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Editorial and Notes

The length of "Asquith: The Formation of a Prime Minister", of which a condensed version was delivered as the Society's Annual Lecture in May 1980, is not intended to set a precedent, neither is it entirely a symptom of editorial self-indulgence. It assembles material, not previously displayed in this way, illustrating the context of a major politician — the Asquith hinterland. This context has been less ignored than discounted, hence its consideration in these pages.

The Society's third Summer School was held at Bristol Baptist College from the 12th to 14th September 1980. It was outstandingly successful. Major papers by Dr. Nuttall and Dr. Orchard were balanced by sectional papers whose subjects ranged from Essex suburban Congregationalism to the Presbyterian Church in England before 1876, from William Jay of Bath to the Rodborough Connexion. Bristol, its city, chapels and Baptist college, was expounded by Mr. Grant, Mr. Moon and Mr. Stell, and there were expeditions on foot into Bristol and by motor car into Bath.

Notes: The List and Index Society are to publish in 1981 Edwin Welch's catalogue of the Cheshunt College archives. The cost is expected to be £9 and enquiries should be directed to The List and Index Society, c/o The Public Record Office, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DV.

Family History Societies are a growth industry of great interest to members of this society; our attention has been drawn to *The Sussex Genealogist and Local Historian,* published quarterly from 4/33 Sussex Square, Brighton, BN2 5AB.

ASQUITH: THE FORMATION OF A PRIME MINISTER[1]

I

"We were never very fortunate in our M.P.'s", wrote R. F. Horton, whose congregation contained plenty. ". . . We might, of course, claim that Lord Oxford and Asquith was with us at the beginning, and Lord Reading, the recent Viceroy of India, at one time used to come to Lyndhurst Road, but the connection of all these was slight, and precarious; and as we may not appropriate the greatness of some, perhaps we may be exonerated from the weaknesses of others."[2]

So much for M.P.s. As for Prime Ministers, two particularly concern this society. Sir Harold Wilson was a member of one of our churches during his years of office[3]; Herbert Henry Asquith had been a member of a Congegational church in his late adolescence, and perhaps still counted as a Congregationalist when he first entered parliament. Our business is with him.

Imagine seven types of Liberal Prime Minister. The first, if he so cares, can work out a family connexion with Gladstone, Campbell-Bannerman, Cobden and Bright. Two sons marry the daughters of noblemen, two marry into the legal, landed and administrative classes; the fifth, who does not marry, distils the essence of such connexions into the film direction of *The Winslow Boy, The Browning Version* and *The Importance of Being Earnest.* One daughter marries a Balkan prince and knows Proust, the other marries a Winchester and Balliol civil servant nicknamed Bongie. Thus entrenched in all corners of the establishment, a great grandchild (to be precise, six great grand-daughters) of our Prime Minister can contemplate Arnold Toynbee as a grandfather and Gilbert Murray as a great grandfather, with Bertrand Russell as a first cousin and Clementine Churchill as a second cousin, three times and twice removed respectively. The family network has now become unmanageably Gilbertian, literally so, for W.S. Gilbert is also a cousin, twice removed, which would have amused our Prime Minister whose taste in music stopped at *Iolanthe.* [Chart I].

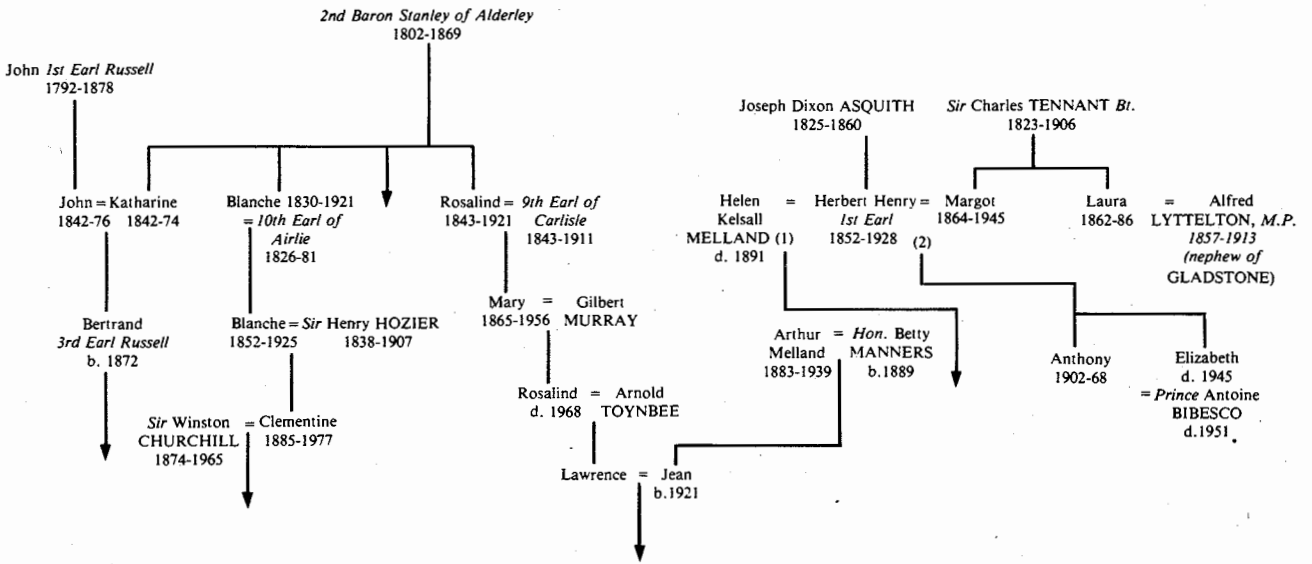
Superimpose a second type of Liberal Prime Minister. This one has been a Fellow of Balliol and a pioneer extramural lecturer, supplementing his stipend by writing for learned periodicals. A brother-in-law teaches at a London grammar school and a brother is housemaster at one of the most successful of the new public schools; two uncles and a great uncle are chairmen of important northern school boards. There is a first cousin whose husband, a medical knight, professes therapeutics at a provincial university and an aunt whose brother is Master of the Rolls and whose niece is married to a Cambridge professor of mechanism best known for his university extension work. There is also an aunt whose first cousin

[1]A condensed version of this paper was delivered as the Annual Lecture to the United Reformed Church History Society at Sheffield on Tuesday, 6th May, 1980.

[2]A. Peel and J. A. R. Marriott, *Robert Forman Horton,* 1937, p. 203.

[3]His membership was transferred from Rockferry Congregational church to Hampstead Garden Suburb Free church in January 1950. Hampstead Garden Suburb Free Church, *Roll of Church Members, 1938-1952* (Unless otherwise stated, church records were in possession of the local church at the time of consultation).

Chart I: An Established Cousinhood



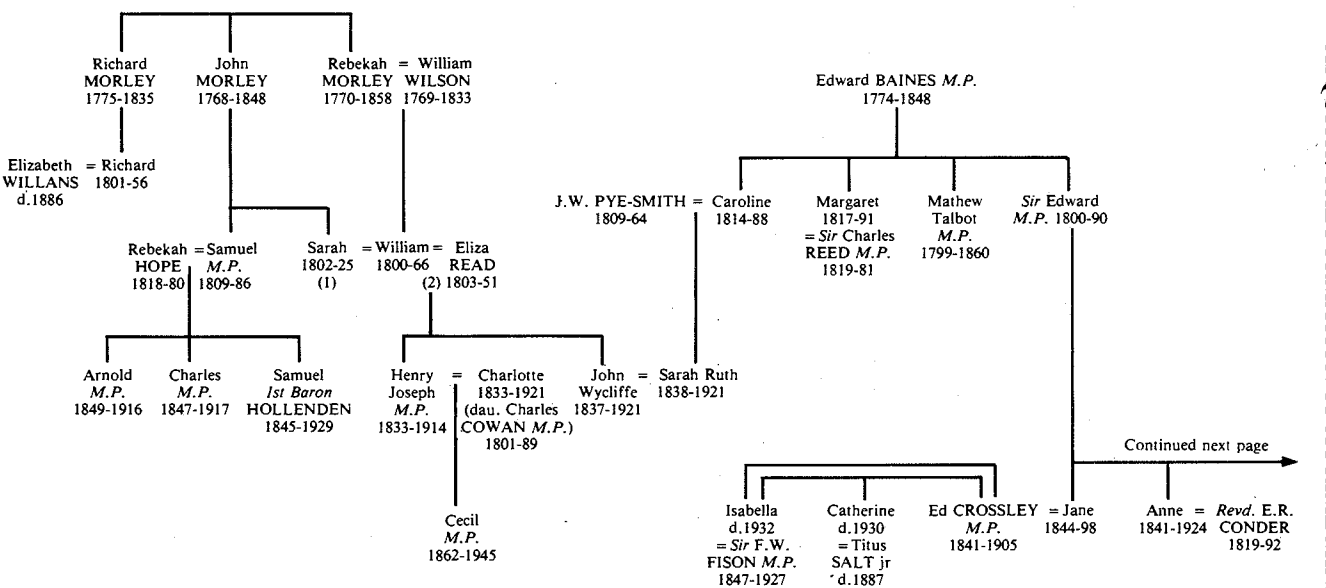
writes school yarns, whose uncle is a founder member and early chairman of the London School Board and whose step-niece is headmistress of a school for ministers' daughters with an early reputation for sending on its girls to Newnham and Girton.

Our third Prime Minister has philanthropy and mutual help for his context. In his youth he debated in the north London Y.M.C.A. of which an uncle was vice-president. Mechanics' Institutes and Sunday schools are hereditary concerns for his family, best reflected in the aunt's aunt whose husband has a national name in Sunday school matters, whose son is a secretary of the Bible Society and whose father-in-law has founded asylums for the orphaned, the insane and the incurable. The philanthropic context, already interconnected, becomes circular for our Prime Minister has another uncle who is founder, treasurer and chairman of Cottage Homes for Little Boys in North Kent.

