A further complication for the Liberals arose from the close links between their ally, the Free Kirk, and Ulster Presbyterianism.<sup>4</sup>

More subtly divisive was the gap of understanding between the Scottish and Irish temperaments. In many ways, it resembled the equally ancient mutual distrust in Scotland between the Highlander and the Lowlander. Most Scots can appreciate the beauty of the Gaelic culture but few can identify with or take it seriously. John Buchan, a radical driven to Toryism by the Irish question was a case in point:

As a practical politician and a public man Buchan could not do with the waywardness and whimsey of the Celt, nor with his argumentativeness .... he was out of patience with a people who seemed to be forever harping on past wrongs.<sup>5</sup>

Besides these emotional considerations which included the gap between a people proud of being part rulers of an empire and a people who saw themselves as victims of that Empire, there were more material obstacles to any Scottish sympathy for Irish aspirations. Scottish commercial and financial interests had large stakes in the Irish economy and the prospect of even a semi-autonomous Dublin regime,

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4. McCaffery<sup>re</sup> op. cit. p. 245

5. Smith op. cit. p. 185

given an assumed legacy of hostility, was a source of great anxiety. A high proportion of Scottish overseas investment, higher than England's, was placed in Ireland; there were large branch business operations and the cultural tie to Ulster was reinforced by the close commercial ties between Glasgow and Belfast. Oft-cited examples were the three sugar refineries at Greenock which were wholly dependent on Irish markets. Hence, any disruption of Irish affairs leading to threats such as tariff restrictions would strike hard at Scotland's economic vitals. Scottish business men were necessarily essentially Imperial in outlook and feared for "the destruction of a great field for the employment of British Capital".<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, the economic throat of industrial Scotland lay at the approaches to the Clyde estuary, approaches totally dominated by the coast of Ireland. It did not take much imagination to visualize the dangers that an independent and hostile Ireland might pose to Scotland in the future. The strong military tradition of Scotland which was particularly strong in the South-west, aided the rise of fears for the safety of the country if in time of war Ireland was to be used by a hostile foreign power.

The Clyde, like Liverpool, was the destination for the thousands of immigrant Irish who sought to escape the

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6. McCaffery<sup>re</sup> op. cit. p. 231 McGrigor to Glasgow Chamber of Commerce April 19, 1886

hard times in Ireland. This created immigrant communities of both Orange and Green with the importation of all the feuds and hatreds so endemic to them. It also established a large mass of unskilled, poorly educated, cheap labour which seemed to threaten the livelihood of Scottish workmen. In the eyes of many Scots, an Ireland run from Dublin under the thumb of Parnellites and priests supported by a population like that resident in the Clyde region could only result in disastrous economic failure, a failure which would ruin Scottish investments and flood Scotland with new waves of indigent Irish. Thus the spectre of Irish Home Rule could raise (for all levels of Scottish society) fears going beyond simple prejudice.

b) Waiting: Anxiety after Hawarden

The Hawarden kite was neither a policy statement nor even a declaration of intent. It was designed to breach a conspiracy of silence and raise an idea for public inspection. Its effect was indeed to focus public attention on the future of Ireland, with the indication that Gladstone had decided to place that future at the top of the Liberal agenda, but the country was forced to wait for any indication of what those plans might be. The G.O.M. had determined upon the necessity for Home Rule well before the election results had succeeded so spectacularly for the nationalists. His conversion to the idea had been



well under way in 1884 and was finally confirmed on a trip to Norway in August 1885. Ireland, not the Liberal Party, was to be his future, his last great 'call'.

Unlike Unionists who raised appeals to prejudice and self-interest in opposition to Home Rule, the Gladstonian theme was to be a great moral commitment to a people; to do right for its own sake. The appeal issued by the National Liberal Federation of Scotland in 1886 epitomises this spirit:

(Follow) our great and trusted leader whose appeal is to the British people, to their humanity, to their sense of justice, to their faith in Liberal principles .... (in opposition to) fear, prejudice and religious intolerance .... let not the people of Scotland be led astray .... the question is one of natural and civil right.<sup>7</sup>

The affinity between Gladstone and the Scottish pulpit is fully evident. But Gladstone was not the only important Liberal to have to come to the conclusion that Home Rule was the only alternative left for Ireland. Campbell-Bannerman had become Secretary for Ireland in February, 1885 and in 1886 he wrote of his conversion to Home Rule:

I have passed myself through all the steps of hope and fear, doubt, misgiving, confidence, dismay and abhorrence .... it took me from June to Christmas 1885 with the assistance of the opinion and advice of the most competent men in Ireland and in the Irish Government to reach solid ground in the matter. Lord Spencer and the rest of us have gone through the same process .... and

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7. North British Daily Mail June 12, 1886

it is in unison with him I come to the conclusion that we must support what is the main policy of the Bill.<sup>8</sup>

However, Campbell-Bannerman, like Rosebery and the majority of the Scottish leadership founded his support for Home Rule on something less than the evangelical fervour of Gladstone, Morley and the radical Scots of Glasgow and the N.L.F.S. While Campbell-Bannerman described the Gladstonians' varying motives as "enthusiasm ... history ... philosophy ... sentiment and 'Irishophilia'", he agreed with Rosebery that they themselves were moved mainly by "necessity - black unpleasant necessity."<sup>9</sup> The vast majority of the nation, however, at the end of 1885 were utterly unprepared for the impact of such revolutionary proposals.

Much of the trauma that was to engulf the Liberal Party resulted from Gladstone's habit of Olympian leadership. While rumour had been rife as Gladstone tried to urge Salisbury to take on the role of Peel, the Liberal rank and file were given no hint of direction from the top. Bewilderment was near universal. Even Chamberlain could not elicit any guidance during a personal visit to Hawarden. The building storm broke on January 26 when Hicks Beach gave notice of new coercion policies. That night Gladstone led the Liberals into the lobbies behind

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8. C. B. to John Ross April 28, 1886 CB MSS 41232

9. C. B. to Rosebery Sept. 8, 1892 Rosebery MSS 10002

Jesse Collings' motion for rural labourers and defeated the Government. Many Liberals, however, realized the true meaning of the division and eighteen Liberal M.P.s crossed over to vote with the Tories.

These eighteen, who included Hartington, Goschen and Sir Henry James, can be regarded as the hard core of Liberal Unionism. Of the sixty Scottish Liberal M.P.s (two vacancies), two, Goschen, who was English, and A. R. D. Elliot, joined Hartington. Not surprisingly they were generally considered to be among the most extreme right wingers of the Scottish Party and only questionably Liberal. Of those absent, Sir John Jardine, Leonard Lyell, John Ramsay and A. Craig-Sellar, only Lyell eventually voted for Home Rule. Fifty-four Scottish Liberals voted for Collings' motion including seventeen who would eventually oppose the Home Rule scheme. 25% (76) of the entire Liberal representation were absent. Interestingly, the equivalent figure for the Scots was only 7% (4). Yet a higher proportion of Scottish Liberals than the English were to defect on the Home Rule Bill. Could it have been that there ran in the Scottish representation a deeper vein of loyalty which, had Gladstone been more astute and less remote, could have been exploited to retain a large section of Scottish Liberalism?

The early months of 1886 had the quiet air of expectancy. It was general knowledge that Gladstone was

preparing new Irish measures to deal with administration and land but the substantive details were still a mystery which Gladstone kept even from his cabinet colleagues until March. The mood in Scotland was one of patience and faith, well reflected by the Scotsman whose editorials repeatedly advised Liberals to keep their heads and trust the wisdom of Gladstone. However, the unyielding tone of both the Scotsman and the Glasgow Herald, the premier newspapers of Scotland, to any countenance of Home Rule boded ill for the future. On March 26, the same day that Chamberlain and Trevelyan, having heard for the first time the full provisions of the Home Rule Bill, had walked out of the Cabinet Room, J. J. Reid, Rosebery's chief agent in Midlothian, wrote of Scottish public opinion:

Scotland is somewhat shaky upon the present phase of the Irish question. The opinion of the great bulk of the Liberal Party regarding the land question is that of open minded expectation but always with an unabated reliance and confidence in the Prime Minister both personally and politically .... while they trust Mr. Gladstone, they do not trust Irishmen .... were it made clear that (financial security) had been sufficiently guaranteed, I feel confident (there will be) no objections and no defections worth speaking of.<sup>10</sup>

These sentiments were not strange even to members of the Scottish caucus. C. S. Parker, M.P. for Perth, expressed grave doubts.

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10. Reid to Rosebery March 26, 1886 Rosebery MSS  
10085

I feel much anxiety about Ireland. I have known for months that Mr. Gladstone cared more for this than any other question. I only hope he will not let himself be deceived by Parnell or by his generous aspiration to settle the Irish difficulty before he retires. For my part I profoundly distrust Parnell .... and the Land League whether they succeed or fail to secure large majorities under the new Irish franchise. Of course, Mr. Gladstone cannot in the teeth of all his promises consciously hand over the loyal minority in Ireland to their deadliest foes. But I do not feel equally sure that he might not in his endeavour to reconcile Ireland be made a fool of by worthless 'securities' on paper for the interests of those whom it is desired to plunder and expel .... ll

The Storm Breaks: April 8, 1886 and After

Gladstone presented his Home Rule proposals to Parliament on April 8 and the Land Bill on the 16th. The effect was devastating, not only in Westminster but throughout the country. The attention of the nation was captured as it had not been in recent history. Robert Yellowlees, the Provost of Stirling, and a leading Liberal in that burgh wrote to his M.P., C-B, in subsequent days of the atmosphere that had existed in the city. An immense meeting had been organized on the 8th:

telegrams had been arranged from the House of Commons giving an account of Mr. Gladstone's Great Speech - the first of these came at 8:30 and by 9:30 I had read to the meeting a series of messages giving what proved to be a very accurate outline of the government proposals as to the first bill. These proposals were listened to with intense interest and at

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ll. Parker to R. B. Bruce Dec. 17, 1885 Elgin MSS

the close there were some exultant shouts from the Irishmen present but by the meeting as a whole the news was received with a silence that was almost painful and bewildering .... the feeling in Stirling was very strong against the bill .... the Liberals were all despondent for they feared Mr. Gladstone had made a great mistake and the Tories were all exultant because they were sure he had ....<sup>12</sup>

For many Liberals it was the confirmation of all their worst fears. This was particularly true in the East of Scotland where the control of the party had been carefully kept in the hands of those who tended towards conservative Liberalism. Devoted by tradition and personal feeling towards Mr. Gladstone and the party, they felt their world coming apart:

Friends (in Stirling) here are greatly perplexed and personally I must say I must oppose Mr. Gladstone when the time comes and I fear the Liberal Party will be found broken up and rent asunder in Scotland generally.<sup>13</sup>

John Ross, CB's agent in Dunfermline and the Elgin family solicitor, had to write an abject and despairing letter of resignation to CB.<sup>14</sup> Such old and trusted relationships were being brutally torn apart by the demands of conscience. Sir Edward Colebrooke, a former Liberal and Lanarkshire industrialist spoke of the unhappy decision faced by the anti-Home Rule Liberals:

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12. Yellowlees to CB April 22, 1886 CB MSS 41232

13. R. Smith to CB April 20, 1886 CB MSS 41232

14. Ross to CB April 24, 1886 CB MSS 41232

They had at once to sever ties which had bound all of them during their lives - they had to separate themselves from an honoured leader, to whom they were bound by every attachment on account of his past services and the personal feeling they entertained for him.<sup>15</sup>

The press reaction was immediate and vicious. Previously loyal Liberal organs like the Scotsman were overnight converted to rabid anti-Gladstonianism. The violence of this volte-face was such that Gladstone was transmuted from "the preacher of righteousness to the prophet of evil."<sup>16</sup> Whereas in the heyday of Victorian Scotland, the press had stood united as a bastion and tribune of Liberalism, in the new era, it was to stand in bitter and unrelenting opposition.

Previously united communities where the creed of Liberalism had been a bond that had transcended class and social divisions now broke along those lines for and against Gladstone. Yellowlees reported on this evolution in Stirling:

The community is divided now into two sections .... local Tories, still jubilant, think that the Gladstonian period is at an end and are certain that the Stirling Burghs will no longer be peacefully retained by the Liberals .... Local Liberals: a) the respectable 'old stager' class like Graham (a banker) Gow (bootmaker) Drummond (seedsman) Grieve (farmer) still decidedly against the

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15. McCaffery<sup>re</sup> op. cit. p. 54

16. Shaw op. cit. p. 74

bills .... the Free Church section of this class is speedily deserting .... many will abstain (from voting) ....

b) Liberals of a somewhat lower social order are very divided in opinions but gradually coming to think that Mr. Gladstone knows more about the matter than they .... they will follow their leader. c) working class Liberals .... are prepared to vote straight for the Government measures not so much because they have thought the matters out .... as out of affection for the Grand Old Man .... faith in him is kindly and blind as the Tory enmity is bitter and odious ....

I met two Falkirk working weavers and one remarked, "This is awful news Provost have ye heard that Lord Salisbury (he mistook him for Shaftesbury) has shot himself in a cab? My neebour Jock Marshall was jes' saying' that one of Auld Wullie's enemies was awa' and he wished twa' or three mair of them would jus' gang and dae the same thing".<sup>17</sup>

In spite of the havoc being played by division over Home Rule, it was the devout wish of many on both sides to prevent any kind of permanent split destroying the Scottish Liberal Party. Toryism remained the fundamental evil for many even though they disliked Home Rule:

Both Stair and Graham though it would be a bad thing for the Liberal Party if you were to resign (Elgin the chairman of the SLA) - this is quite my view - it will take all we can do to hold the party together. I have only heard one man say a good thing about Gladstone's Irish Bill and I have talked to a good many ....<sup>18</sup>

I am afraid that Gladstone is going to break up the Liberal Party as he did in '74 - the outcome of which was six years of Tory rule ....<sup>19</sup>

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17. Yellowlees to Campbell-Bannerman April 22, 1886  
Campbell-Bannerman MSS 41232
  18. R. Cathcart to Elgin April 20, 1886 Elgin MSS
  19. Cathcart to Elgin April 24, 1886 Elgin MSS



A month after the Bill had been unveiled, local Liberal associations were still going through contortions in efforts to keep both sides under the same roof:

The Liberal Association had another night of it last night and again adjourned. There were about 200 present and I should say that opinion was pretty well divided .... all the speaking was good natured .... whether a speaker was for or against if he made a good point it brought down the house.<sup>20</sup>

Opinions and personal loyalties were, of course, irretrievably confused:

Opinion as to the bill is somewhat chaotic but on the whole adverse .... as far as you are personally concerned the feeling is almost universally sympathetic.<sup>21</sup>

For many, the situation was a tragedy and, what was worse, an unnecessary tragedy caused by the actions of the great man to whom they had devoted themselves for so many years:

I cannot help devoutly wishing that the fertile brain of our great chief had never conceived these Bills and if as seems, they are doomed to an untimely death may they have a decent burial and no resurrection!<sup>22</sup>

Prof. Blackie wrote in succinct despair to Rosebery:

What a mess Gladstone has thrown us into!<sup>23</sup>

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- 20. Ross to CB May 4, 1886 CB MSS 41232
  - 21. Ross to CB May 4, 1886 CB MSS 41232
  - 22. Yellowlees to CB May 18, 1886 CB MSS 41232
  - 23. Blackie to Rosebery April 24, 1886 Rosebery MSS 10085

The breakup of the Liberal Party in Scotland passed through several stages. Because Liberalism had always included in Scotland a strong body of the natural conservatives of society, a body whose social equivalents in England were Tories, one part of this movement was towards a party system more clearly divided by ideology and social factors. The party transition in Scotland in 1886 was complicated by the nature of the conflicts of 1885 which had so badly divided the party over the church question. The alliances that began to grow in 1885 for and against the Church Establishment provided, in many parts of Scotland, the framework of future politics. This was most notable in the West of Scotland which was to join with the West Midlands as the two genuine centres of Liberal Unionist strength in Britain.

The fratricidal battle of 1885 had left the middle class radicals who were to form the backbone of Gladstonian support, in control of all seven divisions of Glasgow. As a result, the effect of the Home Rule Bill was merely to confirm an alienation of the 'moderates' that had been in existence for months. There was little scope for the sort of accommodation and struggle to preserve a facade of unity such as occurred in other parts of Scotland. Opinion in the West was uncompromising and, after violent scenes, the Unionists walked out of the Liberal associations to stage a Unionist rally three days after the Bill had been published.

Glasgow Liberal Unionism had a definite social character. Almost all the leaders belonged to bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce, the University Court, and the Board of Management of the Royal Infirmary, and most were lawyers and businessmen who had offices close to each other in Central Glasgow. The presence of those like Lord Kelvin with Ulster ties ensured that sectarian feeling would be harnessed. On April 23, a great Orange rally in Glasgow degenerated into a mob which attacked a Catholic church. By May, representatives of Ulster Presbyterianism along with Ulster working men were appearing on Unionist platforms to help transcend the social limits of the original Liberal Unionists. By the 1st of June a formal pact with the Tories was near. While Scottish Toryism had always been strongest in Glasgow and the South West, it willingly allowed its new allies to take the Unionist leadership.<sup>24</sup> Thus (in Western Scotland) unlike most parts of Britain, Liberal Unionism became the dominant half of the partnership. This was confirmed by the complete resurgence of the Liberal Party in the West in 1906 once the Irish issue had faded away.

While it is true that the disestablishment question laid the groundwork for Liberal Unionism in some areas and particularly in the Clyde region, it would be wrong to suggest that the two issues became interchangeable. It is probable that a majority of those Liberals who had

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24. McCaffrey *op. cit.* p. 263

fought disestablishment completed their drift away from the Liberal Party in the following year but not all Churchmen became Unionists and not all disestablishers became Home Rulers.

On March 30, Sir Charles Cameron presented his annual Disestablishment resolution to parliament. 33 Scottish Liberals voted, dividing 26 in favour and 7 against with 29 absent. Of the 26 who voted with Cameron, 19 were to vote for the Home Rule Bill but seven were to vote against. Of the 7 who voted against Cameron, 2 were to vote for Home Rule, 4 against and one to be absent. Of those who abstained from the church vote 17 voted for Home Rule and 12 against. The clear divisions within each block are evident. Liberal Churchmen became rarer after 1886 but a considerable number did stay loyal. Significantly, the most fervent advocate of Disestablishment in the Mid-Victorian era, Duncan McLaren, virtually from his deathbed, declared his passionate opposition to Gladstone's Irish plan.<sup>25</sup> Campbell-Bannerman wondered how Unionism would be able to embrace such alliances:

One thing appears to me is that it would be difficult to get a 'thoroughgoing Liberal' whom the Tories would support because he opposes Home Rule. Would the Tories vote for a Disestablisher; and would the Disestablishers in the constituency vote for a "Liberal Churchman."<sup>26</sup>

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25. J. Mackie Life of Duncan McLaren Nelson Edinburgh 1888 Vol. 11 p. 253

26. CB to Yellowlees May 19, 1886 CB MSS 41232

However unlikely some of the new alliances may have appeared, Gladstone's decision to go immediately to the country once his bill had been defeated sealed the fate of any hope of reconciliation. Many Liberals had hoped and continued to hope that Home Rule would prove to be a one-off division, with the party swiftly re-uniting once the source of disruption had been buried. For many, Ireland was an alien issue, with little relevance to the great struggles of the past that had bound Liberals together into a party. Liberalism continued to live on both sides of the Irish issue, by this account, and any continuing division was unnatural. Gladstone's decision to defer retirement until his last crusade was won wrecked these hopes; for his identification with Home Rule coupled with the irreparable effects of an election campaign made any reunification, so long as he chose to remain, impossible.

The spectre of the election depressed those Liberals who, like Yellowlees in Stirling, wished so dearly to keep the old party together:

whatever the merits or demerits of the Irish Government bill, it is deplorable that a General Election should take place on a question regarding which all conservatives are agreed while amongst Liberals there is the utmost diversity of opinion.<sup>27</sup>

Now the prospect was one of unrestricted fratricidal war to be unleashed on the hustings, but Yellowlees naively continued to hope against hope that conflict between

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27. Yellowlees to CB June 10, 1886 CB MSS 41232

Liberals could be avoided.

I do not know if it is intended to put up a Gladstonian Liberal against each of the 23 Scottish Liberals who voted against .... I fervently hope that the split in the Liberal party is not going to develop into a fraternal strife of that kind .... any attack on those who voted for the bill simply because they did so is equally to be deplored.<sup>28</sup>

However, since the election was called by Gladstone to settle that very issue, and that issue alone divided Liberals, such hopes were clearly doomed. The sense of rage and despair amongst Liberals viewing the impending conflict must have been even stronger in Scotland than in England. The Scottish party and its leadership had just emerged from a year's desperate struggle to avoid this very situation over the church issue. In 1885, moreover, the battle had remained a struggle within the party, despite the similar aims of Liberal Churchmen and Tories. Tacit understandings may have given one or the other a clear run in certain circumstances but much more common were three-way contests. Now a pact was emerging between Liberal and Conservative Unionists not to oppose each other. In the eyes of Home Rule Liberals such collusion on the part of their former brethren was tantamount to treason. Final estrangement was only a matter of time.

The SLA continued to include both groups of Liberals but it was a fiction maintained only by the virtual emasculation of the organization. Under the influence of Rosebery and Elgin it had been designed to avoid the endemic

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28. Yellowlees to CB June 10, 1886 CB MSS 41232

policy conflicts of Scottish Liberalism by restricting itself to neutral organizational matters. While such a policy had managed to survive the pressures of the Church dispute, it was hopeless to try to straddle the Home Rule collision.

#### The Campaign: Civil War

The weight of battle in 1886 in Scotland was indeed carried by Liberal against Liberal. Of the 64 Liberal candidates who were opposed, 39 faced Liberal Unionists and only 25, Conservatives. Moreover, 20 of the 23 Liberal M.P.'s who voted against the Home Rule bill stood again, this time under Unionist colours.

The campaign in Scotland itself was swift, bitter and singleminded. Gladstone's Midlothian manifesto put the issue as a simple choice: "Will you govern Ireland by coercion or will you let Ireland manage her own affairs?"<sup>29</sup> The Scotsman agreed with the starkness of the choice before the country: "The issue which the country will have to decide will be (Repeal of the Union and Separation) and nothing else."<sup>30</sup>

The basic Unionist objections to Home Rule had been established in the press as long ago as December, 1885: The difficulty in limiting Irish autonomy, the strain that

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29. Scotsman June 14, 1886

30. ibid. June 9, 1886

would result in future Anglo-Irish relations, the economic threat of Home Rule and the question of Ulster.<sup>31</sup>

However the rising tone of debate became more passionate as evidenced in the leader columns of the now-completely Unionist press. For a time, the Scotsman tempered its criticisms: "let us provide a safer and wiser means of dealing with self-government in Ireland than those provided by Mr. Gladstone's Bill".<sup>32</sup> However by the middle of June caution was thrown away as it shrilly proclaimed: "it directly encourages separation .... it practically repeals the Union and hands over our Government to the men who direct the National League and places the protestant minority at their mercy".<sup>33</sup> The Scotsman did not hesitate to suggest that "Ireland differs from Scotland for one reason, because her people are infinitely less qualified for self-government."<sup>34</sup>

Unionist speeches carried different emphasis. Arthur Elliot and Robert Anstruther, as Liberal Unionists in the East of Scotland underlined their 'Liberalism' and denounced the radical influences in the Gladstonian party.<sup>35</sup> One of the chief assets of the Unionists was the general anti-pathy that led some to see Home Rule as a means of ridding Britain of the Irish burden. The Unionists spared no

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31. Glasgow Herald Dec. 28, 1885

32. Scotsman June 8, 1886

33. *ibid.* June 15, 1886

34. *ibid.* June 11, 1886

35. *ibid.* June 20, June 22, 1886



effort, however, to paint a picture of Gladstone as the tool of the Irish. R. B. Finlay declared: "The current ministers have sold their soul to the Parnellites."<sup>36</sup>

Sir George Grant accused the Home Rulers of wishing "to leave Irish affairs in the hands of those who would amnesty murder".<sup>37</sup> Orr-Ewing suggested that if left alone by "the agitators", the Irish people would soon "become as prosperous and contented as the Scots".<sup>38</sup>

However, the most recurring theme was to leave such points aside and appeal directly to a prejudice against the Irish nation and Roman Catholicism. In East Renfrew, Shaw-Stewart characterized Ireland as "a bankrupt province swarming with revolutionists".<sup>39</sup> Most such attacks, however, were closely linked to the question of Ulster. Haldane's opponent in East Lothian, Myburgh, spoke of "the horror of handing over Protestants to the tender mercies of their hereditary enemies, the Roman Catholics of Ireland who would never be content so long as one protestant is left."<sup>40</sup>

The Liberal appeal for Home Rule rested on two counts: one, a moral imperative to do right; the other, a hard-eyed acceptance of Irish realities. To those Unionists who described coercion as a necessary evil,<sup>41</sup> Liberals like Sir

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36. *ibid.* June 18, 1886

37. *ibid.* June 22, 1886

38. *ibid.* June 17, 1886

39. *ibid.* June 16, 1886

40. *ibid.* June 15, 1886

41. *ibid.* (Shaw-Stewart) June 16, 1886

Charles Tennant replied: "the principle of granting to Ireland a domestic legislature to deal with her own affairs is not only a just and sound one but the only one on which you can hope to establish satisfactory relations with our fellow subjects ... to close the long record of disaffection in Ireland".<sup>42</sup> Liberals repeatedly tried to link Home Rule with the ancient Liberal creed of 'trust in the people'. Haldane described Home Rule as a "question of trust in the people and representative government".<sup>43</sup> Mark Napier put the British option as meeting Ireland "with trust or with the sword".<sup>44</sup> An equally important Liberal point was "justice to Ireland". Wallace denounced coercion and Castle rule: "no law is just if imposed by an unjust authority".<sup>45</sup> R. T. Reid suggested that British rule in Ireland had been an evil comparable to that of Russia in Poland<sup>46</sup>. However, if "trust" appealed to a sense of Liberal generosity and a willingness to allow the slate to be cleaned of wrongs on both sides, "justice" demanded that the Scots admit to sin in their treatment of Ireland. The former asked the Scottish voters to see the best in the Irish but the latter demanded a recognition of the worst in themselves. One was not unreasonable but the other was a great deal to ask.

