

BRITISH CONSERVATISM AND THE PRIMROSE LEAGUE: THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF
POPULAR POLITICS, 1883-1901

Diana Elaine Sheets

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DIANA ELAINE SHEETS

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ABSTRACT

BRITISH CONSERVATISM AND THE PRIMROSE LEAGUE: THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF POPULAR POLITICS, 1883-1901

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This thesis has two principal objectives: to trace the organizational development of the Primrose League between 1883 and 1901 and to examine its role in creating a popular basis of support for Conservatism, thereby minimizing any losses incurred to the party by the enactment of the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 and the 1885 Reform Act. A major reassessment is also provided of the Marquis of Salisbury, the leader of the Tories during the years under review. It is argued that Salisbury played a fundamental role in formulating the tactics and strategy of the modern Conservative party, the predominance of which is unchallenged to this day.

Existing works by Ostrogorski and Robb provide only a general overview of the development of the Primrose League, omitting a detailed examination of the Minutes, the papers of Conservative party leaders, newspapers, and many primary and secondary sources. Here the first systematic study of the origins and development of the Primrose League between 1883 and 1901 is given. The first detailed examination of the demographics of the membership is also provided, based on the 1888 and 1899 Rolls of Habitations and selective membership rosters maintained by local associations.

These sources suggest that the Primrose League achieved its greatest level of participation in 1883, when it claimed over a half

million active members. In general the Primrose League was best represented in regions where the Conservative party was active, although its strength in the East Midlands testified to its ability to flourish in areas noted for their Liberal, Nonconformist character. The rank and file membership comprised predominantly members of the lower middle and middle classes, whereas the leadership was drawn largely from influential local notables.

The thesis concludes with an examination of the political subculture nurtured by the League, an illustration of some local studies, and a summary of the League's performance prior to the First World War.

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PREFACE

For a scholar embarking on her first sustained endeavor in historical research, the challenge of undertaking a detailed analysis of the Primrose League is unmistakable. It offers the opportunity to address some of the central issues in late nineteenth and twentieth century political history. Prominent among these are the social, political, and geographical foundations of popular conservatism, extra-parliamentary factors responsible for the transformation of the Conservative party to the preeminent ruling power in government, and the role of the Marquis of Salisbury, the Prime Minister throughout most of the years under study. The first two themes are exemplified in the evolution of the League while the third is the subject of a major reassessment.

An investigation of the Primrose League also offers an increasingly rare chance to students of modern British political history, the absence of an existing systematic study. I have attempted to fill that void by providing both a qualitative and quantitative account of the growth and development of the Primrose League.

In the course of my research I had an opportunity seldom conferred upon a doctoral candidate, the chance to assist in the transfer of a privately held collection of documents to a public archive. In this case, the papers of the Primrose League, the most extensive collection of late nineteenth century manuscripts available relating to the Conservative party, were conveyed from a storage

facility in London's East End to the Conservative Party Archives of the Bodleian Library in Oxford. A special debt of gratitude is owed to Lord Blake, Provost of The Queen's College, Oxford as well as Lord Home and Lord Mowbray and Stourton for having generously contributed their time and effort to ensure the timely acquisition of these papers.

Particular thanks are owed to D.G. Vaisey, Keeper of Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian, Stephen Stacey, Archivist of the Conservative Party Archives, and various members of the staff for their kindness in making the documents available to me immediately upon their arrival at Oxford, a courtesy indispensable to the completion of this thesis. My appreciation also extends to the executive of the Primrose League for their efforts which enabled me to examine the papers.

In obtaining archival materials necessary to the completion of the dissertation, I was fortunate to be able to enlist the assistance of a number of individuals and institutions including Joan West, the librarian for the Conservative Party Research Department, and Miss Ann Hay, Secretary to the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association. Miss Hay generously made available, not only the collection of Scottish Grand Council records, but, for a good portion of my stay in Edinburgh, the use of her office as well. A number of archivists rendered valuable assistance including Miss M.M. Stewart at Churchill College, R.H. Harcourt Williams of Hatfield House, and Dr. B.S. Benedikz of Birmingham University Library. I am also grateful for the opportunity to examine papers from the estates of Lord Balfour and the late Duke of Beaufort.

Materials were also consulted at the British Library, the London School of Economics, the Public Record Office, the House of Lords Records Office, the National Register of Archives for England and Scotland, and the Institute for Historical Research at the University of London. Reference sources were examined at the Victoria Library in London, the Navy League, the League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers, and Rhodes House. Librarians at both the Gloucester Public Library and the Birmingham Reference Library provided generous assistance as did the archivists and their assistants at the Dorset, Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Gloucestershire, and Cumbria Records Offices.

I am indebted to a number of scholars for their advice regarding my thesis, particularly during its early stage of formation. Arno J. Mayer originally proposed the Primrose League to me as a topic worthy of a dissertation and provided great encouragement during the preliminary phase of my graduate studies. Michael Wills, a television news reporter for I.T.V., generously provided me with material on various aspects of the Primrose League. Martin Pugh, Henry Pelling, R.F. Foster, Bernard Porter, Jonathan Steinberg, Peter Clarke, Graham Howes, and R.K. Webb also offered valuable advice.

It is my great misfortune that the untimely death of S.E. Koss, who began the supervision of thesis, prevented him from overseeing its completion. I am, however, fortunate in having had the assistance of four individuals who donated generously of their time, helping to shape and improve the contours of the final draft of the dissertation. In

this regard, I acknowledge my sponsor, J.M. Bean; my Second Reader, Allan Silver; and members of my committee, Dr. David Cannadine and Professor Michael Hanagan. Any errors in historical fact or judgment which remain are mine alone.

Financial support was provided in the form of a "Pre-Dissertation Grant" from the Council of European Studies at Columbia University.

A number of British friends contributed to making my stay in the United Kingdom memorable. Charlotte Caplan generously took me in as a guest in her house in London for more than three months, an intrusion met with repeated acts of kindness. Professor Frank Fallside and his wife Maureen greatly enhanced my stay in Cambridge through their many cordial invitations and the thoughtful gesture of obtaining dining privileges on my behalf at Trinity Hall. Adrian and Valerie Johnson and their daughter Chloe provided a warm hearth, friendly cheer, and great intellectual stimulation as did the support of two fellow students, Lynn Thomas and Lois Rutherford.

My greatest debt, however, is to my husband, Stephen E. Levinson, without whose unwavering support and encouragement this thesis would not have been possible.

INTRODUCTION

The Primrose League was a by-product of late nineteenth century electoral reforms which unevenly and somewhat hesitantly ushered in the democratic era. The much heralded legislative acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884 were a piecemeal process of enfranchisement, gradually extending voting privileges over time to a widening sector of the adult male population. Not until 1918 could the electoral system be characterized as genuinely approaching a democratic franchise for adult males and still another eleven years elapsed before women were accorded comparable rights.

Despite recent historical interpretations suggesting the gradual and transitory nature of suffrage reform,¹ for many individuals of the late Victorian age the period appeared to be characterized by an ever accelerating rush toward democracy which, for the Conservatives at least, was to be met by sustained and forceful opposition. Their outlook was demonstrated most visibly in the leader of their party, the Marquis of Salisbury, whose function became that of

1 This is indicated by the shift in focus of scholarly research during the past few years from the act of 1832 toward the 1867, 1884, 1918, and even 1928 reforms. F.B. Smith, The Making of the Second Reform Bill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966). Maurice Cowling, 1867: Disraeli, Gladstone, and Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967). Andrew Jones, The Politics of Reform, 1884 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). Neal Blewett, "The Franchise in the United Kingdom," Past and Present vol. 32 (December 1965), pp. 27-56. Martin Pugh, Electoral Reform in War and Peace 1906-1918 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). Martin Pugh, "Women's Suffrage in Britain 1867-1928," The Historical Association, General Series 97 (1980).

a brake to the frightful locomotive-like influences of the leveling, popular democracy. The Primrose League with its quasi-medieval titles and orders, its reformulation of deference, and its popular call to arms in support of broadly "conservative"² aims was to become the great Conservative weapon of the late nineteenth century, a veritable army of supporters to counteract the onslaught of the mass, democratic age.

The League was founded in November, 1883 by key Fourth party members,³ ostensibly in memory of the recently deceased leader of the Conservative party, Lord Beaconsfield. Its primary function, however, as envisioned by Lord Randolph Churchill, was to assist him in his bid for the Conservative party leadership. The Primrose League was intended as Churchill's caucus, the Conservatives' response to the Liberal machine politics introduced by Joseph Chamberlain in Birmingham in the 1860's and extended nationally in 1877 through the establishment of the National Liberal Federation.

However, with the rapid expansion of the League, particularly during the General Election years 1885-86, came changes. The Primrose League quickly evolved from a vehicle for Churchill's drive for power to a quasi-independent bastion of support for the traditional

² The terms "conservative" and "conservatism" written in the lower case refer to those individuals who, while not necessarily aligned with the Conservative party, nevertheless, maintained indirect ties with party officials either in their voting patterns or through their support of political associations endorsing a broadly Conservative stance.

³ Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, M.P.; Lord Randolph Churchill, M.P.; John Gorst, Q.C., M.P.; and Sir Alfred Slade, Bt.

Conservative party leadership. This shift was indicated in the League's growing official membership figures which rose from 11,366 in 1885 to 565,861 in 1887 to over one million in 1891 and more than two million by 1910.⁴ The numbers suggest what was in fact the case, a large popular basis of support which extended beyond a personal allegiance to any single member of the Conservative party.

It was through this tremendous growth at the grass-roots level that the League was able to serve as a potent political subculture for nurturing Conservative sympathies, enabling the elite party to come to terms with democracy. No other organization was to rival its influence in late Victorian Britain, and save for its European counterpart from the left in Germany, the Social Democratic Party, it had no continental equivalent.

With its host of glittering notables at its apex and a loyal multi-class representation at its base, the Primrose League became the principal carrier and fortifier of Conservative principles throughout the nation. It was the party's answer to popular democracy. The League, in alliance with the Marquis of Salisbury's leadership from above, provided a constant and sustained effort against the quickening pace of reform. It nurtured within its ranks substantial segments of the newly enfranchised electorate predisposed to "conservatism." The years 1883 to 1901 were to be the most critical years in its

⁴ The figures provided are contained in Janet Robb's, The Primrose League (New York: AMS Press, 1968), Appendix III, a reprint of the 1942 edition published by Columbia University Press. The numbers are taken from reports of the annual Grand Habitations and can be found in The Primrose League Gazette, 1 September 1899, p. 9; May, 1910, p. 4.

development. It was during this period that the foundations for a popularly constituted Conservative electorate were established and it is here that we must look for the causes underlying the predominance of the Conservative party in the course of twentieth century British history.⁵

I

At present there exist only two major studies of the League, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties (volume 1, 1902) by M. Ostrogorski⁶ and The Primrose League (1942) by Janet Robb.⁷ In many respects, Ostrogorski's study sets the stage, although not the tone, for future research on the subject. His reaction to contemporary British political society is one of restrained horror at what he perceives to be the debilitating effects of modern, democratic

^b Two sociological studies provide an analysis of the factors responsible for the overwhelming triumph of the Conservative party since the Third Reform Act. Robert McKenzie and Allan Silver, Angels in Marble (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). Eric A. Nordlinger, The Working-Class Tories (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

⁶ M. Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties vol. 1 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1922). More recently Seymour Martin Lipset has edited and abridged a new edition which includes an introduction on the significance of Ostrogorski's method. Idem, "Ostrogorski and the Analytical Approach to the Comparative Study of Political Parties," in Moisei Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, vol. 1 (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964), pp. ix-lxv.

⁷ Robb's study originally was submitted to Columbia University as a doctoral dissertation in 1942 before being published that same year as part of the university series: Studies in History, Economics and Public Law.

government. It is, for him, a system based upon oligarchical and authoritarian party management resting atop a mass base. The caucus in particular is portrayed as the most characteristic institution of the new machine age; the Primrose League serving as the Conservative manifestation of this tendency.

While Ostrogorski's political outlook necessarily omits a dispassionate investigation of his subject, he, nevertheless, provides a perceptive analysis of the League. The study captures the essential flavor of the organization, although it distorts the League's influence and import by neglecting to show its strong ties with traditional party leaders, its continuity with the previous associations, and its adaptation of modern institutions to reforge older, existing practices.

In The Primrose League, Janet Robb extends the basic contours of Ostrogorski's analysis. However, she sees the League as performing a more evolutionary function, embodying the transition from older authoritarian forms of rule to modern democratic representation. Women play a key role in this process, not only in advocating Conservative principles, but also in seeking to present their views and tentatively stake their claims for citizenship⁸ in the modern state.

⁸ Citizenship is defined here in the sociological tradition of T.H. Marshall and Reinhard Bendix. It refers to voting rights granted within a larger context of social and civil rights pursued by individuals in western industrial societies. T.H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," Class, Citizenship, and Social Development (New York: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 71-72, 78, 83-84, 109-10; published originally in England in 1963 under the title Sociology at the Crossroads. The essay was presented as the Marshall Lecture in Cambridge in 1949. Reinhard Bendix, Nation-Building and Citizenship (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 2nd ed., pp. 89-90, 92, 94, 96, 105, 112, 126.

A third scholar, Martin Pugh of Newcastle University in England, is currently engaged in writing another study of the Primrose League. His work promises to provide us with a study of its development from the 1880's through the 1920's. It will draw on a variety of historical manuscripts and recent publications which link the Primrose League to the actions of the Conservative party, the National Union, and the efforts of women to extend their political influence.⁹

While my dissertation is bound to intersect with the themes developed by other historians, there seemed little point in providing still another generalized study of the Primrose League. Instead, I have sought to explore areas which, by and large, have not been addressed by examining the organizational means by which the Primrose League developed a mass political base for conservatism. I have chosen an approximately twenty year period beginning with the 1880's and ending with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. These years are the most crucial in the formation and development of the League and in the transformation of the Tory party from minority representation to the preeminent political force in Britain.

The Edwardian era marked the waning influence of the Primrose League as an "independent" extra-parliamentary institution. Although its numbers continued to grow on paper, its vitality had been ebbing since the mid-1890's. A host of smaller, diverse organizations sprang

⁹ My assessment of Martin Pugh's work is based on my conversation with him in the summer of 1982 and winter of 1983-84; his lecture given at Cambridge in February, 1984; and the draft outline of his proposed book, a copy of which he kindly gave me.

up in the early twentieth century, in effect, challenging the predominance of the League through their spontaneity, initiative, and criticism of existing political institutions and events. During this period the League came to serve as an official organ of the party, a role formalized in 1913. For the above reasons, I see the last years of Queen Victoria's reign as the crucial period for assessing the significance of the Primrose League.

II

This thesis is divided into two sections. The first four chapters provide a chronology of the Primrose League between the years 1883 and 1901, focusing primarily on its operations as a bureaucratic organization serving the extra-parliamentary interests of the Conservative party. Chapter One provides a description of the early years (1883-84) when the League, relatively small in operations and funds, served the interests of Lord Randolph Churchill.

Chapters Two and Three trace the development of the Primrose League between 1885 and 1886, describing the means by which it became Britain's preeminent political pressure group, overseen by the Conservative Prime Minister, the Marquis of Salisbury. Between 1885 and 1886, Salisbury assumed formal control over the Primrose League. This action, in effect, circumvented one of the principal avenues available to Churchill in making a bid for the leadership of the Conservative party.

The fourth chapter focuses on three principal themes central to the 1890's. The first of these points considered concerns the overriding and growing importance women assumed in the management and operations of the Primrose League. Another key issue addressed is the increasingly heroic efforts made to offset stagnating and even diminishing rates of growth. Finally, the importance of stressing the specter of imperial decline as a means of eliciting support for the organization and its parent party is examined.

The second part of the thesis provides an analysis of selective topics. Among these are the structure of the League, its creation of a political subculture, an examination of some local studies, and an assessment of the declining fortunes of the organization in the early years of the twentieth century. Chapter Five presents the first detailed investigation ever provided on the actual number of active members, their social class representation, and their geographic distribution throughout the country. The study is based primarily upon an examination of the 1888 and 1899 Rolls of Habitations and three local registers of Habitations. The results suggest that the Primrose League generally conformed to the geographic and social class representation characteristic of the Conservative party.

The development of a popular subculture is the focus of Chapter Six. In an effort to nurture the creation of a mass basis of support for the Tories, the Primrose League set about to redefine deference and inaugurate a tradition which would sustain and perpetuate a system of conservative values into the twentieth century. One of the principal tools in achieving this end was the use of literature as a medium for political propaganda.

Through an examination of a number of local studies, Chapter Seven seeks to demonstrate the continuity of operations, selective regional factors which come into play, and the impact of Habitations in circumventing the limitations imposed by the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883. The Epilogue focuses on the causes underlying the declining influence exerted by the League in the 1900's challenged, as it were, by a new assortment of independent, extra-parliamentary interest groups vying for popular support.

In undertaking this study, I have relied primarily on the manuscript sources of the Primrose League originally housed in its Central Office. These include two volumes of minutes maintained by the Grand Council for the years 1883-86 and 1886-87 as well as a special minute book for 1886-1900. I also relied heavily upon the four volumes of minutes kept by the Ladies Grand Council representing the years 1885-86; 1886-89; 1890-94; 1894-1901.

In addition to the above stated minutes of the Primrose League, I also consulted four volumes of Grand Council minutes covering the years 1900-32 and the minutes recorded by the Scott Habitation (1897-1909), a Scottish association. The above sources, in addition to an extensive collection of The Primrose League Gazette and three Rolls of Habitations for 1886, 1904, and 1912 represent the entire collection of materials available for the period preceding the First World War at the Conservative Party Archives located in the Bodleian Library.

Newspapers likewise formed an important source for my dissertation, most particularly The Primrose Record (1885-87), The Primrose League Gazette (1887-1901), England (1880-98), The Morning

Post (1885-1901), and The Times (1883-1901). All of the above publications along with The Primrose, a local Bournemouth paper published between 1886-87 were examined at the Colindale branch of the British Library.

The papers of several prominent statesmen were consulted. Among these were the correspondence and records retained by the Marquis of Salisbury, W.E. Gladstone, Lord Randolph Churchill, the Earl of Iddesleigh, A.J. Balfour, and Joseph Chamberlain. These archives and others, however, yielded little.

More fruitful was my examination of local sources. The records of the Scottish Grand Council contained at the office of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association in Edinburgh were especially useful. Materials derived from Habitations and retained by Gloucestershire, Lancashire, Dorset, Hertfordshire, and Cumbria Records Offices, as well as, the Birmingham Reference and Gloucester Public libraries were also of interest.

While my use of documents appears in some instances to overlap with the literature examined by both Ostrogorski and Robb, their accounts of the League are so generalized as to render the minute books and newspapers consulted an unexamined source. For this reason I have concentrated on these materials as the focus of my thesis, omitting a broader, more sweeping treatment of my subject matter. For it is through these sources that I am able to provide the first precise and detailed account of the operations of the Primrose League between 1883 and 1901.

. CHAPTER ONE

Early Years, 1883-1884

Makes Mighty Things from Small Beginnings Grow
John Dryden, Annus Mirabilis (1667)

I doubt the Primrose League coming to anything--
there is too much unlimited obedience to suit
English tactics.

Marquis of Salisbury to Sir Stafford
Northcote (23 December 1883)

I told Wolff I did not like declarations of
secrecy and obedience to persons, unknown and
that it struck me that there was very little
"Libertas" in his Primrose League. It seems to
be something between the Ribbon Association and
the "Ancient Order of Buffaloes," though I did
not submit this comparison to its author.

Sir Stafford Northcote to Salisbury
(Christmas Day, 1883)

I

Between 1883 and 1884 the leadership of the Primrose League was generally characterized by its affiliation with Fourth party members and other, less prominent, political figures represented on the Council of the National Union who were known to be loyal supporters of Lord Randolph Churchill. While archival sources reveal relatively little regarding the underlying motivations and intentions of the founders of the League, political events and actions of the executive suggest it was conceived to serve as a popular base of support for Churchill in his bid to assume control over the Conservative party.

This chapter will focus on two principal areas: the political circumstances which contributed to the formation of the Primrose League and the organizational features characteristic of the association's growth and development. The increased role accorded Salisbury and official party leaders over the operations of the League by the end of 1884 will also be addressed.

The Primrose League was an outgrowth of the political transformations influencing late Victorian society. The reforms of 1832 and 1867 had succeeded in gradually expanding the male electorate to include members of the middle class and a significant portion of the urban working class.¹ However, the basis of power in mid-Victorian society had not fundamentally altered.² The aristocracy still continued to dominate the political and social institutions in the

¹ The 1832 Reform Act, traditionally viewed as having extended the franchise to the urban middle class, only increased the United Kingdom electorate from 435,000 to 813,000 in an adult male population of approximately six million. The limited nature of the reform was reinforced by the overwhelming representation of seats in the counties and small boroughs where aristocratic influence was predominant. Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 313-14. The principal beneficiaries of the 1867 Act were urban male workers who paid an annual rent of ten pounds or above. Approximately sixty-three to sixty-six percent of adult men were thereby made eligible to vote. Martin Pugh, The Making of Modern British Politics (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 5. The legislation effectively added 938,000 voters to an electorate of 1,056,000 in England and Wales. Perkin, p. 318.

² H.J. Hanham, Elections and Party Management (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), p. xviii; a reprint of the 1959 Longmans, Green and Company edition. F.M.L. Thompson, English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 1-2, 48, 62-63; a reprint of the 1963 edition. W.L. Guttsman, The British Political Elite (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 60, 74, 82-83, 89-90. David Cannadine, Lords and Landlords (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1980), pp. 21-25.

country, albeit with the tacit support of the middle class which, for the moment at least, was largely restricted in its direct political influence to extra-parliamentary pressure groups^ and therefore found it necessary to accept the dictates of reform or restraint imposed from above.

The willingness on the part of the landed elites to incorporate some wealthy industrial magnates and socially prominent individuals within and around its ranks also served to bolster and prolong its influence well into the nineteenth century at a time when the economic predominance of the middle class hinted it was the rightful heir to the reins of power.⁴ Even the Ballot Act of 1872, which provided for secret voting and by implication freedom from undue influence at the polls, failed to have a significant effect on the existing patterns of deferential behavior for at least a decade following its passage.⁵

³ D.A. Hamer, The Politics of Electoral Pressure (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977), pp. vii, 3-4, 6.

⁴ Guttsman, The British Political Elite, pp. 60, 77-78, 80, 82-84, 89-90. Idem, "Social Stratification and Political Elite," The British Journal of Sociology vol. 11, no. 2 (June 1960), pp. 142-43, 147. T.H. Hollingsworth, "The Demography of the British Peerage," Population Studies Supplement to Part II, vol. 18, no. 2 (1964-65), pp. 9-10. David Thomas, "The Social Origins of Marriage Partners of the British Peerage in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," Population Studies vol. 26, no. 1 (March 1972), pp. 102-09. C.B. Otley, "The Social Origins of British Army Officers," The Sociological Review New Series, vol. 18, no. 2 (July 1970), pp. 215-16, 236.

⁵ D.C. Moore, "Political Morality in Mid-Nineteenth Century England: Concepts, Norms, Violations," Victoria! Studies vol. 13, no. 1 (September, 1969), pp. 31-32, 34-35. Idem, "Social Structure, Political Structure, and Public Opinion in Mid-Victorian England" in Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain, ed. Robert Robson (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1967), pp. 56-57.

Given the tendency of political reforms to achieve their impact on the society often a decade or two following enactment, it is hardly surprising that the full weight of early and mid-Victorian innovations only came to be felt in their entirety in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This period was to be the battleground over which the war for popular democracy was waged. It was during this time that the aristocracy was forced to yield significant ground within one of its most prized sanctuaries, the parliamentary institutions of government. A growing number of professionals, wealthy industrialists, and their descendants were admitted into the House of Commons, the Cabinet, and even the House of Lords.⁶

The march toward democracy was evident in the electoral reforms of the 1880's: the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883, the expansion of the franchise (1884), and the readjustment of electoral districts (1885). These acts succeeded, respectively, in eliminating the worst aspects of corruption associated with election campaigns, notably treating and excessive expenditure; in extending voting privileges to the counties to include most male agricultural workers; and in modifying voting

⁶ W.L. Guttsman, "Aristocracy and the Middle Class in the British Political Elite 1886-1916," The British Journal of Sociology vol. 5, no. 1 (March 1954), pp. 20-21, 23-24. J.P. Cornford, "The Parliamentary Foundations of the Hotel Cecil," in Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain, pp. 268-69, 277, 282-83, 289, 305. Harold Perkin, "Who Runs Britain? Elites in British Society since 1880," The Structured Crowd (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), pp. 159-61. Ralph E. Pumphey, "The Introduction of Industrialists into the British Peerage: A Study in Adaption of a Social Institution," American Historical Review vol. 60, no. 1 (October 1959), pp. 8-14. Gerald Macmillan, Honours for Sale (London: Richards Press, 1954), pp. 220, 244. H.J. Hanham, "The Sale of Honours in Late Victorian England," Victorian Studies vol. 3, no. 3 (March 1960), pp. 277-78.

districts to reflect the distribution of the population throughout the country.

The social consequences brought on by the reforms of the 1880's, like those which had preceded them, took time to be fully realized. But the implications were clear: democracy was stubbornly making its way forward and if the aristocracy wished to survive it must regroup and adapt its tactics to the challenge of changing times. This it was able to do through the aegis of the Conservative party leader, Marquis of Salisbury.

Existing studies of Salisbury, as Robert Blake noted in 1970, have generally tended to de-emphasize the extent of his power and influence while in office.⁷ Instead, they have focused on his stated preference for the management of the Foreign Office over the duties of the prime-ministership and have stressed his limitations and reticence in directing and influencing members of the Cabinet, the Lords, or even errant parliamentarians. Similarly, Salisbury's failure to arouse the emotional fervor of his audiences has often been interpreted as an indication of his lack of rapport with the public. While there is some justification for these claims, on balance, they have tended to minimize or neglect the triumphs of one of the most successful political leaders of modern Britain.⁸

⁷ Robert Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill (London: Fontana, 1979), p. 130; reprint, published originally in 1970 by Eyre and Spottiswoode.

⁸ For the traditional interpretation see Lady Gwendolen Cecil, Biographical Studies of the Life and Political Character of Robert Third Marquis of Salisbury (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948); printed for private circulation. Idem, Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury, 4 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921-1932). Robert Taylor, Lord Salisbury (London: Allen Lane, 1975). Peter Marsh, The

Salisbury might not at first glance appear to be the individual most suited to meet the challenge of the "democratic" age. He was the third son of the second Marquis of Salisbury; blessed with a distinguished lineage on both sides of the family dating back to the sixteenth century. His acutely searing wit, his intellectual grasp of issues, his aloofness, pessimism, and reclusive tendencies were not necessarily the qualities that come to mind as those most suited for the task at hand.

Despite these apparent disadvantages, Salisbury was able to put his considerable talents to good use. As the third son of a nobleman he had not expected to inherit the title and consequently had acquired valuable practical experience first as a paid journalist and subsequently as a member of parliament before assuming the family title in the House of Lords in 1868. His intellectual attributes when combined with the hard lessons learned in the political arena, produced a statesman with an extraordinary sense of timing, a thorough knowledge of the limits of the possible, and an ever-evolving pragmatism in strategy and outlook which enabled him to take on the daunting challenge that lay before him.

Salisbury was aided in his efforts by a gradual shift in public sentiment during the 1880's. The relative decline of British economic performance vis-a-vis her chief competitors, the United States and Germany, the increasing competition for territory which impinged on or appeared to threaten her imperial possessions, the setbacks in Egypt

Discipline of Popular Government (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978).

marked most dramatically in the death of General Gordon, and the threat of Irish independence, all served to buttress a growing popular feeling of conservatism within the country.

Salisbury was a representative par excellence of the aristocratic resistance to forces making for change. He was therefore in many respects uniquely suited, if not by temperament, then by outlook, to represent a people who looked to strong national leadership as a means of staving off the dismemberment of the empire and the displacement of Britain as the world's greatest power. While many individuals, groups, and institutions combined to provide a grass-roots basis for this effort, none would prove more vigilant than the Primrose League.

II

The League was the brainchild of Henry Drummond Wolff. It was reputedly inspired by the public tribute paid to the memory of Disraeli on the second anniversary of his death, 19 April 1883. Participants, including individuals of both sexes and members of the two Houses of Parliament, gathered before a newly erected statue of Disraeli located in Parliament Square. There they met to recall the contributions made by their departed statesman. Most individuals attending were adorned with primrose, said to be Disraeli's favorite flower. Wolff, entering the Commons' chamber later that afternoon, viewed the entire body of Conservative M.P.'s wearing primroses in their buttonholes and reportedly determined to form a Primrose League.

The association was conceived as a sort of Masonic lodge, secret and select in character and designed to assist Lord Randolph Churchill in his bid for the Conservative party leadership. It gradually took shape in a series of meetings held in the early fall during which Lord Randolph Churchill, M.P.; Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, M.P.; John Eldon Gorst, Q.C., M.P.; and Sir Alfred Slade, Bt.; framed the general principles and organization of the League. On 17 November 1883 it was initiated in the card room of the Carlton Club.⁹

The Primrose Tory League, as it was originally titled, was an ancillary organ to the Fourth party and the National Union. Of the four founding members, the first three named individuals were key participants in the Fourth party. All were active supporters of Churchill on the Council of the National Union during his quest for its prominence within the Conservative party hierarchy (1883-1884).¹⁰ At the initial meeting the four affirmed their loyalty to the association through an oath devised by Wolff which committed them to the maintenance of religion, the "Estates of the Realm," the British empire, the sovereign, and secrecy.

I, A. B., declare on my honour and faith that I will devote my best ability to the maintenance of Religion, of the Estates of the Realm, and of the Imperial Ascendancy of Great Britain; that I will keep secret all matters that may come to my knowledge as a member of the Primrose Tory League; and that consistently with

⁹ Harold E. Gorst, "The Story of the Fourth Party," The Nineteenth Century and After (July-December, 1902), p. 1044. Winston Spencer Churchill, Lord Randolph Churchill (London: Macmillan Comp., 1906), pp. 256-58. Robb, The Primrose League, pp. 36-38.

¹⁰ "National Union Annual Conference Minutes," 23 July 1884; NUA 2/1/3.

my allegiance to the Sovereign of these Realms, I will obey all orders coming from the constituted authority of the League for the advancement of these objects.H

They then established themselves members of the executive body, the Ruling Council. A second meeting, held in the Carlton Club on November twenty-third, admitted four more men, entitled Knights, to the Council. The newest members, Colonel Burnaby, Percy Mitford, Dixon Hartland, M.P., and Stone, were also represented on the Council of the National Union and actively backed Churchill.¹² Lord Randolph was designated Ruling Councillor, formal head of the association.¹³

By mid-December the League was begun in earnest. The statutes and ordinances had been secretly printed, official records were now being kept, and a two room office had been obtained on Essex Street in the Strand, and a registrar was appointed.¹⁴ As the statutes make clear,¹⁵ organizational emphasis was beginning to shift away from individual recruitment achieved at the Central Office to the establishment of "Habitations," local branches where groups consisting of a minimum of thirteen Knights could join and which were affiliated with the London executive.

11 Robb, The Primrose League, p. 38.

12 "National Union Annual Conference Minutes," 23 July 1884; NUA 2/1/3.

13 "A Short History of the League" contained in the Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 1883-1886.

¹⁴ "A Short History" and Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 15 December 1883.

¹⁵ A copy of the original statutes is contained in Appendix I of Robb's The Primrose League, pp. 221-25 and is taken from The Primrose League. Its Rise, Progress, and Constitution (London: Hatchards, 1887), a copy of which is in the British Library.

At this stage of development, the only category of membership was that of Knight. It was subdivided into two classifications: Knight Harbinger and Knight Companion, the latter group eligible to apply for a Harbinger designation after a year of service. Members of the clergy assumed a separate title, Knight Almoner, comparable to Knight Companion. Entrance fees and annual "Tribute" were set at a half-crown apiece, the yearly contribution payable by the nineteenth of April.

The executive, as defined by the statutes, consisted of the Grand Councillor followed by the three Executive Councillors, and the Ruling Council. Randolph Churchill occupied the position of Grand Councillor, designated as a three year appointment. Gorst, Wolff, and Slade were Executive Councillors, posts subject to annual elections. The Ruling Council, as of the end of December, consisted of thirteen members. They included the above named officers as well as Councillors Burnaby, Mitford, Dixon Hartland, and Stone in addition to the newest recruits, Sir Algernon Borthwick, Sir Henry Hoare, Bt., Seager Hunt, William Hardman, and F.D. Thomas, the Registrar.¹⁶

The constitution of the members of the Council suggests a marked Birmingham connection as represented by Burnaby and Stone and an equally vital Morning Post affiliation as indicated in the participation of the newspaper's editors Borthwick and Hardman. All the members of the executive, with the possible exception of Seager Hunt, were strong supporters of Randolph Churchill in his bid for party

¹⁶ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 22 December 1883.

leadership.^{1?} yhe Registrar was responsible for all communications issued from the Central Office.

An elaborate system of rules governing the League was set forth in the statutes. Habitations were to keep a roll of members, set local Tributes, and recruit in their respective areas. Habitation applications and Knight enrollments were to be sent to the Central Office together with the payment of four crowns or five shillings, respectively. A Warrant or diploma would be returned stamped with the seal of the League, the issue number, date, and certified by the Registrar. Correspondence from the Central Office to the local Habitation was termed "Precept"; that from the association to the executive was labeled "Representation."

The seal of the League consisted of three primroses; the badges had an imperial crown encircled by primroses. Officers and Knights had their own specific types of diplomas, badges, and ribbons commensurate with their rank. Badges were required to be worn at all meetings and members were instructed to show their allegiance to the League by wearing primroses on the nineteenth of April.

The League's motto, "Imperium et Libertas," was taken from the Guildhall speech given by Disraeli in November of 1879. It referred to the virtues of strong government founded on a commitment to empire, patriotism, and the diplomatic sagacity to defend these interests

*⁷ In two out of three major amendments considered by the Council of the National Union, Seager Hunt voted with Lord Percy, Ashmead Bartlett, and the "establishment" camp. "National Union Annual Conference," 23 July 1884; NUA 2/1/3.

without the loss of personal liberties at home.^{1**} Disraeli's phrase has generally been interpreted over the years to refer to a policy favoring a strong empire combined with a commitment to social reform, trademarks of Disraelian Tory Democracy.¹⁹ The League in adopting the term shifted the focus to a union of all social classes working together toward the promotion of a strong "constitution"^{2*}) and a vital empire.

The political functions of the League were made explicit in statutes ten and twelve. In effect the association was designated a voluntary canvassing agency for the use of the Conservative party, a means of circumventing the restrictions imposed by the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883.

In all towns and districts under a Habitation one or more Knights shall be assigned to sub-districts. Such sub-districts shall not contain more than one hundred houses. It will be the duty of such Knights to promote to the best of their ability the doctrines of the League throughout their sub-district, to obtain information as to the views and position of each inhabitant, details useful for registration, and to make reports on these and other subjects of importance

^{*8} William Flavelle Monypenny and George Earle Buckle, The Life of Benjamin Disraeli (New York: Macmillan Comp., 1929), pp. 1366-67; a revised edition.

^{!9} This paper will assume that the moderate and even strong "Cowlingsque" position on Tory Democracy—that it was motivated more out of a desire for power and a need for a popular base than from any enthusiastic wish to transform the social order—is essentially correct. Nevertheless, one should not presume that because of this the approach was any less effective in extending and broadening the popular basis of support for the Conservative party than if it had endorsed a Radical program.

²⁰ "Constitution" as defined by the League is an amorphous term, by turns applying to the nation and the preservation of all that is perceived as fundamental to British institutions.

at the meetings of the Habitation. During any public election the Habitation will meet every evening, each Knight bringing a report of his proceedings during the day. Monthly reports to the Habitations, and during election time daily reports shall be forwarded by the Ruling Councils of the Habitations to the Registrar.²¹

Statute twelve made clear that any Knight or Councillor found guilty of corrupt or illegal practices was to be "degraded and expelled from the League."²² His name was to be erased from the Habitation roll and Ruling Council rolls and the reason stated for his removal.

The statutes give the impression of a fairly well formulated organization emanating from the center to the "periphery."²³ In fact little more existed by December than the bare-bones structure of the League, fortified by the personal support and enthusiasm of Churchill's close allies. No Habitations were formed as yet; membership was confined to personal persuasion; and the fees were generally beyond the means of the working class. Political clauses relating to canvassing remained, for the moment, fantasy and swagger; a dream and a boast of a grass-roots organization then unknown to the public. These claims likewise served as a potential smokescreen of official aims and

²¹ Robb, The Primrose League, p. 223, statute ten.

²² Ibid., statute twelve.

²³ The terms "center" and "periphery" were also utilized by Feuchtwanger in explaining the transformation of the Conservative party in the mid-1880's from an elitist organization to one based on the popular support, above all, of the middle classes. For him the process was one of dictation from the center outward with little influence exerted at the level of the local constituency, despite its affiliation with the National Union. Thus it would seem that the Primrose League duplicated the essential framework of its parent party, but with a larger popular base. E.J. Feuchtwanger, Disraeli, Democracy and the Tory Party (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 190.

purposes from behind which to launch a subterranean assault upon the party leadership.

Despite the obvious obstacles in the way of League success at the end of the year, steps were being taken to remedy the situation. To this end, plans were made to establish a Habitation in the Strand with which members of the Council would be associated and to encourage the formation of associations elsewhere.²⁴ The Council made arrangements to print diploma forms and distribute them on an individual basis. In order to encourage greater participation, the Council decided to place advertisements in some of the prominent "Conservative" papers: The Times, Morning Post, Standard, Telegraph, England, and Vanity Fair.²⁵ This action established a precedent of close ties with the Conservative press, most particularly the Morning Post and subsequently England, both of which eventually featured regular columns devoted to the League.

Perhaps the most significant development—at least viewed retrospectively—was the decision made on the twenty-second of December to accept women as honorary members of the League. They would be called "Dames," and contribute an entrance and subscription fee equal to that of their male counterparts.²⁶

²⁴ While the decision to establish a Habitation was made on 1 December 1883, active steps to this end were not taken until the following year. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 8 January 1884. The original members included Abergavenny, Churchill, Borthwick, Burnaby, Slade, Wolff, Dixon Hartland, Hoare, Hardman, Gorst, Hopkinson, Seager Hunt, and Mitford. The Primrose League. Its Rise, Progress, and Constitution, p. 3.

²⁵ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 15 December 1883.

²⁶ ibid., 22 December 1883.

Women in a sense had been active in the organization from its conception, already prominent figures in the crowd gathered to honor the memory of Benjamin Disraeli on 19 April 1883. Lady Dorothy Nevill, a cousin of Henry Drummond Wolff, frequently entertained members of the Fourth party: Wolff, Churchill, and Gorst. It was at her home that several early discussions regarding the formation of the League took place. Lady Dorothy Nevill and her daughter Meresia came to be prominent members of the future Ladies Grand Council (LGC) and were part of the close circle of acquaintances asked to join in the early days. As a next-door neighbor of Disraeli and a personal friend of his for many years, she had ties to the Disraelian heritage.²⁷

Conservative party leaders had, by the end of the year, already begun to take notice of the League. Ashmead Bartlett, M.P., principal owner and editor of England and a staunch supporter of established party interests, kept close tabs of dissident and rebellious factions through his affiliation with the Council of the National Union. In September, 1883 he had written Northcote advising him of Churchill's intention to challenge Conservative party leaders by means of the October Conference of the National Union.²⁸ By December his concerns had extended to the Primrose League. Responding to Bartlett's cautionary warning, Northcote noted in his diary,

²⁷ Lady Dorothy Nevill, Leaves from the Note-Books of Lady Dorothy Nevill, ed. Ralph Nevill (London: Macmillan and Comp., 1907), pp. 18-19, 70-74. Idem, The Reminiscences of Lady Dorothy Nevill, ed. Ralph Nevill (London: Edward Arnold, 1906), pp. 199-203.

²⁸ Northcote's diary, 25 September 1883; typed copy, Iddesleigh Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 50063 A, vol. 2.

He anticipates much harm from the new "Primrose League," which is to be worked in the interests of the Fourth Party. It has an oath of Obedience, and an Oath of Secrecy."

Northcote was sufficiently alarmed about the League to inquire within inner party circles as to its intentions. Stanhope, the most active member of the Central Committee, replied three days later.

You ask me about the Primrose League. I cannot at present find anything alarming about it. Percy has the papers relating to it. But I shall probably get more information.³⁰

Enough information had circulated within inner party circles by the end of December that Wolff and Churchill felt compelled to write party leaders, Sir Stafford Northcote and the Marquis of Salisbury, officially notifying them of the existence of the League. Wolff emphasized in his letter to Northcote the benefits that it would provide to the party. In particular he stressed its role as a counterweight to the restrictions imposed by the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883.

It is intended to obtain the help of volunteers to replace the paid canvassers abolished by the Corrupt Practices Act.

The League is obtaining such strength that I think you will take an interest in its progress as being likely to stimulate Conservative efforts in constituencies where it is often not sufficiently active.³¹

²⁹ Ibid., 10 December 1883.

³⁰ Stanhope to Northcote, 13 December 1883; Iddesleigh Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 50042, vol. 30.

³¹ Wolff to Northcote, 22 December 1883; Iddesleigh Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 50042, vol. 30.

Although this was precisely the role that the League came to play in the subsequent years, there is little evidence to suggest that this declaration reflected the wholehearted intentions of the founders. Rather, it appeared to reflect a desire to deflect and minimize criticism which party leaders might direct against the organization,

Churchill's letter to Salisbury, written the same day as Wolff's to Northcote, was briefer and by implication less conciliatory.

The success of the enterprise appears now to be assured and as it is meant to, and may, prove very useful to the party I thought it right to acquaint you with the rules which fairly explain the objects arrived at.³²

In fact the League's success was by no means insured and its real intentions only implied: a popular base of support for Randolph through the espousal of the claims of Tory Democracy and, by extension, imposing a challenge to established party interests and leadership.

Northcote, continually harassed by Fourth party and National Union maneuvers, was deeply suspicious of the League and its intentions. Salisbury, possessing an inside source of information through his nephew Balfour, was less demonstrably concerned, expressing support for its professed goals to Churchill while privately envincing his skepticism about its future.³³ Nevertheless, he maintained a watchful, discerning eye toward any actions that might pose a threat to his position.

³² Churchill to Salisbury, 22 December 1883; Salisbury Papers, Churchill/12-3.

³³ R.R. James, Lord Randolph Churchill (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1959), p. 127 citing Churchill and Northcote. Salisbury to Northcote, 23 December 1883; Iddesleigh Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 50020.

By the end of the year, then, the Primrose League had taken tentative steps toward establishing itself as a viable political organization. Its distinctive character and structure were beginning to become apparent, if only partially composed. The organization had been initiated from "above," perhaps not by the glittering array of notables which were to adorn its ranks in subsequent years, but from a band of political supporters loyal to Randolph Churchill and active in the National Union.

The organization proceeded in this early phase of development from the center to the periphery, its origin and impetus emanating from Churchill and the political environs of Westminster. It was not an enthusiastic reaction of rank and file Conservative supporters generated spontaneously from the countryside. However, it did manage to gain support from back-bench Conservatives and lesser ranked political figures.³⁴

The creation of the organization of the Primrose League was ad hoc in character, proceeding from the haphazard goals and inspiration of the Churchill camp and equipped with sufficient organization to allow for future growth. A lack of systematic planning and ill-defined goals suggested its provisional status. The specific purpose of the League remained ambiguous, implying support for conventional party aims while indirectly posing a challenge. A great deal would happen in the new year to give shape and direction to League activities.

³⁴ This was particularly relevant in the composition of the League and its Ruling Council during its initial stage of growth.

III

As early as January, 1884 there were indications that the League was beginning to take hold. The newspaper advertisements, begun in December, encouraged an influx of members which in turn led to an expansion of Central Office functions. An Organizational Secretary and Deputy Registrar were appointed. Diplomas were being printed for Dames. The League issued its first Precept through the auspices of one of its temporary recruiting officers, Sir John Montagu Burgoyne, Bt., working in Bedfordshire. It encouraged prospective members to join.³⁵

Another indication of growing vitality was the ordering in January of seven hundred and twenty rosettes and one hundred enamel pins for possible purchase by Knights and Dames.³⁶ The use of decorations to connote affiliation and service was significant. For, in an age characterized by an ever accelerating rush for honors,³⁷

³⁵ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 19 January 1884.

³⁶ Rosettes were to be issued free to members; enamels sold for one shilling, full dress badges for five. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 19 January 1884.

³⁷ Macmillan, Honours for Sale, Pumphey, "The Introduction of Industrialists into the British Peerage," and Hanham, "The Sale of Honours in Late Victorian England," have aptly demonstrated the accelerating demand for peerages in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Salisbury made known his displeasure in having to dispense titles on several occasions. Commenting to Buckle, an editor of The Times who came to interview him in 1885, he remarked,

You are the first person who has come to see me in the last few days who is not wanting something at my hands—place, or decoration, or peerage. **You** only want information! Men whom I counted my friends, and whom I should have considered far above personal self-seeking, have been here begging, some for one thing, some for another, till I am sick and disgusted. The experience

marked most noticeably in the rising sectors of the middle class, the establishment of medallions by the Primrose League brought the process still further down the social scale and potentially within the reach of any enterprising individual. It enabled the buying of honors through relatively minimal sacrifice and income to persons wishing to emulate the social manners and traditions of those situated above them. With the increasing numbers of titled aristocracy joining another advantage was conferred: the perceived opportunity for social betterment and by implication, affiliation with one's social superiors.

has been a revelation to me on the baser side of human nature.

Lady Gwendolen Cecil, Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury, vol. 3, p. 142.

By 1890 demand for honors had grown to such an extent that Salisbury characterized the decade as exhibiting an unparalleled "rage for distinction." Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government, p. 192; citing Salisbury's comment to Sir Henry Ponsonby, 23 March 1890, Royal Archives L7/64. Two years later in drawing up an enhanced honors list following the Conservative party's defeat in the General Election, Salisbury grumbled to Lord John Manners,

I think if Dante had known all we know, he would have created another inferno, worse than all the others, in which unhappy sinners should be condemned eternally to the task of distributing two honours among a hundred people so as to satisfy them all.

Taylor, Lord Salisbury, p. 147.

Salisbury complained bitterly of the task which befell him, managing whenever possible to relegate the burden to a few trusted subordinates. Nevertheless, he realized it was an essential part of oiling the party machinery. To this end, he took every conceivable opportunity, relying, not only on annual New Year's and Royal Birthday honors, but also on the 1887 and 1897 Royal Jubilee distinctions to reward party faithful, meritorious civil servants, and distinguished individuals in the arts and sciences. The political disbursements had increased to such an extent after 1895 that he himself commented extravagantly of "so many knights and baronets as to justify the saying you cannot throw a stone at a dog without hitting a knight in London." Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government; citing J.M. Maclean, Recollections of Westminster and India (Manchester, 1902), p. 126.

The gains made in the recruitment of the aristocracy and other individuals of rank were demonstrated the following month. A list was prepared by the League of some of its most illustrious members for advertising purposes; the net effect of which was to shed its "secret" status. Topping the page was the Marquis of Abergavenny, cousin of Lady Dorothy Nevill, and more significantly, then the unseen and all knowing hand behind Conservative organization. He was singularly responsible for raising much of the party's political funds. Recruited by Churchill to serve as the highest ranked official in the League, Abergavenny occupied the position of Grand Councillor until April of 1885 when he resigned.³⁸ His appointment lent considerable political weight and prestige to the newly founded association.

The League's social status was further buttressed by the likes of the Duke of Portland; the Earls of Hoptoun, Limerick, Orford, Kinnoull, and Egremont; and the Viscounts Castlereagh and Curzon. It included Lord Wimborne as well as the Baronets Sir Robert Peel, Sir George Wombwell, Sir Henry de Bath, Sir Gerald Codrington, Sir William Heathcote, and Sir Henry Peck, M.P. Even Ashmead Bartlett, who initially had viewed the League suspiciously, joined as a Council member.³⁹

Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that all notables who joined played a prominent or enthusiastic role. The Marquis of

³⁸ Abergavenny to Churchill, 11 April 1885; Churchill Papers, RCHL v/590.

³⁹ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 23 February 1884.

Abergavenny only agreed to assume the role of Grand Councillor on the condition that it not involve any official functions.⁴⁰ The Duke of Portland, like many others, joined at Churchill's request, having "had little doubt I was invited because they were hoping for a good subscription." He served as a Knight Harbinger for fifty years during which time he "had no notion what that meant, except that I received an illuminated parchment certificate." Sir Robert Peel, taking reluctance one step further, is reputed to have shouted "Filthy witches" at Dames engaged in electioneering activities on behalf of the League.⁴¹

Nor were all so eager to join in the early phase of development. The Duchess of Sutherland expressed great misgivings at having her name associated ^{with} a movement the names of the leaders of which are kept secret." Her remark prompted Balfour's confident script notation on the back of her letter "Have told her her name shall not be associated with League except with her full consent. Have no doubt she will wear her badge on Ap:19 &c &c."⁴²

Further inroads were also made in extending and popularizing the League's image. The word "Tory" was dropped from its title,⁴³ a

⁴⁰ Abergavenny to Churchill, 11 April 1885; Churchill papers.

⁴¹ Foster, Lord Randolph Churchill, p. 134; citing Men, Women and Things; Memoirs of the Duke of Portland (London, 1937), pp. 175, 135.

⁴² Duchess of Sutherland to Sir Algernon Borthwick, 4 February 1884; Churchill Papers, RCHL ii/281. By 1888 the Duchess of Sutherland was well represented in League functions, serving as Divisional President for the northwest sector of Staffordshire as well as Ruling Council to four Habitations in the surrounding region. The Primrose League: The Roll of the Habitations, 1888; B.L. 8139.f.16, pp. 122-23.

⁴³ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 2 February 1884.

move intended to suggest the association's extra-parliamentary character and its willingness to recruit participants beyond the bounds of traditional Conservative party supporters. The name change suggested a desire to draw from a wider social class spectrum.

By March the broadening pattern of membership had increased to such an extent that "working men"⁴⁴ were being admitted to the League at reduced rates. Their recruitment had begun at the local level and had grown to such an extent that month as to prompt the Central Office to create a new grade of membership, "Esquires," for men who could not pay Tribute at the existing rates of Knights and Dames.⁴⁵

The move was interesting in two respects. First because it genuinely extended participation to a more diverse and "popular" level, enabling the League to draw on the legacy of Tory Democracy. Second, it was an innovation achieved at the local level, prompting a change in policy at the Central Office. While the London executive was generally successful in dictating policy from the center to the periphery, spontaneous actions initiated from below when adopted enthusiastically by local Habitations occasionally prompted, as is this instance, a reformulation or alteration of established practices.

⁴⁴ The term "working men" is applied here loosely as the Conservatives used it to refer to those individuals below the middle class proper who were receptive to party principles. The most numerous sympathizers would appear to be artisans, farmers, and agrarian workers, although there were many League members who came from industrial and factory backgrounds or even more disadvantageous sectors of society.

⁴⁵ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 22 March 1884.

The response of the London headquarters was typical of future practices since it sought to legitimize spontaneous actions emanating from "below." The need on the part of the executive to establish formal and consistent practices was a characteristic feature of the Primrose League and was responsible in large measure for ensuring fairly uniform procedures amongst the Habitations.

The League's emphasis on standard codes of behavior was further indicated in the revised statutes and the newly proposed bylaws for Habitations presented in May, 1884.⁴⁶ In these documents the Central Office laid out in greater detail the organizational and philosophic guidelines to be followed by members. The provisions suggest that the basic character of the League was already well formulated by this time.

The motto, seal, and badges of the League were retained, although the addition of Dames and Esquires necessarily expanded the categories of membership and the decorations offered. The oath was shortened and its vow of secrecy removed, but its emphasis was not significantly altered.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid., 10 May 1884, Statutes and Ordinances contained in the Minutes.

⁴⁷ Ibid. The revised oath as it appeared in the Minutes read,

I declare, on my honour and faith, that I will devote my best ability to the maintenance of Religion, of the Estates of the Realm, and of the Imperial Ascendancy of the British Empire; and that consistently with my allegiance to the Sovereign of these Realms, I promote with discretion and fidelity the above objects, being those of the Primrose League.

The Ruling Council enlarged its ranks to include twenty-six Knights elected perfunctorily at the annual meeting of executives and local representatives, the Grand Habitation. The newly chosen Council was in turn able to coopt thirteen additional members (men) to its ranks.

The Grand Habitation was typically set as close to April nineteenth as possible and the statutes made provisions for male or female representatives allocated at one per hundred members of a Habitation. The executive of the London office attended and was given a prominent position on the dais. The meeting was largely pro forma in character, though it served as an opportunity for local leaders to air grievances and in a few instances actually helped to bring about changes. In general, however, it served as a rubber stamp for the policy already initiated by the Grand Council. It was, above all, a celebratory affair, proclaiming the League's growing numbers and influence and affirming its allegiance to the Conservative party.

At the intermediate level, the organization had expanded to include Divisional Habitations, which were intended to facilitate the flow of information between London and local associations. They were to be composed of Ruling Councillors and executive^members of the surrounding Habitations. The statutes called for Divisional Habitations to meet twice yearly and report to the Grand Council. Nevertheless, it was some time before they would be distributed uniformly around the country. Consequently, communications generally emanated directly from the Central Office to the local associations.

The Habitations experienced some modifications. The numbers of officers increased to approximate the executive body serving the London headquarters. The individuals charged with overseeing the operations of local associations generally included a Ruling Councillor, an Honorary Secretary, and several Executive Council members. Dames¹ fees at the local level were set at the same rate as Knights', one crown for compounded entrance and annual dues or two shillings and sixpence for yearly membership renewal. No charge was made by the Central Office toward the admittance of Esquires into Habitations,⁴⁸ although modest sums were obtained for diplomas and badges. Fees were also levied by local associations for their own use. Typically the annual payment was set at a half-crown for Knights and Dames and ranged between one pence and a shilling for Esquires. The cost of purchasing a Warrant to establish a Habitation was set at four crowns. All members were, in theory, to be equal,⁴⁹ although Knights and Dames generally occupied the executive positions at the local level and the London Council appears to have been entirely composed of Knights.

The actual power of the League resided almost exclusively with the body of Ruling Council members. They set policy, directed the procedures to be followed by rank and file Habitations, regulated the admission of members, issued Warrants, and promoted national League functions. Three trustees appointed for life served as ex officio

48 ibid.

49 Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 22 March 1883.

members charged with overseeing funds. They were appointed by Grand Council and subject to its review. Communications, like the organization as a whole, were chiefly in the hands of the Council.

Specific instructions were provided by the model bylaws concerning the election of officers, the arrangement of meetings, and the maintenance of an up-to-date register and minute book. The Habitation executive was responsible for subdividing the district into regions, each supervised by an individual officer charged with overseeing registration and canvassing, a further elaboration of the scheme first developed in 1883.⁵⁰ A host of other details concerning management were provided in the bylaws, in effect standardizing the process. Habitations which devised their own rules had to submit them for the approval of the Central Office.⁵¹

Despite the advances made in organization, the gain in terms of League membership were neither immediate nor overwhelming. On the twenty-third of April the Organizational Secretary's report claimed a total of forty-six Habitations and a bank balance of £532.52. The financial figure was an inflated one in the sense that it seems to have represented a maximum for the year, reflecting the surge of donations which came in on the anniversary of Disraeli's death. By 26 November 1884, the number of Habitations had more than doubled, totaling one

⁵⁰ Ibid., 10 May 1884. Suggested Bylaws contained in the Minutes.

⁵¹ Ibid., Statutes and Ordinances contained in the Minutes.

⁵² Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 23 April 1884.

hundred in all and comprising 4,840 Knights, 550 Dames, and 260 Esquires. The Central Office recorded a bank balance of £122.53

Still, if the expansion was not overwhelming, it was steady. By June the membership had grown to such an extent that the Central Office felt justified in moving to larger headquarters. A four room complex at St. Margaret's Offices on Victoria Street in Westminster was rented at a cost of £250 a year.⁵⁴ An indication of continued growth was also manifest in the permanent office staff in London. By December it included the Registrar, Deputy Registrar, Organizing Secretary, clerk, and two junior clerks in addition to a number of part-time individuals hired for office or recruitment work.⁵⁵

In the course of the year the key events sponsored by the Grand Council included the first annual banquet and the Grand Habitation. The dinner was held in Freemasons' Tavern on the third anniversary of the death of Disraeli. About four hundred Knights and Dames toasted his memory, the Ladies occupying the gallery.⁵⁶ The location was a significant one, serving as a meeting place for Conservative functions over the years. Not the least among these gatherings was the first Conference of the National Union held in November of 1867 under the

⁵³ Ibid., 26 November 1884.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 11 June 1884; 14 June 1884.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1 December 1883; 19 January 1884; 2 February 1884, 9 February 1884; 23 April 1884; 17 December 1884. The figures given on 19 December 1884 list the Deputy Registrar's salary as £150 per annum; a clerk's earnings at £55 per year, and two junior clerks wages set at 18s.7d. per week.

⁵⁶ The Primrose League. Its Rise, Progress, and Constitution, p. 9; The Times, "Beaconsfield's Anniversary," 21 April 1884, p. 7.

chairmanship of Gorst.⁵⁷

The Primrose League banquet was presided over by the Earl of Egremont in the absence of Abergavenny and Churchill, the latter citing his strenuous campaign-like efforts in Birmingham as the cause of his absence. The meeting eulogized the memory of Disraeli, staunchly defended the Conservative party and the House of Lords while attacking what was seen as the weak and vacillating foreign policy of Gladstone's administration. The Primrose League's great object as defined by one of the participants, Colonel Burnaby, was "not to make an appeal to government; it was to denounce them to the British nation."⁵⁸

The Grand Habitation, postponed until mid-July to allow sufficient time for preparation, was chaired by Randolph Churchill. Delegates from thirty-six Habitations attended. All existing members of the Council were reelected with the exception of Ashmead Bartlett, the least receptive individual on the Council as far as Churchill was concerned. Twelve Knights were also elected to complete the twenty-six member Council.⁵⁹ While most of the reelected individuals were

⁵⁷ "National Union First Annual Conference," 12 November 1867; NUA 2/1/1.

⁵⁸ The Times, 21 April 1884, p. 7.

⁵⁹ The reelected members to the Council based on subsequent Minute Book records of attendance would appear to be Lord Randolph Churchill, M.P.; Sir H.D. Wolff, M.P.; Sir Alfred Slade, Bt.; J.E. Gorst, Q.C., M.P.; Sir Henry Hoare, Bt.; Sir Algernon Borthwick; Colonel Burnaby; F.D. Dixon Hartland, M.P.; F. Seager Hunt; William Hardman; Wainwright; A.A. Hopkinson; Bateson; and Stone.

The twelve representatives chosen by the Grand Council delegates based on a list of names circulated at the first annual meeting were Sir Michael Hicks Beach, Bt., M.P.; W.T. Marriott, Esq., Q.C., M.P.; Robert Bourke, M.P.; Colonel King Harman, M.P.; Lord John Manners, M.P.; Lord Elcho, M.P.; J. Sclater Booth, M.P.; Lord Charles Beresford; Earl of Hopetoun; Captain Fellowes, M.P.; Sir Samuel Wilson; Maurice Mocatta, Esq. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose

sympathetic to Churchill, the newest members were, on balance, more favorable than the previous executive to the Conservative establishment as represented by Salisbury and Northcote. The participation of Abergavenny, Hicks Beach, Lord John Manners, and Lord Elcho within the executive for the ensuing year suggested the growing ties to conventional party interests.

In March, 1884 the first real efforts were made by the Council to encourage political support for the Conservative party. A precept was ordered to be sent to all Habitations in order to ascertain the Knights' willingness to volunteer their services to local Conservative associations for the work of canvassing, providing free rooms for meetings, and conveying voters to the polls.⁶⁰ The Precept marked the first time a statement has been sent to all Habitations. It initiated a practice of League members assisting Conservative campaign efforts, in effect having the League serve as the handmaiden to the Conservative party. The League's growing political activity was indicated in April when the Central Office ordered an electoral map so as to mark the relative positions of Habitations throughout the country with yellow flags.⁶¹ In doing so it anticipated the League's future role as nationwide canvasser for the Conservatives.

League, 16 July 1884. Members coopted to the Council included the Earl of Egremont; the Earl of Limerick; Lord Arthur Hill, M.P.; J.T. Agg-Gardner, Esq.; J. Brindley, Esq.; Ponsonby Moore, Esq.; and William Vaughan, Esq. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 19 July 1884.

⁶⁰ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 1 March 1884.

⁶¹ Ibid., 26 April 1884. The color yellow was designated to represent the League's "pale yellow flower," the primrose.

The political responsibilities of League members was further developed and made explicit in the model bylaws.

It shall be the duty of every member to see that the adherents of the League in his district are placed on the register of electors and to furnish a list of such adherents to the Secretary of the Habitation.

During an election the Habitations shall meet daily to receive reports from its members as a result of their work, and arrange for future proceedings.

The Executive Councillors shall also arrange public meetings and other work . . . doing all in their power . . . to further the objects of the League.⁶²

The League's relationship with the National Union during this early period of development remained largely that of an affiliate, a potential basis of support for Churchill in his bid for Conservative party leadership. The League was the indirect beneficiary of the National Union and Conservative party struggle which surfaced most prominently during the first six months of 1884. Churchill took pains to stack its leadership and to ensure the organization of wealthy benefactors so as to provide a potential political base for him in his drive for power. However, with an enhanced membership and financial status, the League began to acquire greater diversity in outlook, gradually emerging as a political organ in its own right.