Our fourth Prime Minister has an uncle who was mayor of Rochdale in 1869 and a great uncle who was Huddersfield's first mayor, in 1868. An aunt has married Firth's carpets while an uncle is brother-in-law to Crossley's carpets (and thus, by extension, to Salt's alpaca and mohair) as well as being son-in-law to *The Leeds Mercury*. Another uncle is brother-in-law to Colman's mustard and uncle by marriage to Pilkington's glass. Morley's stockings can be incorporated without undue difficulty and thus the way is open for Sheffield precious metal smelters, Scottish papermakers, the Batley prophet of successful profit-sharing, an early exponent of fire brigades, railway directors and a host of wool-staplers. This is on his parents' side. His first wife introduces a Lancashire tangle of cotton spinning Armitages, Lees, Rigbys and Haworths, together with Morton Peto, the Houses of Parliament's building contractor. In sum we have a national entrepreneurial network, several generations thick, backed inevitably by political muscle. Although our Prime Minister's grandfather and uncle have failed to enter parliament, their entrepreneurial-and-parliamentary cousinhood includes Samuel Morley, his sons Arnold and Charles, his brother-in-law George Denman, his nephew W. H. Bateman Hope and his cousin H. J. Wilson (whose wife's father and uncle were also M.P.s, not to mention the uncle who was chairman of Gladstone's Midlothian Liberals); it includes Francis Crossley, his brother John, his son Savile, his nephew Edward and his nephew-in-law, F.W. Fison; it includes Edward Baines senior, his sons Matthew and Sir Edward, his son-in-law Charles Reed; it includes Herbert Hardy Cozens-Hardy, his son William and his son-in-law Silvester Horne; it includes J. J. Colman and his son-in-law James Stuart; there are Morton Peto, Arthur Haworth and George Kemp; Benjamin, William and Thomas Whitworth, and more besides. When peerages come, three of them (Cozens-Hardy, Rochdale and Hollenden) are on the recommendation of our Prime Minister, as are three baronetcies (Firth, Willans Nussey and Haworth). [Chart II]

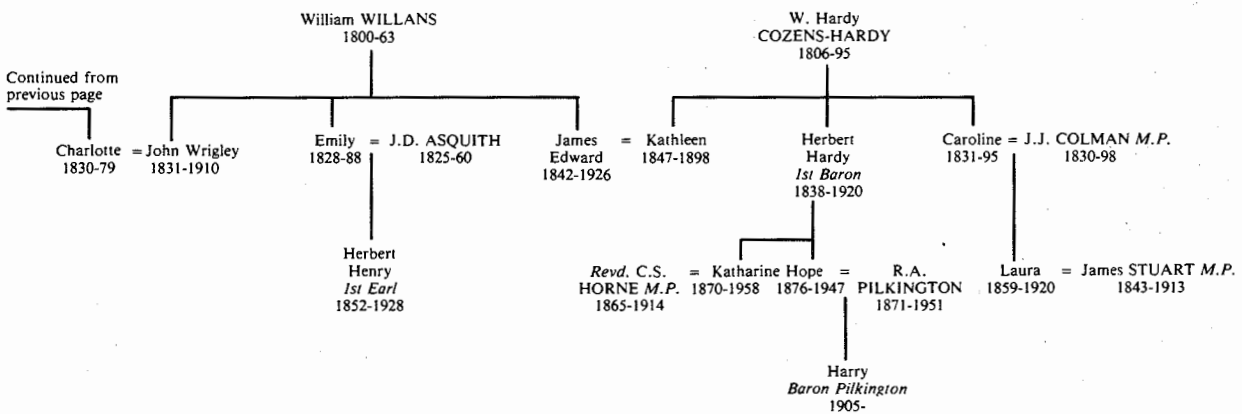
So to our fifth Prime Minister. He joined a Congregational church at the age of fifteen, as did his elder brother, his sister marries a Congregational minister and on his father's side there are cousinly connexions with several more, one of them a missionary to South Africa. Maternal connexions include ministers of leading Congregational churches in Leeds and London, and the pious dynasties of Reed and Pye-Smith. Since it is hard to find any extended entrepreneurial family without its clerical core (or fringe) there emerges a connexion of cousins, friends and churches;

Chart II: A Dissenting Cousinhood



[issue of Joseph CROSSLEY, brother of *Sir* Francis CROSSLEY *Bt., M.P.*]

Chart II: A Dissenting Childhood *(Continued)*



deacons, missionary society directors, Sunday school superintendents; Andrew Reed, father and son, James and Edward Parsons, Silvester Horne, and also Robert Vaughan and Henry Robert Reynolds, Barrett of the *Hymnal,* Elkanah Armitage of Yorkshire United Independent; Princes Street Norwich, Union Islington, Great George Street Liverpool, Milton Rochdale and Milton Huddersfield, Albion Ashton-under-Lyne, Harrogate and St. Leonards. Nor are they solely Congregationalists, for there are Free Methodists and New Connexion Methodists in Rochdale, Ashton and Darlington; there are Baptists in Rochdale and Unitarians with, here and there, the Free Church of Scotland and its English fellow travellers.

There remain the sixth and seventh Prime Ministers. The father of the sixth dies when he is eight, his mother when he is thirty-six. There is little money and much ill health in a youth where schools and lodgings mix unevenly and where life means self-help, with origins successively rejected or forgotten when Oxford caps the educational edifice, when the bar completes the professional ascent, and when Westminster opens the world of affairs. As for the seventh, he is in the Commons from 1886 to 1918 and from 1920 to 1924, and in the Lords from 1925 to 1928; he is Home Secretary from 1892 to 1895, Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1905 to 1908, Prime Minister from 1908 to 1916. In short, he is in parliament for forty years and in the highest offices for fourteen, for eight of them presiding over a cabinet which has been equalled in talent and performance but not surpassed and over legislation which has been fundamental in forming our present liberal, indeed social democratic, society.

These are seven ways of looking at Herbert Henry Asquith. The first is the way of memoirists and distinguished anecdotards, the last is the way of text books. Asquith favoured the sixth which, with the first and last, is also the way of his biographers. The others have been less ignored than discounted. To Stephen Koss, his latest biographer: "Because Asquith's early development did not contribute materially to his mature outlook, it does not warrant a detailed investigation [in a concise political biography]". The reasoning is firm: Asquith's

> modest upbringing, while never repudiated, was effectively transcended . . . he quickly outgrew the Puritan ethic and theology of his forebears. . . Once he arrived, he had no reason to recollect his point of departure, which had proved more an irrelevance than a liability. . . From all indications . . . those Nonconformist roots had never run very deep. Certain influences were inescapable, but these tended to be of a negative quality. The deprivations of his boyhood left him with a thirst for luxury, a weakened ability to resist temptation, and a financial recklessness. . . Without a supreme belief in his innate ability, what hope would he have had for storming the citadels of late-Victorian Oxford and Westminster?[4]

We may find this unconvincing. Puritan ethic and theology may be rejected but not outgrown and we might feel that, if proper weight is given to the full context of Asquith's first forty years, bearing in mind that politically he remained loyal to that context and was therefore never quite free from its intellectual and social affinities, we have the basis for a more satisfying appreciation of the last Prime Minister of a

[4]S. Koss, *Asquith,* 1976, pp. 3,2.

wholly Liberal government. That government, moreover, reflected the first and most consistently successful of our mass political parties at a brief but piquant stage of our political development when there was a mass electorate with a working class majority which was nonetheless still based on property and interest, and from which millions of able bodied men, as well, of course, as women, were excluded. Asquith reflected that electorate to perfection. Indeed, my purpose in beginning with a seven-fold amen was to suggest that no Prime Minister in the past hundred years has been more representative of the contemporary body politic. Asquith may not have taken the obvious openings that came his way. It would be silly to read too much into links and coincidences, many of them unknown to him. They provide no blueprint, for the attitudes which they encompassed were often mutually exclusive, but there remain sufficient congruities to justify the reconstruction of an Asquithian context that was varied, peculiar and pervasive. Within this setting enough people knew of each other to explain a whole complex of responses, and plenty of its men (and several of its women) successfully breached the educational, professional and political citadels of established society. Asquith was unique only in his earldom and his Prime Ministership: given his context and qualities, anonymity would have been more remarkable than inclusion in the proliferating *Who's Whos* of a near democracy.

II

"What novelist could have invented the name Asquith?" Evelyn Waugh wanted to know[5]. What novelist could have invented a Prime Minister Asquith whose private circle was so dramatically the mainspring of British political life at such a time?[6] "Beatrice Webb often used to say with one of her well-known derisory sniffs that it was the Asquith circle who convinced her that the English upper classes were doomed to extinction. Somehow the short 'a' in her pronunciation of 'classes' gave the remark an extra ferocity".[7] The distaste was shared, for different reasons, by foreign aristocrats and by some of Asquith's colleagues; yet the tradition endures of higher qualities. For the *Irish Times* in 1928 Asquith, the soul of honour,

> became the sport of intrigue, the victim of ingratitude and misrepresentation, but he was always loyal, always proudly serene, most patient when provocation was bitterest and least deserved. The keynote of Lord Oxford's character was magnanimity, and with his death a high and subtle quality has gone out of English politics.[8]

For *The Times* of London in 1970 it was enough to devote an election leader to "The Asquith Ideal":

> . . . Asquithian Liberalism has been one of the consistent influences on *The Times* in recent years, indeed since the war. It is in our view the finest of all the British political traditions, humane, conscientious, lucid, intellectual, courageous, and just. . . . To an unusual degree the Asquith tradition has been

[5] C. Sykes, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography*, 1975, p. 86.

[6] "The irreplaceable Sir Maurice", (review of S. Roskill, *Hankey; Man of Secrets), Times Literary Supplement*, 23 April 1970 p. 453.

[7] M. Muggeridge, *The Observer Review*, 21 April 1968.

[8] Quoted in H. H. Asquith, *Memories and Reflections 1852-1927*, Vol. 1, 1928, p. XII.

> maintained by the Asquith family. . . *The Times* in this election would cheerfully work on a dynastic principle and give our support to any Asquith anywhere.[9]

In 1974 it was enough for The *Times* obituary to Sir Harry Verney to stress that he was the last survivor of Asquith's administration.[10]

Our interest in this Asquithian myth is that its context was cemented as much by religion as by social or economic factors. We are not here concerned with the obsolescence built into certain expressions of Nonconformity or the failure, political and sometimes personal, built into all Prime Ministerships. Our concern is to isolate the religious inheritance of a particular political personality.

It was J. S. Rowntree's belief that a spiritual inheritance is a possession until renounced or lost[11]: Asquith did not quite do either. Indeed he had a great belief in personality. He wrote to Lady Horner in 1891 about Parnell, who fascinated him, "Personality is still the most potent factor in the world, and as long as some men die at forty-five and others live to be ninety, political prophecy will be a fond and futile art."[12] He was also sensitive to connexion. John Simon (whose uncle and Asquith's brother-in-law had been fellow students at Spring Hill College) recalled how he and Asquith were listening to one of Stanley Baldwin's early speeches:

> Asquith did not know who he was and presently he whispered to me, 'Do you notice what good English this man talks?', and stretched his hand to the Table for *Dod's Parliamentary Companion* — the little blue-covered reference book which Ronald McNeil once threw at Winston Churchill. Asquith loved to study the details of a parliamentary biography while sitting in the House and he pointed out to me how the speaker was the son of a former Member, who had been Chairman of the Great Western Railway.[13]

This memory illuminates the small collection of congratulatory letters at Asquith's peerage, and after, which survives in the least personally revealing of political archives, the Asquith Papers in the Bodleian Library: love and heartiest good wishes from his first wife's cousin, Annie Melland; heartiest congratulations from the surviving Willans uncle and his first wife's sister, Josephine Armitage (this with a dynastic note about a family connexion, "a good stout Liberal in more than one sense. The Haworths don't change . . ."); heartiest congratulations and "very lively remembrance" from Ramsden Street Congregational Church, Huddersfield, then on the verge of closure.[14] There were two especially revealing letters. Thomas Barlow wrote from Wendover: ". . . I hope you will tolerate a line from a humble member of the group of middle class puritans whose principles and traditions you have embodied and interpreted. We have always believed in you and always shall".[15] A year later, T. R. Glover, the Baptist classicist, sent his *Herodotus*

[9] "The Asquith Ideal", *The Times*, 8 June 1970.
[10] The obituary was headed "An Asquithian Liberal", The *Times*, 24 December 1974.
[11] Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, O.U.P. 1970, p. 69.
[12] J. A. Spender and C. Asquith, *Life of Herbert Henry Asquith, Lord Oxford and Asquith*, Vol. I, 1932, p. 66.
[13] J. Simon, *Retrospect*, 1952 p. 274.
[14] Anne Melland to H. H. A[squith] 27 January 1925, Asquith Mss. 35/80, Bodleian Library; J. E. Willans to H.H.A., 27 January 1925, Asquith Mss. 35/91; Josephine Armitage to H.H.A., 30 January 1925, Asquith Mss. 35/117; Revd. F. Wheatcroft to H.H.A., 29 January 1925, Asquith Mss. 35/111.
[15] Thomas Barlow to H.H.A. 26 January 1925, Asquith Mss. 35/22.

in return for Asquith's *Scaliger:* "I shall be glad if you will accept it from a fellow student (if I may say so) and a follower who proposes to go on following".[16] These people were neither fond nor naive in seeing Asquith's honour as their honour. Whatever its outworkings in him, Asquith's was the Nonconformist generation which, born when Huddersfield, Morley or Rochdale were yet to become municipal boroughs, saw one of themselves become Home Secretary at the age of forty and Prime Minister when he had just turned fifty-six.