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42. *ibid.* June 18, 1886

43. *ibid.* June 15, 1886

44. *ibid.* June 20, 1886

45. *ibid.* June 17, 1886

46. *ibid.* June 15, 1886

The theme of trust was limited to a particular Gladstonian perception of the world. By this view, Home Rule and the cause of other European nationalities like Italy were closely linked to the rise of British democracy. Gladstone and his followers believed that responsibility was to be earned, but more importantly, that responsibility was an uplifting factor leading towards the responsible use of authority. Thus R. T. Reid claimed: "give (the Irish) power and responsibility to bring their nation to its senses .... (it has) never failed before."<sup>47</sup> R. B. Bruce, brother of Lord Elgin, suggested that no matter the behaviour of the Parnellites in the past, power in the hands of the Irish people would put them out."<sup>48</sup> As evidence, Bruce pointed to the record of his father, the 8th Earl of Elgin who as governor of a rebellious Lower Canada had insisted that the French Canadian nation and its hitherto Parnellite-like leaders be given responsibility with the result a happy and pacified colony.

Liberals protested that political labels were being falsified and that it was their policy that was most likely to promote the furtherance of the Union. Haldane described the Liberals as "the true Unionists" who were seeking to build a real union in the place of a none-too-ancient or successful one.<sup>49</sup> Menzies called himself "the Unionist

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47. *ibid.* June 15, 1886

48. *ibid.* June 23, 1886

49. *ibid.* June 15, 1886

candidate" and demanded Home Rule as a replacement of "a paper union".<sup>50</sup>

The Liberals did not fail to emphasize the force of the democratic authority of the newly enfranchised masses who had so overwhelmingly backed Parnell in 1885. C. S. Parker pointed out that if an equivalent section of Scotland had voted for a restoration of the Scottish parliament this would have been viewed as a "legitimate claim".<sup>51</sup> Menzies spoke of "the rights which (the Irish) have constitutionally demanded"<sup>52</sup> while Ferguson identified the eighty-six Parnellites as "the mind of Ireland". Of course, the implication was that a true Liberal could only acknowledge and accede to the legitimate voice of a people. However, some, like Campbell-Bannerman, pointed out the reality; in the face of such national unity, "resistance is hopeless."<sup>53</sup>

To this extent the Liberal campaign carried a positive note. However, they were, in reality put in a hopeless defensive position: partly by the weaknesses of the Home Rule Bill but more so by Gladstone's total failure to reckon with the problem of Ulster and all the prejudices that were wrapped about her. As the Unionists played the 'Orange Card' with gleeful effect, the only response open to the Liberals was to dismiss the entire issue as a red-herring.

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50. *ibid.* June 15, 1886

51. *ibid.* June 16, 1886

52. *ibid.* June 17, 1886

53. *ibid.* June 17, 1886

Ferguson baldly asserted that there was "no chance of religious persecution through Home Rule"<sup>54</sup> while Wallace claimed that the anti-clericalism of the Parnellites was insurance enough.<sup>55</sup> Reid denounced the use of Ulster as a "bluff" and a "bogey".<sup>56</sup> Crawford declared: "Ulster is not a nation. The protestants of Ireland are Irish and have to take their chances as Irishmen. I have no doubt they will get their fair share of power and reward."<sup>57</sup> These statements were unlikely to soothe the fears of Presbyterian Scotland.

On top of this the quick consignment to oblivion of the companion land bill after its very unfavourable reception in the House, did little to increase confidence in the remaining Home Rule proposal.

The single-mindedness of the campaign is underlined by the virtual disappearance of all mention of the church controversy which had so dominated Scottish politics less than a year before. While some unionists continued to emphasize the point, and other candidates found themselves questioned on their beliefs after their address, these were mostly notable for their rarity. Local and traditional issues continued to be mentioned, usually at the final summation of

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54. *ibid.* June 24, 1886

55. *ibid.* June 17, 1886

56. *ibid.* June 15, 1886

57. *ibid.* June 24, 1886

a speech, but these consisted only of the briefest of notice.

The only real issue was Ireland and in this the Liberals were totally handicapped by their inability to appeal to self-interest, the true basis of reform. High-mindedness was not a substitute. For most Liberals, Liberalism had been the vehicle which had brought them specific rights and economic benefits. High-mindedness might have an effect when considering distant peoples in Italy and Bulgaria, but it cut little ice when directed to the disliked, distrusted and all-too-close Irish. The only self-interest involved was the benefits ensuing from the banishment of the Irish, a point utterly overmatched by the emotional forces at the disposal of Unionism.

The events of 1886 eliminated the remains of the Mid-Victorian Scottish political environment and recast, in its place, a dramatically new battleground. Consequently, the election of 1886 is undoubtedly the single most important event between 1885 and 1906. Liberalism lost not only the last of its conservative support but with it went those upper and middle class Liberals which had given the Scottish party such a unique air of social breadth. For the most part, after 1885, Scottish politics were to be divided between a Unionism which represented the attitudes and interests of the social Establishment and a Liberal Party largely dependent on the lower orders of society for

support though continuing to be led by a hardy band of loyalists from the upper echelons. Unionism's strength, however, lay in its ability to surmount class identifications and to secure for itself a large section of lower class support. To this end, its chief appeal was to the religious and patriotic feelings aroused by the Home Rule question.

e) The General Election Results and Their Consequences

The outstanding result of the 1886 results was the massive defeat suffered by the Home Rulers in the United Kingdom. Losing 144 seats, the Liberal Party was reduced from being the natural party of power to what seemed to be a perpetual minority status. The Scottish results were no less of a catastrophe for the Liberals and, in some ways perhaps even more so. Having held 62 of 70 seats in 1885, the Liberals saw themselves reduced to 43, a loss of 19. While the percentage loss was smaller in Scotland than in the United Kingdom as a whole (30.5% in Scotland, 43% in the U.K.), its effect was more devastating in a psychological sense. The Liberals' assumption of a natural identity with the whole of the Scottish nation, a status not seriously called into question since the Great Reform Bill was manifestly at an end. While the party could continue to regard Scotland, and particularly Eastern Scotland, as a vital base of numerical

strength, the days of a political fiefdom were at an end. By one reckoning, of course, Scotland was still as 'Liberal' in its loyalties as it had ever been; only now 'Liberalism' was divided between two branches. After all, of the 19 seats won from the Liberals in 1886 only two had gone to the Tories and 13 of the 17 Liberal Unionist gains had been made by dissident sitting M.P.'s who carried their constituencies over with them. Thus not only was Scotland to remain a source of considerable Liberal Home Rule strength but it also was to prove to be a major centre of Liberal Unionist support, supplying over a fifth of that caucus in 1886.

Liberalism had maintained itself in Scotland for generations as much by a national antipathy to 'Toryism' as by any of its own particular virtues. The revolution in Scotland in 1886 was the outflanking of this Liberal position by the creation of a 'Liberal' opposition party. The Liberal Unionists could and did claim that it was the Home Rulers and not they who were the true 'dissidents' and if the majority of the party had chosen to stand by Gladstone, it was the Unionist minority who were remaining loyal to traditional Liberal principles. A Liberal Unionist official proclaimed fervently:



they were the true church .... it was they who held those noble Liberal principles that had been handed down from generation to generation of Liberals to all Liberal statesmen since the Great Reform Bill .... they were prepared (to suffer) in support of that ancient creed.<sup>58</sup> (Col. Montague Hozier, London Sec'ty of Liberal Unionism)

The first post-election edition of Dod's reflected this interpretation of the Home Rule split, designating the Liberal Unionists as "Liberals" and the Gladstonians as "Home Rulers". In a nation wedded to "Liberalism", this appeal could not have been without effect. Though the platform battles were fierce and bitter both strains of Liberals remained with the S.L.A. and, as the Stirling example shows, within many of the local associations. (One important effect of this, of course, was to effectively paralyse these bodies, a considerable handicap to the Liberal Home Rulers). The suddenness and single mindedness of the Home Rule split in Scottish Liberalism must have caused many wavering Liberal voters to consider the division a temporary aberration with reunion certain in the near future. Thus they could cast a vote for Liberal Unionists in the confident belief that they were still loyal to the 'national' party.

The division of Scotland within the Unionist alliance reflects the strength of the Liberal side of the

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58. McCaffery<sup>TC</sup>, op. cit. p. 271

partnership. In 1885, the Conservatives had put up candidates for 59 seats. In 1886, the combined Unionists challenged in 64 constituencies (counting Dundee always as two). Of these, Liberal Unionists stood in 47, almost three times the Tory portion. More revealing is the geographic breakdown.<sup>59</sup> Of the 17 seats the Tories retained to fight, all but 4 were in the West; the two Aberdeenshire seats, Linlithgow and the semi-western Argyll. Thus of the 8 Highland seats, Liberal Unionists took on 7; of the 34 Eastern seats, which included all 6 left unchallenged, the Liberal Unionists took 25 to the Tories' 3. Only in the west, the bedrock of traditional Tory strength was a genuine division of responsibility made with the Liberal Unionists taking on 15 and the Tories 13. There is no precise pattern for the Western allocations but a few indications can be discerned. Automatic support went to sitting M.P.'s: all 8 Scottish Tory M.P.'s and the 7 Liberals who voted against Home Rule. (One unexplained shift came when Ernest Noel left Dumfries District to take on another sitting M.P., J. C. Bolton in Stirlingshire. From the Conservative totals of 1885, Noel probably had a better chance in Dumfries; 47% in Dumfries, 38% in Stirlingshire. In any event he lost to Bolton while R. T. Reid secured Dumfries for the Liberals with a Tory opponent not

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59. I consider the "West" the counties of Galloway Dumfries, Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire, including Glasgow and Falkirk Burghs, Dumbarton and Bute. Ayr Burghs included both Ayrshire and Argyll burghs but I have placed it in the West groupings.

able to improve his 1885 total). Strong candidates from either side were allowed to go forward: Baird in Glasgow Central; Caldwell, who was denied the Liberal nomination in 1885 by the disestablishers, in St. Rollox; and the powerful industrialist, Sir Thomas Colebrooke, in Lanark North East. In the most general sense, however, Liberal Unionists tended to dominate the urban areas, e.g. 6 of 9 Glasgow nominations whereas Tories tended towards areas of rural influence. Most obviously, in industrial Clydeside from Greenock to the Lanarkshire burghs, it was the Liberal Unionists who carried the main weight.

As noted above, success for the Unionists at the polls came largely to the Liberal Unionists. The Tory total of 10 resulted from holding 7 of the 8 1885 seats (Kilmarnock Burghs, despite its title, composed largely of industrial burghs, like Dumbarton, on the Clyde, went back to the Liberals after the fluke results of 1885) and adding 3: the Glasgow middle class seats of Glasgow Central and Renfrewshire East and the rural Lanark South. These meagre gains were in contrast to the Liberal Unionist total of 17. Since 13 of these were held by sitting M.P.'s, this factor would seem to be the most important in the Liberal Unionist success. Analysis confirms this.

If one considers the 12 constituencies where a L.U. carryover followed a Liberal-Tory fight in 1885, it can be

found that, on average, a swing of 14% away from the Liberals and with the incumbent was the result. (The Liberal average falling from 61% to 47%). In contrast if one looks at the 18 constituencies which had Liberal-Tory contests in 1885 but Home Rule incumbents facing Liberal Unionists in 1886, the result was an average decline of only 6% in the Liberal vote. (A fall from 62% to 56%). It should be noted that both of these groupings show a reasonable sample between East and West, urban and rural. Further if the 17 seats contested by Conservatives in 1886 are studied, the decline in the Liberal vote is found to be close to the 6% found in the Liberal Unionist contests. Clearly the most important factor in carrying over Liberal votes into Unionism was personal identification with a sitting member. The Home Rule issue itself - which did not distinguish between Tory Unionism and Liberal Unionism - was good for a general boost of about 6% without regard to label; whereas, on average, a shift of the member could add another 8%. Therefore it was not enough to simply pick a label to gain an advantage. Consequently, this dependence on personalities already identified as "Liberals" may have been one of the causes of Liberal Unionism's inability to build on their 1886 success.

After 1885, the Liberals had a complete grip on the 34 seats of the East and divided the 8 Highland seats with their radical fringe, the Crofters. Only the West was a

true point of party conflict, with the Tories holding on to 8 of the 28 seats and doing well in an appreciable number of others.

This regional pattern was altered only in degree in 1886. The Liberal-Crofters lost three seats in the Highlands, Argyll, Invernessshire and Inverness Dist., the latter two on L.U. M.P. carry overs. The Unionists were always in the future to have considerably more strength in the Southern Highlands than in the North.

The Eastern region hardly yielded as a phalanx of Liberal strength. Liberal Unionists did pick up 6 of the 34 constituencies but 4 of these, Elliot in Roxburghshire, Barclay in Forfarshire, Buchanan in Edinburgh West and Currie in Perthshire West were carried over. (St. Andrews Burghs was won by H. T. Anstruther, the son of Sir Robert Anstruther who had voted against Home Rule.) Both Roxburghshire and Forfarshire were won by small margins on very large swings, 18% and 30%, respectively; almost certainly due to the personality factor. Both returned to the Liberal fold in 1892.

The real revolution was concentrated in the West. From 20, the Liberal total dropped to 10, thus switching their position with the former opposition who now became dominant. The traditional Toryism of the West, the conservative and imperial outlook of establishment Liberalism on the Clyde and the special potency of the Irish issue came together in great strength for the Unionists. The character of the Liberal holdouts was revealing: the Lowland burghs of Dumfries Dist., Kilmarnock Dist. and Paisley; the working

class Glasgow seats of Blackfriars, Camlachie, Bridgeton, (College, held narrowly, was middle class); and the industrial sections of Lanarkshire, North West, North East and Mid. The L.U. M.P.s who fell below their colleagues in average carryover from the Liberals were Sutherland of Greenock (8%),<sup>60</sup> Corbett of Tradeston (12%) and Sellar of Partick (12%) - all in the industrial belt. Thus, though the occasional urban radical Unionists, like Caldwell might spring up, Western Unionism was rooted in the counties and the suburbs. The best evidence of the extreme division of Scotland into West and East is that while the Liberals took 20 Scottish seats with a total share of the vote in each case of over 58%, none were in the West, three were Crofters and the other 17 in the East. Midlanark with 57% was the highest in the West.

Always a wayward factor, the Irish vote was again important in 1886. After the alliance with Toryism in 1885, the Irish returned to their traditional Liberal loyalties in 1886, going against the general trend and complicating the pattern. The only seat to show a large Liberal gain was Lanarkshire North West where the swing to the Liberals was an extraordinary 9%. According to Kinnear<sup>61</sup> this constituency had the highest concentration of Irish Catholics in Scotland, perhaps up to 25%. In the

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60. Pelling suggests that Greenock could never decide between Ireland and Free Trade. p. 397

61. Kinnear op. cit. p. 130

three other seats in which the Liberal share rose (Dumfries Burghs 3%, Lanark N.E. 1%, Dumbartonshire 1%) all had Irish Catholic populations in excess of 12% (12%, 18%, 13%). However, this is to be contrasted with the fact that of the 27 seats with a Catholic population over 9% the Unionists won 17 and the Liberals 10 while of the 43 others, the Liberals won 34 and the Unionists 9. One obvious outside factor was the much heavier concentration of Irish in the West of Scotland where many other forces worked against the Liberals. Kinnear notes that the swing away from the Liberals was greatest in those constituencies which had a Catholic population of between 3% and 10%. The trend was much more favourable towards the Liberals both above and below that level.<sup>62</sup> He suggests that the 3-10 level was sufficient to provoke a stronger anti-Home Rule wave than usual without being able to match it in return. Above 10%, the Irish vote swamped any backlash and less than 3% was too small to create one.

#### Summary

There was little sign of any bond of sympathy between the Scottish and the Irish nation. On the contrary, religious differences, Scotland's ties to Ulster, fears of further indigent Irish immigration, threats to commercial and financial interests in Ireland and defence considerations all combined to create a climate of considerable hostility.

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62. *ibid.* p. 18

During the early months of 1886, the mood of Scotland was one of uncertain expectancy. The parliamentary vote to defeat the Tory government suggested both the division that was to come in Liberal ranks and a tendency amongst the Scottish caucus to cling somewhat longer to their faith in Gladstone despite increasing doubts. Scottish party opinion outside of the caucus was apprehensive and nervous.

The release of the Home Rule measures had a cataclysmic effect on the party. The suffering was particularly severe in Scotland where party links had been notably close and socially broad. The net effect was to destroy the remains of the 'national' character of the Victorian party and to align politics much closer to class division. While the alienation of the 'moderates' of the West led in part to the future strength of Liberal Unionism there, it would be false to suggest any direct parallel in support for the Irish issue. Despite the fervent hope of many prominent Liberals in Scotland that the schism would prove temporary once Home Rule was disposed of, the close links between the Unionists and the Tories drove an unbridgeable gulf into the ranks.

In Scotland, the force of the electoral battle occurred between the two Liberal factions and was bitterly single-minded in the extreme. The most frequently used Unionist weapon was that of open appeals to anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudice. The Home Rulers could appeal only to



'morality' and an acceptance of 'reality'. There was no room left for the oldest and most potent base of Liberal support - an appeal to self-interest. Consequently, the Liberals were left at a severe disadvantage.

The results of the election created a new political landscape in Scotland that would endure until the First World War. The Liberal losses in Scotland were as massive as in any other part of the United Kingdom but they differed in a way significant for the future. The bulk of seats lost to Unionism went to sitting Liberal Unionists, thus leaving a country, at least, in one sense, still "Liberal". This was the final tribute to the endurance of Scottish Liberalism: it could only be defeated by the creation of a 'Liberal' opposition party.

## **CHAPTER 5**

Scottish Nationalism and Social Politics:

Limited Recovery: 1885-92

### 1887-1892

#### (a) Organizational Reconstruction

The framework of a single Scottish Liberal Association, embracing both Home Rulers and Unionists survived until October 1886. However, the angry mood of vengeance amongst the radicals was not to be denied and the efforts of Elgin, in particular, to preserve the S.L.A. as a vehicle of future reconciliation, were doomed to failure. Those few Unionists still in touch with the organization, such as Robert Cathcart, stressed that their remaining in the Association was completely dependent on a continuing ban on discussion of the Irish question. However, at the first meeting of the S.L.A. after the election, the radicals forced through a resolution in support of Gladstone's Irish policy. The Unionists instantly resigned and cut their last links with the party.

In the ashes of 1886, the Scottish leadership had to turn to reconstruction. The chief organizational leaders at this time were Lord Elgin, chairman of the S.L.A. and Edward Marjoribanks, the Scottish whip. Elgin's position was curious: undemonstrative yet of the first importance. One of the tiny band of Scottish aristocrats who remained loyal to Liberalism after 1886, and preferring to reside in Scotland rather than a detested London, he supplied Scottish Liberalism with a prestigious and respected resident focus which it would otherwise have lacked. His impartiality in

organizational matters, in keeping with his care and concern for the Liberal 'family' of Scotland, marked him as a Whig of the very highest tradition. Marjoribanks was, like Elgin, a member of the Eastern Scottish social elite but unlike Elgin, he did not hesitate to throw his weight about in party disputes. He displayed a strong and active opposition to both Scottish Home Rule and the Scottish Liberal Imperialists.

The Liberals were particularly fortunate in managing to retain the loyalty of many of their leading officials and organizers. J. P. Macdougall had pronounced conservative views but stayed with the party as did G.O.T. Omond. Enough of these veterans remained to supply the Scottish Liberals with a vital strength of experience and to allow the weakened traditional leadership to keep the radicals from entering the controlling circles of the party:

Macdougall will make a good secretary if kept within certain lines, he has energy and knowledge while Omond and Selkirk would provide the prudence and tact in which he may be lacking.<sup>1</sup>

Marjoribanks hoped that the consequence of the defeat of 1886 would provide enough preoccupation to prevent the radicals from seizing their improved opportunities:

We may have some trouble in keeping A. L. Brown and Co. quiet but for the first eighteen months the association should have plenty to do organizing itself.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Marjoribanks to Elgin Nov. 21, 1886 Elgin MSS

2. Marjoribanks to Elgin Dec. 16, 1886 Elgin MSS

Much more worrying was the growth of Scottish Home Rule (S.H.R.) feeling: "The only real rock I see ahead is this Scottish Home Rule Association."<sup>3</sup>

b) The Scottish Home Rule Movement

It was not surprising that Gladstone's Irish proposals should have triggered a movement in Scotland seeking equal treatment. "Home Rule for Scotland" never came to dominate Scottish politics as the church issue had done but for some years it was to be an important and highly contentious issue. A Scottish Home Rule Association was founded in 1886 to become the leading extraparliamentary pressure organization. An earlier movement in the 1850's had dissolved in the excitement of the Crimean War. Rosebery had played a major role in the resuscitation of nationalist feeling in the 1870's and 1880's. Nationalist ideas did not seem to follow any of the ideological lines of previous controversies though one of S.H.R.'s strongest supporters was the radical M.P., Dr. G. B. Clark, the author of the first S.H.R. resolution in Parliament in 1887. Sympathizers with S.H.R. included such establishment figures as Rosebery, Campbell-Bannerman and Munro-Ferguson. The opposition to S.H.R. was equally diverse, including, most notably, Marjoribanks, Haldane and Bryce.

Gladstone and his closest followers on the Irish question, like Bryce and John Morley, saw S.H.R. as the thin end of a federal wedge which could only hurt

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3. Marjoribanks to Elgin Nov. 29, 1886 Elgin MSS

Gladstone's Irish crusade. Bryce expressed these fears:

What I hear from Scotland regarding this so-called Scottish Home Rule movement gives great cause for much uneasiness .... it is likely to divide the Liberal Party in Scotland more seriously than the Irish issue .... it can hardly fail to prejudice the Irish question in the minds of Englishmen because it will point not to such a solution as the bill of last spring but to a reconstruction of the British constitution on a federal basis .... The bare idea of such a change will affright persons who might be willing to let Ireland have such a legislature as you have proposed and may seriously retard a settlement of the Irish difficulties .... 4

Gladstone, himself, assumed that the Scots would quickly dismiss the idea:

I have not as yet heard any facts to lead me to suppose the Home Rule movement in Scotland likely to take a dangerous shape but perhaps you ha' more .... I decline to admit as a postulate that there is to be equal treatment for the three countries I feel every certainty that Scotland will make up her mind quickly and certainly .... a Home Rule Parliament for England would be too absurd.<sup>5</sup>

Bryce conceded Scotland's special needs but felt they could be adequately satisfied by innovations short of a disruption of Parliament:

Speaking as a Scotsman, I cannot see that Scotland has any need of a separate legislature -- a Scotch Grand Committee with a relegation of private bills to some extra-parliamentary tribunal would meet all she has to complain of ....<sup>6</sup>

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| 4. | Bryce to Gladstone | Nov. 29, 1886 | Bryce | MSS | 11 |
| 5. | Gladstone to Bryce | Nov. 30, 1886 | Bryce | MSS | 10 |
| 6. | Bryce to Gladstone | Nov. 29, 1886 | Bryce | MSS | 10 |

In 1888, he was to give strong support to efforts to establish just such a Grand Committee.<sup>7</sup> Very significantly, Bryce revealed the traditional Scottish ambition to establish and maintain influence in fields wider and more profitable than those of his homeland.

it would be a loss to both countries for Scotchmen not to have a voice in specifically English legislation.<sup>8</sup>

The rising note of intense defensiveness amongst those who opposed S.H.R. sprang in part from a fearful appreciation that the federal argument was developing an internal insistence of its own, apart from the efforts of its advocates. Even Bryce conceded that it was "logically strong".<sup>9</sup> Any proposal that offered semi-autonomy to Ireland alone seemed, within the context of the United Kingdom structure, to be fundamentally unsound. The 1886 Bill's proposal of a Dublin Parliament of limited power, and a Westminster Parliament closed to Irish representation and retaining Imperial powers was unsatisfactory to all sides. The proposal that would re-emerge in 1893, that of Irish representatives at Westminster being empowered to rule on Scottish and English local affairs while the representatives of those countries were forbidden to interfere in Ireland, was little better. The only satisfactory settlement was equal treatment for all - which meant either the

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7. Bryce to Gladstone March 5, 1888 Bryce MSS 12

8. Bryce to Gladstone Nov. 29, 1886 Bryce MSS 10

9. Bryce to Campbell-Bannerman Dec. 16, 1886 CB  
MSS 41211

status quo, full breakup of the Union or federalism.