The quarrels between the National Union and the Conservative party appeared to have little direct impact in executive circles of the League. The minute records of both the Union and the League give no indication of any close ties between the two organizations as measured either in terms of actions taken or policies pursued, save for a few

⁶² Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 10 May 1884. Suggested Bylaws as contained in the Minutes.

isolated cases of Habitations joining as constituency organs.⁶³ in June the League affirmed the practice of associations joining the National Union, although little was done to encourage its development. In general the Conservative party under Salisbury discouraged the blurring of boundaries between political institutions^ and the local agencies affirmed this view, each jealously guarding its own vested interest. In practice of course the lines between League, National Union, Conservative association, party agent, and party continued to intersect, reflecting the unsteady state of organization as it moved from amateur to professional status.

In the wake of the Grand Habitation and the Sheffield Conference held by the National Union in July of 1884, the League began to cement closer ties with the party. The agreement achieved between Salisbury and Churchill following the conference set well-defined limits to the powers of the National Union. Hicks Beach was made the Chairman of its Council; Balfour, Akers-Douglas, and Gorst its Vice Chairmen; Bartley, its Treasurer.⁶⁵ This arrangement, in combination with the other provisions of the pact, enhanced the level of support for Salisbury within the Council. Hicks Beach, while sympathetic to Churchill, was a reliable party man, having served in the last

⁶³ "National Union Annual Conferences 1885 and 1886," Annual Reports; 6 October 1885, NUA 2/1/4; 26 October 1886, NUA 2/1/6.

⁶⁴ Conservative party agent under Salisbury, R.W.E. Middleton, for instance, opposed League affiliation with the National Union. Middleton to Read, 24 May 1886, Chilston Papers, Middleton*s copybook, cited in Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government, pp. 203, 212.

⁶⁵ Salisbury to Northcote, 26 July 1884; Iddesleigh Papers, B.L. Add. MS. 50020.

Conservative Cabinet. Balfour, Akers-Douglas, and Bartley were all staunchly loyal to Salisbury bound in addition by ties, respectively, as nephew to Salisbury, Conservative Whip in the Commons, and Party Agent.

The agreement marked the end of a serious challenge by the Union to Conservative leadership until the party's defeat in 1906. It also served notice of Salisbury's bid for unrivaled party leadership, a move to outmaneuver both Northcote and Churchill in his quest for dominance. A minor provision of the agreement granted official status to the Primrose League. It marked the first formal recognition of the League by Salisbury since its formation. The reference, while ostensibly a concession to Churchill, conceivably offered Salisbury a safeguard against any action Churchill might take to utilize the League as the next base of operations for his assault on the party leadership. The action was also potentially advantageous in that it represented a positive step toward placing the League firmly under the rubric of the Conservative party.

The enhanced communications between League and party were not long in coming. In September, 1884 the Grand Council decided to send a circular to various Conservative associations throughout the country asking them to join. Hicks Beach was consulted regarding leaflets and in November seven hundred notices were sent out to M.P.'s and prospective Conservative candidates asking them for their support. Council plans to direct the canvassing of outvoters were submitted to

Bartley for approval.⁶⁶ The League also gave its assistance to Conservative candidates in Hackney, Brighton, and South Warwickshire.⁶⁷

The nomination of Salisbury and Northcote as trustees of the League had been considered by Wolff in January when he proposed it to Churchill as a means "in order to attract subscriptions and consequently funds."⁶⁸ The plan had been scraped in the wake of the National Union controversy. However, in November Salisbury took the initiative, offering himself and Northcote as official dignitaries of the organization.

Northcote and I agree that there is no objection to our becoming Patrons of the Primrose League if it should be thought desirable. But I suppose we shall have no such commonplace name. What do you say to Vavasours?⁶⁹

In December an official delegation of the League waited on Salisbury and Northcote presenting both with diplomas. The following year both were designated "Grand Masters," the titular heads of the organization.⁷⁰

Thus, by the end of 1884, the Primrose League was no longer exclusively promoting Churchill's interests. A number of actions had

⁶⁶ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 12 September 1884, 5 November 1884, 12 November 1884, 26 November 1884.

⁶⁷ Robb, The Primrose League, p. 40; citing The Morning Post, 22 December 1884.

⁶⁸ Foster, Lord Randolph Churchill, p. 134.

⁶⁹ H.D. Wolff, Rambling Recollections, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan and Comp., 1908), p. 271. Also cited in Robb, The Primrose League, p. 40, and James, Lord Randolph Churchill, p. 127.

⁷⁰ Robb, The Primrose League, p. 52, 40, citing The Morning Post, 22 December 1884.

been taken, presumably at the instigation of Salisbury, to place the organization under the supervision of the party coinciding with and following the settlement achieved in July, 1884 limiting the powers of the National Union. Among these measures were included the formal acknowledgment of the Primrose League by Salisbury and a review made by Hicks Beach of the organization's circulars to be distributed amongst Tory M.P.'s. Chief Agent Bartley was also charged with advising the League on the methods to be applied in political canvassing as a means of assisting Conservative candidates at election times.

The most telling indication, however, was Salisbury's request that he and Northcote be named official dignitaries of the League. Their future appointment provided still another deterrent to any action which might be initiated by Churchill to challenge the existing leadership of the Conservative party by means of an appeal to Tory Democracy. While it would be some time before Salisbury's name would be inexorably linked to the League, the first important steps had already been taken.

CHAPTER TWO

Development, 1885-1888

At its birth great doubt was expressed by the political doctors as to its chance of life, however after its baptism at November and July elections all fear pass[ed] away, and now we see it developing into a healthy child, with the stamina for making a strong man. If carefully nourished it will pass from youth to manhood and from manhood to old age, only to die, when the cause for which it has fought remains triumphant all along the line.

Octavius Curtis from The Primrose
newspaper, Bournemouth (1 February 1887)

I

If the Primrose League experienced growing pains between the years 1883 and 1884 associated with birth and early development, the subsequent four years marked its transition to a full-fledged political institution with a capacity for influencing a popular electorate. Total membership rose from 11,366 and 169 Habitations on Primrose day, 1885 to 672,606 and 1,877 Habitations three years later. Particularly significant was the rise in the number of Esquires, now comprising men and women termed "Associates," from 1,914 to 575,235 individuals. It marked substantial progress from the 5,650 members, 260 of which were Esquires, and the one hundred Habitations recorded in late November, 1884.¹

¹ The 1885 and 1888 figures cited are contained in The Primrose League Gazette, 1 September 1899, p. 9 and Robb, The Primrose League, Appendix III. The November, 1884 numbers are found in the Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 26 November 1884.

In many respects the formal adoption of the title Associate over that of Esquire at the Grand Habitation in April, 1885 reflected larger, more general changes in the character of the organization from a body comprising almost exclusively male and largely affluent supporters to one representing a broad cross section of the male and female population. While no explanation is provided with the Minutes regarding the causes responsible for this change of title, the records do indicate that the practice was introduced at the local level as the Primrose League began to increase dramatically in membership. Desiring to maintain uniform standards, the Central Office endorsed the term Associate.² It would appear, then, that the designation "Esquire" held little appeal for men from the working and lower middle classes who were most likely to join as Associates. For those individuals who coveted titles of distinction, the classification of Knight or Dame more properly served as an indication of their desired or actual social status.

Between 1885 and 1888 the Primrose League developed the basic structure characteristic of its organization. The Central Office evolved into a complex enterprise comprised, on the one hand, a Grand Council studded with aristocrats and, on the other, a growing staff of "professionals" hired to implement policies and to ensure continued expansion. A network of agents maintained by the London headquarters traversed the country encouraging the formation of Habitations and general compliance with the dictates of the executive. Two auxiliary

² Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 22 March 1885; 25 April 1885.

bodies were created in 1885, the Ladies Council (LGC) and the Scottish Grand Council (SGC) both of which supplemented the administrative functions of the Central Office.

With the vast change in the size and scale of operations, the Central Office began to assume the rudimentary features common to any large bureaucratic entity.³ Under these circumstances, it was hardly surprising that the Primrose League shed its personal allegiance to Lord Randolph Churchill in favor of the more general endorsement of the issues advocated by Salisbury and the Conservative party. As the League expanded, an increasing number of employees were hired in order to enforce rules and regulations. By 1888 the Central Office had acquired a "rationalistic" character typical of large-scale organizations, exhibiting a preoccupation with perpetuating its own expansion as an end in itself, rather than merely a means to promote the interests of the Conservative party.

Despite innovations achieved in the operations of the London headquarters, the Primrose League, as a whole, never obtained the thorough mechanization characteristic of a sophisticated bureaucracy. Instead, it straddled the older, declining forms of patronage that still held some measure of support, particularly in rural communities, with the newly emerging and increasingly nondeferential relations coming to characterize partisan politics. In seeking to maintain

³ Both Max Weber and Robert Michels have provided interesting studies illuminating some of the characteristic features common to bureaucracies. From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology translated and edited by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 196-98, 228. Robert Michels, Political Parties (New York: The Free Press, 1962), pp. 333-34, 338-41.

existing institutions by means of a growing reliance on the methods of modern organization, the Primrose League was able, with some degree of success, to forestall the loss of traditional values.

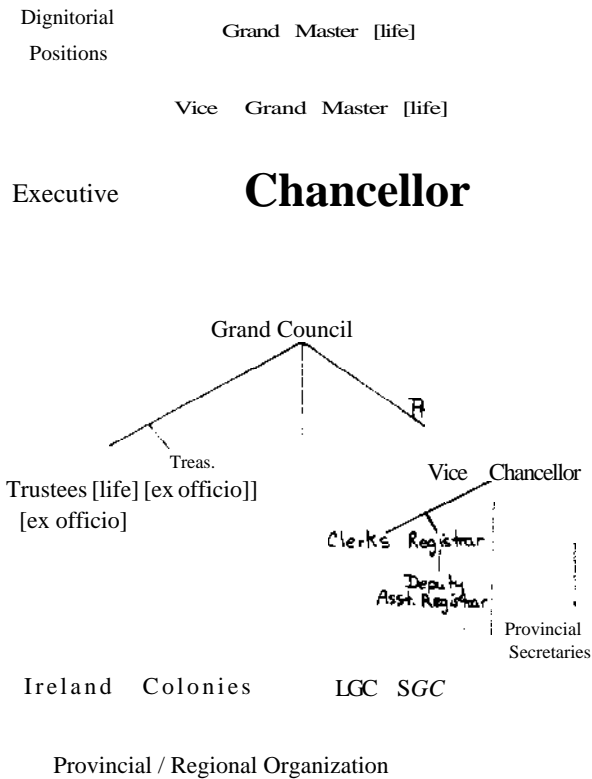
By 1888 the League, if not a finished product, closely resembled its mature structure of the subsequent decade. The Central Office had become a semiprofessional source of support for the Conservative party, employing a permanent office staff. Heading up its paid work force was the [Vice] Chancellor, responsible for overall League operations. Under his supervision a Political Secretary managed the political efforts, chief among these the direction of regional organizers named "District Agents" or Provincial Secretaries as they came to be called in the 1890's. A Registrar, Deputy Assistant Registrar, and several clerks, whose numbers expanded and contracted to meet the immediate needs of the Council, assisted in general management.

At the dignitary and executive levels, the organization had also matured. Salisbury and Northcote were designated honorific Grand Masters, supreme heads of the Primrose League, in the fall of 1885. They held the position jointly until Northcote, subsequently raised to the peerage under the name of Lord Iddesleigh, died in January of 1887. Salisbury then assumed sole leadership, occupying the post for the remainder of his life. The office of Vice Grand Master was created in 1895, A.J. Balfour holding the title for the remaining years under study.

Beneath the level of Grand Master stood the Chancellor,⁴ appointed annually to serve both ceremonial and chief executive functions as de facto President of the Council. The Ruling Council, renamed Grand Council in 1885, was overseen on a day-to-day basis by its annually elected Chairman, later termed the Chancellor, and the Vice Chairman. Ex officio members of the Council included four trustees and one treasurer charged with handling fiscal matters. A diagram illustrating the organization of the Primrose League at the level of the Central Office as it appeared in its mature form, circa 1895, is provided below.

PRIMROSE LEAGUE ORGANIZATION CHART

Circa. 1895



⁴ The title was referred to by several different names initially including Ruling Councillor, Grand Councillor, and Grand Chancellor before the term Chancellor became commonplace in 1889. The position was held by a number of prominent individuals. Listed in consecutive order for the years 1883-1888 they were Lord Randolph Churchill, Lord Abergavenny, Sir William Hardman, Viscount Folkestone, and Lord Harris (1887-88). To confuse matters further, the position of Vice Chancellor frequently went by the name Chancellor prior to 1889, although the functions of the two offices remained distinct.

Gains made in other spheres helped to ensure the League's rapid expansion. The establishment of two quasi-independent institutions in 1885, the LGC and the SGC, succeeded, respectively, in extending the role of women in the League and in assisting the Conservative party in challenging the Liberal stranglehold in Scotland. The executive pattern of management of both organizations resembled that of the Central Office.

In the case of the LGC, its officers consisted of a President, Vice President, and a Grand Council assisted by a paid secretary and small staff of employees, as well as, the assistance of two members of the Council who served, respectively, as Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer. By 1895 one new dignitary position was added, the Extra President, to be offered to any retiring President no longer actively participating within the Council. More than one thousand Dames were members of the LGC by 1888, contributing one guinea annually to its funds.

The SGC, like the London Grand Council it resembled, had its own appointed Grand Master who presided over the annual meetings of the (Scottish) Grand Habitation. The SGC also maintained a paid secretary, some staff members, life trustees, and, on occasion, one or two regional agents. The body was primarily charged with supervising and maintaining the activities of Habitations throughout Scotland.

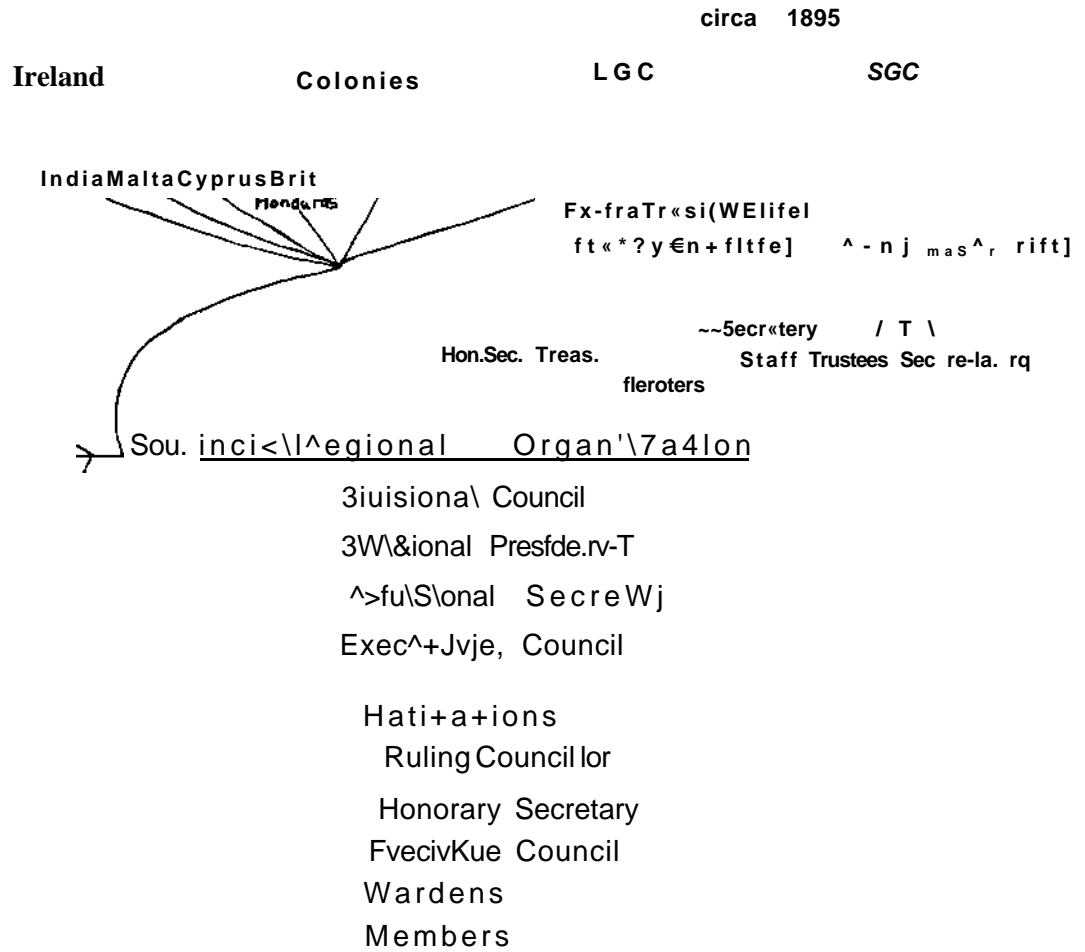
By 1888 the Primrose League had developed a rudimentary organization in Ireland. A few associations were also located in colonies as far afield as India, Malta, Cyprus, British Honduras, Mauritius, and Australia.

The regional and local organization of the Primrose League within England and Wales was overseen by District Agents from the Central Office who were responsible for maintaining activities and enrolling members within a geographical region, typically consisting of several counties situated adjacent to one another. Divisional Councils were in theory to be erected in parliamentary districts throughout Britain and to consist of a Divisional President, Secretary, and an Executive Council comprised of officers and representatives of the surrounding Habitations. In practice not all Divisions contained a Council or representatives from all associations in the area.

At the grass-roots level, the Habitation typically consisted, apart from its rank and file participants, of a Ruling Councillor, Honorary Secretary, Executive Council, and Wardens. The last named individuals performed a number of tasks essential to the operation of the association: recruiting members, collecting subscriptions, circulating pamphlets, and assisting in the canvassing and registration efforts undertaken to assist political candidates. In some instances Habitations were also served by Dame Presidents, a dignitary or executive appointment roughly equivalent or superior to that of the Ruling Councillor.

The diagram presented on the following page illustrates the regional and executive patterns of the organization where it functioned, to some extent, apart from the Grand Council. While the figure represents the mature organization, circa 1895, only one new position, that of the LGC Extra President, was created after 1888.

PRIMROSE LEAGUE LOCAL ORGANIZATION CHART



Anticipating the rise in popular support and augmented by a proliferation of League-related newspapers which helped to maintain and cement its growing influence, the functions of the Central Office grew rapidly during this period. An examination will follow of some of these key features that characterized the organizational development of the League from infancy to young maturity.

As the League prospered, its income, derived primarily from annual Tributes, entrance, Warrant, and badge fees, subscriptions obtained from The Primrose League Gazette, donations obtained from the LGC, and interest received from the Capital Account, became substantial. By 31 March 1888 receipts for the 1887-88 "Primrose year," were a generous £6,464.16.2. Nevertheless, this figure represented a relative decline when compared with the earnings obtained in 1886-87, £10,133.9.8. The latter figure constituted the highest annual income received at the Central Office during the years under study. In large measure the decrease incurred in 1887-88 was attributable to smaller receipts obtained from three key sources of income, specifically, entrance and Warrant fees and Life Tributes. Together they accounted for £4,739.10.5 in 1886-87 as against £1,226.8.0 in 1887-88. Despite the failure to maintain the record level achieved in 1886-87, the Capital Account continued to rise, if more slowly than the previous year, reaching ten thousand pounds by the end of March, 1888.5

In response to heightened levels of activity, the Grand Council began meeting in January, 1885 on a quarterly basis, relegating day-to-

⁵ The Primrose League Gazette, 21 April 1888, p. 4.

day decisions to its Executive Committee, a subset of the Council's most active members.⁶ Increasingly, as time progressed, the office assumed a more professional character, hiring growing numbers of organizers and staff workers to maintain its expanding operations. In March, 1885 Claude Hay, the League's Organizing Secretary, resigned to assume the role of "Consulting Organizer," an advisory post for which he received the fairly modest annual stipend of fifty guineas. While his tenure as Secretary had been principally voluntary, his successor, T.B. Cusack-Smith, began his term with a salary set at £120 per year. Like many of the League's "political" workers, Cusack-Smith had initially served for only a token allowance before assuming "professional" status. An Assistant Deputy Registrar was also hired at an annual salary of one hundred pounds while a clerk's wages were increased to seventy-five pounds.?

Grand Council committees increased in accordance with the expanding base and enhanced Central Office functions. In May, 1885 the Executive Committee was replaced by three distinct organs: General Purposes, Finance, and Consultative, all of which regularly reported to the Council as a whole. The Consultative Committee was to focus on speakers, meetings, and local issues. A Dames Conference Committee was formed in June in order to promote close, cooperative relations between Grand Council and the LGC.⁸

⁶ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 21 January 1885.

⁷ Ibid, 11 March 1885; 18 February 1885.

⁸ Ibid, 13 May 1885; 28 May 1885; 24 June 1885.

As the Central Office "machine" expanded, its clerical staff was enlarged. Many were hired on a temporary basis to meet the immediate demands of registration. The minutes recorded by the Grand Council indicate an increase in the number of employees just prior to July in anticipation of a General Election. Certainly, heightened political awareness was shown in June when the Organizing Secretary's title was changed to Political Secretary, a staff of lecturers established, and a "Special Fund" created to assist his efforts. The presence of Captain Middleton, Principal Agent for the Conservative party, at Council meetings during this period suggests the importance of these gatherings and their relevance to larger political developments.⁹

The professionalization of the Central Office continued apace. In July, W. Haigh was appointed Registrar at an annual salary of £150. He replaced F.D. Thomas, who had served from December through April, receiving an honorarium of one hundred pounds for his contributions. After just over four months service as Secretary, Cusack-Smith was given a raise of over fifty percent, totaling £230 a year. In September the Political Secretary was encouraged to hire several more lecturers and make temporary additions to staff, again in anticipation of the November General Election and under the watchful eye of Middleton. Pamphlet distribution was stepped up and three more rooms were rented to accommodate the League's expanding functions. A telephone was even sanctioned for the Central Office.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., 17 April 1885; 10 June 1885; 17 June 1885; 8 July 1885.

¹⁰ Ibid., 22 July 1885; 29 April 1885; 9 September 1885; 16

Between the years 1886 and 1888 the League solidified the organizational strides made in 1885. The tremendous expansion in the number of members during these years initially left the Central Office unprepared to handle the influx of applications and orders for medals and leaflets. Lady Gwendolen Cecil, daughter of Lord Salisbury and a member of the LGC, responded to numerous complaints of delay by requesting the Grand Council conduct an investigation. A subcommittee was formed in February, 1886 to look into the matter. Various changes were proposed with the end result of an appointment of a chief executive in March. Hugh H. Riach was named [Vice] Chancellor and charged with the maintenance of Central Office operations. His salary was generously set at £500 per year.^H

By July of 1886 the demands of the Central Office had grown to such an extent that it was necessary to move to Number One Princes Mansions, Victoria Street. The new premises were situated across from the Army and Navy Store and not far from Parliament Square. Made necessary by the continued growth of the Central Office, they enabled the Grand Council and the LGC to be housed in a single building.¹²

August brought additional changes. Divisional Habitations were renamed Divisional Councils,¹³ a move not of particularly earth-

September 1885; 23 September 1885.

¹¹ Ibid., 3 February 1886; 24 February 1886; 17 March 1886; 24 March 1886.

¹² Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 16 July 1886. Primrose League Special Minute Book, 1886-1900, 7 February 1887. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 15 September 1886.

¹³ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 20 August 1886.

shattering consequence, but suggestive of the League's need to be constantly in motion. This tendency became more striking in some respects in the subsequent two decades as membership declined relative to the dynamic 1880's and the League therefore found itself resorting to increasingly more dramatic organizational initiatives in compensation and in hopes of stimulating further growth. This dynamic process of development is amply demonstrated in the formation of District Agents.

The General Purposes Committee proposed in August the creation of eight District Agents, each assigned to a large geographical region. All told the areas covered accounted for most of England and Wales. The agents were responsible for supervising Divisions and local Habitations within the assigned territories.¹⁴

The District Agent was a transitional figure, part lecturer and proselytiser of League principles, part "party agent," concerned with maintaining the vitality of the Primrose machine. The position was conceived in response to the poor performance and reception given Central Office lecturers, who failed to attract the support and enthusiasm of local Habitations, causing financial losses. In large measure this was due to the amateurish quality of speakers hired and the assumption that the Habitations must be a self-supporting enterprise.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 20 August 1886.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 20 August 1886. Letter to the editor signed, "A Delegate to Grand Habitation," England, 21 May 1887, p. 14.

By contrast, District Agents were envisioned as "professionals." Their positions were devised along the lines of the National Union reorganization scheme introduced by Middleton in May of 1886. According to this plan, Middleton's nine Provincial subagents were made responsible for supervising the regional constituencies of the National Union.¹⁶

The initial report proposed by the General Purposes Committee called for the appointment of eight agents at salaries projected at two hundred pounds a year. Total cost was figured at between twenty and twenty-two hundred pounds. An estimated savings of one thousand pounds annually was expected to be achieved.¹⁷ In fact, the appointment of District Agents appears over the years to have been a significant drain on funds.¹⁸ Nevertheless, their contribution was considerable in terms of ensuring compliance with policies issued from the Central Office and securing greater uniformity among Habitations and regional centers.

¹⁶ "National Union Annual Conference," 26 October 1886; NUA 2/1/6. Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government, p. 199.

¹⁷ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 20 August 1886.

¹⁸ The actual cost of lecturers and agents sent to the Habitations for the Primrose year 1886-87 is listed at £1,589.9.6. However, during this period only three months included payments to agents. Expenses rose in the ensuing year to a total of £1,948.8.10, suggesting an overall increase in expenditure of a little more than 358 pounds. The Primrose League Gazette, 21 April 1888, p. 4. The following year the numbers jumped still higher to £2,538.1.5 and the trend continued upwards. The Primrose League Gazette, 19 April 1890, p. 3. Nevertheless, the League in its annual report of April, 1888 indicated that its agents were self-supporting, perhaps basing this assessment on the projected rise in new members and sustained annual subscriptions achieved through their efforts. The Morning Post 19 April 1888, p. 5.

In January, 1887 the agents began work on a six month trial basis. Initially they were paid weekly; however, a decision was subsequently made to distribute their salaries monthly, reflecting their perceived professional stature. An Agency Committee was set up to monitor their work and report to the Grand Council. In June, the program was extended to twelve agents for a one year period. Based on June figures, salaries generally appeared to range between £100 and £220,¹⁹ roughly comparable to the desired £150 minimum income advocated by Middleton's newly formed National Society of Conservative Agents in 1891 when it sought to ensure its professional stature.²⁰

The dynamic nature of the League's expansion was reflected in the varying numbers of District Agents employed. While in January, 1887 there were only six assigned to geographical regions around the country, by June their number had doubled. Toward the end of 1888 their numbers had jumped to twenty-two. Eleven years later the scope of operations had shrunk considerably to nine regions and a modest six member team of agents, signifying the rising and waning fortunes of the League as a whole.²¹

¹⁹ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 5 November 1886; 13 May 1887; 16 June 1887; 7 July 1887. The Morning Post, 19 April 1888, p. 5.

²⁰ Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government, pp. 194-95.

²¹ The 1888 and 1899 figures are supplied from the League Habitation Rolls for those years. The Primrose League: The Roll of the Habitations, 1888; B.L. 8139.f.16. The Primrose League: The Roll of the Habitations, 1899; Gloucester Public Library, JQ5.10.

As the organization expanded, new methods were developed to simplify office procedures. In December of 1885 a lithograph signature of the registrar was introduced to ease mounting paperwork. The diplomas issued to members were also altered to reduce cost and facilitate mass production. In January, 1886 a facsimile letter containing the Grand Masters' signatures v/as introduced for general usage on League letterheads. By July, other procedures were introduced, further cutting the cost of diplomas by 25 percent.²²

The massive national organizational network necessitated an ever-growing set of uniform regulations. They were developed on a piecemeal basis to meet the immediate needs at hand. By January, 1887 the organization had grown to such an extent that standard procedures were available for transferring members from one Habitation to another. The distribution of literature was routinized in June when each Habitation was allocated one thousand free pamphlets every three months subject only to carriage fees. Additional materials could be purchased at cost.²³ These measures, aimed at streamlining office procedures, were made necessary by the tremendous volume of correspondence churned out and reflected the League's newfound role as a "mass" political association.

The financial circumstances of the Primrose League reflected its growing basis of support. Funds were sufficiently high in March, 1886 to prompt the Council to set up a Capital Account in which four

²² Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 9 December 1885; 27 January 1886; 16 July 1886.

²³ Ibid., 7 January 1887, 16 June 1887.

thousand pounds would be invested. That same month a bank account was opened with London and Westminster Bank to cover office expenses and salaries.²⁴ By the end of March, 1887 the Capital Account had risen to £959.18.7. The following year it totaled over ten thousand pounds (£10,824.6.7).²⁵

As the organization expanded, increasingly efforts were made to restrict the spontaneous expression of Habitations or their representatives. This was achieved by the Central Office through a number of means including correspondence, sending representatives from London to outlying regions, and continually revising and tightening statutes expounding uniform standards of behavior, rules, methods, and activities.

Efforts were also made by the executive to minimize controversy and criticism at gatherings held by both the Grand Habitation and the local association. As early as April, 1885, a motion was made by a member of Grand Council to restrict the powers of the Grand Habitation, the chief vehicle for a national airing of local grievances. The following year the statutes were changed to require that notice be given by delegates submitting motions, two weeks prior to the annual meeting. In July a two page Precept was issued on the "Standing Orders of Grand Council and Rules of Procedure,"²⁶ which made explicit how

²⁴ Jbld., 24 March 1886.

²⁵ The Primrose League Gazette, 21 April 1888, p. 4. The March, 1887 figure is derived by subtracting the Capital Account earnings of £1,226.8.0 for 1887-88 from the cumulative total for the year listed at £10,824.6.7 to get £9,597.18.7.

²⁶ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 22 April 1885; 7 April 1886; 16 July 1886.

meetings should be conducted at the local level.

Further restrictions regarding the initiatives available to local delegates at Grand Habitations were introduced in February, 1887 through a series of "reforms." Because of the growth of Habitations, only one delegate from each association was eligible to attend. Motions to be introduced were required to be passed at the local Habitation first before being submitted in writing a fortnight prior to the meeting. The Grand Council also considered extending this deadline to the month preceding the convention. Another modification restricted the numbers of Grand Council members to be elected in any given year to two-thirds of the existing Council (thirty), the other third remaining to help ensure continuity in function and procedures. Because the Grand Habitation had, by this time, become a major undertaking, constituting in 1887 alone three to four thousand delegates, a decision was made that year to extend the gathering over two days. The first was set aside for business, the second serving as a celebratory affair attended by the Grand Master, Lord Salisbury.²⁷

With the rising numbers of Habitations came delays in administrative procedures. A number of associations expressed dissatisfaction concerning the slow issuance of Warrants and diplomas, as well as, the improper recording of dues paid. Many Habitations pushed to have registration done at the local level.²⁸ This received

²⁷ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 7 February 1887. The Morning Post, 21 April 1887, p. 2.

²⁸ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 16 December 1885; 16 December 1886. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 9 April 1886; 26 November 1886. Mocatta to Churchill, 1 April 1886; 9 April 1886. Churchill papers, RCHL xii/1441; 1460. Robb, The Primrose League, citing England, 5 June 1886; 5 February 1887. England, 30

some measure of support in the Grand Council. M. Mocatta, a member of the executive, was concerned that these initiatives would pose a threat to the authority of the Central Office. While his perceptions on the consequences of decentralization were astute, he undoubtedly exaggerated the potential challenge from below. In a letter to Lord Randolph Churchill on 1 April 1886 he made explicit his concerns.

There is a movement on foot to do what I consider will absolutely tend to destroy the splendid progress we are now making, and completely to alter the character of the League.

It is proposed to reduce the staff and send books, with counterfoils to all the Habitations, with instructions to make out their own Diplomas. These are to be periodically communicated to the Head office, with remittances. If this be done I think the Head office will become a Habitation, to receive information from a mass of small Primrose Leagues. We should lose sight of all that daily goes on and snap our control altogether. At present we see day by day & week by week, the progress which is making (10,000 a week) but we should otherwise know it only by fragments & imperfectly.²⁹

Mocatta realized that if the movement were successful, it would lead to a general breakdown in Central Office functions and threaten the continued success of the League. He urged Churchill to attend the next Council meeting noting,

The Habitations if they did the work (which I do not think they will) would want to know why 2/6 entrance & 2/6 fees sho' [sic] be paid at all to the League & we shall create questions leading to the stoppage of the immense growth now beginning. The impression on me is so serious, that I hope you will make an effort to attend.³⁰

April 1887, pp. 9-10; 7 May 1887, pp. 9-10.

²⁹ Mocatta to Churchill, 1 April 1886; Churchill papers. See also his second letter to Churchill on the matter dated 9 April 1886.

³⁰ Mocatta to Churchill, 1 April 1886; Churchill papers.

While the move to shift registration duties to the localities was unsuccessful, it did point to pressures exerted by Habitations for greater freedom and initiative.

The potential limits of Central Office powers were further indicated in June, 1887 when an Agency Committee report recommended that a uniform system of bookkeeping be introduced in all Habitations. Recommendations were also made that no Associate be admitted free of charge at the local level. In both instances the Grand Council expressed support in principle for the proposal, but was disinclined to act for fear of interfering with established precedents.³¹

The introduction in October, 1887 of The Primrose Gazette, a newspaper inspired by Grand Council, in many respects marks the transition of the League from one organization among several interest groups to the political association par excellence of late nineteenth century Britain. In actual fact, there was no shortage of Primrose League newspapers. At the local level the League received frequent coverage in the provincial Conservative papers and several grass-roots Primrose League productions. They included The Primrose (Bournemouth) begun in December, 1886 and extending through April the following year. Ladywood Magazine, first begun in March of 1887, was still in existence by 1892, although serving principally as a party organ. Two other regional productions in existence at least during 1887 were The Primrose Magazine (Huddersfield region) and The Constitutional Magazine and Primrose Record (Coin Valley, Gloucestershire).³²

31 Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 3 June 1887.

32 The Primrose (Bournemouth), British Library. Ladywood

At the national level the League was served by The Primrose Record, begun in June, 1885. Initially it maintained fairly close ties to the Central Office though its shareholders, all of whom sat as members of the Grand Council.³³ The newspaper occupied a quasi-independent position, receiving some measure of League support, but fell short of obtaining proprietary status. Council resolutions were made as early as July, 1885 to improve the paper. In May of the following year, the newspaper lost its claim to official League patronage as a result of its assault on the Marquis of Hartington. Its shareholders, however, continued to sit on the Grand Council and some measure of contact remained, despite the censure.³⁴

The Morning Post, and to an even greater extent England, featured regular articles on the functions of the Primrose League. Their restricted coverage and their independent editorial positions, which on occasion brought them into conflict with official Conservative policy, suggested their limitations in serving the interests of the

Primrose Magazine (Birmingham), Birmingham Public Library, L76.21. The Primrose Magazine (Huddersfield), West Yorkshire Archive Service, Kirklees District Archives, Newspaper Reference, Newspaper Cuttings No. 4, July-December, 1887. Constitutional Magazine and Primrose Record (Coin Valley, Gloucestershire), Gloucester Record Office, D1070 viii/10.

³³ A listing of the Primrose Record shareholders is contained in its registration of incorporation dated 4 December 1886 under the name "Primrose League Printing and Publishing Company," PRO BT31 3774/23563. The shareholders named are the following: the Duke of Norfolk, Alfred Slade, Bt., Hon. Claude Hay, T. Gibson Bowles, Lord Harris, Viscount Folkestone, and Captain Philip Green. All were members of the 1886-87 Grand Council. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 1 October 1886.

³⁴ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 8 July 1885; 5 May 1886; 1 October 1886.

League. Consequently in January, 1887 the Council began tentatively to discuss steps that could be taken toward creating a newspaper under the supervision of the Council. Pursuing this course necessarily meant rejecting options to improve The Primrose Record or to work through existing papers. In May, the executive agreed to form a committee to consider proposals for implementing the paper, and plans were made to acquire the registered trade name of The Primrose Record. On the first of October, the initial weekly issue was published at one pence per issue.³⁵

The enterprise was not without its opponents, the most notable of whom was Ashmead Bartlett, Brooklyn, New York born Conservative M.P. The unstinting attacks on Gladstonian foreign policy that had begun during the Bulgarian crisis of 1877-78 and his outspoken support for British imperialism helped earn him a reputation as one of the leading platform speakers of his day. As Conservative representative to the Ecclesall Division in Sheffield from 1885 until his death in 1902 and as Chairman of the National Union between 1886 and 1888, he proved a staunch supporter of the Salisbury government and its policy of highly centralized authority.³⁶

Undoubtedly his greatest contribution to the party was the establishment of his national penny weekly newspaper, England, in March of 1880. It was the first Conservative weekly of its kind and served

³⁵ Ibid., 7 January 1887; 20 January 1887; 16 May 1887; 16 June 1887; 30 August 1887. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 October 1887, p. 1.

³⁶ Dictionary of National Biography, 1901-1911 supplement, pp. 105-06.

unstintingly in support of the party cause. In June, 1886 the newspaper was renamed England and Primrose Chronicle, reflecting its increased coverage of League events. By 1890 the newspaper had once again changed its format and assumed a modified title England the Union, and the Primrose Chronicle, continuing publication until May, 1898 when it folded for lack of sufficient funds. The newspaper proved a continual drain on Bartlett's fiscal resources, involving him in financial deals which proved damaging to his reputation.

As proprietor of England he had a vested interest in maintaining his newspaper. The decision on the part of the League to establish an independent newspaper led Bartlett to make a series of strident attacks on the leadership of Grand Council in the pages of England, eventually prompting a retaliatory strike by the party faithful Vanity Fair. In January, 1887 England voiced strong opposition to the League's proposal to establish its own newspaper.

The objections to such a paper are obvious. In the first place it is not wanted. The idea that the League must have a special organ of its own is a purely sentimental one.³⁷

Bartlett proposed as an alternative the continuation of the existing practice of sending circulars directly to the Honorary Secretaries of local Habitations, a cost which he determined to be twelve pounds per Precept.

Not content with attacks on the proposed newspaper, Bartlett launched an assault on the elitist character of the executive leadership.

³⁷ England, 29 January 1887, p. 9.

The idea of a great loose body of fifty persons like the Grand Council of the Primrose League, controlling a paper is absurd. They cannot do it. The paper will fall into the hands of a small clique, and will be worked by them and in their interest.³⁸

Bartlett's attack on the Grand Council reached its zenith in April. Writing in response to the executive's decision to put up only two thirds of its members for reelection in any given year, he mistakenly charged them with creating a permanent body of sixteen members. He used this as the pretext for launching an assault.

It is part of a vicious system which has become more and more developed of late in the Primrose League, a system of getting all the political and financial control of the society in the hands of a small clique on the Grand Council who really pull the strings and make the puppets dance.³⁹

He went on to note the willingness of delegates to accept the status quo if only to hear Grand Master Salisbury speak at the annual Grand Habitation.

The programme is carefully cut and dried, the elections are a farce, people are naturally anxious to hear Lord Salisbury speak, and so complaints and reforms are stifled. The Central body of the Primrose League is practically worthless. It is a huge money-absorbing, money-wasting, lifeless mechanism, whose operations are conducted with **the maximum of expense and the minimum of result**. It is doubtful whether any political body ever existed in which the cost of management was so high in proportion to the actual work done.⁴⁰

Bartlett went on to champion League initiatives at the local level and to affirm its genuinely representative character.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 16 April 1887, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Despite the fact that England was forced to retract its claims that a permanent body served on the Grand Council, it continued to rail against the "clique."⁴¹ The prolonged assault brought about a counterattack from Vanity Fair on 23 April 1887, mocking England's natural rights as the League's newspaper and suggesting the basis of Bartlett's attack lay in his failure to obtain a seat on the Council.⁴²

In response England staunchly defended its righteous crusade against the excesses of the Primrose executive and vigorously attacked the claims made by Vanity Fair. The newspaper printed a battery of letters from readers in an attempt to justify its position. Letters in support of Bartlett continued intermittently to grace the newspaper's pages throughout the controversy. In addition to the usual charges levied against the Council, England extended the focus of its attack on the twenty-third and the thirtieth to include the decision on the part of the executive to allow only local Ruling Councillors the right to examine the Central Office fiscal balance sheet upon request.⁴³

Vanity Fair, now heavily involved in the fray, noted with wry amusement England's inaccurate claim on 30 April 1887 that Bartlett had served on the Grand Council from 1881-1882, nearly two years prior to

⁴¹ Ibid., 23 April 1887, p. 9.

⁴² "He has persistently sought--and hitherto wholly without success--to get chosen into the Council." Vanity Fair, 23 April 1887, p. 264.

⁴³ England, 23 April 1887, p. 9; 30 April 1887, pp. 9-10; 7 May 1887, pp. 9-10; 21 May 1887, p. 14; 27 August, p. 7.

the League's formation.⁴⁴ A more serious expose by Vanity Fair was its demonstration that some key members of the Primrose executive were in fact principal shareholders of England. Among those so named were the Marquis of Salisbury, Lord Wimborne, the Duke of Norfolk, and Henry Chaplin, M.P., with holdings respectively of £1,000, £100, £100, and £500. The implication was clear: England was in fact closely tied to the clique against which it raged.⁴⁵

An examination of the newspaper's 1889 registry of incorporation in the Public Record Office affords additional details concerning its underlying ties to the Conservative party and the Primrose League. Of the nominal fifty thousand pounds of capital contributed to incorporate England, distributions in the form of one pound shares went to a number of individuals associated with the Primrose League. Salisbury's and Norfolk's holdings remained constant at one thousand and one hundred pounds, respectively. The Duchess of Buckingham and Chandos, the Countess of Wharncliffe, the Earl of Sandwich, and the Marchioness of Londonderry were all local officers of

⁴⁴ Bartlett served briefly as member of Grand Council between February and July of 1884. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 23 February 1884; 16 July 1884. He was asked in April of 1886 to submit his name for nomination, but declined. The following month he was proposed for cooptation and, according to his account, illegally prevented from sitting on the Council. England, 30 April 1887, p. 9. On 5 May 1887 his name was once again withdrawn from consideration for cooptation at his request. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 5 May 1887.

⁴⁵ Vanity Fair, 7 May 1887, p. 291.

the League. Lady Londonderry also served as a member of the LGC.⁴⁶
All were married to shareholders of England.⁴⁷

Other prominently placed Conservative figures mentioned in the registry included the Earl of Stanhope, Viscount Cranbrook, Marquis of Waterford, Earl of Glasgow, Sir E.C. Guinness, the Earl of Egremont, and Lord Elcho. Small-scale subscribers but nonetheless of particular importance in the political world included A.B. Forwood, Conservative party magnate of Liverpool (five shares) and Salisbury's nephew, Arthur Balfour (one share).⁴⁸ The records suggest, then, more than a casual connection between newspaper, League, and party.

England tempered its remarks somewhat in May, approving of the appointments of Henry Chaplin, Colonel Malleon, Sir Albert Rollit, Lord Harris, and George Curzon to the executive. However, criticism again surfaced against Vanity Fair that same month, and in August, England resumed its attack on the League's decision to establish its own newspaper.⁴⁹ The repeated outbreaks prompted the Grand Council to ask Rollit, editor of England and member of the Council, to persuade Bartlett to refrain from making attacks on the League.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Based on my computerized listing of titled local Habitation officers derived from The Primrose League: Roll of Habitations, 1888 and the LGC executive membership for 1887-88 provided in The Primrose League Gazette, 1 September 1888, p. 1.

⁴⁷ "England Newspaper and Publishing Company, Ltd.," 11 May 1889, PRO BT31 3081/17618.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ England, 7 May 1887, p. 9; 14 May 1887, p. 10; 20 August 1887, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 30 August 1887.

The controversy, which assumed its most virulent form in the first half of 1887, was significant, not so much in itself, but for what it revealed about the League. Despite the overbearing nature of Bartlett's attacks, they struck a responsive chord among many Habitation members who sought greater local and regional freedoms and a reduction in Central Office expenses.

Criticism against excessive Central Office powers not surprisingly achieved its greater expression in England. A letter to the editor in June, 1886 and signed "Rural Knight" complained that the headquarters was badly managed and that local Habitations were seriously lacking in funds as a result of their contributions to the London executive. By February the following year the editor of England wrote that its columns could be filled with similar complaints.⁵¹

John D. Bonner, Honorary Secretary of the Stoke Newington Habitation, undoubtedly expressed the feelings of many rank and file members when, in April, 1887 he wrote complaining of the severe crippling of his Habitation by lack of sufficient funds. He suggested that over 27 percent of his association's revenue in the previous year went toward fees and badges, an excessive amount, given the more than nine thousands pounds in reserve at the disposal of the League.

Complaining of the Council's promise but failure in fact to reduce fees, he urged Habitations to unite to achieve this end.

That promise not having been fulfilled, I consider that habitations should write to secure the promised reductions without delay, the more especially as the

^{5*} Robb, The Primrose League, p. 62, citing England, 5 June 1886 and 5 February 1887.

Grand Council is extracting from them moneys for which it has⁵² no immediate use, but which it merely wished to save.

Bonner's entreaty for Habitations to join together in bargaining for lower fees underscored Mocatta's concern that a popular reaction might surface to decentralize League organization, thereby destroying its potential for greater expansion and influence.

Throughout the Bartlett controversy, complaints from readers continued to surface within England's editorial pages in support of cost reductions. The Central Office, however, was not without its public supporters as a letter in the 7 May 1887 issue of Vanity Fair attests.⁵³

Nevertheless the Grand Council's own minutes and those of the LGC suggest a series of longstanding, if muted, internal complaints concerning the excessive expenditures incurred by the London executive. In April, 1885, for instance, a delegate to the Grand Habitation, Mr. Ankett, publicly requested the right to examine the League's balance sheet. The suggestion was tabled by Randolph Churchill. The following year at the Grand Habitation popular support was affirmed by delegates ("Hear, hear") for a decision made by the Grand Council to reduce entrance and Tribute fees by 20 percent.⁵⁴ The LGC minutes suggest a series of attempts on the part of the women's executive to persuade the Grand Council to lower fees, or alternatively, to subsidize poor

⁵² England, 30 April 1887, pp. 9-10.

⁵³ Vanity Fair, 7 May 1887, p. 292.

⁵⁴ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 25 April 1885. The Morning Post, 20 May 1886, p. 2.

Habitations.⁵⁵

The dispute between Bartlett and the Central Office is also of interest in that grievances within Conservative circles were rarely worded publicly. Like the party it represented, the Primrose League preferred, wherever possible, to minimize internal frictions and to avoid their public exposure. In taking this tack the Conservatives and the League distinguished themselves rather noticeably from their counterparts, the Liberals and the National Liberal Federation.⁵⁶

Finally, it should be noted that while the Central Office was generally slow in responding to grievances, nevertheless, it sought to show some measure of flexibility to criticisms from below, particularly

⁵⁵ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 9 April 1886; 29 October 1886; 12 November 1886; 26 November 1886; 10 December 1886; 17 February 1888. In response to initiatives made by LGC in the spring of 1886 to alleviate difficulties of poor Habitations, the Grand Council agreed that the women could contribute funds to the newly established Joint Literature Committee for possible distribution to poor Habitations. However, donations were to be strictly limited to special functions which included exhibitions, formation of club libraries, and general social functions. The Grand Council, through the establishment of this policy, made clear its opposition to direct subsidization of Habitations. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 9 April 1886; 7 May 1886. The LGC responded by generously contributing five hundred pounds to the Joint Committee in support of the proposed program and the continuance of the existing policy of funding lecturers. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 14 May 1886; 28 May 1886; 29 October 1886.

⁵⁶ D.A. Hamer, Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery discusses at some length, the factors responsible for Liberal party dissension, subjected as it was to a number of factious quarrels from below and personal struggles from above, many clearly visible to the public eye. See also Peter Stansky, Ambitions and Strategies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), for a detailed behind-the-scenes portrayal of the 1890's quest for leadership within the party. Feuchtwanger and others have frequently noted the contrasting methods by which the Liberal and Conservative parties institute policy and react to dissension. Feuchtwanger, Disraeli, Democracy and the Tory Party, pp. 190, 211-12.

when the cost in terms of central power and financial expenditure was minimal. Thus the London office began, in 1887, to publish copies of the annual balance sheet in its newspaper, The Primrose Gazette, thereby making the figures accessible to all members and by implication to the general public.⁵⁷

Some efforts were also made to reduce annual Tributes owed to the Central Office as in the case of a 20 percent savings introduced in April, 1886 to Habitations paying within a specified period.⁵⁸ in practice, however, lower fees were instituted more to encourage tardy Habitations to send in their dues than as an altruistic gesture from above or a responsive action in support of popular sentiment.

The consequences appear to have been fairly minimal. By December of that year eighteen thousand circulars were sent out to Knights and Dames for overdue subscriptions, an astonishing figure given that only a total of 56,026 Knights and Dames are listed on the League registry as of the end of March, 1886 and 89,473 the following year.⁵⁹ if the average of the two years is taken as a rough gauge of their membership for December of 1886, then fully 25 percent of the total number of Knights and Dames were negligent in their payments.

⁵⁷ The Primrose League Gazette, 24 December 1887, p. 5; 21 April 1888, p. 4; 25 May 1889, p. 10. Detailed figures cited from the Annual Balance sheet were also made available through the Conservative press, enhancing public access to League accounts. See "Meeting of Grand Habitation," The Morning Post, 19 April 1888 and 21 May 1889, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 7 April 1886.

⁵⁹ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 16 December 1886. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 September 1899, p. 9.

The direct-mail solicitation successfully brought in over seven thousand overdue Tributes. By May, 1888 the Grand Council appears to have found it necessary to resort to greater incentives, offering Habitations a 60 percent reduction in order to stem the relative decline in subscriptions.⁶⁰

Notwithstanding the Council's desire to maintain control, they did distinguish between central and local spheres of influence and generally were reluctant to impose policy regarding a local matter except when it involved a conflict with important League principles. On balance the powers of the Central Office remained essentially unaltered, despite the criticisms raised. The executive conceded where the cost was minimal and protected, whenever possible, the policies it had initiated.

Other initiatives included the formation of the LGC and the SGC in 1885. These actions were responsible, respectively, for creating an elite core of Primrose Dames and establishing an organizational network in Scotland. The LGC, originally entitled the Ladies Committee, first met at Lady Borthwick's home in March of 1885. It was composed of a highly select group of women including the Marchioness of Salisbury, the Duchess of Marlborough, Lady Randolph Churchill, Lady Gwendolen Cecil, Lady Knightley, Lady Wimborne, Lady Borthwick, Lady Beresford,

⁶⁰ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 1 May 1888. The League also appears to have offered some reductions in individually compounded payments. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 13 January 1886; the revised statutes contained in the minutes dated April, 1886. The principal beneficiaries appeared to be those persons not affiliated with a particular Habitation and therefore not eligible for the 20 percent group Habitation reduction offered in April, 1886. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 7 January 1887.

Lady Dorothy Nevill, her daughter, Meresia, and Mrs. Hardman, wife to the editor of The Morning Post. The participation of Lady Northcote and Mrs. Akers-Douglas also helped to encourage the participation of many of Britain's most prominently placed women devoted to the support of the Conservative cause.^{6*}

An Executive Committee was formed and membership quickly opened up to rank and file "Ladies" contributing one guinea annually to the LGC and additional entrance and annual dues allocated to Grand Council which totaled five shillings.⁶² The participation of the Duchess of Marlborough, Lady Churchill, and Lady Georgiana Curzon in the 1885 elections of Lord Randolph Churchill undoubtedly influenced many women to make their way indirectly into the political arena through the auspices of the Primrose League.

The General Elections of 1885 and 1886 in effect served as baptism by fire, initiating the Primrose Dames, and in particular the LGC, in the art of political canvassing and conveyancing thus paving the way for their eventual dominance of the grass-roots politics associated with the Primrose League. Lord Randolph Churchill was to pay tribute to the contribution of the Dames as early as the Annual Grand Habitation in April, 1885, suggesting that their "powers of political persuasion . . . [were] likely to be greater than those of the knights."⁶³

⁶¹ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 2 March 1885; 16 May 1885; 6 June 1885; 9 July 1885.

⁶² Ibid., 2 March 1885; 12 May 1885.

⁶³ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 25 April 1885.

Lord Salisbury, as Grand Master, likewise praised their efforts the following year. According to him, "the feminine element" not only contributed generously to the cause, but also was influential in ensuring "the prudence and the respect for the law,"⁶⁴ factors of considerable importance in Salisbury's view and significant in securing the legitimacy of the League and its future as handmaiden to the party.

By May of 1887, the LGC had 1,043 members, over half of whom were actively involved in a variety of political roles ranging from initiating Habitations to assisting agents in canvassing, registering outvoters, and engaging in the production or distribution of League political literature.⁶⁵ Their independent organization and funding enabled them, over the course of time, to exert considerable influence within the scope of Primrose affairs.

The SGC, originally named the Scottish Branch, was conceived by the Central Office in July of 1885 as a means of extending the influence of the League to Scotland. It was a quasi-independent organ, having its own Grand Master, trustees, and Grand Councillors who exercised substantial discretionary powers in local matters so long as these did not conflict with Central Office dictates. The Scottish organization was responsible for its own financial affairs, issuing Warrants, diplomas, and collecting its own fees. A weekly return listing the number of Warrants issued was prepared and sent to London, enabling the Grand Council to keep a watchful eye on Scotland's

⁶⁴ The Morning Post, 20 May 1886, p. 2.

⁶⁵ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 6 May 1887.

progress. The League's registrar, W. Haigh, was sent to Edinburgh to help organize the office and to ensure its efficiency and uniformity with general League principles.⁶⁶

The first meeting of the SGC was held in October, 1885. The Scottish organization had a slow beginning and consequently failed to play a role in the November, 1885 elections. By 20 May 1886, however, it had established over seventy Habitations and some 8,653 members, modest when compared to England's dramatic growth, but nevertheless a foothold in what was traditionally solid Gladstonian territory. By the end of the year, the number of associations had risen to 118 with a total of 21,958 members, 1,948 recruited in the past month.⁶⁷ Efforts to establish a Scottish branch of the LGC met with some resistance from the London office. However, once the primacy of the Grand Council and the LGC was assured, a successful accommodation was reached.⁶⁸

By the end of 1888 the overall organization of the League had assumed many of its mature features. A semiprofessional staff had been established to oversee office, political, and bookkeeping functions. The Grand Council had expanded its committees to keep abreast with its ever growing interests. These included General Purpose, Finance,

⁶⁶ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 22 July 1885; 5 August 1885; 30 September 1885; 15 October 1886.

⁶⁷ The Primrose League. Scottish Branch Minute Book, 1885-1904, 2 October 1885. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 5 August 1885; 9 December 1885; 7 January 1887. The Morning Post, 20 May 1886, p. 2.

⁶⁸ The Primrose League. Scottish Branch Minute Book, 14 December 1887; 14 November 1888. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 17 February 1888; 27 July 1888; 9 November 1888; 7 December 1888.

Agency, a Primrose Gazette Committee, and, when needed, an audit committee to review annual financial records.⁶⁹

A companion LGC had been formed in March of 1885. It supplemented and complemented overall Grand Council interests, while retaining its own executive and financial interests. Both Councils participated on the Joint Literature and Joint Consultative Committees to ensure uniform standards regarding literature and general harmonic relations.⁷⁰ The SGC was established in the fall of 1885 to assist the League in developing in the far north. Overall the League was making gains in Ireland and the Colonies though her greatest strength remained overwhelming represented in England. Wales, like Scotland, lagged behind in its support for the League.

Among the greatest innovations achieved during this period were the formation of District Agents and a newspaper sponsored by the League. Both helped to ensure a nationwide coverage and overall heightened levels of activity throughout the country.

Two other organs were in an initial state of development. One was an enterprise loosely modeled after the LGC and later named the Knights Imperial. It was conceived primarily to generate greater income for the Grand Council through the recruitment of "Gentlemen" at an annual rate of one guinea each. Unlike the LGC, however, its members were not expected to be actively engaged in League functions.⁷¹

⁶⁹ The Primrose League Gazette, 1 September 1888, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 27 July 1888.

An Entertainment Committee was also in the process of formation. Its significance was twofold. The Committee was conceived by the LGC and reflected the Dames' growing initiative. Its functions were to provide a general clearinghouse of names of female and male members willing to address local meetings and to suggest social groups available to perform at League functions.⁷² The Committee was a natural extension of the Grand Council proposal made in 1886 that the LGC provide limited assistance to poor Habitations through a series of special events functions. It underscored the role of entertainment as a political function for recruitment.

By 1888, then, the Primrose League had assumed the essential features of its organizational development. Much would change in the ensuing twelve years, but the fundamental pattern of development remained intact.

⁷² Ibid., 19 October 1888; 9 November 1888; 23 November 1888.

CHAPTER THREE

Politics, 1885-1883

We live no longer, alas, in Pitt's times; the aristocracy governed then and we were able to form an active policy, which made England after the Congress of Vienna the richest and most respected power in Europe. Now democracy is on top, and with it the personal and party system, which reduces every British government to absolute dependence on the **aura popularis**.

Salisbury to Herbert Bismarck
(January, 1889)

When I die my epitaph must be: "Died of writing inane answers to empty-headed Conservative Associations." It is a miserable death to look forward to.

Salisbury to Lady John Manners
(9 March 1884)

I

Salisbury frequently expressed a longing for the restoration of an era preceding the 1832, 1867, and 1884 Reform Acts. However, his actions suggested a man fully cognizant of the possibilities and limitations confronting a politician who sought to resist the encroachment of democracy in the modern age. Thus, while taking steps to consolidate his hold over the Conservative party between 1885 and 1886 through an espousal of a policy of retrenchment, he sought to bring the Primrose League, the popular expression of Tory sensibilities, directly under his influence. To this end he had his most trusted lieutenants, Chief Whip in the Commons, Akers-Douglas, and Chief Agent for the party, Captain Middleton, serve on the Grand

Council in an ex officio capacity during these years. There they maintained a watchful eye over the operations of the Primrose League, paying particular attention to its political and electoral activities.

The task of acquiring the Primrose League was made all that much easier by the apparent lack of resistance from Churchill, who, for all intents and purposes, ceased attending functions sponsored by the League after April, 1885. By the fall of 1885, Salisbury was named, along with Northcote, Grand Master. He consolidated his ties with the League by regularly presiding over meetings of the annual Grand Habitation beginning in 1886. There Salisbury addressed enthusiastic delegates, gathered from all over the country. He praised their efforts and directed the League toward the promotion of interests most vital to the Conservative cause. Salisbury's influence was made all that much more potent by the presence of his wife and daughter on the executive of the LGC, respectively, as President and Honorary Treasurer, beginning in 1885.

Between 1880 and 1886 Salisbury addressed over seventy meetings throughout the country. Although Disraeli seldom utilized the public forum as a means for popularizing parliamentary policy, Salisbury proved to be a more modern orator, seeking through these gatherings to establish a direct link between himself and the electorate.* In this way he hoped to circumvent the growing powers of the House of Commons and the caucus, thereby restoring the Lords to undisputed primacy while

¹ Cecil, Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury, vol. 3, p. 3. Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government, p. 42. Corinne C. Weston, "Salisbury and the Lords, 1868-1895," The Historical Journal, vol. 25, no. 1 (March 1982), pp. 105-08.

minimizing the irreversible gains made by democracy through the extension of the franchise.²

If Salisbury was somewhat overshadowed in his rhetorical talents by the most vibrant speakers of his day, Gladstone, Chamberlain, and Churchill, he nevertheless proved supreme in his management of the party machine.³ By 1888 his primacy was unchallenged, extending from the corridors of Westminster to Chief Agent Middleton's vast enterprise. The Tatter's field of operations was maintained by the efforts of agents dispersed throughout the country, the assistance of regional and urban party bosses, and the intricate local networks operating under the auspices of the National Union and the Primrose League. They would serve Salisbury well in the years to come.

The essential core of Salisbury's future strategy was sketched out in his article entitled "Disintegration" published by Quarterly Review in October of 1882. In the essay he made a strong case for an innovative, vibrant Conservatism which worked actively to promote and maintain two of Britain's most prized achievements: her empire and the conciliatory relations existing between the social classes.⁴

According to Salisbury, the weakest link in the imperial armor lay in Ireland. In calling for an alliance of political and social

² See Salisbury's speech to the London and Westminster Working Men's Constitutional Association. The Times, 15 May 1884, p. 10.

³ Taylor, Lord Salisbury, p. 77.

⁴ Reprinted in Paul Smith, Lord Salisbury on Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 341.

groups working in opposition to the threat of national disintegration, he appealed to Whigs as the natural ally of Conservatives in resisting Irish Home Rule and the disruptive influence of Radical reforms.⁵ The characterization of Conservatives as the rightful defenders of Britain's imperial and national interests would provide the party with an effective battle cry in the years to come.

II

Salisbury's strategy of invoking the threat of imperial disintegration to stave off domestic reforms was first tested in 1884. He utilized the potential hazards of the ill-fated Liberal decision to send General Gordon on a rescue mission to the Sudan as a means of obstructing passage of the 1884 Reform bill. While ultimately unsuccessful in preventing the passage of the act, nevertheless, Salisbury achieved a partial victory. By forcing the bill to be linked to a redistribution measure most suited to Conservative representation, he indicated his ability to compromise where necessary in order to achieve long term advantages instrumental to the future performance of his party.