In 1873, when Asquith was still an Oxford undergraduate, the minister of Huddersfield's senior Congregational church spoke at the opening of new buildings for Silcoates, the school for Congregational ministers' sons just outside Wakefield:

> He was anxious that the Congregational body should avail itself to the fullest extent of the high educational advantages now offered for the sake of the influence such learning would enable its possessors to exert as teachers of others and leaders of public opinion. Then there would be no pretext for saying that there was no Congregationalist fit to be a headmaster of a School, a Government Inspector, or to take any of the highest offices of State. He did not see why it should be thought a thing incredible, before this century was ended, that some of those who now sat on those benches should have a seat on the Woolsack and in the Cabinet of State Ministers. With a learned Jew as Master of the Rolls, a right royal Quaker in the Duchy of Lancaster, and a Baptist on the Bench, why might not a Christian Gentile, though the son of a poor independent Minister be Attorney General or Lord Chief Justice.[17]

Dr. Bruce, whose own family circle produced its first M.P. in the following year, and who in earlier days had taught John Morley, lived to see the spirit of his dream fulfilled, if not the letter.[18]

III

It is part of the received truth about Asquith that he put the North behind him in 1864 when he and his brother left Huddersfield for Islington and City of London School while his mother and sisters moved on down to St. Leonards. Received truth is seldom the whole truth and Asquith's northern background is too wide for summary rejection. When, thirty-nine years later, Asquith excused himself from the centenary celebrations of Union Chapel, Islington, a local journalist got his origins terribly garbled, turning Asquith's Yorkshire cloth merchant father into a Lancashire cotton spinner who died for his faith, as it were, having lost his money in the cotton famine caused by the American Civil War.[19] Yorkshire and Lancashire, cotton and wool, must be very similar to a London reporter, yet he was not too far wrong and the Yorkshire Asquith is best seen as a product of the distinct yet interlocking Nonconformist, Liberal and textile communities, each with its hinterland, of Morley and Huddersfield in the West Riding and of Rochdale, across the Pennines.

[16] T. R. Glover to H.H.A., 28 April 1926, Asquith Mss. 35/202.
[17] H. H. Oakley, *The First Century of Silcoates,* Cheltenham 1920, p. 41.
[18] The nephew was W. E. Briggs, M. P. Blackburn 1874-1885; *Huddersfield Examiner,* 21 July 1906.
[19] Undated cutting, April 1899, in Union Chapel Islington, *Scrap Book.*

The Asquiths were from Morley. Their name is frequently found in the membership rolls and diaconates of the West Riding, but Morley was the heartland of the Prime Ministerial Asquiths. Morley is small, still self-contained although untidily attached to Leeds, with Wakefield, Dewsbury, and Bradford to complete its encirclement. It is neither distinguished nor prosperous and any intervening stretches of countryside are unsatisfactory. Its dominating feature is a recreation of Leeds town hall forty years on. There are no commanding villas although several austerely substantial houses remain along the road, inevitably called Victoria Road, to Leeds. Asquith's birthplace, Croft House, is towards this area, in what was then called Windmill Hill and is now confined by the speculative housing of Croft House Road, Close, Gardens, Drive, and View. The house itself survives, more solidly representative of the reticent prosperity of mid-Victorian woolmen than Asquith's biographers have suggested. In the West Riding way it was in ample grounds yet very close to rows of workmen's cottages. Its style suggests resident maids, yet it was the home of a family man in his twenties.

These were chapel villas. The three Anglican churches, none older than 1830, are off centre and until recently it was the chapels which caught the eye: the Baptists, large and sturdy late-comers, the ornate Primitive and solidly old-fashioned Wesleyan Methodists, and the Congregationalists of Rehoboth and St. Mary's. Rehoboth, 1830's classical, was on a bank near Morley Hall framed by one of those northern graveyards whose grandeur and panache confound the southerner, though the brief lives etched on the prosperous stones add the uncertainty necessary to proper understanding. Here, under a drape surmounted monument, encompassing the century from 1778 to 1888, lie Asquith's grandparents, parents, and two of his sisters. The other Congregational church is as surprising as the town hall. This one is very much the parish church, commandingly close to the centre, with its Sunday school an opulent dependency some way off. At first sight, St. Mary's-in-the-Wood, rebuilt by Lockwood and Mawson in 1883 in what was by then rather old-fashioned Decorated Gothic with clocktower, spire and much stained glass, could have been built by any community of over-rapidly prosperous northern Dissenters, as good of its kind as it is disturbing to an agonized posterity. But its graveyard does not fit. St. Mary's graveyard, larger than Rehoboth's although filled with the same names, serves a community for whom chapel, not Church, was the folk religion. Hence the table tombs to the Websters of Morley Hall, the mausoleum to the Scatcherds of Morley House and other unexpected things, for the daughter of a seventeenth-century poet (Edmund Waller) and the wife of an eighteenth-century Lord Chancellor (Loughborough) are as unusual in a Dissenting burial ground as Charles II's Arms, a Pancake Bell rung an hour before noon each Shrove Tuesday, and a Passing Bell, for funerals, are strange in a Dissenting chapel. Morley has them all. Such Dissent, unbroken since Cromwell's day, is less that of the great West Riding textile centres than of the small East Anglian towns, Stowmarket, Beccles, Bungay, Halstead, Braintree, with their settled chapel communities and their self-sufficing economy. Like them Morley was stiff with instinctive Dissent. William Smith captured its nature in 1888 when he applied to Morley what Bardsley's *English Surnames* applied more generally to the West Riding:

> Puritanism . . . was like the fire that smoulders among the underwood before it catches flame, it spreads the more rapidly afterwards. The Geneva Bible crept into the dales and farmsteads, and their own primitive life seemed but to

be reflected in its pages. The Patriarchs lived as graziers, so did they. There was a good deal about sheep and kine in its chapters, and their own lives were spent among the milk-pails and wool shears. The women of the Old Testament baked cakes, and knew what good butter was. So did the dales folk. By slow degrees Cecilia, Isabella, and Emma lapsed from their pedestal, and the little babes were turned into Sarahs, Rebekahs, and Deborahs. As Nonconformity gained ground, Guy and Miles, and Peter and Philip became forgotten. The lads were no longer ushered into existence than they were transformed into duplicates of Joel and Amos, and Obadiah. The measles still ran through the family, but it was Phineas and Caleb, not Robert and Roger, that underwent the infliction. Chosen leaders of Israel passed through the critical stages of teething. As for the twelve sons of Jacob they could all have answered to their names in the dames' schools, through their little apple-cheeked representatives which lined the rude benches. On the village green every prophet, from Isaiah to Malachi, might be seen of an evening playing leap-frog; unless, indeed, Zephaniah was stealing apples in the Garth. If we look over the Directories of West Yorkshire and strike out the surnames, we could imagine we were consulting anciently inscribed registers of Joppa or Jericho. It would seem as if Canaan and the West Riding had got inextricably mixed.[20]

This was the Morley whose Old Chapel (as St. Mary's was better known before 1883) employed at least to 1847 a clerk to give out hymns and notices in a sing-song drawl from his place below the pulpit[21] That Old Chapel, "the only instance in England and Wales", it was locally believed, "of an ancient episcopal place of worship which was not restored to the Established Church at the restoration of the Stuarts",[22] survived much altered until demolished as a dangerous structure in 1875. It had started as a tithe barn, become a chapel of ease to Batley, been refitted in the 1640's by the Puritan Saviles of Howley Hall, and leased in September 1650 to Morley's Presbyterians. From the 1690's (there had previously been three decades of Prayer Book worship, although the Presbyterian trustees never relinquished legal control) the chapel housed an avowed and respectable Presbyterian congregation, in neighbourly relationship with the West Riding's oldest Congregational church one mile off, at Topcliffe. Its ministers were respectable men, their orthodoxy increasingly suspect but never disproved; and so it continued when the church became fully Congregational in the early nineteenth century. The cause attracted college trained men with eligible pastorates or college tutorships ahead of them. There was, too, the hint of greater matters: one of the ministers was Henry Dunckley's brother-in-law, whose *Manchester Examiner,* far more than the *Manchester Guardian,* was the voice of the true Manchester School. Samuel Stead of the *Morley Observer* sat under him.[23]

[20]W. Smith ed., *The Registers of Topcliffe, and Morley,* 1888, pp. 39-40. Compare this with Dr. Halley's address at the Centenary Tea-meeting of Highfield, Huddersfield in February 1872: ". . . . How fond the Yorkshire people were of their Bibles! They recorded on the fly leaf the names of their children, and he never read such a list of Joshuas, Jonases, Jeremiahs, Gamaliels, Elkanahs and Lukes . . .", R. Bruce, *Centenary Memorial of Highfield Chapel, Huddersfield,* Huddersfield 1872, p. 134.

[21]Smith, *op. cit.,* p. 46.

[22]Thus the church noticeboard.

[23]For the history of the church see Smith *op. cit. passim,* esp. pp. 24-51; J. G. Miall, *Congregationalism in Yorkshire,* 1868 pp. 320-3. Dunckley's brother-in-law was the Revd. George Southey, minister from 1866 to 1875.

Rehoboth was more in the West Riding style. Titus Salt, that alpaca prince of Bradford prosperity, was baptised there in 1803.[24] Independent from its inception, the self-consciously evangelical product of revival, it began in 1763 as a secession from the Old Chapel (with whom it reunited in 1967) and its second minister was from Trevecca. In the early 1830's there was trouble with the lord of the manor. As J. G. Miall summarises it, "the chapel, minister's house and graveyard were seized by the Earl of Dartmouth, because the people worshipping there refused to pay church-rates."[25] Or, as the *Church Book* puts it: "The people weary of Tory arbitrary and high Church tyranny over their consciences left the Chapel the 'dwelling' house the Vestery and the sepulcheres of their fathers and erected a spacious Chapel and Vestery and a Sabbath School room". These were freehold, vested in trustees powerless to "interfere with the spiritual concerns". Hence Rehoboth, broad places. "The Lord hath made room for us [it seated 800] and the best of all is the Lord is with us and hitherto the Lord hath helped us [it cost £3,000]."[26]

This excitement braced Morley Congregationalists between 1833 and 1835, in the aftermath of the Great Reform Act and at the very time that the Old Chapel was consolidating its Congregationalism. This was Morley's experience of that first national shift towards the emergence of what became known as the Nonconformist Conscience and the new Rehoboth's second minister summed up every aspect of this experience. Jonah Reeve, at Rehoboth from 1849 to 1858, was an Essex man from Braintree, who left for Stowmarket in Suffolk. Braintree and Stowmarket were Congregationally notable, indeed notorious, the former for its Church Rate Case and the latter for its Early English mini-cathedral which Jonah Reeve went to build. All three were proper pastorates for a man of 1662 descent with Cromwellian connexions, educated at Mill Hill but awakened at Thomas Binney's Weigh House and trained at Thomas Wilson's Highbury, whose father-in-law was one of Andrew Reed's deacons at Wycliffe, Stepney, and whose patron in his first pastorate was that fox hunting teetotaler of a Cumbrian squire, the elder Sir Wilfrid Lawson.[27] His was the Asquiths' Rehoboth.