The efforts of the S.H.R.A. to push not only for Scottish Home Rule but for a full federal plan was disconcerting to Gladstonians like Bryce:

I am sorry to say that the accounts from Scotland are far from satisfying. The Scottish Home Rule movement has not remained in the stage of a mere expression of a wish for greater and even better local self-government but now has taken shape in the specific demand for a "Parliament sitting regularly in Scotland to deal with all specifically Scottish questions, together with a Scottish executive, responsible to the Scottish parliament and the crown." .... this plan .... would probably transform the British Constitution by making it Federal will alienate many (in England) .... while the (1886) Bill did not propose to keep the Irish members at Westminster, the proposal of the Scotch Home Rulers is to give Scotland both her own Parliament and representation in the Imperial Parliament which would become a supreme Federal Council for the Three Kingdoms, England also receiving a separate parliament of her own."<sup>10</sup>

Bryce's opposition to federalism may well have been influenced by his deep interest in American affairs. The American Civil War, which was not a distant memory in 1886, seemed to offer the lesson that federal structures with substantial devolution of power from the centre could lead to sectional conflict and political dismemberment. Bryce felt that the situation in Scotland required the exercise of the G.O.M.'s unmatched influence:

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10, Bryce to Gladstone Dec. 22, 1886 Bryce MSS 11



most of the Scotch members in London whom I have seen are alarmed at the progress of the agitation but I doubt if this authority is enough to stop it. They think, however, that an opinion from you that (S.H.R.) is premature, to say the least .... would have great influence ....<sup>11</sup>

Four years later, even after the strength of the movement had waxed still further, Bryce continued to put the greatest faith in Gladstone's influence in Scotland:

I continue to believe that Mr. Gladstone's authority will be sufficient to induce nine-tenths of the Scottish radicals to let us deal with Ireland separately.<sup>12</sup>

The question of S.H.R. continued to simmer through the next two years feeding on a feeling of neglect in the country at large and, within the caucus, on the continuing difficulties of attempting Scottish legislation in an English-dominated legislature. Scotland's difficulties were not caused by enmity or obstruction so much as by lack of attention. The often incomprehensible nature of Scottish legal and Church affairs helped foster this condition. The frustrations of reform-minded Scottish M.P.s were expressed by Leonard Lyell, M.P. for Orkney and Shetland:

I fear it will not be easy to get the necessary reforms carried (on a legal reform). Parliament seems very shy of Scotch law questions of which it understands very little and therefore has to accept any measure on trust in the proposer's word ....<sup>13</sup>

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11. Bryce to Gladstone Dec. 22, 1886 Bryce MSS 11  
 12. Bryce to Rosebery Jan. 10, 1890 Rosebery MSS  
 Box 64  
 13. Lyell to C.-B. Feb. 12, 1889 C.-B. MSS 41233

Moreover, deep resentment was created by the continuing pattern of a Unionist (English) majority outvoting the Scottish majority (Liberal) in the House on specifically Scottish questions. Gladstone attempted to counter the use of these points as arguments for S.H.R.:

the moment that we declare for Home Rule in Scotland, we are open to the observation that such a question as that of licencing ought to stand over for the consideration of a Scottish legislature .... (throwing) into arrear and into the shade every other Scottish question on which the national opinion of Scotland is entitled to bear sway.<sup>14</sup>

However, by this time, the movement in Scotland was rapidly gaining ground. Childers, who sat for an Edinburgh constituency, spoke of the increasing pressure on him to declare for the "Federal idea".<sup>15</sup> Rosebery suggested that "a scheme approximate to the federal principle would serve to reunite and rehearten the Liberal ranks still "bewildered as to the scheme of 1886."<sup>16</sup> Bryce thought S.H.R. was slipping but admitted that everyone else in Scotland "answered that in their opinion the idea was gaining ground and that the demand could not be resisted. This is the belief of Campbell-Bannerman and Childers and apparently also of Marjoribanks who also doesn't like the movement at all ...."<sup>17</sup>

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14. Hansard April 9, 1889

15. D. Hamer Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery Oxford 1972 p. 159

16. ibid. p. 158-9

17. Bryce to Rosebery Jan. 10, 1890 Rosebery MSS Box 64

What was developing in Scotland was essentially a struggle between those who took the long view and those who took a short one. Those who sided with Gladstone, in opposition to the idea of S.H.R., concentrated on demanding a simple and uncomplicated focus on Ireland. For the aging Gladstone, the 'old man in a hurry', a sense of urgency forbade him from taking on any encumbering burdens just at the moment when the Piggott affair seemed to have delivered a final triumph into his hands. On the other hand, the desire for S.H.R. sprang from nationalist grievances, a lesser commitment to the cause of the Irish and, for some, a distant projection of a federal Britain as a blueprint for a federal Empire. Some like, characteristically, Campbell-Bannerman, could appreciate the strength of both sides:

My contention is that it is only by local parliament and local executives in each of the three kingdoms that we can settle Home Rule at all, and on the whole although there will be difficulties, the advantages outweigh them. The argument put forward by John Morley in Edinburgh - "where should we English Liberals be without the help of you Scotchmen?" is surely a rum sort of argument in the mouth of a Home Ruler .... I am therefore ready (but not anxious) for it: and my experience is that everywhere I go the body of a meeting favours Scotch Home Rule and I meet no complaints against it. It is not a doctrine imposed on the people for our own purposes but a genuine growth of popular opinion .... (but) I think we should deprecate the idea of complicating the Irish question by a simultaneous demand for Scotch Home Rule .... but one will follow the other as sure as eggs is eggs. It

should be pointed out that Scotch Home Rule involves English Home Rule and that not one in a thousand Englishmen has ever grasped the idea of having a local parliament as apart from the Imperial Parliament so that Scotch Home Rule must wait until the sluggish mind of John Bull is educated up that point.<sup>18</sup>

The cause of Scottish Home Rule had a particular importance for a group of influential Scots with ramifications far beyond simple nationalism: The Liberal Imperialists. The establishment of a federal structure throughout the United Kingdom appealed not only to the nationalist impulses of Rosebery and Ferguson but also, and more importantly, to a wider theme, the extension of federalism to the British empire. These ideas had been flowering in Rosebery's mind soon after the Hawarden Kite opened the floodgate of 'Home Rule' thought:

I cannot understand people preferring separation to Home Rule. I detest separation and feel nothing could make me agree to it. Home Rule, however is a necessity for both us and the Irish. They will have it within two years at the latest. Scotland will follow, then England. When that is accomplished, Imperial Federation will cease to be a dream. To many of us, it is not a dream now but to no one will it be a dream then.<sup>19</sup>

Ferguson, in particular, took up the S.H.R. theme with enthusiasm with the intention of linking it to a larger scheme:

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18. Campbell-Bannerman to D. Crawford Nov. 19, 1889  
Campbell-Bannerman MSS 41233

19. Rosebery to C.-E Dec. 23, 1885 quoted in Crewe  
op. cit. p. 124

We had a long discussion on Scottish Home Rule at Leith, some of my people are extreme. Many say what are the use of Imperial Politics to us. All we want is to be able to do as we like with laws that affect our everyday lives. I have not heard the way to upset this argument .... still I got on very well along Imperial Federation lines and sticking to the position of Scotland in the United Kingdom.<sup>20</sup>

Ferguson's commitments soon brought him to an internal party clash:

I have put down a Scots Home Rule amendment for which Bryce has violently attacked me.<sup>21</sup>

Even as the elections approached, Ferguson's interest grew:

Scotch Home Rule has grown very fast .... some new system (is demanded). I mean to go for it as much for Imperial Federation as for Scotland.<sup>22</sup>

In the years to follow the growth of these ideas was to have the profoundest effect on the course of the Liberal Party.

c) The Rise of Working Class Issues

Beneath the preoccupation with the constitutional question, other new concerns were quietly forcing themselves upon the Scottish Liberals. Having lost the bulk of its upper class support and now largely dependent on the support of working class voters, the Liberal Party was

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20. Ferguson to Rosebery Jan. 18, 1892 Rosebery MSS  
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21. Ferguson to Rosebery Feb. 10, 1892 Rosebery MSS  
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22. Ferguson to Rosebery April 27, 1892 Rosebery MSS  
10018

forced, with noticeable reluctance to turn towards social and working class issues. At the same time, the growth of Trade Unionism and socialism in the 1880's was generating the extraparliamentary movement and awareness that previously had been lacking.

The regional patterns of support created in Scotland by the 1886 election had a considerable effect on the receptiveness of the party to social politics. In the West of Scotland, as in England, Liberal representation had been reduced almost entirely to urbanized working-class districts. On the other hand, Liberalism in the non-industrial East continued to be dominated by a naturally more conservative section of society. However, the Western representation in the party failed to reflect these new realities; even more than the East, it stood for a politics irretrievably fixed in an earlier age. The most common type of Western Liberal, both in Parliament and out were the old middle class radicals like Sir Charles Cameron, Stephen Williamson and A. D. Provand, linked to commercial interests, generally unreceptive to the claims of labour and still spiritually committed to the fading causes of disestablishment and temperance. Genuine social radicalism was rare within the Liberal caucus. Only four of its members between 1886 and 1892 could make claim to it: Dr. Robert Wallace, M.P. for Edinburgh East; J. H. Dalziel from Kirkcaldy Burghs; Dr.

Clark of Caithness and, most colourfully, Keir Hardie's close friend, R. B. Cunningham-Grahame of Lanark North-West. However, for all their radicalism, none of these Liberals were in any way working class or directly connected to labour movements (Cunningham-Grahame was, to a limited degree, an exception to this). The two most prominent Scottish labour men, Hardie and John Burns, were both forced to make their way into Parliament by way of seats in England. The Mid-Lanark by-election of 1888 was dramatic evidence of the antipathy held by the old-style middle class-dominated local associations for working class candidates. Hardie's treatment at the hands of the local association, an almost contemptuous brush-off, in spite of the pressure exerted by the physical presence of Schnadhorst, up from London, was all too typical. In 1889, Marjoribanks, the Scottish Whip persuaded John Burns to withdraw from Dundee, defusing another conflict, and secured for him a clear run in Battersea.<sup>23</sup> As a result of the Mid-Lanark affair, Schnadhorst had promised Hardie a safe seat elsewhere in Scotland. After dealing with Burns, Marjoribanks negotiated with Hardie and his Scottish Labour Party to give them three seats but all these promises came to naught when the Scottish local associations rebelled and repudiated the agreement. In 1892, Munro-Ferguson tried to take a direct hand in promoting a working-man as a Scottish Liberal candidate. He commended to Rosebery:

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23. Barker op. cit. p. 135

.... John Holburn, a tin-plate worker, from Newcastle) who ought to be in Parliament. I should like to bring him to you some day. If you give any money help to the party again, I don't think you would do better than give to this man .... he is just what is needed.<sup>24</sup>

However, the paternalism evident in this letter hardly marked Holburn as a Hardie-style candidate. Indeed Ferguson acknowledged this to Rosebery:

The "Labour Party" may give trouble  
.... Holburn is the old stamp of Union man.<sup>25</sup>

Ferguson's only quibble was Holburn's nationality: "Too many English over the border all ready." In any event, even this sort of very diluted approach had no effect when Holburn was rejected by the relatively radical constituency of Kirkcaldy Burghs. Thus, without any "Lib-Lab" element and an industrial representation tied to an out of step traditional radicalism without social concerns, the Scottish Liberal Party was left in a dangerously weak position on its left flank. Curiously, one effort to remedy this defect was to come from a section of the Scottish Party which, by some estimates, would come to represent its 'right' flank: the Liberal Imperialists.

The "Lib-Imps", as they came to be known, were a loosely bound group of young Liberals belonging to the

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24. Ferguson to Rosebery Jan. 18, 1892 Rosebery MSS 10018  
25. Ferguson to Rosebery Feb. 19, 1892 Rosebery MSS 10018



East of Scotland social and intellectual elite. Not all of them were wealthy: Haldane and Asquith had to live off the earnings of their legal practice. Nor was Asquith even a Scot. But long before they entered into formal organization in the late 1890's, this group, centred about the Firth of Forth, were distinctively set apart from the rest of Scottish Liberalism. Ambitious and unsatisfied with a Liberalism chained to the endless tunnel of Ireland, they searched in a number of directions for a new basis to resuscitate a Liberalism gone flat and stale. The most striking thing about these efforts was the intellectualism displayed. They sought not merely new issues but an entire new plan and philosophy, which eventually evolved into an attempted merger of social politics and Imperialism.

Some like Haldane were evidently more concerned with the domestic aspect of this combination while others, like Rosebery focused more on overseas concerns but both factors remained intrinsic to the general scheme. "Imperialism" implied a return to Palmerstonian foreign policy and an emphasis on the future of Imperial Federation. Home Rule All-Round, as the groundwork of a wider federalism, was to serve to harness nationalist opinion in Scotland and Wales as well as pacifying Ireland. This grandiose scheme, however, required a concrete domestic base: "The best way to have a strong hand in Foreign

Affairs is to be as advanced as possible at home."<sup>26</sup> This judgement might be characterized as liberalized "Bismarckianism": satisfying domestic wants in order to retain a free hand abroad. It is questionable just how far the "Lib-Imps" were prepared to go in order to be "advanced". To a large extent their interest was motivated by a negative fear of full-blooded "socialism". In order to seize the new political high ground of pressing urban social problems, they realized that the Liberal Party would have to move in advance of the revolutionaries. Then, as now, "socialism" was an ambiguous word claimed by Marxists, by traditional radicals like Harcourt and even by Rosebery who once referred to himself as a "committed socialist".<sup>27</sup> Benignly, it could mean a simple concern for social questions; more commonly it was coming to mean something more menacing. Ferguson tried to integrate this desire to "dish" the Marxists into his growing belief in the need for a federal structure. "(At Westminster, Scottish) social questions are not properly grappled with, leading to a serious growth of socialism".<sup>28</sup>

The impact of Henry George and his 'single tax' ideas had made the question of urban land valuation of major interest for social radicals. Haldane began developing

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26. Ferguson to Rosebery Jan. 28, 1892 Rosebery MSS  
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27. Ferguson to Rosebery Aug. 18, 1887 Rosebery MSS  
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28. Ferguson to Rosebery March 16, 1887 Rosebery MSS  
10017

ideas to curb land speculation, to put vacant sites to use and to empower local authorities to acquire land compulsorily. Ferguson attempted to inject some of these ideas into a Scottish local government bill in 1889.

R. T. Reid moved a motion on May 6, 1890 contending that local authorities be allowed to acquire land by order.

(But, as Barker notes, Reid did not belong to the Haldane 'inner' group and hence received little support from that quarter.<sup>29</sup>) However, the traditional radicals of West Scotland led by Andrew Provand fought such ideas as dangerous and attempted to reduce the policy to one of an adjustment of rates.<sup>30</sup>

Labour provided the other main field of interest for the social radicals. As early as 1887, Ferguson was displaying a eager concern for the problems of trade unionism and working men in Scotland, though his "education", under the influence of Haldane and through him, the Fabians, was never very profound. He enthused on the subject to Rosebery:

The vote on the regulation of hours of labour to eight was interesting. You should have heard the discussion. I did not know the 8 hours movement had gone so far in Scotland nor that the English unions were so much better organized than ours. I voted against the proposed clause but the West of Scotland miners deserve great sympathy. You should say something about this subject at Airdrie. Drink is at the bottom

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29. Barker op. cit. p. 187

30. *ibid.* p. 187

of most of the mischief in Lanarkshire, where there is a lot of Irish and floating cheap labour with a few very powerful coal masters like the Bairds.<sup>31</sup>

The weakness of Scottish trade unions referred to by Ferguson, which had plagued Keir Hardie's organizing efforts in Lanarkshire, as well as being one cause of the thin support he received in Mid-Lanark in 1888, continued to concern Ferguson in years following:

The reason they gave me in Lanarkshire why the miners' unions did not exist there was that Catholic and Protestant cantankerousness stopped them.<sup>32</sup>

The rising tide of interest in social issues within the Liberal Party reached a peak of sorts in 1891 and it had a particular and sometimes contradictory effect in Scotland. A protracted strike by the railwaymen of Scotland was large in the public mind in the winter of 1890-91. At stake was the recognition of the union and, much more importantly, persistent compulsory demands by the companies for excessive working hours to a degree which threatened public safety. The situation made a large impression in Parliament: even Harcourt was moved to condemn the railway companies. However, the real breakthrough for labour came when the eminently moderate and respected C.-B. spoke at Falkirk, giving great sympathy and support to the cause of the strikers. The 'fall-out' from this action was prime evidence of the difficulties that a Liberal Party, seeking

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31. Ferguson to Rosebery Aug. 18, 1887 Rosebery MSS 10017

32. Ferguson to Rosebery Nov. 7, 1891 Rosebery MSS 10018

lower class support but dominated by elite figures, could invite upon itself. Lord Elgin, though not a hard-line conservative, was a member of the board of the North British Railway Company and wrote in some heat to C.-B., rebuking him and calling his attention to acts of violence committed by the strikers against property and strikebreakers. C.-B.'s reply is indicative not only of the atmosphere of 1891 but also the special qualities that raised him above the ordinary Scottish Liberal:

You somewhat misapprehend my view when you imply that I take the men's side in the sense of approving of all that they have done .... the general desire of the men for easier hours was not a sudden or malicious idea but had existed for a long time and had attracted general public sympathy .... it was a nonsense for the companies to refuse to recognize the union .... there is no party in question in all this but at a public meeting dealing with the public questions of the hour, I could hardly pass by without notice, the one subject of acute interest throughout Scotland at this moment.<sup>33</sup>

In the autumn of 1891, Haldane and Sydney Webb failed to move the English N.L.F. to place the leading labour question of the hour, an eight hour day for miners, on the Newcastle Programme. Judging from the record of Scottish Liberals in dealing with the labour movement, especially their treatment of Hardie three years earlier, there was no reason to suppose that the Scottish rank and file would react any differently from their English colleagues. Indeed, in 1889, a regional conference of the North Eastern

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33. C.-B. to Elgin Jan. 23, 1891. Elgin MSS

Scottish Liberals treated with contempt a resolution backing the miners cause.<sup>34</sup> Yet in October 1891, the S.L.A., meeting in conference in Glasgow gave strong approval to the regulation of hours in mines.

Thus, the complexities of Scottish reaction to social issues becomes evident. The long-standing antipathy to labour in Scotland endured while the same men could back the miners' greatest cause. The relative unimportance of S.L.A. resolutions and the character of the radicals who dominated the conference does not simplify matters. The elite, which held real power, was divided between personal interests such as Elgin's, the intellectual flirtations of the Roseberyites and the plain common sense justice of Campbell-Bannerman.

In contrast to this confused picture, another aspect of radicalism was becoming crystal clear. That traditional hobby-horse of Liberal radicalism, disestablishment, triumphed within the party in 1891 and was formally adopted as party policy. As early as 1888, a majority of the caucus had come to pledge themselves to the measure. Yet, these events, which would have convulsed and driven the party into self-destruction in 1885, passed off with only a minimum of interest. Only the leaders of the dissenting churches made much of it. In short, disestablishment was returned to the long and tiresome queue of Liberal 'fads',

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34. Barker op. cit. p. 147

a millstone on the party and ignored by most.

a) The Parnell Divorce Case and Consequences

However, despite "Newcastle" and the hopes and efforts of those like Haldane, all other questions continued to pale before the problem of Ireland. Liberal fortunes had seemed to have been utterly crushed by the damning 'evidence' of the Piggott letters published in early 1887. Macdougall had reported bleakly:

It is constantly stated and with apparently some authority that Mr. Gladstone's policy is making great progress in Scotland. I don't think there is much ground for this assertion .... much antipathy to the Parnellites and their ways. 35

Michelstown and the 'Plan of Campaign' raised temperatures in Ireland on both sides. In this atmosphere, the exposure of Piggott's fraud in 1889 sent Gladstone's support as high as it had been low two years before. Cruelly, the wheel came full circle, again, on Nov. 17, 1890 when Parnell failed to contest the O'Shea divorce action. The reaction of the English Victorian middle class non-conformists, who bulked so large in the support of the Liberal Party, in rejecting any further links with Parnell was matched by the Presbyterians of Scotland:

The feeling amongst our people in Scotland is very strong against Parnell remaining as the recognized head of his party. There is here a strong undercurrent of distrust of the Irish character and this recent exposure ensures it .... whether they are right or wrong, my belief is that the Scotch will

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35. Macdougall to Rosebery May 12, 1887 Rosebery MSS 10092

not tolerate Parnell in his position of  
quasi-partnership with Liberal leaders ....<sup>36</sup>

In the final cutting blow, Parnell, in an attempt to  
rescue his position in Ireland, turned on Gladstone with  
accusations of perfidy. C.B.'s anger was vented at  
Dunfries on December 17, 1890:

Mr. Parnell has shown by his actions that he  
is unfit to be a leader of a political party  
.... an unblushing attempt to employ for the  
interests of his own personal cause those fires  
of racial animosity between peoples of the two  
islands which it has been the prayer of the  
best men of the three countries to assuage  
and extinguish.<sup>37</sup>

The Parnell episode seemed to bring to the surface a  
sour weariness in a public fed to the teeth with Ireland.  
An air of almost fatalistic calm seemed to come over  
Scotland as the elections of 1892 approached. Ferguson's  
letters to Rosebery took on an increasingly energetic tone  
but remained fundamentally pessimistic. Accurately, he  
predicted: "I do not at present give us a more than 20  
majority with the Irish".<sup>38</sup> At this time the English  
headquarters were complacently expecting at least 100.<sup>39</sup>  
Ferguson's summation of the situation was prescient: "There  
is not great confidence in the government. There is not  
quite enough in us."<sup>40</sup>

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36. Wilson op. cit. p. 105, C.B. to Harcourt Nov. 20,  
1890

37. Ibid. p. 106

38. Ferguson to Rosebery Jan. 9, 1892 Rosebery MSS  
10018

39. Ferguson to Rosebery Jan. 18, 1892 Rosebery MSS  
10018

40. Ferguson to Rosebery Jan. 10, 1892 Rosebery MSS 10018



## e) The Campaign of 1892

In 1892, Liberals in Scotland, continued to find themselves chained to the Irish issue. All the old arguments and abuse of 1886 were again rolled out by both sides. The Liberals suffered from having committed their specific proposals to paper. Whereas Unionists could smooth over their ideas with generalities, Liberals had to stand or fall on each comma and period of the Home Rule Bill. The question of Imperial representation for the Irish, in the absence of a plan of complete federalism, nagged at Liberal speakers, who could only clutch at Gladstone's inadequate assurances that all would be well in the end. Worse still, the Irish themselves were discrediting the basic tenet of Home Rule: the assumption that Ireland would be happier, more prosperous and content if she were allowed to rule herself. The reports that were gleefully printed each day in the Unionist press of violence and chaos on the Irish hustings seemed to be making a mockery of this idea. With the Parnellite and anti-Parnellite factions attacking each other venomously in word and viciously in deed, it seemed increasingly self-evident that the last thing the Irish would be capable of was the order and self-discipline of government. Moreover, the repeated claims on the Irish hustings that Home Rule was to be only a first step seemed to hold the Liberals up to ridicule as gullible.

The chief villain working against the Liberals was Ulster. Although the question of the protestant minority

had been significant in 1886, two factors augmented its importance in 1892. Firstly, the passage of six years had allowed Ulster to organize itself better and had armed it with Randolph Churchill's cry, "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right." Secondly, the split in the Irish Nationalist ranks seemed to offer prima facie evidence of the power of the Roman Catholic priesthood in the affairs of the Irish. That the former idol of Ireland, a Protestant, should have been so completely tossed aside under clerical influence did not bode well for tolerance in a self-governing Ireland.

Without Ulster, it is not improbable that Britain might have opted for the Liberal formula; if only to be rid of the Irish. However, the spectre of protestant 'hostages' aroused deep feeling and nowhere more than in Presbyterian Scotland. Gladstone, curiously unable to acknowledge the nationalist feeling of Ulster, and perhaps offended by the naked bigotry of the North, never supplied his followers with an adequate response to Unionist accusations. Therefore, Liberal speakers could only utter unconvincing assurances that Ulster would come to accept Dublin rule in the end. Some Liberals took the offensive by insisting that Ulster Protestants would benefit from Irish autonomy but this had only the sad air of whistling in the dark.

The attempts of Liberal candidates to handle this most difficult issue ranged from the aggressively unrepentant to the soothing and conciliating. One of the most forthright and radical Liberals on the Irish question was R. T. Reid, M.P. for Dumfries Burghs. Standing behind the Home Rule proposals, he denounced "the bugbears and the Hobgoblins" of Ulster, confessing that though he had listened he could not, as yet, understand what the Ulsterman were afraid of.<sup>41</sup> When questioned about the character of the Irish M.P.'s whose quarrels were so public, his response was unequivocal. The Irish M.P.'s were his friends, he admired them and he stood by them. Britain, according to Reid was guilty of a legacy of "tyranny" in Ireland which had resulted only in waste and misery. The record of the Union was "fifty years of distress" in Ireland.<sup>42</sup> He stressed that Home Rule was "needed badly" for both Ireland and Scotland and characterized the Irish as "oppressed" and their M.P.'s as neither "disloyal nor traitors" but instead as "patriots."<sup>43</sup>

More common was the soothing approach of C.B.: "Ulstermen would not be slaves but active partners in their own country."<sup>44</sup> Menzies insisted that "there was no chance

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41. Scotsman July 1, 1892; July 4, 1892

42. ibid July 4, 1892

43. ibid July 1, 1892

44. Glasgow Herald July 1, 1892

of the South persecuting the North."<sup>45</sup> Wallace in Edinburgh East pointed to the present power of Ulster's voice as ample evidence of her strength and security in a united Ireland.<sup>46</sup> Paul in Edinburgh South suggested that "Ulster would be even stronger under Home Rule" and dismissed fears of Irish tariffs.<sup>47</sup> Most common of all were simple declarations for Gladstone's wisdom and "Justice for Ireland."

Not surprisingly, Ireland was virtually the sole theme of the Unionist campaign. With a weak ministerial record to defend, Ireland presented an easy opportunity to shift the burden of defence over to the Liberals. The focus of the Unionist campaign of 1892 was the "orange card" of Ulster.

In 1886, Ulster had remained only a secondary question, but 6 years later that had changed, with the Loyalist forces of the North organized and a bond established between the Protestants and the Unionist party. Cynically, the Unionists of Scotland employed the bigots of Ulster, often clergymen, to denounce the threat of "Home Rule" from platforms in Scotland. Such speakers were well characterised by Lord Rosebery as: "carrying the

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45. Glasgow Herald July 1, 1892

46. ibid July 4, 1892

47. Scotsman July 2, 1892

Shorter Catechism in one hand and a revolver in the other".

The Unionists could not plead Ulster's cause by anything resembling "national self-determination" - for that would imply acceptance of the South Irish cause. Therefore popular will was always cast within the structure of the United Kingdom as a whole, within which, of course, Ulster joined the majority (England and Scotland) in opposition to the minority (South Ireland). "Ulster claims to have the majority on its side - the majority of the electorate of the United Kingdom."<sup>48</sup> Any suggestion that Ireland's loyalty had to be earned or that it was hers to choose, was dismissed as 'treason'.

Not all Unionists relied on these primitive tactics; nor did they have to. Gladstone's proposals were all too vulnerable to detailed criticism; and the vagueness of sections of the bill and of Gladstone's defence of it provided much ready ammunition for reasoned attack.