The settlement which was eventually agreed upon between Salisbury and Gladstone in the fall of 1884 entailed a number of provisions which proved beneficial to Conservatives. Although the 1884 Reform bill would be immediately enacted, Gladstone agreed to delay its

⁵ Ibid., pp. 343-45, 350, 356, 358-60, 372-76.

implementation until January, 1886 by which time the Redistribution bill was expected to become law. The compact further stipulated several conditions which were particularly favorable to the Tories.⁶

Constituencies were to be predominantly single-member districts. Only the City of London, the Universities, and twenty-three mid-sized cities were granted more than one representative. The agreement also provided for the division of county boundaries along the lines of their existing rural and urban concentrations of population. Both the preponderance of single-member districts and the separation of rural and urban communities were advantageous to Conservatives. These provisions helped to ensure that in the metropolitan regions the propertied middle and upper class voters were not dominated by the interests of working class electors. Similarly in the rural areas Tory interests were protected by the allocation of separate districts for borough or urban centers, generally associated with Liberal, cosmopolitan voters, from farming communities, traditionally regarded as centers of Conservative influence.⁷

The above provisions in large measure ensured that the Redistribution settlement reached between Salisbury and Gladstone would weigh quite substantially in favor of the Tories. The agreement, therefore, was ample compensation for any minimal loss incurred by the

⁵ For a summary of the political maneuvers underlying the settlement of the 1885 Redistribution Act, see Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government, pp. 36-45.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 37-38, 40, 43-44. James Cornford, "The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century," The Victorian Revolution, ed. Peter Stansky (New York: New Viewpoints, 1973), p. 310.

Conservatives by the extension of the franchise to country constituencies, areas noted for their strong ties to conservatism.

On a personal level, the negotiations had the added advantage of demonstrating Salisbury's superior leadership qualities to those of Northcote. While Salisbury's talents as an arbiter of domestic disputes were first indicated in July, 1884 during his meetings with Churchill regarding the powers of the National Union, his skills were proven conclusively in his agreement achieved with Gladstone concerning the Reform bill .8

The pursuit of imperial interests to the detriment of domestic reforms reflected a shift away from the ambiguous claims of Tory Democracy once formulated by Disraeli toward a concerted effort to win the support of a broad coalition intent on preserving national institutions threatened from without. Ultimately Salisbury's approach would prove extremely effective, transforming the Conservatives from a minority based, quasi-aristocratic concern to the single most successful and resilient party in modern British history. It was conceived as a reaction to forces contributing to dismemberment and decline and proved especially effective when combined with the pragmatic, modern electoral methods of the new democratic age.

The claims of modern democracy necessitated the creation of an auxiliary army of rank and file supporters. Salisbury, ever knowledgeable, if distrustful of the mechanics of the new age, took steps to ensure that conservative political associations would provide

8 Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government, pp. 45-47, 59.

a source of popular support. In January, 1885 Chief Whip in the House of Commons, Akers-Douglas, wrote Churchill, presumably at the request of Salisbury. Akers-Douglas expressed his concern regarding the impending resignation of Claude Hay, Organizing Secretary, proposing that a strong man be chosen to succeed him. Complementing the Primrose League on its "excellent work in the Counties," Akers-Douglas indicated the party's desire that the duties of the new Secretary be extended "to take in the farmer & more-respectable labourer class," a course of action which, he acknowledged, would "help us greatly."⁹

The newly appointed Chief Agent, Middleton, was charged by Salisbury with the task of creating the Conservative response to the Chamberlainite caucus. The principal, though by no means the exclusive, purveyors of the precepts of the new conservatism would be the Primrose League. Middleton's first contact with the League appears to have been in March, 1885 when he wrote instructing the Council on procedures relating to the canvassing of out-voters. In April he was invited to attend an executive meeting to advise members on the matter. That same month, League statutes were altered to include Middleton and Chief Conservative Whips in the Lords and Commons as ex officio members of the Council.¹⁰

The increasing incursions of Salisbury's lieutenants, Akers-Douglas and Middleton, into the activities of the Primrose League

⁹ A. Akers-Douglas to Churchill, 31 January 1885; Churchill Papers, RCHL iv/552.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 25 March 1885; 15 April 1885; 22 April 1885; 25 April 1885.

appears to have met with little direct opposition from Churchill. No evidence is provided from the Minutes of the Grand Council, Churchill's Archives, or indeed any other source which indicates any resistance on the part of Churchill to Salisbury's efforts, or those of Middleton and Akers-Douglas, to place the Primrose League firmly within the Conservative party's sphere of influence. Indeed, after an initial flurry of activity associated with the operations of the Grand Council, Churchill appears suddenly to have lost interest in the organization in the aftermath of his July, 1884 agreement with Salisbury regarding the National Union. This assessment is based primarily upon his sparse correspondence relating to the League and his absence from meetings of the Grand Council .H

Churchill's attendance at public events sponsored by the League was limited, even in the early years, confined largely to yearly celebrations: the Grand Habitation meetings of 1884 and 1885 and the

¹¹ The correspondence of Lord Randolph Churchill provides very few references to the Primrose League. Between 1883 and 1888 only fifteen letters relate directly to the organization. Of these, only six were dated between 1883 and 1885, the years when Churchill was most closely associated with the League. 1883-85: RCHL ii/217, 230a, 255, 291; iv/552; v/590. 1886-88: RCHL xxi/1441, 1442, 1460; xiii/1492; xvi/1939, 1989; xx/2535, 2536; xxii/2839.

The records relating to Lord Randolph Churchill's attendance at the Grand Council meetings probably serve as a more accurate reflection of his interest and involvement with the Primrose League. Between 17 November and 1 March 1884 there were eleven such gatherings, and Churchill attended every one of them. From 15 March 1884 until the end of July, eighteen sessions were cited, including the Grand Habitation. Churchill attended half of these. Finally, between 6 August 1884 and 25 April 1885 twenty-five gatherings were listed. Churchill attended only two meetings, one of which was the annual Grand Habitation over which he presided. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 17 November 1883-25 April 1885.

banquet held just prior to the 1885 annual gathering.¹² His lack of participation in the activities sponsored by the Grand Council after April, 1885 would appear to have two possible explanations. Perhaps he perceived the Primrose League as having little intrinsic value once the National Union was curbed of its powers. Alternatively, there was no "rational" explanation underlying his motives. As R.F. Foster's biography of Churchill has noted,¹³ inconsistent and abrupt changes in behavior were characteristic of Churchill throughout his political life.

In presiding over the Grand Habitation held in April of 1885, Churchill presented a fairly restrained manner, complementing the organization for its growth and cautioning against interference with existing Conservative party organs. His concluding remarks, however, ended dramatically, and somewhat inexplicably given the text of his speech, with the words "and remember, ladies and gentlemen, whatever happens, by the Primrose League I stand or fall."¹⁴

Notwithstanding Churchill's grandstand pronouncement, his association with League activities became minimal after April. He continued along with Gorst and Wolff to be officially listed as Council members for the 1885-86 Primrose year and retained his position as

¹² Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 16 July 1884; 25 April 1885. The Primrose League. Its Rise, Progress, and Constitution, p. 13.

¹³ R.F. Foster, Lord Randolph Churchill, pp. 2-7.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 25 April 1885.

trustee throughout his life.¹⁵ Only Wolff seems to have attended meetings with any frequency. His visits occurred primarily before Middleton and Akers-Douglas began to make their presence felt, just prior to the formation of Salisbury's Caretaker government in July of 1885.¹⁶

In May, 1885 Lady Salisbury, Lady Northcote, and the Duchess of Marlborough were appointed Presidents of the LGC. Their positions upon the executive along with that of Mrs. Akers-Douglas, who was represented upon the Council between 6 June 1885 and 22 April 1887,¹⁷ can also be seen as a barometer of Conservative party interest in supervising the League, particularly during its early, formative stage.

The anticipation of a General Election in June, 1885 led Middleton to attend some key Council meetings, one of which authorized the payment of lecturers and allocation of funds for the use of the

¹⁵ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 25 April 1885. The last letter from the League to Churchill concerning fiscal matters relating to his position as trustee is dated 31 January 1894. F. Willis to Churchill; Churchill papers, RCHL xxx/4433. Gorst also held a "permanent" position as League trustee from August of 1886, continuing to serve in that capacity throughout the years under study. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 6 August 1886. List of Council and trustees for the 1900-1901 Primrose year contained in The Primrose League Gazette, 2 July 1900, p. 3.

¹⁶ Wolff appears to have attended at least nine Council meetings between January and June of 1885 and few if any sessions during the subsequent twelve months. Conversely Middleton and Akers-Douglas seem to have attended, all told, only five executive functions between January and June of 1885, all of them occurring from April onward. The following year they were present for at least nineteen Council meetings. The above figures are based on attendance records maintained in the Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League between January of 1885 and June, 1886.

¹⁷ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 16 May 1885 and between 6 June 1885 and 22 April 1887.

Political Secretary. A decision was also made to keep the Chief Agent informed of political activities. The renewed expectation of elections in September led to a resolution by the Council authorizing the Finance Committee "to expend such sums as it may deem necessary before the date of the General Elections." To this end the Political Secretary was empowered to engage a staff of lecturers and supply them free of charge to local Habitations.¹⁸ Middleton's presence at the meeting gave a clear indication of the party's endorsement of League functions.

The General Election of November, 1885 served as the first significant test of the value of Primrose League activities. While individual efforts had been made on the part of League members to support a number of Conservative candidates, there had been no national campaign to test their talents. The growth of the League in the period just prior to the election, particularly at the Dame and Associate levels, which were beginning to "take off," suggested its correlation with larger political developments as manifested on the national scene.

The election was of particular significance as the first nationwide contest since the introduction of the celebrated reforms of 1883-85. The ability of the League to perform within the prescribed limits of the Corrupt Practices Act would, in large measure, determine its future viability. The Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 was the product of a heightened parliamentary and public awareness of illegal campaign practices and the spiraling cost of elections. Its passage marked the first truly comprehensive and enforceable set of regulations

¹⁸ IS Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 17 June 1885; 9 September 1885.

restricting campaign expenditures and a variety of practices associated with the treating and bribery of voters.¹⁹

The act marked a transition from earlier nineteenth century forms of deferential behavior associated with an individual patron toward twentieth century standards of individual voter preference influenced by a number of distinct pressure groups.²⁰ The legislation was provisional in character, straddling both the old and the new. This was particularly evident in the imprecise definition given to "agency" in the act, in effect enabling associations to exercise a great deal of influence on prospective voters, actions that might encourage bribery.

The law, as it was applied, permitted social and other functions, in so far as they were a normal part of an organization's activity, to be performed, although some restrictions were in force during the period directly associated with the election.²¹ Nevertheless, as Ostrogorski noted, the practices of extraparliamentary associations left them "continually sailing very near the Corrupt Practices Act" and would certainly have been considered illegal if performed by the candidate. However their independent stature and

¹⁹ William B. Gwyn, Democracy and the Cost of Politics in Britain (London: Athlone Press, 1962), pp. 51-53, 55, 89-91.

²⁰ For a philosophical treatment of this issue spanning the first three Reform bills, see D.C. Moore's "Political Morality in Mid-Nineteenth Century England: Concepts, Norms, Violations," Victorian Studies, vol. 13, no. 1 (September 1969), pp. 5-36.

²¹ Cornelius O'Leary, The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections, 1868-1911 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 201, 203-04. Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, pp. 472, 479-80, 620.

self-imposed restraints exercised during election campaigns generally resulted in freedom from prosecution.²²

For the Primrose League with its natural blurring of social and political functions, the definition of agency provided ample flexibility to operate within the hazy confines of the law. As a voluntary association with no formal ties to any party, it was able to offer a continuous stream of "social" activities, in effect engaging in a never-ending campaign to recruit potential voters into what was, by all rights, a conservative subculture upon which the party could draw.

Unsure of the exact application of the Corrupt Practices law as it applied to the 1885 General Election, many Habitations appeared to offer their services to local Conservative agents working on behalf of the candidates. They were generally instrumental in registering voters, particularly those situated in outlying districts; conveying individuals to the polls; distributing pamphlets; and in some instances directly assisting the campaign efforts of the local candidates. By the 1886 General Election, League efforts had become so comprehensive as to prompt Middleton to request that Habitations send notices of removals and omissions on the local voter register to the appropriate agent or Conservative association.²³

Because of the ambiguities surrounding the applications of the Corrupt Practices law, particularly in the first few years of

²² Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, pp. 472, 479-80.

²³ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 16 July 1886.

application, the Primrose League frequently modified its electoral campaign procedures, never quite sure which actions properly placed it within the confines of the law. At various points, legal advice was sought and in each instance a different interpretation appears to have been given.²⁴ prior to the November, 1885 election Habitations were sent notices instructing them on "What Members of the League Must Not Do." Statutes and Precepts repeatedly urged members to observe the law. Nevertheless, its exact contours remained unclear. In June, 1886, anticipating the July General Election, the Council issued a Precept to Habitations instructing them "to use every effort consistent with the law" in placing themselves at the disposal of the agent representing the local (Unionist) candidate.²⁵

Confusion continued. It was reflected in the disparate practices which grew up surrounding League election activities. Some Habitations formally dissolved, placing themselves as individuals under the instruction of agents. Others worked directly for the local representative. Many preferred maintaining an independent stance, aligned to the agent and Conservative association but principally involved in registration and conveyancing, functions that might easily be carried out apart from existing party operations.

As late as July, 1887 the Grand Council remained divided regarding the legal status of election and registration procedures

²⁴ Ibid., 14 January 1885; 22 July 1885; 16 July 1887; 18 June 1888.

²⁵ Ibid., 21 October 1885; 15 June 1886.

practiced by Habitations.²⁶ By June of the following year, the Council appeared to have reached agreement, devising what was, in effect, a universal strategy for Habitations. All members who qualified as voters were expected to register. Wardens assigned to subdistricts would be responsible for supervising registration and canvassing activities associated with the local Habitation. They were also charged with consulting voter lists posted annually on Church doors and post office buildings during the month of August in order to ensure that qualified members had placed their names on the rolls.²⁷

The Ruling Council of the Habitation in the constituency where the election was being held was responsible for determining the candidate which best represented Primrose principles. Habitations were advised to plan the best means of assisting local candidates before elections. The district under the Habitation's supervision was to be parceled out "street by street, village by village, and hamlet by hamlet" with active members distributed accordingly and assigned the task of determining the names and politics of every voter, providing conveyances where needed.²⁸

Under the 1888 procedures, Habitations were instructed to operate independently, although in harmony with local candidates and Unionist associations. Assistance given to local political figures was

²⁶ Ibid., 16 July 1887.

²⁷ Primrose League Special Minute Book, 1886-1900, 18 June 1888; 26 June 1888.

²⁸ Primrose League Special Minute Book, 1886-1900, 18 June 1888.

to be free and, in so far as possible, to terminate at election time. However, a Habitation was able to hold meetings during this period provided the facilities were donated or rented on a yearly basis. Wardens were instructed to obtain a list of vehicles available in the district at election time, privately requesting their use on polling day. All Habitation members were to be acquainted with the provisions of the Corrupt Practices Act. The above procedures remained the generally accepted practices of Habitations for several years to come.

Periodically the Liberals accused the Primrose League of illegal practices. Two such instances are cited here. In 1887, the Home Department was asked to investigate allegations that the Ladywood Habitation in Birmingham had unduly influenced voters through the actions of its sewing society which distributed garments to the poor. In making the charges in the House of Commons, P. Stanhope gave as evidence the fact that "this Habitation has been engaged in three contests already, and has been successful in each." The request was tabled by Stuart Wortley, Under Secretary of State, noting that sufficient provision was made available through the Corrupt Practices Act to investigate alleged malpractices.²⁹ In Huddersfield Liberals accused the League of a variety of offenses ranging from boycotting a confectioner who refused to vote for the Conservative candidate to buying voters and intimidating electors.³⁰

²⁹ Great Britain, Parliament, Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd Series, 314 (1887); 352-53.

³⁰ The Huddersfield Examiner, 8 December 1888, p. 6.

The exact extent of League complicity in illegal practices is difficult to assess, particularly given the highly partisan nature of its accusers. Certainly the League as a whole intended to operate within the confines of the law. From the above descriptions of League canvassing and election practices, however, it is clear that several of their procedures were at least potentially in conflict with the law. By placing Habitations directly at the disposal of local agents during election times, the League raised questions concerning its professed independent status. The Grand Council itself speculated that in instances where Habitations demanded political allegiance as a criterion of membership, they were in violation of the law and took steps to end the practice.³¹

Overall, the imprecise definition of agency permitted the League to exercise enormous discretion in its activities and as Gyn noted, the result was that "at times the League in effect took over candidates' treating expenses."³² Whatever the limitations of the Corrupt Practices Act, its benefits were immediately felt. By November, 1885 direct election costs incurred by political parties had declined by seventy-five percent when compared with comparable 1880 figures.³³ The League's methods, like its appeal, were transitional in character, straddling older crumbling forms of deference with the newly

³¹ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 3 March 1887.

³² Gyn, Democracy and the Cost of Politics in Britain, p. 127.

³³ O'Leary, The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections, p. 231.

emerging democratic system. No longer able to rely on the unconditional support of its traditional constituents, the Conservative party found it necessary to lend support to the creation of a sociopolitical subculture within which to nurture a new electoral alliance.

In addition to marking the first general implementation of the 1883-85 reforms, the November, 1885 election also provided the opportunity for women to assist in political campaign activities throughout the country. Lady Gwendolen Cecil took an active role at LGC headquarters, overseeing arrangements to provide carriages to Conservative candidates in the metropolitan region. The action was significant, representing an innovation put into practice through the efforts of prominent Dames. Demands for carriages, however, exceeded supply, prompting criticism from some candidates who had counted on assistance.³⁴

At the local level, many socially prominent women followed the example set by Lady Churchill in campaigning for her husband during the July and November elections of 1885. As a result of Lord Randolph Churchill's appointment to a position in the Conservative Cabinet in July, 1885, he found it necessary to stand for election in Woodstock, Oxfordshire. Lady Randolph Churchill and her sister-in-law, Lady Curzon, canvassed the district in a "tandem" carriage drawn by two horses decorated in Churchill's racing colors, pink and brown.

³⁴ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 11 December 1885.

Lady Churchill recalled that at the time of the election the League was still in an early phase of organizational development. There was, as a consequence, in the region "no Habitation to furnish us with Primrose Dames."³⁵ Nevertheless, her efforts along with those of Lady Curzon served as a stimulus for women to become involved in politics through their affiliation with the Primrose League in the months and years to come.

The victory at Woodstock was an exhilarating one for Lady Churchill. Her sense of personal triumph and power through proximity reflected the excitement and appeal of campaigning which attracted many women to the Primrose League.

I surpassed the fondest hopes of the Suffragettes, and thought I was duly elected, and I certainly experienced all the pleasure and gratification of being a successful candidate. I returned to London feeling that I had done a very big thing, and was surprised and astonished that the crowds in the street looked at me with indifference.³⁶

Her effectiveness in the campaign led Henry Hames to suggest, with wry humor, that a revision of the Corrupt Practices laws was needed in order to account for "the graceful wave of a pocket handkerchief."³⁷

Lady Churchill's experience in Woodstock suggested the relative quiescence of agricultural laborers in the district. Likewise the donning in an election campaign of Churchill's racing colors was a trait characteristic of mid-nineteenth century politics, indicative of

³⁵ The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill, ed. Mrs. George Cornwallis-West (New York: The Century Comp., 1968), p. 167.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 171.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 171-72.

a deferential constituency. Birmingham proved to be another matter entirely. There Lady Churchill campaigned with her mother-in-law, Lady Marlborough, on behalf of Churchill's candidacy for the Central Division in November, 1885. As she noted,

The voters were much more enlightened than the agricultural labourers of Oxfordshire; the men particularly were well up in the questions of the day. The wives of the Radicals were also admirably informed, and on more than one occasion routed me completely.³⁸

Nevertheless, she persisted. In speaking to men in an industrial factory located in Birmingham she met with a sullen resistance. Upon inquiring why this was the case, she was informed by a man that the workers did not like being asked for their vote. Lady Churchill's reply, "but you have something I want, how am I to get it if I do not ask for it?"³⁹ appeared to win her some measure of support. For upon leaving the factory, she was roundly cheered. Churchill was narrowly defeated in his bid for the Central Division of Birmingham in favor of John Bright. Nevertheless, the efforts of Lady Churchill and other prominent women in the election campaigns of November, 1885 encouraged the more general participation of Dames and female Associates in assisting the Unionist cause.

By the time of the November, 1885 General Election, the activities of the Primrose League were quite substantial. As William Hardman reported in identical letters sent to Salisbury and Northcote, the League in the weeks preceding the election had distributed free of

³⁸ Ibid., p. 173.

³⁹ Ibid.

charge 1,222,000 pamphlets, leaflets, and posters. It had supplied Central Office lecturers and speakers throughout the country, averaging more than fifty meetings per week. At least sixteen thousand out-voters had been canvassed by volunteers. By January, the Primrose League had more than 110,000 members on its register. Over one thousand Habitations had begun or were in the process of formation. In addition the League had made inroads overseas, promoting the organization in Canada, India, Australia, and the Cape, not to mention inspiring Continental imitations in both France and Denmark.⁴⁰

Salisbury as Grand Master responded to the report in an encouraging vein.

I agree with you in thinking that the results have been exceedingly satisfactory, and far beyond any that the most sanguine advocate of the League could have anticipated. The evidence which reaches me from a great many different parts of the country all points to the conclusion that it is hardly possible to overrate the value of the Primrose League in organizing Conservative opinion for electoral purposes, and in bringing to bear the influence of the more highly educated classes, both men and women, upon those with whom the preponderating weight of political power is now lodged. I earnestly trust that the League will spare no effort to extend the sphere of its usefulness. I do not doubt that it will be a powerful agent in overthrowing Radical illusions in many places where they now seem to be impregnable.⁴¹

Northcote was more circumspect in his praise, noting "those who have been active in the conduct of the work have, so far as I have been

⁴⁰ A copy of the letters sent is contained in the Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 20 January 1886.

⁴¹ Salisbury to William Hardman, 18 January 1886 in the Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 20 January 1886, also cited in England, 23 January 1886, p. 7.

able to see, been remarkably successful in stimulating energy and promoting organization." While complimenting the League on its observation of "the spirit of the election laws," his manner suggested a general lack of enthusiasm for its endeavors.⁴²

Salisbury, on the other hand, seemed to grasp quite early on that the future success of the party as a whole and his position in particular were dependent on his ability to capture the loyalty and support of the new electorate as represented indirectly through rank and file political associations. Between 1880 and 1885 he addressed a number of Conservative groups throughout the country, frequently praising their efforts and calling on their aid in furthering party principles which strengthened the empire and resisting "the active assailants of our institutions." In launching a campaign offensive, Salisbury challenged existing Liberal strongholds, venturing into Scotland and the city of Birmingham, respectively, the home of Gladstonian Liberalism and the Chamberlain caucus.⁴³

42 Iddeleigh to William Hardman, 13 January 1886 in the Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 20 January 1886, also cited in England, 23 January 1886, p. 7.

43 Citing Lord Salisbury's speech to the Junior Conservative Club in Wolverhampton. The Times, 31 March 1883, p. 6. The myriad political associations with which Salisbury had contact during these years included those located in London, Littlehampton, Brighton, Edinburgh, and Birmingham. "Lord Salisbury," The Times, 6 March 1881, p. 9; writing an acknowledgment to the Southwark Workingmen's Conservative Association for its vote of confidence in his appointment as Conservative party leader in the House of Lords. "Lord Salisbury," The Times, 19 July 1881, p. 8; sending a note of congratulations on the formation of the Littlehampton Conservative Association. "Lord Salisbury on the Policy of the Government," The Times, 15 May 1884, p. 10; speaking to the London and Westminster Working Men's Constitutional Association against the debilitating effects of the Liberal caucus and the government's inadequate defense of the empire. "Lord Salisbury at Brighton," The Times, 16 October 1885, p. 7; addressing representatives from Sussex regarding Liberal foreign policy failures in Egypt. "Lord

He was perfectly prepared to draw upon facets of the Disraelian mythology in order to create a multiclass coalition endorsing strong national interests. Thus, in speaking at the unveiling of Beaconsfield's statute in April of 1883, Salisbury paid tribute to the Disraelian legend, modifying its contours to suit his own distinctive purposes. Disraeli was to be remembered, "not because he was a great party leader, but because he was animated by sentiments and moved by ideas wider than the issue of parties." He was to be praised for achieving consensus "in times when the idea of the national greatness and of the strength and of the unity of the country was assailed by tendencies . . . which seem to . . . [split] . . . our country into classes and sectors."⁴⁴ in Salisbury's hands, Lord Beaconsfield became a legendary figure beckoning for national unity amidst the raging seas of disintegration.

Salisbury's Visit to Scotland," The Times, 22 November 1882, p. 4.
"Lord Salisbury and Mr. Gibson at Birmingham," The Times, p. 6;
greeting the crowd gathered to mark the opening of the Midland
Conservative Club.

⁴⁴ The Times, 20 April 1883, p. 11.

Salisbury's willingness to go beyond the corridors of Westminster in order to secure popular support was matched within the parliamentary arena by his pragmatism and astute bargaining skills. His mediation of the fractious disputes between Northcote and Churchill in the Commons, his adept negotiations with Gladstone regarding the 1885 Redistribution Act, and his tolerance of divergent even dissenting opinions when they did not pose a conflict with the larger claims of party principles all underscored his mature executive and administrative capabilities.

However, as Marsh and others have noted, there were severe constraints on the ways in which the leader of the House of Lords could exercise his authority in an age which increasingly delegated power to the hands of the Commons and the mass electorate.⁴⁵ Salisbury's success in the face of these obstacles lay in his ability to maneuver beyond the perceived and actual limitations of his powers to win the eventual support of both Houses of Parliament and a broad cross section of the electorate.

Despite the effective tactics pursued by Salisbury, his methods ultimately would have proven less than satisfactory without Gladstone's official endorsement of Home Rule in the opening months of 1886. The Liberals' support of Irish local government enabled Salisbury to capitalize on English fears of national decline, loss of empire, and rising class tensions, to transcend the existing limits of Conservative political support.

⁴⁵ The Discipline of Popular Government, reads in fact as a study of the relative limits of Salisbury's power. See pages 23, 25, 29-30, 34-35, 37, 44, 49, 53-54, 89, 94, 151-52, 173, 187, 254, 259.

Increasingly the party made inroads into the growing ranks of the professional middle class, the gradually assimilating Nonconformists, and substantial sectors of labor not aligned with the more vocal and unionized members of the working class.⁴⁶ The result was the creation of a broad-based coalition wishing to preserve imperial and personal interests against the perceived threat of decline. The Conservative legacy of Tory Democracy under Salisbury's able hand was transformed into a Conservative policy of strong national interests combined with active resistance to the sweeping tides of reform.

To be sure, it was a gradual process, uncertain and hesitant in character, its victory far from certain, particularly in the early years. Both Churchill and Chamberlain sought to exploit the reformist tendencies associated with Tory Democracy as a means to power only to discover the rewards elusive at best, confined, as they were, to restricted Cabinet posts under Conservative party sponsorship, with the ultimate benefits accruing to Salisbury.

As for the Primrose League, its endorsement of religion, "estates of the realm," and the "Imperial Ascendancy of Great Britain" made it particularly well suited to defending national institutions under crisis. Likewise its professed nonpartisan status and its

⁴⁶ James Cornford, "The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century," *The Victorian Revolution*, pp. 294, 305, 316-18. Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1975), pp. 15-16, 23-24, 26-27. Alan J. Lee, "Conservatism, Traditionalism and the British Working Class, 1880-1918," *Ideology and the Labour Movement*, ed. David F. Martin and David Rubinstein (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 84-85, 92-94, 96.

encouragement of interclass cooperation through the sponsorship of a variety of social functions made it especially fitted for serving as an auxiliary army for rallying mass support for the Unionist cause.

By May, 1886, when Salisbury first addressed the annual Grand Habitation meeting as the League's Grand Master, he had found his stride, setting forth the precepts of the new Conservative party and its handmaiden, the Primrose League. Complementing the League for its enormous growth and scope of activities, he expressed his appreciation of its success amidst cheers of approval. Salisbury also stressed the importance of the League maintaining its extraparliamentary status.

It appears to me that the figures tell their own tale with such singular force that there is no possibility of misunderstanding them. (Cheers.) They show that whatever the progress of the Conservative party in the narrowest sense maybe--and I believe it is very hopeful-(cheers)-there is a Conservative party in a wider sense that is making a most rapid conquest of the opinions of the country. (Cheers.)⁴⁷

In his speech, Salisbury delineated to an attentive audience what he saw as the goals of the League: to spread among all classes and all religions a conviction

that critical times are at hand, and that the three great objects defended by the League—Religion, the Constitution of the Country, and our Empire-(cheers)-are threatened, and need the combined action of all loyal men for their support. (Cheers)^{4**}

He paid tribute to the successes of the League in the last General Election, laying particular emphasis on its independent status

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 19 May 1886, citing The Morning Post article of 20 May 1886.

48 Ibid.

in promoting a voluntary extraparliamentary work force free from "strict party organization" and "rigid party lines." He noted,

You are not attached to members or to candidates in localities. You are general missionaries of the principles you profess-(cheers)-and if I may, without irreverence so compare your functions, you are rather the preaching friars of the message that you have to convey than the regular clergy attached to each particular district. (Cheers.)⁴⁹

Salisbury praised the League's conscientious observance of the Corrupt Practices law and its assistance in canvassing and conveying voters to the poll. However, he warned members against developing an easy complacency which might obscure the dangers looming ahead, particularly as manifested in the proposed Liberal Home Rule legislation. He urged an alliance of Conservative and Liberal Unionist interests as a means of combating "the peculiar menace and peril of our present time."⁵⁰

The address was a significant innovation. It marked the beginning of Salisbury's regular attendance at annual League meetings. The gatherings provided him with an opportunity for publicly setting forth existing and future party policy while influencing the emphasis and direction of League activities. Salisbury's reaching out to popular conservative associations, particularly the Primrose League, on vital national issues helped to expand his basis of mass support. It also enabled him to develop an auxiliary force of rank and file adherents with which to bolster embattled institutions.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

League activity was again stepped up in the weeks preceding the July General Election, its participation in the process once again underscored by Akers-Douglas' attendance at Council meetings. The League's decision at that time to move to larger accommodations on Victoria street reflected the mounting pace of its efforts. Election procedures had become sufficiently routinized by June for the Grand Council to issue a precept urging all members to place themselves at the disposal of local Unionist agents and their candidates while working in cooperation with other Conservative associations.⁵¹ In all, 1,287,928 leaflets, pamphlets, and posters were issued by the Council in the period leading up to the election, an increase of more than sixty-five thousand *oyer* the preceding November figures.⁵²

The figure was relatively modest given the expanding League membership, but appears to reflect a decision on the part of the Conservative party that political pamphlets should be the chief province of Conservative and Liberal Unionist parties and their representative organs.⁵³ Nevertheless, acceleration of League

51 Ibid., 16 July 1886; 1 June 1886.

52 LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 24 May 1887. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 20 January 1886.

53 At a meeting attended by both Middleton and Akers-Douglas in March, 1886 the Grand Council agreed to a resolution favored by Middleton "that no political literature be issued with the imprint of the P.L." It undoubtedly altered both the character and volume of League publications. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 31 March 1886. As Marsh indicates, the National Union, under Salisbury's and Middleton's influence, became chiefly concerned with propaganda, spending at least half its annual budget on literature and lecturers. Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government, pp. 199-200, 202.

activities brought about by the election can be gauged by the fact that during the ensuing nine-and-one-half months only 365,000 more leaflets were produced.⁵⁴

The new-found role of the Primrose League as handmaiden to the Conservative party was emphasized by a member of the Grand Council, Lord Harris, in a confidential letter to Lord Randolph Churchill dated the twenty-ninth of October, 1886. In writing to Churchill, Harris expressed concern regarding the intentions of the LGC and two of its most prominent members, the Duchess of Marlborough and Lady Randolph Churchill, in focusing on political issues to the detriment of social and philanthropic concerns.

The fact is, my dear Randolph, your child has not outgrown its strength, it is strong not to say headstrong, and it has developed a decided tendency to work in the very field from wh [sic] the Ladies G.C. say it must be excluded. The Habitations in many ways are working benevolently and philanthropically & I think, whatever was the original intention of the founders, it is a desirable direction, & that we should be shortsighted [sic] to attempt to check this tendency. Look at it practically: where is the P.L. to work in a district already possessing a sound & active Conservative Assocn, [sic] not in registration except in the way of aid, not always by holding meetings: the people are sick of politics just now; but there are a hundred little ways in wh [sic] [the Primrose League can assist] by . . . reminding the people that the Conservative Party does not assume a friendly demeanour only at election time.⁵⁵

Lord Harris concluded by asking Lord Randolph Churchill to intervene on behalf of the Grand Council and its supreme authority over

54 LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 24 May 1887.

55 Lord Harris to Lord Randolph Churchill, 29 October 1886; Churchill Papers, RCHL xvi/1939.

the LGC. It was a request which presumably was honored since no further reference was made regarding the matter in either personal correspondence or the Minutes.

By the following year, there could be little doubt of the Primrose League's role as messenger for the Conservative party. In addressing the fourth annual Grand Habitation in April, 1887, Salisbury spoke at length regarding what were, for him, the key party issues: the progress made by the Conservatives, the success of the Unionist coalition, continued opposition to Home Rule, and the impending Irish Crimes bill. He was sufficiently confident concerning the party's revitalization over the past few years to mock derisively Gladstone's ill-fated prediction of Liberal victory in the period immediately preceding the July, 1886 elections and hint of future Conservative triumphs to come.

He had not forgotten that we were an unorganized body then. We are an organized body now. (Cheers.) . . . We have now an organization with which no party in any country would be able to offer any comparison for refuting the falsehoods and for disseminating the truth. (Cheers.) I think in his horoscope he counted without the Primrose League. (Loud cheers.)⁵⁶

Particularly noteworthy was Salisbury's use of the colloquial "we."⁵⁷ it bound him in almost familiar terms with the extraparliamentary activities of the League. The speech reflected a sustained effort on his part to achieve direct contact with

⁵⁶ The Times, 21 April 1887, p. 8.

⁵⁷ A mannerism first employed by Salisbury in discussing the subject of religion at the annual Grand Habitation in May, 1886. The Morning Post, 20 May 1886, p. 2. The original passage is cited on pp. 122-23 of this chapter.

"representative" conservative organs, an action which he saw as a means of establishing a direct link between himself and the new electorate. Salisbury continued throughout his prime-ministership to address the League and other political associations as a means of educating, informing, and influencing the electorate upon which his support was based.

While the Primrose League continued to expand throughout 1887 and 1888, in many respects 1885 remained the pivotal year in its development. This is demonstrated quite strikingly in the League's membership figures. Between 26 November 1884 and 19 April 1885 the membership more than doubled from 5,650 to 11,366. From 19 April to 16 December 1885 the figure had increased by a factor of over eight to 93,077 *or* more than sixteen times that given for 26 November 1884. A comparison of Primrose day returns for 1885 and 1886 gives a higher yield, an increase by a factor of over twenty.⁵⁸ However, their April to March summaries fail to take sufficient account of the growth experienced in the later months of 1885, accelerated by the November elections. The building up of a sufficient base by December of that year provided a means by which a mass membership could properly be launched.

No matter which set of statistics is employed, it remains clear that the single most important period of growth for the League occurred between 1885 and 1886. While the League continued to expand its

⁵⁸ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 26 November 1884; 16 December 1885. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 September 1899, p. 9.

numbers significantly in later years, at no time was it able to approach the dynamic growth experienced during this period.

Since agreement achieved in July, 1884 between Salisbury and Churchill which placed the National Union under the control of the Conservative party, Salisbury had made steady gains in securing its unconditional support. Initially this was sought through the supervision of Principal Agent Bartley serving as Treasurer and the assistance of Balfour and Akers-Douglas, two of the designated Vice Chairmen.

The appointment of Middleton to Bartley's post in 1885 accelerated the process. Under his able management the National Union was transformed into a virtual propaganda organ for the party, doubling its publication in that year and once again in 1886. Middleton's reorganization scheme in 1886 completed the process. Under the new guidelines the Union was to serve as a national federation of Conservative clubs and associations. Middleton was appointed honorary secretary of the Council. His nine agents were to serve as regional organizers and honorary secretaries within the executive of the newly created Provincial Unions. These measures effectively transformed the National Union into Middleton's own personal instrument.⁵⁹

Salisbury's strategic control by 1886 of party organization as represented at the parliamentary, National Union, and Primrose League levels proved a formidable obstacle to challenges from Churchill.

⁵⁹ Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government, pp. 198-200, 202. "National Union Special Conference Report," 15 May 1886; NUA 2/1/5.

Churchill's prospects further diminished as a result of Gladstone's endorsement of Home Rule and Salisbury's careful and painstaking courtship of the Liberal Unionists. The threat of Irish self-government pushed the Conservatives to the right, signaling an endorsement of Salisbury's policy of retrenchment. The result was that when Churchill made a desperate bid for leadership in December, 1886 on the intractable issue of reduced defense expenditures, his resignation produced a rupture, but no government collapse. It marked the end of any serious contesting of Salisbury's position until his resignation in 1902.

Relations between the National Union and the Primrose League between 1885 and 1888 remained generally fairly amiable, assisted, on the one hand, by the coordinating efforts of Middleton and Akers-Douglas and, on the other, by the continuity of membership existing between the governing Councils of both bodies. The 1887 annual report to the National Union conference listed a total of fifty-seven Council members, eight of whom occupied ex officio positions. Of the above individuals mentioned, twenty-two were represented on the Primrose League Grand Council between December of 1883 and 1889, with fourteen appearing on the executive for the 1887-88 Primrose year.

The twenty-two men included Middleton, Bartlett, J.H. Stone, Maple Blundell, Wainwright, Colonel King-Harman, Seager Hunt, and Bemrose. Other individuals represented on both Councils were the Marquis of Salisbury, Akers-Douglas, Lord Randolph Churchill, the Duke of Norfolk, the Earl of Amherst, the Baron de Worms, Sir Alfred Slade, Sir H. Chaplin, and Sir A. Rollit. Colonel Malleon, Hon. G. Curzon,

Irwin, Vincent, and Dixon Hartland were also named. The last fourteen persons cited served on the 1886-87 Grand Council.⁶⁰

The high level of cross-membership combined with the supervision and attendance of Conservative party functionaries at executive meetings of both organizations helped to ensure cooperative relations at the national and local levels. Certainly some degree of tension existed, in large measure due to the overlapping functions of the two bodies, but its impact was, wherever possible, minimized.

A comparison of the performance of the National Union with the Primrose League with respect to publications, lecturers, membership, and income, generally favors the latter. Publications were the Union's strong point, with over five million leaflets produced in the 1885-86 Primrose year compared with the League's more modest figure of three million.⁶¹ During the period surrounding the 1886 General Election, the gap widened with the Union producing a total of twelve million pamphlets, fly sheets, and posters as compared with the League's relatively modest record of 1,289,928 for the same period and its overall total for the 1886-87 Primrose year of only 1,652,928. By the Primrose year 1888-89 the League's publication figures had edged up only slightly higher, to a total of 1,724,100 and most of these were reprints.⁶²

⁶⁰ "National Union Annual Report to the Conference, 1887"; NUA 2/2/1. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 8 January 1884; 23 February 1884; 25 April 1885; 21 May 1886. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 October 1887, p. 1.

⁶¹ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 19 May 1886, citing The Morning Post article of 20 May 1886.

⁶² "National Union Annual Report to the Conference, 1886"; NUA 2/2/1. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 24 May 1887. The Times, 21

Despite the lapse of time since the 1886 General Elections, Primrose League publications remained focused on the Irish question. The topical list of lantern slide shows proposed by the executive for possible distribution to Habitations circa 1888 gives a total of twenty subjects, subdivided into two categories, "Irish" and "General." Their titles are particularly revealing, suggesting the heightened tone of outrage employed by the League in disseminating its views and the organization's endorsement of the policies enumerated by Salisbury's government. The Irish selection, subtitled "The Reign of Terror in Ireland," included the "Murder of John Meade," "Outrage on Patrick Robinson," "O'Brien in Prison Enjoying Sandwiches and Sherry," and "Gladstone, the Cause of Law and Order."⁶³

The general slides, despite their stated category, also contained at least two presentations on Ireland, "Ireland Prosperous-Loyalist," and "Ireland Otherwise-Separatist." The remaining titles dealt with common Primrose themes including "the Queen," "General Gordon at Khartoum-Hemmed in--," a presumably uncomplimentary portrayal of the opposition leader entitled "Gladstone at the Theatre," as well as such common topics as "Salisbury's Speech as Grand Master," and "Beaconsfield's Statue Decorated with Primroses."⁶⁴ The slides

May 1889, p. 8.

⁶³ "Slide Committee," Primrose League Special Minute Book, 1886-1900. No date was given, but the adjacent minutes suggest the Committee met sometime between 18 June 1888 and 28 January 1889. The LGC minutes indicate that many of the slides were incorporated into a traveling "Magic Lantern Tour" given by the League in the winter of 1889. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 1 February 1889; 22 February 1889; 31 May 1889.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

suggest the overall emphasis of the League, particularly its focus on Ireland, imperial and national concerns, the preservation of the monarchy, attacks on Gladstone, and the nurturing of a Disraelian mythology.

Following the Conservatives' electoral defeat in 1880 came a rise in popular associations affiliated with the National Union. Their enhanced value as officially sanctioned organs of party propaganda helped bring about a corresponding rise in the Union's national lecturing capacity. In the year ending 23 July 1884 the organization sponsored 560 lectures. Fourteen months later the figure had jumped to fifteen hundred and fifty. By May of 1886, the Union was representing over eight hundred associations. The Primrose League appears to have been more dynamic during roughly the same period, registering a total of 1,134 lectures for the six months ending 19 May 1886 and claiming twelve hundred affiliated Habitations.⁶⁵

In terms of income the Primrose League managed, on the whole, to generate greater amounts of capital. The National Union reached its apex in financial returns in the year ending 31 December 1885, recording £7,690.17.4. The following year its income dropped to £6,763.9.5 and continued to decline, reaching £5,243.12.10 in the fiscal year ending 30 September 1890.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ "National Union Annual Conference Minutes," 23 July 1884, NUA 2/1/3; 6 October 1885, NUA 2/1/4; 15 May 1886, NUA 2/1/5. The Morning Post, 20 May 1886, p. 2.

⁶⁶ "National Union Annual Reports to the Conference," 1885-1887, 1889-1890, NUA 2/2/1.

Maximum annual earnings for the League appear to have been obtained during the 1886-87 Primrose year when it recorded an income of £10,133.9.8 in addition to monies contributed to the Capital Account in the amount of £4,789.10.5. Its income declined rather significantly for 1887-88, reflecting the drop in activities following the General Election. Net revenue for that year totaled £6,464.16.2 with an additional £1,226.8.0 set aside for the Capital Account, the latter sum dropping nearly by a factor of four. By 1888-89 the figure had edged up somewhat to £7,113.17.11, although the contribution to the Capital Account was down by £249.16.6. Total capital investment by April, 1889 stood at over thirteen thousand pounds.⁶⁷

The League's financial stature appears even more substantial when compared to that of the National Union's if its greater costs incurred in the rent and fees paid to the professional staff are seen as reflecting its more vital and active role as an "independent" political institution. For the 1886-87 year the Grand Council spent a total of £5,136.12.4 for office, staff, and lecturers, more than half its annual earnings, exclusive of contributions to the Capital Account. The National Union spent only £1,661.19.7 out of its £6,763.9.5 annual budget for 1886, less than a quarter of its income. Of the total revenue received by the Union, three thousand, or nearly half, was supplied annually by the Conservative party.⁶⁸ The assistance of

⁶⁷ The Primrose League Gazette, 21 April 1888, p. 4; 25 May 1889, p. 10.

⁶⁸ The Primrose League Gazette, 21 April 1888, p. 4. "National Union Annual Report to the Conference, 1886"; NUA 2/2/1. "National Union Annual Conference Minutes," 23 July 1884, NUA 2/1/3; 22-23 November 1884, NUA 2/1/7.

Middleton's nine agents in the regional operations of the Union likewise served to keep administrative expenses at a minimum, enabling the organization to devote the bulk of its efforts to publication and propaganda services.

An issue frequently raised in the continuing campaign of Primrose League recruitment was the first principle of the League, "the maintenance of religion." The overwhelming basis of League support was derived from members of the Established Church. The diminishing influence of Anglicanism in the course of the nineteenth century was gradual, uneven, but inexorable. The process unfolded in three successive stages encompassing respectively significant concessions, revived influence, and irreversible decline, a progression which roughly corresponded to the years marking the passage of the three electoral reform bills.⁶⁹

The mounting influence of nondenominational and secular concerns was reflected in the formation of the most significant Liberal political pressure group of the age, the Liberation Society, particularly during its years of greatest ascendancy, 1874 through 1885. Just as Nonconformists increasingly came to dominate the politics of the Liberal party, the Conservatives became the repository of Anglican interests.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ p.T. Marsh, The Victorian Church in Decline (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969), pp. 1-2, 5-6, 8.

⁷⁰ Hamer, The Politics of Electoral Pressure, pp. 1-2, 4-5, 91, 139, 145, 159-60. Koss, Nonconformity in Modern British Politics, pp. 15-16, 18, 23-24, 26-27. Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government, pp. 165-67. Maurice Cowling, Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 364, 374-76, 378. Kenneth D. Wald, Crosses on the Ballot (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 55-60, 62.

The Rev. J.S. Beckwith, speaking at a local political gathering held in Northumberland in January of 1885, expressed the sentiments of many.

We are sometimes told that a clergyman has no right to political opinions, nor to express them. To that article I never will subscribe. If (as we have been told by authority) the Nonconformists are the backbone of the Liberal party (which the Duke of Argyll says has no backbone), then I don't see why the clergy and the churchmen should not be the backbone of the Conservative party.⁷¹

Nevertheless, the demands of the modern age with its heightened politicalization and increased secularization necessitated a Conservative appeal to a broad cross section of religious beliefs. It is within this context that the Primrose League was conceived.

The diminishing influence of religion in late Victorian society was reflected symbolically in the growing public recognition given to Darwin's Origin of Species (1859) and expressed in a more pragmatic manner through a gradual decline in Church attendance, particularly among members of the working class. The Primrose League sought to challenge this trend by offering through its organization an assortment of social activities which endorsed and affirmed Christian beliefs. Nevertheless, the fact that the League found it necessary to promote all Christian religions, rather than exclusively endorsing the Established Church was, in itself, an indication of the diminished role of religion and, most particularly, Anglicanism in the late nineteenth century.

⁷¹ Rev. J.S. Beckwith, Knight of the Primrose League. Quoted by England, 17 January, 1885, p. 10.

The greatest resistance within religious circles came, not surprisingly, from Catholic circles. It reached its apex in March of 1886 when Bishop Bragshaw of Nottingham refused absolution to members of his diocese who joined the League. A bishop in the adjoining district took an opposing stand, encouraging local parishioners to join Habitations.⁷²

The matter was sufficiently controversial to prompt Cardinal Manning to publish a letter in The Times on 22 March 1886 stating that the existing declaration of the League was not in violation of the Catholic faith. The decision was affirmed the following week by the Pope, who decided in favor of the League. The verdict of the Pope was generally hailed as a victory for the Conservative cause. In his capacity as newspaper baron, Ashmead Bartlett went further, arguing in England that the Pope should proceed to the next logical step: condemning the tactics of the Nationalist League.⁷³

While addressing the Grand Habitation in May of 1886, Salisbury took full advantage in exploiting the verdict of the recent Nottingham controversy, extolling the virtues of the League and its pursuit of a united religious community. Congratulating the League on having managed to avoid "another dangerous rock," he cautioned them against applying religion in a narrow sense to any one form of Christianity.

You know what has taken place in the Roman Catholic diocese of Nottingham. I need not allude to that more specifically, except to show that in the judgment of

⁷² The Times, 18 March 1886, p. 4.

⁷³ The Times, 22 March 1886, p. 9. St. James Gazette, 29 March 1886, p. 8. England, 27 March 1886, p. 7; 3 April 1886, p. 7.

the most jealous religious community in the world the Primrose League has done nothing to forfeit that character-catholic in the highest sense-which it has maintained from the beginning. (Cheers.) I earnestly trust that we shall be careful to maintain that character, to remember that we are for the defense of religion, and that to all supporters of religion, to all Christian men, we hold, out the hand of fellowship, if they will join us in resisting that threatening flood of unbelief by which not England alone but the civilized world is menaced. (Cheers.) There are characteristics which we carefully preserve. They do not cast any doubt or slur upon our more special attachments--our belief in the Conservative party or the attachment of most of us to the Church of England. But we recognize that in these days there are more universal dangers before us and that larger interests are threatened; and therefore a greater freedom, a greater catholicity, in the union of all well-meaning men is necessary if the peculiar menace and peril of our present time is to be conquered.⁷⁴

It was one of Salisbury's classic speeches. It combined a note of triumph with the voice of despair, simultaneously praising, cautioning, and influencing the course of future Primrose League efforts.

Despite the favorable verdict in the Nottingham controversy, the relationship of Catholics to the Primrose League continued to be an uneasy one, marked by recurring tensions. In April, 1886 the Grand Council issued a Precept to Habitations forbidding exclusion of individuals on religious grounds. The following month just prior to the Grand Habitation, the Chancellor of the Primrose League, Cusack-Smith, and the President of the LGC, the Duchess of Marlborough, were forced to respond to complaints made by Cardinal Manning concerning the exclusion of Catholics from some Habitations. In 1887 the League was

⁷⁴ The Morning Post, 20 May 1886, p. 2.

forced to withdraw the warrant of Glengeary Kingstown Habitation in Ireland because of its refusal to admit Catholics. Negotiations eventually brought about the formation of a new Habitation in the surrounding district.⁷⁵

In spite of the hoopla associated with the League's promotion of religious principles, it disguised a larger ongoing process of secularization within society as a whole. This trend was reflected in the declining levels of church attendance. In the League itself, the process was indicated in the secondary status given to religion, relegated to a back seat as social and entertainment functions assumed primacy. The fact that members of the Church of England and other religious groups found it necessary to make their claims in an extraparliamentary political forum not exclusively devoted to ecclesiastical issues underscored their beleaguered status. The predominantly secular nature of League functions was amply demonstrated in the decision reached by the Grand Council in March, 1887 not to sanction the use of prayers in opening local Habitation meetings on the basis that no such provision was made in the statutes.⁷⁶

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⁷⁵ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 14 April 1886. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 7 May 1886. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 17 March 1887; 3 June 1887; 16 July 1887. The Primrose League: The Roll of the Habitations, 1888, p. 212.

⁷⁶ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 17 March 1887.

Between the years 1885 and 1888 the League established in the political sphere, as in its organization structure, its essential framework for a generation to come. The key years were 1885 and 1886, a time of rapid growth. It was during this period that the League developed its distinctive contribution to the Conservative cause, serving as a continuous recruiter of potential voters for the party.

The rise and ultimate success of the Primrose League was closely tied to Salisbury's policy of retrenchment and the actions of the Conservative party. The primary focus of the government was a restricted one, largely confined to an emphasis on a strong national and foreign presence, opposition to Irish Home Rule, and a limited emphasis on domestic and social reforms. Fears concerning the Liberal policies of dismemberment and decline buoyed the fortunes of Salisbury, his party, and the League, sustaining their position for almost twenty years. It was the party and the League's triumph during this crucial period in the development of democratic institutions that proved so influential in shaping Conservative electoral practices in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER FOUR

Maturity and Stagnation, 1889-1901

The League is a curious compound of duchesses and maids of all work, but it is a great instrument to the Tory party for bribery and corruption. These wives and daughters of the Philistines stop at nothing. All the unscrupulous women of England are members of the Primrose League. In the country districts they threaten; in the towns they cajole; in both town and country their armouries are overflowing with thousands of yards of flannel and countless sacks of coal.

Herbert Gladstone, The Primrose
newspaper, Bournemouth (1 February 1887)

Since the execution of Charles I, the fate of no one Briton has so profoundly stirred the heart of the nation as the death of Gordon at Khartoum. Nay, more; while there was a certain division of opinion about the former, a section of the nation deeming it, if not an act of justice at least an act of necessity, there was no such divided view about the latter, except that while all saw it in the light of disgraceful error, to some it appeared a hideous crime.

Horace G. Hutchinson, Portraits of the
Eighties (1920)

I

If the activities of the Primrose Dame and female Associate were the frequent subject of ridicule by Herbert Gladstone and other Liberals, this was in large measure due to the electoral successes achieved through their assistance. A measure of the importance of Women in the League can be gauged by their prominence in positions of leadership at the local level. By the 1890's fully 17.4 percent of the officers of the Divisional Councils were female. Women accounted for twenty-five percent of the senior officers of the Habitation, Ruling Councillors or Dame Presidents, and nearly thirty percent of the

Honorary Secretaries. At the bottom of the organizational hierarchy, female Wardens and canvassers appeared to dominate political activities. The significance of the Primrose League Dames and female Associates was made all that much more apparent by the failure of the Liberal party to provide similar opportunities for its women.

Despite the strides made since 1885, both the Conservative party and the Primrose League found it increasingly difficult to sustain levels of growth and initiative by the late 1890's. In part, this may have been due to their continued emphasis on the issues which dominated the 1880's: the threat of national decline, the loss of influence overseas, and the menacing prospect of an independent Ireland. More likely, however, inertia and atrophy were the natural consequences following years of political triumph.

While Salisbury was temporarily successful in reviving the fortunes of the Conservative party due to the outbreak of the Boer war, the Primrose League was not as fortunate. Though it struggled to maintain and to extend its influence, the war marked its transition from the preeminent Conservative association in Britain to a significant, if no longer key focus, of extra-parliamentary activity. Ultimately both Salisbury and the League proved unsuccessful in their bids to retain their positions of power and influence in the twentieth century; the death of Queen Victoria signaling the end of an old era and the beginning of a new age.

Between the years 1889 and 1901 the League's development was marked by three basic tendencies. These were the growing predominance of women as the principal figures in its initiative and operation, a

vigilant but increasingly strained effort to offset decline through the introduction of organizational innovations, and the constant reference to the threat of imperial disintegration as a means of maintaining support and mobilization. The impact of these factors on the overall development of the League is the main focus of this chapter's inquiry.

In assessing the patterns of power and influence, Ostrogorski made a distinction between the Primrose Dames, who were the chief workers in the League enterprise, and the real arbiters of policy: the all male Grand Council.

In every respect it may be said that the League rests on women; it is they who keep it going and eventually ensure its success, although the number of members of the male sex not only equals, but even slightly exceeds, that of the women.

It would be a mistake, however, to infer from this that the influence of women in the League corresponds to the importance of their role. The women work, but the men direct them, especially the men in London. The women are only an instrument in their hands which they wield with skill and firmness. . . . The Grand Council of Dames, which sits in London, has no real authority; each of its acts of any moment is submitted to the approval of the Grand Council composed of men. The Council of Dames is simply a decorative body serving as a pretext for subscriptions, a considerable amount of which goes into the coffers of the Grand Council.¹

While Ostrogorski properly characterized the explicit organizational chart governing the behavior of the League as elaborated in its statutes and Precepts, he neglected the implicit means of influence and initiative exercised by women in both the London headquarters and the local Habitations. Their powers were indicated at

* Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, vol. 1, pp. 547-48.

the highest level by the operations of the LCC. The Ladies' executive was responsible for maintaining and extending the boundaries of the League in a number of ways. It was a major contributor to the "Magic Lantern Tour" sponsored by the Grand Council in the winter of 1888-89, donating a generous one hundred pounds to the traveling slide show exposition.²

More important still, was its role in serving as the sole financier of a Primrose League horse drawn van. The vehicle made its way to the rural voting divisions of north and south Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire in the winter of 1891-92, proselytizing on behalf of League and party principles. The project had the enthusiastic backing of influential Conservatives, encouraged most particularly by Lady Salisbury and Middleton, the latter of whom volunteered "to afford us any assistance in his power and to clear any route we liked."³

While the venture was initiated at the suggestion of Grand Council and received the general supervision of both the Joint Committee and Middleton's agents, this in no way lessens the LGC's contribution. It proved to be of great benefit to the Conservatives, offering a challenge to Radical vans traversing the countryside. The benefits to the League, however, proved more elusive and no effort was made to finance similar campaigns in the later years under study.⁴

² See the "Ordinances of the Ladies' Grand Council" contained on the inside page of the LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 1886-1889 and the resolution passed by the Grand Council, Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 2 December 1886.

³ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 25 June 1891.

⁴ Former Honorary Secretary of the Victoria (Dames) Habitation in Hammersmith, Mrs. Wienholt, first proposed utilizing vans to the LGC in December of 1889. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 6 December 1889.

In addition to providing speakers at local functions sponsored by the Habitations and maintaining ongoing canvassing and conveyancing services for Unionist parliamentary candidates, the LGC began early in the 1890's to extend its endeavors to other fronts. Particularly noteworthy was its participation in metropolitan contests where national political issues had come to dominate increasingly local elections, most notably the school board and London County Council (LCC) contests.

Distressed at the progressive "Lib-Lab" LCC victory of 1892, the LGC, at the suggestion of its Presidents, the Duchess of Marlborough and the Marchioness of Salisbury, wrote the Vice Chancellor of the Grand Council, Lane-Fox, complaining of the poor showing made by moderates and requesting an investigation. In addressing the Ladies' executive, Primrose League metropolitan agent De Grey attributed Conservative losses, in declining order of importance, to apathy, late entries, lack of a definite program, support for Radical policies, and "the election being held on Saturday."⁵

The election results were actively challenged by the LGC in June, 1894 through the formation of a metropolitan registry of women volunteers devoted to strengthening Unionist representation in London. A member of the Grand Council provided instructions to women regarding the proper canvassing and registration procedures. The following month, through Lady Salisbury's instigation, the LGC became involved in

Ibid., 14 May 1891; 29 May 1891; 25 June 1891; 3 July 1891; 17 July 1891; 6 November 1891; 15 January 1892; 19 February 1892.

⁵ Ibid., 18 March 1892; 1 April 1892.

promoting supporters of denominational instruction in the London School Board elections.⁶

By February the following year, the Provincial Secretary for London was able to report that the League had played a significant role in local school board elections. Eight Habitations had worked collectively and forty-eight others participated on an individual basis. In all, seven Habitations were characterized as "very active," twenty-five as "active," twenty-four as "fairly," and forty-eight as having apparently played no role. That same month, LGC canvassers extended assistance in the LCC election to Sir Blundell Maple (South, St. Pancras Division) and Mr. Costigan (Battersea, Division). They were assisted by the Hampstead and Marylebone Habitations, working for Maple and the Hammersmith and Kensington Habitations, serving Costigan.⁷

LGC support in local, regional, and national elections continued throughout the period under study. In November, 1895 the LGC executive was instructed to write friends and bring to the notice of their representative associations the importance of maintaining religious education in the schools. Widespread activity on the part of the LGC was also reported in an annual assessment prepared by the Ladies' Honorary Secretary, Lady Westbury. She credited women with having made extensive efforts in board school and County Council contests. The LGC was attributed with having been particularly

⁶ Ibid., 1 June 1894; 29 June 1894; 27 July 1894; 2 August 1894.

⁷ Ibid., 1 February 1895; 15 February 1895.

effective in campaigning for the General Election "when nearly all the Executive Committee were engaged in looking up the out-voters, and in this way rendered very valuable assistance to the Unionist Party."⁸

Other key efforts included the recruitment in February, 1898 of 720 members of the LGC residing in the vicinity of London to participate in a canvassing and conveyancing drive associated with the LCC election. While the response was not nearly so bountiful, the solicitation points to the overwhelming metropolitan character of the LGC. During the General Election of 1900, thirty-six members of the LGC, out of a total membership of 1,621, were responsible for canvassing twenty-seven constituencies and maintaining registration and removal records on some 890 out-voters. Their efforts prompted the thanks of Captain Middleton.⁹

In addition to the extensive political efforts, the LGC was also responsible for a variety of social and quasi-philanthropic functions. The Ladies' executive straddled older, time honored, aristocratic traditions of providing for the less privileged through the newly burgeoning role of the female political activist. The LGC sponsored the Beresford Hope Choir, later renamed the Primrose League Choral Society, which performed at many metropolitan League events.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 29 November 1895; 7 February 1896.

⁹ Ibid., 11 February 1898; 2 November 1900; 16 November 1900.

¹⁰ Financing for the choir first appears in the LGC budget statement of 1888, a copy of which is contained in the LGC Executive Committee Minutes of 22 February 1889. Ibid., 16 May 1891; 22 July 1892; 4 November 1892; 18 November 1892; 2 June 1893; 30 June 1893; 6 November 1896; 20 May 1898.

The women were prime movers in the Social and Entertainment Committee and the Poor Habitation fund. The latter was introduced by Lady Salisbury to subsidize selective East End functions offered by local Habitations. In their capacity as members of the Joint Committee, the Ladies' executive also served as major contributors in the publication and distribution of League pamphlets.¹¹

Nor were the Women's efforts restricted to organizational, political, and social activities at the executive level. By the end of the nineteenth century, women occupied key positions as Provincial Secretaries for the London Metropolitan Boroughs. The first woman named to occupy the post of paid agent was Miss Sclater Booth, appointed in 1896. Her assistant, Miss Monteath Moran, was hired that same year. With the death of Sclater Booth in 1900 came the selection of her replacement, Miss Bloomfield, and another full-time assistant, Miss Gye. The latter two women received salaries of £125 and £75, respectively.¹²

By 1901, then, three women held posts of Provincial Secretaries out of the seven individuals then employed in that capacity.¹³ The

¹¹ Ibid., 8 July 1898; 4 November 1898; 12 May 1899. Ibid., 27 July 1894; 2 November 1894; 31 May 1895; 29 November 1895. Ibid., 16 May 1890; 20 June 1890; 7 December 1894; 1 February 1895; 6 March 1896; 3 April 1897; 4 June 1897; 23 July 1897; 5 November 1897; 2 June 1899; 3 November 1899; 2 February 1901; 13 July 1900; 15 February 1901.