An Asquith was a trustee of the Old Chapel at the time of the 1763 secession.[28] A hundred years earlier a Morley Asquith, his connexion with the Prime Minister more circumstantial than proven, had been imprisoned in York Castle in the aftermath of the Farnley Wood Plot.[29] But Asquiths were certainly a continuous part of Morley's Dissenting community from the late seventeenth century to the 1950's. It was a community of large and interrelated families, and among the Asquiths at least

[24] On 9 November 1803, *Baptismal Register: New Independent Church Morley, 1765-1967,* Rehoboth archive, Book 57, in possession of Morley United Reformed church.

[25] Miall, *op.cit.,* p. 324.

[26] *Subscription Book 1833-35,* Rehoboth Archive, Book 63. Rehoboth, "broad places" and "plenty of room" (N.E.B.) was the name given to a well dug by Isaac's servants after two others dug by them had provoked a quarrel with the King of Gerar (Gen. 26, v. 22). The chapel, latterly a warehouse, was destroyed by fire in the early 1970's.

[27] For Jonah Reeve, 1810-98, see *Congregational Year Book,* 1899, pp. 199-200.

[28] Smith, *op.cit.,* p. 33.

[29] The connexion is circumstantial and the degree of suffering is in doubt; "Joshua Asquith, *alias* Cardmaker, *alias* Sparling, descendants of whom are still living, also escaped with his life by turning informer . . ." *Ibid,* p. 32.

life expectancy was distressingly low. Herbert Henry Asquith's immediate circle was small since his father was an only child, but within the compass of Morley great uncles and aunts down to second cousins, chapel goers all, the spectrum ranges from the spinster dressmaker, who would appear to have died in the workhouse, through artisans to farmers, toolmakers, to manufacturers and wool merchants. Two Asquiths in this section of the extended family were J.P.s. The rhythm of their prosperity was that of Morley's Congregationalism. [Chart III]

The relative prosperity of Asquith's father, Joseph Dixon Asquith, owed most to the Gillroyd Mills and to the Dixon connexion. The millowning Dixons of Bank Top were the leading Rehoboth family: the graveyard is full of Dixons, Dixon Marshalls, Dixon Perkinses and Dixon Asquiths. A Dixon was trustee of Old Chapel in 1763; Thomas Dixon was a deacon at Rehoboth for many years before Jonah Reeve's pastorate; Asquith's grandmother was one of three Dixon women to marry Asquith brothers. The Gillroyd Mill Company, formed with the style of Asquith, Clark and Co., but financed as a cooperative by forty local manufacturers, in 1834, the year of Rehoboth's rebuilding, was a useful concern whose purpose-built premises, valued at £30,000 in 1867, had been one of Morley's first three steam powered mills.[30]

Dixon Asquith, therefore, was a man of local substance. In 1853, when the population of Morley approached 5,000, and Dixon Asquith was twenty-eight (and Herbert Henry in his second year), White's *Directory* lists him as one of Morley's six "gentlemen", two of the others being Dixons.[31] He was a merchant rather than a manufacturer, and merchants needed to know about outlets in the cities and overseas. Their horizons were wide. Yet the picture of Dixon Asquith, mediated through his widow's family, who came to her rescue and who were also wool merchants, is of a gentle man, ineffectually upright, unsuccessful in business without failing in it, at one with surviving photographs of a good-looking fellow, wide-browed, eyes widely set in a beard-fringed face.[32] Certainly his early death at a bad time for trade in a business notorious for its annual fluctuations doomed his widow to gentility in the quieter southern resorts and London suburbs; yet there is also the recollection, not incompatible, of an intellectually alert man, fluent on the platform, active in the Mechanics' Institute and the Young Men's Bible Class.[33] This Dixon Asquith fits more easily into Croft House and Rehoboth.

Rehoboth explains his education at Dr. Haigh's, one of those transient, adequate boarding schools run by Dissenting ministers from (and for) respectable families. Benjamin Bentley Haigh (1803-1869) was diverted to Tadcaster, where he learned fifteen languages, when poor health prevented a career as principal of a London Missionary Society college in China. His school eventually blossomed as Bramham College, with a hundred pupils to whom he would preach "in his own

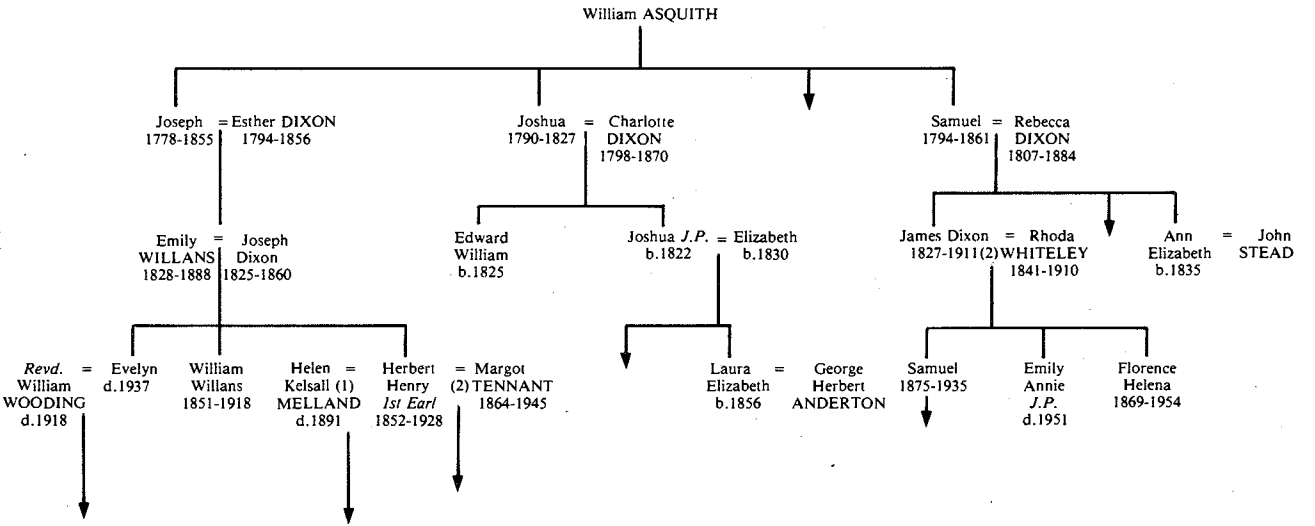
[30]G. Wood, *The Story of Morley*, n.d.c. 1914 pp. 332-3, 224; W. Smith, *Rambles About Morley*, 1866, p. 58. The Asquith was Joseph Asquith, H. H. Asquith's grandfather.

[31]W. White, White's *1853 Leeds and the Clothing Districts of Yorkshire*, rep. Newton Abbot 1969, p. 319.

[32]A photograph is reproduced in Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

[33]F. Elias, *The Right Hon. H. H. Asquith, M.P.*, 1909, p. 12. He "was gifted with many estimable qualities; was, for a while, the idol of his parents; marrying well, his path for a time, seemed strewed with flowers, but he was suddenly called away". Smith, *Rambles, op. cit.*, p. 88.

Chart III: The Morley Asquiths



peculiarly interesting and instructive manner."[34] Like Jonah Reeve, Haigh expresses the complex of early Victorian Congregationalism. Among those whom he influenced was William Dixon (1815-1867), the chronically frail son of Thomas Dixon, the Rehoboth deacon and manufacturer.[35] Through Haigh, Dixon entered the Congregational ministry in 1850; and once breached the ministry opens many avenues. Eight years earlier William Dixon's sister Sarah had married William Ashton who joined Robert Moffat at Kuruman in 1843; another sister married Simeon Dyson, who belonged to the Guinness Rogers generation of ministers and whose hilltop ministry at Idle, with its Croft House-like manse, solid, square and purpose-built, was one of the West Riding's powerful pastorates.[36]

This criss-crossing of paths and pastorates was reflected in the criss-crossing of family relationships, for the sons of two of the three Asquith brothers with Dixon wives went to Haigh's school. Dixon Asquith was one, the other was his first cousin, Joshua (b.1822), whose career was what Dixon's should have been. Joshua Asquith's mercantile success was reflected in his Morley houses (Mount Pleasant; Springfield, where some of the Websters had lived; Morley Grange) and in his retirement to Scarborough. He became a J.P. and his daughters married manufacturers. One of them, Laura Elizabeth, Mrs. George Herbert Anderton, took the pen name of Mrs. Herbert Lea and in 1885 wrote a novel, *Weary Wealth.*[37]

The wealth, possibly weary, frequently relative, was certainly pious and it embraced each of Morley's Congregational chapels. Two Asquiths contributed to the purchase of Rehoboth's first baptismal register in 1765, an Asquith was the second largest donor to the church-rate-free, landlord-purified Rehoboth of 1833 and an Asquith was deacon, secretary and treasurer thirty years on.[38] For most of the century there were also Asquiths on the Old Chapel's management committee, sometimes chairing its meetings, and the most active of these, James Dixon Asquith (1827-1911), cousin of Joseph Dixon and Joshua the J.P., became senior deacon.[39] James and Joshua, unlike their cousin, saw the Old Chapel turn into St. Mary's, a transformation as significant for Morley Congregationalism, and no less a reflection of national trends, as the rebuilding of Rehoboth had been in 1834.[40]

IV

Herbert Henry Asquith was directly linked with Morley for eight years, from 1852 to 1858, and with Huddersfield for half that time, from 1860 when his father died

[34]For Haigh see *Congregational Year Book,* 1870, pp. 295-6; his pupils included Sir J. E. Bingham Bt., (1839-1915) head of the Sheffield cutlery firm of Walker and Hall, Tory (and a freemason) but of Congregational origins. *Sheffield and District Who's Who,* 1905, p. 96.

[35]*Congregational Year Book,* 1868, pp. 269-70.

[36]For Ashton see J. Sibree and E. Shillito, *London Missionary Society: A Register of Missionaries, Deputations, etc. from 1796 to 1923* 4th ed. 1923 p. 56; for Dyson see *Congregational Year Book,* 1905, pp. 157-8.

[37]Elias, *op.cit.,* p.12; St. Mary's Congregational Church, *Roll of Church Members 1862,* St. Mary's archive, book 6; *Marriage Register and List of Church Members,* book 8.

[38]*Baptismal Register: New Independent Church Morley 1766-1967,* Rehoboth archive, book 57; *Subscription Book 1833-35,* Rehoboth archive, book 63. Edward William Asquith (b.1825), Joshua's younger brother, was deacon from 1864 to 1870, P. Kightley, *the Story of Rehoboth,* Morley 1934, p. 41.

[39]James Dixon Asquith, millwright, of Middlethorpe, was elected deacon in 1868, and his activities can be fully monitored from the surviving records of St. Mary's, notably book 8. His firm made most of the machinery for the local mills.