Those who concentrated on religion included Walter Thorburn, Liberal Unionist M.P. for Peebles and Selkirk, whom Ferguson described as a "heavy, middle class snob."<sup>49</sup> He claimed that the Liberals were in league with the Pope so that the Catholic church would be established in Ireland with the taxes of the Protestants. Glasgow

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48. Ferguson to Rosebery June 17, 1892 Rosebery MSS 10018

49. Scotsman July 4, 1892

Unionists made particular use of references to "brethren in Ulster". Parker Smith in Partick asked his supporters whether they were prepared "to hand over their fellow religionists in Northern Ireland to the agitators."<sup>50</sup>

Stirling-Maxwell in College division claimed that Unionists were "in fighting Home Rule .... defending their friends and fighting the enemy."<sup>51</sup>

However, in 1892, unlike 1886, Ireland did not entirely monopolize political discussion. When the subject could be avoided, most Liberals preferred to turn to the ancient cry of the 'outs' against the record of the 'ins'. "The Tories have done nothing in six years that they promised to do and all the things that they promised not to do." - Sir James Carmichael.<sup>52</sup> While most of this criticism was directed towards an alleged absence of social reform, the Tory record in Ireland was also denounced as "do-nothing". "The Conservatives have done nothing in the past six years to grapple with the Irish question." - Capt. John Sinclair.<sup>53</sup> "The present peace in Ireland is the result of reforms forced on the Tories and the good-will generated by Liberal Home Rule efforts." - Stephen Williamson.<sup>54</sup> Unionists retorted "Liberal government means Ireland and no social legislation." - J. Parker Smith.<sup>55</sup>

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50. Glasgow Herald July 6, 1892

51. Ibid. July 6, 1892

52. Scotsman July 2, 1892

53. Ibid. July 6, 1892

54. Glasgow Herald, July 1, 1892

55. ibid. July 6, 1892

In 1892 it was still common to identify the phrase "social reform" with measures such as temperance or the crofter's cause. Some Liberals, e.g. T. Reid and S. Williamson<sup>56</sup> however manifested an awareness of new forces: emphasising the new influence as expressed in the Newcastle Program. Not surprisingly the most socially conscious areas were the mining districts. Here, however, issues tended to be concentrated narrowly on specifically mining matters. Labour issues did arise in other working class areas but not to such a degree. In Lanark N.W., Reade attacked the "classes" and identified himself with the welfare of the masses by supporting a general 8-hour day.<sup>57</sup> Some Liberals however took specific objection to these proposals. Paul felt that regulation of hours was an unwarranted intrusion in the economy and opposed the idea of any national system of pensions.<sup>58</sup>

In Aberdeen, James Bryce was one of the few Liberals to face a Labour opponent. Friends like J. W. Crombie, M.P. for Kincardine, warned him that he was vulnerable because of his opposition to SHR and his wobbling position on labour questions. He was also assured however that Champion, the labour man, was strong only 'with a knot of socialists" and had lost support amongst working men by

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56. Ibid. July 1; July 2

57. Glasgow Herald July 1, 1892

58. Scotsman July 4, 1892

advocating protection.<sup>59</sup> Bryce's agent, Buchart told him: "Deal firmly and finally with the labour 8-hours question. The working man can be easily managed."<sup>60</sup> On June 24, in Aberdeen, Bryce devoted most of his speech to labour. "Eight hours" was desirable for mining and like trades, he admitted and, citing Liberal measures of the past, tried to identify the cause of Liberalism with the cause of the working class. Liberalism stood for civil and religious liberty, free trade, popular representative government, conciliation, social equality and the easing of the burdens of the weak.<sup>61</sup>

Disestablishment was still raised occasionally by Unionists who felt it did no harm to remind the electorate that "Every vote for a Gladstonian candidate is a vote for the abolition of the Church." -- Sir Andrew Agnew.<sup>62</sup> The few Liberals who made mention of it, like C.B., Kinloch, Asher, Trevelyan, and Crombie, confined themselves to a brief statement of support for the proposal. A few Liberals like McLagan and Ure made equally brief mention of their continuing opposition.

f) The Election Results:

The general election of 1892 was decisively lost by the Unionists but was not really won by the Liberals.

59. Crombie to Bryce June 17, 1892 Bryce MSS 29

60. Butchart to Bryce June 22, 1892 Bryce MSS 28

61. Bryce MSS 28

62. Scotsman July 1, 1892



Without the Irish, the Liberals were, in fact, left 41 seats short of Unionist strength in the House of Commons. A country tired of a Unionist administration but even more tired of the millstone of Ireland, left the Liberals in a hopeless parliamentary situation whose ultimate effect was to send them into the wilderness for over a decade.

In Britain, the Liberals managed to regain 84 of the 144 seats lost in 1886, thus recovering 59% of their losses. However, this pattern was not a uniform one. In London, the Liberal recovery was almost complete but in the West Midlands, Chamberlain's Liberal Unionist barony refused to crack, yielding up only 5 of the 26 seats (19%) taken in 1886. Scotland, too, fell below the Liberals' national average. Of 19 seats lost in 1886, only 7 or 33% returned to the Liberal fold. In 1892, it was the tenacity of Liberal Unionism in its strongholds that denied Gladstone his mandate.

The 50 seats won by the Liberals in Scotland were certainly fewer than had been hoped for, though some, like Ferguson, had been pessimistic from the outset: "The Scottish constituencies seem to be less keen than in 1886."<sup>63</sup>

All told, the Liberals won back eleven constituencies (Glasgow St. Rollox, Ayr Burghs, Ayrshire South, Govan, Dumbartonshire, Falkirk Burghs, Forfarshire, Roxburghshire, Argyll, Inverness Burghs and Invernessshire) but lost 4

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63. Ferguson to Rosebery June 17, 1892 Rosebery MSS  
10018

others (Glasgow Camlachie, Perth, Lanark N. W. and Wick Burghs) for an overall gain of 7, well short of the 19 they lost in 1886. Of the seats won back, 4 (Ayr Burghs, Roxburghshire, Forfarshire and Invernessshire) had been taken into the Unionist column by their sitting members. This reflected a general trend in those seats where a sitting Liberal MP had carried his constituency over with him into Liberal Unionism. Just as incumbency had produced a greater than average swing to Unionism in 1886, so in 1892, the swing back to the Liberals in those seats was above average. Clearly, the member's influence had been a temporary effect for a single election. Of the other six gains, three came in Tory held seats and three in Liberal Unionist seats.

The Liberal losses were of a mixed variety. Two resulted directly from the old Liberal curse of a divided vote. In Perth, C. S. Parker, who had survived a radical intervention in 1885, could not do so again with a greatly strengthened Conservative vote (from 29% (1885) to 37.5% (1892)). Ironically, the Unionist vote fell from its 1886 level in both Perth and Glasgow Camlachie, by 4.5% and 4% respectively. In the latter case, it was the intervention, as a labour candidate, of the famous socialist and former M.P., R. B. Cunningham-Graham, taking 12% of the vote which denied the Liberals the seat; they came only 5% behind the Unionist. The other two losses were more forgiveable. Lanark North West, always a hairline marginal, swung slightly to the Unionists. Wick Burghs, with a tiny electorate was

always unpredictable and after the election a number of Liberals spoke darkly of 'bribery'. Ferguson, who had no great liking for Crofter M.P.s, dismissed the defeated Wick Crofter as an example of the low quality of Liberal Highland candidates: "the worst I ever saw. An awful bounder."<sup>64</sup>

Again, distinct regional patterns were visible in the results of 1892. Just as the West proved to be the low point of 1886 for the Liberals so it was the area of their greatest recovery in 1892. 6 of their 11 gains came in the 28 western seats, More emphatically, 19 of these constituencies registered a Liberal swing. In the East, where the Unionists were cut back to 5 of the 32 seats, the trends were almost equally divided for and against the Liberals. 5 of the 8 Highland seats had Unionist swings. Broken down to a more local basis, the Liberal recovery was best in Glasgow and along the lower Clyde valley with lesser gains in the South West and the industrial belt of Stirling-Fife. Results were balanced in Edinburgh, along the East Coast and in the Borders, with the Unionists doing best in Lanarkshire and the Highlands. It should be noted that the Liberals did much better in the Southern Highlands, where they gained three seats, than further north. It is to be remembered that this division was exactly reversed from that of 1886.

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64. Ferguson to Rosebery June 17, 1892 Rosebery MSS 10018

Finally the changing composition of the Unionist alliance in Scotland should be noted. Whereas in 1886, the Liberal Unionists took on the bulk of the responsibility with about three times the number of candidates as the Tories - 47 to 17; in 1892 the totals were more equal - 38 Liberal Unionists to 21 Tories. Finally, for the first time, the Liberals faced what was close to a complete opposition slate in Scotland; only one seat, rock-solid Kincardine, did not have a Unionist standing.

#### Summary

The disaster of 1886 did not, as some Liberals had hoped, put an end to the burden and incubus of Ireland. So long as Gladstone retained the leadership, the Liberal Party's fate would continue to be determined by the fortunes of Irish Home Rule. The cruel irrationality of events from the emergence of Piggott to the body-blow of the O'Shea affair dramatically illustrated the degree to which the Liberal party's future was no longer within its own control. The final cruelty was the 'victory' of 1892, a 'victory' which, ultimately would break the spirit of the party for a decade.

Although conscious of the primacy of the Irish issue, Scottish Liberals were, in the years 1886-92 forced to cope with other pressing concerns. One of these, Scottish Home Rule, was closely related to the Irish crisis. Indeed, the real strength of the movement lay in the degree to which

it could draw on more than merely parochial concerns for support. While relying on a growing sense of Scottish nationalism, the idea also commended itself to the hard headed minds of the party by appearing as an integral and necessary component within any proposed scheme of federal government for the United Kingdom, a scheme which many saw as the only means of satisfying both the Irish and constitutional logic. To others, like Rosebery, the concept found favour as a stepping stone for their dreams of an ultimate Imperial Federation. While grievances of national neglect linked with traditional nationalist feeling provided the initial base of the movement, it was the need to find a workable solution for Irish government, and the looming problem of a maturing Empire that brought in much of the most influential support. Consequently, Scottish Home Rule, while remaining a campaign for autonomy, was also, for many, a campaign for the preservation and development of the union and the Empire.

The other new concern for Scottish Liberals, social and working class demands, was, in the long run, to pose far greater difficulties. The concept of 'radicalism' was changing in the early 1890's but the Liberal Party of Scotland seemed particularly unable to adapt. In the West of Scotland, where these issues were most pressing, 'radicals' of another age, the middle class commercial men who controlled the local associations, were in fact the most unyielding opponents of the new forces and attempted to shut

them out of the party. The rejection of Keir Hardie in Mid-Lanark was not merely a local occurrence but a reflection of a generally held antipathy to what Hardie stood for. Already weak in the face of the alliance of traditional Tory strength and the exceptional Liberal Unionist strength in the region, the party could only decline farther as a result of these attitudes. Paradoxically, it was in the 'conservative' East that the new ideas received more of a hearing whether through Haldone's Fabian associations, Rosebery and Ferguson's evolving domestic strategy for Liberal Imperialism or the common sense of those of C-B's instincts. Nevertheless, the industrial conflicts of the early 1890's in Scotland brought out much of the deeply felt reluctance of Scottish Liberals to new forces that seemed designed to undermine much of what they had traditionally stood for.

CHAPTER 6

Demoralization and the New Radicalism

1892-95

a) Despair and Futility

The result of the 1892 election, a Liberal government dependent for its majority on the Irish party, was the worst possible for the Liberal Party. Demoralized before the election by the effect of the Parnell-O'Shea affair, the parliamentary situation left the Liberals committed to a course of action utterly doomed to futility by the hand of the House of Lords; a course of action to which fewer and fewer in the party felt any serious commitment. Gladstone was left with no option but to go through the motions even if the party and, more importantly, popular opinion were sunk in apathy. As one of the main props of the Liberal Party, the opinion of Scotland was particularly crucial and the reports reaching London from those like Ferguson in the months before the presentation of the Second Home Rule Bill were not encouraging:

I did not hear much in Scotland except as to lengthy education projects."<sup>1</sup>

On Feb. 6, 1893, one week before the introduction of the Bill, Herbert Paul, M.P., for Edinburgh South, reported to Ferguson:

Red-hot from Scotland, he speaks of great apathy and a lead being wanted."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ferguson to Rosebery Nov. 25, 1892 Rosebery MSS 10018
  2. Ferguson to Rosebery Feb. 6, 1893 Rosebery MSS 10018



These reports proved to be accurate because, in spite of the almost contemptuous manner in which the Lords tossed the Home Rule Bill out, very few of Gladstone's supporters in Scotland were motivated to stir. A. L. Brown and some of the radical wing organized a few anti-Lords rallies but their very novelty highlighted the more general attitude. In short, the country was probably grateful, at least for the moment, that the whole business had been finally removed from general concern. Defeated and discouraged, Gladstone resigned in March, 1894. After some struggle with Harcourt, Rosebery, the idol of Scotland, succeeded to the leadership of the Liberal Party.

Rosebery's succession might have been expected to have had an enormous effect in Scotland. Yet it seemed to pass with a minimum of impact. Rosebery was and still remains an enigma, a powerful yet vague and shadowy figure. As Sir Charles Hardinge told the Prince of Wales: "He's a strange, weird man."<sup>3</sup> Always aloof, he had been utterly shattered by the premature death of his wife in 1890. In the aftermath, his zest for life and politics, in particular, seemed to quite vanish, his public life reduced to an empty ritual. Tragically, he became Prime Minister just at a moment when his party's fortunes were sliding to a new ebb. His personal despair matched

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3. R. Magnus Edward VII, Penguin, London, p. 384

the apathy and fatalism then rife within the Liberal Party. Though possessed of enormous talents and commanding a powerful and enduring loyalty in Scotland, he never fully responded to the urgings of many loyalists like Ferguson to seize his opportunities. He was a man stripped of ambition, content with political dilettantism.

Moreover, though he had first made his mark by the promotion of Scotland's interests and as Gladstone's Scottish shepherd, his commitment to the country of his birth seemed to fall directly as his personal fortunes rose. There is little doubt but that if he had actively sought it, he could have used his Scottish strength to enormous effect, both for himself and for Scottish Liberalism. Even A. L. Brown, the leader of Scotland's traditional radicals, though ideologically set against the Rosebery interest, could describe him as "the natural leader of Scotland."<sup>4</sup> He wrote to Rosebery in 1896 after the latter's resignation:

"I don't think you realize how very earnestly some of us desire to be led by one who can really speak as a Scotsman to Scotsmen."<sup>5</sup>

As time passed, Rosebery spent less and less time in Scotland and, in 1888, he resigned the presidency of the S.L.A. on the grounds that:

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4. Ferguson to Rosebery June 17, 1892 Rosebery MSS 10018
  5. Brown to Rosebery Oct. 8, 1896 Rosebery MSS Box 74

"I am less constantly in Scotland than you (Lord Elgin) .... my connection with a political organization in Scotland must be real if at all .... "6

His personally ambivalent attitude to his native country is best illustrated by this passage from a letter to Ferguson:

"I am very lonely - personally and politically and somehow or other I find an air of sympathy in Scotland which I find nowhere else .... However, I must turn to the cultivation of my garden and look northwards no more."7

While the traditional leadership had retained its position in Scotland after 1886, this had been at the price of conceding to the radical wing priority for some of their oldest 'fads'. In December, 1886, the S.L.A. and the radical N.L.F.S. had united. The effects of this merger had been mixed. The radicals had gained control of the party conferences and reversed the old non-topical character of the S.L.A. In 1891, a programme, considerably more radical than the English Newcastle programme, was drawn up to include Home Rule all-round, woman's suffrage, disestablishment and the eight-hour day for miners.

"The progressive programme at Newcastle might be good enough for Englishmen but it was not good enough for Scotsmen - it wanted the democratic ring."8

- David McLardy, Glasgow radical.

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6. Rosebery to Elgin July 17, 1888 Elgin MSS
  7. Rosebery to Ferguson April 7, 1893 Rosebery MSS 1001B
  8. Kellas op. cit. p. 14 Feb. 17, 1892

These resolution victories remained hollow, however, so long as men like C.B., Ferguson and Rosebery continued to dominate the effective political representation of Liberal Scotland; and they would do so so long as the Western radicals were faced by Unionist hegemony and the conservative East remained Liberal. Nevertheless, the return to power of Liberalism in 1892 required some gestures towards the radicals and 'faddists'. Therefore, Scottish and Welsh disestablishment proposals went into the Queen's speech. Gladstone had agreed that the questions were now 'ripened' by national opinion:

"Cameron has twice, and in two parliaments, (I think) had majorities, rather large, of the Scotch members present; and every by-election reinforces them. I seem as a Scotch member to have got the declaration of Scotch opinion which I have required."<sup>9</sup>

Ferguson, though a supporter of disestablishment, saw action on the issue in 1892 as a means of clearing the deck of an old political handicap:

"I saw J. B. Balfour (the Lord Advocate) and told him Scots Disestablishment should come after Wales in The Queen's speech. Both Bills are badly wanted. Wales will be quiet no longer and as we have gone too far in Scotland, we shall remain about 10 seats short in the bad until we finish this business off. Besides it would do a lot of good."<sup>10</sup>

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9. Gladstone to Rosebery Nov. 10, 1889 Rosebery MSS  
10023

10. Ferguson to Rosebery Nov. 3, 1892 Rosebery MSS  
10018

This attitude of wry cynicism and political realism was matched by C.B. in 1894 when Rosebery's administration put forward a disestablishment bill:

"You may avoid the name (Cameron) which may be offensive to some of the Church people: but substantially the bill represents the least we can do. The line I think is to be effusive over the Presbyterian Church - the characteristic church of the Scottish people .... largely moulded by its characteristic spirit .... lament its present division into three bodies equal in zeal, etc., etc. .... disestablishment would raise rather than degrade .... (but) the Church people are and will remain hard against us and that we must not in the futile hope of pleasing them damage the zeal of our own supporters."<sup>11</sup>

Such was the ineffectualness of the Rosebery government that the Welsh bill, which preceded the Scottish, was still bogged down in the Commons, when the Government fell in June, 1895.

There were some other slight concessions to another 'fad' - temperance. The prime object of the radicals was the institution of "local veto", a provision which would allow local authorities to regulate or ban the sale of liquor. Peter McLagan, former M.P. for Linlithgowshire who had made this his hobby-horse for years, had retired in 1893. John Wilson, M.P. for Govan, took over McLagan's mantle and was soon complaining of the lack of interest on the part of Rosebery.<sup>12</sup> Eventually, a mild

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11. C.B. to Rosebery March 13, 1894 Rosebery MSS 10002

12. Ferguson to Rosebery May 5, 1894 Rosebery MSS 10018

proposal was brought forward which the faddists accepted reluctantly:

"The temperance people do not like the Government's veto Bill. They much prefer the one known as McLagan's which is in the hands of Mr. John Wilson, M.P. but they refrain from criticizing the Government measure for fear of weakening their cause."<sup>13</sup>

In any case, Rosebery had virtually ruled out action on this front in a speech in Glasgow on November 11, pointing out the certain objections of the House of Lords.<sup>14</sup>

b) Old Faddists and the New Radicalism

More important for the future of Scottish Liberalism than the mutterings of shop-worn 'faddists' was the rapid rise of labour as an industrial and political force. Scattered unions were beginning to unite on a wider basis and growing in self-confidence. Socialism was becoming a political force, particularly on the Clyde, and its growth was putting severe strains on labour's relationship with Liberalism:

"It would be well if you spoke in Glasgow before the end of the year. The Labour men are getting very wide apart from the Liberals in the West. So much so that Graham, the secretary of the Western section told me this morning that it would be difficult and really impossible for any of the labour men to be adopted by any of our Liberal associations.

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13. Ferguson to Rosebery Nov. 16, 1894 Rosebery MSS 10018

14. Crewe op. cit. Vol. 1 p. 464

The Scotch socialist goes so thoroughly to work that he will not stop short of nationalizing many things and the mass of the Liberals won't hear of this programme. Graham says there are bound to be splits and probably seats lost; he thinks the Tories will do a little better next time."<sup>15</sup>

The summer of 1894 brought a national coal strike in Scotland that served to highlight the cause of labour and its increasing militancy. The men went out in June and held out for the summer. A lack of unity weakened their strength and, eventually, by October, a settlement was made on the owners' terms.

The strike left the Scottish Liberals in a curious position. Liberal doctrine stood for rigid non-interference in the economic affairs of industry but at the same time claimed to be the party of 'progress' and depended on working class votes. Bryce's correspondence with Rosebery hints at this discomfiture:

"the miners are thoroughly disheartened and prepared for virtual surrender .... The men will be driven to an unconditional surrender and will blame us for not having tried to help them. In case a proposed conversation shows that the Lanarkshire and Ayrshire coal owners will reject my professional intervention, I should doubt the wisdom of inviting a rebuff."<sup>16</sup>

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15. Ferguson to Rosebery April 10, 1894 Rosebery MSS 10018

16. Bryce to Rosebery July 30, 1894 Rosebery MSS Box 57

A month later:

"The strike is really at an end in the West  
 .... The only thing that can be done to lessen  
 the defeat of the miners is to induce the non-  
 association masters to agree to a fixed wage to  
 be maintained for a certain time, say a year at  
 a minimum. The association masters are quite  
 obdurate .... it seems quite probable that Fife  
 and Leith may make a separate settlement ...."<sup>17</sup>

Trevelyan (the Secretary of State for Scotland), writing  
 to Bryce, held to the traditional Liberal belief in strict  
 neutrality:

"I have been to the provost of Glasgow who  
 has told me a great deal about the strike.  
 Your province, that of conciliation was evi-  
 dently hopeless with sad perverseness and  
 obstinancy on both sides. Mine and that of  
 the Lord Advocate, which is peace and order has  
 kept us both very anxious and constant work but  
 there has been no calamity. We have been  
 attacked by both sides though not very fairly so  
 I suppose we have about preserved the balance."<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps the best expression of the difficulties of  
 the Scottish Liberals, especially in the West, in coming  
 to terms with the new working class movement was offered  
 by A. D. Provand, Liberal M.P. to Glasgow Blackfriars.  
 His constituency contained many of the worst districts of  
 the city, including the Gorbals, and was almost solidly  
 working class. Provand, as a Glasgow-born Manchester  
 merchant was an example of the old middle class radical  
 tradition of Glasgow. By and large he was not a reactionary,

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17. Bryce to Rosebery Sept. 1, 1894 Rosebery MSS Box 67

18. Trevelyan to Bryce Oct. 2, 1894 Bryce MSS 18



often dealing with progressive themes and later toying with Georgite ideas.<sup>19</sup> Yet a memorandum he sent to Rosebery in 1894 was an extraordinary documentation of social incomprehension. He had heard from Ferguson that Tweedmouth was attempting to revive the abortive 'deal' of 1891 with the Scottish Labour Party in order to avoid a repetition of the 1892 Camlachie result. Provand was furious:

"The words 'Labour Party' are misleading .... those who call themselves Socialists .... terrorism is their only political weapon and they have been taught its uses and values by recent political developments. Lord Tweedmouth had negotiations three or four years ago with Mr. Cunninghame-Graham and Mr. Hardie and latterly intentions of some kind through Mr. Munro-Ferguson and that he has talked veiled collectivism is well known to the Socialists. I have therefore to say that if anyone officially connected with the Government makes any bargain with the representatives of Socialism in Glasgow there are scores of leading Liberals in Glasgow who will not again be seen on a Liberal platform and thousands of voters who will in the future go to Liberal meetings solely out of curiosity .... it would create a split in the Liberal Party as pronounced as the Home Rule Bill did. I meet many convinced men in my visits to the city .... who, while they are good Liberals have the most pronounced opinions in reference to those attempting negotiations with the Socialists .... a socialist cannot possibly be returned for any Scottish division. Mine is probably the most radical in all Glasgow .... Socialists could not be elected here even if they were opposed by a Conservative alone .... no bargain is possible. Their leaders seek their own personal advancement .... it is a mistake to suppose many working men believe in Socialism .... The methods of the Socialists are simply to terrorize the Liberals (and bargain or appeasement inviting more) .... they say that possessors of inherited wealth are thieves and

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19. Ferguson to Rosebery Feb. 6, 1898 Rosebery MSS 10019

and that I and all other mercantile men are worse than thieves .... the strength of socialism arises from the slums. All their object lessons are drawn from them and the worst features of the slums are the creations of drink. Nothing would benefit and disarm Socialism so much as a check upon the drink traffic. Practical Drink Legislation would settle the question in the minds of nine-tenths of such persons on account of the change that would follow in our cities within a reasonable period."<sup>20</sup>

In the light of this statement, Trevelyan's report the next month seems rather optimistic:

The state of things is critical as regards the Labour Party here but not hopeless by any means."<sup>21</sup>

In 1895, Labour candidates were to run in five of the seven Glasgow divisions including both Trevelyan's and Provands. Fortunately for the Liberals, none won more than 700 votes and did not affect any of the results.

c) More Despair

The public apathy, which had crippled Gladstone's Home Bill efforts in 1893, thickened about the aimless Rosebery administration. Part of the cause was the growing political and intellectual bankruptcy of Liberalism in the fall of 1894. Campbell-Bannerman found himself bereft of ideas:

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20. Provand to Rosebery Dec. 20, 1894 Rosebery MSS Box 67

21. Trevelyan to Bryce Jan. 16, 1895 Bryce MSS 18

"I have to speak to my constituents later in the month and am at a loss what to say ...."22

It was no more comforting to him when he came to Scotland:

I have been the rounds of my Fife constituents -- they are all quiet and I was very well received. But there is very little life or enthusiasm. So far as I can get at it, it is a feeling which prevails of exhaustion or even sickening and of repugnance to any great effort. Meetings applaud what one says about the Lords and they are with us in the abstract: But it is like offering a new dish to a man distended with a rather unwholesome meal: He knows it will only make his indigestion worse and he has no healthy appetite .... (attacks on the House of Lords) have small support: there are few abolitionists nor does one hear the march of the unicameral men. I was obligated to coo like a dove and I believe a suspensory veto is all my people would stand. The market for Disestablishment is very flat."23

He also wrote to Bryce of Scottish public "exhaustion and sickness of politics."24

November had seen a by-election in Forfarshire and Campbell Bannerman's report at the time is revealing of the state of disorder in Scottish Liberalism.