¹² Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 7 February 1901.

¹³ Miss Bloomfield, Miss Gye, and Miss Monteath Moran. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 June 1901, p. 4. However, of the three women mentioned, only Miss Bloomfield would appear to have occupied a position and income commensurate with her male colleagues. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 2 November 1895. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 7 February 1901; 16 November 1905.

professional role of women in political activities of the League was primarily confined to the metropolitan region where the LGC's influence predominated.*⁴ Nevertheless, their appointments were tangible evidence of the value placed on women organizers by members of the Grand Council.

The influence of women in positions of authority at the Divisional and local levels was substantially greater, their numbers increasing significantly as one descends down the organizational hierarchy of the League. The 1888 Roll lists 565,084 members, 366 Divisions, and 1,730 Habitations. Of the 3,435 officers of the Primrose League identified, 907 were women, 26.4 percent of the total.¹⁵

At the Divisional level there were 212 officers, 17.4 percent of which were women. The most prestigious position at this rank was that of Divisional President, held, respectively, by 90 men and 17 women, the latter constituting a relatively modest 15.9 percent of those listed. At the level of Divisional Secretary, women fared better, occupying 19 out of 84 titles or 18.4 percent of the total. Both a man and a woman held positions as Divisional Vice Presidents, their numbers insufficient to merit statistical comparison.

¹⁴ Miss Sewell of Bideford was also mentioned as having reported for the Agency Committee. However, she received no official mention as a Provincial Secretary and it was doubtful that she was employed in a professional capacity. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 1 November 1900. The Primrose League Gazette, 2 July 1900, p. 3; 1 June 1901, p. 4.

¹⁵ The figures cited are based on my computer tabulation of Habitations, Divisions, officers, Knights, Dames, and Associates contained in the 1888 Roll of Habitations. The membership total does not include District Agents (22). Officers holding multiple titles are counted on each occasion, except where they occupy two or more posts within the same Division.

Women assumed a proportionately greater role at the Habitation level. There they held 372 positions as Ruling Councillors while 48 assumed the title of Dame Presidents. If the above categories are grouped together under the general heading of Ruling Councillor, the women constitute 25 percent of the total. If the position of Dame President is treated separately, the figure declines moderately to 22.8 percent.

The category of Dame President occupied a somewhat ambiguous status. By turns, it represented either a woman of rather substantial local prestige assuming a purely ceremonial role or, alternatively, a woman who acted in one of three capacities: chief officer, co-director with or the immediate successor to the Ruling Councillor.

Local Habitation policy and the woman involved largely determined the role played by the Dame President. Consequently she might be classified either with the Ruling Councillor or in a distinct unit. Generally her social status was equal to or above that of the Ruling Councillor. For our purposes the identification of the position of Dame President with that of Ruling Councillor is perhaps more useful, although there is little statistical distinction between the two calculations.

Not surprisingly, it is at the level of Honorary Secretary that women achieve their greatest representation as officers. They occupied 450 places or just under thirty percent of all persons named to the position.

Overall, women appear, particularly in the 1890's and beyond, to be assuming the predominant role in Primrose League activities.

They served increasingly as the most active workers, gradually occupying a greater proportion of the available local and regional positions, although their actual numbers never exceed in absolute terms those of their male counterparts, even at the grass-roots level. Precise figures are difficult to ascertain since no Central Office records remain beyond those provided in the 1888 Roll and local records are insufficiently representative or abundant to provide for an accurate estimation. Nevertheless, these trends appear to be sustained by the growing influence of women as represented at or below the level of Warden in Habitations with a mixed gender representation.

As early as 1887, Ladywood Habitation in Birmingham recorded a staff of all female Wardens. Indeed, only one of its officers was male, the Assistant Honorary Secretary.¹⁶ Huddersfield Habitation had always employed a largely female staff of Wardens. However, by 1893, the Minutes were resorting to the pronouns "her" and "she" to describe its all female cast of organizers. Each Warden was instructed "to send in names of two of her Committee who will undertake to bake bread, prepare the tea and do anything else that is wanted on the night itself." Each woman was also urged to circulate a petition in opposition to Home Rule with a notation "she will get signatures in the district and return them to the Hon. Sec. by the end of Easter week."¹⁷

¹⁶ Ladywood Magazine, March, 1887, p. 7.

¹⁷ Huddersfield Habitation Minutes, 1886-1898, 29 March 1886; 23 August 1886; 30 August 1887; 4 July 1887; 15 April 1889; 29 March 1893; Kirklees District Archives, DD/RE/160.

More typical, perhaps, is Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation in Gloucestershire. In January, 1888 it was listed as having twelve Wardens, seven men and five women. Overall men appeared to have retained a slight numerical advantage, although women seem, on balance, to gain ground as the years advanced. In 1893, females accounted for six out of thirteen Wardens; by 1897 they constituted nine out of thirteen. Two years later they had declined somewhat, but nevertheless managed to constitute half of the ten Wardens serving the Habitation.¹⁸ Given the uneven quality of local recordkeeping and the lack of materials available, it is difficult to determine the representative character of the above citations. Certainly many Habitations were served prominently, if not exclusively, by male Wardens.¹⁹

Because of the failure on the part of the Central Office and the local Habitations to maintain records regarding the numbers of male and female Associates, it is difficult to ascertain their relative percentages. However, it would appear that, overall, men outnumbered women in this category. In the case of Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation in Gloucestershire, for instance, there were 75 male and 62 female Associates as of the twelfth of August, 1887. They measured, respectively, 47.2 and 39 percent of the total membership. Male

¹⁸ Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation Minutes, 1887-1899, 13 January 1888; 25 April 1890; 15 May 1891; July, 1893; 18 November 1895; 21 April 1897; 1899 list of Wardens; Gloucestershire Record Office, D2219 6/8.

¹⁹ Bayham Habitation, located in the counties of Sussex and Kent, is a prime example. Containing over two thousand members in 1886, it was made up exclusively of male (fifty) Wardens. J-G'C Executive Committee Minutes, 22 February 1885.

Associates obtained an even stronger representation in the Garstang Habitation, located in Lancashire. A register spanning the years 1897-1909 lists 173 male Associates and 120 females, respectively, 55.4 and 38.5 percent of the total membership.²⁰ Although men appeared to outnumber women as Associates within the Primrose League, the prominence of female Wardens and canvassers suggests that women played a key part in grass-roots functions, despite their smaller numbers.

Notwithstanding Ostrogorski's assessment of the role of the LGC, its generous annual financial contributions to the Grand Council and the SGC enabled it to exert some degree of influence, even leverage, particularly in areas of joint concern. The Grand Council took care to provide a forum for cooperation through the establishment of several joint committees, prompting conciliatory relations between the two bodies. Many of these committees appear to have become bastions of female influence, attended with greater frequency and numbers by their women representatives and thereby serving to place the interests of the LGC at the forefront.²¹

The Grand Council also kept the LGC abreast of events as a means of ensuring their effective participation. Representatives,

²⁰ Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation Minutes, 12 August 1887. Garstang Register, 1897-1909; Lancashire Record Office, DDFZ. A xeroxed copy of the Garstang Register was obtained courtesy of Michael Wills.

²¹ Women were represented on the Joint Literature and Consultative Committees. The two bodies combined in 1890 to form the Joint Committee. They were also represented on the Entertainment Committee (1898), an amalgamation of the previous Dramatic Society and Entertainment Committee. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 16 May 1890; 24 June 1898; 8 July 1898.

agents, and even the Vice Chancellor were sent to meet with members of the Ladies* executive. The Council also took into account criticism of the LGC concerning the unpopular style of the Gazette. By way of compromise, it offered to broaden the scope of the "Ladies¹ column," but refused to allow the coverage to serve as a pretext for a society page. Recognizing that financial contributions were voluntarily conferred by the LGC, the Grand Council sought to distribute the funds according to the wishes of that body.²²

The actual sums involved were substantial enough to ensure that the LGC was accounted for in Grand Council deliberations. During the first year of existence (1885), the Ladies¹ executive contributed a generous £360. By 1889 the figure had increased to £560. Donations in the amount of £800 began in the Primrose year 1893-94,²³ a generous ten percent of that year's operating Grand Council budget.²⁴ They continued to be regularly featured on balance sheets of the Council in the period prior to the First World War.²⁵ Other sources of income for

²² Ibid., 8 March 1889; 14 May 1891; 29 May 1891; 17 July 1891; 3 June 1892; 27 July 1894. Ibid., 21 June 1889; 5 July 1889; 19 July 1889; 27 July 1889; 25 July 1890. Ibid., 3 February 1893; 3 March 1893; 20 May 1898.

²³ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 22 February 1886; May, 1890; 2 November 1894.

²⁴ The Primrose League Gazette, 1 May 1895, p. 5.

²⁵ Based on Financial Reports prepared by the Grand Council covering the years 1901 through 1913 exclusive of 1903-04 Primrose Year when figures were not available. In all of the above named years the LGC contributed £800 except in 1901-02 when it gave £750. Xeroxed copies of the reports were obtained courtesy of Michael Wills from the Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, vols. 1900-04, 1904-08, and 1908-14. However, the original reports for the year ending 31 March 1903 and the year ending 31 March 1906 appear to have been lost. They contained records for the 1901-02, 1902-03, and 1904-05, 1905-06 Primrose Years, respectively. The Minute book records,

the Grand Council during these years were derived primarily from annual Tributes, entrance, Warrant, and badge fees, subscription from The Primrose League Gazette, and interest obtained from the Capital and Income Accounts.

Two financial tables are displayed below. The first provides a fairly comprehensive listing of the LGC's membership, income, and expenditure.²⁶ The second gives a breakdown of three key areas in

however, do contain "Statement of Receipts and Expenditures of Tributes and Donations" for the years 1 April 1902 to 31 March 1903 and 1 April 1905 to 31 March 1906. The figures provided in these statements vary somewhat with those given in the Grand Council Financial Reports for the same years.

²⁶ The figures provided in Table 1 regarding the LGC are based, unless otherwise noted, on the LGC Executive Committee Minutes for 1885-1901. Primrose League recordkeeping was variable and at times inconsistent. Nevertheless, the figures provide a necessary point of reference from which to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the performance of the League. Therefore, they are accepted, despite their uneven quality.

1885 The material for 1885 is obtained from the LGC minutes of 22 February 1886, citing The Morning Post, 22 February 1886, p. 5.

1886 The financial statement for 1886 is found in the LGC minutes of 14 January 1887. Membership information is contained in the LGC minutes of 22 February 1886, citing The Morning Post, 22 February 1886, p. 5.

1887 The financial records for 1887 are recorded in the LGC minutes of 1 May 1888. Membership figures are listed in the Minutes of 24 May 1887.

1888 The figures for 1888 are enclosed in the LGC minutes of 22 February 1889. Membership information is found in the 2 March 1888 Minutes.

1889 The financial balance sheet is provided in the Annual Report of the LGC executive dated May, 1890. Membership figures are unavailable.

1890 The financial balance sheet and membership total for 1890 are contained in the LGC Annual Report, a copy of which is enclosed in the 1 May 1891 Minutes.

1891-92 The financial balance sheet and membership total are contained in the Annual Report dated 13 May 1892.

1892-93 The figures for 1892-93 are found in The Primrose League Gazette, 13 May 1893, p. 7.

1893-94 Membership information is contained in the Minutes of 2 February 1894. Grants to the SGC are recorded in the Minutes of 2 March 1894 and 6 April 1894. The grant to Grand Council is registered

which the revenues of the Grand Council were distributed between 1887 and 1901: the total annual budget, investments, and Knights' and Dames' Tributes.²⁷

in the Minutes of 2 November 1894.

1894-95 The donation to the SGC is recorded in the LGC minutes of 2 November 1895. The allocation to Grand Council is listed in The Primrose League Gazette, 1 May 1895, p. 5. Membership figures are also found in the Gazette issue 1 June 1895, p. 6.

1895-96 The grants to the Grand Council and the SGC are contained in the LGC minutes of 7 February 1896. Membership figures are listed in The Primrose League Gazette, 1 June 1896, p. 5.

1896-97 Grants to the SGC and the Grand Council are found in the LGC minutes of 22 January 1897 and 7 February 1897, respectively. Membership information is contained in the Minutes of 3 April 1897.

1897-98 Grants to the SGC and Grand Council are found in the LGC minutes of 3 March 1898 and 20 May 1898, respectively. Membership information is contained in the Minutes of 24 June 1898.

1898-99 The grant allocated to the Grand Council is listed in the LGC minutes of 17 March 1899. The donation to the SGC and the LGC membership total for the year are contained in the Minutes of 28 April 1899.

1899-1900 The donations to the Grand Council and the SGC are listed in the LGC minutes of 2 March 1900 and 16 March 1900, respectively. The membership total for the year is contained in the Minutes of 18 May 1900.

1900-01 Grants to the Grand Council and the SGC are listed in the LGC minutes of 15 February and 15 March 1901, respectively. Membership for the year is recorded in the LGC minutes of 3 May 1901.

²⁷ The revenues obtained by the Grand Council are divided into five column headings in Table 2. These include Total Budget, Plus or Minus Budget, Investment Accounts, Funds Added to Investments, and Knights' and Dames' Tributes. Total Budget, Investment Accounts, Funds Added to Investments, and Tribute columns for the years 1887-99, exclusive of 1898, are based on financial statements printed in The Primrose League Gazette for those years. 1888: 21 April 1888, p. 4; 1889: 25 May 1889, p. 10; 1890: 25 May 1890, p. 10; 1891: 30 April 1892, p. 7; 1892: 30 April 1892, p. 7; 1893: 18 April 1893, p. 3; 1894: 1 May 1895, p. 5; 1895: 1 May 1895, p. 5; 1896: 1 May 1896, p. 3; 1897: 1 June 1897, p. 5; 1899: 1 May 1899, p. 7.

The years 1900 and 1901 are based on the xeroxed Financial Report for the year ending 31 March, 1901 provided by Michael Wills from the Grand Council Minutes of 1900-1914. The original report appears to have been misplaced. The figures under the Total Budget column for 1900 and 1901 constitute only the receipts earned for the year. The figures under the +/- Budget column for 1899, 1900, and 1901 constitute the cost expenditure incurred by the League for those years. The 1899 citations are obtained from The Primrose League Gazette, 1 May 1899, p. 7, while those for 1900 and 1901 are listed in the Financial

TABLE 1

Finances and Membership of the LGC, 1885-1901

Year	Membs.	Income (£)	Subscrips. (£)	(£) G C Lects.	(£) LGC Pamphts.	(£) SGC
1885	362	865.15.09	790.06.09	360	72 *	
1886	796	1226.15.05	1029.00.02 *	551		
1887	1060	984.14.10		500		
1888	1045	1216.09.05	962.09.00	600		100
1889		1122.12.00	1036.10.00	560		100
1890	1180	1229.09.07	1097.15.00	550		150
1891 +	1370	2037.18.11	2005.00.00	700		150
1892-93	1500	1885.11.11	1410.10.00	725		150
1893-94	1530			800		140
1894-95	1570			800		120
1895-96	1605			800		120
1896-97	1663			800		120
1897-98	1681			800		120
1898-99	1612			800		120
1899-00	1630			800		120
1900-01	1611			800		120

* In the year 1885, the LGC maintained an independent political fund for financing its own election pamphlets. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 20 February 1885; 3 March 1893.

The 1886 figure for subscriptions, £1029.00.02, included both fees and earnings received from badge sales.

+ 1891 actually covered a fifteen month period.

Report for 1901. The figures under the Investment Accounts column for 1900 and 1901 constitute both the monies held in the Capital and Income Accounts, stockholding concerns. The numbers in the Funds Added to Investments for the years 1900 and 1901 constitute only receipts received for the Capital Account.

TABLE 2
Grand Council Revenue, 1887-1901

Year	Total Budget (£)	(£) */- Budget	Investment Accounts	£ Added to Investments	K & D Tributes (£)
1887	10133.09.08		10824.06.07	4739.10.05	5303.00.00
1888	6464.16.02		12050.14.07	1226.08.00	5656.03.09
1889	7113.17.11		13027.06.01	976.11.06	5668.03.00
1890	7233.06.02		13739.02.07	711.16.06	5690.01.01
1891	8370.19.03		14824.11.01	393.10.00	5368.17.07
1892	8612.07.11		14678.01.01	340.06.06	5059.18.07
1893	8660.08.04		15018.07.07		5021.14.07
1894	7433.14.08		10644.01.01	257.10.06	5459.14.05
1895	6399.02.01		10901.11.07	287.11.06	4735.19.11
1896	6213.09.01		11189.03.01		4537.14.05
1897					4486.11.04
1899		5825"	11763		4215
1900	6650*	6740"	14776	329	3215
1901	6516*	6609"	14818	312	3019

* receipts
expenditures

The illustrious composition of the LGC executive also helped to ensure its position. Many of its members were wives of the most prominent Conservative politicians in the country and others were descended from some of the most aristocratic families in Britain. As an administrative body, the LGC wielded enormous informal power and influence. The social class composition of its executive, when combined with the financial contributions and the political activities of Primrose Dames throughout the country, helped ensure that the LGC never became a mere rubber stamp of the dictates of the Grand Council.

It was with regard to the policy of the SGC that the LGC sought most frequently to assert its control over the purse strings. Between 1888 and 1901 the Women's executive contributed an average of ten percent a year to the budget. Repeatedly they made requests for detailed information regarding the manner in which contributions were being spent, even going so far as to suggest how the money might best be employed in an upcoming (1892) General Election and to offer general advice concerning overall improvements to Scottish organization.²⁸

The SGC Ledger Summary for 1886-1901 provided in Table 3 offers a breakdown of financial and membership figures relevant to Scotland and the contributions made by the LGC during these years.²⁹

²⁸ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 12 March 1891; 10 April 1891; 24 April 1891; 1 May 1891; 29 May 1891; 17 July 1891; 29 April 1892; 3 November 1893; 6 November 1896.

²⁹ The SGC Ledger Summary is divided into nine columns. These include the financial categories of Income and Expenditure, Knights' and Dames' Tributes, LGC Grants, and the LGC Grant as a Percentage of the Total SGC Budget. Table 3 also provides figures representing the numbers of Knights, Dames, Associates, their cumulative total, and a listing of Habitations for Scotland.

The Income/Expenditure and Tribute Received columns are based on figures rounded down to the nearest pound as derived from the "Income and Expenditure Account" in the Ledger of the Grand Council Scottish Branch.

The LGC record of donations is derived from Table 1.

SGC official membership figures are obtained from several sources. The 1886 figures are listed in the Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 7 January 1887. The numbers provided for 1889, 1890, 1899, and 1900 are derived, respectively, from The Primrose League Gazette, 25 May 1889, p. 9; 19 April 1890, p. 2; 2 January 1899, p. 5; 1 February 1900, p. 18. The 1901 figures are from "The Fifteenth Annual Report" of the SGC published in February and contained in the Scottish Branch Minute Book, 1885-1904.

TABLE 3
SGC Ledger and Membership Summary, 1886-1901

Year	£ Inc./ Exp.	£ K&D Trib. Rec'd	K	D	A	T	H	£ LGC Grant	£ % LGC Budget
4/86	879	245							
10/86	1615	219	2211	1730	18017	21958	118		
10/87	2273	413							
10/88	1179	397						IOC	5.6
10/89	2069	509	3330	2566	38624	44520	147	100	4.8
10/90	2114	454	3529	2775	44432	50736	152	150	7.0
10/91	2136	469							
10/92	1985	381						150	7.5
10/93	1666	269						150	9.0
10/94	1434	319						140	9.7
10/95	1300	283						120	9.2
10/96	1182	264						120	10.1
10/97	1061	241						120	11.3
10/98	1036	203						120	11.5
10/99	997	163	4172	3501	73399	81072		120	12.0
10/00	1105	214	4222	3569	75496	83287		120	10.8
10/01	1075	180	4316	3652	78021	85989	86	120	11.1
								Average	10.8

The growing prominence of women in the League led quite naturally to questions concerning its status as a women's organization and, more importantly, its stand on suffrage. The LGC executive repeatedly rejected all proposals for affiliation with other women's organizations, emphasizing that it was not a female association and occupying a subsidiary status to the governing Grand Council.³⁰

More troublesome to the Ladies' executive was the recurring issue of women's suffrage. Women ratepayers had gradually been

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4 November 1892; 18 November 1892; 7 February 1895; 5 November 1897.

accorded local voting privileges. They were eligible to cast a ballot in municipal elections in 1869. Married women were subsequently prohibited from participating until 1894 when they qualified as occupiers, but not with respect to the same property as their husbands. The powers of female property owners were extended by 1888 in the same manner to the election of County Council members. However, they were effectively barred from sitting on these bodies until 1907. Their right to participate on school boards was granted in 1870 while similar legislation entitled them to run for Parish and District Councils in 1894.³¹ Despite advances made in the local and regional spheres, all women were prohibited from voting and sitting for parliamentary elections.

The League appeared to be sharply divided on the issue of women's suffrage. Many members of the Ladies' executive opposed extending the parliamentary franchise to women while the League as a whole remained officially neutral.³² Nevertheless, this did not stop members from taking a position, particularly at the local level. In August of 1889 Miss Milner, an active organizer in the West Riding region of Yorkshire, spoke out against women's suffrage at a Primrose rally in Bath. Her remarks were politely received, although those present passed a motion in support of the enfranchisement of women.³³

31 Pugh, Women's Suffrage in Britain, p. 13.

32 LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 4 November 1892; 18 November 1892; 19 March 1897; 11 February 1898.

33 Robb, The Primrose League, p. 125. Nor was the League alone in hotly debating the issue of women's suffrage and passing controversial resolutions on the subject. A member of the National Union and Grand Council executives, Mr. H. Wainwright, proposed at the 1887 annual Union meeting a resolution calling for the extension of the

A Grand Council Precept was issued in 1889 forbidding Habitations to take part in suffrage meetings or to pass resolutions on the subject. Nevertheless, the executive found it necessary to reissue warnings repeatedly because of action taken at the local levels in violation of official policy.³⁴ The Council's position was further undermined by the nominal support given by both Balfour and Salisbury to the cause of women's suffrage. In true Disraelian fashion, both men realized the potential gains which could be achieved by the party by enfranchising property holding women, deemed to be staunch supporters.

In speaking to the House of Commons in 1892, Balfour vigorously defended extending the parliamentary franchise to women as an action generally consistent with his support of the Primrose League. Endorsing their right to vote over the objections of Liberal member Asquith and Liberal Unionist representative Henry James, he stated

I should think myself grossly inconsistent and most ungrateful if I supported that argument in this House, for I have myself taken the chair at Primrose League meetings, and urged to the best of my ability the women of this country to take a share in politics, and to do their best in their various localities to support the

franchise to property holding women. It was passed as were similar measures sponsored in 1889, 1891, and 1894. "National Union Annual Conference Minutes," 22-23 November 1887, NUA 2/1/7; "National Union Annual Report to the Conference," 1909, NUA 2/2/4.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 126. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 August 1899, p. 10.

principles which I believe to be sound in the interests of the country.³⁵

Salisbury advocated the right of women to vote in parliamentary elections at the annual 1896 Grand Habitation, fully cognizant of the divisions within his own party regarding this issue.

I am one of those—I speak only for myself individually—who are of opinion that women have not the voice they ought to have in the selection of the representatives of the people—(hear, hear)—but I warn you that there is no question at present which divides parties more completely—and I am not certain even whether I express the opinion of the majority of my own party. (Laughter.)³⁶

The ongoing debate concerning whether women were entitled to the parliamentary franchise raises the larger issue as to whether the League in general promoted or hampered women's suffrage and the larger issues surrounding the feminist movement. At first glance it might well appear that the Primrose League was a restrictive influence in the emancipation process, particularly given the professed subordinate status of the LGC to the Grand Council and the explicit disapproval aired regularly toward women's issues at the Ladies¹ executive meetings.

However, on closer examination a somewhat different image emerges. The Primrose League provided prominent women and representatives of the growing middle class with an opportunity to

³⁵ Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 4th Series, 3 (1892): 1527; 1530; 1453; 1508; 1523-24. The bill was introduced by Sir A. Rollit, a member of the executive of the Grand Council and the National Union. A similar measure was also introduced in 1897, but likewise failed to achieve passage. The Primrose League Gazette, 2 May 1898, p. 8.

³⁶ The Primrose League Gazette, 1 June 1896, p. 8.

become involved in party politics. Their ability to carry out political speeches, canvassing, the conveyance of voters to the polls, and their application of the tenets of the Corrupt Practices Act as well as their leadership rendered at the central and local levels gave them valuable experience in the political arena. The growing sophistication of the Ladies' executive was demonstrated at their annual general meetings which initially had been dominated by male Primrose and Conservative party figures.

Lady Jersey's address to the LGC gathering held in 1887 marked the gradual transition from an annual event presided over by prominent Conservative and Grand Council figures to a forum for the expression of the views of the women's executive. In defending their active role, Lady Jersey noted that year, "Some may object to women descending into the political arena, but surely none can gainsay their arming their combatants for the fray."³⁷ The military metaphor was more forcefully applied by Lady Jersey at an annual LGC meeting held in 1890. Anticipating a General Election within the next two years, she urged her female audience "to clear the decks for action and keep our powder dry. (Loud applause.)"³⁸

Women made frequent references to their limited oratorical abilities and their general reluctance to intrude into the male dominated sphere of politics. Their actions generally were defended as based on restoring and protecting vital national institutions for the

³⁷ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 25 May 1887, citing The Morning Post article of 25 May 1887.

³⁸ The Primrose League Gazette, 24 May 1890, p. 2.

sake of their families and posterity. Nevertheless, by the period 1889-1901, they had begun to advance their own claims as well as assume a prominent role in the direction of LGC annual meetings.³⁹ Thus, in 1889 Lady Willoughby de Eresby, addressing the members assembled, spoke of the tremendous role exerted by women in the establishment and leadership of Habitations throughout the country.⁴⁰

At that same gathering, Lady Lathom proposed the establishment of League sponsored County Councils, to be composed entirely of women. Their formation, she argued, would not only extend the domain of Primrose influence, it would serve as an avenue for greater participation of women while not interfering with the male preserve of elected representation at the county level. The proposal was both a defense of the status quo and simultaneously an effort to engage women further in the political domain. The Councils were introduced by the Grand Council the following year, but with the distinction that they were composed of both men and women and their adoption voluntary.⁴¹ Other

³⁹ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 25 May 1887, citing The Morning Post article of 25 May 1887; 1 May 1888; 24 May 1890, citing The Primrose League Gazette article of 24 May 1890, p. 2; 16 May 1891, citing The Primrose League Gazette article of 16 May 1891, p. 3; 14 May 1892, citing The Morning Post article of 14 May 1892, p. 5.

⁴⁰ According to Lady Willoughby de Eresby, there were three hundred female Ruling Councillors and 450 Honorary Secretaries. These numbers are well below the respective 508 and 564 figures contained in the 1888 Roll of Habitations. They do not appear to be substantiated by other sources and unlike the 1888 Roll provide no details concerning the names of individuals and their Habitation affiliation. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 24 May 1889, citing The Morning Post article of 24 May 1889, p. 5.

⁴¹ The Primrose League Gazette, 19 April 1890, p. 2; 5 May 1892, p. 8. The 1899 Roll of Habitations lists both male and female County Council officers.

notable female initiatives included efforts by Miss Rowan and Countess of Bandon to build a foundation for League support in Ireland.⁴²

Despite the primarily supportive role of the Ladies' executive and the female members of the Primrose League represented in Habitations throughout the country, there can be little doubt of either their serious intent or their effectiveness. In sorry contrast to the expanding army of women Primrose League combatants, was the Women's Liberal Federation. Begun in 1887 as a defensive response to the overriding influence of the Primrose League, it was but a pale reflection of its Conservative rival. Mrs. Gladstone served as its symbolic head while Lady Aberdeen assumed the role of managing director. Despite efforts to promote the organization, it met with the general resistance of its male counterpart, the National Liberal Federation.

Mrs. Abel Buckley's depiction of events in Huddersfield was perhaps generally representative of the response accorded women's initiatives in Liberal party circles and are cited here by way of illustration. In describing the foundation of the Huddersfield Women's Liberal Association she noted defensively, "the men had not thought fit to ask them to join them in their association."⁴³ The result was a limitation in the opportunities and prospects open to Liberal women who wished to become actively involved in politics.

⁴² The Primrose League Gazette, 24 May 1890, p. 3; 16 May 1891, p. 3; 14 May 1892, p. 4.

⁴³ The Huddersfield Examiner, 8 December 1888, p. 6.

The Women's Liberal Association, like the Liberal party it represented, distinguished itself from the Primrose League, both through its moral character and the restricted fields of expression open to its largely middle class representatives. In describing these activities, Mrs. Buckley unintentionally reveals the limited scope of endeavors.

As to the work women could do and the question in which they were interested, . . . they were interested in seeing that the men who were sent to the Town Councils were upright and honourable men; and, from a domestic point of view, they were quite as much interested as men in having a good supply of pure water to aid them in the performance of their domestic duties, and it was quite as much their duty to see that the town was rightly and properly governed as it was

In mapping out the proper sphere of Liberal Women's activities, Mrs. Buckley never quite managed to leave the confines of the domestic realm. Citing the efforts of women in Ashton who were credited with having brought a Liberal victory to pass, she extols their achievements against a backwash of Liberal (male) opposition.

That was one advantage gained, especially as the men were so strongly against them taking part whatever in political affairs. Women could render service in many ways that men would not think of, and during [the] last election some of the lady workers stopped to wash up-(laughter)-or look after the baking-(laughter)-or tend the baby-(renewed laughter)-while the mothers went and gave their municipal vote; so that women could render valuable help in a constituency.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Perhaps more than anything else it is the noble, but lesser strides made by the Women's Liberal Association which indicate so conclusively the political gains achieved by the Primrose Dames.

II

Official figures of the League between 1889 and 1901 suggest an organization which, while perhaps failing to maintain the tremendous growth rates of the 1885-87 years, nevertheless continued to expand its numbers significantly, although at a diminishing rate. Thus while total membership is listed at 810,228 with a total of 1,986 Habitation in 1889, the 1901 figures respectively are 1,558,750 and 2,396.⁴⁵ The table provided below gives the official membership and Habitation figures of the League for the years 1884-1901.⁴⁷

46 The Primrose League Gazette, 1 September 1899, p. 9; 1 June 1900, p. 8; 1 June 1901, p. 5. The financial records of the SGC reveal a similar trend, with allowances being made for regional variations. Given its later start and slower initial momentum, peak revenue occurred later, in 1891, four years after that of the Grand Council. However, both the SGC and Grand Council reached their maximum Tribute returns during roughly the same period, respectively, 1889 and 1890. See Table 3, the SGC Ledger Summary, and Table 2, the Grand Council Revenue, pp. 145, 143.

47 Membership column-Figures for the years 1884-1899 are taken from The Primrose League Gazette, 1 September 1899, p. 9. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 June 1900, p. 8 lists an additional 43,209 members as having joined in the past year. If this figure is added to the total for 1899, we get 1,518,561 for 1900. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 June 1901, p. 5 lists an additional 40,189 members as having joined in the past year. Added to the 1900 total, this makes 1,558,750.

New Members column-Derived by determining the difference in total membership from year "x" to year "y." Based on the total membership figures provided in the Gazette issue of 1 September 1899. The figures for 1900 and 1901 are not calculations, but numbers provided in the Gazette issue of 1 June 1900 and 1 June 1901, respectively.

Total Habitations column-Habitation figures for the years 1884-

TABLE 4
Primrose League Membership and Habitation Totals, 1884-1901

Year	Total Members	New Members	K.	D.	A.	Total Habs.	New Habs.
1884	947		747	153	57	46	
1885	11366	10419	8071	1381	1914	169	123
1886	237283	225917	32645	23381	181257	1200	1031
1887	565861	328578	50258	39215	476388	1724	524
1888	672606	106745	54580	42791	575235	1877	153
1889	810228	137622	58180	46216	705832	1986	109
1890	910852	100624	60795	48796	801261	2081	95
1891	1001292	90040	63251	50973	887063	2134	53
1892	1075243	73951	65149	52914	957180	2188	54
1893	1131821	56578	66570	54623	1010628	2233	45
1894	1198431	66610	67896	56147	1074388	2275	42
1895	1259808	61377	69167	57632	1133009	2296	21
1896	1315128	55320	70475	59117	1185536	2326	30
1897	1376428	61300	71563	60484	1244381	2346	20
1898	1430019	53591	72590	61817	1295612	2360	14
1899	1475352	45333	73566	62942	1338844	2371	11
1900	1518561	43209				2380	9
1901	1558750	40189				2396	16

However, as the League itself admitted on numerous occasions in response to criticism from Liberal circles, the figures provided were based on the cumulative list of members, rather than active subscribers. Habitation numbers were also subject to inflated values. In some instances new Habitations appeared to be little more than revived or amalgamated associations which had failed to pay dues over a

1899 are provided in The Primrose League Gazette, 1 September 1899. Figures for the years 1900 and 1901 are calculated based on the stated numbers of additional Habitations for these years as provided in the Gazette issues of 1 June 1900 and 1 June 1901, respectively.

New Habitations column-Derived in the same fashion as the New Members column. The figures for 1900 and 1901 are not calculations, but numbers provided in the Gazette issue of 1 June 1900 and 1 June 1901, respectively.

period of several years and found it easier to begin anew, rather than be subject to back Tributes. Administrative adjustments in Habitation boundaries, a process begun in 1890, resulted in the subdivision of large associations into several smaller denominations, thereby magnifying Habitation growth rates in a period characterized by increasing atrophy.⁴⁸

Complaints of "defunct" associations began to surface as early as 1886.⁴⁹ By 1889 the League was experiencing a significant slow-down with the result that periodic reports of inertia reached the attention of the Central Office. Similar patterns were exhibited in the membership of the LGC. The trend was significant enough by 1890 for the Ladies' annual report to note that while increases continued, they "have not yet, however, reached the figure . . . they should have attained."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ The Primrose League Gazette, 24 May 1890, p. 1; 18 April 1891, pp. 4, 7; 5 May 1892, p. 8; 1 June 1894, p. 7; 1 May 1896, p. 3.

The most notable instance of a reconstituted Habitation was the Glengeary Kingstown Habitation (1497) which was reconstituted in 1887, assuming the name Kingstown (The Victoria) Habitation (1991). Another likely contender was the Charlton Kings Habitation (1145), which by the time of the 1899 Habitation Roll had assumed a new number (2417) and an appropriately later formation date (from 1886 to 1892). It was also probable that the Burnley Habitation (1294) was renamed Burnley and District Habitation (2488), amalgamating four inert associations in the borough. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 17 March 1887; 16 July 1887. The 1888 Roll of Habitations, pp. 212, 81, 133. The 1899 Roll of Habitations, pp. 64, 105.

Examples of subdivided Habitations include the Longford Castle in Wiltshire, King Arthur's Round Table in Cornwall, and New Forest in Hampshire. They split into eight, two, and six Habitations, respectively. The 1888 Roll of Habitations, pp. 38, 71, 90. The 1899 Roll of Habitations, pp. 25, 77, 237-38.

⁴⁹ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 15 October 1886.

⁵⁰ "Primrose League Report of the Executive Committee of the Ladies' Grand Council," in the LGC Executive Committee Minutes, May,

That same year the Liberal magazine, Truth, launched a frontal assault on the League. The paper suggested that the actual amounts of Tribute paid by Knights and Dames was proportionately representative of total active membership, a figure it assessed at 200,000.⁵¹ There is no reason to believe that active Associate membership was related to the annual fees paid by Knights and Dames. Nevertheless, it might be useful to test Truth's calculations based on its own set of assumptions.

In addition to engaging in faulty arithmetic, Truth incorrectly assumed that Knights and Dames were paying 2s6p a year. Since the statute revision made in April, 1887, members contributing prior to the nineteenth of April were charged only two shillings. Using the Truth gauge of membership and assuming for the sake of simplicity that all individuals pay in a timely fashion, thereby receiving the twenty percent reduction, we divide two shillings into the total amount of Tribute received for 1889-90, £5,690. The result is an active membership of 56,900 Knights and Dames. When this figure is divided by the total Knights and Dames listed for 1889-90, 109,591,⁵² we get fifty-two percent. If the Truth method of calculation is then applied, more than half the total League representative for 1889-90 (910,852), or 473,643, were active members. This figure represents more than two-and-one-quarter times the magazine's estimate.

1890.

⁵¹ The Primrose League Gazette, 24 May 1890, p. 1.

⁵² The membership and Tribute figures are taken from The Primrose League Gazette, 1 September 1899, p. 9; 25 May 1890, p. 10, respectively.

However, the declining membership rate of active Knights and Dames over the years when compared with the cumulative figures utilized by the League over time, alters the percentage rates rather significantly as the years progress. By 1899 Knights and Dames paying Tribute represented a mere thirty percent of their reported numbers. The percentage had dropped to 21.5 by 1901.⁵³

Since no accurate figures were provided for total League membership, it is difficult to determine the exact extent of participation, let alone make a determination of the proportion of active members actually contributing to the League's political efforts. Only the 1888 Rolls provide a listing of the number of members contained in reputedly active Habitations. Of the 1,730 Habitations included, 29 percent contain no information regarding the number of Knights, Dames, and Associates. Nevertheless, it is the only detailed listing available and is therefore worthy of examination.⁵⁴

By averaging the official Habitation and membership figures provided by the League for the Primrose years 1888 and 1889, we get an

⁵³ The calculations are based upon membership figures obtained from The Primrose League Gazette, 1 September 1899, p. 9; 1 June 1900, p. 8; 1 June 1901, p. 5.

⁵⁴ The numbers are derived from my computer tabulation of the 1888 Roll of Habitations. It is assumed that the absence of Habitation and membership information on the Roll is, in some sense, an indication of the general level of activity. While a number of Habitations recording no membership information are sure to contain individuals, it is equally likely that the representations given for the Habitations named are well in excess of active participants. Therefore, the numbers provided in the 1888 Roll are tentatively accepted as a rough gauge of overall membership. Chapter Five shall examine some local registers.

approximation of their value for the end of 1888.⁵⁵ The calculations reveal, respectively, 1,931 Habitations and 741,717 members as against the 1888 Roll listing of 1,730 and 565,084. Thus the 1888 Roll shows a net decline of 201 Habitations and 176,633 members over projected official League figures, a respective eleven and twenty-four percent reduction in the above stated categories.

Equally striking is that by the time of the 1899 Roll the active Habitations declined from the 1888 figure of 1,730 to 1,541. Divisions for England, Wales, and Ireland dropped from 366 in 1888 to 350 in 1899. Only six District Agents representing nine Provinces in England, an area formerly supervised by twenty-two men.⁵⁶ In general the numbers support what Minute records obliquely suggest: overall League stagnation, even decline, and the loss disproportionately represented at the lowest levels of organization.

Production and distribution of pamphlets also exhibited a decelerating trend between 1889 and 1901. The 3,048,000 leaflets circulated in 1891 represented a high for these years. However, the numbers were perhaps misleading, reflecting the League's shift from

⁵⁵ The official Habitation and membership figures are those contained in The Primrose League Gazette, 1 September 1899, p. 9. They are Primrose year totals, running roughly from April to April. The 1888 and 1899 Rolls, however, are based on calendar years. For this reason the average of the 1888 and 1889 Primrose Years is taken in order to have the official figures approximate those represented on the 1888 Roll of Habitations.

⁵⁶ Based on my computer tabulation of the 1888 and 1899 Rolls of Habitations. Division and Habitation listings for Scotland are available only for 1899 and therefore not subject to a comparison. Local records and declining Tributes suggest that the figures contained in the 1899 Roll are well in excess of their actual numbers.

multi-page handouts to single fly sheets. Nevertheless, it was still well below the record 4,752,754 established in 1886. Between the 1892 and 1894 Primrose years, the materials circulated at a fairly constant rate, two million per year. During the election year 1895, however, the number actually dropped to one million. In general, the pamphlets of both the Primrose League and the National Union in the 1890's indicate a movement away from Irish issues toward broader political and imperial themes.⁵⁷

While the League was generally reticent to address the issue of diminishing revenue and inert Habitations, the problem had become so great by 1900 as to receive official commentary in the Minute books. The records suggest a level of decline far greater than that indicated in the 1899 Roll. Thus, the LGC embarked on an effort to revive associations in Norfolk in response to their reports, which indicated the area had only twelve good Habitations by December, 1900. By contrast, the 1899 Roll was more optimistic in its assessment, listing fully thirty-two Habitations in the county.⁵⁸

That same year the Agency Committee of the Grand Council generally dismissed activity in Liverpool noting, "The condition of the Primrose League in Liverpool is very unsatisfactory but your committee

⁵⁷ The Primrose League Gazette, 19 April 1890, p. 2; The Morning Post, 20 May 1886, p. 2. The Primrose League Gazette, 5 May 1892, p. 3; 18 April 1893, p. 2; 1 May 1894, p. 3; 1 May 1896, p. 2. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 4 June 1897; 8 July 1898; 2 June 1899; 3 November 1899; 13 July 1900; 18 January 1901. "National Union Annual Reports to the Conference," 1894, 1897, NUA 2/2/2.

⁵⁸ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 7 December 1900; 18 January 1901. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 4 December 1902. The 1899 Roll of Habitations, pp. 148-53.

thinks it would be inadvisable to withdraw the warrants at the present time." The 1899 Roll suggests Liverpool had six active Habitations.^{5^}

Countywide, Lancashire was regarded as the most successful Primrose League region. By 1901 it was also in difficulty, having only forty-nine active Habitations. Thirteen others were listed as "dead" and the state of thirty was unknown. Only two Habitations were in the process of formation. These figures present a sorry contrast to the reputed 113 active associations recorded for Lancashire on the 1899 Roll.⁶⁰

In the western region of England, things were no better. The entire province was listed as "unsatisfactory" and earmarked for "a special effort . . . in the coming year." Scotland, ever a troubled spot for activity of the Primrose League, was also having great difficulty in maintaining Habitations and members by 1900. The SGC was sufficiently alarmed at the falling rate of Tributes collected from Knights and Dames in 1899 to have its Political Secretary prepare a report the following year discussing where "the leakage was taking place." The result was a three page statement produced in April detailing the state of Habitations in decline. Subsequent Annual reports for 1900 and 1901 focused on associations in "abeyance" and in need of "resuscitation." By February of 1901 official figures of the SGC recorded only eighty-six Habitations, a noticeable reduction from

59 Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 1 November 1900. The 1899 Roll of Habitations, p. 115.

60 Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 19 December 1901. Based on my computer tabulation of the number of Habitations in Lancashire from the 1899 Roll of Habitations.

the 152 reported in 1890.⁶¹

One means by which the League sought to check its stagnating enterprise was through organizational initiative. A never-ending series of reforms, alterations, and adjustments were made between 1889 and 1901, although little substantive change occurred. In 1889 the Central Office and LGC headquarters moved to still larger quarters located at 64 Victoria Street. Within the next year the Chairman of Grand Council was renamed Chancellor and the head office administrator, formally referred to as Chancellor, was renamed Vice Chancellor. District Agents were renamed Provincial Secretaries by 1891.⁶² As stated earlier, their numbers declined significantly from a generous allotment of twenty-two individuals in 1888 to a mere six in 1899.

Provincial Habitations, in theory the apex of the regional power structure, were proposed in 1899. The governing heads, the Provincial Grand Masters, were to be annually appointed by the Grand Council. They were empowered to review local records and convene annual meetings with representatives of County, Divisional, and local associations. They do not appear to have received much support at the regional and local levels and consequently were not implemented. However, regional representation was insured by the annual election at

⁶¹ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 5 December 1901. In 1901 Province Nine, the western region, encompassed the counties Dorset, Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 29 April 1892; 2 March 1894; 6 November 1896. Scottish Branch Minute Book, 11 January 1900; 9 April 1900; Fifteenth Annual Report, February, 1901; Sixteenth Annual Report, December, 1901.

⁶² LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 5 April 1889. The Primrose League Gazette, 19 April 1890, p. 2; 25 April 1891, p. 3.

Grand Habitation beginning in 1893 of nine Provincial representatives to sit on Grand Council.⁶³

A level down the organizational ladder stood the County Councils (1890). They served as the Primrose counterpart to the elective institutions of the same name implemented by the Conservative government in 1888. The Councils were served by a President and Secretary. They were entrusted with summoning Divisional and local representatives for periodic meetings. The County Councils were optional institutions, their creation left to the discretion of local bodies. They never achieved a wide representation.⁶⁴

Another innovation implemented during these years was the Knights Imperial. Introduced in 1892 as a revenue raising device for Grand Council, its members were essentially nonparticipatory, contributing one guinea a year to the Grand Council. Formally the organization was modeled after the LGC. By 1901 it had a membership of 1,895 Knights and included fifteen subordinate chapters.⁶⁵

The LGC also sought to boost its numbers and financial contributors. In 1892 it initiated Drawing Room meetings, gatherings held in prominent members' homes as a means of enticing recruits. Five

⁶³ The Primrose League Gazette, 1 May 1899, pp. 6-7; 1 June 1900, pp. 7-9; 1 June 1901, pp. 5-6; 18 April 1893, p. 2. There is no mention of Provincial Habitations in subsequent Annual Reports submitted to Grand Habitation or the 1899 and 1904 Rolls of Habitations.

⁶⁴ The Primrose League Gazette, 19 April 1890, p. 2; 7 May 1893, p. 7; 18 April 1893, pp. 2, 9-10. The 1899 Roll of Habitations lists only two County Councils, Cheshire and Suffolk.

⁶⁵ The Primrose League Gazette, 7 May 1892, p. 7; 18 April 1893, p. 2; 1 June 1891, p. 5.

years later they proposed the establishment of "Imperial Dames," an intermediate body straddling the ranks of the LGC and Dames membership. The women were to be eligible to join from the populous Associate category, contributing one guinea annually inclusive of fees paid to the Grand Council. However, the Imperial Dames were to be denied voting privileges on the LGC and excluded from its more elegant social functions.⁶⁶ The measure failed to stimulate interest and appears to have been quietly tabled.

Grand Council itself introduced a number of schemes designed to encourage greater participation. In 1889 the Champion Banner was initiated along with second and third prizes to Habitations with the largest and most active members. By 1900 the awards had undergone some modifications. The Champion Banner was conferred on the Habitation with the best three year record of activity while Red and Blue banners rewarded distinguished annual performances. In 1901 a Metropolitan Banner was introduced for the most active association in the London area.⁶⁷

Two key innovations in these years were the Cycling Corps (1884) and the Juvenile Branches (1899), the latter comprised of young children otherwise referred to as "Primrose Buds." Both programs were formally proposed by delegates at the 1894 annual meeting and initiated by local associations prior to the official endorsement of the Grand

⁶⁶ "Report of the Executive Committee of the Ladies¹ Grand Council," 13 May 1892, LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 5 November 1897; 12 November 1897.

⁶⁷ The Primrose League Gazette, 16 March 1889, p. 5; 1 June 1900, p. 8; 1 June 1901, p. 5.

Council. Both organizations were affiliated with existing Habitations, although they retained some measure of independence. The concept of a children's program had first been conceived by the Grand Council in 1885, but had been discarded when the Ealing Dames protested the induction of youths. As for the Cycling Corps, it was sufficiently advanced by 1900 to offer assistance to a number of Habitations during the period surrounding the General Election.⁶⁸

Other institutional features of the 1890's were the introduction of regional conferences. In 1896-97 Primrose year, Nottingham and Rochdale sponsored gatherings. Similar meetings were held two years later in Bristol and Rochdale, in 1899 in Leicester, and in Exeter in 1901. Provincial Secretaries' Conferences were also sponsored in 1899 and 1900. Central Office committees underwent some transformation between 1889 and 1901 as in the case of the amalgamation of the Joint Literature and Consultative Committees (1890) and the introduction *in* 1899 of a Joint Committee to promote SGC and Grand Council relations.⁶⁹ However, there was little substantive change. By 1901 the committees were little altered from those existing in 1888, namely, a General Purposes, Finance, Agency, Entertainment, Gazette, as well as joint bodies promoting harmonious relations with the LGC and SGC.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1 May 1894, p. 5; 1 November 1898, p. 11. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 24 June 1885; 9 September 1885. The Morning Post, 8 May 1901.

⁶⁹ The Primrose League Gazette, 1 June 1897, p. 5; 1 May 1899, pp. 6-7; 1 December 1899, p. 7. Primrose League Special Minute Book, 1886-1900, 23 November 1899. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 13 December 1900; 19 December 1901. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 16 May 1890.

On the political front the Grand Council continued to be troubled over just what constituted the legal boundaries of the Corrupt Practices Act. Repeated adjustments were to ensure compliance with the law as in restricting Dame Drawing Room meetings from occurring during election periods. Prior to the time of the 1895 General Election, the Grand Council formally approved Habitations working under the direction of the Unionist agents, although some continued to "dissolve" while others appear never to have disbanded.⁷⁰

Charges of corrupt practices were levied against Habitations on many occasions. No convictions were obtained against the Primrose League. However, two Conservative party candidates were unseated in Hexham and Rochester because of their excessive contributions to local League entertainments during the period surrounding the 1892 General Election. During the 1895 campaign one petition was filed against a Habitation detailing multiple charges, but it was withdrawn before reaching the courts. A further claim was made in Lancaster and brought to trial in January of 1896. Despite the battery of citations and a network of Liberal agents employed investigating the charges, no conviction was obtained.⁷¹

⁷⁰ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 3 June 1892. Primrose League Special Minute Book, 1886-1900, 18 June 1888. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 May 1895, p. 6; 1 May 1896, p. 2; 1 October 1900, p. 3. Scottish Branch Minute Book, 1904-1920, 6 December 1905; 14 February 1905.

⁷¹ The Primrose League Gazette, 18 April 1893, p. 6; 1 May 1896, p. 6; 1 June 1899, p. 7.

The Conservative party's support for the League remained unstinting, demonstrated most visibly in Salisbury's frequent attendance at annual Grand Habitations and more concretely indicated on one occasion by means of party donations to the Primrose League's "Special Organization Fund" earmarked for the 1892 General Election. Among the contributors: the Marquis of Salisbury, £100; W.H. Smith, £50; the Duke of Portland, £100; Viscount Cranbrook, £20; Arthur Balfour, £5; G.J. Goschen, £20; and the Duke of Norfolk, £100.⁷²

III

To a great extent Salisbury and the Conservative party's gains in the eighties had been based on a public perception that vital national institutions were under attack. For many the defeats sustained by the British under the Liberal government both at Majuba Hill in the Transvaal (1881) and by virtue of General Gordon's massacre at Khartoum (1885) served as a more general indicator of Britain's threatened status. Economic historians today, particularly those labeled "Optimists," tend to be more charitable than their predecessors

⁷² Out of the seventeen annual Grand Habitations held between 1886 and 1902, Salisbury addressed twelve meetings, missing those held in 1888, 1890, 1895, 1899, and 1901. His absence was minimized by the appointment of Balfour as Vice Grand Master in 1895. Thus, on the three occasions after 1890 when Salisbury was unable to attend, Balfour went in his place. The importance Salisbury placed on these meetings was underscored both by his presence and by the messages imparted at these events. His unique appearance at the annual Knights' Imperial Banquet in 1899, by way of compensation for his absence at the League's annual meeting, was a symbolic gesture indicating the value he placed on League functions. The Primrose League Gazette, 18 July 1891, p. 7.

concerning Britain's economy and overseas position in the period under study.⁷³ Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the late nineteenth century public widely feared their country's loss of economic, political, and global stature amidst the mounting imperial drives of western Europe and the industrial challenges posed by the newly emerging competitors, the United States and Germany.

Francois Crouzet dates Britain's concession to the burgeoning American economy to the year 1880, a significant time in a number of respects.⁷⁴ Domestically it marked the transition from a Conservative to a Liberal government as well as a gradual shift away from the reforms of the Disraeli/Gladstonian era to the retrenchment which would characterize the closing period of Victoria's reign. The year also

⁷³ The Economic History of Britain since 1700, an edited collection, is perhaps the most forceful presentation of the Optimist school. In general the authors tend to characterize late Victorian and Edwardian Britain economically as exhibiting a mixed industrial performance which gave little indication before 1914 of absolute decline in either the economy as a whole or in its key sectors. Typical of this perspective is R.C. Floud's, "Britain, 1860-1914: a survey," The Economic History of Britain, vol. 2, eds. Roderick Floud and Donald McCloskey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

In taking this position, the revisionists place themselves in opposition to "Traditionalists," as represented by David Landes and Peter Mathias. David S. Landes, The Unbound Prometheus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). Peter Mathias, The First Industrial Nation (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969).

The terms "Optimists" and "Traditionalists" are adopted from Francois Crouzet's synthetic study of nineteenth century economic trends and current scholarly interpretations of these developments. The Victorian Economy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 385.

⁷⁴ Crouzet, The Victorian Economy, p. 9. Trevor Lloyd in The General Election of 1880 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968) provides an excellent overview of the traditional character of the 1880 election, marking the end of widespread corruption campaign practices and the beginning of the modern, national election.

marked the establishment of the newspaper England; devoted, like the Primrose League, to restoring British national interests at home and abroad. Given the general politicization of the press during this period, papers like The Morning Post and local conservative publications also served as universal carriers of the Conservative message.⁷⁵

As important as the Conservative strategy was in forcing public attention on the need for a strengthened national and imperial policy, it is doubtful that it would have triumphed without the continual threat of Irish Home rule which dominated the politics of the 1880's and the 1890's. It was Salisbury's genius to realize the singular importance of the issue and to play continually upon public fears while reforging a multi-class alliance with which to base the establishment of the modern Conservative party. The years 1885 to 1888 constituted the crucial phase in this "realignment."⁷⁶ The most interesting

75 For a more general discussion of the evolution of the nineteenth century political press, see Stephen Koss, The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

76 in using the term realignment, I accept the position taken by Pelling, Blewett, Cornford et al. that the 1885-86 elections constituted a restructuring of British politics, at least for the period preceding the 1906 election. Wald is certainly correct in pointing to the limitations of employing inter-election correlations as a means by which to justify this conclusion. However, the validity of a realignment need not be measured solely on the basis of the strength of statistical voting correlations in either inter- or intra-election periods. The key works around which this debate is centered are the following. Henry Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967). Neal Blewett, The Peers, the Parties and the People (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972). James Cornford, "Aggregate Election Data and British Party Alignments, 1885-1910," Mass Politics, eds. Erik Allardt and Stein Rokkan (New York: Free Press, 1970). Kenneth Wald, "The Rise of Class-Based Voting in London," Comparative Politics vol. 9 (1976-1977), pp. 219-29. Idem, "Realignment Theory and British Party Development: A

feature of the later years was the extent to which Salisbury consciously reworked the themes so assiduously and successfully pursued in the 1880's.

Addressing the annual Grand Habitation in 1889, Salisbury noted the rise in public support for imperial issues over the last few years, paying homage to the League's contribution.

A great spirit of patriotism has been shown, and I cannot but think that if during the last seven or eight years the idea of empire has gathered strength and power, and that the feelings which are associated with it have become more weighty in the hearts of all classes of society, no small party of the praise goes to the efforts of the Primrose League. (Cheers.)⁷⁷

In celebrating the League's official count of a million members two years later, Salisbury cast its achievement in military terms, "such a gigantic army in so short a space of time." He looked back almost nostalgically to the gains achieved since 1886.

It is a circumstance full of encouragement when we remember with how gloomy a view a few years back men looked upon our political prospects. It shows that there is a power of resistance and stability in the institutions of this country.⁷⁸

Nevertheless, realizing that the political pendulum was likely to swing in favor of the Liberals in an upcoming General Election, he cautioned his troops against relenting in their efforts in the arduous battle before them. While the election might turn on a number of current issues, it must not be allowed to threaten larger, more vital

Critique," Political Studies vol. 30 (1982), pp. 207-20. Idem, Crosses on the Ballot.

⁷⁷ The Primrose League Gazette, 25 May 1889, p. 15.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 25 April 1891, p. 9.

concerns in which Ireland was prominently featured.

We must remember that our views look somewhat higher than the ordinary political conflict, that it is not the predominance of this or that set of men we have principally in view; . . . we have great principles to maintain.⁷⁹

Salisbury reiterated these concerns with still greater emphasis at an annual Grand Habitation meeting held in 1892 prior to the July election. On this occasion he raised the frightening spectre of a civil war, a divided Empire, and an enfeebled England.

Whether the Ulster men choose to put themselves against the rest of Ireland, whether, if they do so, they will succeed is a matter for their consideration. . . . Political prophecy is always uncertain; but I think I may venture to prophecy that any attempt on the part of any Government to perpetuate such an outrage as this would rend society in two. . . . What a terrible division of an Empire which hitherto presented a united front to the world. . . . A state of things which would destroy the credit and enfeeble the power of England in every quarter of the world.⁸⁰

One of Salisbury's greatest speeches was delivered to the Primrose League in 1894. The Liberals, defeated by the Lords regarding their proposed Home Rule legislation, had sought to limit the powers of the Upper Chamber. Salisbury correctly perceived that the electors would not support the measure, most particularly because of its bearing on the issue of Home Rule. Once again in Salisbury's hands the Lords become the representative, par excellence, of the people.

Now, what I want you to carry home is this conviction-- that the second Chamber in this country is not an instrument for pronouncing a permanent, definite, irrevocable decision; it is an instrument for reserving

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸⁰ *JJbid.*, 7 May 1892, p. 11.

on all great and vital questions a voice to the electors and the people of this country. (Cheers.) . . . Of course, if the House of Lords ever had in the course of its history permanently maintained any vital question against the declared will of the people of this country, there would be great ground—I freely admit it—for complaint, because, according to our principles in this century, it is the inhabitants of this country, and they only, who can decide in the last resort any political controversy that is raised; but if it is, as I maintain all history shows it to be, the function and the practice of the House of Lords to reserve these vital questions in respect to which it thinks that the House of Commons and the country are not really in accord, then you have no reason to complain of delay. Delay is the necessary consequence of such a machinery, delay is vital to the action of a second Chamber, without which few civilized nations have ventured to conduct representative institutions; and not only is there no reason to complain of delay, but there is no reason to complain of the general tendency of the votes of the House of Lords.⁸¹

With the Conservatives' return to power in 1895 and throughout the final years of Queen Victoria's reign, the Conservative party shifted its focus away from Ireland toward mounting international tensions. Nevertheless, the most striking feature of these years, at least in terms of Salisbury's and the League's portrayal of events, is the overwhelming preoccupation with issues central to the 1880's.

In addressing the annual Grand Habitation in 1898, Salisbury suggested that efforts to create a divided Britain and a ravaged empire had been thwarted.

The battle has been fought and won. The fatalistic doctrine that Radical proposals once made must eventually succeed has been contradicted by the test of a capital experience. We have tried issues with those who would break the Empire in pieces, and not only have

⁸¹ The Times, 20 April 1894, p. 11; The Primrose League Gazette, 1 May 1894, p. 7, also published the passage, although its punctuation and text differs slightly from The Times.

they failed in their result, but they have failed so completely that they have shattered the political party which in a moment allied themselves to them.⁸²

It was a triumphant speech, filled with trumpets and fanfare, praising the fifteen years of triumph accorded to the Conservative cause. Prominent in the recall was the memory of the British defeat suffered at the hands of the Mahdi's in Khartoum in 1885. Typical of Salisbury, even in the moment of overwhelming victory, he mixed exaltation with despair, warning of the prospect of "living and dying nations" and the need of the Primrose League to ward off prospects of decline.

While speaking to the Primrose League in 1900 during the midst of the Boer war, it was once again the events of the 1880's, the defeats suffered by the British at Majuba Hill and Khartoum, that sprang to Salisbury's mind.

The death of Gordon has already been avenged. (Cheers.) The savage empire which crushed the Egyptian Government of that time, and in contending with which he met his heroic death—that has been swept away utterly, so that no vestige of it remains (cheers): and all the wide territories which the Mahdi ruled with barbarous and atrocious cruelty have now been brought within the civilizing influence of the British Government in alliance with the government of Egypt. (Cheers.) That great blunder has at last been erased. There was another blunder, another humiliation, even greater than Khartoum—the humiliation which is connected with the name of Majuba. (Hear, hear.) Perhaps it is too soon to say that that great humiliation has been avenged, but we feel that we are on the road to accomplish that.⁸³

⁸² The Primrose League Gazette, 1 June 1898, p. 4. The Times also gave extensive coverage to Salisbury's speech. 5 May 1898, p. 7.

⁸³ The Times, 20 April 1900, p. 8. The Gazette also published the passage, although style and content varied slightly compared to The Times. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 June 1900, p. 12.

It seems significant that at the time of Boer war Salisbury's focus should continue to be based on events of almost twenty years earlier. However, these themes had served him admirably in what came to be the longest premiership of any modern day political figure.⁸⁴ While Chamberlain's tactics in waging the South African war might have been with the hopeful prospect of future political victories in mind, negotiating for an imperial union, tariff reform, the straddling of military might with measures of social reform,⁸⁵ Salisbury's vision lay in the past. Nevertheless, it is his perspective which proved most enduring.