[40]Morley had a third Congregational church, Zion, a secession from Rehoboth which built a chapel at Churwell in 1804 and moved into Morley in 1850, rebuilding in 1866. This cause, long independent of all denominational ties, still survives. Miall, *op.cit.*; p.324.

to 1864 after the death of his grandfather Willans. The links were wool, Congregationalism and politics; and William Willans, the Huddersfield deacon, woolstapler, Radical, and frustrated minister, contributed £1 to Rehoboth's building fund in 1835.[41] Such links were confirmed on 18 September 1850, at a double wedding in Ramsden Street Chapel, Huddersfield, when Willans's eldest daughter Emily married Dixon Asquith. Emily was twenty-two, her husband twenty-five.

Huddersfield in 1850 was Morley ten times larger, but there were deeper differences than those of scale for Huddersfield was to all intents and purposes a new town. Indeed, in the outward expression of civic consciousness (rebuilt parish church, railway station, cemetery, college) the transformation was barely fifteen years old and was still in full swing. The Huddersfield notables were men who had come into the town, grown with it, moulded it, had their opportunities and perceptions enlarged by it. Their children intermarried, and although the second and third generations were now thickening the town's traditions, the pioneers were still alive and kicking. The long procession of civic funerals which celebrated their passing was not quite in sight. The Wrigleys and Hirsts came in from neighbouring villages, the Joneses from Manchester, the Woodheads from Holmfirth, the Willanses from Leeds.

Willans, like Asquith, is a confusingly common West Riding name, more Congregationally notable though less Congregationally numerous. Between the woolstapling, Congregational William Willanses of Huddersfield and the textile manufacturing, Congregational Obadiah Willanses of Leeds, there was acknowledged connexion and some friendship. The Obadiah Willanses were East Parade and, later, Headingley Hill, with their own network of useful cousins, from a daughter of Principal Vaughan of Lancashire College (there was a particular friendship between Emily [Willans] Asquith, widowed in 1860, and Susan [Vaughan] Willans, widowed in 1863[42]) to the large Leeds branch of Nottingham Morleys, thence to Morley Fletchers and Morley Horders; there were also the Nusseys, of whom T. Willans Nussey was M.P. for Pontefract from 1893, thence to East Anglian Radicalism through R. L. Everett, the Baptist agriculturalist who became M.P. for Woodbridge in 1885.[43]

Such limitless vistas of connexion should not obscure one important disconnexion between Huddersfield and Morley. Huddersfield Congregationalism, although influential, could not be Huddersfield's folk religion. It had begun with Highfield, formed in 1772 when the parish church's evangelicalism appeared to be on the wane. In the 1820's Highfield provided the nucleus for an amiable secession to form Ramsden Street and by the late 1850's there was agitation for further movement. These were successful northern churches. Highfield had weight, Ramsden Street had drive. Ramsden Street was a young man's church, perhaps an ageing young man's church. The Willanses, Joneses, Hirsts, Shaws and Wrigleys

[41]Subscription Book 1833-35, *op.cit.*

[42]So recalled her youngest sister, digging up family reminiscences for her youngest brother, Mrs. M. E. Cullen to J. E. Willans, 26 February 1924. I am grateful to Mr. J. Willans for this information. In March 1851 Susan's sister, Katherine Louisa, was staying at Croft House with the J. D. Asquiths *Borough of Morley Census Returns,* 1851, Morley Reference Library.

[43]T. Willans Nussey, baptised at Headingley Hill, and Mrs. R. L. Everett, married at East Parade, were first cousins. The precise relationship between the Leeds and Huddersfield Willanses, both Congregationalists, both in textiles, both originating from Hunslet, is not clear, and at best was distant. But they crossed each other's paths frequently, and there were marriage connexions. I am indebted here as elsewhere for the unravelling of connexions to R.M. Fletcher, who descends from the Obadiah Willanses.

were Ramsden Street rather as the Dixons and Asquiths were Rehoboth. In the 1850's William Willans and William Wrigley were deacons, the members included Samuel Stead, later of the *Morley Observer,* and to Huddersfield's moulders were joined its architects. The architect of Ramsden Street was the elder J. P. Pritchett, one of James Parsons's deacons at Lendal, York. Pritchett found the Huddersfield connexion so profitable that three of his sons settled there, each of them in membership at Ramsden Street in the 1850's. The public face of Victorian Huddersfield was a Pritchett face.[44]

The nature of Ramsden Street and its dependency, Hillhouse, has been described elsewhere.[45] What needs description here is its political context as filtered through the interrelated trinity of Hirst, Jones and Willans, with their Firth outposts at Heckmondwike and Lightcliffe.

Huddersfield became a Parliamentary Borough in 1832. Twenty years later its electorate was 1,400. Since it was also a polling place for the West Riding county constituency its political activities had a more than local significance.

Of the Ramsden Street politicians the Hirsts were for the longest time Liberals of purest essence, beginning with Charles Hirst (1807-84) and distilled through his son Alfred (1845-1913), who married Emily Asquith's cousin Mary Wrigley, to his grandson Francis Wrigley Hirst (1873-1953), who was Asquith's second cousin. [Chart VIII]

Charles Hirst ("Hirst o' th' Iron Steps", so called to distinguish him from all the other woolstapling Charles Hirsts) was Huddersfield man to perfection, dame school educated and almost self-made, who became one of his town's chief woolstaplers and was an undeviating Anti-Corn Law Leaguer (using his wife to collect local subscriptions for it) and Cobdenite (which meant, since Cobden was the County member from 1847 and a Huddersfield candidate in 1857, seeing him through the Crimean opprobrium).[46] Alfred Hirst, by contrast, was college educated, which meant Huddersfield College, founded a few years before his birth largely by his kith and kin and with the reputation of being "perhaps the largest proprietary school in Yorkshire, religious, but undenominational".[47] Charles read *Letters to Junius* out loud; Alfred, who was blind, preferred Milton. Alfred hunted, played cricket and cribbage, had been to Australia in the 1860's and sent his sons to Clifton College (because their cousin Willans Asquith taught there) and Oxford, and his daughters to St. Leonard's and Newnham. But the Cobdenite dimension of the Hirst tradition remained unimpaired.

> I am happy to think that my own nonconformist ancestors on both my father's and mother's side worked and voted for the Reform Bill, the repeal of the Corn Laws, and for all the measures of public health and education in the critical half-century following Waterloo. . .[48]

And the earliest election of which Francis Wrigley Hirst had any memory was that of 1880, when for the first time all the West Riding M.P.s were Liberal and the local candidate, W. H. Leatham, John Bright's brother-in-law, stayed with the Hirsts at Dalton Lodge, their soundly Croft House-like villa. "I wore a bright yellow band

[44] Ramsden Street Congregational Church, *List of Members 1826-1918* (Huddersfield Central Library); G. H. Broadbent, "Life and Work of Pritchett of York", W. A. Singleton ed., *Studies in Architectural History,* Vol.II, 1956 pp. 102 ff.
[45] C. Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity 1780-1920,* 1977, pp. 145-158.
[46] F. W. Hirst, *In the Golden Days,* 1947, pp. 19, 39-40, 44-47, 49.
[47] *Yorkshire Post,* 30 August 1913.
[48] Hirst, *op.cit.,* p. 48.

round my straw hat, and the horse wore yellow rosettes, and was busy conveying my grandfather, my father and other voters to the polling booth".[49]

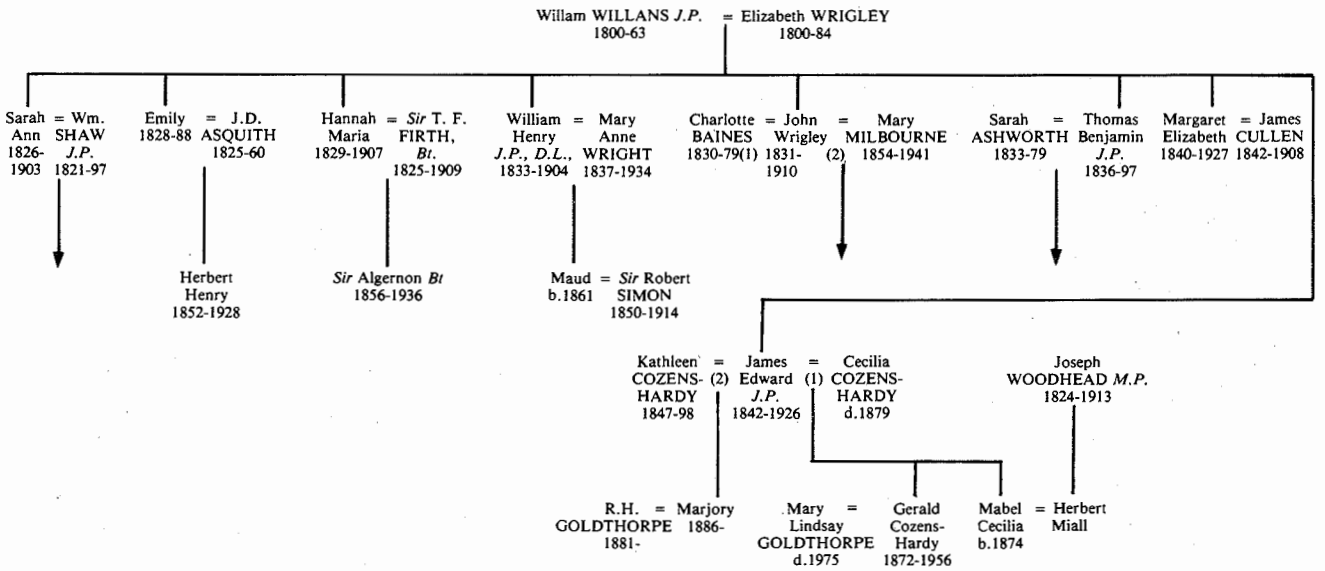
Mrs. Alfred Hirst, born Mary Wrigley, and Mrs. Charles Henry Jones, born Emma Wrigley, were niece and aunt. Charles Jones (1800-1884) like Charles Hirst was archetypal: of Buxton and Beaumaris farming stock transmuted into twenty years of Manchester drapery. He put all that behind him when he moved to Huddersfield in 1841. Henceforth railways were his business and for the rest he was perfect material for local politics. He had been weaned on Peterloo, and narrowly escaped the Cheshire Yeomanry in its aftermath. He had attended the Anti-Corn Law League's first meeting in Manchester; in Huddersfield he chaired the Liberal Registration Association and effectively rid the town of Church Rate by outwitting Vicar Bateman, who, as the brother of an active London Congregationalist, should have had the measure of his opponents. Cobden and the Leathams were his friends. The inevitable accompaniments to this were the chairmanship of the local Improvement Commission (in 1854-5 and 1856: the local Waterworks Act was "the great event of his life"), the Bench (he believed firmly in Bench jobs for Liberal boys and was stern to tramps, drunks and "confirmed bad characters") and, when it came, the Corporation. He was Huddersfield's first mayor, in 1868, held office for four years, and then left the Council (to be succeeded as mayor by a Highfield notable). There remained Huddersfield College, of which he was president, the Bible Society, of which he was vice president, the School Board, of which he became chairman, and an appropriate funeral.[50]

Sixteen years before the Joneses settled in Huddersfield, in 1825, Emma Jones's eldest sister, Elizabeth Wrigley, had married William Willans (1800-1863). They were both twenty-five. Willans had settled in Huddersfield three years earlier, coming from Leeds by way of a brief salesmanship in Halifax.[51] He was in process of setting up on his own account as a woolstapler. His impact on Huddersfield Liberalism and Congregationalism was vivid and his children enhanced it: his four sons and two of his four sons-in-law were the stuff of which Liberal caucuses were made. [Chart IV]

Congregational lights danced around William Willans when he was born and accompanied him thereafter; Edward Parsons of Leeds baptized him and twenty-four years later preached at Ramsden Street's stonelaying and presided at the church's formation; James Parsons of York preached at Ramsden Street's opening and preached again at its jubilee fifty years on.[52] Willans called his youngest boy James Edward after the Parsons father and son, and Parsons of York, past his extraordinary prime and overtaken by pulpit fashion, was one of Herbert Henry Asquith's earlier memories.[53]

[49] *Ibid.* pp. 52-3.
[50] For Jones see *Huddersfield Examiner,* 30 August and 6 September 1884; A. W. Sykes, *Ramsden Street Independent Chapel, Huddersfield. Notes and Records of a Hundred Years 1825-1925,* Huddersfield, 1925, pp. 99-100; Hirst, *op.cit.,* p. 58; D. Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England,* Leicester U.P., 1976 p. 181.
[51] *Huddersfield Examiner,* 12 September 1863; "Memoir of Mr. Willans", *Evangelical Magazine,* January 1864, pp. 25-9.
[52] *Salem Chapel Baptismal Register 1791-1847* in possession of Trinity St. Davids United Reformed Church, Leeds; Sykes *op.cit.* pp. 11, 14, 15, 49.
[53] Jottings added to a letter from T. F. Taylor to J. E. Willans, 11 April 1924, in possession of Mr. J. Willans; *Memories and Reflections op.cit.,* p. 230.