"I do not know what to tell you to expect in Forfarshire. We were terribly handicapped by our candidate being an utter stranger and a man who looks as if he had never been out of an accountant's office in his life. His great recommendation was that he is and always has been a U.P. - and therefore he was sent to a

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22. C.B. to Rosebery Oct. 5, 1894 Rosebery MSS 10003

23. C.B. to Rosebery Dec. 9, 1894 Rosebery MSS 10003

24. C.B. to Bryce Dec. 23, 1894 C.B. MSS 41211

county where there are practically no U.P.'s  
 Lots of our people would not vote for him  
 except under compulsion .... I shall be greatly  
 relieved if we have a 500 majority .... our  
 people will have done their best in depressing  
 circumstances."25

In fact the result was a Unionist majority of 286 reversing  
 a Liberal majority of 866 in 1892.

d) The Campaign of 1895

The campaign of 1895 was the final episode of the  
 Home Rule period. While the battle lines and the groupings  
 established by Home Rule were to remain the parameters of  
 political conflict, Ireland ceased to be a political  
 preoccupation. 1895 resembled 1885 both by marking the end  
 of a fading Liberal government and by lacking any central  
 theme. However, the divisive intensity of the Church issue  
 in 1885 in Scotland lacked any real counterpart. More  
 significantly, distinctively Scottish issues and opinions  
 were rapidly disappearing.

One cannot escape the feeling as one reads the re-  
 ports that politicians, on both sides, were perfectly con-  
 fident of the outcome of the election and content to let  
 the inevitable take its course. The campaign had some-  
 thing of the atmosphere of a charade about it. The Liberals  
 expected to lose, though never publicly admitting so, while

the Unionists complacently waited for victory to drop into their lap.

The Liberal campaign was a non-starter from the beginning. The humiliation of their defeat in Parliament, revealing a total breakdown in morale, made them easy targets for ridicule from opposing candidates and hecklers in their audiences. The only Liberal response was to denounce the whole affair as a "shabby Tory trick" - an accusation that merely seemed to underscore naive witlessness.

The Liberal leadership was hopelessly divided. Rosebery, who was in any case barred from campaigning, longed to abdicate. The mutual antipathy of Harcourt and Rosebery was an open secret and the subject of many Unionist taunts:

"The Liberals cannot afford to win the General Election; it is scarcely a secret that Lord Rosebery and Sir William Harcourt will not again sit together in the Cabinet Council."<sup>26</sup>

Every Liberal candidate had to face questions about his own loyalty to one 'leader' or the other. Matters were not helped when some Liberals took an open stand against their official leader e.g. A. Fletcher in Greenock.

For the lack of anything more promising, most Liberals had seized upon the House of Lords as the principal target of their campaign. Clearly having lost both the will and

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26. Glasgow Herald July 1, 1895

the ability to rule, the Liberal accusations seemed little better than a sham. While most Liberals opened their campaigns on the theme of the Lords, a lack of response seemed to diminish its prominence towards the end.

Much as the cry in 1892 had been 'Ireland blocks all' so, in 1895, it became 'the Lords block all'. Sir Charles Cameron's manifesto was typical: All other questions, particularly Home Rule would have to await measures to deal with the Lords' veto.<sup>27</sup>

Most of this was simply ignored by the Tories, probably shrewdly. Those who took the trouble to defend the Lords as an institution portrayed it as a 'non-partisan' body defending the people against 'excesses' such as Home Rule. The Glasgow Herald went as far as to extend this role to the Unionist party itself, characterizing it as "the property, the intelligence and education of the country."<sup>28</sup>

Unionists, confident of victory, were content to strike more statesmanlike attitudes than they had in 1892. There was little evidence of the open pandering to religious prejudice and, instead, some suggestions for the improvement of material conditions in Ireland. Home Rule was visibly on its last legs and another defeat of the Liberals would bury

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27. Ibid. July 8, 1895

28. Ibid. July 3, 1895

it at last. The suggestion was that peace and tranquillity would come to both Ireland and Britain once the agitation was shown to be futile. Above all, the Unionists cast themselves in the role of a wise, experienced and competent team ready to take over from the frenetic and muddled Liberals so obviously out of their depth. Even so, the Tories were careful to remind their audiences that a Liberal majority would lead once again to "a scheme of disintegration which must pop up again like some evil jack-in-the-box."<sup>29</sup> The Liberals would always be ready "to sell themselves to the Hibernian Mephistopheles."<sup>30</sup> Nor was the lingering Liberal threat to the Church forgotten, either. However, by 1895, these matters required only mention to be effective. The Unionists could afford to be contemptuous of foes who were tied to "Home Rule, pinchbeck revolution and sham local option."<sup>31</sup>

1895 did see, however, the first widespread glimmerings of a new basis for Liberal politics. The eclipse of the Home Rule issue naturally allowed other interests to force their way forward. Disestablishment was still raised by the die-hards but to little notice. Also lingering without enthusiasm were temperance and land reform. What was really emerging for the first time was what might be called

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29. Ibid. July 9, 1895

30. Ibid. July 9, 1895

31. Ibid. July 9, 1895

'social politics'. 1895 can be pinned down as the first time a significant number of Scottish Liberal candidates gave substantial emphasis to the interests of the urban working classes. It is also clear, however, that it would be at least another decade before social questions achieved the status of voting determinants in the mind of the electorate.

There was no particular increase in Scotland of specifically 'Labour' candidates. Like the five Glasgow entrants, of whom, Smillie in Camlachie, with 11% of the vote, was, by far, the most successful, Scottish Labourites remained a weak fringe, curiosities, rather than contenders.

The only unmistakable working-class Liberal candidate was Ferguson's protégé, John Holburn; although Green in Tradeston identified himself vaguely as a working man.<sup>32</sup>

Holburn appealed:

"Three quarters of the House of Commons is out of sympathy with the claims of Labour .... (I) am one of your own class .... (and) was on the bench a fortnight ago .... (pledged) to stand by the classes to which I belong."<sup>33</sup>

He was returned but was the only working-man in the Scottish Liberal caucus. This was in contrast to the English caucus where the Lib-Lab tradition was becoming well established.

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32. Ibid. July 2, 1895

33. *ibid.* July 2, 1895



However, the Liberals did have a few candidates who stood for the 'new' left. The most interesting was A. E. Fletcher in Greenock. It was not without significance that he was English. The Herald ridiculed him as 'a dreamer of socialistic dreams' but this was not an inaccurate assessment.<sup>34</sup> He certainly referred to himself as a 'socialist' and in 1900 ran under both Liberal and ILP banners. His programme in 1895 included the limitation of hours, factory reform, manhood suffrage and an attack on unemployment. To establish his Liberal credentials he also threw in the old standards of temperance, disestablishment, Home Rule and the recent Armenian controversy. He described his general stance as advancing "legislation generally based on ethical and democratic principles and aimed at the breakdown of the power of monopolists, rent-rackers, sweaters and land grabbers."<sup>35</sup> Donald Pirie in West Renfrewshire demanded "payment of M.P.'s with a view to securing working men's representatives .... employee's compensation .... an end to sweating (and) eight hours for miners."<sup>36</sup>

The old radical John Wilson in Govan now made prominent cause of "an improvement in the condition of the working class" through factory reform, and employer's liability,

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34. Ibid. July 2, 1895

35. Ibid. July 2, 1895

36. Ibid. July 2, 1895

aid to the unemployed and old age pensions."<sup>37</sup> Even the virulent anti-socialist Provand advocated 8 hour limits and employer's liability.<sup>38</sup> Adam in Glasgow Central and Trevelyan both spoke of the need for graduated income tax.<sup>39</sup> Colville in Lanark N.W. and Lambie in Lanark South backed Provand's measures.<sup>40</sup> Colville, a large industrialist, also supported a minimum wage and fixity of tenure during strikes. At the least, some like C.B. made a point of identifying Liberalism with the cause and interest of the working class.<sup>41</sup>

These innovations were, however, by no means universally accepted. Some Liberals totally ignored social questions; while others went further and publicly denounced the infiltration of "socialistic" ideas into the Liberal Party. William McEwan, in Edinburgh, the great brewer, attacked the radicalism of the Newcastle programme.<sup>42</sup> Alexander Ure of Linlithgow and the old Glasgow radical, Cameron, denounced any measures of state pensions and welfare payment.<sup>43</sup> Gibson-Carmichael, Gladstone's successor

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37. Ibid. July 4, 1895; July 8, 1895

38. Ibid. July 8, 1895

39. Ibid. July 8, 1895; July 12, 1895

40. Ibid. July 8, 1895; July 9, 1895

41. Ibid. July 16, 1895

42. Ibid. July 9, 1895

43. Ibid. July 8, 1895

in Midlothian attacked both ploughmen's holidays and the limitation of hours for any workers.<sup>44</sup> It was an omen of the future when he conspicuously withdrew the latter objection under the pressure of the Midlothian miners.<sup>45</sup>

It is significant, though not surprising, that most of those Liberals who made mention of social interests were from the industrial West while hostility was centered in the East. Thus, in 1895, a subtle, but profound change was entering Liberal politics. The old cry of 'the classes versus the masses' was taking a new meaning. As the middle ranks of society confirmed their social conservatism through Unionism and with the emergence of a politically conscious working class, Liberals were beginning to take up the cause of the lower members of society, instead of, as in the past, that of the middle against the top. These noises were being made but, as Provand's memo suggests, the genuine adaptability of Scottish Liberalism was still highly questionable.

e) The Election Results

The results of the 1895 poll were catastrophic for the Liberal Party in Britain. The Unionists, seemingly, had been confirmed as the new historic party of government with the Liberals reduced to the position of the 'pre-Disraeli' Tories: "The stupid party." The gains of 1892

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44. Ibid. July 9, 1895

45. Ibid. July 16, 1895

were more than reversed, the Liberals losing 97 seats in the United Kingdom and falling to a total of 177, 13 less than in 1886. At first glance, the defeat was less severe in Scotland. In England the Liberals lost 42% of the seats they held in 1892 but in Scotland only 22% went over to the Unionists. In addition, it has been calculated that the swing in popular vote to the Unionists in England was much greater than that in Scotland<sup>46</sup>. However it is to be remembered<sup>ed</sup> that in 1892, the Liberals' recovery from the losses of 1886 was much more restricted in Scotland than in England. In short, in 1895 the English Liberals fell farther than the Scots mostly because they had climbed back up further. Nonetheless, given the fact that the Liberals were led by Rosebery, the Scottish losses, resulting in a new low of 39 seats (4 less than 1886), could really be regarded as a disaster.

The Unionists gained 14 seats in Scotland (Glasgow College, Glasgow St. Rollox, Dumbartonshire, Ayr. Burghs, Ayrshire South, Kilmarnock Burghs, Falkirk Burghs, Stirlingshire, Roxburghshire, Edinburgh South, Elgin and Nairn, Argyll, Inverness Burghs and Invernessshire). On the other hand, the Liberals won back, against the tide, three (Perth, Lanark N.W., Dumfriesshire). Nine of the 14 Unionist gains were in those seats won by Liberals from Unionists in 1892. With the exception of Edinburgh South (a swing of 3%), the other five gains came via swings well above the national

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46. Kinnear op. cit. p. 24

average, e.g. Kilmarnock 6%; Glasgow College 11%.

Likewise, two of the three Liberal wins reversed losses of 1892: Perth and Lanark N.W. Perth was won despite a Unionist swing of 7.5% because of the healing of the Liberal split of 1892. Lanark N.W., won by Ferguson's protégé, John Holburn, tipped once again marginally against the general trend as it was to in every election through 1910.

About one quarter of the Scottish constituencies (17) went against the national trend, swinging towards the Liberals. Twelve of these, however, were those constituencies which had swung towards the Unionists in the Liberal year of 1892: the result being, to some degree, a late compensation.

There was no particular regional pattern of voting shift within Scotland. The West was only slightly more anti-Liberal in movement than the East. Some patterns do emerge along the Lower Clyde where the Unionists improved their position in every single constituency. In Edinburgh, the Lothians, Stirling, Fife, and the East Coast only a few Liberals could fight the tide. The Liberals did best in the Highlands, Lanarkshire, the Borders and the South West.

In many respects these patterns are a remarkable reverse of those of 1892. Despite the varying shifts of support, the enduring basis of Scottish politics remained a Unionist West and a Liberal East. Viewing these results, Ferguson, the new Scottish Whip, wrote his leader and patron, Rosebery:

"I am vexed for your sake at the result of the polls, especially in Scotland, otherwise I don't care much .... There is nothing I can look forward to more than to pulling the party together in Scotland for you."<sup>47</sup>

Ferguson's attention was fixed on the trail of defeats in the West:

"I will get Captain John Sinclair to take care of the Western Section where we have come to grief. The Edinburgh 36 seats did very well .... we are almost as we were .... Russell of the Scotsman used to say that the East was reliable while the West never was."<sup>48</sup>

It might have been more profitable for Ferguson to reflect that the supposed heartland of Rosebery's influence, the regions about the Forth, had, in terms of popular voting shifts, behaved almost as badly as the West. Liberal victories in the East, founded on a fund of loyalty built up by Mr. Gladstone, could be taken for granted, as was the weakness of the Tory-Radical West. If Rosebery could not rouse loyalty above that tradition then his worth as a basis for a new movement in Liberalism was considerably devalued. The behavior of the Liberal Imperialists in the future showed that they never grasped this reality.

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47. Ferguson to Rosebery July 27, 1895 Rosebery MSS 10019

48. Ferguson to Rosebery Aug. 9, 1895 Rosebery MSS 10019

### Summary

From the point of view of Scotland and Scottish interests, the most striking feature of this period was the virtually complete failure of Rosebery to have any significant impact on the fortunes or politics of his native land. Having succeeded Gladstone after the latter's final defeat in the Home Rule struggle, Rosebery led a government marked chiefly by its lack of morale, aimlessness and ineptitude. While some of the old 'fads' of Scottish Liberalism were put down as bills, very little effort or interest came from the top to promote their passage. Rosebery, who began his career as the popular champion of Scotland, seemed, once at the top, to be oblivious of its existence.

The state of apathy that emanated from the leadership pervaded the Scottish party. It seemed frozen in a state of lack of animation, its members unable even to develop speeches let alone new ideas. The dangerous gap that was opening on the left between the new labour interest and the party continued to grow. While not yet ready to challenge effectively at the ballot box, the new movement was steadily building up its forces outside of the Liberal party. With the traditional Eastern establishment holding unchallenged control of the party and its 'left' dominated by the old anti-labour radicals, and much of the party still committed to a non-interventionist ethic, the vulnerability

of the party was growing rapidly.

As the Rosebery government stumbled towards collapse, despair and apathy gripped the party's supporters in Scotland. Such was the collapse of morale that when defeat in the House led to the general election of 1895, Scottish Liberals seemed to campaign under an acceptance of their forthcoming defeat, an assumption eagerly accepted by the Unionists as well. Individual candidates were challenged to take sides in the rancour between Rosebery and Harcourt, a choice made especially difficult in Scotland where ideology might conflict with personal and national loyalties to Rosebery. With the retreat of "Ireland" as an issue, 1895 marked the emergence for the first time of social reform as a major element in the Liberal platform and the widespread identification by Liberal candidates with the desires and interests of the lower classes. In the election results, the Liberals lost less ground in Scotland than in England but perhaps only because they had gained less in 1892. The result was the reaffirmation of a Unionist West and Liberal East in Scotland. Rosebery's personal failure to exert influence in his own country boded ill for the future schemes of his supporters.



**CHAPTER 7**

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL: 1895-1899

The Downward Spiral: 1895-99a) The Composition of the Late Victorian Party

The party shambles of 1895 encouraged the growth of competing and increasingly incompatible factions within the party. Founded as a coalition of varying 'progressive' forces, since the early 1880's the party had been held together chiefly by the personal authority of Gladstone and the habits of tradition. The removal of Gladstone from active politics and the weakening of the unifying philosophy of 'Liberalism' allowed fuller play to the natural centrifugal forces within. Scottish Liberalism did not escape these developments.

In Scotland, by one analysis, the party was divided, as it always had been, between an inner circle defined more by personal factors than ideology and an outer ring of functional groupings as well as the nondescript party rank and file. The 'inner club' included the Roseberians: Ferguson, Gibson-Carmichael, Haldane, Crawford and the Tennants; Campbell-Bannerman and his friends: T. R. Buchanan, James Bryce and Captain Sinclair; and the independent figures of influence like Elgin, Tweedmouth, Marjoribanks and Aberdeen. It would be incorrect to suggest that this constituted some form of intimate cabal; distinct 'houses' existed within it and members were often fiercely at odds with each other. However, the unifying characteristic was mutual acknowledgement of influence and position.

The elite was more than a political gathering. The image of a Scottish 'family' was sometimes less metaphorical in the case of these leaders. The case of Donald Crawford, M.P. for Lanark North East is a good example. An Edinburgh Scot of great legal abilities, educated at Balliol and Heidelberg, he was a member of Rosebery's set. He gained unwelcome publicity as the plaintiff in the Dilke divorce case, an affair which involved Rosebery in the settlement and spiritually reduced Crawford. However, even before the scandal, Crawford had been attempting to terminate his marriage in order to marry Miss Valentine Munro-Ferguson, who was later to jilt Haldane.<sup>1</sup> Asquith's marriage to Margot Tennant was another example of the closed world of the 'Forth' society. Ironically, it was this liaison to a woman Haldane considered frivolous that made him begin to drift apart from Asquith. Ferguson and Rosebery's close friendship resulted not only from personality and politics but went back to strong family ties between the Primroses and Fergusons. While the Roseberyites were the most obvious example of 'family', these patterns criss-crossed through the Scottish Liberal leadership. Captain John Sinclair, who served C.B. as close friend and political manager, in the fashion of Ferguson to Rosebery, married the daughter of the Earl of Aberdeen. Aberdeen's wife, in turn was the sister of Edward Marjoribanks.

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1. James op. cit. p. 183

These close personal relations naturally led to a considerable amount of mutual promotion. Ferguson was particularly notable for this in his role as Rosebery's political operator in Scotland. In the period before the formation of the Liberal government of 1892, Ferguson's correspondence to Rosebery was filled with suggested promotions for various Scottish figures. Most conspicuously he pushed hard to have Crawford take over the Scottish Whip from Marjoribanks (who would go to the Scottish office). This suggestion is curious in the light of Ferguson's own description of the 'post-Dilke Crawford' as "will not live .... more like a dormouse than ever."<sup>2</sup> These could hardly be the qualities required of a Whip and one can only conclude that Ferguson saw the promotion as psychological therapy for a needy member of the 'family'.

Outside of this circle and undoubtedly on the periphery were: the old traditional radicals: A. L. Brown, and his followers, Donald Pirie, A. D. Provand and Edward Robertson; the remaining crofter M.P.s and the newer labour-oriented radicals of the industrial areas. The rest of those consigned to the outer regions can best be described as 'the plain', those Liberals whose political talents or social influence were insufficient to qualify for the 'magic circle'.

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2. Ferguson to Rosebery Nov. 9, 1891 Rosebery MSS  
10018

After 1895, however, and especially after Rosebery's resignation a year later, this pattern of the 'ins' and 'outs' became less important even at the centre as each faction sought to gain on ascendancy in a fluid, almost chaotic, situation. Seemingly, the most potent were the Roseberyites, wealthy, well-connected and socially integrated members of the East of Scotland social and intellectual élite who found political unity in the figure of Rosebery: "our salvation - the Wallace who will ultimately lead the party to victory."<sup>3</sup> A quite distinctive group of influential Scottish Liberals began to form loosely about the less charismatic but more dependable figure of C.B. Prominent in this group were Captain John Sinclair, Sir John Kinloch, T. R. Buchanan, James Bryce, Leonard Lyell and possibly, R. T. Reid. These Liberals, though usually men of inherited wealth and position, tended to be socially distinct from the Rosebery group. Unlike the latter they had few ties with England or London society and tended to be more exclusively tied to Scotland. Outside of these inner groupings lay a number of 'interest' groups of varying composition and importance. These included the remains of the crofter movement in the highlands, and old temperance and disestablishment radicals in the lowland burghs and the beginnings of a new radical block concerned with the social conditions of the larger urban areas.

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3. A. C. Wood to Ferguson Sept. 27, 1897 Rosebery MSS  
10019

Nevertheless, the division between 'ins' and 'outs' remained important. Tories might see A. L. Brown, R. T. Reid and James Dalziel as equally dangerous radicals. In fact, each held a significantly different position in the political struggles within the Liberal party. Reid's academic background and social 'respectability' led him to be personally close to the Roseberyites despite his fierce anti-Imperialism. He was an unhesitating supporter of Rosebery instead of the more ideologically compatible Harcourt. Brown, the bete noire of the Liberal establishment, was undoubtedly an 'out'. The fact that his influence within the old radical ranks was considerable cut no ice. He was regarded as a rather tiresome and somewhat scruffy boisterous terrier on the fringe of the pack. Dalziel, who had moved considerably into social politics was an 'out', as well, though perhaps by a more passive judgement. Though he had leaned towards Harcourt over Rosebery his real loyalty always remained with the disgraced Dilke.

It would be a vast over-simplification to suggest that any of these groups were mutually exclusive of each other or that frontiers were at all distinct. Many individuals defy any precise classification: Haldane, socially and politically belonged with the Roseberyites yet his cosmopolitan proclivities always took him beyond the small world of Scottish politics which he seemed to regard with considerable contempt. Also to be considered were the odd ideological alliances developed such as the links between

the Fabian influence within the Rosebery group and the industrial socialists.

b) Radicals, Newspapers and English Carpetbaggers

It might have been expected that the anti-Rosebery activities of Harcourt after 1895 would have boosted the radical cause within the Scottish party. In fact, the English leader's radicalism counted far less for many Scottish radicals when set against Rosebery's Scottish nationality and social influence. Moreover, it was not of small note that the Scottish Whip, Ferguson was a thick and thin Rosebery man. Ferguson's confidence that he would be able to weld Scottish Liberalism together as a base of support for the leader of the party shines through the following letter to C.B.:

"I asked Captain Sinclair to take your pleasure as to your being Chairman of the Liberal Scotties in this parliament. Daziel has already expressed a warm approval but I have mentioned the matter to no one else but Rosebery who said "of course". It would add enormously to the weight of any decisions at which the body arrives and in the times ahead it is sound policy for selves and country to make Scots Liberal opinion as reliable as possible".<sup>4</sup>

Certainly Ferguson was fully prepared to use strong measures to coerce the radicals if they caused trouble:

"A member showing himself to be of more harm than good to his party (will be penalized); for example, I refused money to Weir and informed his association that I had done so giving them my reasons."<sup>5</sup>

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4. Ferguson to C.B. Dec. 14, 1895 C.B. MSS 41222

5. Ferguson to Rosebery Sept. 1, 1895 Rosebery MSS 10019

It is clear that the condition of the radicals left them in little position to resist the dominance of their opponents. On October 20, 1895, in Glasgow, the S.L.A. executive decided to restrict policy considerations to the caucus thus removing the influence of the radical-dominated S.L.A. The consequences would be to sever the radicals from an 'official' voice and, thus, greatly lessen their impact and reduce the authority of the radical wing. Gibson-Carmichael reported in contemptuous terms of the radical faddists and their feeble performance in Glasgow:

"I was relieved to find that A. L. Brown was not there and was bored to find that Pirie was .... Brown was suffering from a bad sore throat which I regretted the less because it made long speeches impossible .... the disestablishers, all their valour seems to have departed this earth...."<sup>6</sup>

C.B., too, perceived the rapid decline of the old church radicals in 1897:

"As to dissent, I think Tommy Shaw is right - a frank and firm reference to it is advisable but saving his presence there are few of our public men who care much about it; and fewer still in private."<sup>7</sup>

If this particular problem of radicalism was contained, there were others to vex Scottish Liberalism; for example, the continuing lack of a respected newspaper voice in Scotland. Proposals to remedy this deficiency were an almost annual occurrence after 1886, but all ideas to establish

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6. Gibson-Carmichael to Rosebery Oct. 20, 1895 Rosebery MSS Box 72

7. C.-B. to Bryce 1897 Quoted in Spender, op. cit, p. 187



a rival to the bitterly anti-Liberal Scotsman and Glasgow Herald came to no fruition. Liberals did receive the support of local papers such as Leng's Dundee Advertiser but as Ferguson complained: "we shall never be right in Scotland until we have a good paper."<sup>8</sup> The disaster of 1895, and the position of Rosebery and his friends in Eastern Scotland gave new impetus to the search for the means for a new paper in late 1895. The proposed publication was to be Edinburgh-based with an overlap into Northern England but remaining in essence "thoroughly Scottish".<sup>9</sup> However, enthusiasm was not enough and like so much about Rosebery, the idea remained only an ephemeral promise.

This desire to insist on a "thoroughly" Scottish party reflected the enduring nationalist feeling within Scottish Liberalism with regard to their own party affairs. A lingering sore was created by English carpet-baggers. Scotland had always provided a refuge for English Liberals who could not secure a seat in their own country and in the circumstances after 1886, the strength of the East of Scotland increased the degree of attraction. However, it was repeatedly evident that the arrival of such refugees was resented by Scottish M.P.s who did not wish to see Scotland reduced to a dumping ground for unsuccessful Englishmen or to see the national integrity of the Scottish caucus called into question. In the later years of the century, it was

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8. Ferguson to Rosebery Sept. 9, 1895 Rosebery MSS 10019

9. Ferguson to Rosebery Sept. 6, 1895 Rosebery MSS 10019; Sinclair to Rosebery Jan. 2, 1896 Rosebery MSS Box 73

increasingly felt that Scotland's hospitality was being abused.

In 1880 only 3 of 50 M.P.s were English and of these, Gladstone was accepted as a Scot. The other two, G. O. Trevelyan and C. S. Parker worked hard to identify with the Scottish issues of their constituents. However, after 1886, the English in Scotland had grown to 6 and in a considerably reduced caucus, at that. Asquith, Lacaite and Birrell were true carpet-baggers in that their interest in Scotland was never profound. After 1895, and another shrinking of the caucus size, there still remained 6 English imports: Asquith, Birrell, Trevelyan, John Holburn, Leng and Robert Wallace. Therefore, when John Morley, who had been defeated in Newcastle in the general election proposed to return to parliament via Montrose Burghs, replacing a Scot, J. S. Will, some bad feeling was inevitable.