The Primrose League, like its leader, harkened back to events of the eighties, rather than anticipating the issues which would confront Britain and the Conservative party in the twentieth century. Its central focus remained rooted in the memory of General Gordon's death in 1885 and the threat of a separate Ireland, events which were seen as undermining Britain's status as a world power. General Kitchener's decisive victory in the Sudan in 1898 and his triumphant march into Khartoum were generally celebrated as marking the

84 By the end of March of 1901, Salisbury had held the office of Prime Minister longer than any other political figure of the post-1832 Reform era. His record remains unchallenged to this day. The Times, 20 March 1901, p. 4.

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restoration of British supremacy and the avenge of Gordon's death.⁸⁶ The importance placed on these events was underscored by the League's sponsorship of lantern lectures on the subject over the next two to three years. The focus of the presentations was indicated by the Gazette's suggestion in 1900 that Habitations link the issues Egypt and Ireland to deliver popular lectures on "A Double Desertion—Gordon and Ulster."⁸⁷

Despite the constant effort to maintain levels of activity through the continuous espousal of Britain's threatened imperial interests, support for the Primrose League, like the Conservative party, began to flag by the 1890's. Ironically enough, the Boer war, in theory the sine qua non of League principles, marked its transition from the preeminent conservative association in Britain to a significant, if no longer key focus of political activity. The fortunes of the League declined significantly. In terms of the Knights' and Dames' Tributes received this was represented by the modest returns of £3,215 and £3,019, respectively, for the years 1900 and 1901 as compared with the £5,690 figure achieved in 1890. At the local level, flagging energies were indicated through the decreasing number of meetings held.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ The Morning Post support for a memorial to Gordon was perhaps typical of the strong nationalist fervor sparked by events in the Middle East. One of its captions read, "General Gordon's Memory. Lord Kitchener's Appeal for a statue at Khartoum." With added emphasis the article noted, "where presently an empty pedestal stands in the desert." The Morning Post, 3 May 1900, p. 7.

⁸⁷ Robb, The Primrose League, pp. 187-88.

⁸⁸ The Primrose League Gazette, 1 June 1900, p. 8; 1 June 1901. p. 5; 25 May 1890, p. 10; 1 November 1899, p. 6; 1 February, p. 5.

A new generation of imperial associations was on the rise, assuming a growing role in the propagation of leaflets, lectures, and war promotion efforts. The Imperial South African Association (1896), the British Empire League (1895), the Victoria League (1901), the League of the Empire (1901), and the Navy League (1894) featured prominently in these efforts.

In many instances the Imperial South African Association effectively assumed the function of a Primrose lecturing agent.⁸⁹ The Navy League's activities and even membership intersected with Habitation efforts. Both the Navy League and the League of the Empire spawned their own national commemoration in imitation of "Primrose day," respectively, "Trafalgar day" and "Empire day."⁹⁰

Like the annual Primrose day pilgrimages to Disraeli's statue in Parliament Square or his Hughenden estate, Trafalgar day gathering at Trafalgar Square sought to honor Lord Nelson and the triumph of Britain's imperial fleet. Empire Day, on the other hand, was a worldwide celebration of Britain's imperial holdings observed on the anniversary of Queen Victoria's death. While neither usurped the predominance of Primrose day, they nevertheless served as notice of a challenge from a new crop of political and national associations.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1 December 1899, p. 6; 1 January 1900, pp. 4-5. Scottish Branch Minute Book, Fifteenth Annual Report, 1901.

⁹⁰ Robb, pp. 205-07. The Scott Habitation No. 271 Minute Book, 1897-1909, 19 October 1898. Navy League Minute Book "B", 13 July 1896; 21 October 1896; the Navy League. The Federal Magazine New Series 34, no. 6 (1907), p. 75. A copy of which is kept at the offices of The League of the Empire, since renamed the League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers.

Certainly, the Primrose League participated in these ventures, distributing over 110,000 leaflets and pamphlets in November of 1899 alone. They focused particularly on the moral sanctity of the British cause.⁹¹ Special meetings were held, resolutions passed, and efforts made to carry out Salisbury's appeal for the establishment of local rifle clubs as a means of ensuring "Home Defense."⁹² A number of members volunteered their services "at the front" while others contributed time and resources toward the provision of goods for soldiers and their families.⁹³

However, these measures merely underscored the contributory, rather than the initiating role now performed by the League. Like its leader Salisbury, the chief distinguishing feature of League efforts in

⁹¹ The Primrose League Gazette, 1 December 1899, p. 8. Typical of these publications are two housed in the political pamphlets collection at the London School of Economics. "Why Are We At War With The Boers?," No. 221, and "Complaints of Transvaal Boers Outside Pretoria," No. 219; vol. 9, JF2(42C)/420-464.

⁹² The Primrose League Gazette, 1 November 1899, pp. 3, 6, 10; 1 January 1900, pp. 3-6, 9, 15; 1 May 1900, pp. 5-7; 1 June 1900, p. 12. The Whitehaven Habitation in Cumbria was particularly active in promoting meetings devoted to the war efforts. Primrose League Whitehaven Habitation 2055 Minute Book, 1888-1902, 1 November 1899; 3 March 1900; 20 April 1900; 2 January 1901; 12 April 1901; 13 November 1901. Cumbria County Council. Lowther Family Archive, DL0NS. More typical perhaps were the Huddersfield and Nailsworth and Hosley Habitations, the former recording its last official minutes in 1898 while the later discontinued records in 24 May 1900, after passing a resolution in support of the formation of rifle associations to promote Salisbury's program of Home Defense. The Huddersfield Habitation Minutes, 1886-1898; Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation, 1887-1899.

⁹³ Robb, The Primrose League, p. 213. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 January 1900, p. 18; 1 February 1900, p. 6; 1 March 1900, p. 9; 1 August 1900, p. 4; 1 August 1901, p. 11. The Scott Habitation, 14 February 1900. Garstang Minute Book, 1894-1911, 28 August 1901; Lancashire Record Office, DDFZ. The Preston Harold, 26 October 1899.

the war was the extent to which it harkened back to events of the 1880's, rather than in pursuing themes central to the opening years of the twentieth century. Repeatedly the themes of Home Rule and Gladstone's foreign policy failures of 1880-81 were stressed, at times to the detriment of more pressing issues.⁹⁴

Like many of the old issues which failed to stimulate renewed public enthusiasms by 1900, the executive leadership, at both the London headquarters and the local Habitations, was ageing, a phenomenon which tended to deter new initiatives. A prominent feature of the late 1890's was the obituary columns in the Gazette.⁹⁵ Between 1898 and 1899 alone, at least five principally sustaining members of the LGC executive died: Lady Glensk, Lady Lathom, the Duchess of Marlborough, and Lady Salisbury, and Lady Ridley.⁹⁶ Their deaths were reflective of a more general trend exhibited throughout the organization. Even the Queen and Lord Salisbury, who had inspired the League in its quest for greatness, were ultimately unsuccessful in their bid to survive the transition into the twentieth century.

⁹⁴ Hemel Hempstead Gazette and W. Hert. Advertiser, 16 December 1894, p. 5. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 January 1900, p. 6; 1 June 1901, pp. 7-8.

⁹⁵ The Primrose League Gazette, 1 April 1898, p. 1; 1 June 1898, p. 3; 1 August 1898, p. 1; 1 October 1898, p. 9; 1 November 1898, p. 1; 1 December 1898, pp. 5-8; 1 February 1899, p. 5; 1 May 1899, pp. 4, 7; 1 August 1899, p. 9; 1 December 1899, pp. 1, 3-4; 2 April 1900, p. 6; 1 December 1900, p. 3; 1 February 1901, pp. 3, 10. Deaths had become so commonplace by 1900 as to prompt a regular feature column in the paper entitled, "Memento of the Moment." Ibid., 1 March 1900, p. 6; 1 June 1900, p. 7; 2 July 1900, p. 10.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1 June 1898, p. 3; 1 May 1899, pp. 4, 7; 1 December 1899, pp. 3-4.

Certainly the League was capable of and indeed succeeded to some extent in rejuvenating its forces to pursue its interests in the coming years, particularly in the aftermath of the 1906 Conservative electoral defeat. However, its spiritual leadership and impetus remained focused, if not anchored to, its nineteenth century antecedents. It is to this period that one must look in examining its greatest achievements.

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85 Richard Jay, Robert Kubicek, A.N. Porter, and Richard Rempel provide a useful starting point for an analysis of Chamberlain's motives. Richard Jay, Joseph Chamberlain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981). Robert V. Kubicek, The Administration of Imperialism: Joseph Chamberlain at the Colonial Office (Durham: Duke University Press, 1969). A.N. Porter, The Origins of the South African War: Joseph Chamberlain and the Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1895-99 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980). Richard A. Rempel, Unionists Divided (Hamden: Archon Books, 1972).

restoration of British supremacy and the avenge of Gordon's death.⁸⁶ The importance placed on these events was underscored by the League's sponsorship of lantern lectures on the subject over the next two to three years. The focus of the presentations was indicated by the Gazette's suggestion in 1900 that Habitations link the issues Egypt and Ireland to deliver popular lectures on "A Double Desertion—Gordon and Ulster."⁸⁷

Despite the constant effort to maintain levels of activity through the continuous espousal of Britain's threatened imperial interests, support for the Primrose League, like the Conservative party, began to flag by the 1890's. Ironically enough, the Boer war, in theory the sine qua non of League principles, marked its transition from the preeminent conservative association in Britain to a significant, if no longer key focus of political activity. The fortunes of the League declined significantly. In terms of the Knights* and Dames' Tributes received this was represented by the modest returns of £3,215 and £3,019, respectively, for the years 1900 and 1901 as compared with the £5,690 figure achieved in 1890. At the local level, flagging energies were indicated through the decreasing number of meetings held.⁸⁸

86 The Morning Post support for a memorial to Gordon was perhaps typical of the strong nationalist fervor sparked by events in the Middle East. One of its captions read, "General Gordon's Memory. Lord Kitchener's Appeal for a statue at Khartoum." With added emphasis the article noted, "where presently an empty pedestal stands in the desert." The Morning Post, 3 May 1900, p. 7.

87 Robb, The Primrose League, pp. 187-88.

88 The Primrose League Gazette, 1 June 1900, p. 8; 1 June 1901, p. 5; 25 May 1890, p. 10; 1 November 1899, p. 6; 1 February, p. 5.

A new generation of imperial associations was on the rise, assuming a growing role in the propagation of leaflets, lectures, and war promotion efforts. The Imperial South African Association (1896), the British Empire League (1895), the Victoria League (1901), the League of the Empire (1901), and the Navy League (1894) featured prominently in these efforts.

In many instances the Imperial South African Association effectively assumed the function of a Primrose lecturing agent.⁸⁹ The Navy League's activities and even membership intersected with Habitation efforts. Both the Navy League and the League of the Empire spawned their own national commemoration in imitation of "Primrose day," respectively, "Trafalgar day" and "Empire day."⁹⁰

Like the annual Primrose day pilgrimages to Disraeli's statue in Parliament Square or his Hughenden estate, Trafalgar day gathering at Trafalgar Square sought to honor Lord Nelson and the triumph of Britain's imperial fleet. Empire Day, on the other hand, was a world-wide celebration of Britain's imperial holdings observed on the anniversary of Queen Victoria's death. While neither usurped the predominance of Primrose day, they nevertheless served as notice of a challenge from a new crop of political and national associations.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1 December 1899, p. 6; 1 January 1900, pp. 4-5. Scottish Branch Minute Book, Fifteenth Annual Report, 1901.

⁹⁰ Robb, pp. 205-07. The Scott Habitation No. 271 Minute Book, 1897-1909, 19 October 1898. Navy League Minute Book "B", 13 July 1896; 21 October 1896; the Navy League. The Federal Magazine New Series 34, no. 6 (1907), p. 75. A copy of which is kept at the offices of The League of the Empire, since renamed the League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers.

Certainly, the Primrose League participated in these ventures, distributing over 110,000 leaflets and pamphlets in November of 1899 alone. They focused particularly on the moral sanctity of the British cause.⁵¹ Special meetings were held, resolutions passed, and efforts made to carry out Salisbury's appeal for the establishment of local rifle clubs as a means of ensuring "Home Defense."⁹² A number of members volunteered their services "at the front" while others contributed time and resources toward the provision of goods for soldiers and their families.⁹³

However, these measures merely underscored the contributory, rather than the initiating role now performed by the League. Like its leader Salisbury, the chief distinguishing feature of League efforts in

91 The Primrose League Gazette, 1 December 1899, p. 8. Typical of these publications are two housed in the political pamphlets collection at the London School of Economics. "Why Are We At War With The Boers?," No. 221, and "Complaints of Transvaal Boers Outside Pretoria," No. 219; vol. 9, JF2(42C)/420-464.

92 The Primrose League Gazette, 1 November 1899, pp. 3, 6, 10; 1 January 1900, pp. 3-6, 9, 15; 1 May 1900, pp. 5-7; 1 June 1900, p. 12. The Whitehaven Habitation in Cumbria was particularly active in promoting meetings devoted to the war efforts. Primrose League Whitehaven Habitation 2055 Minute Book, 1888-1902, 1 November 1899; 3 March 1900; 20 April 1900; 2 January 1901; 12 April 1901; 13 November 1901. Cumbria County Council. Lowther Family Archive, DLONS. More typical perhaps were the Huddersfield and Nailsworth and Hosley Habitations, the former recording its last official minutes in 1898 while the later discontinued records in 24 May 1900, after passing a resolution in support of the formation of rifle associations to promote Salisbury's program of Home Defense. The Huddersfield Habitation Minutes, 1886-1898; Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation, 1887-1899.

93 Robb, The Primrose League, p. 213. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 January 1900, p. 18; 1 February 1900, p. 6; 1 March 1900, p. 9; 1 August 1900, p. 4; 1 August 1901, p. 11. The Scott Habitation, 14 February 1900. Garstang Minute Book, 1894-1911, 28 August 1901; Lancashire Record Office, DDFZ. The Preston Harold, 26 October 1899.

the war was the extent to which it harkened back to events of the 1880's, rather than in pursuing themes central to the opening years of the twentieth century. Repeatedly the themes of Home Rule and Gladstone's foreign policy failures of 1880-81 were stressed, at times to the detriment of more pressing issues.⁹⁴

Like many of the old issues which failed to stimulate renewed public enthusiasms by 1900, the executive leadership, at both the London headquarters and the local Habitations, was ageing, a phenomenon which tended to deter new initiatives. A prominent feature of the late 1890's was the obituary columns in the Gazette.⁹⁵ Between 1898 and 1899 alone, at least five principally sustaining members of the LGC executive died: Lady Glensk, Lady Lathom, the Duchess of Marlborough, and Lady Salisbury, and Lady Ridley.⁹⁶ Their deaths were reflective of a more general trend exhibited throughout the organization. Even the Queen and Lord Salisbury, who had inspired the League in its quest for greatness, were ultimately unsuccessful in their bid to survive the transition into the twentieth century.

⁹⁴ Heme! Hempstead Gazette and W. Hert. Advertiser, 16 December 1894, p. 5. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 January 1900, p. 6; 1 June 1901, pp. 7-8.

⁹⁵ The Primrose League Gazette, 1 April 1898, p. 1; 1 June 1898, p. 3; 1 August 1898, p. 1; 1 October 1898, p. 9; 1 November 1898, p. 1; 1 December 1898, pp. 5-8; 1 February 1899, p. 5; 1 May 1899, pp. 4, 7; 1 August 1899, p. 9; 1 December 1899, pp. 1, 3-4; 2 April 1900, p. 6; 1 December 1900, p. 3; 1 February 1901, pp. 3, 10. Deaths had become so commonplace by 1900 as to prompt a regular feature column in the paper entitled, "Memoir of the Moment." Ibid., 1 March 1900, p. 6; 1 June 1900, p. 7; 2 July 1900, p. 10.

⁹⁶ ibid., 1 June 1898, p. 3; 1 May 1899, pp. 4, 7; 1 December 1899, pp. 3-4.

Certainly the League was capable of and indeed succeeded to some extent in rejuvenating its forces to pursue its interests in the coming years, particularly in the aftermath of the 1906 Conservative electoral defeat. However, its spiritual leadership and impetus remained focused, if not anchored to, its nineteenth century antecedents. It is to this period that one must look in examining its greatest achievements.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Structure of the League

I feel sure the madness of the people will soon subside—but I do not think our side has talked enough and by all accounts the organization has been deplorable. We must have "Caucuses."

Lady Salisbury to Lord Beaconsfield, 17
April 1880

I

The Birmingham "caucus" was born in the aftermath of the 1867 Reform Act. A special provision of the legislation permitted four large towns, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds, to return a total of three members to parliament while limiting the voters' selection to only two of the candidates. The measure was designed to increase the number of representatives allocated for these communities while protecting "minority" (i.e. Conservative) interests that might otherwise be threatened by the enfranchisement of male working class voters.

Despite these intentions, Radicals in Birmingham were able to take advantage of the restrictions placed on plural voting. In 1868 Joseph Chamberlain, Francis Schnadhorst, and their colleagues set about to canvass the town in order to assess the political outlook of the electors and to instruct Liberals on how to vote in the General Election of 1868 so as to ensure the safe return of all three Liberal candidates.

Their victory in 1868 brought greater organizational initiatives. Ward Committees were set up by the Radicals throughout Birmingham. Each was entitled to elect members to the Central Representative Committee. The number of individuals associated with this body rose from four hundred to two thousand between 1868 and 1886, an increase roughly equivalent to the growth achieved by the town's population. Policy was determined by a General Committee composed of only one hundred men, who, in effect, dictated programs and candidates to be chosen by the rank and file supporters.

The methods employed by Birmingham Radicals were seen by Conservative critics as dictatorial and indicative of the corrupt practices utilized in a mass democracy and demonstrated most graphically by the Tammany General Committee in New York. They therefore evoked the American term, "the caucus," a derogatory inference, to describe Chamberlain's organization. Despite the accusations, Birmingham practices were conceived and remained distinctly British in character.¹

¹ The literature on the Liberal caucus is fairly extensive, although no modern comprehensive study has been undertaken on the subject. With the establishment of the NLF in 1877, Chamberlain sought to publicize its democratic, reformist goals in the Fortnightly Review. "A New Political Organization," Fortnightly Review vol. 22 (July-December, 1877), pp. 126-34; "The Caucus," Fortnightly Review, vol. 24 (July-December, 1878), pp. 721-41. Francis H. Herrick, "The Origins of the National Liberal Federation," Journal of Modern History, vol. 27, no. 2 (July, 1945), makes a spirited defense of the NLF, strongly sympathetic to Chamberlain's point of view and in noted opposition to Ostrogorski's portrayal of the Birmingham methods of organization as the embodiment of oligarchical democracy. "The Introduction of the Caucus into England," Political Science Quarterly, vol. 8 (1893), pp. 287-316 and Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, vol. 1, pp. 161-78.

One of the relatively recent articles, P.C. Griffiths', "The Caucus and the Liberal Party in 1886," History vol. 61, no. 202 (June, 1976), pp. 183-97 provides an overview of the past literature on the

The Radical management of the Liberal machine in Birmingham proved extremely effective between 1868 and 1885 dominating, not only the choice of parliamentary candidates, but also the election of representatives to the Town Council and the local School Boards. The methods introduced by Chamberlain and Schnadhorst were also applied to two other organizations which sought to extend these practices throughout the country: the National Education League, begun in 1869, and the National Liberal Federation (NLF), established in 1877.

The NLF was attributed by many with having been a significant factor in bringing the Liberals to victory in 1880. Over the next five years, the organization took hold in the local constituencies. The Conservative response to the tactics of the NLF and its parent party was the Primrose League, which served as an auxiliary army of rank and file supporters of the Conservative party and engaged in promoting its principles.

subject, demonstrating the continuous links between the pyramidal structure of power of the Liberal party and the similarly constructed NLF. Despite the apparent integration of the NLF into official Liberal circles after Chamberlain's departure in 1886, Griffiths stresses the influence of the organization within the party, in noted contrast to the more minimalist position generally taken by scholars and demonstrated in A.B. Cook's and John Vincent's The Governing Passion: Cabinet Government and Party Politics in Britain 1885-1886 (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1974), pp. 20-22.

Other works on the subject include, R. Spence Watson, The National Liberal Federation 1877-1906 (London: T.F. Unwin, 1907); Barry McGill, "Francis Schnadhorst and Liberal Party Organization," Journal of Modern History vol.34 (March-December, 1962), pp. 19-39; and Asa Briggs, The History of Birmingham, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 164-99. It should be noted that even during the height of NLF activity between 1884 and 1885, receipts accounted for only a relatively modest £5,173 compared with the Primrose figure of £10,133 two years later. "Statement of Receipts and Expenditure," National Liberal Federation, Eighth Annual Report, 1 October 1885, B.L. P.P.3558.inb., p. 28. The Primrose League Gazette, 21 April 1888, p.4.

II

The best means available for evaluating the ability of the Primrose League to meet the challenge of the Liberal caucus is by examining by means of a computer the strength of the League's membership as manifest in the 1888 and 1899 Rolls of Habitations and three local cases studies of membership rosters. The figures provided cannot serve as an exact measurement or determination of the League's effectiveness since membership need not be equated with political participation or influence. Nevertheless, the numbers do indicate the breadth and scale of the organization which provided the basis for an auxiliary army dedicated to the advancement of the Conservative cause.

The statistics presented in this chapter derive from the Rolls of Habitations and local registers and, unfortunately, have been based largely on incomplete sources. In the case of the most comprehensive source available, the 1888 Roll of Habitations, for example, there is no information regarding the membership of 29 percent of the Habitations listed. Some omissions or errors may also have occurred in the process of entering the 1888 and 1899 Rolls onto a computer system. The task was long and tedious, requiring many hours of compilation. Wherever possible these deficiencies have been detected and corrected by checking for consistency with the Rolls. Even so the figures cited in this chapter should be relied on more as indicators of general trends rather than exact measurements of precise events. Despite these obvious limitations, it is hoped that by examining the imperfect data

at hand, a deeper understanding of the character and influence of League activities can be obtained.

Relatively few sources are available for ascertaining the socioeconomic character of the membership. The three associations examined in detail include the Brent Primrose League Club, located in Hanwell, an outlying suburb of London, and two rural Habitations, Melbury and Garstang, situated, respectively, in Dorset and Lancashire.²

They have been selected because of the general strength of the Conservative party in these counties during the years under study, the geographical diversity of the areas in which the associations were situated, and the large number of members affiliated with the Habitations represented in the three regions.

No other demographic and political-geographical study exists regarding either the popular membership of the Primrose League or the Conservative party as a whole during this period. The most relevant source available is Henry Pelling's Social Geography of British

² "The Brent Primrose League Club," PRO BT31 3540/21610. Melbury Habitation Register, 1886-1893, Dorset County Record Office, D124/Box 343. Garstang Habitation Registrar, 1897-1909, Lancashire County Record Office, DDF2. Other registers include those for Hardwicke and Coin Valley Habitations in Gloucestershire, three for Whitehaven Habitation located in Cumberland, and the Knights' and Dames' Register for Huddersfield Habitation in West Riding, Yorkshire. Hardwicke Habitation Register, Gloucester Public Library, JF11.47. No date is provided, although the Habitation continued to be listed on the national Rolls as late as the 1904. The 1904 Roll of Habitations, p. 64. Coin Valley Habitation Register, 1885-88 Gloucester Record Office, D1070/viii,6. Whitehaven Habitation Registers, 1893-97; 1898-1901; 1902; Cumbria Record Office, DL0NS. Huddersfield Habitation Knights' and Dames' Register, 1896-1900, Kirklees District Archives, DD/RE/165.

Elections³ which provides a detailed examination of the strengths and weakness of the political parties in Britain between 1885 and 1910 based on their electoral performance achieved in the local constituencies measured as a function of their geo-political region. Social Geography of British Elections has been utilized in this chapter as a principal reference, providing a means by which to identify political behavior of constituencies in which local Habitations were situated.

The overall membership figures provided by the 1888 Roll of Habitations suggest that, even allowing for varying regional, political, and social influences, the League managed to obtain a fairly significant foothold in most English counties. The organization gained the greatest strength in traditionally Conservative areas, particularly where local party officials were prepared to utilize its influence. At a time when the Conservative party was in the process of transforming itself from a minority representation to the preeminent political party of Britain, it seems significant that the League was seeking to establish itself in regions which were traditionally viewed as citadels of Liberalism. Thus inroads were made in Wales, Scotland, Yorkshire, and the North of England. These efforts had a limited impact, confined in many instances to local pockets of Conservative strength. Nevertheless, they served as a declaration of the intent of the League to recruit, and even convert, regions deemed centers of Gladstonianism. In this sense the Primrose League, like its Grand Master, Salisbury,

³ Henry Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967).

showed initiative and tenacity, leaving no stone unturned in its quest to assist the rise of the Conservative party to political dominance.

While the League exercised influence throughout the county, its greatest role appeared to be in rural communities where agricultural and small business interests predominated. Primrose officers were overwhelmingly drawn from the noble, professional, and commercial ranks of the community. The general membership, however, was more diverse, encompassing, not only individuals from the aristocracy, military, religious, and professional sectors of society, but also industrial, agricultural, and domestic workers.

III

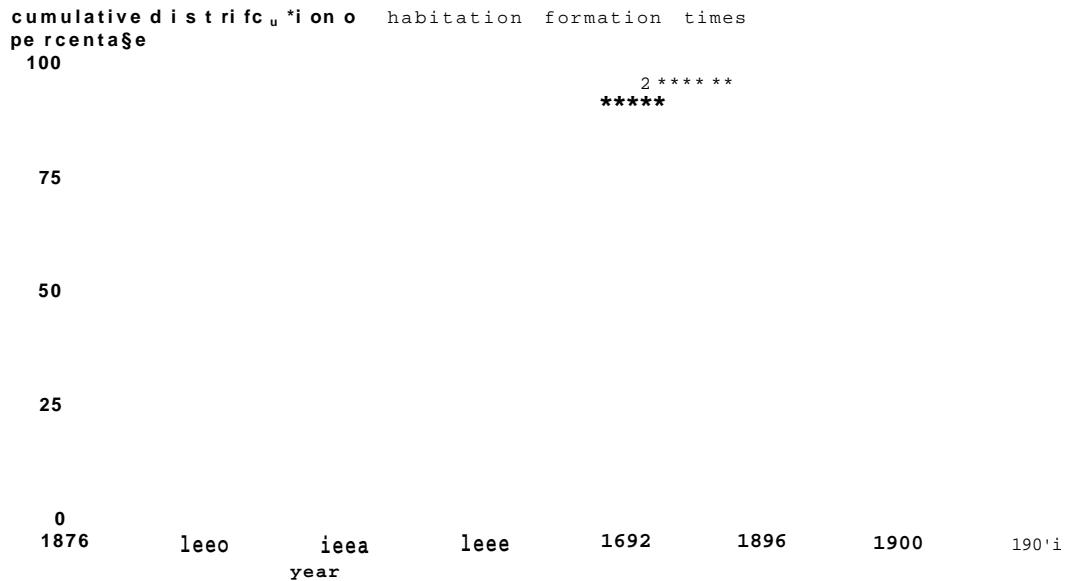
The most striking feature exhibited by the records of Habitation formation during the years under study is the almost exponential increase in membership occurring between 1885 and 1886. While some ninety-three associations were formed in 1884, approximately five percent of the total, the next two years saw a dramatic rise, accounting for fully sixty-five percent of the total membership as measured by the 1899 list of associations.⁴ The subsequent nine years were a time of moderate, but continuous expansion which was virtually complete by 1895. Despite the heightened international tensions of the late 1890's and the dramatic events surrounding the Boer war, the last

⁴ The statistics obtained from the 1888 Roll suggest the Habitations formed in 1884 constituted 5.3 percent of the total. The 1899 listing which does not include the associations which disappeared between 1888 and 1899, gives a slightly higher figure of 6.1 percent.

stage of Habitation growth on a national basis occurred during the events surrounding the 1892 and 1895 elections.

The graph provided below plots the Cumulative Distribution of Habitation Formation Times for the 1899 Roll revealing this trend. The rapid early growth is indicated by the steep slope of the curve in the first few years, whereas the slower growth of the later years is demonstrated by the more gradually sloped portion of the curve.

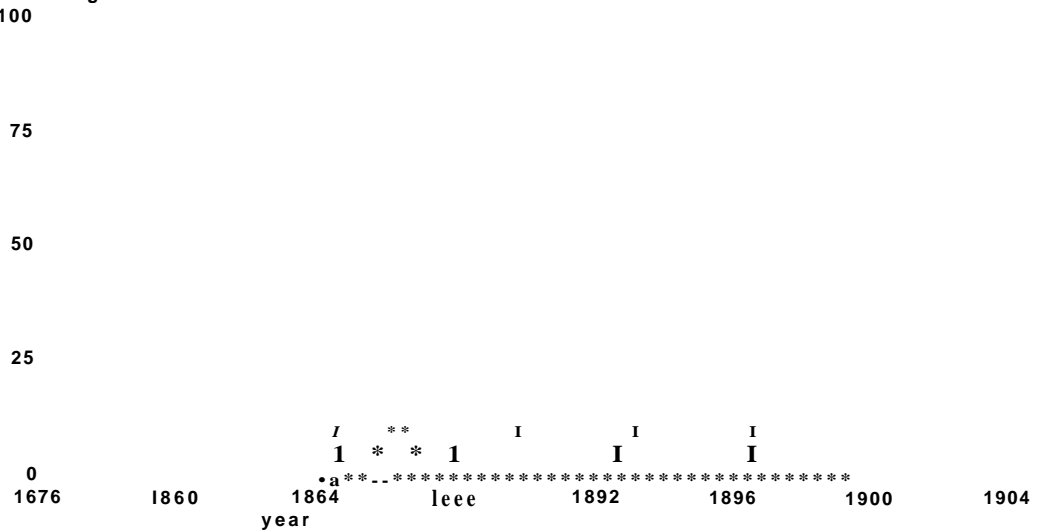
1899 ROLL



More striking, however, is the plot of the Distribution of Habitation Formation Times for this same period. What the cluster of data points reveals is a surge of growth around 1885-86, demonstrating very vividly the importance of this period.

1899 ROLL

distribution of habitation formation times
percentage



Appendices A, B, C, D, and E provide analogous, but somewhat contrasting views of regional performances for London; Lancashire; Dorset; the North and East Ridings, Yorkshire; and West Riding, Yorkshire, respectively.⁵

Since the 1885-86 expansion was so extensive in scale, affecting virtually the entire country, it obscures the distinctive early patterns of formation. Nor does the picture differ significantly upon analyzing the 1888 Roll. An examination of the regional and social influences governing the first year of Habitation formation, however, does reveal a great deal about the geographic and social class appeal of the League during its initial phase of operation.

IV

Grand Council minutes provide the identification numbers of thirty-six associations which sent representatives to the first annual Grand Habitation held in July, 1884.⁶ Of these, only thirty appear on my computerized listing of the 1888 Rolls.? They covered eight

⁵ Graphs for Scotland and Wales have not been included in the appendices because of their general similarity to the national trend, the key difference being the somewhat delayed introduction of Habitations in these regions.

⁶ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 12 July 1884.

⁷ The parliamentary Divisions represented by these thirty Habitations included the following. The London metropolitan administrative county contained eight associations located in the district of Westminster, Chelsea, St. George's, Hanover Square, the Strand, South Kensington (2), and Fulham. The next largest concentration of Habitations was in Surrey. Primrose members were

administrative counties including London. Their geographic locations reveal their largely metropolitan character. Fully eleven Habitations came from the Greater London Region, another six were situated in counties immediately adjacent to the city. An additional six associations were located in areas only moderately removed from London,⁸ leaving only six situated in areas remote from the pervasive influence of the metropolis. These distant Habitations were located in Staffordshire (2), Gloucestershire, Pembrokeshire, Warwickshire, and Lancashire counties.

More noteworthy, perhaps, is the character of the constituencies represented. Using Pelling's Social Geography of British Elections as a means of identifying prominent class and voting features of electoral districts, provides some interesting, if not altogether surprising results. Of the regions in London in which the

located in the Guildford, Epsom, Norwood, Croydon, and Dulwich parliamentary districts of the county. The latter three Divisions fell within the Greater Metropolitan area of London as defined by a twelve mile radius emanated from Charing Cross. Staffordshire and Middlesex each had two Habitations, respectively, occupying the parliamentary Divisions of Wednesday borough and Brentford.

The remaining associations were distributed individually among several counties. These included Buckinghamshire, South Division; Berkshire, North Abingdon; Hertfordshire, Eastern Division; Sussex, Brighton Borough; Essex, Epping Division; Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough; Cambridgeshire, Cambridge Borough; Oxfordshire, Mid or Woodstock Division; Huntingdonshire, North or Ramsey Division; Warwickshire, Birmingham Borough; Pembrokeshire county, represented by the town of Tenby; Lancashire, Bootle Division; Hampshire, Portsmouth Borough.

8 Those counties with Habitations in the immediate vicinity of London included Middlesex, Surrey, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, and Essex. Located at a somewhat greater distance from the metropolis were Sussex, Hampshire, Bedfordshire, Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, and Huntingdonshire.

League made early inroads, almost all were cited in Pelling's "Category A," composed of predominately middle class, Conservative voting districts. Only Fulham was listed in "Category B," which comprised constituencies of a mixed middle and working class affiliation. That town appeared to contain a fairly stable population of artisans which might have been attracted to League functions. During this early phase of growth and development, no Habitations were represented in Pelling's third and final category, "C," which included only working class constituencies.⁹

As for the Habitations located outside London, most, if not all, were to be found in areas of primarily middle class, Conservative disposition.¹⁰ In the case of Tenby Habitation in Pembrokeshire, Wales, for instance, it was situated in a region noted as English speaking and distinguished for its Conservative voting record. Similarly, the only Habitation formed in Lancashire was in the Bootle Division, a solidly Conservative district. Brentford, Middlesex contained two associations. It was one of the few areas exhibiting a more mixed social class representation, although its voting record was solidly Conservative for the period under study.¹¹

The West Midland Habitations were located in the Wednesbury Borough of Staffordshire (2) and Birmingham (1), areas subsequently

⁹ Henry Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, pp. 22-23, 30, 37, 40-41.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 30, 64-65, 69-70, 74, 77, 97, 113, 117-18, 228-29, 253.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 367-68, 250-51, 62, 67, 84.

noted for their Liberal Unionist complexion and which were, already in 1885, in a state of transition from Liberalism to a more Conservative disposition. Of all the Habitations represented at the 1884 Grand Habitation, only Saint Alphege of Portsmouth Borough in Hampshire appears to have been in a parliamentary district which marginally favored the Liberals between 1885 and 1900. However, its anomalous voting pattern was linked to special interests associated with Naval Shipping concerns prominent in the area.¹²

By the end of 1884, the Primrose League had begun to achieve a truly national dimension, paving the way for the dynamic growth of the next two years. Nevertheless, during this early phase of activity, Habitation strength continued to reside largely within the confines of the South-East. A total of thirty-three counties including the administrative district of London were represented by League associations.¹³ London and Surrey obtained the largest base of support, with fourteen and ten Habitations, respectively.

Other counties with a moderately high proportion of associations included Hampshire (6), Sussex (5), Middlesex (5), Essex (4), Kent (4), and Gloucestershire (4). Of these, only Hampshire and Gloucestershire do not lie close to the metropolis. Both were subject to somewhat greater Liberal and Nonconformist influences than the South-East region, but remained primarily Conservative in their political preferences during the 1885-1900 period.¹⁴

¹² 2bjd., pp. 180-82, 184-86, 128-29.

¹³ The figures are based on my computerized listing of 1884 Habitations as contained in the 1888 Roll.

¹⁴ Henry Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, pp.

If we examine other regions of low Primrose activity during 1884, political patterns begin to emerge. Using Fawcett's Provinces of England as elaborated by Pelling to serve as a guide for the political geography of Britain, we observe some interesting facts. On the basis of their dissident or Nonconformist politics, it is not surprising that the areas in which the League organizations were least developed were Ireland (0), Scotland (0), and Wales (4). No effort was made to form Habitations in Ireland and Scotland until 1885. That same year Wales had ten counties with no Primrose representation.

In fact, most regions in England with low Habitation activity exhibited markedly Liberal or Nonconformist beliefs. Thus the North province, renowned for its dissenting tradition, was retarded in League development and indeed never obtained a sizeable representation. Its counties, Cumberland, Northumberland, Durham, and part of Westmorland, contained, respectively, only 0, 2, 1, and 1 associations. The East Midlands area, second only to the North in its Liberal, Nonconformist voting record between 1885 and 1900,⁵ was similarly underdeveloped. The area encompassing Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, and a section of Nottinghamshire, contained, respectively, 1, 0, 1, 0, 1 associations.

Other areas noted for their low level of participation included Norfolk (1) and Suffolk (0) in East Anglia and counties Shropshire (0) and Herefordshire (0) in the agricultural regions of the West Midlands.

127-31, 133-34, 138, 154-55, 157.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 227.

While Norfolk was prominently Liberal in its voting preference, Suffolk tended to favor the Conservatives. After 1885 Shropshire and Herefordshire proved strong centers for Liberal Unionism.¹⁶

Counties which were strikingly under represented in 1884, relative to their later Habitation strengths, included Lancashire (3) Cheshire (0), and Yorkshire (1). These figures contrast greatly with the numbers recorded for 1888, respectively, 113, 53, and 105. While the politically Nonconformist Liberal tendencies of Yorkshire perhaps make its 1884 showing more plausible, Lancashire and Cheshire were areas exhibiting a strong base of Conservative party support during the 1885-1900 period.¹⁷ For this reason their 1884 levels of development require a different explanation. Their physical distance from London combined with their highly industrial character were, no doubt, factors discouraging membership in 1884, a year in which Knights and Dames were familiar to, if not synonymous with, the social circles of London.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 95, 175, 198-201.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 314, 284-85.

V

Four years later, the situation had been altered dramatically. The computerized summary of the 1888 Roll lists 1,730 Habitations, distributed amongst Britain's Colonies (11),¹⁸ Ireland (22), Wales and Monmouthshire (124), and England (1,573). While Scotland was not included on the Roll, The Primrose League Gazette reports 147 Scottish Habitations in May of 1889.¹⁹ Of the 565,084 individuals recorded in the 1888 Roll, 527,179 resided in England, 30,839 in Wales, 6,687 in Ireland, and 379 in the Colonies. The Gazette lists 44,520 members in Scotland during roughly the same period. However, the official figures provided by the newspaper overstate active participation relative to the 1888 Roll of Habitations and therefore are to be regarded with some qualification.²⁰

Wherever possible Divisional Councils were established to correspond by name and area to Parliamentary county and borough boundaries. By 1888 the League had established 327 Divisions for England, 21 for Wales, and 18 for Ireland representing, respectively, 75, 63.6, and 18 percent of the parliamentary constituencies in those regions. The extensive distribution of Divisions and Habitations

¹⁸ They include India, Malta, Cyprus, Mauritius, British Honduras, and Australia.

¹⁹ The Primrose League Gazette, 25 May 1889, p.9.

²⁰ For restrictions regarding the calculation of membership figures, see Chapter Four, footnote fifteen. The Primrose League Gazette, 25 May 1889, p.9.

throughout the country tends to support what the League, Salisbury, and Ostrogorski all contend: namely, that the organization, which served in the capacity of auxiliary troops for the Conservative party, was prepared to battle on its behalf in local constituencies.²¹

[^] Military metaphors are prominently featured throughout the Primrose literature. Lady Jersey's references to the importance of "arming their combatants for the fray," and of clearing "the decks for action," were themes which were emphasized on a number of occasions. The Ladies Executive Committee Minutes, 25 May 1887, citing The Morning Post article of 25 May 1887; The Primrose League Gazette, 24 May 1890, p. 2; see Chapter Four, p. 149. By way of illustration, the Duke of Abercorn as Chancellor in 1894 compared the role of Wardens and Subwardens in Habitations as bearing "an exact parallel to non-commissioned officers, sergeants, and corporals in a regiment." The Primrose League Gazette, 1 May 1894, p. 3.

Salisbury emphasized the auxiliary role of the League in serving the interests of the Conservative party. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 19 May 1886, citing The Morning Post article of 20 May 1886, see Chapter Three, pp. 95-96. Nevertheless, he was not averse to applying military terms to underscore the importance of Primrose operations. In addressing the annual gathering of members in 1891, he praised their official tally of one million members noting, "such a gigantic army in so short a space of time." The rank and file were cautioned not to relent in their efforts since the advances made in recent years were "no cause that we should lay aside our armour as though the battle were at an end." The Primrose League Gazette, 25 April 1891, p. 9.

The necessity of maintaining an ever vigilant force was stressed once again in 1896. While praising the great efforts of the Primrose League over the years in assisting the Conservatives to victory, Salisbury stressed the continual struggle at hand.

You must never expect a period of peace. The warfare for the defense of our society and our institutions, will always continue, and of course its vicissitudes will depend upon the energy and the courage which is maintained by those to whom the guardianship of these institutions is entrusted. The matter lies with you.

The Primrose League Gazette, 1 June 1896, p.8. The following year at Grand Habitation, Salisbury entered Royal Albert Hall to the strains of "See the Conquering Hero Comes." The Primrose League Gazette, 1 June 1897, p. 8.

Ostrogorski was even more graphic in his application of military imagery. During the initial phase of League development under the tutelage of the Fourth party, he characterized the organization as "an engine of war of Tory Democracy." Within a short time it assumed the ranks of the "irregular troops" of party organization, "formed into

The representation of the Primrose League in parliamentary boroughs was significantly less, thus emphasising its strength in the rural districts. Only 51 boroughs appear in the 1888 Roll under borough or city classifications, distinct from county groupings. Breaking that figure down by region, we find Primrose designated boroughs representing just under 24 percent of all English parliamentary boroughs. The corresponding figures are only 9 and 3 percent, respectively, for Wales and Scotland.

While useful in demonstrating the sheer size and scope of Primrose activities, the national figures tell us little about the regional variations. For a detailed county by county listing, it is necessary to consult Appendices F, G, and H. They provide a breakdown, respectively, of League membership up to 1888 (F); a comparison of these figures to census returns for 1891 (G); and groupings of counties, ranked by order of their Habitation representation for 1888, along with comparable 1899 figures (H).

What general conclusions can be drawn from this material? In counties where members exceeded 20,000 (Appendix F), the Primrose League achieved its greatest representation. These included in descending order of importance, Lancashire, Yorkshire, London, Lincolnshire, Hampshire, Kent, and Cheshire. Other; strong contenders

regiments and disciplined, but intervening only as auxiliaries." Foremost of all political interest groups existing in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, was the Primrose League, comprised of "battalions of Amazons . . . [with] a field of political activity which they do not possess elsewhere and a sphere of influence which they have hitherto never enjoyed in the English state nor in any other country." Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, vol. 1, pp. 440, 530, 534-35, 547-48.

are those counties with figures in excess of 15,000. They included Devonshire, Derbyshire, Somerset, Sussex, and Norfolk. Based on similar assessments, counties with notably poor representation include Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire, Herefordshire, and Westmorland in England as well as virtually the entire region of Wales (excluding Denbighshire and Glamorganshire) and county Monmouthshire.

However when League membership is measured relative to population as given in the 1891 census returns (Appendix G), a different picture emerges. The densely inhabited counties of Lancashire, Yorkshire, and London do not appear nearly so active, accounting for, respectively, only 1.4, 1, and .6 percent of their populations. Conversely, a number of counties previously cited for their low membership managed to reverse their relative standing. For example Herefordshire and Westmorland obtained a strong 4 and 4.8 percent following, respectively, of their population.

The census figures, however, must be applied with some degree of caution, particularly in counties where both population figures and overall League representation were low. This applies especially to regions like Wales where efforts to make inroads into Liberal strongholds might easily be exaggerated because of the small numbers involved. In the case of the Welsh counties, a strong "national" identity combined with a tradition of favoring dissenting religious beliefs and a decided preference for the Liberal party were factors which tended to minimize the significance of Primrose League representation in the region.

The use of the census as a measure of League development is most appropriate in counties where membership figures exceed at least 5,000 but preferably 10,000. Looking at these categories, we find that the League figured most prominently in the rural constituencies of England. This coincides with the general Primrose League emphasis in recruiting agricultural communities as the principal, though by no means the exclusive, base of support.

Looking at those counties exceeding 5,000 Primrose members and representing 3 percent or more of the population, we find the League grew in areas not ordinarily associated with the Conservative party. This was particularly the case in the East Midlands and East Anglia regions where Liberalism and Nonconformity dominated. Most striking is the development of Lincolnshire county with over 26,000 members representing a generous 5.5 percent of its population. Similarly, Derbyshire with 17,223 members or 3.2 percent of the county census and Leicestershire whose 12,040 members made up 3.2 percent of the population, were also active constituencies. In East Anglia, Norfolk and Suffolk counties were well supported, the former with 15,104 members constituting 3.3 percent of its census, the latter, respectively, 11,375 and 3 percent.

The League also prospered in the Central region, achieving 5 percent representation in Buckinghamshire, a somewhat more modest 2.9 percent in Berkshire and 3.4 percent in Oxfordshire. All of the aforementioned counties had a Primrose membership of between five and ten thousand. In the Bristol region, the League flourished in Somerset, registering 3.5 percent of the population with 17,333

Primrose members. While the Central region tended to give precedence to the Liberal party between 1885 and 1900, the Bristol area conformed to the more Conservative national voting trend exhibited in those years.

The Wessex region of England was one marked both by exceedingly strong Primrose representation and significant support for the Conservative party. In Hampshire the League had a very impressive 24,501 members, 3.5 percent of its census. With 12,709 members and 6.5 percent of its census, Dorset was the strongest county represented in my study. Only Rutland showed a higher relative standing (8.2 percent), but must be discounted because of the small number of Habitations (3), low membership (1,699), and sparse county population (20,659), factors which tend to exaggerate its strength. Wiltshire, which Pelling has straddling the Central and Bristol regions,²² also grew to 11,888 members corresponding to 4.4 percent of its census.

The agricultural regions of the West Midlands, specifically Shropshire and Herefordshire counties, also proved centers for Primrose and Unionist party activity. With 10,778 League members and 4.5 percent of its census, Shropshire was well represented. On the basis of size, Herefordshire's membership (4,659) was insufficient to justify its inclusion in this category. However its regional affinity with Shropshire, similar electoral preference, and high census representation (4 percent) make it worthy of consideration.

Cheshire county, located in Fawcett's Lancastria region, also qualifies to be placed amongst the rural, well represented Primrose counties. However, like Lancashire, it was far more urban and industrialized than many of the other rapidly developing centers of League activity. Nevertheless, with 22,589 members and 3 percent of its census, it made a strong showing.

Areas of notably low Primrose activity in England include the "Liberal" regions of the North, the West Midlands, and Yorkshire. In the North, Cumberland, Durham, and Northumberland counties had relatively modest Primrose memberships of 6,218, 5,023, and 7,534, respectively. In terms of their populations, this corresponds to only .6, .4, and 1.4 percent, respectively. In the West Midlands, most particularly Warwickshire, Worcestershire, and Staffordshire counties, fairly large membership figures are obtained, respectively, 12,707, 6,946, and 13,648. Nevertheless these numbers translate to only 1.5, 1.6, and 1.2 percent of their counties' populations.

Because of Yorkshire's large size and dense population, its Primrose Habitations and membership appeared strong when measured against other counties. However when evaluated in terms of its own census, its standing drops to 1, 1.9, and .7 percent, respectively, for the entire county, the North and East Ridings, and the West Riding regions.

Care should be taken not to dismiss too readily the counties with a strong Conservative base of support which, nevertheless, made a relatively poor showing because of their large, urban populations, although retaining a strong force of local Habitations. These counties

include London, Middlesex, Surrey, Kent, Sussex, and Lancashire. The great enthusiasm generated by the League in London, assisted in part by the efforts of the LGC, helped generate activities in the South-East region. Herefordshire was the most active county in the area, measuring 5.9 percent of its 1891 census (220,162). Nevertheless, its rural, agrarian character sets it apart from other counties in the South-East. Sussex, for instance, was the second strongest county in the region. It had more than double the population (550,446) and obtained less than half (2.9 percent) Herefordshire's representation while Surrey achieved only .7 percent of its census (1,731,343).

In the case of Lancashire in the North-West, it seems to have developed a significant base for Habitations, despite a number of obstacles. These included the strength of working class organizations in the urban constituencies of Liverpool and Manchester; a lack of enthusiasm for the League in a number of smaller, but significant industrial centers; and the rivalry with radical politics nurtured in sections of the eastern portion of the county.

Wales, with 94 Habitations in 1888, and Scotland, with 85 in 1899, were less significantly developed relative to England in 1888 (1,573).²³ As Appendix H demonstrates, efforts were made to establish associations throughout these regions. Nevertheless, they formed primarily in areas sympathetic to the Conservative party. Centers of

²³ No geographical/political interpretation has been provided for Ireland because of its exceedingly poor Habitation representation. The 1888 Roll lists 22 associations covering a radius of fifteen counties, leaving fully 17 with no League organization. By 1899 the representation had declined to 21 associations encompassing a ten county region.

Habitation influence in Wales as measured by the number of associations, membership, and percentage of the population (Appendices F, G, H) were Denbighshire, Flintshire, and Radnorshire.

The three counties are distinguished by their proximity to the English border, their chiefly rural character, and the predominance of English speaking peoples (with the notable exception of Denbighshire West constituency) in their regions. These factors were of considerable importance in nurturing Conservative sympathies. While Glamorgan had the largest Primrose representation in Wales, measured in terms of Habitations (23) and members (7,057), its industrial and mining concerns nurtured Liberal political sympathies.²⁴ The result was a population largely unswayed by Primrose tenents, measuring but 1 percent of its 1891 census.

In the case of Scotland, the evidence available is much more tenuous, confined to the 1899 Roll which provides information concerning only the numbers and locations of Habitations in the region. Midlothian county (5) and the burgh of Edinburgh (7) appeared to be natural centers of Primrose activity based on the numbers of associations in the area and the location of the SGC headquarters in the capital. Membership was also undoubtedly strengthened by the prominence of middle class and professional interests in the area. Perthshire West parliamentary constituency also proved a strong center for the recruitment of members with ten Habitations in its district. The area was noted for its open highlands, agrarian setting, and the

²⁴ Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, pp. 363-64, 366-67, 258-62.

territorial influence exerted by prominent aristocrats, notably the Duke of Atholl, the Earl of Breadalbane, and the Earl of Ancaster.²⁵ Both the Earl and the Countess of Ancaster were active in SGC functions.²⁶

A number of other areas attained a far less potent base of support, but offered a plausible source for Primrose and Conservative party recruitment. Among these were Aberdeen (5), presumably drawing on its middle class constituency in the Southern Division, Stirling (4), and Linlithgow (4). The latter two counties were able to draw upon Orange sympathies in their region. A number of counties in the western region appeared to give some measure of support to the League. These included Argyll (4), Dunbarton (5), Ayr (4), and Dumfries (4). In these areas Unionist, anti-Home Rule sentiments appeared fairly strong, reflecting the counties geographical proximity to Ireland. Not all centers of Primrose activity, however, were drawn from Conservative strongholds. Berwick county, known for its fishing interests, large estates, and strong social class divisions, displayed a distinctly Liberal voting record while nevertheless managing to support six Habitations.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., 393-94, 396.

²⁶ The Countess of Ancaster is listed on the 1899 Roll as Division President for Perthshire and Ruling Councillor for Crieff and District Habitation in the same region. The Earl of Ancaster served as trustee for the SGC. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 April 1901, p. 18.

²⁷ Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, pp. 389-90, 395-96, 405-07.

Even allowing for varying regional, political, and social influences, the League managed to obtain a fairly significant foothold in most English counties. The organization gained the greatest strength in traditionally Conservative areas, particularly where local party officials were prepared to utilize its influence.

VI

The changing character of Primrose performance between 1888 and 1899 can be gauged by comparing the Rolls of Habitations for these years. This presents some difficulties as the 1899 Roll provides only numbers of Habitations and officers, omitting the most significant indicator, rank and file membership. The generally declining position of the League by 1899 raises the possibility that the 1899 Habitation listings were somewhat inflated. Despite these limitations, the Roll does provide a basis of comparison over time, thereby enabling a better understanding of League development.

The 1899 Roll of Habitations lists 1,541 Habitations, a decline of 11 percent over the 1888 figure. Of these associations, 1,322 are located in England, 113 in Wales and Monmouthshire, 21 in Ireland, and 85 in Scotland. If we examine the 1888 and 1899 figures for England, the area of greatest Primrose activity, we find a rather dramatic 16 percent decline during this eleven year period. Wales fared somewhat better, losing only 9 percent of its Habitations. The relatively moderate loss sustained by Welsh Habitations in 1899 appears to be compensation for the region's slow development ten years previously.

Scotland and Ireland have been excluded from the comparison: the former has no detailed Habitation listing available for 1888, while numbers for the latter are too small to provide a point of reference.

A somewhat surprising feature manifested in a comparison of the two Rolls is the considerable amount of Habitation reformation which took place. Thirty-seven percent of associations listed in 1888 do not appear by 1899, an additional 28 percent forming during that same period. Divisions also underwent a significant realignment as two-thirds of those listed in 1888 disappeared by 1899. The total number of Divisions representing England and Wales during these years declined by three percent, although when measured alone, Wales actually managed to increase its count by one. The relatively strong performance of Divisions throughout the country as compared with the more rapidly declining Habitations reflected the strong emphasis at the Central Office and executive levels of local organization in maintaining these intermidate administrative bodies.

The numbers of Divisional and Habitation officers between 1888 and 1899 declined by a seemingly insignificant 6.2 percent. However the percentage is somewhat understated due to the inclusion of 198 Scottish officers. If we consider only those regions listed in the 1888 and 1899 Rolls, Ireland, Wales, and England, a more dramatic picture emerges. While Ireland made slight gains, increasing its total from 41 to 47 or 7.3 percent, Wales declined by just under 10 percent. The largest and most significant area of Primrose activity, England, lost 11.3 percent of its local leadership between 1888 and 1899.

Another prominent feature exhibited in the comparison of officers listed in the two Rolls is the growing number of Habitations headed exclusively or in the majority by woman. In 1888 women oversaw 199 associations or 5.2 percent of the total. By 1899 this figure had risen to 10.9 percent. The numbers lend support to the growing public perception of the League as a "women's organization," comprising female canvassers serving the interests of the (male) Conservative party.²⁸

If we examine the regional development of the Primrose League in 1899 against that of 1888, some interesting results emerge (Appendices H and I). The East Anglia region decreased the most. Cambridgeshire suffered the greatest decline in the number of Habitations of all counties in this study, dropping from 21 to 7 between 1888 and 1899, a paltry 33 percent of its original level. Suffolk and Norfolk also experienced significantly lower levels of activity, respectively 67 and 72 percent of their previous standings. Both had performed quite strongly on the 1888 Roll, accounting for some 3 percent of their total 1891 population figures.

While the Central region underwent a more moderate decline relative to East Anglia, nevertheless, it also lost significant ground. Berkshire fared the best with 84.6 percent of its 1888 representation, then set at 2.9 percent of its 1891 census. Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, however, declined to 70 percent of their original standing, previously 5 and 3.4 percent, respectively, of their 1891 census.

²⁸ A perception shared by Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, pp. 530, 534, 548-49, 561.

Both the Bristol and agricultural regions of the West Midlands declined at a rate comparable to that of the Central district. For Somerset and Gloucestershire counties in the Bristol area, this meant decreases of 78 and 62 percent, respectively, from their positions in 1888. The two counties had accounted for a solid 3.5 and 2 percent portion, respectively, of their 1891 censuses. The Shropshire and Herefordshire counties in the rural West Midlands region decreased to 73 and 75 percent, respectively, of their 1888 total. While Herefordshire only included 20 Habitations in 1888, it has been included here because of its marginally acceptable status and regional proximity to Shropshire.

The London and South-East section of England, which in 1888 had performed well in terms of number of Habitations and membership, but poorly regard to proportion of the census, also experienced a fairly significant decline. The exception to the trend was Hertfordshire which maintained its distinctive status, managing to retain fully 96.4 percent of its original 1888 representation. Sussex, the second strongest county in the region, lost a relatively modest 12 percent between 1888 and 1899. Essex experienced the greatest decline, maintaining only 65 percent of its previous figure. The remaining counties Surrey, Middlesex, and Kent lost between 20 and 30 percent of their Habitations. London dropped to 71 percent of its 1888 strength, a loss of 23 associations.

The relatively poor showing of this region is not altogether surprising. It experienced the earliest growth in the country, most of its initial spurt of activity occurring between 1884 and 1885. As a

region it appears to have reached its saturation point quicker than other areas. The generally urban, suburban, and mixed social class character of this area included many large constituencies which were not drawn in large numbers to the League. This is exhibited perhaps most strikingly in the poorest sections of London, Pelling's "Category C."²⁹ While Habitations were maintained in these areas, only in the more mixed sections of middle and working class representation were they able to generate sufficiently high levels of participation within the Primrose League.³⁰ Nevertheless, a network of associations was maintained throughout the South-East with significant levels of activity, even if the results did not reflect strength in terms of the percentage of the total population of the area.

Despite the overall decline of League fortunes by 1899, its organization did manage to maintain a significant presence in a few areas. Perhaps the best example in terms of its 1899 performance is the East Midlands. A moderately industrial region which possessed strong agricultural interests, the East Midlands was noted for its Liberal, Nonconformist beliefs. Nevertheless, the League managed to increase its presence slightly in this section of the country.

²⁹ Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, pp. 43, 53-54.

³⁰ Of the 24 London parliamentary districts listed under Category C of Pelling's Social Geography of British Elections, the 1899 Roll contains lists of 20 Divisions and 23 Habitations. Only Battersea was left without Primrose representation. Nevertheless, Lady Salisbury's "East End Poor Habitation fund" introduced in 1894 attests to the flagging efforts of League recruitment in the more marginal social class constituencies. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 27 July 1894; 2 November 1894; 31 May 1895; 29 November 1895.

Derbyshire county fared the least well, declining to 87 percent of its 1888 standing. Leicestershire and Lincolnshire on the other hand, rose to 113 and 118 percent of their previous records, respectively, 3.2 and 5.5 percent of their 1891 census. Given that the Liberal, Nonconformist character of the East Midlands region was second in England only to that of the North in its intensity, the performance is striking.

The South-West region of England, comprising the counties Devonshire and Cornwall, was another area with a predominantly Liberal voting pattern which, nevertheless, managed to sustain 1888 levels of growth. Both counties had been solid constituencies of the Primrose League in 1888, representing, respectively, 2.3 and 2.8 percent of their censuses. By 1899 Devonshire retained a generous 93.8 percent of its Habitations and Cornwall increased its count by two, constituting a net loss of one Habitation to the region.

Fawcett's Lancastria region, encompassing Lancashire and Cheshire,³¹ also was able to maintain its status, even managing to improve its overall standing slightly. Lancashire retained its previous record of 113 Habitations. To some extent the county's ability to maintain its level of activity is explained by the relatively low figures reported on the 1888 Roll. Members accounted for only 1.4 percent of Lancashire's 1891 census. Nevertheless, it was able to sustain its level of Habitations at a time when England as a whole was experiencing a 17.6 percent decline. Therefore, Lancashire's

31 Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, pp. xxii, 238.

achievement is a significant one. Cheshire, which had performed well in 1888 with 53 Habitations and 3 percent of its 1891 census, actually increased its Habitation count by two in 1899.

If we include the entire county of Wiltshire within Wessex, the area managed to maintain a strong presence. The exception to this trend was Dorset which declined by 31 percent. This poor performance is explained to some extent by the county's extremely strong showing in the previous Roll which measured 6.5 percent of its 1891 census population. Under these circumstances it would have been very difficult for Dorset to measure up to its' past record. Nevertheless, the decrease was a significant one, extending beyond mere readjustment. Hampshire, a strong performer in 1888, retained 96 percent of its original standing. Wiltshire actually managed to increase its number of Habitations by one, bringing the total to 35 associations in 1899.

Two final areas worthy of note are the North and West Midlands known, respectively, for their Liberal and Liberal Unionist representation. The northern-most counties of England, Cumberland, Durham, and Northumberland, declined somewhat, managing to hold within 10 percent of their earlier levels. However, given their extremely poor showing in 1888, this can not be seen as a substantial achievement. The industrial West Midlands region, encompassing Warwickshire, Worcestershire, and Staffordshire counties, declined significantly by 1899, to 82, 74, and 53 percent, respectively, of their 1888 totals. This represents an especially significant decline in the face of the area's poor standing nine years previously.

VII

One of the most important features of League membership is its social class composition. Records are available which list members of some local Habitations and clubs of the Primrose League. These can in turn be examined to determine the class or occupation of individuals on the registers, thereby providing a greater understanding of the economic status of rank and file participants. The evidence available is sufficient to allow for informed speculation, however use of these records at times necessitates somewhat arbitrary decisions concerning titles, job descriptions, and even residential addresses.

The task of determining the social stratification of members holding positions as officers at either the Habitation or Divisional Level is made somewhat easier by the preponderance of titles: aristocratic, military, religious, professional, and honorific. I have divided the various headings into two basic categories "Aristocratic" and "Professional." Each includes a number of subclassifications.

Of the 3,824 officers named in the 1888 Roll, 27.9 percent can be identified by title.³² Under the "Aristocratic" heading were placed

³² Individuals with multiple titles are identified under each designation on each occasion that they appear as officers, except where they held more than one position within a Division. Under this method of calculation, the proportion of officers holding positions of distinction is slightly inflated. This duplication of title holders occurs almost exclusively in the professional categories and among those individuals placed under the Aristocratic heading ranked equal to or below that of Baronet. This procedure is consistent with the method of tabulation of officers described in Chapter Four, footnote fifteen.