Chart IV: The Willans Family



Political lights danced too. Willans's circle in Leeds had been that of the younger Edward Baines[54]. In Huddersfield he was a Reformer in 1831, a founder of its Anti-Corn Law League in 1839 and a disruptive voluntaryist in 1847. The lights danced fiercest in the 1850's, although his own bid for parliament failed in 1852, as did Cobden's five years later when Willans chaired the Cobden committee.[55] 1857 was as mutinous a year among Cobdenite constituencies as it was in India. ". . . In the end India will be governed by Indians. God has so willed it . . .", wrote Cobden to Willans towards the year's close.[56]

Sometimes, in local mythology at least, the lights danced together, as when in the 1840's, with New Testament to hand, Willans faced a meeting convened to demand the legal suppression of socialism. His drift was that such state interference would be as impolitic, abhorrent and anti-Christian as any socialism; and he won.[57] Such Cobdenism and Congregationalism presupposed mutual help with a prejudice for philanthropy. When Ramsden Street's minister could find no school suitable for his son, Willans busied himself with founding Huddersfield College, preceding his brother-in-law Jones as its President.[58] So it was with Huddersfield's model lodging house, its infirmary and its mechanics' institute.[59] Willans, in short, was the foremost of his Huddersfield breed and his minister was appropriately candid:

> It must be remembered that humility and gentleness were not so much with him natural qualities as Christian graces, imparted and matured by the spirit of God. Naturally he was . . . possessed of a remarkable amount of critical acumen, and a somewhat dangerous power of irony and sarcasm, which indeed not infrequently produced ill-feeling towards him . . .[60]

Of William Willans's four sons the second, William Henry (1833-1904), was probably the richest, most evangelical and most philanthropic.[61] He repeated his father's parliamentary misfortune in 1874 when he failed to take the normally Liberal seat of Frome (it had been Tom Hughes's seat; can this failure be why Willans sent his sons to Harrow rather than Rugby?). Since he was a London wool merchant progressing in twenty years from Canonbury to Highbury and on to Holland Park and a place in Devon, he is not our present concern, and it was his youngest brother, James Edward (1842-1926), who maintained the Huddersfield tradition in Congregationalism, wool, politics and mental improvement. He too was Huddersfield College, topped with eighteen months in Düsseldorf and Geneva, and his subsequent educational concerns ran from Sunday and elementary schools to Leeds University, which gave him an honorary degree. He was a Huddersfield alderman from 1901 to 1908, the year when his nephew, who was only ten years his junior, became Prime Minister, and his death during that General Strike which put the last nail in the coffin of Asquith's Liberal leadership, prompted a melancholy cable: "Our deepest sympathy. Should, of course, have come to the funeral, but in existing circumstances cannot be away from London, Thursday".[62]

[54] Cutting in Hillhouse Congregational Church, *Minute Book of Origins and First Committee Meetings . . .*, 1863-7, referring to tea meeting of 23 February 1865.
[55] *Huddersfield Examiner* 12 September 1863; Hirst *op.cit.*, 49-51, 58-68; R. W. Ram, *The Political Activities of Dissenters in the East and West Ridings of Yorkshire 1815-1850,* Hull M.A. thesis, 1964, *passim.* esp. pp. 122-8, 145-6, 255-281.
[56] R. Cobden to W. Willans, 5 December 1857, quoted in Hirst, *op.cit.*, pp.50-51.
[57] *Huddersfield Examiner,* 12 September 1863; Hirst, *op.cit.* p. 66.
[58] *Sykes,* op.cit. p.30.
[59] *Huddersfield Examiner,* 12 September 1863; Sykes *op.cit.* p.96; Hirst *op.cit.* p.67.
[60] *Evang. Mag, art.cit.*, p. 27; Hirst, *op.cit.*, p.68.
[61] For W. H. Willans see *Huddersfield Examiner,* 10 October 1904; *Times,* 28 September 1904; *Who Was Who 1897-1916; The H.L.B. Old Boys' Journal,* Jan. 1905, pp. 2-3.
[62] *Huddersfield Examiner* 21 September 1918; 15 May 1926.

A family's opportunities may be gauged from its marriages. William Henry Willans married Islington Congregationalism in 1859; James Edward Willans married Norwich Free Methodism twice over; the eldest son, John Wrigley Willans (1831-1910) married Leeds Congregationalism in 1855. He was the peripatetic Willans; Huddersfield, Islington, Huddersfield, Islington, Bromley (or Bickley), Lightcliffe, Leeds, Harrogate, West Hampstead, each removal save the last reflected by a transfer of Congregational church membership. Because he was childless for most of this time[63], he assumed active responsibility for his fatherless (and grandfatherless) Asquith nephews. His Yorkshire lives, which were directly due to his family connexions, are our present concern.

It was through his first wife, a daughter of Sir Edward Baines, that he left textiles in 1875 to succeed a Baines brother-in-law as a director of the *Leeds Mercury,* eventually becoming managing proprietor in its early twilight years.[64] For nine years before that, however, his career had been determined by a Willans brother-in-law, with whom he had established the Brighouse carpet firm of Firth, Willans. It was thus, in the shade of Sir Titus Salt who lived and worshipped there, that Wrigley Willans became building committee secretary for Lightcliffe's great Lockwood and Mawson Congregational church in 1870, rather as William Willans had served Ramsden Street nearly fifty years before. When he left Lightcliffe and Firth Willans for Leeds and its *Mercury* there was a joint church and works farewell in the new chapel at which Wrigley Willans spoke of capital and labour.[65] In the past year his firm's weavers had joined the 1120 strong Power Loom Carpet Weavers Mutual Defence and Provident Association,[66] so he spoke topically of how the best security for a right relationship between capital and labour was a fair and open understanding between classes and a fair and open speaking about mutual concerns, and he spoke of how a sound and enlightened Liberalism meant a sound, enlightened and continuous progress with constitutional safety. And he looked to the young, who in Congregationalism would find the best opportunity to develop Christian grace *and* power: "In their church there were no lordships; it was a sort of Christian Republic".[67]

The rulers of such Christian republics as Lightcliffe Congregational church were literally an *élite,* since their deacons were elected by the church members. In the West Riding churches too, as elsewhere, there was a natural tendency to oligarchy, each family caught by cousinhood: thus, for instance, the Firths of Heckmondwike and Lightcliffe, the Andertons and Goldthorpes of Cleckheaton and Lightcliffe, the Cookes of Liversedge and the Taylors of Batley. There were accumulated connexions between Andertons and Asquiths, Asquiths and Willanses, Willanses and Goldthorpes, Goldthorpes and Firths, Firths and Cookes, Cookes and Taylors, all of them Congregationalists save the Cookes, who were Wesleyans. Wrigley Willans's elder sister, Hannah Maria, married Thomas Freeman Firth in February 1854. [Chart V]

The Firths are the mixture as before: that is to say, the family firm manufacturing blankets and horse rugs founded at The Flush, Heckmondwike, by

[63]He had a daughter (b.1885) from his second marriage.
[64]*Times,* 3 May 1910.
[65]D. H. Mason, *Ten Thousand Sermons 1871-1971. The People, Parsons and Praise of Lightcliffe Congregational Church.* Lightcliffe 1971 pp. 12-14, 18, 21.
[66]J. N. Bartlett, *Carpeting the Millions,* Edinburgh n.d.c. 1978, pp. 118-9.
[67]I am indebted to Mr. D. H. Mason for this information.

Chart V: The Firths

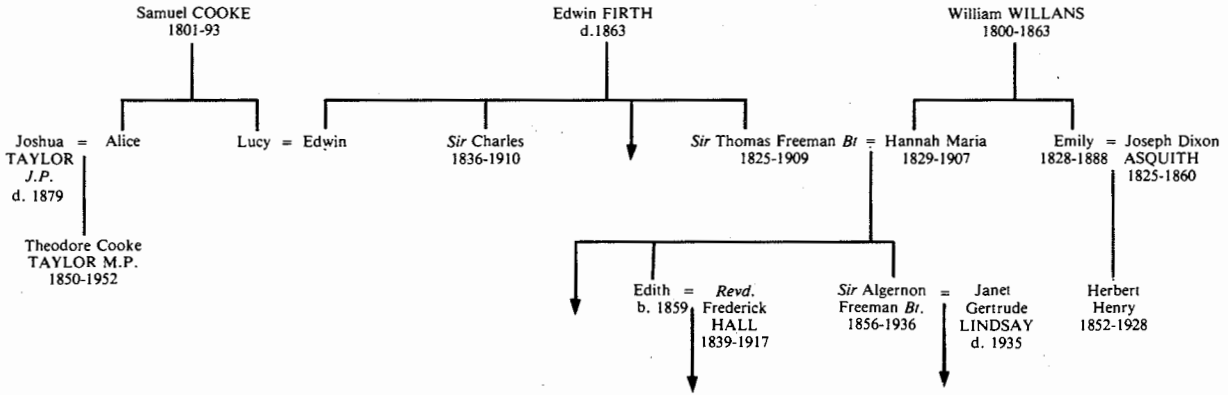
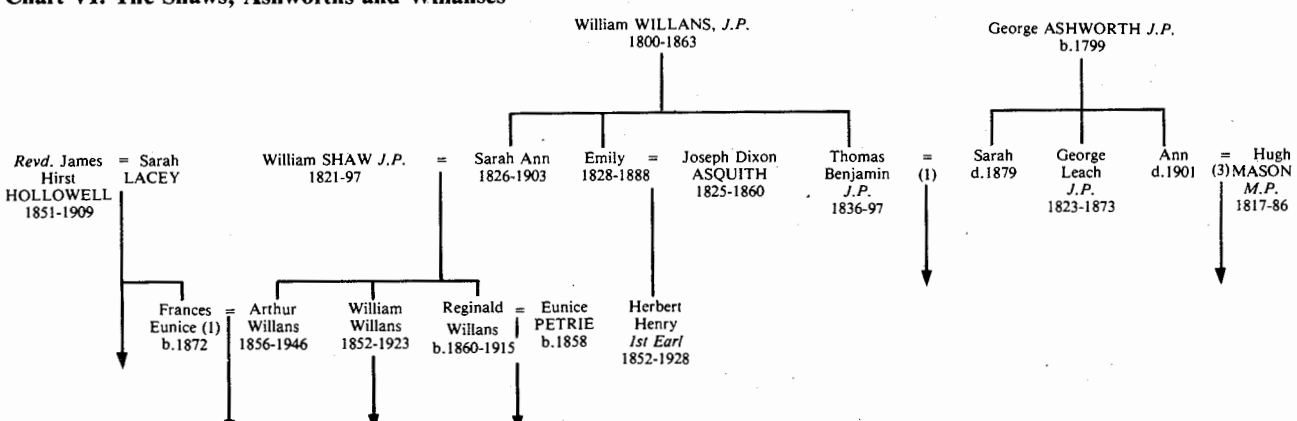