Morley had never shown any particular affinity for Scotland or her affairs; indeed, quite the reverse. In 1891, he had felt uneasy about a request from Ferguson to come as a speaker:

"Morley does not want to be brought up just now. He says, except once in Glasgow, he has never succeeded here and that he will only listen to our own men .... The religious feeling that does exist against him."<sup>10</sup>

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10. Ferguson to Rosebery Dec. 19, 1891 Rosebery MSS 10018

In 1895, Ferguson, like many other Scots, took exception to Morley's devotion to Gladstone's Irish plan which barred Home Rule all round. This nationalist feeling which had proved a handicap even for a native Scot, James Bryce, when he had opposed SHR, was the basis of a warning sent by Ferguson to Morley:

"I do not believe that my countrymen ever adopted or ever will adopt in its full and unrestrained scope Mr. Gladstone's view of Home Rule for Ireland .... The necessity for more measures of Home Rule All Round .... I am not the only one who holds this view strongly. Haldane and Robert Wallace may be exceptions to what I regard as the rule but they are the only ones I know of."<sup>11</sup>

Ferguson wrote to Rosebery of Morley:

"If he preaches his word in Scotland at this time of day he will be repudiated."<sup>12</sup>

Morley's views were undoubtedly a handicap in Scotland though Ferguson who had a special interest in S.H.R. doubtless exaggerated the effect. More important was the general grumbling over the introduction of another Englishman to Scottish representation. Ferguson also stated these objections clearly:

"I should have thought the East of Scotland was overstocked with celebrities already."<sup>13</sup>

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- 11. Ferguson to Morley Nov. 24, 1895 Rosebery MSS 10019
  - 12. Ferguson to Rosebery Nov. 24, 1895 Rosebery MSS 10019
  - 13. Ferguson to Rosebery Nov. 19, 1895 Rosebery MSS 10019

"Morley's selection will weaken the Scottish representation as a Scots body."<sup>14</sup>

C.-B. swung his significant weight behind these feelings:

"I think it regrettable that he should take refuge in a Scotch seat and doubt his being here will help us in our little Scotch politics."<sup>15</sup>

He took the same stance six years later when Cecil Harmsworth, a Liberal from the opposite pole of the party from Morley received a by-election nomination for North-East Lanark in 1901:

"The Lanarkshire seat is a mess and must go its own way. I do not at all like the idea of a pure English coming down and capturing a seat or even a hold upon a constituency - but if my countrymen like it, what can be done."<sup>16</sup>

c) The Resignation of Rosebery and CB's succession

Far more damaging to the fragile order of the Scottish Party than any of this was Rosebery's precipitous resignation on October 3, 1896. His national position in Scotland gave the resulting turmoil a particular impact there with his political friends naturally rallying to his support, deluging him with telegrams of protest. However, it was an unexpected disappointment that the S.L.A. could offer no more than a feeble regret: "thanks to you for your services in the past, a hope that you might at a future time lead the party."<sup>17</sup>

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14. Ferguson to Rosebery Nov. 24, 1895 Rosebery MSS 10019

15. C.-B. to Rosebery Dec. 13, 1895 Rosebery MSS 10019

16. Quoted in Spender op. cit. Vol. 2, pp. 4-5

17. Gibson-Carmichael to Rosebery Oct. 22, 1896 Rosebery MSS Box 74

Ferguson had no hesitation in giving the strongest encouragement to his friend:

"Public opinion is running more for you here than it was in the past. The working men are with you .... those who don't want you are the middle class faddists or Enthusiasts like John Wilson - temperance M.P. Govan; Knox of Kilbirnen, another leading Western Free Kirkman; Sir John Kinloch who is never happy ....<sup>18</sup>

Gibson-Carmichael attempted to convince Rosebery that whatever the S.L.A. said, Scottish opinion was still behind him:

"in Dundee, there are many who are angry with you about Armenia, in Dunfries a few, in Glasgow a fair number .... every other part of Scotland I hear of approves of (you) ... the keen disestablishers are divided, the single tax men are against you, also the teetotalers in the West but not in the East .... (no) part of Scotland where there is not a large majority in the Liberal Party who are anxious to be led by you."<sup>19</sup>

The resignation of Rosebery meant a victory of sorts for the radical wing of the Liberal Party through the advance gained by Harcourt but in Scotland the Roseberyites were confident of the ineffectualness of the radicals fringe:

"(A. L. Brown) has practically no following outside the office bearers of the Free Church .... even in Galashiels (Brown's home)."<sup>20</sup>

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18. Ferguson to Rosebery Oct. 14, 1896 Rosebery MSS 10019
19. Gibson-Carmichael to Rosebery Oct. 22, 1896 Rosebery MSS Box 74
20. Gibson-Carmichael to Rosebery Oct. 22, 1896 Rosebery MSS Box 74

"amongst the strong Free Kirkers and tee-totalers there is not the same feeling as with the leading politicians and with the masses .... except with A. L. Brown and maybe with a few others .... There is an entire absence of (radical) feeling in Scotland."<sup>21</sup>

Ferguson consoled Rosebery with the judgement: "we are not a party fit to lead."<sup>22</sup> But he was still certain of an eventual return:

"There is no doubt in my mind that he must ultimately return .... under the pressure of necessity."<sup>23</sup>

However, even Ferguson could see that, for the moment, at least, another Scot was to take the lead for Scottish Liberalism:

"with no party leader .... I imagine we shall go on much as before. The Scotties at any rate coming closer around you (C.B.)"<sup>24</sup>

"Our men in Scotland will group themselves rather closer round Campbell-Bannerman, for a bit."<sup>25</sup>

The period between the resignation of Rosebery and the selection of C.-B. as leader in 1899 was probably the effective low point of the Liberal Party before 1914. Virtually rudderless, an object of general derision, the

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- 21. Ferguson to C.-B. Nov. 2, 1896 C.B. MSS 41222
  - 22. Ferguson to Rosebery Oct. 22, 1896 Rosebery MSS 10019
  - 23. Ferguson to C.B. Oct. 12, 1896 C.B. MSS 41222
  - 24. Ferguson to C.B. Oct. 12, 1896 C.B. MSS 41222
  - 25. Ferguson to Rosebery Oct. 17, 1896 R. MSS 10019

party faced catastrophe stripped of all purpose and morale. This chaos was equally true of the Scottish party. An incident in 1897 was symptomatic. The S.L.A. executive had issued an invitation to Harcourt, then leader, to come to Scotland to speak to the Association. However, Leng and Ferguson as active Roseberyites sought to diminish the impact of the speech by diverting the venue to the lesser city of Dundee. A. L. Brown and his friends, outraged, put pressure directly on Harcourt to come unsponsored to Edinburgh to speak from a radical platform on the question of Armenia. Ferguson made it known that he considered the idea inflammatory and Brown's actions "impossible".<sup>26</sup> As the situation built up to explode, Harcourt could do nothing but refrain from speaking altogether.<sup>27</sup>

It is important to note that Ferguson's real position and attitude underwent a crucial change with the self-removal of his patron, Rosebery, from the party leadership and the seeming ascendancy of the hated rival, Harcourt. So long as Rosebery led the party, whatever the conditions, Ferguson's commitment to Rosebery's personal course did not conflict with his party responsibilities as Scottish Whip. However, after October 1896, Ferguson was placed in obvious conflict with his new nominal leader. Ferguson's official Scottish Chief, C. B. as caucus chairman, was not

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26. Ferguson to Rosebery July 8, 1897 Rosebery MSS 10019

27. Ferguson to C.B. July 13, 1897 Rosebery MSS 10019

regarded as an enemy but rather as a benign neutral in the war between Harcourt and Rosebery. Thus Ferguson could maintain the facade of working for the benefit of the Scottish party, as a whole, while, in fact, concentrating his real dedication on the return of Rosebery in spite of the latter's obvious disinclination to do so. Ferguson's letters to Rosebery underwent a marked change from that of confident command and leadership to that of subterfuge and conspiracy.<sup>28</sup> He managed to maintain a much more straight-forward attitude to C.B., then quite unsuspected. To him he wrote of the state of Scotland. At the internal level:

"The Party in Scotland is behaving 'with great propriety' as our forebears said when there was a great row."<sup>29</sup>

but of the country at large:

"more dead than alive .... the wire pullers remain quiet .... the constituencies, like Frenchmen, are regarding the future with perfect calm."<sup>30</sup>

The supersession of Harcourt by C. B. in January, 1899 tore this fragile arrangement apart. Ferguson was caught in a classic conflict of interest, committed personally to the resumption of leadership by Rosebery and,

28. see especially: Ferguson to Rosebery Feb. 6, 1898  
Rosebery MSS 10019
29. Ferguson to C.B. Dec. 16, 1898 C.B. MSS 41222
30. Ferguson to Rosebery Dec. 16, 1898 Rosebery  
MSS 10019



officially, to the existing leader; worse, the new leader was no longer an English radical but a fellow Scot, friend and long time associate. Ferguson had predicted C.-B.'s coming for some time but had never really grasped its implications. At first he saw it as a means to lever Rosebery back by assigning C.B. to the Commons under the overall lead of Rosebery from the Lords:

"C.B. is the only possible nomination for House work .... it is the very general opinion in Scotland."<sup>31</sup>

C.B. was confirmed as Leader of the Opposition on Feb. 6, 1899. In no sense was he put forward as the choice of Scottish Liberalism. A strong section including Haldane and Tweedmouth wanted Asquith, but he was not interested, primarily for personal financial reasons.<sup>32</sup> Ferguson's frustration exploded in the wake of C.-B.'s first major address in Parliament as leader, an address which seemed to drift to a support of a "Little England" overseas policy:

"It is merely plain enough now that if we never fail to find in (C.B.) a pleasant and interesting conversationalist that we should not less fail to find as unlimited a capacity for wobbling as that which destroyed his predecessor .... I am most thoroughly disgusted .... C.B. is another dunce man .... he has flopped into Harcourt's net .... a deplorable exhibition."<sup>33</sup>

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31. Ferguson to Rosebery Dec. 16, 1898 Rosebery MSS 10019

32. James op. cit. p. 407

33. Ferguson to Rosebery Feb. 25, 1899 Rosebery MSS 10019

Rosebery's telling rebuke speaks volumes for the cross-currents of personal friendship and political objects which marked the Scottish Liberal elite:

"You show too much discontent with your new leader .... (C.B.'s speech) doesn't represent my views - but why should it? It probably represents the view of the Liberal Party in the main and that is what C.B. has to think of. Remember too, that he is thoroughly straight, a gentleman a Scot, a friend of yours and do not be too hasty to despair of him or even criticize him".<sup>34</sup>

Bryce was well aware of the source of Ferguson's unhappiness; the perception that C.B.'s gentle moderate character and inclination to the centre of Liberal opinion represented the greatest possible obstacle to the revival of Rosebery's leadership prospects and the hopes of the Roseberites to seize, control or alter the direction of the Liberal policy:

"You would best unite the party, would prove the most acceptable to the whole party and would make it less easy for the 'Dissident Liberals' to give trouble if they were so inclined .... you are the choice of the great majority."<sup>35</sup>

Three months earlier Bryce had reported "in the heart of Scotland they are eager to have Rosebery back again."<sup>36</sup> C.-B. himself took the leadership in a spirit of renewed hope, not foreseeing the events of 1899:

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34. Rosebery to Ferguson March 14, 1899 Rosebery MSS 10019

35. Bryce to C.-B. Jan. 13, 1899 Bryce MSS 21

36. Nov. 5, 1898 quoted in Wilson op. cit. p. 280

"I confess that I look forward to it without fear and with a confident expectation of some actual enjoyment .... what an incubus we have been living under, not only for recent years, but for a dozen years. That incubus has removed itself and those of us who remain can realize a friendship and hearty comradeship which we have never had."<sup>37</sup>

And in a more Scottish vein:

"I am enough son of my country and have enough of the 'shorter catechism' still sticking about inside me to do my best with a thing if it comes straight to me."<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the best description of the situation that C.B. inherited in 1899 was offered in an epitaph in The Nation in 1908:

"He came to the rescue of Liberalism when it was a mere hulk floating captainless and rudderless on the waste of waters."<sup>39</sup>

#### Summary

In the late 1890's, the Scottish Liberals continued to be dominated by an inner circle of power. This elite was not of an ideological character and was often fiercely divided against itself. However ties of respect, social position, education, blood and marriage kept the circle closed and lent substance to the image of a 'family'.

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37. C.-B. to Bryce Jan. 15, 1899 Bryce MSS 21

38. quoted in Wilson op. cit. p. 295

39. quoted in Wilson op. cit. p. 296

Distinctive groups often developed within the elite, grouped about a prominent leader or cause.

One group, the radicals, declined significantly in strength and influence during this period. Many found their loyalties divided between Harcourt, the English radical and Rosebery whose magnetism as a fellow Scot endured, the group seemed to lose cohesiveness.

One developing pattern in Scottish political life did unite all sections of the family. The rising numbers of English carpetbagging Liberals coming to Scotland in search of safe seats provoked a deep resentment throughout all levels of Scottish Liberalism.

It is significant that Rosebery's resignation in 1896 failed to provoke any serious reaction despite the best efforts of his friends. That such a drastic act should fall flat even in the country that only recently had so lionized him was a measure of the decline in his political stock. The interregnum between the resignation of Rosebery and the selection of Campbell-Bannerman as the new leader in 1899 undoubtedly marked the nadir of Liberal fortunes as bitter and petty factional squabbles over the succession consumed what energy remained in the party. Rosebery's interest, headed by Munro-Ferguson,

was concentrated in Scotland where an attempt was made to build up a power base. Ironically, it was Scotland under Munro-Ferguson's uncomprehending eyes, that was to produce the new leader, Campbell-Bannerman, and thus end hopes of a Rosebery Restoration.

CHAPTER 8

Scotland and the Empire

a) Patriotic Politics and Imperialism

Hindsight now suggests that the selection of Campbell-Bannerman as the new leader of the Liberal Party in 1899 was the first, and, perhaps, in the long run, the most essential step towards a recovery of Liberal fortunes. However, C.B. was deceived if he thought that the political 'incubus' represented by the Irish issue was about to be lifted from the shoulders of the Liberals. The Home Rule question, itself, was to fade but the forces which supported it were to re-emerge, reconstituted as the Imperialist movement and subsequently, more specifically, in the South African war.

The political effect of the Irish issue had been to deliver over to the Unionists virtually all the high ground of patriotism. Mid-century Liberalism under Palmerston had been able to base its appeal on both patriotism and morality. One of the distinct trends of the forty years following the 1884 Reform Bill was the increasingly demagogic, self-interested and irrational character of British political debate. The imperial issue of 1899-1900 was merely the growth of the original appeal of Unionism into an even greater patriotic vision.

Until the 1880's, the Empire had always been a peripheral consideration of the British national interest. The

Mid-Victorians had rightly perceived that Britain's wealth depended most on her industrial strength and her commercial supremacy in the non-British world. But the intervention of new factors in the 1870's: the rise of commercial and industrial rivals, the erection of tariff walls and the entry of European claims into the rest of the world, closing territory to British traders, all served to undermine the old faiths. Trade did not necessarily follow the flag but protected opportunity did and in the minds of the late Victorian public grew up what A. P. Thornton has called "the Imperial illusion":

"That power increases and status is enhanced in proportion to the extent of territory that a nation exclusively commands."<sup>1</sup>

However, these practical considerations seemed at times to exist only as rationales for more influential abstractions. Rosebery dismissed "Empires founded on trade alone .... (they) irrevocably crumble" and suggested instead a vision of "a larger patriotism."<sup>2</sup> In this new guise, patriotism was to embody new ethics and new duties. The New Imperialism, as it was then styled, took a dual view of the Empire, dividing it between the "white" dominions which, it was hoped, would unite with Britain in a great

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1. A. P. Thornton The Imperial Idea and its Enemies  
Macmillan, London 1959 p. 19

2. Ibid. p. x



Anglo-Saxon Imperial Federation and the tropical territories which were to become the 'burden' of the white man's Federation. The duty of the Empire was:

"To lead the world in the arts of civilization, to bring light to dark places, to reach the true political method, to nourish and protect the liberal tradition .... to be the trustee for the weak and to bring arrogance low."<sup>3</sup>

John Buchan wrote of a man who dreamed such Imperial dreams:

"In those days, the afterglow of Cecil Rhodes' spell still lay on Africa and men could dream dreams .... it was a very young man's talk .... He had had his 'call' and was hastening to answer it. Henceforth, his life was to be dedicated to one end, the building up of a British Equatoria, with the highlands of the East and South as the white man's base. It was to be both the white man's and the black man's country .... It was to be a magnet to attract our youth and a settlement ground for our surplus population. It was to carry with it a spiritual renaissance for England .... Here was a man dedicated to a crusade ready to bend every power of mind and body to a high ambition .... a young knight errant gravely entering upon his vows of service."<sup>4</sup>

Imperialists of the best kind did not talk of superiority to others but rather of responsibilities to others. Fatally, Imperialism failed to appreciate that such noble ideals could just as easily be construed as paternalism on the grandest scale, what Santayana described as "the school-boy master of the world."<sup>5</sup> Worse, a 'higher

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3. *ibid.* ix - x

4. John Buchan Island of Sheep Penguin, London pp. 15-17

5. Thornton *op. cit.* p. 94

patriotism' could and did easily descend into simply a more vicious form of chauvinism.

Imperialism never fitted easily into existing British political divisions. To suggest that the Liberals were anti-Empire is to swallow Tory propaganda slogans. In fact, much of the Imperialist elite were self-declared Liberals. Perhaps most prominent were Rosebery and Chamberlain but with them were Dilke, Forster, Cromer, Seely, Milner and Rhodes. The paradox of the Imperialists was that while they appealed to the Tory instincts of patriotism and property, what they were in fact proposing amounted to a vast innovation, even a revolution. Imperialists of the expansive visions could never be conservatives. Milner was a social reformer who helped establish Toynbee Hall<sup>6</sup> and Rhodes contributed £ 10,000 to the Liberals in 1891 because he hoped that Irish Home Rule would be the first step on the road to the great Federation.<sup>7</sup> However, the Imperialists had to face the sober truth as Salisbury outlined it to Milner:

"the Conservative Party is a party shackled by tradition, all the cautious people, all the timid, all the unimaginative, belong to it .... Yet, the Conservative Party is the Imperial Party. I must work with it who indeed am just such a one myself - but you must work with it if you are to achieve even a part of your object."<sup>8</sup>

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6. Smith op. cit. p. 106

7. Shannon op. cit. p. 326

8. Ibid. p. 229

Yet the language of 'Imperialism' remained essentially  
 Liberal:

"Imperialism is to fight not for selfish  
 British interests but for great causes  
 which are in danger or great principles  
 which are imperilled in order to succour  
 the oppressed and do justice to the  
 weak." (Joseph Chamberlain)<sup>9</sup>

These were sentiments which would have gained the sympathy  
 of the Gladstone of Italy and Bulgaria .... and, most  
 ironically, of Ireland. And herein lies the crux of the  
 matter. Gladstone and the Gladstonian tradition never  
 stood in opposition to the Empire, but rather to the cor-  
 ruption of its use. They would have regarded Chamberlain's  
 words above as cant and hypocrisy. To Gladstone, the Empire  
 was a force for great potential good and in that light he  
 was determined to preserve it. The anti-Imperialism of the  
 Liberal Party rested on an objection to the practices not  
 the sentiments of the Empire-Builders; most notoriously,  
 the Jameson Raid which seemed to reveal all the motives of  
 gross greed, the worship of power and the institution of  
 amorality which they loathed.

b) Scottish Attitudes to Empire

The Empire had always had a particular importance to  
 Scotland. Lacking any overseas possessions and bankrupted

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9. quoted in R. Faber The Vision and the Need Faber and  
 Faber, London, 1966 p. 74

by the Darien catastrophe, she had turned in 1707 to a union with England and her Empire as a last chance to gain access to the new worlds opened to European trade. Rosebery supplied a characteristically Scottish interpretation of the Union, likening it to "a poor man marrying an heiress, .... mortifying to pride at first, irksome occasionally, in the long run harmonious because founded on interest."<sup>10</sup> With a poor land of their own, the result of the Union was to make the Scots into a nation of emigrants and travellers. Some went only as far as the industrial cities of England, others went on to London; but the greatest wave crossed the oceans to settle in the newly-acquired lands.

In one sense, thus, the Scots became natural Imperialists. The Empire was now theirs to use and it was an opportunity seized with enthusiasm. Sea captains, traders, administrators, explorers, missionaries, soldiers, settlers, and pure adventurers poured out of Scotland. The British armies that fought the American colonists were notable not only for Hessian mercenary troops but also for the extraordinary number of Scottish officers that led them. Scottish enterprise made full use of Imperial opportunities from the Canadian fur trade to the development of Uganda.<sup>11</sup> It has been estimated that up to 75% of all British foreign

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10. James op. cit. p. 113

11. Gibb op. cit. p. 145

and colonial investment companies were of Scottish origin or based on Scottish models.<sup>12</sup> In the age of the steamship, it came to seem as if most of the globe-spanning British merchant marine had been built on the banks of the Clyde and that each ship had, by regulation, a Scottish marine engineer.

However, no matter how prominent the place of Scots in Imperial history, the Empire remained essentially English in character. Overseas possessions took on Scottish characteristics only as the result of direct Scottish settlement. Nowhere was the Scottish legal system adopted. Nowhere was the Church of Scotland established; though the Church of England often was, leaving overseas branches of the Kirk in the embarrassing position of being placed in opposition to an establishment. Scots could regard the exploits of their countrymen with pride but they could have sensed little in the way of a "greater Scotland".

The Englishness of the Empire was matched by the Englishness of the Imperialist movement. At the most obvious level was the exalting of English institutions and the adoption of an English ideal even by Scottish Imperialists like Livingstone and Buchan:

"(Buchan was) the Scottish 'outsider' with his idealized admiration for the closed circle of English power where everyone knew

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12. McCaffrey, *op. cit.* p. 244

everyone else, where everyone knew where everything was - "The pass on the right as you cross over into Ladakh" - and where everything and everyone not so known was not worth knowing."<sup>13</sup>

There was also the unconscious adoption of English opinions and attitudes as the root faith of the movement. The spirit of nationalism was antipathetic to the cause of the Empire. Never having suffered conquest and never having needed a national Liberator: a Joan of Arc, a Bruce or an O'Neill, the English have never had a true appreciation of the power or nature of nationalism, hence, the seemingly endless English agony in Ireland. To the Imperialist, a nation was not a matter of sentiment or history but a capacity to conduct an orderly government under the rule of law and the protection of liberty - the hallmarks of Anglo-Saxon civilization. The Empire would win, the Imperialists argued, the loyalty of less fortunate peoples by providing them with Right and Good Rule. It was a fundamental article of faith that by keeping a sense of responsibility to others, by doing the Right Thing, good administrators could win over the loyalty of colonial populations from retrogressive and anarchical nationalists.

However, the Scottish experience was very different from that which gave rise to these misconceptions. Scottish history and culture is permeated with a sense of national struggle and identity. Of course, simply to be a

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13. Thornton op. cit. p. 92

nationalist is no guarantee that one will sympathize with others of a different culture. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to ask whether the Scottish approach to Imperialism was different and, if so, was it because of this national factor.

It is very difficult even to establish what the reaction to the Imperialist movement in Scotland was. Scottish historians, themselves, disagree considerably. Pryde's interpretation was put by Henry Pelling:

"as the century drew to a close, local issues were dwarfed by an all-pervading Imperialism .... Scotland (was) swept along with the main current ...."<sup>14</sup>

However, more recently, the opposite view has been strongly argued by William Ferguson:

"Scotland (the Imperialists) found a difficult field for their labours. There, in spite of the hysterical trumpeting of the press, existed a powerful core of radical "little Englandism" and a cynical refusal to plaster material needs with moral whitewash. For many of the Scots, the Empire denoted objects rather than ideas - places to go, to explore, to exploit, proselytize or settle. Except among the Anglicized upper class, the Empire had little of the quasi-religious significance which seemed to appeal to all classes in England."<sup>15</sup>

This dispute reflects the conflicting nature of the evidence available. On one side is the record of individual Scotsmen in Imperial affairs. It may be, for instance, no

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14. Pelling Politics and Society p. 93, Pryde op. cit. p. 219

15. Ferguson op. cit. p. 333

coincidence that the right of cultural survival was given to the conquered French settlers of Canada by two Scotsmen, General James Murray and the 8th Earl of Elgin. By contrast, it was the very radical but no less English, Lord Durham who, in contempt of the French Canadian nationality, stood as the most vigorous advocate of their assimilation. Of Elgin, it has been written:

Despite every countervailing factor, James Bruce was and remained a Scotsman. There is nothing more natural than that a Scotsman with his more difficult appreciation of the nationhood of others should have led the way in treating French Canada with common fairness."<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting to note that it was his son, the 9th Earl, who, as the Colonial Secretary from 1905 to 1908, closed the era of Chamberlainite Imperialism and created realistic imperial policies for the 20th century.<sup>17</sup> Even Buchan testified in later years to his ability to overcome the myopia of those like his patron Milner who were unable to grasp the meaning of colonial nationalism:

"I realized what Sir Wilfred Laurier, first of all imperial statesman (Prime Minister of Canada 1896-1911) realized, that you could not bind a growing Empire with any elaborate constitutional bonds. I realized the strength of Colonial Nationalism - the different Dominions had still to rise to national stature and that until that day comes it was idle to talk about any machinery of Union."<sup>18</sup>

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16. Gibb op. cit. p. 82

17. Hyam, R. Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office  
MacMillan London 1972

18. Smith op. cit. p. 183



His biographer suggests that his appreciation of colonial sentiment and minority cultures such as the Boers and French Canadians derived largely from his Scottishness.<sup>19</sup> It is, however, difficult to establish much, from such individual examples, suggestive as they may be.