316 or 8.3 percent of all officers. They included 95 members of the nobility ranked between Duke and Viscountess.³³ An additional 144 Lords, Ladies, Barons, Baroness, and Counts are included. Baronets, Knights, and Dames accounted for still another 77 individuals.

The armed services were listed under the heading "Professional." The ranks of admiral and general and their attendant subcategories[^] were held by 73 individuals, 1.9 percent of the total. Because of the propensity of younger sons of the nobility and members of the gentry to join the service as commissioned officers, the ranks of admiral and general are considered roughly equivalent to the "Aristocratic" heading. Together these categories comprise 389 individuals or just over 10 percent of all officers on the Roll. Below the rank of admiral and general, the armed forces provided 240 officers of 6.3 percent of the total. If we group the military categories together they account for 313 individuals or 8.2 percent of all officers of the League.

The clergy accounted for 131 positions, 3.4 percent overall. Fifty-eight members of parliament served as officers, while honorific titles below the level of knighthood were held by 43 persons, respectively, 1.5 and 1.1 percent of the total membership. If we group together all other remaining categories including holders of professional degrees; members of professional societies; public

³³ Duke, Duchess, Marquis, Marchioness, Earl, Countess, Viscount, and Viscountess.

³⁴ Lieutenant-General, Major-General, Vice-Admiral, and Rear-Admiral.

officials, among which are included Justices of the Peace, Deputy Lieutenants, and members of the Queen's Counsel, we count 205 individuals or 5.4 percent of all officers. Finally, those members placed under the "Professional" heading, excluding the ranks of general and admiral, numbered 677 or 17.7 percent of the total.

By the time of the 1899 listing, the categories of officers underwent some modification. Of the 3,587 officers listed, 25 percent were identified by title, 2.9 less than in 1888. However "Aristocrats" gained significant ground, increasing by 28.5 percent, despite the 10 percent decline in officers in the 1899 Roll. The figure was even more significant for those individuals holding titles above or equivalent to Viscount. Their numbers rose by one-and-a-half times (152) the 1888 total (95).

Generals and admirals, however, declined in number to 43, 59 percent of the 1888 figure. If the ranks of general and admiral are combined with the "Aristocratic" category, they account for 12.8 percent of all officers listed in 1899. The overall numbers of military personnel below the level of admiral and general declined to 21 percent of the 1888 figures. "Professionals," excluding generals and admirals, accounted for 431 individuals or 12 percent of all officers in 1899.

The statistics provided regarding the social classification of officers in the 1888 and 1899 Rolls suggest the rather elite character of Primrose leadership. Approximately one quarter of the officers of each Roll of Habitations occupied positions of aristocratic or professional distinction. Of the remaining individuals, many were

undoubtedly highly esteemed in their communities, although they were not designated by honorific or professional titles. Businessmen, for instance, were likely to have played a significant role, but were rarely identified by title.³⁵

The figures tend to suggest what local registers affirm: the importance of obtaining the support of notables as a means of attracting membership and enhancing the quality of social functions. The dramatic increase in aristocratic influence demonstrated in the 1899 officer count suggests the League had, in large measure, achieved social and political legitimacy. It had, in effect, become an acceptable forum for the participation of the most highly esteemed members of the community. The prominence of notables in both the 1888 and 1899 figures appears to support Cannadine's contention that as the aristocracy was forced to concede economic and political power in the course of the nineteenth century, their importance as figureheads increased dramatically.³⁶

Determining the social class designation of rank and file members of Habitations is also somewhat conjectural. The sources available are limited, consisting essentially of two incorporated club

35 Their presence as members in the Melbury (Dorset) and Garstang (Lancashire) Habitations indicates a more general participation at the local level. See pages 220 and 224-25 of this chapter. In the case of Garstang Habitation, the Honorary Secretary, William Bennett, was a butcher and cattle dealer. The 1899 Roll of Habitations, p. 102. Kelly's Directory of Lancashire, B.L. P.P.2505.yby., p. 452.

36 Cannadine, Lords and Landlords, pp. 54-56.

listings of shareholders and a few registers of Habitation members.³⁷ In the case of the local registers, occupations must be determined by consulting contemporary post office directories. It is a tedious process, ultimately yielding details on only the more prosperous members of the community, notably local gentry, professionals, tradesmen, and farmers who presumably had title to the land they worked. Despite these limitations, an examination of local records affords us a better idea of the character of League membership and is therefore worthy of attention.

The most comprehensive listing available is the registry of incorporation for the Brent Primrose League Club located in Hanwell, Middlesex.³⁸ Begun in 1885, it appeared to have been a fairly vital institution until as late as 1896. By 1901 the registry was filled with names of "dead" or "missing" members. The following year the club closed.

The town of Hanwell, located along the line of the Great Western Railway, was not far from London. Discount train fares attracted many artisanal and working class commuters to the community. By Pelling's classification, Hanwell would be designated as "Category B." The town possessed a mixed middle and working class population and was situated near a Catholic community of considerable size. While

³⁷ These include the Brent Primrose Club in Hanwell, Middlesex; the Salford Primrose Club in Lancashire; the Melbury Habitation in Dorset; the Garstang Habitation in Lancashire; the Whitehaven Habitation in Cumberland; the Coin Valley Habitation in Gloucestershire; and the Knights¹ and Dames' Register for Huddersfield Habitation in West Riding, Yorkshire.

³⁸ "The Brent Primrose League Club," PRO BT31 3540/21610.

Hanwell might best be characterized as a suburban town, a significant riverside industry was located nearby.³⁹

The club generated capital by issuing shares at five shillings apiece. Of the 77 men constituting its membership between 1885 and 1901, 28.6 percent characterized themselves as gentlemen, 11.7 percent as professionals, 5.2 percent as merchants,⁴⁰ and 19.5 percent held service positions.⁴¹ Shopkeepers accounted for 13 percent of members, assistants, 5.2 percent.⁴² Thirteen percent of club members were skilled tradesmen, a scant 3.8 percent manual laborers. Under the merchant heading were included a brewer and a wine distributor. Religious interests were represented by two clerks from the Holy Orders, recorded in the service category.

Loosely termed the privileged stratum, the gentlemen, professionals, and merchants, combined accounted for just under 40 percent of the membership of Brent Club. Nevertheless, the diversity of rank and file members should not be minimized. There were clerks, a station master, grocers, a baker, butcher, asylum workers, a porter, shop assistants, builders, a boot maker, plumber, blacksmith, painter, stoker, an oilman, and still others.⁴³

39 Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, pp. 62, 67, 84.

40 Merchants encompassed manufacturers and distributors (1), the liquor trade (2), and inn and hotel keepers (1).

41 The Service category was composed of a number of members of the lower middle class including teachers, clerks, secretaries, inspectors, surveyors, and traveling salesmen.

42 Within the Service classification were placed assistant shopkeepers, stewards, porters, and asylum attendants.

43 -The Brent primrose League Club," PRO BT31 3540/21610.

Presumably absent from their ranks were the representatives of the skilled and semiskilled portions of the work force identifying with the "new unionism" of the late 1880's and 1890's. Despite the obvious limitations of the club failing to draw proportionally from all social class constituencies, it nevertheless maintained a sufficiently broad representation to justify, at least on its own terms, the frequent Primrose claim of having achieved a "union of all classes."⁴⁴

In Salford the Primrose Club Company appeared to exhibit a distinctly more working class character, listing as its stockholders a blacksmith, millwright, two overlookers, an engine fitter, a Manchester Provisions Dealer, and a Grocer's Manager. Shares were set at the relatively prohibitive rate of £1 apiece.⁴⁵ It is not clear from the records to what extent the shareholders reflected overall club membership, if indeed there was rank and file participation. The club, formed in April of 1884, dissolved seven years later.

In an effort to gain a better understanding of the social class composition of the Primrose League, this section will conclude with an examination of the register of two local Habitations, one located in Dorset, the other in Lancashire. Wherever possible I relied on the information provided in the post office directories concerning social and occupational titles. However given the prevalence of family members and the limited occupational listings, it was necessary to make

⁴⁴ Robb, The Primrose League, p. 148. "A Short History of the League" contained in the Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 1883-1886. The Primrose League Gazette, 25 May 1889, p. 15.

⁴⁵ "Primrose Club Company, Ltd.," PRO BT31 3317/19653.

a number of judgements. Individuals who appear to be direct family members; husband, wife, and children; were cited by the husband's or in a few instances, the wife's occupation.

Only the more prominent farmers appear to be included in the directory. Tenants, leaseholders, and small freeholders seem to be omitted from this occupational listing. Therefore, I have placed in the above category individuals who appear to be small, independent, farmers based on what seem to be residential addresses.

While it is likely that many persons whose names appear on the register held positions as agricultural laborers and servants, others undoubtedly worked as assistants in a variety of ancillary roles. Because they could not be positively identified, however, these individuals were not categorized by occupation. As for those persons classified by position, every effort has been made to place them properly in the appropriate category. Nevertheless, given the limitation of the sources' at hand, the statistics provided are useful principally for the trends indicated, rather than the actual figures designated.

Melbury Habitation was located in the Western Division of Dorset, a county cited previously for having the highest number of Primrose League members in 1888 relative to its 1891 census figures. By Pelling's account, the inland part of the county in which Melbury was situated was principally agricultural. The Dorset laborer was the most poorly paid in the country, frequently living on large farms, located on the downs. Large farming concerns were the rule as only one quarter of the land was held in estates of less than one thousand

acres. The national average, by contrast, was 38.5 percent.⁴⁶

The Western Division of Dorset in which Melbury Habitation was situated, was the most politically Conservative of the four county Divisions. Because of the overwhelmingly rural character of the constituency, farmers and laborers could determine the political outcome of an election. Nevertheless, many unmarried laborers were ineligible to vote because they resided within owner-occupied farmhouses. Nonconformists did not obtain much of a foothold in this section of the country.⁴⁷

Out of the 970 individuals listed on the register, 164 were identified by occupation,⁴⁸ 16.9 percent of the total. Of these, 4.2 percent came under the heading nobility/landowner. The most illustrious members of this category were the Earl and Countess of Ilchester, the latter serving as Ruling Councillor. She also held the position of Dame President for the Abbotsbury Habitation, located nearby. Other prominent landowners featured on the Habitation roll included Arthur Martin, Thomas Ffooks, and H.J.J. Cockeram.

⁴⁶ Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, pp. 126-27.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 129, 135-38.

⁴⁸ The Melbury Habitation records are from the archives of the late Earl of Ilchester. They are contained in the Dorset County Record Office, D124/Box343. Two volumes of registers are available covering the years 1886-1893 and 1894-1901. My analysis is based on volume one. Information regarding the occupations of Melbury Habitation members is derived from Kelly's Directory of Hampshire with the Isle of Wight, Wiltshire, and Dorsetshire, 1889. B.L. P.P.2505.ybt. Xeroxed copies of the registers and directory were obtained courtesy of Michael Wills.

Members of the military, none of whom ranked at the level of admiral or general, represent merely 1.8 percent of those identified, as compared with 3.7 percent professionals. Clerical interests were prominently represented, constituting 9.8 percent of the named categories if we include individuals working as assistants or servants for local rectories within this grouping. Service occupations accounted for 3 percent of those identified while the "drink industry, which comprised a brewery manufacturer (2.4 percent), inns and hotels (4.9 percent), and public houses (.6 percent), totaled 7.9 percent.

Industrial merchants constituted 3 percent of those named, while shopkeepers accounted for a substantial 13.4 percent. Individuals engaged in the skilled trades constituted 6.8 percent of those identified compared with 12.8 percent of unskilled workers, presumed to be either agrarian laborers or servants.⁴⁹ Farmers and estate managers accounted for 33.6 percent of the total.

Given that only 16.9 percent of those listed on the register are identified by occupation, some degree of caution must be exercised when drawing conclusions from the material. Of the 970 individuals whose names are listed on the roll, only 57 were Knights or Dames. Associates accounted for 94.1 percent of the membership. Most of the rank and file participants could not be identified from the directory, which featured only the more prominent members of the community. Thus

⁴⁹ This determination is made from the addresses provided on the register. The individuals identified appear to have few, if any, family members and are associated with what appear to be large farming establishments. Their numbers are likely to be substantially underestimated because of the difficulty of obtaining positive identification.

the figures substantially overrepresent the more affluent sectors of society. Undoubtedly most of unidentified members were derived from the agricultural community, supplemented by individuals employed in local industries, businesses, shops, and domestic service. Nevertheless, the precise character of the membership remains elusive, not subject to detailed occupational analysis.

Garstang Habitation provides, in some respects, an interesting contrast to the Melbury case study. Situated in Lancashire, the county with the single largest number of Primrose members, it nevertheless only accounted for 1.4 percent of its 1891 census. In part the relatively poor showing can be explained by the highly populous and industrial character of the area.

The League's performance was further hampered by its failure to make a strong showing in the two regional capitals: Liverpool and Manchester. With its vital base of popular conservatism nurtured in response to the Irish Catholic immigrants in the area, Liverpool might have been expected to provide a strong base of support for the activities of the League. However, the working class Protestants who formed the core of support for Conservatives in the town identified with a particular brand of Tory Democracy which was, in some respects, sympathetic to the Orange movements indigenous to the region. Industrial-magnate-turned-politician, A.B. Forwood, established the foundations for this popular support for the party during the 1885 General Election, winning, on behalf of Conservatives, eight of the nine constituencies in the town. His efforts in building an urban, sophisticated, Tory Democratic machine for Liverpool in the 1880's

caused many to regard his achievement as the Tory counterpart to Chamberlain's Birmingham caucus.⁵⁰

During the 1890's, A.T. Salvidge assumed control over the Conservative party machinery through his management of the largest working class Tory organization in town, the Liverpool Working Men's Conservative Association. By 1894 it numbered between five and six thousand members. The size and influence of the association in Liverpool, the largest in all of Britain, continued to expand until the early 1900's when it numbered about eight thousand members.⁵¹ In the face of the strength of urban "Orange" styled Conservative working class movements, the Primrose League proved no match. The result was a small Primrose organization of 8 Habitations and 1,493 members in 1888. Based on the 1891 census, this represented .2 percent of the city's 517,980 inhabitants.⁵²

In Manchester the League fared slightly worse with seven Habitations and 1,071 members (.2 percent). Salford which bordered on Manchester and contained a mixed suburban/urban community of less than one third Manchester's size, nevertheless, obtained a higher Primrose membership, 1,237 or 1 percent of its 1891 population.⁵³

⁵⁰ p.j. Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1981), pp. 46, 48-49, 60, 77, 92-94, 96, 134, 166.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 93, 123, 142.

⁵² The Habitation figures for Liverpool were obtained from the 1888 Roll of Habitations. The 1891 census provided population figures for the town of Liverpool. Great Britain, Parliament, Parliament Papers, "Population," 1881 and 1891 Censuses England and Wales, vol. 20, p. 12. Irish University Press, Series Reprint, 1970.

⁵³ The number of Habitations in Manchester and Salford was obtained from the 1888 Roll of Habitations. The population figures for

The area in which the Primrose League was best represented in Lancashire was Blackpool. The town supported thirteen Habitations and 3,772 members, who made up 15.8 percent of its 1891 census.⁵⁴ It was a solidly based Conservative constituency. Other districts where the League appeared vital were Bootle (326), Newton (3,638), West Houghton (2,095), Chorley (3,629), and Southport (3,585), all prominent centers of Conservative influence. Nevertheless, the League was not confined to party strongholds. The organization achieved some measure of success in Burnley (907), known for its Nonconformist and Social Federation activity; Darwen (4,474); Leigh (5,835), a solid Liberal constituency; as well as the mixed political constituencies of Heywood (2,447), Radcliffe (4,627), and Middleton (6,385).⁵⁵

Garstang Habitation was located in the Lancaster Division, a marginally Liberal constituency. Situated halfway between the Liberal, Nonconformist, market town of Lancaster and the staunchly Conservative city of Preston,⁵⁶ Garstang favored the latter in political outlook.

Garstang was an ancient market center which had 856 inhabitants in 1891. It was surrounded by a cluster of agrarian hamlets which were served by the Habitation. Farming was the principal occupation in the

the two towns were ascertained from the 1891 census. 1881 and 1891 Censuses England and Wales, vol. 21, p. 169.

⁵⁴ The census information for the municipal borough of Blackpool was obtained from the 1881 and 1891 Censuses England and Wales, vol. 21, p. 169.

⁵⁵ Habitation figures were taken from the 1888 Roll of Habitations.

⁵⁶ Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, pp. 275, 277, 261-62.

area, although a cotton factory and two paper mills were also a source of local employment. Catholics were prominent in the area, their influence indicated by the churches and independent schools situated in the region.⁵⁷ The prominence of the Irish Catholic population undoubtedly contributed to nurturing Conservative sensibilities in the region as indeed it did for much of the western section of Lancashire.

The Garstang Habitation register⁵⁸ distinguishes itself from Melbury's in a number of respects. A far greater proportion of its members can be identified; 191 out of 498 or 38 percent as compared with 16.9 percent for Melbury. This may be attributed to the greater number of farmers, small businessmen, and shopkeepers accounted for in the rolls. Farmers represented 43.5 percent of the total, 10 percent greater than in the Melbury listing. The overwhelming agrarian character of the region was underscored by the numbers of businessmen, innkeepers, and skilled tradesmen who were also simultaneously engaged in farming.

The nobility/landowning class appears to have occupied a less prominent role in Garstang, although their relative standing was slightly higher than that of Melbury's, respectively, 4.2 to 4.7 percent. The most highly placed participant in Habitation activities, the Countess of Bective, was not even listed on the register, although

⁵⁷ Kelly's Directory of Lancashire, 1898, pp. 450-51, 96, 114, 223, 338, 359-60, 423-24, 457, 507, 589-90, 703, 854, 1109. A xeroxed copy of Kelly's Directory was obtained courtesy of Michael Wills.

⁵⁸ The Garstang Habitation records, including the Garstang Register, 1897-1909, are housed in the Lancashire County Record Office in Preston, DDF 2.

she was recruited successfully for the ceremonial post of Dame President.⁵⁹ *par more* active in Habitation affairs was W.J. Fitzherbert Brockholes, a prominent landowner in the region.

The occupational categories in which Garstang Habitation appeared noticeably deficient include the armed services and clerical sectors. No individuals were associated with the former, while only three (4.2 percent) were identified with the latter. Their status as single women and the absence of other family members suggests they served as domestic servants for local vicars. Professionals accounted for 3.1 percent of the named members while services constituted a substantial 16.8 percent of those listed. Shopkeepers made up 11 percent of those listed as compared with 12 percent for skilled tradesmen.

The number of Knights and Dames recorded on the Garstang register was 6.1 percent of the total, slightly more than the 5.9 percent listed for Melbury. Men were 58 percent of all individuals on the register. As for the women, 27 percent were married, 73 percent single.

The preponderance of single women participating in the League appears also to have been exhibited on a national level, based on the large numbers of "Misses" appearing as officers in the 1888 and 1899 Rolls, although no figures have been provided in this chapter to demonstrate this claim. While their presence might suggest a propensity for youth, it seems more probable that women of all ages

59 Minutes of the Garstang Habitation, 7 March 1895.

were attracted by the unique opportunities offered for combining social and political endeavors. For many it served as an avenue to apply previously untapped business and organizational skills in service of their party.

VIII

This chapter represents the first systematic study of its kind regarding the popular foundations of Conservative support. The dramatic growth of the Primrose League between 1885 and 1886 and its more limited expansion in the late 1890's appeared to coincide with and reflect larger developments within the Conservative party during this same period. Just as the latter organization made gains in extending the basis of its popular support in the 1880's while striving to maintain its electoral lead through the late 1890's, so too the Primrose League sought to prolong and to extend its influence, despite stagnating patterns of growth by the time of the Boer war.

Based on the statistical material provided in this chapter, it appears that while the League established Habitations throughout the country, its greatest influence was in rural communities where agricultural and small business interests predominated. This development is not surprising. For while popular support for the Conservative party in the urban constituencies was, by and large, relegated to Conservative Working Men's Clubs and in the suburban communities predominantly the domain of local Conservative Associations, in the agricultural regions the Primrose League assumed primacy.

There were two primary causes for this concentration. The 1885 Reform Act necessitated the creation of an organization which would gain the support of the newly enfranchised electorate in the counties. Secondly, the longstanding patterns of deference in these communities, although on the decline, made them more receptive to the methods of the League. The Primrose League could fill a function not met by either the working class clubs or local Conservative Associations in appealing to newly enfranchised voters residing in the countryside.

At the regional and local level the operations of the Primrose League were managed by the officers representing Divisional Councils and Habitations. They were drawn overwhelmingly from the noble, professional, and commercial ranks of the community. The rank and file membership, on the other hand, appeared to more diverse, consisting of local notables, military, religious, and professional members of the community as well as labor, agricultural, and domestic workers. Thus, the Primrose League was able to legitimately claim a multi-class representation, although its following fell short of a proportionate distribution of all social classes.

CHAPTER SIX

Political Subculture

Some nations have a gift for ceremonial. No poverty of means or absence of splendour inhibits them from making any pageant in which they take part both real and impressive. . . . In England the case is exactly the reverse. We can afford to be more splendid than most nations; but some malignant spell broods over all our most solemn ceremonials, and inserts into them some feature which makes them all ridiculous. . . . Something always breaks down, somebody contrives to escape doing his part, or by-motive is suffered to interfere and ruin it all.

Lord Robert Cecil, the future third Marquis of Salisbury. Excerpt from an article published anonymously by The Saturday Review 9 February 1861.

Beaconsfield dead is quite as useful to the Tories as Beaconsfield alive.

Attributed to Lord Randolph Churchill, England, 23 April 1892.

Lord Beaconsfield is much more than a memory--he is a religion to the party he led.

Lady St. Helier, Memories of Fifty Years (1910)

I

Salisbury was correct in his observation concerning the lack of grandeur associated with public ceremonies in mid-Victorian Britain. Nevertheless, the last quarter of the nineteenth and first decade of the twentieth centuries were to provide a striking contrast, constituting in Cannadine's words, the "golden age of 'invented traditions.'^H The introduction of elaborate rituals for state functions were made manifest most visibly at the apex of society through the lavish proceedings initiated to commemorate monarchical

rule. The most notable events included the Golden (1887) and Diamond (1897) Jubilees honoring Queen Victoria's long years of service, her funeral procession (1901), as well as the coronation (1902) and funeral (1911) of Edward VII and the coronation and durbar (1912) of George V.¹

These pageants inaugurated a tradition of elaborate monarchical ceremonies performed before a receptive mass audience.² They in turn helped to instill a popular, nationwide devotion to the rituals of pomp and circumstance, bolstering support for the royal family and the aristocracy in an age which, based on economic considerations alone, would seem to have prohibited the exaltation of bygone splendors.³

The causes underlying the public's endorsement of grand stately functions are not difficult to fathom. The nation's position as the predominant world power was increasingly threatened in the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by mounting economic, military, and imperial drives from European and American competitors. The country was internally beset by changes altering the character of

¹ David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition,'" The Invention of Tradition eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 138, 108, 133-34.

² Although, as Lant has shown, the development of royal processions during this period was not without its confusions and setbacks. Jeffrey L. Lant, Insubstantial Pageant (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979), pp. ix, 15, 17-18, 24, 138, 149, 151-53, 167.

³ Edward Shils and Michael Young, "The Meaning of the Coronation," Sociological Review vol. 1, no. 2 (December, 1953), pp. 63-64, 67. For two twentieth century accounts of the public enthusiasm accorded the monarchy, see Richard Rose's and Dennis Kavanagh's, "The Monarchy in Contemporary Political Culture," Comparative Politics (July, 1976), pp. 548-76 and Philip Ziegler's, Crown and People, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

urban and rural communities while having to grapple with the newest innovation: the suburb.

Social classes were also in a state of upheaval. The aristocracy was forced to concede, albeit in a piecemeal and reluctant fashion, its preeminent role in the economic and political spheres. The middle class gradually gained ground, obtaining increased access to political power as a result of over a half century of proven business and industrial acumen. The working class also made strides. However, its influence was exerted principally through the growing number of trade unions forming throughout the country and, to a far lesser degree, by means of the extension of the franchise.

The scope of technological change was less than all encompassing. Modern "heavy" industrial firms existed side by side with a preponderance of smaller, old styled consumer manufacturing businesses and small shopkeeping concerns.⁴ Nevertheless, for many, the age appeared to be one in which the country was being catapulted headlong into "modernity." This perception was underscored by the changing character of "mass" transportation. In the course of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, the public made its way from carriages and horses to railway cars, toward city trams and finally the automobile.

⁴ Arno J. Mayer, The Persistence of the Old Regime (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), pp. 37-38, 47, 77. Mayer's controversial study provides a notable contrast to the "modernist" viewpoint as represented by David S. Landes in The Unbound Prometheus (1969).

The widespread perception of the dizzying pace of social and technological change was further spurred on by other developments. Many viewed the economic difficulties encountered between 1873 and 1896, which came to be characterized as the "Great Depression," as an indication that Britain had fallen upon troubled times. Rural communities were the most adversely affected because of the influx of foreign grains at greatly reduced prices, the livelihood of many British farmers was threatened by the imports; profits declined sharply.

Troubled economic times encouraged the continued movement of agricultural laborers from country to city, a mass migration which had been underway for nearly a century. The resulting overcrowding of urban communities in the late nineteenth century encouraged the proliferation of the garden suburbs as well as the intervention of state and local governments in the day-to-day lives of citizens. In the face of these transformations, there emerged a mass following within society which embraced "traditionalism" by means of the modern methods of "conservatism."⁵ This was achieved through the "invention of tradition."

^b The terms are borrowed from Karl Mannheim's Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 94-98, 102. Mannheim adopts Weber's usage of "traditionalism" in order to signify "a tendency to cling to vegetative patterns, to old ways of life." By contrast, he characterizes "conservatism" as a pragmatic means by which to resist reformist tendencies. Shils makes a similar distinction between "tradita" and "traditum" in his recent work Tradition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), pp. 12-13.

II

The "invention of tradition" found a receptive audience in the political arena, most particularly in the organization of the Primrose League which exceeded all rivals in the scope and breadth of its innovations. Foremost among its achievements was its role in elevating the founder of the modern Conservative party, Benjamin Disraeli, to the virtual status of a state icon.

The funeral of Lord Beaconsfield was a modest, deliberately low key affair. It was held at Hughenden and attended by a number of the most prominent political figures of the day with the most notable exception of Gladstone.⁶ Prohibited by custom from attending the service, the Queen, nevertheless, sent two wreaths of primroses with the inscription "his favorite flowers from Osborne, a tribute of affection from Queen Victoria." While considerable controversy arose subsequently concerning whether the pronoun "his" referred to Prince Albert or Disraeli, it seems likely to have been the latter.⁷

In the week following the funeral, the Queen and Princess Beatrice visited the grave site. The monarch and her daughter traveled in an open carriage drawn by four greys. The coachman retraced the path last taken by Disraeli the previous December in returning from Windsor to Hughenden. In an effort to minimize a public following, the

⁶ The Times 27 April 1881, p. 12.

⁷ Robert Blake, Disraeli (London: Methuen and Comp., 1978), p. 752; reprint, published originally in 1966 by Eyre and Spottiswoode.

Queen's visit was not publicized beforehand. Nevertheless, her actions subsequently received detailed coverage in the press.⁸

In having primroses laid at the grave of Lord Beaconsfield, not only on the day of his funeral, but also on each subsequent anniversary of his death until her own demise in 1901,⁹ Queen Victoria instituted a tradition which obtained a wide popular following. On the nineteenth of April 1882, primroses were worn by many individuals in the metropolis. By the following year, the practice had begun to assume national proportions, encouraging "pilgrimages" to both Hughenden and the newly established statue of Disraeli at Westminster Square.*⁰

The formation of the Primrose League at the end of 1883 encouraged the promotion of Primrose Day. It helped to ensure the continued popularity of the celebration, complete with tributes and demonstrations throughout the country. The day served as a virtual national holiday until the First World War.*¹ Even today the date is printed in British calendars.

It would be difficult to underestimate the importance ascribed to Disraeli in the Primrose League and its two primary newspaper affiliates, England and The Morning Post. The three principles of the

⁸ See The Times report of 2 May 1881, p. 8.

⁹ Ibid., 20 April 1883, p. 10; 20 April 1889, p. 6; 20 April 1895, p. 7; 20 April 1900, p. 8; 20 April 1901, p. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., 29 March 1883, p. 8; 4 April 1883, p. 6; 20 April 1883, pp. 10-11.

¹¹ For the importance ascribed to the observation of Primrose Day in small villages in the period up until the First World War see, J.A. Bridges, Victorian Recollections (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1919), pp. 9-11.

League, "the maintenance of religion," "estates of the realm," and the "Imperial Ascendancy of Great Britain," were derived from his Crystal Palace speech delivered in 1872.¹² Repeatedly the League stressed selective Disraelian themes: the importance of maintaining the constitution, the role of the Conservative party in serving national interests and in promoting the union of all classes, as well as the famed slogans of Disraeli, "Peace with Honor" and "Imperium et Libertas." These issues were referred to continuously in speeches, literature, pamphlets, and newspapers sponsored by the League throughout the period under study.

The anniversary of Disraeli's death evolved into a virtual carnival of remembrance. In assessing the tributes paid to his memory in 1884, England noted in exaggerated fashion, "by the Queen down to the humblest peasant his memory has been cherished and his principles honoured." In 1885 the newspaper began sponsoring a special annual Primrose edition, appropriately tinted yellow to represent "his favorite flower." Prize poems were featured from patriotic contestants, as were excerpts from his novels, an impression rendered on his last public appearance, a description of his final hours, and a glowing overview of his achievements.¹³

¹² 24 June 1874; Disraeli Papers, Box 66, B/XV/15.

¹³ England, 26 April 1884, p. 7; 18 April 1885, pp. 4-5, 9-10. Not all members of the Primrose League were comfortable with endorsing the Disraelian mythology, although few, if any, were prepared to voice their objections. One of the most active members of the LGC, Lady Knightly, never overcame her distrust for a man, who had managed to make his way to the "top of the greasy pole." After his victorious settlement of the Balkins crisis in 1878, she grudgingly conceded the achievement. None-the-less, Lady Knightly minimized Disraeli's social origins, characterizing him as an individual, "who from a simple attorney's clerk has risen to the truly proud position he now occupies,

Nor was this coverage in any respect unique. Repeatedly England and The Primrose League Gazette featured selections of Disraeli's speeches, writings, and tidbits of knowledge. The aforementioned papers along with The Morning Post and many others frequently editorialized on the virtues and limitations of then current leaders as measured by the often exaggerated yardstick of his past performance.

Thus, Disraeli was credited by England in 1885 with having single-handedly checked the Czar's drive for world power in the Russo-Turkish war (1877-78). By contrast, Gladstone's policies in the Middle East, most particularly Egypt and the Sudan, were violently derided. "Mr. Gladstone and his blind, shivering and craven crew give us neither peace nor honour. Every problem is evaded, every peril runaway from, every responsibility shirked."¹⁴

by the force of genius alone." Salisbury is credited with having been the real force behind the scenes during the negotiations at the Congress of Berlin. "Without Lord Salisbury, to-day's triumph would not have been possible, and England and Disraeli alike owe him a debt of profound gratitude."

On the day of Disraeli's death, she struggles to present his accomplishments in a positive light noting, "Certainly he was a great man in many ways, and few such careers are on record." Nevertheless, on the first anniversary of his death, Lady Knightly cannot conceal her contempt for the fanfare and the nostalgia associated with his memory.

To-day was the first anniversary of Lord Beaconsfield's death. Quantities of people are walking about with primrose buttonholes to commemorate the day. I utterly decline. The Queen called it "his favorite flower," but I can not stand this identification of the most simple and beautiful of flowers with one so artificial and stilted.

The Journals of Lady Knightly of Fawsley, ed. Julia Cartwright (London: John Murray Publishers, 1915), pp. 325, 343, 350.

¹⁴ Ibid., 17 January 1885, p. 9.

As late as 1886, Gladstone's performance continued to be measured by means of a comparison with his dead adversary, Lord Beaconsfield, rather than his current rival, the Marquis of Salisbury.

An impartial historian writing at the present moment of the history of the last quarter of a century could scarcely fail to seize on the antithesis observable in the political conduct of England's most prominent and most trusted leaders . . . Mr. Gladstone . . . and . . . Mr. Disraeli. . . . The one statesman set to work to construct, the other still bends all his talents to destroy, and as a consequence, while the magnificent party of Palmerston seems splintered into fragments, the once ruined anomaly which still called itself Toryism has been reconstituted on a basis of broad and comprehensive principle which promises to defy the roughest assaults of time.¹⁵

It is ironic that the staunchly Tory paper credits Disraeli with the Conservatives' change in fortune, a process it acknowledges to have occurred in the past year. Only during the last administration (1874-1880), did he obtained the unqualified support of party faithful.¹⁶ His ethnic origin and flamboyant style suggested a man who remained in substance, although not in practice, an "outsider."¹⁷ Indeed, Disraeli was hardly the individual one would have expected to become the object of Conservative adoration.

By contrast Salisbury, who, by virtue of his political outlook and aristocratic lineage, would have appeared the rightful heir to Conservative hagiography, is credited in The Morning Post as having

¹⁵ The Morning Post 19 April 1886, p. 5.

¹⁶ Paul Smith, Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 128, 155-56, 194, 311.

¹⁷ Isaiah Berlin, "Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx and the Search for Identity," Against the Current (New York: The Viking Press, 1980), pp. 260, 263-65, 267, 270-71, 275.

simply completed "the work designed by Lord Beaconsfield."¹⁸ While it is perhaps understandable that in 1886 party supporters would tend to view electoral success in terms of the advances made by Disraeli, it is significant that some twenty years later, having managed to sustain the party's position in office during most of that time, Salisbury fails to be credited with a fundamental or even a major role in the transformation of the Conservative party to the most vital organization of modern British politics. It is a tribute to the mythology of Disraeli, much of it manufactured and sustained by the Primrose League under the skillful supervision of Salisbury and Captain Middleton, that it is Disraeli, not Salisbury, who remains the focus of attention even to this day.

It was with respect to the annual visits to Disraeli's statue and the activities sponsored by the Primrose League that the former leader achieved his greatest popular tribute. Judged by reports contained in the newspapers, attendance at Parliament Square on Primrose Day remained high throughout the period under study.¹⁹

In 1896 a particularly large number of visitors, drawn out by the weather, a football match located nearby, and the added convenience of the anniversary falling on a Sunday, made their way to the statue at Westminster. While the statue had been more lavishly decorated in previous years, the arrangements, nevertheless, were profuse. The

¹⁸ The Morning Post, 19 April 1886, p. 5.

¹⁹ See The Times, 20 April 1883, pp. 10-11; 20 April 1888, p. 10; 20 April 1889, p. 6; 21 April 1890, p. 7; 20 April 1895, p. 7; 20 April 1896, p. 8; 20 April 1897, p. 10; 20 April 1900, p. 8; 20 April 1901, p. 13.

following passage is quoted at length in order to convey both the atmosphere surrounding the celebration and the tone of veneration adopted in reporting the event in "Conservative" newspapers.²⁰

The square pedestal had a broad band of primroses at its crown and base and also at each angle, and upon the panel facing Westminster Abbey was a solid tablet of three blooms with the words "Imperium et Libertas" worked upon it in purple violets. Here and there the predominant colour was relieved by blue hyacinths. Rising from the base of the whole structure and reaching nearly to the front face of the pedestal was a screen of trailed ivy, upon which in everlasting flowers was worked "V.R., 1877,"²¹ and the late earl's monogram. The whole screen was surmounted by a crescent-shaped scroll with the words "God bless our Empress Queen" in everlasting flowers. The wreaths were numerous, and were arranged on each side of the statue. They were mostly of primroses, and the majority came from the habitations of the Primrose League, Metropolitan and otherwise. Perhaps the most beautiful contribution of all was a floral shield from the Constitutional Club in Northumberland-avenue. It had worked upon it in pale blue and purple violets the words "Peace with Honour," a crown; crossed swords, and a monogram. Scores of admirers threw over bunches of primroses, and even single blooms, so that the ground in front of and around the statue was literally covered with pale yellow flowers.²²

While the crowds that gathered annually at Parliament Square ensured that it always remained the single largest demonstration of popular tribute, respects were also paid at Hughenden and indeed sponsored throughout the country.

²⁰ As Koss has indicated, The Times by 1886 might properly be counted as a "Conservative" newspaper. Koss, The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain, pp. 286-87.

²¹ The abbreviation "V.R." stands for "Victoria Regina."

²² The Times, 20 April 1896, p. 8.

The Grand Habitation held annually on or about the nineteenth of April was the League's greatest homage to the memory of Disraeli. The meeting also served as a celebration of the organization's triumphs, as well as those of the Conservative party. Delegates representing associations from all over Britain gathered in any one of a number of London's largest public halls to partake in this ritual of remembrance.

The decorations were elaborate. Attending members adorned themselves with primroses and League medals. Banners representing Habitations and various items of Disraelian memorabilia were placed throughout the hall. Color and pageantry infused the ceremony. Notable leaders of the Primrose League and a number of influential figures in the Conservative party stood on the dais overlooking the crowd. Their speeches were filled with praise for the growing number of members and contributions made by the organization. A variety of nationalist tunes opened and closed the proceedings, underscoring the League's commitment to a strong country and a vital empire.

A description of the Grand Habitation celebrations held in Her Majesty's Hall on the twentieth of April 1888 suggests the flavor of the occasion.

Primroses were worn by almost every one, together with the badges and decorations of the various orders of the League, and the theatre itself was freely decorated. The back of the stage was hung with the Union Jack, against which were arranged three trophies of flags around a banner bearing the inscription, "Success to the Primrose League." The wings were also hung with bunting and rich banners of many devices belonging to some of the more important habitations, and with ornamental shields bearing the monogram of the Primrose League. The boxes on either side were draped with primrose-coloured silk, and an edging of the same

material ran round the various balconies. From the proscenium depended the motto, "**Imperium et Libertas**," and at the center of the stage, just before the footlights, stood a marble bust of Lord Beaconsfield and a terra-cotta bust of Lord Salisbury. The armorial banners of many habitations, hung all around the theatre, completed the decorations.²³

III

The League's inventiveness, however, was not confined to an idealization of Lord Beaconsfield. Its greatest achievement was the creation of a conservative subculture from which the party could draw. In achieving this end, it helped to reformulate deferential relations in an age increasingly at odds with hierarchical patterns of social relations.

In recent years the use of the term "deference" has come under a great deal of criticism. The expression was devised by Bagehot in the mid-nineteenth century to refer to the "**theatrical show** of society," the love of the masses for atavistic displays of pageantry. This attraction, he argued, served to cement social class relations.²⁴

²³ Ibid., 20 April 1888, p. 10.

²⁴ Walter Bagehot, The English Constitution (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 248-51; The work was published originally as part of a series appearing in The Fortnightly Review between 1865 and 1867. The above edition is based on The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot edited by his sister-in-law, Mrs. Russell Barrington, and published by Longmans in 1915. Two fairly recent assessments of Bagehot's concept of deference include David Spring's, "Walter Bagehot and Deference," American Historical Review vol. 81, no. 3 (June, 1976), pp. 524-31 and Samuel Beer's "Tradition and Nationality: A Classic Revisited," American Political Science Review, vol. 68, no. 3 (September, 1974), pp. 1292-95.

Beginning in the 1950's and particularly in the 1960's, the terms deference and "embourgeoisement" were increasingly applied, on the one hand, to explain Conservative party triumphs and, on the other, to account for apparent working class quiescence.²⁵ In recent years the latter concept has fallen into disfavor as the result of studies undertaken by Pelling, Goldthorpe, Lockwood and others discounting the desire of the Labor Aristocracy to assume middle class values.²⁶

²⁵ Some of the key studies on deference during this period include writings by D.C. Moore, McKenzie and Silver, and Nordlinger. Moore's most informative work on the subject is his unpublished two volume Ph.D. thesis submitted to Columbia University in 1958 entitled, The Politics of Deference. His published writings on the subject include "Political Morality in Mid-Nineteenth Century England: Concepts, Norms, Violations," Victorian Studies vol. 13, no. 1 (September, 1969), pp. 5-36 and a revised version of his original thesis, The Politics of Deference (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1976). Both of the latter works focus on some of the philosophical issues associated with the decline of deference in the mid-nineteenth century. The studies by McKenzie and Silver, Angels in Marble and Nordlinger, The Working-Class Tories apply more specifically to patterns of twentieth century political deference.

Generally speaking historians endorsing the "embourgeoisement" thesis apply a marxist interpretation, focusing on the extent to which the more affluent sectors of the working class identified with middle class values, thereby defusing class tensions and the prospect of revolution. Two key works include E.J. Hobsbawm's, "The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth-century Britain," Labouring Men (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), a reprint of an article first published in 1954 and a more recent marxist-leninist study by John Foster entitled, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974).

²⁶ Henry Pelling, "Introduction," and "The Concept of the Labour Aristocracy," contained in the second edition of his Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), pp. xii-xiii, 37-61. J.H. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood, et. al. The Affluent Workers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) provides a case study of twentieth century labor relations which calls into question many of the assumptions held by proponents of "embourgeoisement." It should be noted, however, that Arno Mayer has recently revived the concept, applying it to the bourgeoisie's emulation of the aristocracy in his recently published work, The Persistence of the Old Regime. See particularly the Introduction and Chapter Two.

Deference has fared somewhat better, although it has been subject to a number of qualifications and conflicting interpretations.²⁷

For the purposes of this thesis, Newby's definition will be accepted.

The origins of deference lay in the process of legitimation whereby factual matters of power become imbued with evaluative overtones--not only **did** the squire rule the village but it was believed he **ought** to do so.²⁸

McKenzie's and Silver's distinction between deferential and secular working class Conservatives is also useful, although the terms might equally be applied to explain the basis of middle class support for the party. The deferential voter was one who favored the Tories out of a belief that their privileged backgrounds vis-a-vis that of

²⁷ Perhaps the most critical assessment of deference was provided by Dennis Kavanagh in "The Deferential English: A Comparative Critique," Government and Opposition vol. 6, no. 3 (May, 1971), pp. 333, 342, 347, 359-60. The article dismisses the term outright as ambiguous and not easily applicable to circumstances it purports to explain. Somewhat less condemnatory is Jessop's study which expands the distinction provided by McKenzie and Silver of Deferentials and Seculars to include two additional factors: social and cultural influences. However, these might easily be encompassed within McKenzie's and Silver's framework. Bob Jessop, Traditionalism, Conservatism and British Political Culture (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974), pp. 34-35.

Newby provides perhaps the most incisive revisionist approach, building on existing studies to provide a means of taking into account dialectical change and the distinction between deferential attitudes and behavior. H. Newby, "The Deferential Dialectic," Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 17, no. 2 (April, 1975), pp. 139-64. His concepts are applied to his study of East Anglia farm workers in The Deferential Worker (London: Allen Lane, 1977). Finally, Patrick Joyce in Work, Society and Politics examines deference with respect to "politics from below," studying the "culture of the factory" in order to explain the prevalence of popular conservatism in Lancashire. See Chapter Three, pp. 90-133.

²⁸ Newby, The Deferential Worker, p. 48.

their Liberal rivals made them more capable and effective as leaders. The secular individuals supported Conservatives for a variety of pragmatic reasons.²⁹

It should be stressed that deferential relations are not static, constantly evolving over time to reflect changing economic and social circumstances. Cannadine's studies are particularly useful in illuminating this feature. They demonstrate that as the monarchy and aristocracy were forced to concede power in the course of the late nineteenth century, popular support surfaced for their continued presence in social and political functions. The "amphibious" character of the nobility, demonstrating its ability to adapt to changing circumstances, helps explain its continued influence in the period preceding the First World War.³⁰

The Primrose League was particularly helpful in providing a forum from which to recast deferential relations. As Olney noted, the existence of the League was, in itself, an admission on the part of Conservatives that the traditional methods of political and social deference failed to apply.³¹ Thus, in the aftermath of the 1885 election, a Conservative from Lincolnshire reflected at a Primrose League meeting on the changing character of class relations in his constituency.

29 McKenzie and Silver, Angels in Marble, pp. 164-65.

³⁰ Cannadine, Lords and Landlords, pp. 21-25, 30-34, 36, 39, 224-25, 425. Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual," The Invention of Tradition, pp. 108, 114-15, 120-23, 133-38.

³¹ R.J. Olney, Lincolnshire Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 221.

Times are altered, and we have altered so much in our division, and I know the alteration amongst our own neighbours and men is extraordinary. . . . Instead of coming to the squire, the men go on their own ideas, which were put into their heads by men who ought to know better. . . . I may say that they really urged their opinions in places of worship, and these are the men who spoil our men and the chance—we had a little—of returning a good Conservative.³²

Seven years later Lord Spencer lamented the increasing predilection of some of his tenants to join the Primrose League and vote for the Conservatives in the 1892 General Election. Nevertheless, he remained resigned to their independent voter preference, despite his obvious dissatisfaction.

They had "habitations" in villages altogether belonging to me, and of course I could say nothing to tenants who took this line, in the heart of my property where at former Elections there were only 4 of 5 Tory votes in the Polling boxes, there were 50 this week. People here had little or no personal consideration in the fight and we Liberals cannot object, even if we regret to lose votes.³³

The pseudomedieval framework underlying the rituals of the Primrose League hinted at the innovative, indeed, modern mechanisms which were the driving force in reforging deferential relations. The adoption of the terms "Knights" and "Dames," the issuance of "Precepts," and the referral of local associations as "Habitations" reflected a conscious effort to conjure up a mythical past when all peoples lived in a state of rural bliss and maintained harmonious

³² *ibid.*, p. 220. For the influence of the Primrose League in Norfolk Villages, see L. Marion Springall, Laboring Life in Norfolk Villages (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1936), p. 111.

³³ Janet Howarth, "The Liberal Revival in Northamptonshire," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1969), p. 90.

social relations while chivalry reigned supreme.

Lady Randolph Churchill and her compatriots on the LGC might mock the titles assigned to members of the Primrose League, dubbing Knight Harbingers "Night Refugees," criticizing freely the "gaudy badges," and "ye ancient diplomas" printed on vellum for distribution to members. Nevertheless, no one doubted the seriousness of the task before them: the recruitment of a mass electorate to serve the cause of the Conservative party.³⁴

The Primrose League also drew upon various forms of rituals, many of them derived from masonic traditions dating back to the early nineteenth century.³⁵ Characteristically, however, they were diluted and transformed to meet the needs of a modern, political entity. An oath of loyalty was required of members, although this consisted essentially of a vow to affirm the three principles of the League. Initiation rites were never introduced. The most strenuous feature of induction was the payment of national and local fees.

34 The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill, pp. 135-37, 166-67.

35 By far the most useful historical study of rituals and their impact on modern social movements remains the final chapter of E.J. Hobsbawm's Primitive Rebels (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1954), entitled "Ritual in Social Movements." Other studies which are helpful include Hobsbawm's "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914" The Invention of Tradition, especially pp. 267-68, 270, 283; Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (New York: The Free Press, 1965), pp. 22, 472, 474-75, 491, a reprint of the 1915 edition published by Macmillan Comp.; Edward Shils and Michael Young, "The Meaning of the Coronation;" Raymond Firth, Symbols: Public and Private (New York: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 328, 335-36, 354; Robert Bock, Ritual in Industrial Society (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974), pp. 56, 61-62, 64-65, 73, 98-99, 102-03; and Steven Lukes, Essays in Social Theory (London: Macmillan Press, 1977), p. 72.

Periodic meetings were held to promote activities and bolster support for constitutional causes. Badges, primroses, banners, and other symbols served as a means of identification, revealing adherents of the faith. The "communion" of members was achieved through the widespread observation of Primrose day and through the attendance of local representatives at the yearly meeting of Grand Habitation. The above practices had their origin in masonic rituals.

Nevertheless, it would be wise not to overemphasize the links between the forms of symbolism adopted by the Primrose League and those practiced by early nineteenth century fraternal organizations. Only during its initial stages of formation did the League operate as a secret society. It quickly expanded its ranks from a rather elite corps, comprising of some relatively prominent members of the middle class and a sprinkling of aristocrats, to include a broad selection of the British community. In doing so, the League distinguished itself quite visibly from the selective, quasi-intellectual corps which typically represented the masonic brotherhoods. Men, women, and eventually children were permitted to join, making the League the first political organization to encompass families as a central feature of its membership.

Unlike secret societies of the early nineteenth century, which were based on hierarchical patterns of organization, most of which were unknown to the participants, the Primrose League recognized only four gradations of membership. These included, in descending order of importance, Knight Imperial and Dame of the LGC, Knight Harbinger and Dame, Knight Companion and Dame Order of Merit, and Associate. All

four levels were visible, both to the public at large and the individuals involved.

Any member might achieve the highest level, Knight Imperial or Dame of the LGC, simply by paying a guinea annual subscription. In addition the Dames were responsible for contributing yearly to their respective Habitations. Participation within the executive, however, at both the local and particularly the Central Office, was more selective in character, often determined by an individual's privileged social and economic background. Finally, it must be noted that while many masonic lodges were involved in dissident or even revolutionary activity, members of the Primrose League were charged with maintaining the existing political order and with actively resisting reformist policies. All their efforts were geared to this end, whether manifested through electoral canvassing or by promotion of social entertainments.

It is perhaps with respect to medals that the Primrose League reveals its truly modern character. At least thirty-seven variations of decorations existed by 1901.³⁶ They included full dress badges, studs and broaches, and special service bars to denote election work or efforts to establish Habitations. A wide variety of other medals were

³⁶ The analysis provided is based on a fifteen page pamphlet describing the badges offered for sale through the Primrose League, circa 1901. A copy is contained in the Scottish Branch Minute Book records.

offered differentiating the various categories of participation.³⁷ in imitation of the Jubilee honors awarded by the Queen on the fortieth and fiftieth anniversaries of her ascension, the Primrose League offered its own counterpart beginning in 1887: the Order of the Grand Star, composed of five grades of distinguished service.

Thus, in an age gone "mad for honors," members could purchase "titles" and badges at the minimal price of a few shillings. If a merchant could not qualify for royal Knighthood, he might, nevertheless, achieve recognition as a Primrose Knight, conceivably obtaining several badges of distinction over and above his "Knighthood." He might become a Knight Imperial or obtain any one or all of the following: a special service, founder's, or delegate's bars.

A Knight seeking honors might also achieve the position of an officer for any number of positions including Divisional President, Secretary, Ruling Councillor, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Treasurer, and Executive Councillor, not to mention other, less rarefied, titles. Years of devoted service might result in the most coveted award of all, the Order of the Grand Star. He would have the opportunity to display all his medals at local annual meetings or as a delegate attending the Grand Habitation. The Knight's distinguished position would be instantaneously recognized by all participants, thereby granting him a

³⁷ Among the medals designated were those allocated for the various categories of membership: Knight Imperial, Knight Harbinger, Dame, Knight Companion, Dame Order of Merit, and Associate. Badges were also designated for officers including Divisional Presidents, Ruling Councillors or Dame Presidents, Honorary Secretaries, Honorary Treasurers, and Executive Council members. Wardens, Canvassers, Cycling Corp Captains, Lieutenants, and club members, as well as, Primrose Buds also qualified for decorations.

measure of social esteem.

In many respects Bagehot's assessment of deferential relations in his work The English Constitution (1866-67) is more suited to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than to the mid-Victorian age in which he wrote. His concentration on the form (social) rather than the content (economic) of these interactions is far more pertinent to the later period when the public increasingly endorsed the fanfare of elaborate ceremony. In noting the love of the English for a dramatic presentation he wrote,

A certain state passes before them; a certain pomp of great men; a certain spectacle of beautiful women; a wonderful scene of wealth and enjoyment is displayed, and they [the people] are coerced by it. Their imagination is bowed down; they feel they are not equal to the life which is revealed to them. . . . This play is played in every district. . . . The climax . . . is the Queen: nobody supposes that their house is like the court; their life like her life; her orders like their orders.³⁸

Bagehot was prescient in recognizing the public's enthusiasm for "a splendid procession."

The apparent rulers of the English nation are like the most imposing personages of a splendid procession: it is by them the mob are influenced; it is they whom the spectator cheers. The real rulers are secreted in second-rate carriages; no one cares for them or asks about them, but they are obeyed implicitly and unconsciously by reason of the splendour of those who eclipsed and preceded them.³⁹

³⁸ Bagehot, The English Constitution, p. 248.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 249.

Bagehot exaggerated the extent to which the "eclipse" has already occurred in the mid-nineteenth century. He failed to take into account the ability of the notables to endure even as they were forced to concede power and influence.⁴⁰ Bagehot also did not foresee that the love of ceremony grew at the very time that the position of the aristocracy was waning.⁴¹ Finally, he was too quick to assume that the entire nation is in accord, at one in endorsing the spectacle of grandeur.⁴² Despite these limitations, Bagehot, perhaps more than any other contemporary writer, realized the importance of symbols and the display of pageantry in nurturing the basis of popular support for the political order from the citizens of the new democracy.

Bagehot's descriptions cited above are particularly well suited to explaining the appeal of the Primrose League. Each local association could be counted on to supply its annual assortment of teas, entertainments, and fetes which, as often as not, were overseen by one of the notables residing in the district. Both Ostrogorski and Robb have indicated that all classes were represented at Habitation

⁴⁰ F.M.L. Thompson in fact dates the "eclipse" a half century later to the period spanning the years between the First and Second World Wars. Thompson, English Landed Society, pp. 1-2, 290-91, 295, 299, 327.

⁴¹ Cannadine, Lords and Landlords, pp. 21-25, 30, 33-34, 36, 319, 224-25, 425. Idem, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual," The Invention of Tradition, pp. 108, 114-15, 120-23, 133-38.

⁴² N. Birnbaum, "Monarchies and Sociologists: A Reply to Professor Shils and Mr. Young," Sociological Review, new series, vol. 3, no. 1 (1955), pp. 5-8, 13, 20 and Lukes, Essays in Social Theory, pp. 62-64. While the above authors were responding to the arguments presented by Shils and Young in "The Meaning of the Coronation," many of their criticisms apply to Bagehot's interpretation of deference.

functions, although individuals from the lower middle and middle classes appear to have been featured most prominently.⁴³ The activities sponsored by the League provided an opportunity for the rank and file members to mingle with the local gentry or aristocracy, however superficial the character of these interactions. As Ostrogorski noted,

By paying a subscription of a shilling or sixpence,⁴⁴ one becomes the colleague of titled or simply rich personages, one obtains access to their drawing-rooms and parks, which they place at the disposal of the League for its meetings, and there the humblest can rub up against the great ones of the earth.⁴⁵

According to Ostrogorski,

With a little more distinction or wealth, a woman of the lower middle-class can take her place, in the committees of which there is no lack in the Habitations, by the side of titled ladies, perhaps marchionesses or even duchesses, and, seated in their grand drawing-room, discuss the affairs of the Habitation on an equal footing. . . . Her husband or brother, the "knight" who spends his life in selling mustard or candles, will receive his cup of tea from the hands of a "dame" who is a great lady.⁴⁶

Ostrogorski overstated the degree to which a Marchioness and a shopkeeper's wife might be on an equal footing in a committee meeting as well as the frequency with which members of the lower middle class

⁴³ Robb, The Primrose League, pp. 148-50, 166. Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, vol. 1, pp. 544-45, 548-49.

⁴⁴ The fees cited by Ostrogorski were generally representative of the annual sums paid by Associates to their Habitations, although the amount varied according to the local guidelines established.

⁴⁵ Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties, vol. 1, p. 544.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 545.

actually held positions as Knights or Dames. Nevertheless, his analysis of the social advantages conferred through membership was cogent.

For many members, the activities offered provided the key attraction. As Robb realized, these gatherings were political propaganda cleverly disguised with a coating of popular entertainment. Frequently, however, the latter threatened to subsume the former. Lady Churchill's recollections of the meetings of Habitations were typical.

The opening ceremonies were often quaint in their conceptions, a mixture of grave and gay, serious and frivolous—speeches from members of Parliament, interspaced with songs and even recitations, sometimes of a comical nature. The meeting would end with the enrollment of converts.⁴⁷

Indeed, to many, the activities of the Primrose League appeared a veritable circus. Thus in 1888 a Liberal M.P. from Warwick complained to the Home Office of a race held at the annual fete of Rigby Habitation. In the contest several dogs, including a terrier, as well as a lamb and a hen were said to have competed, guided by their owners by means of strings attached to the animals' legs. In response to the complaint, Mr. Matthews, the Home Secretary stated,

It was not a lamb that competed, but a three-year-old-Welsh sheep, and a very small terrier, which was much frightened by the sheep, and took care to keep out of its way. The hen, when brought to the post, settled herself on the grass, refused to move, and was at once taken away. The police assure me that no cruelty took place, nor was there any protest on the part of the crowd. I see nothing in the circumstances to justify or call for any further interference on my part.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill, p. 16.

⁴⁸ Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd Series, 327 (1888): 794.

Nor was the animal race in any respect unique. At one executive committee meeting of the LGC, Lady Salisbury rebuked a member who suggested that an entertainment sponsored by a local Habitation was a little vulgar. "Vulgar? Of course it is vulgar, but that is why we have got on so well."⁴⁹

The Habitation activities spawned a profusion of entertainers including punchinellos, jugglers, ventriloquists, and pierrots, all of whom vied with oriental illusions, wax works, conjuring tricks, and marionettes for principal billing on the programs. As Robb noted, the functions were particularly important in small, rural communities during the bleak, winter months, helping to solidify the local conservative community.⁵⁰

Entertainment proved to be an essential part of executive committee functions, both at the Central Office and local Habitation. A number of privately run agencies emerged, many of them advertising through The Primrose League Gazette. The Primrose Entertainment Bureau, one of the larger concerns, promised

Conjurers and Ventriloquists Combined-Punch and Judy-up-to-date Cinematographs-Nigger Minstrels-Clowns-High Class Vocalists and Entertainers-Glee Singers-Humorous Reciters-Bands-Pianists-Sketch Combinations-Shadow Pantomimes, and any and every kind of Entertainment or Amusement as required, either for Indoor or Open Air.⁵¹

49 The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill, p. 136. Also cited in Robb, The Primrose League, p. 87.

50 Robb, The Primrose League, pp. 89-90.

51 The Primrose League Gazette, 1 January 1900, p.2.

The social advantages conferred upon joining a local Habitation were many, consisting of a frequent round of "teas," concerts, dances, balls, and outings, as well as grand summer fetes. In some cases bicycling and children's activities were also sponsored through affiliated Cycling and Juvenile branches. Of all the activities, the fetes were the most elaborate. They were often sponsored by several Habitations and were, where possible, held on the grounds of one of the more prominent landowners in the region. Events were sponsored throughout the day, seasoned by a sprinkling of political speeches.

The subculture extended beyond the parade of entertainments to include wedding rites and commemorations for departed members, biographical sketches, and even Dame reflections on subjects perceived to be of popular interest.⁵² One particularly festive occasion was the marriage of Miss Winifred Maitland to Thomas Berry Cusack-Smith in the spring of 1886. England gave the event extended coverage, billing it, appropriately enough, as "A Primrose Marriage."

Cusack-Smith, by training a barrister, served as Political Secretary for the Central Office. The second daughter of Rev. Maitland of Loughton Hall, Essex, Miss Maitland participated as a Dame in the League. The bride and groom were married in the parish church of the bride's father. Memorabilia of the Primrose League were generously

⁵² England, 1 May 1886, p. 6; The Primrose (Bournemouth), 5 March 1887, pp. 7-8; The Primrose League Gazette, 1 March 1899, p. 6; 2 October 1899, p. 1. See Chapter Four, page 177, footnotes 95 and 96 for the prominence of obituaries, particularly in the late 1890's. The Primrose (Bournemouth), 1 January 1887, p. 1; 5 March 1887, p. 3; 1 July 1896, p. 6; 1 April 1899, p. 7; 1 June 1901, p. 10. The Primrose (Bournemouth), 1 January 1887, p.2; The Primrose League Gazette, 1 October 1898, p. 7; 1 August 1899, p. 9.

displayed throughout the course of the ceremony.

The bride had a bunch of primroses in her hair, and the bridegroom wore his badge of office. The bridesmaids--nine in number--were attired in costumes of Primrose nun's veiling of British manufacture, with hats to match; they each wore the badge of a dame of the Primrose League, and a brooch of primroses and pearls, the gift of and specially designed by the bridegroom; they also carried gilt fans, on which were their diplomas, surrounded by wreaths of real primroses, the gift also of the bridegroom. The guests in the Church wore the badges of the League. At the conclusion of the service, while the register was being signed, the National Anthem was played on the organ.⁵³

IV

As has been previously demonstrated, the Primrose League placed a tremendous emphasis on the printed word, relying not only on its own newspapers, leaflets, and Precepts for coverage, but also on a variety of Conservative dailies and weeklies. The late nineteenth century was an age when many politicians were convinced loyalties could be won or lost through the presentation of reading material. An especially interesting feature of the period, was the use of story, verse, and advertisement as a means of maintaining a conservative subculture.

The material written for children is, in many respects, the most revealing literature available for analysis since it addresses in allegorical fashion many of the issues most central to the doctrines of the Primrose League. A key feature of these tales is the conscientious reworking of deferential relations in an effort to maintain the

⁵³ England, 1 May 1886, p. 6.

existing order by appealing to the new modern, mass audience.