Chart VI: The Shaws, Ashworths and Willanses



Edwin Firth in 1822, the year of his marriage, and continued after his death in 1863 by five of his sons.[68] It was one of these, Freeman Firth ("a very strong and interesting man" noted a visiting preacher in 1893[69]) who really extended the family interests when he and Wrigley Willans set up their own firm near Brighouse in 1866. Edwin Firth's had manufactured handwoven Kidderminster carpets at least since 1855, but Freeman Firth began the power-loom production of Tapestry and Brussels carpets. Eventually the two Firth firms united, to form T.F. Firth and Sons Limited, in 1889, by which time they were major manufacturers, with one factory, Firthcliffe, in the United States and plans for another in France. In the 1890's there were warehouses in London, Manchester and Glasgow, an office in Paris and six British regional travellers and agents. A traveller for Firth's might earn as much as £447, commission included; the company secretary and London manager each earned £300. By 1913, when they became a private company, their assets were over £700,000, their total output was exceeded only by Templeton's of Glasgow and Crossley's of Halifax, and they employed 1,500 hands in their English mills.[70]

If this remarkable expansion in a difficult field had been Freeman Firth's doing, it was his second son's driving. Algernon Freeman Firth (1856-1936) was Asquith's first cousin, and there were subsequent family and business connexions with the Willanses. The Asquith boys and the Firth boys shared the same mourning carriage at Grandfather Willans's funeral, and family tradition has it that Herbert and Algernon had each to be tied to a table leg to stop them from scrapping. Freeman Firth's refusal to allow Algernon to go to a university (he felt that too much study had brought about his eldest son's death from meningitis) meant that Blackheath, Rickmansworth and Paris were followed by the family firm, with a partnership in 1877, the chairmanship in 1909 and the sort of recognition in national business circles that made him president of the Associated Chambers of Commerce during the First World War.[71]

The Firths's Congregationalism had been nurtured at Upper Chapel, Heckmondwike. Like St. Mary's Morley, only more and baroquely so, this was a late Victorian temple surrounded by a graveyard landscape of mystery and menace.[72] Upper too was of seventeenth-century origin. Subsequent Firths were members and trustees of such polite causes as Lightcliffe, Ilkley and Victoria Avenue, Harrogate. They too had ministerial connexions, in their case a Freeman Firth son-in-law.[73] Edwin, the firm's founder, was treasurer of Victoria Avenue Harrogate's building committee and two of his sons were deacons at Upper where there were four Firth trustees.[74] Algernon, the founder's grandson, succeeded Sir Titus Salt as Lightcliffe's resident grandee, living at Holme House where Palmerston had been entertained by earlier Liberals and renting a pew at the back of the Congregational church's south transept where, obscured from the general gaze

[68] I am indebted to Dr. J. N. Bartlett for further information on the Firth firm.
[69] Thus the Revd. Elkanah Armitage, 3 December 1893, in his mss. *Diary* (in possession of Revd. H. A. Wilson).
[70] Bartlett, *op.cit.*, pp. 47, 60-1, 73, 90, 93, 106-8, 143-4, 211. Sir T. F. Firth left a fortune of £378,975; of the Asquithian uncles only W. H. Willans approached this. *Cleckheaton Guardian*, 28 January 1910.
[71] I am indebted for information about Algernon Firth to the late Mrs. M. Willans and to Mr. D. H. Mason.
[72] The phrase "mystery and menace" is used by K. Lindley, *Chapels and Meeting Houses*, 1969, p. 77.
[73] Sir T. F. Firth's daughter Edith (b.1859) was the third wife of Revd. Frederick Hall (1839-1917), minister of Upper Heckmondwike from 1877 to 1893.
[74] W. Haythornthwaite, *A History of the Congregational Church in Harrogate*, Harrogate 1962, p. 15; E. G. Burnley and J. M. Walker, *Upper Independent Church, Heckmondwike 1674-1924: Historical sketch*, Heckmondwike n.d.c. 1924, pp. 47-8.

by red strips of curtain fixed to solid brass fittings, he balanced his co-director Findlay whose pew was in the north transept.

Algernon Firth was a member and trustee at Lightcliffe. He was never a deacon. It was enough that he chaired important meetings, spoke at social teas, presided at bazaars and lectured on religion and opportunity in America.[75]

For much of this time they had politics to match, and if it seemed to a young local journalist that Freeman Firth, William Anderton and R. H. Goldthorpe "when speaking at election meetings had a tendency to emulate, as far they could, the Gladstonian posture and inflection of voice", it was a very Cobdenite Gladstonianism.[76] Freeman Firth firmly advised local Whigs as to what to say to largely Nonconformist audiences.[77] In the fulness of time he was returned unopposed at Heckmondwike's first county council election, but when the prospect arose in 1892 of standing for parliament for Spen Valley he and one of the Andertons declined it. Their reason was less age than the miners' Eight Hours Bill. The Spen Valley Liberals were divided over it and Firth and Anderton were among those voting against or abstaining.[78] It makes an interesting gloss on Wrigley Willans's farewell speech to the Lightcliffe church and works, seventeen years earlier.

V

Rochdale and Huddersfield are barely fifteen miles apart. Mid-Victorian Rochdale and Huddersfield were equally close in population, noise and dramatic environment. "Ah! one of our manufacturing towns is a wonderful sight . . ." Joseph Toynbee, the Evangelical London physician rhapsodized in the 1860's,

> We passed Rochdale when coming and saw it well from the railway. Fancy a valley full of great red-brick buildings with enormous chimneys pouring out for ever the blackest smoke . . . it rained at R[ochdale] yesterday and the place looked as gloomy and dark as Tartarus, and still to me it was a pleasant sight, for I could but think of the thousands upon thousands working manfully there and while living by honest labour, they were preparing comfort for thousands upon thousands elsewhere. We saw the heather-clad hills again, but for some reason, they did not appear so beautiful as before.[79]

There were, however, major differences. Rochdale was the hub of the true Manchester School, "one of the most alert and socially creative towns in England" it has been called, and the first to have a *popularly* based Liberal organisation.[80] Rochdale remained radical where Manchester became stately, buzzing at the northern edged of Cottonopolis rather as Ashton-under-Lyne buzzed to the south. These were Methodist towns, Free Methodist in Rochdale's case and Baillie Street Chapel was at once Free Methodism's leading chapel and Rochdale's. If in the eyes of the world John Bright turned Rochdale into Quaker country, it was nonetheless the Baillie Street Free Methodists who set the pace, followed actively enough by

[75] Information from Mr. D. H. Mason.
[76] G. H. Cooper, *Fifty Years' Journalistic Experience and Chronicles of a Typical Industrial Area,* 1938, p. 21, quoted in A. W. Roberts, *The Liberal Party in West Yorkshire 1885-1895,* Leeds Ph.D. thesis, 1979, p. 50.
[77] Roberts, *op.cit.,* p. 47.
[78] *Ibid.,* pp. 165, 219-20.
[79] Quoted in M. Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T, H. Green and His Age,* 1964, pp. 321-2.
[80] J. Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857-1868,* 1966, p. 96; H. J. Hanham, *The Reformed Electoral System in Great Britain, 1832-1914,* 1968 p. 18.

Baptists, Unitarians and Congregationalists, their memberships interlocking through marriage and commerce, sometimes in the wake of secession.

Rochdale is a component of the Asquith hinterland in two oblique but significant ways: two of Asquith's Huddersfield uncles settled there and prospered, and his first wife's family had equally close Rochdale connexions.

Rochdale's politics, all Toad Lane Cooperators, Teetotalers, Trade Unionists, Anti-Church Raters, Free Traders, the whole in tension with Manchester, offered a unique apprenticeship for any ambitious youth. Rochdale society, for all Cobden's raillery against the terrible snobbery of Rochdale's flannel lords[81], offered comfortable living after the style of Croft House, Dalton Lodge or The Flush. Late in the century one of its ministers called it "a town of plain living and plain housing. Although many of its people are wealthy, yet I never knew a town where there was less social ostentation."[82] This was Rochdale as remembered by Isabel Petrie Mills, homely even in its pretentions, the sort of place in which tidiness was an obvious virtue in houses which allowed few candles at night, for how else could one find what one wanted in a bedroom drawer?[83] Isabel Petrie, bred in Rochdale Free Methodism, married into Ashton New Connexion Methodism and came to rest in Bowdon Downs Congregationalism with her own Asquith-embracing web of connexion. In Rochdale her childhood neighbours were the West Street Baptist minister and his family, and it was a childhood excitement when the minister's sister-in-law, large and London-bred, went to dine at The Butts, the Henry Kelsalls's red brick, mill-flanked house, in the only carriage in Rochdale capable of holding her:

> A footstool being brought out, one nephew would help her up, the other at the opposite side taking both her hands would pull, so, pushing and pulling, she would get seated. Now, we youngsters always knew when this was going to happen; it was an event, and we would gather round by the door to watch, for we liked to see Aunt Blackett resplendent in a velvet or brocade, and fine cambric neckerchief, fastened with a big cameo, and wonderful cap, trimmed with big bows and nodding plumes. Safely in, we even clapped our hands.[84]

Henry Kelsall (1793-1869), whose dinner parties demanded such memorable preparation, was Lancashire's leading Baptist. He was a flannel manufacturer, his firm contemporaneous with those of the Hirsts, Firths and Willanses, for although it began in 1815, its major expansion only dated from 1835 when Kelsall opened his first mill.[85] There was nothing missing from the Kelsall armoury: Voluntaryist, Free Trader and Cobdenite, benefactor of missions and colleges, founder of churches, deacon, trustee, and father-in-law.[86] Of Kelsall's sons-in-law, one was Morton Peto (1809-89), most flamboyant of contractors, the other was George Tawke Kemp (1810-77), an Essex silk manufacturer (and founder member of Peto's Bloomsbury Baptist Church), who moved up to Rochdale and Kelsall's mills in the mid 1850's.

[81] Cobden to Henry Richard, 23 June 1857, quoted in *Vincent*, p. 109.
[82] W. Evans and W. Claridge, *James Hirst Hollowell and the Movement for Civic Control in Education*, Manchester 1911, p. 43.
[83] [Isabel Petrie Mills] *From Tinder Box to the 'Larger' Light: Threads from the Life of John Mills, Banker, (Author of 'Vox Humana') Interwoven with Some Early Recollections by His Wife*, Manchester 1899, pp. 5-6.
[84] *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4.
[85] J. G. D. Chapple, "The History of Kelsall and Kemp Ltd.", paper given 10 March 1956, *Trans. Rochdale Literary and Scientific Society*, Vol. XXIV, 1950-60; pp. 30-35.
[86] This is best followed in G. A. Weston, *The Baptists of North-West England, 1750-1850*, Sheffield Ph.D. thesis, 1969, *passim*, and J. Lea, *Baptists in Lancashire 1837-1887*, Manchester Ph.D., thesis, 1970, *passim*.