The evidence on the contrary side is equally diffuse but it does seem to command more weight. During the time of the Bulgarian Agitations of 1877, Scotland, despite the strength of the Liberal Party, had been marked by a conspicuous quietness. This was due not only to the attitude of the Scottish whigs but seemed to pervade the whole body of Liberalism. That a few meetings were held by dissenters in the smaller burghs only highlights this fact.<sup>20</sup> This lack of interest was in stark contrast to the fever of emotion that swept Scotland two years later at Midlothian. However, it is a myth that the cutting edge of the Crusade was foreign affairs. As Hanham notes, the anti-tory reaction was based far more on the agricultural and industrial depression of the later 1870's and the personal attachment of Scotland to the Grand Old Man than to any revulsion from Disraeli's Imperial policies.<sup>21</sup>

In viewing Scotland's attitude to Imperial events, the close connection between military events and Empire building must be remembered. The glory of battles won and

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19. Ibid. p. 183

20. Shannon Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitations  
Oxford 1965

21. Hanham op. cit. p. 228

conquests made could be kept quite separate in the public mind from policies dealing with peaceful ruling of an Empire. Scottish troops always played an especially vivid and important role in the expansion of British rule. Domestically, the military was a crucial vehicle for all levels of Scottish society from illiterate highlanders caught in the aftermath of the '45 to the most aristocratic like James Murray, brother of the Duke of Atholl. Between 1797 and 1837, Skye alone contributed 21 lieutenant - generals and major generals, 45 colonels, 600 commissioned officers and 10,000 soldiers.<sup>22</sup> Nor was it merely a matter of close relations between many Scots and the military. The regiments were raised on a territorial basis that gave rise to identification and passionate loyalties long after recruiting needs had filled many so-called Highland units with non-Scots.<sup>23</sup> Thus emotion and interest combined to give the Scottish public a particular enthusiasm for the wars of the Empire. Speaking of his efforts to canvas for peace in the Crimean War, Cobden wrote to the radical Scot, Duncan McLaren:

Nowhere has the movement fewer partisans than Scotland; the reason is obvious. First, because your heads are more combative than even the English .... and secondly, the system of our military rule in India has been widely profitable to the middle and upper classes in Scotland, who have had more than their numerical proportion of

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22. W. H. Murray The Western Islands of Scotland  
Eyre Methuen London 1972 p. 225

23. See esp. C.B. MSS 41233

its patronage; therefore, the military party is very strong in your part of the Kingdom." (Sept. 19, 1853)<sup>23a</sup>

The self-interest of Scotland in the military was increased by the rise of iron and steel technology. The yards and workshops of the Clyde grew fat on naval contracts as Britain found her supremacy at sea challenged in the latter years of the 19th century. War, and especially the Boer War, brought boom-times and it is significant that in 1900, 400 Clydeside shipwrights marched on Glasgow University to demand the expulsion of a professor who had expressed sympathy for the Boers.

The most compelling evidence would seem to be the reaction of the Scottish electorate in 1900 to the Khaki campaign and the degree of support it showed for Chamberlain's Unionism. However, whatever Scotland's attitudes to Imperialism or the Empire, and it can only be concluded that, on the evidence, the question is still open, it would be an error to suggest that the election was a plebiscite on "Imperialism". While the word was frequently invoked, it is clear that the basis of 'Khaki' was a clearly defined war, not a policy or philosophy.

Given this, Scotland's behavior in 1900 becomes easier to understand. No matter what national opinion was on

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23.a. Mackie Life of Duncan McLaren op. cit. p. 10

doctrines of Empire, the Scots would be the very last people to take a soft line in the face of a direct challenge to British arms. This was particularly so when that challenge came, not from a remote land of primitives, but from a well-armed and organized nation of Europeans who were receiving none too discreet sympathy from Germany.

c) The position of the Scottish Liberals

It was therefore a very difficult situation in which the Scottish Liberals were placed in the summer and fall of 1899. To hark back to the legacy of Fox and take a line of high-minded unpopularity was to tempt the final ruin of an already tottering party. To join the war party was to risk moral bankruptcy. Most Liberals took refuge in studied neutrality, questioning the details of diplomacy and war preparation. However, the visible face of the party was one of open warfare as small groups at each end of the question launched attacks on each other and destroyed the healing calm that their new leader had hoped for.

The struggle within the Liberal Party was not an internal version of Unionist-Liberal conflict. To identify the Liberal Imperialism of Rosebery and Ferguson as "Jingo" is to do their creed a disservice. Indeed, there was little of the Jingo in it; it seemed to be conscious of the Liberal tradition of rationality in politics and

thus present an imperial scheme as a thinking man's approach to public questions. Their tactical desire to rob the Unionists of exclusive rights to 'patriotism' was as much pragmatic as it was congenial. If the Unionists were disarmed of their foremost weapon, political discussion could be directed to those domestic social issues where the real future of Liberalism lay. In 1899, the division within the Liberal ranks was unlike the split of 1886 not only in that no formal rupture occurred, but much more importantly because the creed of the "dissident" Liberals of 1899 was not really compatible with that of the Unionists.

The Liberal Imperialists were not 'war-hawks' and, indeed, Ferguson was perceptive enough to clearly foresee the real outcome of the war:

"I am very depressed at the thought of war, for the British record is so bad in South Africa that success may be as bad as former failures."<sup>24</sup>

This comment compares interestingly with Bryce's:

"I hope we shall do all we can to avert war for it would be a great misfortune and might lose us South Africa."<sup>25</sup>

Obviously there was common ground between the 'Imperialists' who had no illusions about past British rule and the 'radical' who feared losing a part of the Empire. Earlier in

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24. Ferguson to C.B. Sept. 2, 1899 C.B. MSS 41222

the year, Ferguson had rejected Dr. Jameson as a candidate in terms that would have stood Sir Robert Reid well: "I hate the Raid and all connected."<sup>26</sup> This would tend to suggest that the 'Imperialist-Pro-Boer' struggle in the Liberal Party was subtler than is sometimes implied. It may be suggested that the frictions brought out by the war had as much to do with tactical judgements, ambitions and personalities as with ideologies of Empire.

#### Summary

Despite the fading of 'Home Rule', the patriotic issue in its new guise of 'Imperialism' was to continue to haunt the Liberals in the last years of the 19th Century. As a doctrine and mythology, Imperialism provided a singular paradox of politics. In essence, it was innovative, radical and inspired wide horizons of thought. Many of its chief disciples were self-declared Liberals. Yet political reality kept it chained to the fortunes of the party of tradition, the Conservatives. The practical requirements of such a policy as opposed to its lofty ideals, left it fundamentally unacceptable to most of those who called themselves Liberals.

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26. Ferguson to Rosebery Feb. 25, 1899 Rosebery MSS 10019

Reid was the only M.P. to rise in the House and condemn a parliamentary inquiry into the Raid as a white wash and a scandal. As a consequence he was pilloried mercilessly in the press.

No conclusion can be drawn whether Scotland was more or less Imperialist than the rest of the United Kingdom. The sense of an appreciation of nationalism that was inherent in every Scot, by fact of his nationality, undoubtedly gave Scots pause prior to any full acceptance of the anti-nationalist assumptions of the Imperialist movement. However, the facts of Empire, as opposed to grandiose philosophy appealed deeply to the Scottish nation both for historical and contemporary reasons. The Empire meant opportunity, for enrichment, for achievement, and for settlement. Most critically it stood for military glory and the pride of Scotland in the record of her men in arms. Given these factors, Scotland, while not necessarily 'Imperialist', had no antipathy whatever to the maintenance and growth of the Empire.

In the face of the South African crisis, this probable Scottish sympathy for a bellicose stance on the part of the government, created grave difficulties for the Scottish Liberal Party. Given the times, the development of Rosebery and the Liberal Imperialists, with their particular strength in Scotland posed the most serious of challenges to any future party unity. Yet curiously, the documents of the time seem to indicate an area of understanding between 'Imperialists' who had few illusions about the 'rightness' of British rule and 'radicals' who feared the loss of a part of the Empire.

CHAPTER 9

Scotland and the Khaki Election



Scotland and the Khaki Election

a) War Fever and Party Division:

In late September, 1899, as war seemed to creep inexorably closer, C.B. and Bryce began to exchange almost daily letters filled with dismay. When the first shot came, Bryce's judgement was immediate:

"Although the Boers may be the first to fire, they have been goaded and frightened into this hasty and deplorable conduct by a long course of provocation."<sup>1</sup>

However, it was obvious that this opinion was exceptional even within the Liberal Party:

".... a good many Liberals will support the government .... we may have to face a split in the party...."<sup>2</sup>

C.B. agreed:

"The ordinary Liberal is saying .... disclosure since the war began of the vast power of the Boers far beyond (internal defensive needs) shows that they meant mischief against us .... shows they must be put down ...."<sup>3</sup>

Asquith's report in mid September from East Fife seemed to confirm these fears:

"It would be a mistake to suppose that our people as a whole are in any way strongly pro-Boer. I talked to one or two representative Liberals before I spoke - Free church ministers and such - and was rather surprised to find how anti-Kruger and bellicose was the frame of mind."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Bryce to C.B. Oct. 5, 1899 C.B. 41211
  2. Bryce to C.B. Sept. 29, 1899 C.B. 41211
  3. C.B. to Bryce Nov. 10, 1899 C.B. 41211
  4. Asquith to C.B. Sept. 19, 1899 quoted in Spender p. 241

J. W. Crombie, M.P. for Kincardine agreed:

"I have not been much in Aberdeen but I have been a deal about in this part of the country and I should say that the general opinion of Liberals is this: "War is a bad business but the Boers have brought it on themselves and it can't be helped." I am not saying that this is a statesmanlike view, I only say that it seems pretty fairly to sum up the view of the average Liberal, nothing like what there was three years ago over the Armenian question, not to mention 1878."<sup>5</sup>

In mid-November, Bryce confirmed this assessment of opinion from Aberdeen but offered some hope:

"it has struck me that you might come to hear in what mood the Liberals are here. Pirie (M.P. for Aberdeen North) and I have both addressed large ward meetings and have both taken the bull by the horns. No dissent was expressed but a section appeared surprised at our condemnation of the Ministerial diplomacy. They have heard only one side of the case hitherto - for all the papers here support the government and they did not know the facts. Few people do .... but we brought more and more of them around."<sup>6</sup>

but Bryce still had to concede the burden of the all-pervading war-feeling:

"my experience in Scotland is that nobody wants at present to hear anything except the war. All one says about the House of Lords, Temperance, Land Values, seems to be quite thrown away ...."<sup>7</sup>

In light of these attitudes, C.B. tried to steer a middle course, avoiding any direct denunciation of the war itself

5. Crombie to Bryce Oct. 7, 1899 Bryce 21
6. Bryce to C.B. Nov. 12, 1899 C.B. 41211
7. Bryce to C.B. Nov. 16, 1899 C.B. 41211

and deploring only the actions of Chamberlain and the government in making it come about.

The stance of the Liberal Imperialists was to declare, in keeping with Rosebery's belief in the necessity for continuity in foreign policy, that in such a national crisis the government had to be supported whatever the errors of the past. In the meantime they had to deal with their position within the party. Ferguson's divided loyalties became more obvious than ever; while he worked tirelessly to promote Rosebery's interests, as whip he was still charged with a responsibility to the party as a whole and to C.B., in particular. Although his partisanship is unquestionable:

"a good large section is against us (The Roseberites), but I am sure we have the majority of the party."<sup>8</sup>

his correspondence, with C.B. remained remarkably helpful and evenhanded:

"our party is much divided .... I have been advising candidates not to hold their meetings for awhile .... we all regard you as the one who is able to speak without involving us in accentuating divisions and that therefore, it is a matter in which we should simply carry out your own views without offering those 'suggestions' in which the S.L.A. is so fertile ...."<sup>9</sup>

His assessment of public opinion was much like that of Bryce and Crombie:

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8. Ferguson to Rosebery Oct. 30, 1899 Rosebery 10019

9. Ferguson to C.B. Nov. 8, 1899 C.B. 41222

"The party is split, as you know, but I believe that the greater part of it, perhaps three-quarters, especially those who don't talk support the war without inquiring very closely into its causes."<sup>10</sup>

From his own experience with his constituents C.B. could only agree:

"There is a great deal of war-fever and they are a little bewildered by the buckets of contempt and abuse poured on me by the Scotsman and other papers. I do not think that it goes very deep but for the moment there is a coldness."<sup>11</sup>

The following week brought news of "Black Week", an unparalleled series of British military disasters. As C.B. foresaw on November 10, this only served to increase the Liberal difficulties:

"The very difficulties of the war and the strength of the enemy help the government in the country!"<sup>12</sup>

On December 20, Robert Pullar, a senior Scottish Liberal, wrote sadly to C.B.:

"may our people recover from their war fever and return to their right mind."<sup>13</sup>

At this feverish moment, however, came a strong indication that in fact the war did not monopolize all

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10. Ferguson to C.B. Nov. 19, 1899 C. B. 41222

11. C.B. to Bryce Dec. 7, 1899 quoted in Spender p. 262

12. C.B. to Bryce Nov. 10, 1899 C.B. 41211

13. Pullar to C.B. Dec. 20, 1899 C.B. 41232

political activity. A by-election was held in Clackmannan and Kinross and despite the observations cited above, an outsider held the seat for the Liberals with almost no reduction in majority. Even more surprisingly, the war was not the chief issue of the campaign. A fierce struggle for the Liberal nomination seemed to be the centrepiece and, amazingly it revolved about the ancient temperance question.

When the vacancy occurred, the Liberal establishment had expected Dewar, Lord Provost of Perth and the head of the famous distillery to inherit the seat without trouble.<sup>14</sup> However, with names like Tennant and McEwan already in the party lists, the anti-drink forces decided to take a stand. "The teetotalers are on the warpath."<sup>15</sup> Pressure was put on Ferguson to reject Dewar but Ferguson put it off by leaving the matter to the local association. The enduring strength of the temperance men was demonstrated when the association rejected Dewar and chose Eugene Wason, an outside temperance leader. However, apart from the liquor issue, Wason belonged to the mainstream of the party and this seemed to minimize conflict within the party. Ferguson sent a promising report:

"Woods sends the most encouraging reports. Wason is doing better than expected as the teetotal candidate because though you could not have a more reliable supporter in the house

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14. Ferguson to C.B. Nov. 8, 1899 C.B. 41222

15. Ferguson to C.B. Nov. 19, 1899 C.B. 41222

he has never been regarded as one of the most brilliant partisans on the platform."<sup>16</sup>

The tone of this message is again notable for its marked friendliness to C.B. at a time when Ferguson was actively advancing Rosebery. Whether this is a reflection of deceit or of genuine ambivalence is impossible to say.

However, Ferguson's prejudices were revealed by the candidacy of the Master of Elibank for Midlothian. While lamenting the genuine troubles the Liberals were having in attracting good candidates, Ferguson took special aim at Elibank:

"We are very short of candidates and money for fresh ones .... The Master of Elibank has no money and is never of the same opinion for 24 hours. I am at my wits end for good men."<sup>17</sup>

The judgement of Gibson-Carmichael, another Liberal Imperialist, was much more favourable:

"The Midlothian Committee have recommended the Master of Elibank to the general body of the association who will take him next Saturday. He has made a good start and if only he 'catiker' on with the miners will be all right."<sup>18</sup>

Since he was barely 30, Elibank may have been less than an ideal candidate but considering that he was to rise to become

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16. Ferguson to C.B. Dec. 10, 1899 C.B. 41222

17. Ferguson to C.B. June 9, 1900 C.B. 41222

18. Gibson-Carmichael to C.B. June 25, 1900 C.B. 41233

the chief Whip of the Liberal party by 1910 he could hardly have merited Ferguson's dismissal. It was well known that Elibank's view of Imperialism stood distinctly to the radical side and Spender has suggested that this plus his intention to run in a Lothian seat, which the Roseberyites considered their particular territory, was the root of Ferguson's attempts to create difficulties.<sup>19</sup>

Another example of Ferguson's biases interfering with a candidate occurred in West Fife. One candidate for the nomination, Anthony Hope, a pronounced pro-Boer, was described as a disaster by Ferguson because he had "demoralized" West Perthshire in 1895.<sup>20</sup> In fact, in that year, he had raised, against the tide, the Liberal vote in the riding.

By September, 1900, Ferguson's partiality in his exercise of his office as Whip was being openly complained of. For over a year Ferguson had played a double game and served two masters. At the same time as he was engaged in recruiting candidates and keeping C.B. informed of the state of the party organization, he was submitting lists to Rosebery of those who might be in the Imperialist camp.<sup>21</sup> The conflicts of interest were obvious and known within the party. In April, Tweedmouth suggested Ferguson's

19. Spender op. cit. p. 288

20. Ferguson to C.B. June 9, 1900 C.B. 41222

21. Ferguson to C.B. Sept. 2, 1900 C.B. 41222;  
Ferguson to Rosebery Aug. 22, 1900 Rosebery 10019

replacement by Capt. Sinclair.<sup>22</sup> Though he denied having misused the office, Ferguson himself recognized the impossibility of his situation and pledged his resignation effective with the termination of the looming election campaign.<sup>23</sup> So Byzantine had the intrigues of the inner chamber of Scottish Liberalism become by 1900 that when Rosebery, as President of the S.L.A., proposed to attend one of its meetings, C.B. was sent into a fit of suspicion:

"What is he up to? He has never attended one before."<sup>24</sup>

The old petty divisions also went on:

"The friction between East and West is continuous."<sup>25</sup>

but they were reaching new depths:

"The Glasgow S.L.A. executive are now all complaining that at your meeting they did not get such good seats as the Edinburgh men."<sup>26</sup>

b) The Campaign:

The circumstances of October 1900 provided the Unionists with the opportunity to revitalize and refurbish their 'patriotic' image. The surrender of the regular Boer armies had seemed to herald the end of a short war

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22. Tweedmouth to C.B. April 17, 1900 C.B. 41231

23. Ferguson to C.B. Sept. 12, 1900 C.B. 41222

24. C.B. to Bryce Jan. 14, 1900 C.B. 41211

25. Tweedmouth to C.B. Nov. 29, 1899 C.C. 41231

26. Gibson-Carmichael to C.B. June 25, 1900 C.B. 41233



which, though commencing disastrously for British arms, had resulted in a glorious victory. That the opposition had been well armed and organized "Europeans" made the glory seem all the greater. An election would give a popular stamp of approval to the triumph and development of the Empire.

For the Unionists, the principle at stake in South Africa was the same as that in Ireland: the maintenance of the integrity of the Empire. The way in which the Irish Nationalists had taken such an open and unconcealed delight in the early Boer victories emphasized the point all too clearly: Home Rule would only encourage the dismemberment of the Empire and a weak hand overseas would lead to renewed troubles in Ireland. The Unionist gamble eventually failed when the emergence of guerilla warfare in South Africa and the consequences of the British military response irredeemably tarnished the image of Imperialism.

The 'Liberals' circumstances in 1900 could hardly have been worse. At the bottom of a long slide, the Liberals could find agreement within themselves on few matters of importance. Caught up with too much of the Gladstonian legacy and with as yet too little commitment to social politics, they could not sort out their own identity let alone make an effective appeal. The struggle between factions within the Liberal party was almost as insistent as that between parties. The Liberals were

caught with a new leader to whom few, outside Scotland, felt any deep loyalty. To most, he was an amiable but lightweight caretaker whose greatest virtue was that he divided least. The public image of C.B. was that of a cosmetic covering the continuing real battle for control between the Harcourt and Rosebery factions. The Unionists naturally made great play with this situation and Liberal candidates in 1900 found themselves regularly and persistently heckled about their personal loyalties. In these circumstances it was impossible to establish any clear party line with which to fight any election.

In Scotland, the party seemed to split all too clearly into factions over the South African question. The Liberal Imperialists gave unequivocal support to the war though suggesting that it was they who were the best equipped to create a just settlement, a more "Liberal" Empire. At the other extreme, Sir Robert Reid and the radicals denounced Imperialism and all its works. The majority of the party, however, followed C.B. in attempting to survive by talking around the issue and awaiting more rewarding times.

With the war and all the easy issues on their side, the Unionists made most of the running in 1900. They followed a standard formula: lauding the victories in South Africa and the future of the Empire, denouncing the Liberals for their doubts and denigrating the pretensions of the party to be an alternative government when it could

barely hold itself together.

There were two sides to the "Imperial" argument: one positive and one negative. R. B. Finlay, one of the most influential Unionists in Scotland, set out the former in his inaugural speech on Sept. 6, speaking of a "great sweeping period", for the Empire, its future and South Africa's place in it.<sup>27</sup> Some like the radical Unionist, Nairn, in Kirkcaldy, (he supported women's suffrage) went so far as emphasizing that any settlement would have to take into account the interests of the South African blacks. He suggested, with reason, that the Liberals might hand the natives over to the tender mercies of the Boers.<sup>28</sup> This was a perfect example of radical Imperialism's dedication to benign paternalism.

However, it was much more common for Unionists to concentrate on the dark but easy road of negative Jingoism at a moment of national war fever. This often consisted of identifying political opponents with 'enemies of the nation' and making accusations of treason, both implicitly and explicitly. One of the most vicious Jingos was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, standing in Edinburgh Central. Describing himself as a "Liberal in all matters but the Empire," he characterized the Liberals as a "party of traitors."<sup>29</sup> Gordon Stewart, in Perthshire East suggested

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27. Glasgow Herald Sept. 6 1900

28. ibid Sept. 24 1900

29. ibid Sept. 24 1900

that the Liberals had learned their "treason" from con-  
 sorting with the "Irish Traitors."<sup>30</sup> Gordon Elgin and  
 Nairn identified Clark, Bryce and Reid as "the Comforters  
 of Kruger" and told the voters "to tell the Boers where  
 Britons stand."<sup>31</sup> J. Sanderson in Hawick accused Thomas  
 Shaw of being "an enemy sympathizer" and a "betraye" of  
 the "gallant British soldiers."<sup>32</sup> Bryce's opponent accused  
 him in Aberdeen of being a particularly dangerous "traitor."<sup>33</sup>  
 It is interesting that one of the loudest of these super-  
 patriots was Bonar Law in Glasgow. Some like Shaw-Stewart  
 in East Renfrew represented the election as the last battle  
 between "us and the Boers."<sup>34</sup>

While the Unionist pitch was usually at a level of  
 crude chauvinism some did raise the more intellectual and  
 economic implications of Imperialism as an ideology. Duncan  
 reminded Govan of her dependence on Imperial and World  
 markets as well as the good that the Empire would bring to  
 dark corners like the Sudan and South Africa. Reid related  
 the Empire to Greenock in terms of the sugar trade. In  
 1895, McKillop had suggested that the social welfare of the  
 working class was necessarily entirely dependent on the  
 national prosperity. In 1900 he extended that idea,

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30. *ibid* Sept. 26 1900

31. *ibid* Sept. 26 1900

32. *ibid* Sept. 27 1900

33. *ibid* Sept. 20 1900

34. *ibid* Sept. 26 1900

suggesting that prosperity being dependent on trade and trade in turn dependent on Empire, the latter was the ultimate source of benefits to the lower classes.

For the Liberals, the South African issue was an uncomfortable and dangerous burden. Their greatest danger was to fall into the trap laid by Unionist doctrine and to become identified as a "Fifth Column". To avoid it, they took different routes.

Those with the least worries were the Imperialists who disarmed the issue by embracing the cause of the war, though often deploring failures of Unionist policy in South Africa. Haldane, for example, "wholly approved" of the war, defended the record of Lord Milner, a particular *bête noire* of the Liberal Party, and advocated an Imperialism that would lead to a "free" tolerant and progressive Empire.<sup>35</sup> However, it is noticeable that Haldane's purpose was to remove the Empire as an issue, not to maximize it in the Unionist fashion. Asquith dismissed the election as a "patriotic trick" preferring to devote his address to social reform.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it is noticeable that the Imperialists were the Liberals most able to concentrate on 'Liberal' domestic issues. Identifiable Liberal Imperialists in Scotland included Ferguson, Haldane,

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35. *ibid* Sept. 15 1900

36. *ibid* Sept. 17 1900

Asquith, Leicester Harmsworth, Sir John Leng, T. G. Hedderwick, Sir John Jardine, Alexander Ure and the Tennant family.

At the other end of the scale was Dr. Clark, M.P. for Caithness, who had acquired the 'blackest' name in all Scotland. He had been an agent for the Boers before the war and since its outbreak had been an open and active sympathizer. This, added to his radical crofter and socialist background, was more than sufficient to identify him as an unqualified traitor. Throughout Scotland, Liberals found that the epithet 'colleague of Dr. Clark' was used as often as 'friend of the Boers'. Clark was violently prevented from even appearing in Caithness where, in any case, he had been stripped of the Liberal nomination which had gone to Leicester Harmsworth, an English Liberal Imperialist.

Aside from Clark it is difficult to speak collectively of the remainder of the left of the Scottish Party. The term used by their opponents, 'pro-Boers' was patently unfair yet it covered an identifiable group of Liberals outspokenly opposed to the Imperialist movement. These included Sir Robert Reid, Adam Black, Thomas Shaw, T. R. Buchanan, A. Souttar and James Bryce among the most prominent. Reid had established himself as the leading figure of this group by his lonely attacks on the Jameson Raid and the passage of time did not water down the passion of his

anger. He accused the Government of 'cowardice' in seeking election in wartime and declared that the country was wakening to the cost of the government's ineptitude in 'a jingo war.'<sup>37</sup> The pro-Boers were not necessarily little Englanders opposed to the Empire itself. Bryce's views have been quoted above. Similarly, Reid was enraged by the chauvinism and deception of the Imperialists, not the fact of overseas possessions. A genuine little Englander was John Morley. In his eyes, the folly of the Unionists was that they had only succeeded in adding another burden.

Nonetheless, the degree of attention paid by Liberal candidates to social questions was very striking and from this emerges a number of patterns. Part of the problem of the Liberal party at the time was the sheer complexity of the division. The party was not simply broken into factions; it was divided differently at different strata with new disputes overlaying the old.

What was a Radical in 1900? One could be radical on the church. One could be radical on the war. One could be radical on drink. One could be radical on Ireland. One could be a Little England radical. One could be radical on social reform. 'Social reform' could mean the old temperance or land issues or something new like housing and pensions. Thus the lines drawn up over South Africa had little meaning when applied to social politics.