The story A Little Primrose Knight was conceived for a primary school audience. The young hero featured in the novella is the son of the Lord of the Manor, Lord Dashleigh. The young boy is actively involved in assisting his uncle, who is running as a Conservative candidate in the 1885 General Election. The gentleman has only recently returned as a hero from the Sudan campaign. During the contest there is much threatening talk of "a cow and three acres" by a neighboring Liberal landlord, only recently raised to the peerage. His political disposition and recently acquired title cast dispersions on his character.

The plot stresses the highly competitive nature of the election, the outcome of which ultimately hinges on a single vote. The young Primrose Knight is able to persuade his father's eldest tenant, "Old Gammon," to vote for the Tories. His is the deciding ballot of the election. The man dies shortly afterward having, nevertheless, done his duty. The village is saved from the fate of "the subversive Liberals."⁵⁴

Another story, similarly titled, The Primrose Knight, was also conceived for the young school child.⁵⁵ It is a romantic tale of Phoebe Bigg and her Primrose Knight. Phoebe is cast in the character

⁵⁴ By a Primrose Dame, A Little Primrose Knight (London: W.H. Allen and Comp., 1890); B.L. 12807.p.28. Robb, The Primrose League provides a synopsis of the story, pp. 172-73.

⁵⁵ Miss Ethel Ross Baker, The Primrose Knight. The novella was serialized by England, 5 June 1886, p. 13; 12 June 1886, p. 12; 19 June, p. 12; 26 June, p. 12; 10 July 1886, p. 12; 17 July 1886, p. 2; 24 July, p. 15; 31 July 1886, p. 2.

of Cinderella, her Knight, a Prince Charming. The neglected fourth daughter in a household containing five siblings, she serves as handmaiden to her elder sisters. Her brother, Joshua, who is sympathetic to Radical policies, is chosen as a Liberal candidate for the district.

The family resides in "New Hall" since Phoebe's father, Erasmus, made his fortune in manufacturing. They serve as symbols of the "new wealth" infusing modern politics. The family is portrayed as participating in the "fast life," engaged in an endless round of parties and noncharitable dinners, the elder daughters arrayed in extravagant clothing and elaborate jeweled accessories to match their opulent life-style. Phoebe, a waif of a child, simple in both mind and attire, is left to catch and fetch.

The local Conservative candidate, Sir Newton Sneade, is depicted as reflecting the Tories of the old school, reclusive and ill-equipped to assume the methods and manners demanded by modern politics. One day prior to the official announcement of the Conservative candidate, he dies. This enables the Primrose Knight, Sir Douglas Wenmore, to assume his position.

Wenmore, a local baronet, has been campaigning on behalf of Sneade. He had spent a number of years abroad and is consequently unknown by local residents. Distressed by five years of gross mismanagement at the hands of the Liberal government (1880-1885), he resolves to work incognito as a Primrose Knight in his local district so as to earn, rather than receive, his countrymen's affections. An ardent Conservative, "a Radical would pull down the Throne, and the

House of Lords, and the Church about our ears, and have everybody
"equal"⁵⁶ he, nevertheless, is receptive and approachable, passing
easily among the people.

Sir Douglas Wenmore is a character designed to represent the
"new" Conservative party. He is open and courting of his public,
accustomed to working within crowds while no less committed to the
preservation of constitutional principles. His ease among the farmers
and townsmen alike earns him their unstinting support, a loyalty
enhanced further by the subsequent discovery of his noble lineage.

Impressed by the Primrose Knight's speeches, Phoebe secretly
campaigns for him. Her political naivete enables her to mistakenly
believe that her actions do not jeopardize her brother's position,
believing, as she did, that his dislike of Gladstone reflected an
opposition to Liberal principles, rather than an affinity for
Radicalism. Her electoral efforts consist primarily of collecting wild
primroses to be distributed amongst supporters of the Conservative
party. The Primrose Knight narrowly wins the contest, although Joshua
is subsequently returned in a local by-election. They remain lifelong
political rivals.

Phoebe is cast aside by her family because of her Conservative
sympathies. She is taken in by Wenmore's sister and blossoms into an
emotionally mature, sincere, attractive young woman. She eventually
marries Sir Douglas Wenmore. Her father, brother, and sisters continue
to display their bad breeding, engaging in conspicuous consumption,

⁵⁶ Baker, The Primrose Knight, quotation taken from the serial
issue appearing in England, 24 July 1886, p. 15.

poor taste, loose morals, and atrocious manners.

Both stories are significant in a number of respects. Despite the romantic plots, they focus primarily on the attributes of the new Conservative party and its Liberal rival. Emphasis is placed on the modern methods of political elections, on the need to gain anew the support of the rural community, and the ever present threat of a Radical government in undermining constitutional principles.

The old patterns of agrarian workers deferring to local nobility appear to have been lost. In their place is a sustained effort by the Conservatives to reforge the alliance. This is to be achieved by presenting a revitalized party; one which is, like its former leader Disraeli, receptive to the people while at the same time remaining committed to traditional principles. It is the intention of these stories to nurture the creation of a new generation of politically committed youths who will be willing to promote the Primrose League.

Primers written for young children were even less subtle in their presentation. A number of imperialist readers were produced at the turn of the century and advertised within The Primrose League Gazette for possible appeal to Primrose Buds. One such work was entitled the "ABC for Baby Patriots." Written by Mrs. Ernest Ames, it recites the alphabet in nationalist terms. One particular stanza noted,

N is the Navy
We keep at Spithead
It's a sight that makes foreigners

Wish they were dead.⁵⁷

A companion book by the same author entitled, "Pictures for Little Englanders," anticipated the thesis of Robinson and Gallagher.⁵⁸

In building railways Johnny Bull
Is anything but a tyro;
He now is seeking to connect

The Cape of Good Hope to Cairo.⁵⁹

A common feature at the end of the nineteenth century was the prevalence of nationalist songs for children. The Radical counterpart to the Primrose League, begun in the 1890's, was the Clarion Society. Like the League, it sponsored a special program for children entitled the "Cinderella Club." In large measure it resembled the Juvenile branches, although exhibiting a decidedly socialist flavor.

The Cinderella Club was conceived as a means of providing poor children with both a good meal (tea) and entertainment. Nevertheless, on the first occasion of the event at the local Swansea association, the youths, after devouring their meals, spontaneously began singing the latest imperial songs, "Bravo! Dublin Fusiliers" and "Soldiers of the Queen," much to the misgivings of their hosts.

⁵⁷ Mrs. Ernest Ames, ABC for Baby Patriots, advertised in The Primrose League Gazette, 1 November 1900, p. 20.

⁵⁸ Namely, that throughout much of the nineteenth century British foreign policy was based on acquiring and maintaining influence in African and Egyptian territories as a means of ensuring a safe route to India. Robin Robinson, John Gallagher, and Alice Denny, Africa and the Victorians (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), pp. 9-10, 13, 15, 17-18.

⁵⁹ Mrs. Ernest Ames, Pictures for Little Englanders, advertised in The Primrose League Gazette, 1 November 1900, p. 20.

It was a strange incongruity of fate that prompted them to sing these songs in a Socialist Society's hall, but the little ones seemed so happy we could not disturb them.⁶⁰

In addition to the stories and verses provided for the benefit of children, England and The Primrose League Gazette periodically sponsored prize competitions for verses and songs endorsing a Conservative vision. The lyrics published in England on Primrose Day, 1885 were in many respects typical. In "The Song of the Dynamitard," a demolitions expert is characterized as pursuing violence for the cause of an independent Ireland by means of Liberal support and American money. One of the stanzas reads,

Bastard both in name and nation,
Extract pure of blatant funk,
I have made a reputation
As [a] base white-Liberal skunk.
I'm not an honest traitor,
For my courage is too weak,
But a crawling agitator.
And a mercenary sneak.⁶¹

Another contribution featured Gladstone, "The Great Disintegrator," chopping away at the great tree of Britain.⁶² A third was composed to the tune of the "Red, White, and Blue."⁶³ It decried the weak and vacillating policies of Gladstone's administration, particularly his government's policy in the Sudan and the reformist measures "propelled by a Birmingham screw."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ The Clarion, 10 March 1900, p. 75.

⁶¹ England, 10 January 1885, p. 5.

⁶² Ibid., p. 9.

⁶³ Ibid., 4 April 1885, p. 7.

⁶⁴ A reference to Joseph Chamberlain, whose fortune was derived from profits received from the sale of the family's holdings in

Conservatives were urged to unite to "wipe out the wood-chopper's whim," in an effort to preserve the name of "our Beaconsfield." The verse closes on a despairing note, calling for Conservative to resist the onslaught of the "the Radical Crew."

Sedition now spreads devastation,
 And war hurls its pitiless storm;
 The outcome of base vacillating,
 The cant of so-called Reform!
 With Gladstone the shifty to guide us-
 Propelled by a Birmingham screw-
 'Tis no wonder all nations deride us,
 And flout at the Red, White, and Blue.

Conservatives! Pull out together,
 And wipe out the wood-choppers whim;
 Shall the name of our Beaconsfield whither?
 Shall the cause that he fought for grow dim?

The prospects of Britain are blighted-
 The work of a radical crew!
 For our Queen and our Country united.
 We stand by the Red, White and Blue!^{6^}

While most of the contributions featured were sorely lacking in meter and rhyme, their messages were clear. They affirmed common Primrose themes: a threatened empire, the need for a union of classes, resistance to "Radical" (Gladstonian) reforms, and the idealization of Disraeli's domestic and foreign policies.

a screw-manufacturing business in Birmingham. His "unauthorized program," espoused while campaigning as a Liberal candidate in the 1885 General Election, was often cited by Conservatives as an indication of the truly Radical character of Liberal government. The impression was underscored by a plank on the program advocating "three acres and a cow" to each agricultural worker.

⁶⁵ England, 4 April 1885, p. 7.

In addition to the activities, leaflets, songs, verses, and stories produced by the League, the newspapers The Primrose League Gazette and England contained advertisements from Conservative businessmen. Many of the products were marketed under the Primrose name, despite the fact that they were not directly affiliated with the League, receiving at best only an official endorsement. The items were diverse, although primroses sold by florists on Primrose Day undoubtedly received the largest volume of sales.

The advertisements included "The Primrose Toothpaste. A Toilet Luxury! Every Constitutionalist Should Use." The Primrose Cigarette Company promoted its special "Disraeli" brand, every cigarette featuring "our Trade Mark--a Primrose and 'Peace with Honour' in Gold letters."⁶⁶ A "Primrose Driving Apron"⁶⁷ was listed as well as the names of performers or their agencies willing to provide services for local entertainments.⁶⁸

V

During the period under study the Primrose League constituted a conservative subculture, providing a range of activities and functions which reached into the day-to-day lives of its participants. The

66 Ibid., 13 August 1887, p. 1.

67 The Primrose League Gazette, 1 January 1895, p. 1.

68 See, for example, the advertisements featured in The Primrose League Record, 7 August 1886, p. iii and The Primrose League Gazette 6 February 1892, p. ii; 1 June 1895, p. ii; 1 January 1900, pp. 1-2.

Conservative M.P.s' thanking local Habitations for their efforts suggests the effective working of the organization throughout the country.⁷⁰ More important, in some respects, than an exacting determination of the Primrose League's contribution to electoral gains and losses, was the environment provided for the promotion of a conservative subculture. For it helped to create the foundations for a broad based coalition which would identify with the party over the course of the years to come.

⁷⁰ The Primrose League Gazette, 1 August 1895, p. 8, 12-13; 2 September 1895, p. 8; 1 November 1900, pp. 4-7; 1 December 1900, pp. 4-5; 1 January 1900, p. 5; 1 February 1901, p. 4.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Local Studies

We have a crude mass to instruct, and only simple tools should be put into their hands. . . . An urban electorate of 300,000 must be dominated by the mass or the poorest on the register. Divided into five--some one or more of the districts will be under the influence of the more intelligent, the various classes living in a great measure apart. A caucus to manipulate a 300,000 constituency and to handle four or five members, is a power that will be felt. Divide this by five each independent they are simply committees of the old sort, of no power beyond their own district and very jealous of interference from extraneous influences. With subdivision the caucus will be broken.

A.B. Forwood to the Marquis of
Salisbury, 20 October 1884

I

This chapter examines a number of disparate themes characterizing the practices of the Primrose League at the local level. The first of the points considered is the uniformity of Habitation practices. Given the size and scale of operations, this was one of the most striking features of the organization. Another theme considered is the importance of the Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 in encouraging the development of the Primrose League as an extra-parliamentary organ serving the interests of the Conservative party.

In order to demonstrate both the continuity of operations and the distinctive features of local organization, seven brief case studies have been provided, several of which are based on records obtained from County Record Offices. Among the Habitations examined

are Ladywood (Birmingham), Huddersfield (West Riding, Yorkshire), Whitehaven (Cumberland), Garstang (Lancashire), and two associations in Gloucestershire, Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation and Thornbury. The SGC has also been considered as a regional organization in order to explore issues relevant to Scotland in this chapter.¹ With the

¹ The Ladywood Primrose Magazine (March-December, 1887) renamed The Edgbaston, Harborne, and Ladywood Primrose Magazine by 1892 (vol. 3, no. 36) constitutes the key source available for Ladywood Habitation. A copy is kept at the Birmingham Public Library, L76.21. The library also provides a number of related materials including the Annual Report (1894) of the Birmingham Conservative Association, Ladywood Ward; Birmingham Institutions F/3. Aston Manor Habitation, Fine Arts Exhibition Catalogue of Exhibitions, Lp76.211. E. Lawrence Levy, The Midland Conservative Club (1909), L76.21.

The records of Huddersfield Habitation include the Minutes (1886-1898); Cash Book (1887-1900); List of Knights¹ and Dames' Register (1896-1900); Cheque Book (1896-1900); and Receipt Book (1897-1900). Ramsden Estate Papers, Kirklees District Archives, DD/RE/160-5.

The materials relating to Whitehaven Habitation include the Minutes (1888-1902); Cash Book (1889-1902); Bank Book (1897-1900); three Registers (1893-97, 1898-1901, 1902); and the 1897, 1899, and 1904 Roll of Habitations. Lowther Family Archives, Cumbria County Council Record Office, DL0NS.

The Garstang Habitation records include the Minutes (1894-1911); the Registrar (1897-1909), and Cash Book (1894-1911). The Papers of Fitzherbert Brockholes, Lancashire Record Office, DDFZ.

The Gloucestershire Record Office includes the documents of a number of Habitations, although the Nailsworth and Horsley and Thornbury Habitations are the only detailed minute records included in this collection. The Minutes of the Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation (1897-1899) were deposited by the Duke of Beaufort. Gloucestershire Record Office, DD219 618 4887. Thornbury Habitation Minutes (1887-1910), D1578. Materials pertaining to the Coin Valley Habitation include the minutes of three meetings (1885-86), a Register (1885-88), Accounts (1885-90), correspondence (1885-1893), and miscellaneous documents. The correspondence of Sir Gerald Codrington, Honorary Secretary of the Chipping Sodbury (Codrington) Habitation, are also housed in the Gloucestershire Record Office, D1610/X31. The Badminton Habitation Cash Book is also available, courtesy of the Duke of Beaufort, D2700/602.2.1.

The Gloucester Public Library contains some relevant materials including Warrants, Diplomas, bylaws, as well as a Register for Hardwicke Habitation, and the 1899 Roll of Habitations.

The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association located in Edinburgh contains the records of the SGC. These include two minutes books covering the years 1885-1904 and 1904-1920; a Cash Ledger (1884-1895), a Ledger providing the income and expenditure accounts (1886-

exception of Ladywood, all of the above studies were selected based on the abundance of materials available. Ladywood was chosen more as a function of its locality, in the heart of Chamberlain's Liberal Unionist Birmingham, than for its extensive collection.

Another issue examined is the tension existing between Conservative Associations and Habitations and within the organization of the Primrose League itself. Chapter Seven concludes with a general assessment of the declining performance of the Primrose League in the late 1890's as measured by the performance of the Habitations under review in the case studies.

II

The Redistribution Act of 1885 achieved the essential objectives proposed by Forwood in October, 1884. The creation of single member districts in county and borough constituencies provided a deterrent to the more effective methods of block voting executed so effectively by the Birmingham caucus.

Not content with the advantages conferred through the tactics of electoral division, the Tories set out to ensure that a network of Conservative Associations and Habitations would nurture a popular resistance to reform. In the case of the Primrose League, this was achieved by raising the threatening specter of imperial disintegration

1917); a Primrose League Scottish Branch Manual (circa 1903); and a pamphlet listing the authorized badges of the Primrose League (circa 1901).

and counterbalanced by the enticing prospect of varietal entertainment. The method was to serve the Conservatives well in the years to come.

The blend of political and social activities sponsored by Habitations was in no respect unique. Greenall and particularly Garrard have both noted the "modern" character of "popular Conservatism" in the Lancashire town of Salford between the years 1868 and 1880.² The use of entertainment as a means of attracting members was also applied in Salford by the opposition. In 1879 an inaugural ceremony was held by the Greengate Liberal Club, located in one of the poorer districts in the town. The public was encouraged to participate in the amusements offered. A science exhibit was one of the featured attractions.

Mr. Wooley provided an electric battery, and, by permission of the patentee, a splendid telephone; Mr. William Leach exhibited a polariscope, a microscope etc.; Mr. Arthur Shafto amused the people vastly by a series of electric shock administered to the audience by his battery. There was a large and varied display of botanical and rare geological specimens.³

The Primrose League distinguished itself from the organizations sponsored by Conservatives and Liberal parties between the Second Reform Act and the 1880 General Election by the rapidity of its growth, the size and breadth of its operations, and the uniformity of its functions. No other organization in Britain was able to match its

² R.L. Greenall, "Popular Conservatism in Salford," Northern History, vol. 9 (1974), pp. 125, 127, 135, 137-38. John A. Garrard, "Parties, Members and Voters After 1867: A Local Study," The Historical Journal, vol. 20, no. 1 (1977), pp. 146-47, 149, 151.

³ Garrard, "Parties, Members and Voters After 1867," The Historical Journal (1977), p. 150, citing the Salford Weekly News, 17 March 1879, p. 3.

official claims: one million members by 1891 and over two million by 1910. Even if the more modest figures obtained from the 1888 Roll are assumed, 1,730 Habitations and more than five hundred thousand members, the figures remained unchallenged by any other auxiliary or party organ.

Given the size of the Primrose League and the limited means available for disseminating information in late Victorian Britain, the most notable feature of the organization was the uniformity of its operations. This was achieved despite the absence of three key twentieth century forms of mass communication: television, radio, and telephone. In large measure the Primrose League overcame the restrictions imposed by large distances and diverse local customs by relying on newspapers sponsored by the League and an assortment of Conservative dailies and weeklies.

Newspapers were supplemented by Precepts issued through the Central Office to the executive bodies of local Habitations informing the associations of changes in policies and practices. Compliance was ensured, both by the hierarchical pattern of Primrose League organization and through the supervision of a national network of agents employed to enforce continuity and efficiency throughout the country. Conformity was reinforced at the grass-roots level through the dissemination of information at public and general meetings and by means of the Wardens, who visited individual members, conveyed messages, and collected dues.

The universal character of Habitation operations was striking. Most could be expected to have a Ruling Councillor or Dame President or

both in addition to an Honorary Secretary, an Executive Committee, and several Wardens working on behalf of the association. Periodic meetings were held by the executive, their frequency determined by the level of activity maintained by the Habitation. Generally speaking an association whose officers met on at least a monthly basis in order to review finances, receive reports from Wardens regarding the subdistrict under their scrutiny, and plan general meetings indicated a prosperous organization. Subcommittees were frequently formed from the executive in order to plan large gatherings.

The sponsorship of six or more social events in a year, over and above any volunteer work performed on behalf of a political candidate, indicated a fairly active association. In some cases, as with Huddersfield Habitation, Wardens organized functions in their districts, taking care to coordinate activities with the local Conservative Association or Club.⁴ Rank and file members generally confined their participation to general meetings and, to a lesser degree, to the periods surrounding elections when they were recruited as volunteers to serve on behalf of the local Unionist candidate.

Typically, general meetings were divided into two basic categories, political lectures and social functions. Political meetings generally featured as their central attraction one or more of the following: a local M.P. or prospective candidate, a Primrose or party agent, and an assortment of speakers drawn from all over Britain and occasionally extending as far away as South Africa. Topics were

⁴ Huddersfield Habitation Minutes, 12 March 1888; 12 April 1889; 19 April 1890; 4 April 1891; 20 June 1892; 21 July 1894.

selected from national themes of central concern to the Conservative party: Home Rule, the British Empire, and other current political issues.

More characteristic, however, were the evenings when social entertainment reigned supreme. Frequently these gatherings were dances or varietal shows. The latter might include a varied program given by selected members for the benefit of the entire Habitation. Patriotic and humorous songs were sung, comic skits performed, passages read, and musical instruments played. The contributions of members were frequently supplemented by a semiprofessional band, acting troupe, or ensemble group hired to perform.

During one of the intervals between performances the Ruling Councillor or invited speaker addressed the audience on a topic of political importance. Typically the speeches were confined to fairly brisk presentations, no Habitation wishing to lose its broad base of membership through an undue emphasis on political subjects.⁵ The evenings generally concluded with a singing of the national anthem. The highlight of the winter season was generally an elaborate ball while summer festivities usually featured a fete held upon the estate of a local notable.

While social functions assumed undisputed primacy among the activities sponsored by the Habitations, nevertheless, political activities held an important place in the functions of the Primrose

⁵ An outlook shared by the local Conservative Associations. See John A. Bridges, Reminiscences of A Country Politician (London: T. Werner Laurie Clifford's Inn, 1906), p. 52.

League. In large measure this was the indirect result of the Corrupt Practices Act (1883) which placed rather stringent limitations on the expenditures made by parliamentary candidates. In the English, Welsh, and Scottish boroughs, candidates were permitted to use only £350 during an election campaign in communities with fewer than 2,000 registered voters. In the larger boroughs individuals contesting office might spend a maximum of £380 with an additional £30 for each additional 1,000 voters.⁶

In the county constituencies the figures were greater, reflecting the larger expenses incurred by the candidates in their efforts to reach electors spread over a larger, more sparsely populated constituency. In the case of districts in which the registered voters numbered fewer than 2,000, the candidates were entitled to spend £650. Individuals standing in county constituencies with more than 2,000 electors could apply £710 to the campaign and an additional £60 for each 1,000 voters. The above figures applied only to individual candidates contesting single-member districts.⁷

Strict limitations were also placed on the number of assistants that could be hired by an individual standing for office. A clerk and an officer were allocated for every 500 voters to a borough polling district. The same restrictions applied to county constituencies. The Central Committee of each party in every county were also permitted a clerk and a messenger for every 5,000 voters. All of the above named

⁶ O'Leary, The Elimination of Corrupt Practices in British Elections, p. 175.

⁷ Ibid.

employees, whether hired by the political parties or candidates, were required by law to be nonvoters.⁸

The Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 was the most comprehensive law of its kind ever passed prior to the First World War. A measure of its effectiveness in restricting the campaign expenditures of candidates can be gauged by the election expense returns submitted following the General Elections of 1885, 1886, 1892, 1895, and 1900. The average total expenditure of the five elections was 48 percent below the 1880 figure of £1,737,300. Even if we use the amount spent in the General Election of 1885, the most heavily contested election in the period under study, the expenses of that year were only 59 percent of those recorded in 1880.⁹

When combined with the extension of the franchise to the counties and the redistribution of electoral boundaries, the limitations imposed upon spending transformed the character of late nineteenth century politics, paving the way for the triumph of the Primrose League as the extra-parliamentary organ, par excellence, for the period under study. The financial restrictions and prohibitions placed on transporting voters to the polls by the Corrupt Practices Act made it clear to Conservatives that the means available to them for reaching the electors, most particularly in the county constituencies, were limited.

⁸ Ibid.

Prior to 1885 the rural communities lacked a systematic network of local associations with which to appeal to voters. Candidates standing for office were often unable to ensure that all their potential supporters were identified, registered, and provided with a means to get to the polls. Their powers of persuasion were further curtailed by the limitations placed on the numbers of clerks and officers available to them.

In the face of these limitations, the Primrose League performed a vital role, marshaling its forces across wide expanses of county constituencies, supplying a large force of volunteers which, in effect, assumed many of the expenses and provided services lost to the Conservative party through the enactment of the Corrupt Practices Act. The League could serve most effectively where the candidate, the election agent, and the Conservative Association were weakest: maintaining a continuous level of propaganda and activity, insuring that its supporters were registered, materials distributed, and voters conveyed to the polls. The League's efforts to ensure the registration and transportation of out-voters to polling sites were particularly helpful.

Before 1895 many politically active members of Habitations worked for Conservative candidates on an individual basis, hesitant to use their Habitations as a collective entity for fear of violating provisions of the Corrupt Practices Act. During the General Elections of 1895 and especially 1900 associations began to work directly on behalf of Unionist candidates. Members of a politically active Habitation might assume virtually all the functions typically performed

by clerks and secretaries in the office of a candidate. These duties might include filling out forms, mailing notices out to prospective voters, and maintaining general records. On election day they might, in effect, run the office, leaving the agent free to supervise general operations.¹⁰

The importance of Habitation members were amply demonstrated during the General Election of 1900 in the Sleaford and Hammersmith Divisions located, respectively, in Lincolnshire and London. In the case of the former, seventy-one out of the seventy-four members of Henry Chaplin's Central Office Committee were drawn from the Boutham, Hartsholme (Ellison) Habitation. Female members from Victoria and Shepherd's Bush Habitations in Hammersmith addressed twenty-six thousand envelopes and filled out thirteen thousand polling cards for William Bull. Both Conservatives were successfully returned to parliament.¹¹

Members also assisted through their participation in the Cycling Corps associated with the Habitations. They performed a number of vital services as couriers, including dispatching messages from the polling booths to the agent and maintaining a watchful eye on election-day proceedings. If reports indicated a low voter turnout in certain Wards, the agent might ask Knights and Dames to provide additional carriages and offer assistance in these districts in order to ensure

¹⁰ The Primrose League Gazette, 1 May 1895, p. 6; 1 August 1895, pp. 8-13; 1 September 1895, pp. 4-9; 1 November 1900, pp. 4-7; 1 December 1900, pp. 4-6; 1 January 1901, p. 5.

¹¹ Ibid., 1 November 1900, pp. 4, 6.

that all qualified voters supporting the Conservative candidate were transported and encouraged to make their way to the polls.¹²

Thus, despite the focus on social activity in the functions of Habitations, their role in the political sphere must not be minimized. In fact, the active Habitations performed a number of services indispensable to the Conservative party. In an era when the means of disseminating information was restricted, the availability of public transportation limited, and fairly stringent restrictions placed on campaign expenditures, the Primrose League was a fundamental source of support to the Conservative party in ensuring that its supporters were actively encouraged to vote and to demonstrate their support of the Unionist cause.

III

The first two local studies to be considered are based on Ladywood Habitation in Birmingham and Huddersfield Habitation located in West Riding, Yorkshire. They provide an interesting point of comparison. Both boroughs were Liberal in outlook. In the case of Birmingham, the city was dominated by Chamberlain's political machine which, in 1886, endorsed Liberal Unionism, aligning itself with the Conservatives. On the other hand, Huddersfield remained, like much of West Riding, Yorkshire, a center for Radicalism, sponsoring Labor candidates in the 1895, 1906, and both 1910 elections.¹³

¹² Ibid., 1 May 1894, p. 5; 1 August 1896, p. 8; 1 November 1898, p. 11; 1 November 1900, p. 4.

¹³ Briggs, History of Birmingham, vol. 2, pp. 181-83.

Birmingham had been a center for national politics since at least the 1870's, when Chamberlain's caucus began to assert its dominance over the metropolis. The symbolic importance attributed to the city was underscored by Gladstone's appearance at the inaugural meeting of the NLF held in Birmingham in 1877. His attendance served the dual purpose of paying lip-service to the claims of democratic representation while demonstrating his emergence from retirement to assume the leadership of the Liberal party.¹⁴

Conservatives also made a special point of using Birmingham as a forum for national politics. Addressing the inaugural meeting of the Midland Conservative Club in 1883, Salisbury praised the efforts of Tories to make organizational inroads within the borough while vigorously attacking the policies of the Liberal government.¹⁵ Later that year Birmingham was the site for the Annual Conference of the National Union. It was there that Churchill appealed to delegates to challenge the authority of the party leadership.

Twice Churchill attempted to serve as a representative for the Central Division in Birmingham as a means of enhancing his position within the Conservative party. He nearly succeeded in 1885, losing by only 773 votes to John Bright, one of the city's most celebrated members of parliament. By 1889 his influence had declined to such a degree that his candidacy was opposed by Salisbury who favored the

Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, pp. 297, 301.

¹⁴ Francis H. Herrick, "The Origins of the National Liberal Federation," Journal of Modern History (1945), pp. 125-27.

¹⁵ The Times, 29 March 1883, p. 6.

Liberal Unionist member.*6

Despite efforts of the Conservatives to challenge the predominance of the Liberal party by importing some of its leading members, introducing of Conservative clubs and associations,*? and providing assistance from local Habitations of the Primrose League, Birmingham remained wedded to Chamberlainite politics. Most rank and file Liberal members in the borough and surrounding region joined Chamberlain in his affiliation with the Conservatives in the aftermath of Gladstone's proposal for Home Rule in 1886. Liberal Unionists generally dominated parliamentary constituencies within the borough between 1886 and 1900.¹⁸ Given the political history of Birmingham, Ladywood Habitation must be considered with respect to the Liberal Unionist policies which were ascendant during the period under study.

The 1888 Roll of Habitations records ten associations in the district of Birmingham. These included one in the borough and three in each of the Southern and Eastern Divisions, the last district of which

¹⁶ Marsh, The Discipline of Popular Government, pp. 136-36, citing Salisbury's letter to Chamberlain, 16 August 1889, Joseph Chamberlain Papers, JC11/30/10.

¹⁷ These included the Midland Conservative Club (1883), the Midland Counties' Union of Conservative Associations (1886), and a host of smaller organizations.

¹⁸ The East Division was solidly Conservative between 1886 and 1910. From 1886 until 1892, Unionist member for the district, Matthews, served in Salisbury's Cabinet as Secretary of State for the Home Office. A Conservative was returned to Edgbaston in the by-election of 1898, marking its transition from a Liberal Unionist to a Tory stronghold between 1886 and 1910. The remaining constituencies for Birmingham: Bordesley, Central, North, South, and West returned Liberal Unionists from 1886 until the First World War. F.W.S. Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results 1885-1918 (New York: Macmillan Press, 1974), pp. 69-75.

encompassed Ladywood. Two Habitations were also located in Edgbaston and one in the less affluent Eastern Division. The Roll lists 927 individuals as having participated. A Divisional Council was formed in 1887 with J. Courtenay Lord, a local Justice of the Peace, serving as its President.

Ladywood Habitation took its name from the Ladywood parliamentary district, a suburban community sandwiched between the inner city borough and the outlying countryside. Located immediately to the south of Ladywood and still further removed from the urban center was the affluent Edgbaston housing development established by Lord Calthorpe. The moving force behind the Habitation was Lady Sawyer, Ruling Councillor and wife to Sir James Sawyer, a physician by profession. They worked, in effect, as a team promoting Conservative politics in Birmingham. An omnipresent force in local politics, Sawyer served as President of the Ladywood Ward of the Conservative Association before becoming the head of the Birmingham Conservative Association in 1887. He also served as President to the Midland Counties' Union of Conservative Associations in its inaugural year (1886).¹⁹

Sawyer stressed the importance of the League "acting entirely

¹⁹ Ladywood Primrose Magazine, containing an enclosed reprint from the Birmingham Daily Gazette, 3 December 1886 entitled "Midland. Counties' Union of Conservative Associations"; March, 1887, pp. 1, 3-5; April, 1887, pp. 9, 12; May, 1887, pp. 18-19, 25; June, 1887, p. 35; July, 1887, pp. 42-43, 48; August, 1887, p. 58; September, 1887, pp. 66-67, 72-73.

independently of ordinary Conservative Associations."²⁰ Nevertheless, Lady Sawyer's efforts were not restricted to her service as Ruling Councillor and editor of the Ladywood Primrose Magazine. She played an instrumental role in obtaining the necessary volumes to create a political library for the Ladywood Working Men's Conservative Club and was a leading figure in the Ladies' Auxiliary Council of the Midland Counties' Union.²¹ Her efforts underscored the close ties which existed between Conservative associations and the Primrose League.

A distinguishing feature of Conservative politics in Birmingham exhibited in the Ladywood Ward was the emphasis placed on maintaining ties with Liberal Unionists. It was a policy dictated from Westminster to the local constituencies in order to ensure a Unionist victory and provide a deterrent to Home Rule.

On the whole, Birmingham Conservatives adhered to the party line, although a measure of ambivalence remained at having to surrender political autonomy to the Unionist cause. Thus, in addressing a meeting of the Ladywood Conservative Working Men's Club in 1887, Sir James Sawyer strove to present, in a positive light, John Bright's accomplishments as representative of the Central district. Nevertheless, he looked forward to a time when traditional Toryism, unhampered by the comprising tactics of the alliance, could once again emerge.

²⁰ Cited from a reprint of the Birmingham Daily Gazette entitled "Midland Counties' Union of Conservative Associations," 3 December 1886, enclosed within the Ladywood Primrose Magazine.

²¹ Ladywood Primrose Magazine, March, 1887, p. 1; June, 1887, p. 35; September, 1887, pp. 66-68; October, 1887, p. 80.

They were proud of him, and no Radical could be half as proud as they were of him, because he was not ashamed of the Conservatives. In his old age he had adopted a policy which had always been theirs, so that no Conservative in Birmingham would ever vote against Mr. Bright for what he did in the great crisis last July. At that time Mr. Bright stood resolutely to his Queen and stood steadily by the majority of the Empire, but if he should cease to represent that division in Parliament, then would be the time for their Toryism to become militant and declare itself, and return a Conservative to represent the Central Division in the House of Commons.²²

Despite the misgivings occasionally expressed by Conservatives, every effort was made to maintain Unionist ties. In speaking to a gathering of the Ladywood Habitation held in the summer of 1887 at his residence, Sawyer stressed the permanency of the union.

The Conservatives and the best of the Liberals had come together on the Irish question, and he did not believe they would ever separate again and resume their former position of antagonism, even when their reason for the present bond had disappeared.²³

In pointing out that the two parties had successfully cooperated in office for more than a year, he anticipated the eventual emergence of a single national party, urging Conservatives to do everything in their power to promote the union.

Nevertheless, tensions continued. Thus, when the Midland Conservative Club endorsed Churchill as a Conservative candidate for the Central Division following Bright's retirement in 1889, Chamberlain protested. Churchill was eventually forced to withdraw, but not before tempers flared on both sides of the Unionist fence.

²² Jbid., July, 1887, p. 44.

²³ Ibid., August, 1887, p. 61.

Relations remained uneasy in Birmingham as late as 1894 when Churchill offered Chamberlain the services of the Primrose League as a means of promoting an upcoming Unionist meeting to be held in the town hall.²⁴ Chamberlain replied by emphasizing the ability of his own men to generate large public attendances. He refused the services offered with the icy observation, "I feared some of my people might retain their old prejudices against the Primrose League."²⁵

Conservative politicians throughout the country made conscientious efforts to comply with the dictates of Conservative party leadership and achieved the electoral successes of 1886, 1895, and 1900 as a result of their compliance. Frictions, however, remained, particularly at the grass roots level, until at least the twentieth century and possibly as late as the First World War. As John A. Bridges noted with regard to local politics, "an annoying thing about the Alliance was that it never approached a fusion, and rarely grew into friendship."²⁶

Efforts were periodically made by Habitations to recruit workers, particularly those individuals engaged in industrial or artisanal occupations.²⁷ Despite attempts to attract a broader base of

²⁴ Churchill to Chamberlain, 26 March 1894, Joseph Chamberlain Papers, JC5/14/49.

²⁵ Chamberlain to Churchill, 27 March 1894, Churchill Papers, RCHL xxxi/4481.

²⁶ John A. Bridges, Reminiscences of A Country Politician, p. 169.

²⁷ Thus, Huddersfield Habitation extended membership to the Working Men's Association in the borough at the nominal cost of four pence per individual. Huddersfield Habitation Minutes, 26 February 1886. Speakers addressing Whitehaven Habitation focused on the benefits of "sound progressive legislation" which would improve the

membership, the League achieved its greatest success in rural and relatively affluent suburban communities. As Shaw noted in his address to Ladywood Habitation in 1887,

As yet they had little more than touched the fringe of the working classes, and seeing how numerous and powerful these classes were every effort ought to be made to penetrate their ranks, not only for the benefit of the party to which the Primrose League was attached, but for the benefit of the working classes themselves.²⁸

Huddersfield Habitation was greatly influenced by the Radicalism of the West Riding region. The minority status ascribed to Conservatives in the area tended to promote a strong sense of solidarity between party, association, and League, a phenomenon also observable in the borough of Birmingham. Unlike Birmingham, however, the Liberal Unionists did not appear to play a major role in the surrounding region, although a national Liberal Unionist conference was sponsored in 1889 featuring some of the more prominent political figures.^{^^}

quality of lives, pointing to the Workmen's Compensation Act (1897) as well as steps taken toward restricting child labor and introducing an eight hour day. Whitehaven Habitation Minutes, 11 October 1895; 3 October 1894; 2 February 1898; 12 April 1901. The Ladywood Primrose Magazine featured an article on the long tradition of enlightened legislation sponsored by Tories, dating back to the 1833 bill proposed by the Earl of Shaftesbury to limit the number of hours children labored in the factories. August, 1887, p. 59.

²⁸ Ladywood Primrose Magazine, July, 1887, p. 49.

²⁹ They included Chamberlain, the Earl of Selbourne, John Bright, and local notable, Sir J.W. Ramsden, Ramsden Estate Papers, Kirklees District Archives, DD/RA/21/9.

Woolen manufacturing was the primary industry in Huddersfield, although the town also included a sizable engineering work force. Liberal members were elected to parliament in all the General Elections held from 1885 through 1900. However, the margin of victory was not always substantial, particularly in the 1886 and 1892 elections. A local Conservative candidate, Sir J. Crosland, did manage to win a by-election in 1893 by a narrow margin of thirty-five votes³⁰ following the sudden death of Liberal member Summers while traveling in India. Although the support of Huddersfield Habitation was attributed with having been an influential factor in achieving the victory, Crosland was unable to retain his seat in the General Election of 1895.³¹

Political loyalties were nurtured through Habitation entertainment functions which were frequently cosponsored by the Conservative Association. An annual winter lecture series was begun in 1888, supported by both organizations. Speakers not only addressed borough residents, but also participated in a number of rural district meetings. Teas, balls, outings, picnics, and bazaars were often a collaborative effort. A number of rural Wards were closely aligned with party associations. Thus, the Milnsbridge and Longwood Wards sponsored sewing meetings to provide funds for the promotion of Conservative clubs in their areas. Donations were, also made by the South, East, and North Wards to Tory organizations in their regions.³²

³⁰ Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results, p. 122.

³¹ Huddersfield Habitation Minutes, 4 January 1893; 6 March 1893; 26 April 1893; 24 April 1896.

³² Ibid., 12 March 1888; 18 February 1888; 24 June 1889; 19 April 1890; 21 July 1890; 4 April 1891; 20 June 1892; 7 November 1892; 6 March 1893; 26 April 1893; 21 July 1894. Ibid., 19 April 1890; 4

Whereas the Ladywood Habitation addressed a fairly broad range of issues while giving prominence to the topic of Home Rule, Huddersfield focused predominantly on the Irish question, despite the apparent lack of emphasis given to the topic in the West Riding region as a whole.³³ Representatives from the Irish Patriotic Union were engaged on several occasions and an Ulster Loyalist was also recruited as a speaker. Political addresses by local, regional, and national lecturers focused on the threat of Home Rule. The leaflets distributed amongst the members of the Habitation reflected this orientation, bearing the titles "Irish Evictions," "What Has Mr. Parnell and his Party Done for Ireland," "A Gladstone Catechism," "Mr. Gladstone's Apologies," and "Two Crimes Act: A Contrast."³⁴

The prominence of national issues was suggested by the speakers recruited to address the Habitation. Two prominent Unionists, Sir Frederick Milner and Ponsonby Moore, addressed members at the inaugural meeting, the latter individual attending on behalf of Grand Council. A member of the Primrose League who lectured throughout the country, Miss Milner of York, spoke at a meeting sponsored by Huddersfield Habitation in the fall of 1889. Other noteworthy individuals attending functions included Ashmead Bartlett, member for Sheffield, J.H. Bottomley, Conservative Agent for Lancashire, and H.J. Pettifer, a "working class"

April 1891.

³³ Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, p. 304.

³⁴ Huddersfield Habitation Minutes, 14 February 1887; 18 April 1887; 8 November 1887; 2 January 1888; 12 March 1888; 12 April 1889; 19 April 1890; 26 April 1893; 21 July 1894. 19 April 1886; 10 January 1890; 19 April 1890.

speaker retained by Grand Council.³⁵

Political addresses referred continually to national issues. Thus, when Crosland attended a Habitation meeting to extend his appreciation for the support given him during the by-election of 1893, his chosen topic was the Home Rule bill placed before the House of Commons. His passionate identification with the plight of Ulstermen, perhaps more forceful than many addresses delivered, nevertheless, appeared to convey the sentiments of many members.

Loyal Irishmen would be perfectly within their rights if they did resist under arms being handed over to their enemies in the way the bill proposed (Applause.). . . . If it did come to civil war those men in Ulster would not be guilty of shooting men from behind hedgerows, nor of maiming the poor dumb beasts, nor of pouring tar on the heads of defenceless women.³⁶

The remaining Habitations considered in this chapter were predominantly rural in character. Of these, only Whitehaven was situated in a borough constituency. The associations examined from the counties of Cumberland, Lancashire, and Gloucestershire distinguish themselves from Birmingham and Huddersfield Habitations by representing generally Conservative districts.

The borough of Whitehaven conformed to the overall national political trends in the period under study, except in 1885 when the district voted Conservatives while the country as a whole favored the Liberals. The most distinguished notables in the region were the Lowthers, represented most prominently by the Earl and Countess of

³⁵ Ibid., 10 April 1886; 18 April 1887; 6 June 1887; 12 March 1888; 19 February 1891.

³⁶ Ibid., 26 April 1893.

Lonsdale. In earlier years the family had controlled Whitehaven as a pocket borough. As the cousin of the Earl of Lonsdale, G.C. Bentinck's victory as a Conservative candidate standing for the borough in 1885 was attributed to the surviving influence of the Lowthers.³⁷

Whitehaven Habitation likewise came under the influence of the Lonsdales, the Countess holding the position of Ruling Councillor and the Earl assisting her efforts. Their symbolic role as dignitaries of the Primrose League was underscored in 1891 when the three Habitations which the Countess served as Ruling Councillor were invited to attend a summer fete on the grounds of Lowther Castle. The Earl's active participation in local politics was indicated by his election as the first Mayor of Whitehaven in 1895.³⁸

The ties between members of the Whitehaven Habitation and the Conservative party were substantial. The Habitation was formed in 1888. Most of its executive meetings and some social functions were held in the premises of the Whitehaven Conservative Association. The facilities there included a large reception room, renamed "Primrose Hall" in 1889 after a substantial donation was made toward renovation by the Earl of Lonsdale. A number of Conservative members of parliament from Cumberland made appearances at Habitation gatherings including G.C. Bentinck, J.W. Lowther, Sir James Bain, Augustin Helder, and H.V. Duncombe.³⁹

³⁷ Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, pp. 323, 330.

³⁸ Whitehaven Habitation Minutes, 1 May 1889; 4 December 1889; 18 April 1890; 31 July 1891; 5 December 1895.

³⁹ Ibid., 12 July 1888; 20 July 1888; 1 May 1889; 8 January 1890; 5 February 1890; 18 April 1890; 29 March 1892; 21 March 1895; 17

In the case of both Bain and Helder, members of their families held important positions within the Habitation. Mrs. Bain served as Deputy Ruling Councillor, in effect, acting as the director because of the purely ceremonial role exercised by the Countess of Lonsdale. In 1897 Mrs. Bain was replaced by Miss Helder, daughter of Conservative party representative for the borough, Augustin Helder. Miss Helder held the position of Dame Ruling Councillor throughout the remaining years under study.⁴⁰

Members of the Whitehaven Habitation worked in support of candidates on a number of occasions. Their efforts on behalf of Sir James Bain, who was returned as borough member for Whitehaven in the by-election of 1891, earned his appreciation. He regarded their support as having been largely responsible for returning him "with such a large majority" (233). Assistance also appears to have been given in the General Election of 1892 to both Bain and Lord Muncaster, representing, respectively, the Whitehaven and Egremont Divisions. In 1895 members supported Helder and Duncombe, respectively, for the above named districts. They also appear to have extended support to Conservative candidates in 1900.⁴¹

May 1900. Ibid., 4 December 1889; 5 February 1890; 31 July 1891; 30 September 1895; 11 October 1895. Bentinck served as a member of parliament for the Whitehaven borough, winning the 1885 and 1886 General Elections. His death in 1891 forced a by-election in which Sir J. Bain emerged victorious. Bain subsequently lost the 1892 contest. In 1895 A. Helder was returned to Whitehaven, winning, once again, in 1900. Duncombe was victorious in the Egremont Division in 1895; Bain in 1900. J.W. Lowther served as M.P. for the Penrith district between 1885 and 1910. Craig, British Parliamentary Elections, pp. 208, 244-47.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1 May 1889; 3 November 1897; 19 April 1898.

⁴¹ Ibid., 31 July 1891; 2 December 1891; 30 September 1895; 16

Geographically situated opposite the Irish coast, Whitehaven included a large proportion of Irish immigrants within its borough. Catholics were estimated at twenty-two percent of the 1906 electorate. Not surprisingly, the Orange vote appears to have obtained 7.5 percent of the vote in that same year.⁴²

Nevertheless, an examination of the minutes records of Whitehaven Habitation does not suggest that religious, ethnic, and Home Rule issues played an especially prominent role in its functions, speeches, or literature. This relative lack of emphasis on the Irish question might be explained in part by the somewhat later formation date of the Habitation, 1888, at a time when Irish issues appeared to be featured less prominently than had been the case in the 1886 General Election. The exceedingly large number of Catholic voters might have been another factor since the League appeared unwilling to offend unnecessarily such a large and hence potentially influential interest group.

Still, the subject received adequate attention. At least two lectures were held in 1889 and an address delivered in 1893 opposed Gladstone's Home Rule bill. The Habitation likewise passed a resolution in 1898 which supported legislation introduced by the Conservative government to provide assistance to voluntary schools.⁴³ However the measure, unlike Home Rule, was likely to have appealed to

November 1900.

⁴² Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, p. 330.

⁴³ Whitehaven Habitation Minutes, 7 January 1889; 6 February 1889; 7 April 1893; 2 February 1898.

Catholics favoring denominational instruction.

The subject which appeared to receive the most sustained coverage in meetings sponsored by the Habitation was the maintenance of a strong foreign policy and a united empire, issues which might have elicited support from the Irish community. In addressing a meeting of the Habitation in February of 1898, the presiding chairman, a member of the executive, contrasted the strength of a Unionist Cabinet to that of a Liberal one "made up of Separatists and men who in foreign politics never seemed to have the courage of their own convictions.

(Applause.)"⁴⁴

At a meeting held that same year in October, Colonel Bain staunchly defended Conservative policy, particularly its foreign policy as a "glorious vindication of Khartoum," which would "wipe out a blot from a page of our national history by the avenging of the death of General Gordon. (Applause.)"⁴⁵ The following year a lecture was delivered by a visiting speaker which provided an overview of the salient features contributing over the past one thousand years to the creation of the modern British navy. According to W.D.P. Field, a powerful fleet was essential, not for its ability to protect industries overseas, but in order "that our daily food might be safe."⁴⁶

Whitehaven Habitation was particularly active in supporting the government's policies regarding the Boer war. The speeches delivered

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2 February 1898.

⁴⁵ J^rid., 5 October 1898.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1 March 1899.

reflected the general position of the Conservative party, suggesting that President Kruger's real motivation was obtaining regional domination. Britain's efforts, by contrast, were portrayed as motivated by a desire for justice.⁴⁷

If Whitehaven appeared to give a prominent place to parliamentary politics in its gatherings, Garstang Habitation in Lancaster Division, Lancashire seemed to place entertainment at a premium. Little reference is made to political issues in the Minutes. Instead, the activities sponsored appear as a succession of varietal shows, dances, and balls held primarily during the winter months, supplemented by picnics and excursions in the summer. Typically these gatherings might consist of a very brief business meeting or lecture, followed by a lengthy social gathering.

The annual meetings conveyed the tone set by Garstang Habitation. The format of the 1897 gathering was characteristic. Approximately three hundred members and friends attended a tea held at 5:30 in the afternoon. It was succeeded by the annual general meeting, which lasted only fifteen minutes. There followed a varietal show consisting of a conjurer and ventriloquist, songs, solos, and a comedy routine. Dancing was provided from ten in the evening until four the next day.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid. See, for example, the speech given by Alderman J.R. Musgrave to members of the Habitation on the twentieth of April, 1900 and the Primrose League pamphlets, "Why Are We At War With the Boers?," No. 221; "Complaints of Transvaal Boers Outside Pretoria," No. 219; political pamphlets collection, London School of Economics.

⁴⁸ Garstang Habitation Minutes, 19 April 1897.

The efforts of members of the executive and Wardens appeared to be primarily devoted, respectively, to the planning of social functions and the distribution of leaflets and tickets regarding proposed events. A general audience, not formally associated with the Primrose League, was encouraged to attend by establishing nominally higher fees for the attending public.⁴⁹

While prominence was given to entertainment, politics did not escape notice. Sixteen members of the Habitation were recommended for General Election badges following the 1895 contest.⁵⁰ Issues surrounding the Boer war appeared to receive some measure of attention. The Earl of Denbigh addressed members in October of 1899, supporting the government's management of the war effort.⁵¹ In response to the Countess of Derby's request for aid to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association, a special evening of entertainment was arranged. The proceeds were designated for the charitable organization.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid., 23 October 1894; 12 February 1895; 7 March 1895; 17 August 1896; 5 December 1896; 1 February 1897; 13 February 1897; 2 September 1897; 20 October 1898. Ibid., 16 February 1899; 8 September 1900. The prices set by the Habitation on the seventeenth of March, 1895 for an upcoming event were characteristic. Members were admitted free to the tea and entertainments, sixpence was charged for reserved seating and an additional one-half shilling for the dance. Nonmembers were charged ninepence for tea, a half shilling for entertainment, and an additional sixpence if reserve seating was desired. Tickets for the dance were priced at one shilling. The cost of an entire evening of entertainment for a nonmember could be purchased as part of a packaged fee for a flat two shillings, exclusive of reserved seating.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 28 September 1895.

⁵¹ The Preston Herald, 28 October 1899.

⁵² Garstang Habitation Minutes, 28 August 1901; 26 September 1901.

Despite the enormous popularity accorded the dances, balls, and excursions offered, it became increasingly more difficult as time progressed to sustain levels of attendance, enthusiasm, and the balance books. The observations provided by John A. Bridges concerning the functions sponsored by the Conservative Association in a rural community, located not far from Birmingham, were particularly apt.

When "smoking concerts" came into fashion we were the first to take them up. . . . At first almost anything served to amuse the farm labourers, who were not very critical. . . . We had to keep moving, and perpetually to improve the character of the entertainment. We even had to send for a party of glee singers from Birmingham, our own glees and songs required a rest. In the course of the evening there was always a speech on whatever was happening in the political world, and care was taken not to make it too long, or the room would speedily have emptied.⁵³

Garstang was especially revealing in this respect. Because of the relatively late formation date of the Habitation (1894), the difficulties associated with maintaining its vitality occurred somewhat later than in most associations. Nevertheless, the circumstances surrounding its decline underscored the plight of many Habitations struggling to sustain operations amidst falling attendance and enrollment.⁵⁴

The financial records suggest Garstang began encountering difficulties by 1904. At an Executive Council meeting held two years

53 Bridges, Reminiscences of A Country Politician, pp. 52-53.

54 This trend was indicated both with respect to the fewer numbers of Habitations appearing on the 1899 Roll as compared with that of 1888 and with regard to the performance of Habitations examined in this chapter. See Chapter Five, pages 204-05; Chapter Seven, pages 308-10.

later, members reminisced "over the past of the E," an indication of waning fortunes. Attendance at concerts sponsored by the Habitation appear to be generally poor from 1906 onward, although dances remained popular.⁵⁵

By February of 1910, the Habitation was in such financial difficulties that the executive elected to sponsor a whist drive as part of the annual general meeting held on Easter Monday in order to bolster sagging fortunes. The following year the committee decided to "dissolve" the Habitation, but not before holding its annual gathering and whist drive to raise capital.⁵⁶

Minute records exist for two Habitations in Gloucestershire, the Nailsworth and Horsley located in the Stroud constituency, and the Thornbury, situated in the Thornbury Division. Both districts voted consistently for Conservative representatives to parliament between 1885 and 1900 and were predominantly rural in character.

A number of Habitations in these regions were overseen by prominently placed individuals. The Duke of Beaufort served as Ruling Councillor and Honorary Secretary, respectively, for the Wotton-Under-Edge Habitation in the Stroud Division and the Badminton Habitation

⁵⁵ Receipts for 1903 accounted for £114.16.1 1/2 as compared with £56.19.4 1/2 the following year. Garstang Habitation Cash Book, 1894-1911, receipts and payments, 1903, 1904; Lancashire Record Office, DDFZ. Garstang Habitation Minutes, 27 April 1906; 25 October 1906; 20 April 1908; 12 April 1909; 28 October 1909.

⁵⁶ Garstang Habitation Minutes, 21 February 1910; 23 March 1911; 6 April 1911. The Cash Book suggests that £16.11.6 of the £18.10.4 receipts received in 1910 were obtained through the whist drive and dance, as well as all of the income generated in 1911 (£21.10.5). Garstang Habitation Cash Book, 1910, 1911.

located in the parliamentary district of Thornbury. The position of Ruling Councillor in Badminton was held by the Marquis of Worcester. The Chipping Sodbury (Codrington) Habitation, located in the Thornbury district, was presided over by Sir Gerald Codrington.⁵⁷

Circencester constituency to the east was marked by a more substantial Liberal representation than either Stroud or Thornbury in the years under study.⁵⁸ The Coin Valley Habitation located in the district was initiated through the efforts of Lady Hicks Beach. Sir Alex Hitchman lies agreed to serve as Honorary Secretary as a result of her persuasive entreaties.⁵⁹ Sir Michael Hicks Beach occupied the position of Ruling Councillor. As a prominent member of Salisbury's Cabinets between 1885 and 1902,⁶⁰ his presence lent a measure of prestige to the Habitation.

⁵⁷ Information provided in the 1888 Roll of Habitations. The use of the names of prominent individuals residing in the district as part of the title of the Habitation was a common practice.

⁵⁸ Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections, pp. 109, 116-17, 149.

⁵⁹ Lady Hicks Beach to Alex Hitchman lies, 12 September 1885. Coin Valley Correspondence: Letters to Alex Hitchman lies, Gloucestershire Record Office, D1070 viii/7. The 1888 Roll of Habitations cites lies as the Honorary Secretary. The formation date is listed as the nineteenth of September, 1885.

⁶⁰ Beach held a number of positions. They included Chancellor of the Exchequer and leader of the House of Commons in the Caretaker Ministry of July, 1886, as well as the post of Chief Secretary to Ireland in the 1886 government. Poor health forced his reappointment as Minister Without Portfolio and his subsequent resignation from the Cabinet. Recovered by 1888, he went on to serve as Secretary of the Board of Trade until the Conservatives left office in 1892. Beach resumed the position of Exchequer in Salisbury's last administration, stepping down in 1902 when the Prime Minister retired.

The increasingly cosmopolitan flavor of local political functions was underscored both by the influential individuals occupying positions in the Habitations and by others attracted to speak at these gatherings. Thus, at the inaugural meeting of the Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation in the Stroud Division held in March of 1887, Lady Hardman delivered an opening address on the principles of the League.⁶¹ Both Lady Hardman and her husband, Sir William Hardman, served as prominent members, respectively, of the LGC and Grand Council.⁶²

Salisbury spoke at an engagement sponsored by the Primrose League in Drill Hall, Bristol during the spring of 1889. It was an elaborate affair, rivaling the ceremonies of the annual Grand Habitation.

Three hundred and fifty delegates from habitations of the Primrose League throughout the western counties occupied seats upon the platform, immediately in front of which were assembled a large number of ladies wearing the insignia of the order. The hall presented a very bright scene, the walls being adorned with the banners of many habitations and with flags. On the

6* Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation Minutes, 21 March 1887.

62 They were active in the Primrose League almost from its inception. William Hardman's attendance on the Grand Council dated back to December of 1883. He served as Chairman of the Council for the Primrose Years 1885-86 and 1886-87. Lady Hardman was one of the original fourteen founding members of the LGC. She served as Honorary Treasurer between 1885-86 and as Honorary Secretary from 1886 through 1891. Lady Hardman remained a member of the LGC throughout the remaining years under study. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 22 December 1883; 29 April 1885; 1 June 1886. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 16 March 1885; 6 June 1885; 20 February 1886; 4 June 1886; 29 June 1900. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 October 1887, p. 1; 1 September 1888, p. 1; 8 June 1889, p. 1; 10 May 1890, p. 1; 6 June 1891, p. 14; 11 March 1893, p. 14; 13 May 1893, p. 1; 2 July 1894, p. 18; 1 October 1897, p. 1; 1 June 1896, p. 24; 1 October 1897, p. 16; 1 December 1898, p. 3; 1 May 1899, p. 5; 1 June 1901, p. 4.

wall at the back of the platform was a large picture of the Queen, and on the wall opposite a portrait of Lord Beaconsfield. Facing the platform was a large scroll bearing the motto, "For God, the Empire, and the people," with the names of "Salisbury" and "Hicks-Beach" on either side. Nearly all those present, like the noble Marquis himself, wore large bunches of primroses.⁶³

The political issues which featured prominently in the Nailsworth and Thornbury Habitations reflected the overall concerns of the Primrose League. They included providing support for Unionist candidates, advocating a strong nation and a united empire, opposing Home Rule, and maintaining the Established Church. In the case of Thornbury, members provided assistance to a Conservative candidate standing for County Council in February of 1892. They were also active volunteers during the 1892 General Election, conveying voters to the poll. Wardens proved particularly indispensable, distributing political pamphlets and disseminating information.⁶⁴

Imperial issues were featured in meetings sponsored by the Nailsworth Habitation in the 1890's. A lantern lecture was provided in 1894 on the subject of "Our Imperial Navy." A speaker from South Africa addressed members regarding the war effort in 1899. Pictorial representations of Bloemfontein, Johannesburg, Kimberly, Port Elizabeth, and other towns were displayed with lantern slides while listeners were informed on current troop movements in the Transvaal. The meeting ended with a resolution of support for "British supremacy

⁶³ "Lord Salisbury at Bristol," The Times, 24 April 1889, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Thornbury Habitation Minutes, 6 February 1892; Midsummer Day, 1892.

in South Africa" and a donation to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Association.⁶⁵

Religious issues appeared to play a particularly prominent role in Gloucestershire. The geographical proximity to the Welsh border and attendant disestablishment interests which prevailed in the latter region may have been factors responsible for the heightened emphasis placed on church matters.

Thus, in speaking to members of the Primrose League gathered in Bristol in April of 1889, Hicks Beach stressed the importance of maintaining the Established Church, religious endowments, and denominational education. He emphasized that legislation introduced by Liberals to further these ends would give impunity to those guilty "of outraging the tenderest feelings of a great Christian nation and poisoning the minds of its children." The Times report noted Hicks Beach urged those attending to heed the advice of Salisbury who had emphasized that nothing could be preserved "merely by folding their hands" and that they must be determined "to fight in defence of their faith, and to spare neither work nor expense in defending the principles in which they believed."⁶⁶

Thornbury Habitation gave a great deal of emphasis to religious themes. At least two Anglican clergy members were active on the executive, one of them, Rev. Jackson, serving as treasurer.

⁶⁵ Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation Minutes, 9 November 1899, citing the Stroud News, 10 November 1899.

⁶⁶ "Lord Salisbury at Bristol," The Times, 24 April 1889, p. 6.

Resolutions in support of the Established Church were also passed on a number of occasions. In 1893 a resolution was passed supporting a speech delivered by Balfour in the House of Commons which opposed Welsh Disestablishment. The following year a similar motion was endorsed. Members of the Habitation also backed Balfour's Education bill, particularly the provisions protecting voluntary schooling and the maintenance of religious instruction.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, while ecclesiastical issues appeared to play a prominent role in the political topics addressed by Thornbury, their scope was largely confined to issues of interest to the Primrose League: opposition to Home Rule, resistance to disestablishment, and the promotion of voluntary education.

The operations of the SGC were distinguished by three factors. First and foremost there was the difficulty of maintaining the vitality of the Primrose League in a region dominated by Liberal politics. Secondly, the SGC differentiated itself from other local and regional bodies by maintaining an unusual degree of autonomy from the Central Office. Finally, despite this relative freedom, tensions surfaced periodically between the two organizations.

From its inception, the SGC appears to have been plagued with problems stemming from the relatively small numbers of Habitations in Scotland and the minority status accorded Conservative politics north of the border. Hardman's letters to Salisbury and Northcote in January of 1886 hints at the problems encountered. "In spite of many

⁶⁷ Thornbury Habitation Minutes, 30 April 1889; 7 March 1891; 6 February 1892; 8 July 1893; 5 May 1894; 28 November 1902.

difficulties, we have at last succeeded, with the aid of W. Reginald Macleod and W. Walter Hadow, in planting the Primrose League in Scotland." While Hardman attributed the SGC and its Habitations as having made "rapid and satisfactory progress,"⁶⁸ complaints continued to persist. A report submitted to the LGC by Lady Ancaster in 1893 regarding operations in Scotland noted

all the keen Primrose League workers complain that very little help or encouragement is given by the Scottish Grand Council, and the whole thing is wanting in energy, and is only kept alive by the efforts of a few who know the advantage of the Primrose League as a means to keep the Conservatives together, and the organization is altogether very weak and disheartening.⁶⁹

In a letter to the LGC the following year, Political Secretary to the SGC, W.W. Hadow, emphasized the problems at hand.

It is difficult to say what can be done to create more interest in [the] P.L. in Scotland—in counties like Perthshire, Dumfriesshire, West-Lothian etc the interest never flags and the Habs are admirably carried on—in other counties the candidates are against it though they openly acknowledge that the Conservative or Unionist Associations conduct their organization entirely on P.L. lines.

Under these circumstances in these districts it is not easy to keep [the] P.L. up to its proper standard.⁷⁰

In 1896 Hadow resigned as Political Secretary in order to assume a position as Commissioner of Prisons in Scotland.⁷¹ His departure

⁶⁸ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, January, 1886.

⁶⁹ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 3 November 1893.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2 March 1894.

⁷¹ The Primrose League Gazette, 1 October 1898, p. 9.

prompted a resolution from the LGC endorsing better organization in Scotland, to no avail.⁷²

As the Scottish minutes of 18 November 1897 suggest, the SGC did not consider itself a "provincial organization" acting on the delegation of Grand Council. Rather, the body equated its powers and organization as comparable to those of the Central Office. Consequently, the executive argued that a statute from the London headquarters was binding "only in so far as adopted by [the Scottish] Grand Council." Despite the persistent emphasis on parity with the Grand Council, the SGC adhered very closely to practices established by the Grand Council J^>

The Central Office, for its part, was prepared to allow a generous measure of administrative initiative in Scotland provided the basic patterns of organization and practice were observed. Efforts were repeatedly made by the London executive to promote cooperative relations. Representatives from the SGC were encouraged to sit on the governing body of the Grand Council. A Conference was held in 1897 to promote harmonious relations between the two bodies. In 1899 a Joint Committee was created at the request of the SGC. It consisted of five members of each organization, the Chancellor of the Central Office serving in an ex officio capacity as chairman.⁷⁴

⁷² LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 6 November 1896. Scottish Branch Minute Book, 1 April 1898; 2 November 1899; 11 January 1900; 6 March 1900; 9 April 1900; 9 July 1900; Fifteenth Annual Report, 1901; Sixteenth Annual Report, 11 December 1901.

⁷³ Scottish Branch Minute Book, 18 November 1897; 15 October 1886; 20 May 1887; 9 September 1887; 12 September 1888; 10 December 1891; 13 December 1892; 7 February 1893; 1 April 1898; 7 November 1899.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 12 May 1891; 13 December 1892; 7 February 1893; 13

While special rights and privileges were accorded the SGC, it never obtained "separate, but equal" status. Grand Council set policy standards and guidelines.⁷⁵ The LGC and SGC held roughly equivalent positions, each subordinate to the Central Office, but convinced of its superior status vis-a-vis the other. Thus, the LGC felt justified in directing how its yearly contributions to the SGC might be spent, even going so far as to insist on an annual balance sheet itemizing all income and expenditures of the Scottish office. The SGC, for its part, refused to provide a detailed statement of its finances, although it eventually provided some information regarding the manner in which donations by the LGC were applied.⁷⁶

IV

Relations between the Habitations and Conservative Associations were generally cooperative and conciliatory. Nevertheless, overlapping spheres of influence occasionally provoked frictions between rival local organizations. In his letters to Salisbury and Northcote in January of 1886, Hardman emphasized the increasingly

January 1887; 18 November 1897; 10 January 1899; 14 February 1899. The Primrose League Gazette, 1 May 1899, p 7.

⁷⁵ Scottish Branch Minute Book, 27 January 1890; 20 July 1894; 18 November 1897; 14 February 1899; 27 June 1899; 2 November 1899. Minutes of the Scott Habitation, 9 April 1901; 28 May 1901.

⁷⁶ LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 12 March 1891; 10 April 1891; 24 April 1891; 1 May 1891; 29 May 1891; 17 July 1891; 29 April 1892; 24 March 1893; 14 April 1893; 2 March 1894; 2 November 1895; 6 November 1896. Scottish Branch Minute Book, 12 May 1891.

friendly relations between Habitations and Associations while nonetheless acknowledging past difficulties.

It has been our wish to act in harmony with the local Conservative Associations . . . and to aid them in every way which they might suggest. Any jealousy which might at first have existed, has been swept away by the loyal and hearty cooperation of the members of the League.⁷⁷

Despite the Grand Council disclaimer, rivalries continued.

One of the more prolonged disputes involved a conflict between Hoddesdon Conservative Association and Hoddesdon Habitation in the Eastern or Hertford Division of Hertfordshire. From the inception of the Habitation in 1886, Hoddesdon Association sought to curtail the influence of the Primrose League in the region. The association set about to ensure that it retained exclusive control in matters relating to the canvassing and registering of voters while taking measures to stem the loss of members to the Habitation.⁷⁸

The situation had deteriorated to such a degree by May of 1886 that Hoddesdon Association contacted Grand Council regarding "the existence of two Conservative organizations in Hoddesdon." A copy of the resolution was also forwarded to the Habitation. In June the association attributed declining attendance to the influence of the Habitation, a phenomenon which it deemed caused "disadvantage to the Conservative Cause." It proposed by way of an alternative, the transformation of Hoddesdon Habitation into an organization composed

⁷⁷ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, January, 1886.

⁷⁸ Hoddesdon Conservative Association Minutes, 28 January 1886; Hertfordshire Record Office, D/EX247 Z1.

exclusively of Dames.⁷⁹

The refusal of the Habitation to comply with the suggestion brought the dispute to the highest levels of arbitration, the intervention of the Chief Agent for the Conservative party, Captain Middleton, and the Political Secretary for the Grand Council, Cusack-Smith. An agreement was stipulated whereby the Habitation agreed to admit free of charge any member of the Conservative Association who wished to join.⁸⁰ It was hoped that the settlement would minimize competition between the organizations.

Despite this attempt at amelioration, Hoddesdon Association, dissatisfied with the terms of the agreement, resolved in 1887 to infiltrate the Habitation, forcing its dissolution.⁸¹ The campaign appeared to have been successful for no mention was subsequently made of the Habitation and it received no listing in the 1888 Roll of Habitations.

Tensions between rival organizations were not confined to relations between Habitations and Conservative Associations. The criticism made by Bartlett within the pages of England in 1885² regarding the elitist and autocratic powers of the Central Office met with some measure of local sympathy. Similarly, actions taken to introduce District Agents and Divisional Councils into local

⁷⁹ Ibid., 25 May 1886; 21 June 1886.

⁸⁰ Jbid., 28 June 1886; 13 July 1886; 21 July 1886.

⁸¹ Ibid., 21 July 1886; 19 January 1887; 20 May 1887; 23 June 1887.

⁸² See Chapter Two, pp. 68-74.

communities were not always accorded an enthusiastic response.

Thus, in March of 1890 a controversy arose regarding the efforts of District Agent Major Barnett to form a Divisional Council for Thornbury in Gloucestershire. In calling a meeting of Habitations within the Division the agent decided to hold the gathering in Yate, a town located within the boundaries of Chipping Sodbury (Codrington) Habitation. The action angered the Ruling Councillor, Sir Gerald Codrington, and his Honorary Secretary, William Merrick, for not having been consulted on the matter.⁸³

A heated exchange of letters followed in which the Vice Chancellor, Lane-Fox, affirmed the inherent right of the Grand Council to call meetings in any district "for organizing purposes only." Codrington stressed the want of courtesy shown by the District Agent in failing to solicit support from the Habitation. Lane-Fox then sought to mollify Codrington, suggesting the oversight was unintentioned and a simple misunderstanding.⁸⁴

The most revealing correspondence relating to the conflict were the letters written by Honorary Secretary William Merrick to the Ruling Councillor, Codrington. They reveal the jealousy with which local autonomy was guarded in such conflicts. In a letter to Codrington

⁸³ Correspondence of Sir Gerald Codrington, William Merrick to Codrington, 21 February 1890; Lane-Fox to Codrington, 28 March 1890; Codrington to Lane-Fox, 29 March 1890; Codrington to Major Barnett, 29 March 1890; Lane-Fox to Codrington, 31 March 1890; Justice to Codrington, 2 April 1890; Codrington to Justice, 4 April 1890; Merrick to Codrington, 7 April 1890; Gloucestershire Record Office, D1610/X31.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Lane-Fox to Codrington, 28 March 1890; Codrington to Lane-Fox, 29 March 1890; Lane-Fox to Codrington, 31 March 1890.

dated 21 February 1890, Merrick complained of a meeting scheduled to be held in Bristol regarding the formation of a Divisional Council.

My own opinion is that each Branch or Habitation has quite enough to do to look after its own district without bothering with its neighbours. . . . I don't think outside interference ever does much good.⁸⁵

In the aftermath of a meeting held in Yate during March, tempers flared. Merrick denied the rights of local, regional, and Central authorities to infringe on the territorial supremacy of Habitations, arguing in a letter to Codrington, "I defy local Ruling Councillors or anyone else to prove our nonjurisdiction." He added that many members of the Habitation were of the "opinion that the Grand Council is not up to much and is merely an association for finding employment for a lot of half pay army officers."⁸⁶

Nevertheless, it must be noted that the conflict was successfully resolved by means of a personal appeal made by the Vice Chancellor, Lane-Fox, to Sir Gerald Codrington. In the final analysis what remains most striking is not the disagreements which surfaced occasionally, but the continual success achieved in minimizing tensions and obtaining the cooperation and alliance of the local Habitations and Conservative Associations, not only with respect to their central organizations, but also with respect to one another and the interests of the party as a whole.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 21 February 1890. The 1899 Roll of Habitations lists the formation date as 22 March 1890.

⁸⁶ A reference to District Agent, Major Barnett. Correspondence of Sir Gerald Codrington, 7 April 1890.

v

The declining levels of activity exhibited in many Habitations throughout the country by the end of the nineteenth century were also generally exemplified in the case studies of associations examined in this chapter. The most detailed financial records and minutes measuring diminished performance are those of Huddersfield, Whitehaven, and Garstang. While Garstang's circumstances have been addressed earlier,⁸⁷ the details surrounding Huddersfield and Whitehaven generally support the overall national trends.

Formed in January of 1886, Huddersfield obtained its greatest annual revenue (£151.7.6) during the 1887-88 Primrose year. While membership continued to increase until 1890, reaching a total of 2,375 as of the nineteenth of April, finances and presumably attendance declined substantially in the aftermath of the 1892 General Election. Between 1893 and 1895 the Habitation operated at a financial loss and limited its activities accordingly. Indeed, after 1894 annual receipts never exceeded thirty-five pounds. By 1897 Huddersfield appears to have been only nominally functioning, its longstanding Honorary Secretary, W.J. Kaye, having departed. The last recorded meeting occurred in 1898. The Knights¹ and Dames¹ Register and the Cash Book were only maintained, respectively, until 1900 and 1901.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ See pages 294-95.

⁸⁸ The 1888 Roll of Habitations provides the formation date. Huddersfield Habitation Minutes, 18 April 1887; 12 March 1888; 12 April 1889; 19 April 1890; 4 April 1891; 9 November 1891; 20 June 1892; 24 April 1896; 12 May 1897; 23 June 1898. Huddersfield Habitation List of

Begun in February of 1888, Whitehaven achieved its greatest annual Tribute (£40.9.0) and revenue (£125.8.1) in the 1891-92 Primrose year. The greatest recorded membership (900) was obtained in April of 1893. Earnings had declined by 1894 to 72.8 percent of the 1891-92 figures. Nevertheless, income remained fairly substantial through the 1901-02 Primrose year. While the Habitation did not formally dissolve until 1924, little activity appeared to take place beyond the last recorded meeting held in November, 1902. Minimal financial transactions appear to confirm its inactive status.⁸⁹

The details regarding the circumstances of Nailsworth and Thornbury Habitations are confined to their Minutes, which are, for the most part, devoid of financial details. Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation, formed in 1887, was operating at a deficit by 1899. Begun in 1885, Thornbury appears to have encountered financial difficulties during roughly the same period, based on its failure to pay the Tribute due to the Central Office in 1899 and 1900. After November, 1902 notations in the Minutes were confined to annual statements of miscel-

Knights' and Dames' Paid Subscription, 1887-1900; Ramsden Estate Papers, Kirklees District Archives, DD/RE/162. For a comparison of declining revenues over the years, see Huddersfield Habitation Cash Book, 1887-1900; Kirklees District Archives, DD/RE/161.

⁸⁹ The 1899 Roll of Habitations. Financial records are provided with the Whitehaven Habitation Cash Book, 1889-1904, 1891-2; 1893-4; 1894-5; 1895-6; 1896-7; 1897-8; 1898-9; 1899-1900; 1900-1; 1901-2; 1902-3; 1903-4; Lowther Family Archive, Cumbria County Council, DL0NS. Membership figures are provided with the Whitehaven Habitation Minutes, 1 May 1889; 18 April 1890; 6 March 1891; 7 April 1893; 18 April 1899; 14 November 1902. A receipt from Central Office regarding the termination of the Habitation is contained at the rear of the Whitehaven Habitation Bank Book, 19 August 1924; Lowther Family Archives, Cumbria County Council, DL0NS.

laneous expenses, certain indications of diminished stature. The last financial entry is dated the 24 of April, 1910.⁹⁰

Far less is available regarding the remaining Habitations considered in this chapter. By 1892 Ladywood Primrose Magazine, the principal source for information on the local Birmingham Habitation, was renamed The Edgbaston, Harborne, and Ladywood Primrose Magazine. It operated under the supervision of local Conservative Associations, a sign of the reduced influence accorded Ladywood.⁹¹

The Habitations examined in this chapter continued to be formally listed on either the 1904, 1910, or 1912 Rolls. However, financial records and minutes indicate their generally deteriorating condition in the 1890's, a phenomenon reflective of the overall condition the League.⁹²

⁹⁰ The 1888 Roll of Habitations provides the formation dates for both Habitations. Nailsworth and Horsley Habitation Minutes, 21 March 1887; 28 July 1899; 24 May 1900. Thornbury Habitation Minutes, 17 June 1901; 28 November 1902; 8 June 1904; 21 November 1905; 13 December 1906; December, 1907; 18 January 1909; 8 June 1910; 24 April 1911.

⁹¹ The Edgbaston, Harborne, and Ladywood Primrose Magazine, 1892.

⁹² Whitehaven, Huddersfield, and Nailsworth Habitations were listed in the 1904 Roll of Habitations, respectively, pp. 28, 253, 63. Garstang was cited in the 1910 Roll while Thornbury and Ladywood continued to be featured as late as the 1912 register, appearing, respectively, on pages 107, 74, and 229. The SGC persisted until 1920. Scottish Branch Minute Book, no. 2, 11 May 1920; Scottish Conservative and Unionist Associations. The 1904, 1910, and 1912 Roll of Habitations were obtained courtesy of Michael Wills. Copies of the 1886, 1904, and 1912 Rolls are available in the Primrose League collection contained in the Conservative Party Archives, Bodleian Library.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Epilogue

We [the aristocracy] have had an excellent innings, I don't deny that for a moment: an excellent innings; and the turn of the people will come some day. I see that quite as clearly as you do. But not yet, not yet. You will educate some of the working class; that is all you can hope to do for them. And when you have educated them we shall buy them; or, if we don't, the Liberals will, and that will be just the same for you.

Lady Dorothy Nevill writing in the early 1880's to the leader of the marxist Social Democratic Federation, H.M. Hyndman, as recorded in her autobiography, My Own Times (1912)

[Recipe for the conversion of the common man from "perdition" to "salvation."] Not by words and dreams; but by thirtyeight [sic] shillings a week, a sound house in a handsome street, and a permanent job. In three weeks he will have a fancy waistcoat; in three months a tall hat and a chapel sitting; before the end of the year he will shake hands with a duchess at a Primrose League meeting, and join the Conservative Party.

George Bernard Shaw, Major Barbara (1905)

I

The years between 1900 and 1914 were marked by an ever valiant effort on the part of the Central Office to bolster the numbers of Habitations, members, and field of operations while, all the while, losing ground to a host of new extra-parliamentary organizations which made inroads into the sphere of "independent" political activity previously dominated by the Primrose League. The death of Queen Victoria in January of 1901, marked with a sense of finality the end of an era and the inauguration of a new age, one which melded older

nineteenth century traditions with twentieth century innovations.¹ The retirement of Salisbury as Prime Minister in 1902 along with his Chief Agent, Captain Middleton, and three members of his Cabinet served as a further reminder of the passage of an age. The following year under Balfour's leadership four more ministers left office, unmistakably marking the end of Salisbury's administration.²

The new generation of Conservative political leaders, even the senior statesmen, Balfour and Chamberlain, had no direct association with the Disraelian heritage nor did they focus post-Victorian politics squarely on the issue of Home Rule. Instead, Chamberlain shifted the focus toward tariff reform and imperial preference in the hopes of finding a new platform on which to base a popular following. Nevertheless, it was the Liberals, aligning themselves with the newly formed Labor party, who achieved electoral victory. Their triumph was obtained on the basis of "retrenchment" (free trade) combined with a hint of "reform" (opposition to Chinese slavery in South Africa).³

The Primrose League, like its Grand Master Salisbury, who retained the title until his death in 1903, was in many respects ill-prepared to make its way into the emerging arena of twentieth century

¹ A theme explored at length in Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

² They included Hicks Beach, the Earl of Cadogan, and Lord James in 1902 and Joseph Chamberlain, Lord George Hamilton, C.T. Ritchie, and Lord Balfour of Burleigh in 1903.

³ For a study of the "Retrenchment versus Reform" dilemma characterizing Liberal politics between 1906 and 1914, see the M.A. thesis by D.E. Sheets submitted to Columbia University in 1980 entitled C.F.G. Masterman and the Crisis of Liberalism.

politics. Although it adopted the motor car as a means of canvassing and conveying voters to the polls in the early 1900's,⁴ the new method of transportation merely underscored the increasing discontinuity of utilizing pseudomedieval points of reference in the modern technological society Britain was becoming.

The relative decline of the League was indicated by the proliferation of extra-parliamentary organizations vying for public support. Associations begun in the late 1890's and early 1900's, such as the Navy League (1894) and the League of the Empire (1901), though smaller in their size and scope than the Primrose League, continued to exert a growing influence. Several new political groups were also formed in response to the Liberal and Labor coalition which came to victory in 1906. These included the Middle Class Defense League (1906), the Junior Imperial League (1906), and the Anti-Socialist Union (1908).

Perhaps the greatest indication of the diminished role accorded the Primrose League was the enormous popularity accorded the Boy Scouts, which attracted over 200,000 members by 1909. Although the Juvenile Branches affiliated with Habitations constituted the largest growing segment of the Primrose League between 1900 and 1914, they proved no match for the enthusiasms accorded scouting. Only 53 Juvenile Branches were formed by 1909; a total of 234 by 1913. In the face of this competition, the Primrose League sought to minimize its

⁴ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 8 October 1903. Ibid., 20 July 1905; 19 March 1908; 24 June 1909; 6 January 1910; 3 November 1910.

limitations by encouraging ties with the Boy Scouts, an action endorsed by both organizations.⁵

The Primrose League also faced competition from a number of extra-parliamentary associations formed by Conservative party members, by turns dissatisfied with the positions taken by Balfour and the reforms proposed by the Liberal government. Thus, the Tariff Reform League was established by Leo Amery and Leo Maxse in 1903. Its aims were to promote support for Chamberlain's program of colonial preference, to discourage the perpetuation of free trade policies, and to apply pressure on the party to endorse these economic views. Liberal legislation, most particularly the 1909 Budget, the Parliamentary Act of 1911, and the 1912 Home Rule legislation, encouraged the actions of protest groups opposed to these reforms. They included Union Defense League (1907), the Budget Protest League (1909), the Reveille (1910), and the Halsbury Club (1911), the last two societies, in effect, challenging Balfour's authority as Prime Minister.⁶

Issues which had been central to the Primrose League in the 1880's, opposition to Home Rule, imperial decline, the loss of national prestige, and proposals to restrict the House of Lords, carried a more limited appeal in the early twentieth century. For individuals within

⁵ Ibid., 29 April 1909; 27 May 1909; 24 June 1909; 8 July 1909; 16 January 1913. The Minutes of the Grand Council provide no mention of similar agreements reached between the Girl Guides and the young females associated with the Juvenile Branches.

⁶ John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1978), pp. 9-10, 32-33, 38-40, 58, 82.

the party like Walter Long, Leo Amery, Henry Page Croft, Lord Willoughby de Broke, and Lord Halsbury who continued to stress one or more of these themes, the emphasis was more forceful, expressing a willingness, if necessary, to resort to extremes, in some instances even civil war, in order to preserve established institutions threatened by Liberal reforms.⁷

The Primrose League, for its part, was left uncomfortably straddling the divisions within the party, unable either to support or reject controversial issues like tariff reform and women's suffrage until receiving an unequivocal endorsement from the Conservative leadership. Consequently, the Grand Council found itself immobilized, advising members to maintain "neutral" positions on contentious topics,

7 In the case of Long, Amery, and Croft their biographies and diaries provide strong testimony to their efforts to achieve these ends. Long was the founder and prime mover behind the Union Defense League. He also served as President of the Budget Protest League in 1909 and Chancellor of the Primrose League between 1912 and 1913. Long was the choice of the "Diehard" Tories in 1911 to replace Balfour before Andrew Bonar Law was selected as the compromise candidate. Viscount Long of Wraxall, Memories (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1923), pp. 187, 189, 191, 193-94, 196-97, 202, 205-06. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 16 May 1912.

Amery's diary entries, particularly those recorded under the chapter headings "In the Wilderness" (1906-1910) and "To the Brink" (1911-1914) suggest, along with the appropriate titled biography by Croft, My Life of Strife, the mood of a younger, more militant generation of Conservatives who favored a heightened emphasis on national and imperial issues. The Leo Amery Diaries, 1896-1929, vol. 1, eds. John Barnes and David Nicholson (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1980). Henry Page Croft, My Life of Strife (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1948).

Their mood was matched in the House of Lords by Lord Willoughby de Broke and Lord Halsbury and in varying degree the 110 other Diehard peers who voted against the Parliament Act of 1911. For an analysis of the social background and political outlook of this group in the House of Lords, see Gregory Phillips. The Diehards: Aristocratic Society and Politics in Edwardian England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

despite resolutions or demonstrations at local Habitations which frequently came out in support of tariffs or opposed Conservative candidates who voted against the extension of the parliamentary franchise to women.⁸

By the 1900's the Primrose League was also encountering competition from a number of women's organizations including the Women's Unionist and Tariff Reform Association, the Women's Unionist Association, and the extra-parliamentary group, the Victoria League. Repeatedly, attempts were made to minimize tensions between these societies and promote cooperation. These efforts appeared to meet with only limited success.⁹ By 1910 the number of organizations in competition with the League were so extensive that the Chancellor issued a Precept warning Habitations of the dangers of extending support to rival groups which threatened to usurp the powers and influence of the Primrose League.

Grand Councillor would specifically call attention to the danger of weakening our forces by dissipating energies in the creation of fresh organizations which, however, worthy of support in themselves, cannot adequately present to the country the consolidated principles which the Primrose League embodies and which represent enduring the abiding causes of national life.¹⁰

⁸ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 25 June 1903; 16 November 1905; 30 November 1905; 16 June 1907; 7 November 1907; 5 March 1908; 22 October 1908; 5 November 1908; 4 March 1909; 7 October 1909; 17 February 1910; 6 October 1910; 22 December 1910; 15 February 1912.

⁹ Ibid., 19 July 1900; 13 December 1906; 4 June 1908; 8 October 1908; 4 March 1909; 3 November 1910; 16 February 1911. LGC Executive Committee Minutes, 3 May 1901.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 3 November 1910.

The years 1900-1914 were marked by the League gradually assuming the status of a official party organ. By 1903 annual conferences of the Primrose League were regularly scheduled in conjunction with the yearly meetings of the National Union. Habitations were increasingly called upon to perform direct services for the party, typically through their assistance provided to local Conservative agents or candidates standing for office.^H

The decision to become a formal part of the party organization was made in 1913. The change was underscored by the inclusion in 1914 of a declaration of loyalty to the Unionist party within the oath of the Primrose League.¹² while it marked no great departure in terms of the practice or policies pursued, the action, nevertheless, served as an indication of the less significant role accorded the League and its departure from the "independent" extra-parliamentary sphere of politics by the First World War.

The role of the Primrose League as a formally sanctioned party organ was emphasized in 1913. Chairman of the Party Organization, Steel-Maitland, requested the Primrose League obtain endorsements for the "British Covenant" program, which was established to provide shelter and financing for the families of Ulster Loyalists in the event

¹¹ Ibid., 16 July 1903. 18 October 1900; 1 November 1900; 13 December 1900; 1 February 1906; 17 October 1907; 6 January 1910; 16 March 1910; 24 November 1910; 16 March 1911.

¹² G.A. Arbuthnot, "The Principles of the Primrose League," The Primrose Election Guide, ed. G.A. Arbuthnot (London: Evaleigh Nash, 1914), pp. 7-9. A copy is available at the London School of Economics. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 13 March 1914; 3 April 1914.

of a civil war. The League obtained two million signatures in affirmation of the plan as well as £12,000 and a pledge to house between five and six thousand women and children.¹³

Grand Council minutes between 1900 and 1914 suggest an ever intensive effort to maintain League functions despite a diminishing base of support. A continual effort was made to "resuscitate" associations. By June of 1904, 1,317 Habitations were on the Roll of Habitations, 14 percent fewer than the 1899 figure and 24 percent below that of 1888. A special subcommittee on organization concluded that of the 253 county Divisions in England and Wales, only 61, or 24 percent, had Divisional Councils while 115 constituencies, or 23 percent, were lacking Habitations at either the county or borough level.¹⁴

Modifications were also made in the Central Office in the aftermath of the 1906 and 1910 electoral defeats incurred by the Conservative party.[^] The reforms of 1906 may have had some beneficial effect as evidenced by the increased levels of Tributes received at the

¹³ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 6 November 1913; 12 February 1914; 3 April 1914. It should be noted, however, that not everyone was in favor of the program. A member of the SGC, John Chisholm, resigned immediately upon learning that the Scottish executive was going to promote the "Help the Ulster Women Scheme," an effort he regarded as potentially treasonous. Scottish Branch Minute Book, No. 2, 16 December 1913.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 1 November 1900; 3 October 1901; 17 October 1901; 5 December 1901; 4 December 1902; 15 January 1903; 22 October 1903; 21 January 1904; 17 March 1904; 14 April 1904; 2 February 1905; 16 February 1905; 2 June 1905; 19 October 1905; 2 November 1905; 18 May 1906; 17 February 1910; 3 November 1910; 16 February 1911; 6 July 1911; 15 February 1912. Ibid., 16 June 1904; 11 July 1906.

¹⁵ Ibid., 11 July 1906; 31 October 1912; 21 November 1912.

London executive following the election.¹⁶ A more likely explanation, however, would be that support was generated spontaneously in response to electoral defeat, bolstering levels of income and enthusiasm among rank and file members.

Despite the relative decline of the Primrose League, it continued to play an important role in many parts of the country. Henry Page Croft proclaimed the effort of the Drummond Wolff Habitation as being instrumental in securing his return as a Conservative member of the Christchurch borough in Hampshire during the 1910 elections. Between two and four thousand members of the association, which was located in Bournemouth, were overseen by two female Ruling Councillors. While the extent of support generated by the Drummond Wolff Habitation was perhaps unique, letters from members of parliament to the Grand Council were plentiful in expressing the thanks of many candidates for the services provided by members of the Primrose League.¹⁷

¹ The Knights' and Dames' Tributes for the Primrose years 1901-02 through 1913-14, exclusive of 1906-07, were as follows: 1901-02, £2,914; 1902-03, £2,873; 1903-04, £2,709; 1904-05, £2,615; 1905-06, £2,774; 1906-07, no figures are provided, although the annual report suggests the income was higher than the previous year; 1907-08, £2,969; 1908-09, £3,072; 1909-10, £3,231; 1910-11, £3,334; 1911-12, £3,348; 1912-13, £3,251; 1913-14, £3,333. Financial Reports for the years ending 31 March 1903; 1906; 1909; 1911; 1913. Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League provide details regarding the earnings for 1903-04; 1906-07; and 1913-14 Primrose years, records not contained in the Financial Reports. 24 April 1904; 25 April 1907; 23 April 1914.

The SGC Income and Expenditure figures contained within the Cash Ledger suggest a fairly steadily declining base of Tributes from £180 in 1901 and £94 in 1914. A slight recovery occurred between 1907 and 1909 and again in 1911. After 1914 income derived from Tributes decreased dramatically, amounting to £6 in 1918. Ledger of the Grand Council Scottish Branch.

¹⁷ Croft, My Life of Strife, p. 185.

Grand Council revenue between 1902 and 1914 never achieved the level obtained in 1887, £10,133, or the sums recorded in the Capital Account during 1893, £15,018. Prior to the 1906 General Election, receipts were relatively small, accounting for less than the 1895-96 figure of £6,213, the lowest recorded earnings obtained between 1887 and 1901. During the 1907-08 and 1912-13 Primrose years, however, income accounted for between 7,000 and 8,500 pounds with the figure rising to a generous £9,065 by 1913-14.¹⁸

Although the sums represented a substantial increase over the 1895-96 returns, the most accurate gauge of membership remained the Knights' and Dames' Tributes which reached their height, £5,690, in the 1889-90 Primrose year. By 1901-02 it had declined to a modest £2,914. While the receipts rose somewhat between 1906 and 1914, the income derived from Tributes never exceeded £3,348, obtained between 1911-12, 58 percent of the 1889-90 figure. The League managed to buttress its diminishing base of Knights' and Dames' subscriptions through its other principal sources of income: contributions of the LGC and Knights Imperial, general donations, revenue derived from The Primrose League Gazette, dividends on investments, and earnings accrued from diplomas and badges.¹⁹

^{ib} For a detailed listing of Income, Tributes and Capital accounts between 1887 and 1901, see Appendix D. A record of Income, Expenditure, and Capital revenue between 1902 and 1914 is provided in the Financial Reports of 1903, 1906, 1909, 1911, and 1913. Figures relating to the 1903-04; 1906-07; and 1913-14 Primrose years, not contained in the Financial Reports, are found in the Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 24 April 1904; 25 April 1907; 23 April 1914.

19 Ibid.

Financial and minute records indicate a relative, rather than an absolute decline in the operations and income of the Primrose League between 1902-14 when compared against the 1888-1892 levels of activity. During the First World War, minute and financial records suggest a continually diminishing level of operations, measured in both economic and social terms, most functions appearing to serve national war relief efforts. Thus, the income generated during the 1914-15 Primrose year was relatively generous, £6,723, as compared with the sums received in 1916-17, £4,929, and 1918-19, £3,992. The fortunes of the Grand Council and the League revived somewhat in the 1920's, revenues reached £6,769 in 1920-21 and £6,148 in the 1929-30 Primrose years. However, Knights' and Dames' Tributes continued to decrease to £2,149 and £1,747, respectively.²⁰

The diminishing role accorded the Primrose League was exacerbated by the extension of the parliamentary franchise to women in 1918 and 1928. The 1918 measure entitled women to vote provided they were over thirty and qualified in local elections by owning or occupying land or premises worth £5 a year, either in their own right or through their husband's holdings. Ten years later women achieved electoral parity with men. Perhaps even more important, in terms of the future vitality of the Primrose League, was the granting of representation to women in the committees and delegations of the National Union roughly in accordance with their electoral strength, thereby obviating the need

²⁰ Minutes of the Grand Council of the Primrose League, 4 February 1915; 15 April 1915; 2 May 1916; 7 April 1917; 26 April 1917; 2 May 1918; 3 April 1919; 24 July 1919; 14 April 1921; 8 May 1930.

for a separate organizational The result was a decrease in the powers and influence accorded the League as females increasingly turned to the National Union and Conservative Associations as the appropriate sphere in which to exert their growing political influence.

In many respects the declining role of the Primrose League was foreshadowed by developments in Scotland. While the SGC had encountered difficulties in sustaining funds and members since the late 1890's, it was the First World War which dealt the most debilitating blow. By March of 1920, only five Habitations remained throughout all of Scotland, a base insufficient to sustain the SGC. The organization was disbanded two months later.²²

Operations of the Primrose League in England, although of a diminished significance after 1914, continued to play some part in political life through the 1920's.²³ The greatest blow to the fortunes of the Primrose League ultimately proved to be the legislation passed in 1918 and 1928 enfranchising women. The Representation of the People's Act (1918) extended the franchise to all male occupiers over twenty-one. Women who were the wives of occupiers and single females

21 Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, p. 250.

22 Scottish Branch Minute Book, No. 2, 2 March 1920; 11 May 1920.

23 it seems significant that no mention of the Primrose League is provided by Ramsden in his study of the Conservative party beyond the 1920's. Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, p. 250. Similarly, Henry Page Croft, who served as Chancellor in 1928, was one of the last politicians to regard the office and organization with great esteem. Despite his assessment, Croft's impression must be qualified by the knowledge that he himself failed to obtain prominence within the inner circles of the Conservative party. Croft, My Life of Strife, p. 185.

who were occupiers in their own right were entitled to vote provided they were at least thirty years old. The measure added 8.4 million women to the rolls, four out of every six electors. Ten years later women were able to qualify on equal terms with men through the enactment of the Equal Franchise bill. Fully 5.25 million females aged twenty-one and older were added to the register by 1929, a total of 52.7 percent of the electorate.²⁴

The legislation accelerated the departure of the Primrose League from the forefront of Conservative politics. The organization had, over the years, come to be viewed as the principal body available for Tory women to express their political convictions. However, by 1918 females were granted one-third of all positions available on the committees and delegations of the National Union. By 1928 this figure had risen to half, reflecting their growing strength in the electorate. While the Primrose League resisted efforts to merge with the National Union, other organizations were more conciliatory. The Women's Unionist and Tariff Reform Association, for example, quickly integrated itself into the Union. The Primrose League was left to forge its own path, increasingly confined to the political sidelines by the 1920's as women came to identify directly with the interests of the National Union and its parent party.²⁵

²⁴ Pugh, "Women's Suffrage in Britain," The Historical Association, General Series 97 (1980), pp. 33-35, 37.

²⁵ Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, p. 250.

Despite the extensive decline in members and influence over the years, the organization persists to this day, albeit a skeleton of its formal self, consisting of a vestigial executive and a few local Habitations.²⁶

II

Previous studies by both Ostrogorski and Robb have sketched a general picture of the character and activities of the Primrose League, its source of appeal, and its purpose. This thesis has sought primarily to provide a systematic examination of the origin and development of the League, its membership, as well as the geographical basis of its strengths and weaknesses throughout the country. A variety of materials have been examined: modern political papers, newspapers, documents of the Primrose League pertaining to both the central and local levels, and a number of secondary works. An effort has been made to provide a detailed study in the tradition of Hanham's pathbreaking study of Conservative party organization between the Second and Third Reform Acts,²⁷ extending that method of analysis to the sphere of extra-parliamentary activities.

The thesis also has sought to resurrect the Primrose League from its long-time relegation to a footnote in British political history, a colorful anecdote of the actions of some eccentric "Dames."

²⁶ "Grand Habitation Number," The Primrose League Gazette, May/June, 1981, pp. 1, 11.

²⁷ Hanham, Elections and Party Management.

In part this misconception has been reinforced by the limited coverage given to the organization in the papers of prominent politicians, and, indeed, the newspapers of the day. Instead, public attention focused on its pageantry, its grand, even farcical proceedings, obscuring the underlying purpose and success achieved in nurturing the creation of a popular conservative subculture, committed to the maintenance of the Tory party.

In tracing the development of the Primrose League a number of salient points emerged. The League began as a extra-parliamentary, political interest group to further the interests of Randolph Churchill. It quickly evolved through Salisbury's careful maneuvers and Churchill's apparent dilettantism into an organ loosely affiliated with the Conservative party proper, overseen by the Prime Minister and his Chief Agent, Middleton. Its dramatic rise in membership coincided with the party's efforts to establish an extensive popular base of support in 1885-86. Membership was sufficiently large by 1888 to justify its designation as Britain's preeminent "mass" organization.

The Primrose League distinguished itself from all other interest groups in nineteenth century Britain by the national character and magnitude of its operations. The organization reached its zenith by 1888, its operations extending to most of the parliamentary Divisions in England, as well as many districts in both Wales and Scotland. A number of associations were also established in Ireland and a few even extended as far as the British colonies. By 1899, however, the Roll of Habitations had declined by 11 percent over the total listed on the 1888 register and decreased a further 14 percent by

1904. This trend was never fully reversed, as indicated in the diminishing base of Knights' and Dames' Tributes recorded between 1900 and 1914 and in the years immediately following the First World War.

Overall the organization performed most effectively in parliamentary districts in which the Conservative party predominated, although its strong position in the East Midlands in both the 1880's and the 1890's suggests its ability to make inroads even within staunchly Liberal strongholds. At its organizational apex were clustered an array of notables. Its greatest proportion of membership appeared to come from the ranks of the middle and lower middle class, as well as from a generous cross-section of the rural agrarian community. While the Primrose League fared least well in urban, industrial communities, it nevertheless did manage to make some inroads amongst the lower class, particularly those individuals engaged in nonunion and nonindustrial trades and services positions. Thus, the Conservatives were able to proclaim, with some justification, its truly multi-class representation.

The Primrose League was, above all, interested in promoting popular opposition to Home Rule. The issue remained the fundamental credo throughout the period under study, followed in close succession by an emphasis on the maintenance of the "constitution," the empire, religion, the monarchy, and the House of Lords.

Despite efforts by Conservatives to move beyond these themes between 1900-1914, both the party and League ultimately failed to shift their central focus. The proposals for tariff reform and colonial preference advocated by Chamberlain in the early years of the twentieth

century received a mixed response within party circles. In actual fact these policies represented only a more emphatic endorsement of proposals originated by "fair trade" proponents in the 1880's, namely, to institute retaliatory tariffs against unfair competitors.

The most sustained political controversies which surfaced in the Liberal administration of 1906-1914 likewise suggested a failure to move beyond nineteenth century conflicts. Thus, the budget of 1909, the Parliament Act of 1911, and the introduction of Home Rule legislation in 1912 reflected a concerted and ultimately successful effort on the part of the Liberal government to overcome the obstacles posed by Lord Salisbury's rule between 1885 and 1902 and ensure the primacy of the House of Commons over the House of Lords as the preeminent governing body in Great Britain.

III

In tracing the development of the Primrose League, the thesis has challenged the prevalent interpretations provided by Cecil, Taylor, Marsh, et al. of the Marquis of Salisbury, the Conservative party leader in the period under study. In general scholars have de-emphasized the extent of his power and influence in office, focusing instead on his stated preference for the management of the Foreign Office over the duties of the prime-ministership. They have likewise stressed his limitations and reticence in directing or influencing members of the Cabinet, the Lords, or errant parliamentarians. These perceptions have contributed to the mistaken impression of Salisbury as

a man out of tune with his times, lacking the necessary resources and tactical skills with which to propel the party into the modern age.

Contrary to these impressions, the actions of Salisbury suggest an individual fully cognizant of the opportunities and limitations which confronted him in extending the scope and direction, not only of his office, but also of the party as a whole. His talents as political strategist were amply demonstrated in his successful negotiation of the Redistribution Act of 1885 and in his circumscribed tolerance of Randolph Churchill, until the latter could be forced out of office in December of 1885. Likewise, Salisbury's willingness to recruit Liberal Unionists as part of his coalition governments while, nevertheless, limiting the avenues of expression open to their most outspoken leader, Chamberlain, suggests the Prime Minister's strength in securing crucial victories from a position in the House of Lords of seemingly limited powers.

Thus, Salisbury's actions, rather than demonstrating the inherent limitations of his rule, indicate his flexibility and willingness to accommodate where necessary in order to promote the party and his position as leader. Salisbury's detailed understanding of the machinery of the Conservative party and his willingness to court the Primrose League to serve as the principal carrier of public messages to popular audiences suggests a man far more resourceful and resilient than existing studies have indicated.

Similarly, Salisbury's "Politics of Despair," rather than serving as a method of disengagement proved an extremely effective means of launching an appeal to the electors to forestall further

social and political reforms. It provided the foundations upon which a mass base of support for the Conservative party was erected. His tenure of office extended further than that of any other modern day political leader, including Gladstone. Salisbury's willingness to rely on political interest groups to combat the methods of the caucus, his realization of the limitations of his powers while, nevertheless, using every conceivable means within his grasp to prolong and extend these boundaries suggest his rightful position as the founder of the modern day Conservative party.

To be sure, Disraeli made important contributions in this direction. He expanded the franchise to include members of the working class, provided limited social legislation in the interest of the electors, promoted a strong foreign policy that placed an emphasis on the importance of empire, and supported the interests of the monarchy and the House of Lords. Nevertheless, it was Salisbury, not Disraeli, who consolidated the advances and developed a long term basis of popular support for the party which would persist virtually unchanged to this day.

This study is not intended to serve as a "total" history of the Primrose League. Instead, the focus has been on its early, formative years which witnessed the growth and were followed by a period of relative decline, coinciding with the death of Queen Victoria and the retirement of the Marquis of Salisbury as Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative party.

Because the subject touches upon virtually every facet of political, social, and economic issues central to late nineteenth

century British history, it has been necessary to concentrate on issues relating to organizational growth and development. Less attention has been devoted to such aspects as the personalities of both the executive and the rank and file members and the women who played such a prominent role in its activities. Religious, class, local politics, and the economic factors underlying popular perceptions of decline have likewise received a limited coverage.

Despite the necessarily narrow orientation, it is hoped that the detailed examination of the "mechanics" of the League will help both to restore the organization to its rightful role on the stage of late nineteenth century British political history and to provide a richer, more comprehensive understanding of the nature of modern politics and its relation to still larger societal phenomena.

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St. James Gazette

The Times

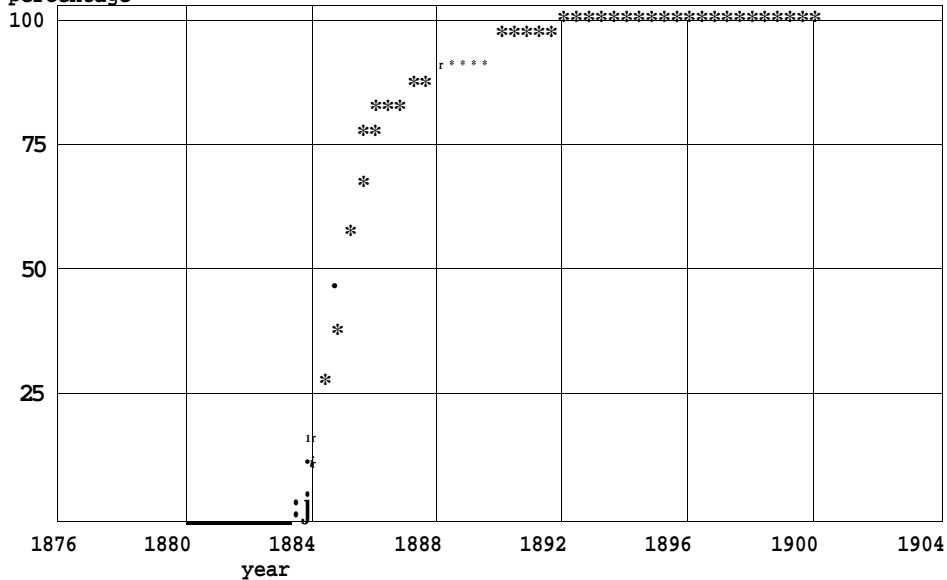
Truth

Vanity Fair

APPENDIX A

London 1899

cumulative distribution of habitation formation times
percentage



distribution of habitation formation times

percentage

100

75

50

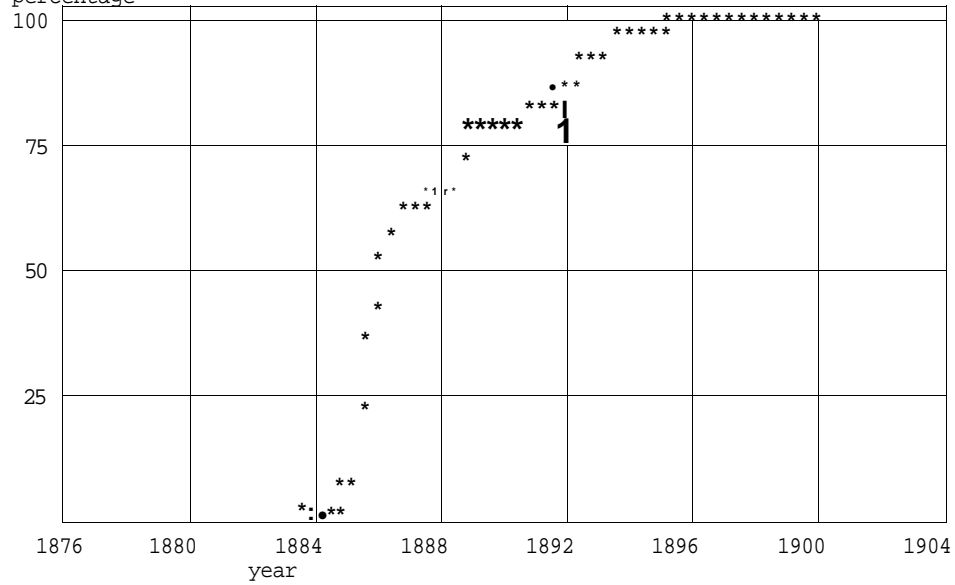
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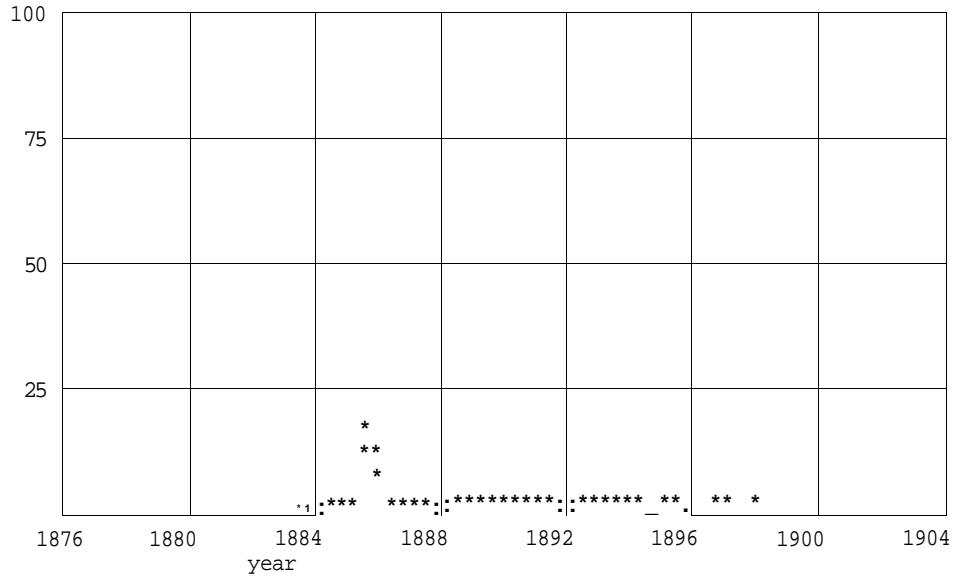
APPENDIX B

Lancashire 1899

cumulative distribution of habitation formation times
percentage



distribution of habitation formation times
percentage



APPENDIX D

North and East Ridings, Yorkshire 1899

cumulative distribution of habitation formation times

percentage

100

75

50

25

1876

1880

1884
year

1888

1892

1896

1900

1904

distribution of habitation formation times

percentage

100

75

50

25

0

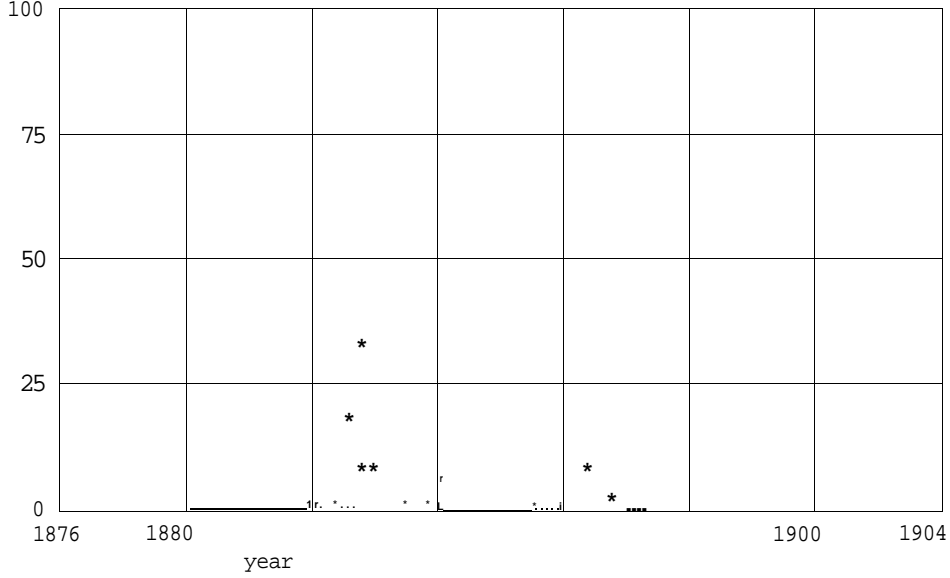
1876

1880

year

1900

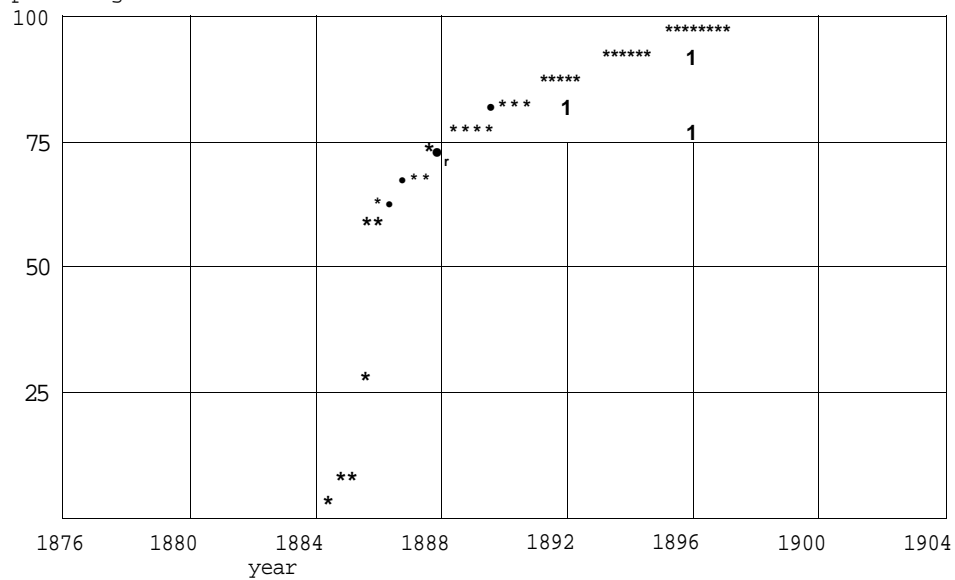
1904



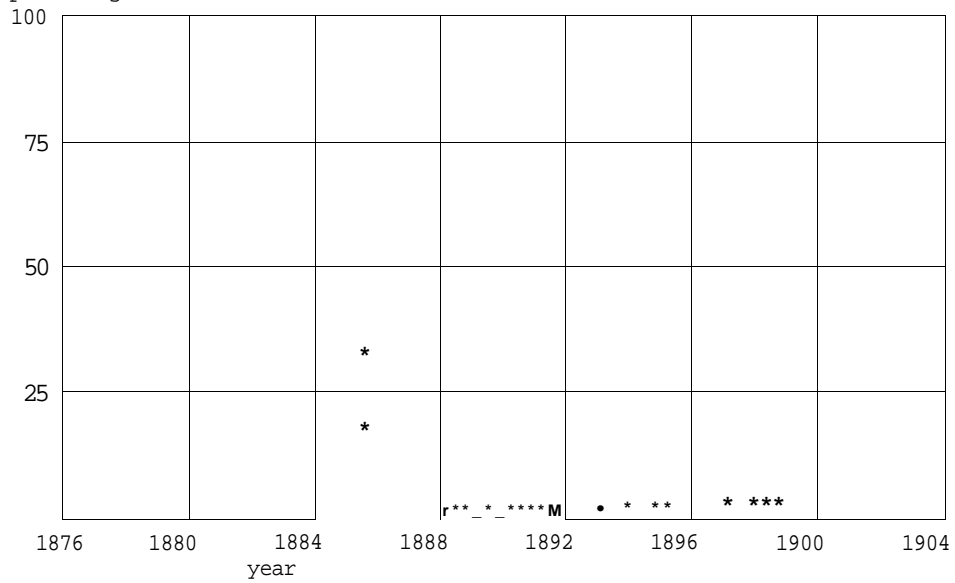
APPENDIX E

West Riding, Yorkshire 1899

cumulative distribution of habitation formation times
percentage



distribution of habitation formation times
percentage



APPENDIX F

Analysis of Primrose League Membership by County for 1888

I 0-2,000 Members				II 2,000-5,000 Members			
Mebrs.	County	Divs.	Habs.	Mebrs.	County	Divs.	Habs.
1969	Bedfordshire	3	11	3464	Cambridgeshire	4	21
1637	Huntingdonshire	2	9	4654	Herefordshire	2	20
1699	Rutland	1	3	3221	Westmorland	2	14
1090	Anglesey	1	4	2512	Cardiganshire	1	7
957	Brecknockshire	1	5	2579	Carnarvonshire	2	10
1065	Carmarthenshire	2	10	3158	Flintshire	1	10
670	Merionetshire	1	5	2510	Pembrokeshire	1	7
1917	Monmouthshire	2	10				
1023	Montgomeryshire	1	8				
738	Radnorshire	1	6				
III 5,000-10,000 Members				IV 10,000-15,000 Members			
Mebrs.	County	Divs.	Habs.	Mebrs.	County	Divs.	Habs.
7103	Berkshire	3	26	12,709	Dorsetshire	4	45
9289	Buckinghamshire	3	27	14,225	Essex	9	52
7472	Cornwall	5	24	12,263	Gloucestershire	9	66
6218	Cumberland	3	14	12,040	Leicestershire	4	23
5023	Durham	7	22	12,993	Hertfordshire	4	28
6060	Middlesex	7	34	12,383	Nottinghamshire	7	32
5232	Northamptonshire	4	19	10,778	Shropshire	4	30
7534	Northumberland	4	32	13,684	Staffordshire	12	45
6432	Oxfordshire	4	31	11,375	Suffolk	7	34
6946	Worcestershire	6	27	12,983	Surrey	19	79
5563	Denbighshire	2	19	12,707	Warwickshire	10	41
7057	Glamorganshire	5	23	11,888	Wiltshire	6	34
6687	Ireland	18	22	14,922	Yorkshire, N&E	8	41
379	Colonies		11				
Y 15,000-20,000 Members				VI Over 20,000 Members			
Mebrs.	County	Divs.	Habs.	Mebrs.	County	Divs.	Habs.
17,223	Derbyshire	8	41	22,589	Cheshire	8	53
17,722	Devonshire	11	49	24,501	Hampshire	9	63
15,104	Norfolk	7	44	23,061	Kent	18	63
17,333	Somerset	8	46	56,770	Lancashire	26	113
16,252	Sussex	8	50	26,419	Lincolnshire	7	22
18,684	Yorkshire, W.	21	64	22,618	London Metro.	33	81
				33,606	Yorkshire	29	105
				527,179	England	327	1322
				30,839	Wales & Monmouthshire	21	124

I-II = Small

III-IV = Medium

V-VI = Large

Bold = Wales and Monmouthshire

Source: The computerized listing of the 1888 and 1899 Rolls.

APPENDIX G

County by County Analysis of the 1888 Primrose League Membership as a Percentage of the 1891 Census

I 0-2,000			II 2,000-5,000		
Population	County		Population	County	%
160,704	Bedfordshire	1.2	188,961	Cambridgeshire	1.8
57,761	Huntingdonshire	2.8	115,949	Herefordshire	4.0
20,659	Rutland	8.2	66,098	Westmorland	4
50,098	Anglesey	2.1	62,630	Cardiganshire	4
57,031	Brecknockshire	1.6	118,204	Carnarvonshire	2
130,566	Carmarthenshire	.8	77,277	Flintshire	4
49,212	Merionetshire	1.3	89,133	Pembrokeshire	2.8
252,416	Monmouthshire	.7			
58,003	Montgomeryshire	1.7			
21,791	Radnorshire	3.3			
III 5,000-10,000			IV 10,000-15,000		
Population	County		Population	County	%
238,709	Berkshire		194,517	Dorsetshire	6.5
185,284	Buckinghamshire		785,445	Essex	1.8
322,571	Cornwall		599,947	Gloucestershire	2.0
266,549	Cumberland		373,584	Leicestershire	3.2
1 016,559	Durham		220,162	Hertfordshire	5.9
3,251,671	Middlesex		445,823	Nottinghamshire	2.7
302,183	Northamptonshire		236,339	Shropshire	4.5
506,030	Northumberland		1,083,408	Staffordshire	1.2
185,669	Oxfordshire		371,235	Suffolk	3.0
413,760	Worcestershire		1,731,343	Surrey	.7
117,872	Denbighshire		805,072	Warwickshire	1.5
687,218	Glamorganshire		264,997	Wiltshire	4.4
			768,933	Yorkshire, N&E	1.9
V 15,000-20,000			VI Over 20,000		
Population	County		Population	County	%
528,033	Derbyshire		730,058	Cheshire	3.0
631,808	Devonshire		690,097	Hampshire	3.5
454,516	Norfolk		1,142,324	Kent	2.0
484,337	Somerset		3,926,760	Lancashire	1.4
550,446	Sussex		472,878	Lincolnshire	5.5
2,439,895	Yorkshire, W.		3,388,957	London Metro.	.6
			3,208,828	Yorkshire	1.0
			27,231,074	England	1.9
			1,771,451	Wales & Monmouthshire	1.7

Bold = Wales and Monmouthshire

Source: The computerized listing of the 1888 Roll of Habitations measured with respect to the 1891 Census for England and Wales] London Metropolitan Habitations and Census figures exclude those metropolitan areas associated with Kent and Surrey counties.

APPENDIX H (Cont'd)

Comparison of Numbers of Habitations by County Based
Rolls of Habitations

VI 71-1573		
Co. Hab. No.	1888	1899
Lancashire	113	113
London Metro.	81	58
Surrey	79	63
Yorkshire	105	99
England	1573	1322
Wales &		
Honmouthshire	124	113
Scotland		85

I, II = Small
 III, IV = Medium
 V, VI = Large

Bold = Wales and Honmouthshire
 * = Scotland

Source: The computerized listing of the 1888 and 1899 Rolls.

APPENDIX I

Percentage Decline in Numbers of Habitations by County Based on the 1888
and 1899 Rolls of Habitations

I Greater than 31% decline		II 21-30% decline	
Co. Hab. No.	%	Co. Hab. No.	%
Bedfordshire	63.6	Buckinghamshire	70.3
Cambridgeshire	33.3	Herefordshire	75.0
Dorset	68.8	Huntingdonshire	77.7
Essex	65.3	Kent	76.1
Gloucestershire	62.1	London Metro.	71.6
Rutland	33.3	Middlesex	76.4
Staffordshire	53.3	Norfolk	72.7
Suffolk	67.6	Oxfordshire	70.9
Carmarthenshire	50.0	Shropshire	73.3
Merionethshire	60.0	Somerset	78.2
Radnorshire	66.6	Surrey	79.7
		Worcestershire	74.0
		Yorkshire, N&E Ridings	78.0
		Anglesey	75.0
		Glamorganshire	78.2
III 11-20% decline		IV 1-10% decline	
Co. Hab. No.	%	Co. Hab. No.	%
Berkshire	84.6	Cumberland	92.8
Derbyshire	87.8	Devonshire	93.8
Sussex	88.0	Durham	90.9
Warwickshire	82.9	Hampshire	96.8
Cardiganshire	85.7	Hertfordshire	96.4
Denbighshire	84.2	Nottinghamshire	90.6
England	84.0	Westmorland	92.8
		Yorkshire	94.2
		Ireland	95.4
		Wales and	
		Honmouthshire	91.1
Y 0-10% increase		VI Greater than 11% increase	
Co. Hab. No.	%	Co. Hab. No.	%
Cheshire	103.7	Leicestershire	113.0
Cornwall	108.3	Lincolnshire	118.1
Lancashire	100.0	Northamptonshire	121.0
Wiltshire	102.9	Northumberland	118.7
Yorkshire, W. Riding	104.6	Brecknockshire	120.0
Carnarvonshire	110.0	Honmouthshire	160.0
Flintshire	100.0		
Hontgomeryshire	100.0		
Pembrokeshire	100.0		

I-II = Significant Decline

III-IV = Moderate Decline

V-VI = Parity or Significant Increase

Bold = Wales and Honmouthshire

Percentages cited in many cases refer to only small changes in the number of Habitations between 1888 and 1899.

Source: The computerized listing of the 1888 and 1899 Rolls