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37. Glasgow Herald Sept. 14 1900

A list of Liberals who took an interest in social reform shows strange bed-fellows, indeed. On one side were the socialist-influenced radicals like Fletcher, Maxwell and Black. On the other, stood the Liberal Imperialists like Asquith, Haldane and Jardine, as well as, a few of the more traditional Liberals who were influenced by their working class constituencies: Provand, Wood, Caldwell, and P. R. Buchanan. Bryce found his attention directed to social issues by the reality that it was the working class voters of his constituency who constituted the Liberal votes.<sup>38</sup>

Those who were reluctant to embrace the new ideas are harder to identify. Morley and Ure had expressed their unease in the past over the new social ideas of interventionism but it is probable that most of those with doubts did not go out of their way to express them in public.

More numerous were the traditional Liberals who clung to the old nostrums like temperance and institutional reform but introduced into their programme bits and pieces like "8 hours" or workman's compensation. Some of these included Colville, Glen-Coats, Dunn, Menzies and Douglas.

Finally there was the not inconsiderable group which failed to make mention of social reform at all. Whether

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38. Bryce to C.B. Oct. 30, 1900 C.B. MSS 41211



this reflected a lack of support or interest or whether it was simply a measure of the overwhelming presence of the South Africa issue, it is impossible to say.

It might have been hoped that Ireland would have ceased to be such a burden for the Liberals in 1900 but it was not to be. Home Rule itself was only mentioned in those seats with large Irish populations (Lanark North West and Greenock). However, Irish support for the Liberals was severely affected by the issue of sectarian education. The Tories had given support to the idea of state subsidies for Catholic parochial schools in Scotland and the establishment of a Catholic university in Ireland. The Liberals, steeped in a long and proud history of struggle for freeing education from ecclesiastical control, could have only one response. Presbyterian, and of a fierce educational tradition, the reaction of Liberal Scotland was only that much stronger. C.B. and Bryce were not prepared to temporize on the question:

It would be a good thing if you said a few plain words on the Irish university question on Friday. You are an unimpeachable educationalist - and also approximate the reluctance of honest fellows in the counties to adopt so reactionary a scheme as a sectarian university."<sup>39</sup>

On September 25, the archbishop published a letter giving direction to support the Conservatives because of the

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39. C.B. to Bryce March 19, 1900 Bryce MSS 21

question. Shaken, the Liberals in Irish areas frantically waved the Home Rule banner. The full effects of these rival forces are hard to discern but it is certain that the Irish did not react uniformly. Colville, in Lanark North East received Nationalist support even though he was, at best, lukewarm on the schools issue. After the election, C.B. and others put a large amount of the blame for the disasters in Scotland on the Irish vote:

"In my Burghs, my failing off is mainly due to the Irish turning against me on the education question: Not unnaturally for I should be sorry to agree with them. But it makes a Big difference if we do not get votes from the Protestant and anti-sectarian side to balance them."<sup>40</sup>

However, other evidence calls these judgements into question.

In the five most Catholic constituencies, Lanark N.W., Lanark-Mid., Lanark N.E., Kilmarnock Burghs and Greenock there was, in each case, a swing towards the Liberals against the national trend. The only constituencies with Catholic populations in excess of 8% to register Unionist swings were three Glasgow seats and C.B.'s own Stirling Burghs which stood only twentieth in terms of Catholic population. It may well have been that within the Irish community, the recommendations of the Church were often passed over in preference for traditional support of the Home Rule Party and in sympathy for the Boer nation. The Glasgow Irish had been openly and enthusiastically

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40. C.B. to Thomas Shaw October 17, 1900 quoted in Shaw op. cit. p. 246

'pro-Boer', holding large 'stop the war' rallies.<sup>41</sup>

Surprisingly, in spite of their desperate handicaps the Scottish Liberals do not seem to have been downhearted during the campaign. Ferguson, who, in previous campaigns had displayed a shrewd political eye, was sure that any losses would be balanced by gains.<sup>42</sup> Bryce's fears in London that "Scotland is still reported to be Jingo"<sup>43</sup> were tempered by the atmosphere that he found in Aberdeen. "There is less excitement in Scotland than I expected and the omens do not seem to be unfavourable."<sup>44</sup> His cautious hopes were raised further by the end of the month to a full expectation of success. "The prospects are now good .... the constituencies have resumed a reasonable mind and at all times like courage."<sup>45</sup> Bryce was to do well personally in Aberdeen but this was not to be the Scottish pattern.

#### c) The Election Results

In Britain, the result of the election was a virtual repeat of 1895; the Unionists improved on their position at dissolution but fell short of their 1895 total. Though hardly a Liberal victory, the result was, considering the circumstances, a considerable defensive success. The effect of the result, however, was to continue the Unionist

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41. J. F. Handley The Irish In Modern Scotland University of Cork Press Cork, 1947 p. 287

42. Ferguson to C.B. Sept. 22, 1900 C.B. 41222

43. Bryce to C.B. Sept. 16, 1900 C.B. 41211

44. Bryce to C.B. Sept. 23, 1900 C.B. 41211

45. Bryce to C.B. Sept. 28, 1900 C.B. 41211

hegemony of politics based on 'patriotic' issues.

"What think ye of Caledonia? 'stands Scotland where she did' as Shakespeare and Charles Parker asked. Is it not deplorable?"<sup>46</sup> Scotland offered Liberalism little comfort in 1900. The Liberals had made gains in both Wales and England rising from 25 seats to 28 and from 112 seats to 123 seats respectively but in Scotland the party fell to a new low of 34 seats from 39. This was the first time Liberalism had been in the minority in Scotland since 1832. In terms of popular vote, the Liberals retained a slight lead 51.2% to 48.8% but this does not include three unopposed Unionists. In Scotland the swing to the Tories was, on average 0.7% but to complete a picture of confusion, the general swing in the United Kingdom, where the Liberals gained seats, was against the Liberals by better than 2%.<sup>47</sup>

In 1895, 17 seats registered Liberal swings; in 1900 there were 19 plus 5 others which remained level. There is some evidence that Unionist success in Scotland was due to abnormally eccentric patterns of voter reaction. Of the six seats captured by the Unionists, (the Liberals gained one), five recorded swings in excess of 7%. In 1895, of 45 seats recording a pro-Unionist swing, 19 recorded swings in excess of 5%. In 1900, only 9 were in excess of 5% including 3 very safe Liberal seats which had massive

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46. C.B. to Thomas Shaw Oct. 17, 1900 Shaw op. cit. p. 246

47. Kinnear op. cit. p. 26

Unionist swings: Aberdeen East (8.5%), Orkney and Shetland (11%) and Sutherland (25%).

Liberals on the East Coast seemed to experience a slightly better reception than those on the West. Of the 12 seats with swings in favour of the Liberals in excess of 3%, 7 were in the East. The Unionist swing was spread throughout Scotland but it was heavily concentrated in Glasgow and the Highlands.

There is some evidence that Liberals who were marked out as radicals or 'pro-Boers' did considerably less well than the Imperialist groups. Of 14 who were clearly identified with the first group (Bryce, Black, Reid, Souttar, Dalziel, Shaw, Morley, and Hope) 10 saw a decline in their vote portion. On the other hand, of 13 who were acknowledged Imperialists (Ferguson, Haldane, Asquith, Leng, H. Tennant, E. Tennant, Farquharson, Jardine, Hedderwick, Parker, Annand) 7 had increased percentages. With the remaining 'centre' candidates, declines outnumbered improvements about 2 to 1.

For the Liberal inner circle, the most shattering result was the defeat of T. R. Buchanan, in Aberdeenshire East. Buchanan, a veteran and much respected member of the caucus was defeated by a Liberal Unionist, A. W. MacConachie. Shock at the defeat was a leading subject of post-mortem correspondence: (A great loss"<sup>48</sup> - Bryce):

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48. Bryce to C.B. Oct. 27, 1900 C.B. 41211

"inexplicable"<sup>49</sup> said Shaw. Buchanan was a leading Liberal figure, in a very securely Liberal seat. His opponent was a Jingo who was described as! "everything that is disgusting"<sup>50</sup>; "a horror".<sup>51</sup> Crombie, who had a particular local knowledge of the region, felt much of the fault was Buchanan's own:

"What we call the "organization" was in a state of ruins. Hitherto Buchanan had depended on the sheer force of the Liberal conviction of the country. That for general reasons .... collapsed and he had not .... the personal element to fall back on .... he never took any trouble to go about the county or live in it. He was a political entity, representing in his person Liberal opinion but of no personal significance to the electors .... (opposite of MacConachie)."<sup>52</sup>

The emphasis which Crombie put on the personal touch and the importance of individual candidates was a theme often suggested by others. By 1900 familiar patterns of modern political activity such as door to door canvassing in place of dependence on the forces of deference were apparent; and set speeches were becoming more of the street corner variety, frequent, brief and impromptu. Crombie himself ascribed his near defeat in 1895 to his opponent's "working the constituency in the modern manner by visiting and shaking hands."<sup>53</sup> Ferguson was sure that the cause of the loss of Sutherland was the weakness of the local

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49. Shaw to C.B. Oct. 22, 1900 C.B. 41227

50. Crombie to Bryce Oct. 1900 C.B. 41227

51. C.B. to Bryce Oct. 29, 1900 C.B. MSS 41211

52. Crombie to Bryce Bryce MSS 21 Oct. 1900

53. Crombie to Bryce Bryce MSS 21 Oct. 1900

Liberal candidate, McLeod.<sup>54</sup> The losses in the Highlands: Sutherland, Wick Burghs, Orkney and Shetland owed something to local factors: "The Scottish crofters were often naval reservists and the crofting counties supplied many army regulars."<sup>55</sup> Ferguson was openminded enough to hail radical anti-Imperialist Thomas Shaw's triumph in Hawick Burgh as 'a completely personal victory.'<sup>56</sup>

Bryce outlined the sort of difficulties that Liberals had faced:

"We had a good deal against us from the newspapers vilifying us, nine months energetic canvassing by the other side while our people were doing nothing, a good deal of war feeling and to top it all a drenching night which stood much worse for our voters who are all nearly working class for whom we had no covered vehicles."<sup>57</sup>

Ferguson agreed that Liberal organizational apathy up against Unionist energy crippled the Liberal effort on the East Coast.<sup>58</sup> The timing of the October election also meant that the fishing fleets were not in port, thus depriving East Coast Liberals of a traditional source of support.<sup>59</sup> Additional strain came from the Liberals having tried to fight the election on the old register,

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54. Ferguson to C.B. Oct. 24, 1900 C.B. 41222

55. Pelling Social Geography op. cit. p. 94

56. Ferguson to C.B. Oct. 24, 1900 C.B. 41222

57. Bryce to C.B. Oct. 3, 1900 C.B. 41211

58. Ferguson to C.B. Oct. 24, 1900 C.B. 41222

59. Ferguson to C.B. Oct. 24, 1900 C.B. 41222

as much a disadvantage then to the Liberals as it is to Labour today.

The real recriminations were reserved for the West where the disasters had been concentrated:

"Glasgow is damnable .... the wretched result on the Clyde where warlike expenditures are popular; partly to the Catholic vote .... partly to Khaki; and partly to our own factions which has taken some of the heart out of us."<sup>60</sup>

Ferguson offered an analysis:

"The west went to pieces partly for the want of outstanding men there and because the Catholic vote went heavily over - we lost some of those in '95 however - and the West has only proved again that it is not always Liberal like the East. The employers put on the screw everywhere and some of our candidates were very raw."<sup>61</sup>

Thomas Glen-Coats, a prominent Western Liberal put it all down to: "War fever and the old register."<sup>62</sup> However, others were inclined to point a finger more personally;

"This poorly organized party to which you have so unselfishly stuck .... The organization in the West is under the thumb of Ronald (Ferguson) .... is rotten .... it could be altered and should be."<sup>63</sup>

Ferguson, looking ahead, saw evil consequences following from the Western defeats:

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60. Spender op. cit. p. 294

61. Ferguson to C.B. Oct. 24, 1900 C.B. MSS 41222

62. T.G.C. to C.B. Oct. 26, 1900 C.B. MSS 41235

63. Thomas Shaw to C.B. Oct. 22, 1900 C.B. MSS 41227



"The relations between East and West may possibly be subjected to fresh strains as a result of the collapse of the West. The East has always complained of the money lost in the Glasgow office! .... the conditions are favourable for recriminations."<sup>64</sup>

Few Liberals had any doubts that war fever had been the chief source of their difficulties. Crombie, however, put little on it in Kincardine.<sup>65</sup> While most took a fatalistic view of the situation, Shaw was convinced that the party would have benefitted from a stronger and more "negative carping" attitude. Furthermore, there had been little in the way of positive suggestions for the future of South Africa, perhaps a settlement like the Canadian Confederation.<sup>66</sup> C.B. was receptive to this critique: "We made a mistake in holding our tongues as long as we did."<sup>67</sup> The idea of an assertive opposition to the war had come from the moderate quarter of G. O. Trevelyan as early as March 1900 when Jingo pressures on the Clyde forced the resignation of a pro-Boer professor at Glasgow University.

"The time seems to have come as in 1793 .... The pressing duty of the Liberal Party should be to protect freedom of opinion .... the outrage at the University of Glasgow ...."<sup>68</sup>

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64. Ferguson to C.B. Oct. 24, 1900 C.B. MSS 41222  
 65. Crombie to Bryce Oct. 1900 Bryce MSS 21  
 66. Shaw to C.B. Oct. 22, 1900 Shaw op. cit. p. 250  
 67. C.B. to Shaw Oct. 17, 1900 Shaw op. cit. p. 246  
 68. Trevelyan to C.B. March 3, 1900 C.B. MSS 41231

To cast C.B. in the role of Fox protests against itself but there can be little doubt that the eventual cry of 'methods of barbarism' was securely in that tradition.

The Irish education issue had certainly not done them any good though whether the effects were as negative as assumed was open to doubt. The most conclusive trouble was probably the condition of the party. The Roseberyites dissent on the flank had undermined party credibility<sup>69</sup> and long years of defeat and decline had reduced party morale and weakened the organization. Perhaps the best analysis of the crisis of the Liberal spirit in Scotland was offered by J. W. Crombie:

"I remember a generation that was divided into Liberals and Tories on political principles alone .... (opinion) crystallized by the issues on great questions that afforded themselves and to have voted Tory would not only have been treason but it would have been against their interest. Home Rule does not personally affect Scotland and any personal effect it had was in favour of Unionism. The great hand of self-interest has been lessened and with it, party ties. Then came the death of Mr. Gladstone and the dispersion of the Liberal Party. In consequence, all party ties have got into confusion - to argue as the Scotsman does that the Tory party is the Liberal party is no doubt utter nonsense; but it is specious enough to have its effect on a generation of voters who never had occasion to take politics seriously - who never fought for cheap bread, or the franchise and who now see little more than tweedledum and tweedledee between Tories and Liberals except that fashion, influence, Lairds and employees are all on the side of the former. This is a very sad and humiliating view to take of one's own country but I am persuaded it

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69. Shaw to C.B. Oct. 22, 1900 C.B. 41227

is true and we must face it. I believe we can only hold our own in the constituencies by 'organization' which is not politics at all. But I do see hope for the future because I am certain that as soon as a really great issue comes up which affects the people personally and directly we will once more get back to our old political position."<sup>70</sup>

### Summary

At the turn of the century, Scottish Liberalism had come a great distance from where it had stood in the glory days of Midlothian. Battered and riven with factional divisions, it had long since lost its old position as the national party of Scotland. By the end of 1900, it would even have ceased to be the majority party of Scotland.

The very nature of politics had changed. No longer were parties lead by titans as they had been in 1880. Instead, leadership had fallen into the hands of lesser beings who, in the case of the Liberals seemed wholly engaged in an endless and tiresome series of sectional feuds. Politics increasingly divided upon class lines. While the active politicians of the Liberal Party in Scotland tended to continue to be drawn from the middle and upper ranks of society, their electoral support was

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70. Crombie to Bryce Oct. 1900 B.2

now almost entirely drawn from the lower orders. The old issues were gone. In the place of struggles for free trade and free institutions were the rising demands of social reform and working class politics. As a result, political controversy in Scotland, by 1900, had become almost indistinguishable from that of England. In 1880, matters could turn on things specifically Scottish but twenty years later, "Scottish politics" had been reduced to disputes between Scots over issues identical in Birmingham or Glasgow.

For Liberalism, the 1890's were at once a period of steady disintegration and of fundamental re-orientation. Between the crash of 1886 and the resurgent triumph of 1906 the intellectual essence of the party was recast. In the midst of these movements it is not surprising that many of the years in between display an appearance of enormous and desperate confusion. Labels, terminology and identifications were all thrown open to the wind as old and new, insurgent and relic fought for the spoils of the future. In Scotland, the particular strength of the Roseberyttes, the weakness of Lib-Labism, the enduring influence of the old middle class radicals, the strength of national feeling and the depth of emergent talent such as C-B and Sir Robert Reid lent a particularly powerful cast to this whirl of confused alarms and excursions.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Liberalism in Scotland after the Khaki election of 1900 was that the party should have survived as well as it did. While loss of majority status was a tremendous psychological blow, the overall pattern of results, given the circumstances, was not all that discouraging. In the face of a campaign of vilification well beyond any of the Home Rule battles, compounded by the stab in the back of the Irish schools question, the Liberals had managed to generally hold their own outside of the Clyde and the Highlands where special factors dominated. That they managed to accomplish this without the benefit of an accepted leadership or even much in the way of party unity speaks well of their residual strength. What the party lacked was a 'calling', a new sense of purpose and direction, and a leader to sew the party together behind it. It was not to be long before a Scotsman, Campbell-Bannerman would voice the cry of 'methods of barbarism' to begin the long road back. But for Scotland, even in the flush of the triumph of 1906, and a cabinet filled with her sons, the age of independent Scottish political life was nearly over, drowned in the flood tide of the new politics.

### An Overview

The two decades that passed between 1880 and 1900 marked a period of profound change for the Liberal Party of Scotland. Although Liberalism in the United Kingdom, as a whole, was being forced to alter in character and direction as it left the era of Gladstone behind, transformation was even more fundamental for the Scottish Party. The chief reason for this was the unique status which it had held up until 1880. Scottish Liberalism, in the Victorian Age, had been the embodiment of a national political voice, a voice which took in the full breadth of Scottish society and was based on feelings of history and national character that gave it a distinctive and independent position within the great alliance that came together to form British Liberalism.

For decades, Liberalism was to represent Scotland's pride of nationhood based on those things which bound Scots together with fellow Scots. The result was a national rather than nationalist creed; a creed for a nation with pride of place in an age of progress rather than an oppressed people struggling to be free. This harmonious marriage between party and nation began to fail not through any slackening of a sense of nationhood but rather because the focus of political life moved away from issues which had brought Scots together on a national basis and drifting, slowly and uncertainly towards new concerns that would divide the Scottish people along class and social lines.

Between 1880 and 1900 the Liberal Party ceased to be the national party of Scotland. At the same time, the British Liberal party was losing its role as the natural party of government, a role which it had held since the time of Peel. However, this latter change was a far less traumatic one because, unlike the change in Scotland, it did not go to the essential nature of the Party. The decline of Liberalism in Scotland is easily measured in numerical terms, whether by seats or by popular vote through the dispiriting crises of Church, Ireland and Empire. However, the real blow was psychological, the loss of the easy old assumptions of national identification. The party of 1900, in its reduced circumstances, was much more of a political fighting machine, more normal in one sense than the old Victorian party with its hazy and comfortable character. Arguably, the change was for the better. There can be no doubt that the individual talent within the party of 1900 was great<sup>ly</sup> superior to that of twenty years before. The infusion of talent in the great cabinet of 1905 that came from those thinned Liberal ranks of the turn of the century is the best evidence of that.

While the Liberal Party itself was losing its unique claim to the loyalties of Scottish voters, it is arguable that the Scots never really abandoned a predilection for a party of national expression, preferably one of Liberal cast. Toryism never really took root even in the years of greatest Liberal decline. The great battle of 1886 seemed to leave the Conservative Party as an onlooker as two

brands of Liberalism fought for the favour of the nation. While Toryism was to progressively increase its position within the unionist alliance, Scotland remained one of the very few areas of very considerable Liberal Unionist strength. Most importantly, in 1906, once divisive issues such as Ireland and South Africa were set aside, Scotland turned in an overwhelming tide back to the Liberals and maintained that level of support through 1910 into the First World War.

For Scottish politics taken as a whole, this era yields one steady and pronounced trend. This was the decline of specifically Scottish issues and their replacement by questions that transcended the national boundaries of the United Kingdom. The disestablishment dispute of 1885 stands out as the last great issue to consume Scottish political life on a purely Scottish basis. Ironically, it was to serve to lay the groundwork for the ultimate division of the old 'national' party of Scotland.

A later issue, Scottish Home Rule was probably the last important Scottish issue to enter into Scottish politics until its rebirth in recent times. For a brief spell it enjoyed great currency but it always seemed to lack a real cutting edge. Moreover, its origin was to be found in the emergence of the Irish crisis and its importance was dependent on the progress of that crisis. Scottish Home Rule attracted considerable support by



linking the major issue of the day to the natural nationalist feelings of the Scots but it never gained any compelling power of its own.

The Scots probably did take distinctive positions with regard to the leading political questions of the time, Ireland and Empire. It is difficult to find any real strain of sympathy in the Scotland of the day for the Irish cause apart from a few individuals. No real bonds were ever forged between the Irish and the Scots despite a shared position of minority status in the face of the 'predominant partner'. While other factors did contribute, without doubt, the greatest obstacle was religion reinforced by the Scottish ties to Ulster.

In the case of Imperialism, while it may well have had a particularly strong impact in Scotland, it is difficult to judge with any certainty on the basis of the evidence available. However, it seems fair to say that even if the Scots were as caught up in the Imperial tide as the English, they did so from different causes and motivations. History, pride and practicality probably counted for more than any mere ideological or emotional surge. The particular concentration of the Liberal Imperialists in Scotland was probably due more to the personal relations of the Lothian elite than to any conditions in the country.

The decline of the party in the late 19th Century was marked by a contrary and paradoxical rise in the personal power and influence of leading members of the

Scottish party within the councils of the British party. Until 1880, few Scots had made any significant impact at Westminster even in the heyday of Victorian Liberalism and massive Scottish representation. Yet the Cabinet of 1905, led by a fullblooded Scot, was originally overloaded with genuine Scottish talent.

One reason for the rise of Rosebery, Campbell-Bannerman and their fellows was the political shift in Scotland towards a division into a Unionist West and a Liberal East. The East of Scotland became one of the few regions of safe Liberal strength in Britain and, unlike most other centres of residual party strength it was essentially non-urban and moderate to conservative in instinct. The Liberalism of the East was traditional, the legacy of a personal attachment to Gladstone and its control rested with men drawn from a traditional ruling group with naturally conservative instincts. Secure in its fiefdom, that elite consolidated its strength by filling its ranks with congenial talent by being able to offer secure political futures - a rare commodity in the Liberal Party of the time.

This was still an age of politics of the elite, be it of the right or the left. Consequently Liberals in the search for credibility and respectability still tended to seek leadership from the ranks of the social elite. Lib-labism, with its infusions of new talent from the lower ranks was still in its embryonic stage, still lacking the confidence to demand or take any real share of power and authority.

Consequently, this grouping of elite Liberalism on the East Coast of Scotland could and did move naturally to the top of the old party with its thinned-out ranks.

The result was that by 1900, the Scottish Liberals had lost their national ascendancy in Scotland but had moved to a position of leadership in the British Liberal Party previously unattained and were soon to rise to even greater heights. The Eastern Scottish leadership not only had taken full command of the Scottish Party but were now extending that control to the British party.

It should also be noted that the tightened circumstances of the party seemed to draw it together into a tight 'clubbish' - family unit. The strong core of those drawn from the social elite seemed to create a natural centre of cohesiveness. Those outside this core could and did organize obstreperous campaigns and groupings which challenged the 'safe' path preferred by the East of Scotland leadership. However, at no time did any of these activities ever amount to much more than an irritant let alone meant any serious challenge to the ultimate control of the party. All of the groups and factions of the party were bound together in a strangely cohesive structure that may well have depended greatly on a shared sense of nationality to overcome any serious ideological differences. Scottish Liberals did not shun the company of their English brethren, indeed many of them were eagerly working their way up in those circles

too, but they did seem to hold out a special loyalty for the smaller and more personal world of Scottish politics. During these years, the concept of a Scottish caucus and a Scottish party had a very real meaning that went well beyond mere organizational structures and which would be unknown today. Moreover, the sheer weight of talent and influence in the structure gave this world a sense of importance that took it far away from any mere relegation to a 'Celtic Fringe'.

Scottish political life at this time did not divide into parties of the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. The peculiar circumstances of Scottish politics and society created a more complex result. After 1886, Scottish Liberalism found itself caught in the paradox of being increasingly dependent on working class votes to sustain it, while finding itself weakest in the west of Scotland where urbanization was the greatest and where the new working class radicalism was being born. The traditional party of 'reform' and the 'left' found itself overwhelmingly dominant in the conservative East while struggling to survive in those areas where the new class politics should have made it strongest. The weakness of the West lay in a combination of traditional Tory strength, greater social polarization on the part of the upper ranks, the effect of religious loyalties and prejudices amongst the lower classes and the weakness and increasing obsolescence of the old Liberal leadership in the region. As a result, in the

traditional conflict in the Scottish party between a conservative East and a radical West, the balance shifted considerably to the former. In the meantime, the anachronistic 'radicals' of the West were allowing a growing and increasingly dangerous gap to open up between the Liberal Party and the new movements that were springing up out of the ferment of the Clyde Valley. It is notable that the supposedly more conservative Liberals of the East, like C-B and the Roseberyites were often more open to the influence of the new social politics than the Liberals of the West who stood in the very heart of the urban areas which provided the source of those issues.

In Scotland, however, the tilt of Liberal power and control to the conservative East was creating long-term problems. The emasculation of the West, leaving it dominated by a class of out of date old Victorian 'radicals' unsympathetic to and uncomprehending of the new political forces boiling up about them was a certain recipe for trouble. Ultimately, the result was the creation of a menacing gap between a party dependent, in the long run, on working class support and the aspirations of those working class voters. By the time of the First World War, the Scottish Liberals were to be the most 'traditionally' Liberal section of the party and the most fiercely hostile to any accommodation with Labour. In the wake of the war, the consequences of this would be disastrous. It

may well be the final irony that the seeds of that 'catastrophe' were planted in the course of the swelling success of individual Scottish Liberals in the last years of the 19th Century.

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