Kemp complemented Kelsall: college treasurer, West Street deacon and trustee, husband and father of ladies bountiful, president of the Rochdale Lyceum, believer in hydropathy (Ben Rhydding was the great discovery of his class), traveller (France and Germany with Brock of Bloomsbury in the 1840's, a beautiful death on the Nile thirty years on), and Cobdenite.[87] He reminded Exeter Hall Baptists in 1860 that individualism not organisation was the basis of Baptist success and his *Freeman* obituary hinted at the combination of the two, which Rochdale had perfected.

> Sympathising with Mr. Cobden in most of his advanced views . . . Mr. Kemp was one of the acknowledged leaders of his party in the borough . . . which has the reputation of being one of the most radical constituencies in Lancashire.[88]

Kemp's son, also George, was quite splendidly second generation, to his father rather as Algernon was to Freeman Firth. That is to say, he was the first Old Millhillian peer, both Balliol Oxford and Trinity Cambridge, Boer War veteran and cricketing blue. He was also head of the family firm, whose trademark, "Doctor", picked up so many Victorian concerns, and reaped dividends from them.[89] [Chart VII]

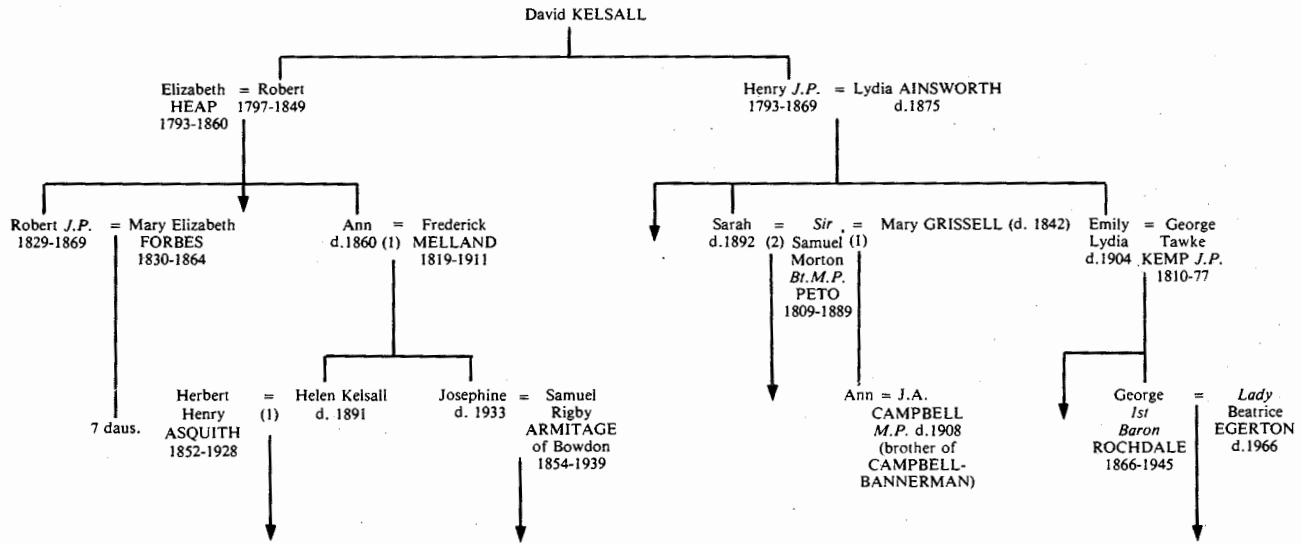
The Kemps and most of the Kelsalls were West Street Baptists. The Rochdale Congregationalists began rather tardily with Providence in 1814 and continued with Milton which seceded from Providence in 1852, with four Kelsalls among its founders. These were the family of Henry Kelsall's late brother Robert: one of them, Ann, was shortly to marry the Manchester physician Frederick Melland. Like the Asquiths the Robert Kelsalls were a frail family. Robert had died at the age of fifty-two and none of his six children lived to be over forty. Nonetheless Robert's eldest son, also Robert, was on Milton's diaconate and had his own mills in Duncan Street; he was also, like Edwin Firth of Heckmondwike, a trustee of Victoria Avenue Harrogate.[90]

It was perhaps illness which prompted the Harrogate connexion. Young Mrs. Robert died in 1864 and by 1868 Robert was a sick man. Between March and July 1868 he attended communion four times at Milton and then moved to St. Leonard's on Sea, to whose Congregational church he transferred his membership, followed in 1872 by three of his seven daughters.[91] By then, however, several notable citizens had been drawn to Milton, among them two brothers-in-law from Huddersfield, William Shaw (1821-1897) and Thomas Benjamin Willans (1836-97).

Willans came first to Rochdale, arriving in 1853.[92] He was a Rochdalian for barely thirty years, but he packed into them all the most gratifying elements of success. At the age of sixteen he secured a position, as the old phrase had it, at the run-down Vale Mills whose principal, Mr. Pagan, was a Milton man. Partnership followed in 1861 with sole control two years later under the style of Messrs. T. B. Willans and Co. Municipal activity was now inescapable. Willans was a founder of Rochdale's Chamber of Commerce and its second president. When he became a

[87]Chapple, *art.cit.*, pp. 34-5; C. M. Birrell, *The Life of William Brock D.D.*, 1878, pp. 150, 153, 195, 342.
[88]Lea *op. cit.*, p. 206; *Freeman*, 1 June 1877, p. 269, quoted in Lea p. 460.
[89]N. G. Brett James, *Mill Hill*, 1938, pp. 69, 84, 149-50; E. Hampden-Cook, *The Register of Mill Hill School 1807-1926* priv. 1926, p. 165; J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, Part II, Vol. IV p. 14; Chapple *art. cit.* p. 38.
[90]Milton Congregational Church Rochdale, *Church Minute Book, 1852-1859*, Victoria Avenue Congregational Church, Harrogate, *Church Minute Book 1868-1878.*
[91]Milton Congregational Church, *Roll Book 1867-1899;* information from Mr. K. Moore of St. Leonard's.
[92]For T. B. Willans see "Men Who have Made Rochdale", *Rochdale Times*, 26 May 1900.

Chart VII: The Kelsalls, Kemps and Mellands



town councillor in 1866 (succeeding Pagan, and ten years after Rochdale's incorporation) he was the youngest councillor. Three years later he was mayor. It was 1869, the year the Robert Kelsalls moved south, Willans was thirty-three, first citizen of the Manchester School's capital, at the outset of Gladstone's greatest ministry. So rapid an ascent in fact owed most to the Rochdale Tories' fatuous boycotting of the council, but it led to an intensely enjoyable year of office. If delays prevented the opening of the new town hall ("one of the dozen most ambitious high Victorian town halls of England")[93] with its opulent mayoral suite and a huge picture of Runnymede, at least the birth of an heir (the Willanses already had three daughters, two sons had died in infancy. The Willans house suitably enough later became the Infirmary) provided another excuse for the presentation of a civic épergne

> in frosted silver and ebony, in which the emblematical cradle was enshrined. There were also emblematical figures at each corner of a tripod representing Faith, Hope and Charity. The tripod was of ebony, mounted on a pedestal frosted with silver and beautifully chased. The borough arms were displayed on the gift, and there were other beautiful details.[94]

Willans was an aggressive mayor, a public figure in the grand manner, rather tall, noted for the flower in his buttonhole, his treats and open house, "the life and soul of municipal and Parliamentary politics . . . in Rochdale". He was noted too for his effrontery. At a Buckingham Palace reception for new mayors, knowing that the King of the Belgians was to be present and lacking robes or chain, Willans sported the Belgian colours and so was introduced to visiting majesty who vowed ever to take an interest in Rochdale. "Think of these words, ye Rochdalians, when you make your annual excursions into Belgium." There was also his reputation for platform repartee, "with occasional telling puns . . . never coarse or vulgar", save when the Tory Mr. Powell came to speak against the Cobdenite T. B. Potter. Willans assured his audience that ' "Mr. Potter would be returned, and that the Conservative candidate and his supporters would all be sent home with the Powell complaint.' There were roars upon roars of laughter at this sally . . ." And so it was up to the 1880 election when Willans chaired the Rochdale Liberal election committee amidst "the most stirring scenes of our modern political history."[95]

But his attendance at Milton was becoming infrequent, and although his wife last attended communion there in January 1879, he was marked as "resigned" by October 1878. Sarah Willans died in March 1879.[96] Her husband then dissolved his business partnership and eventually left for South London where there is no surviving evidence that he maintained his Congregational links.

Nonetheless he was a Milton man for the bulk of his Rochdale years and he owed much of his position to his business partner and to his first wife. [Chart VI]

In 1862, the year after his partnership at Vale Mills, T. B. Willans married Sarah Ashworth. With the Petries of Phoenix House, the Ashworths of Springbank and Roach House were the dominant figures at the Baillie Street Free Methodist Chapel.

[93] N. Pevsner ed., *The Buildings of England: Lancashire* vol. 1., 1969, p. 377.
[94] *Rochdale Times, art. cit.*
[95] *Ibid.*
[96] Milton *Roll Book 1862-1899.*

Sarah's father, George Ashworth, had largely financed the *Rochdale Observer,* her brother Edmund was first chairman of the Rochdale School Board and her brother George Leach was mayor in the year of Sarah's marriage and again in the year of the town hall's opening. At his death the parish church refused to toll the bell for so irreconcilable an opponent as George Leach Ashworth and even the *Observer* remarked that "his principal infirmity was that from the very intensity of his opinions he might not make sufficient allowance for the equal sincerity of those who differed from him". Sarah's eldest sister Ann (d.1901) married the formidable Hugh Mason M.P., immortalised by Haslam Mills in *Grey Pastures,* who was to Ashton what George Leach was to Rochdale, only more so. She was his third wife.[97]

In 1863, following his useful marriage and his father's death, T. B. Willans took control of Vale Mills and was joined by a brother-in-law, William Shaw, fifteen years his senior. Shaw and Dixon Asquith had married Sarah Ann and Emily Willans at the same ceremony in 1850. Shaw at least was an eligible husband, the principal partner's eldest son and eventual heir to the Huddersfield wool firm of John, William and Henry Shaw, Victoria Mills.[98] He had his own Rochdale links because his sister Sarah Shaw married one of the Petries in 1854, as did his youngest son nearly thirty years later. From 1863 his home was in Rochdale where he became Vale Mills's sheet anchor (assuming sole control after 1879) and the dominant personality at Milton: deacon, missionary society director, multiple trustee and treasurer; when he succeeded William Armitage as treasurer of the Lancashire Congregational Union in 1885 he was the first non-Mancunian to hold the post.[99] In short, as his obituary put it, he was a sort of lay bishop cast despite his Yorkshire origins firmly in the strong south Lancashire mould of commercial Congregationalism. In Huddersfield he had been an organiser of Liberal victory — platform speeches being left by common consent to William Willans — but in Rochdale, where such men abounded, he was a giver, to the dispensary, the infirmary, the Coffee House Co., the annual feast for the old and tea for poor widows; and he was an educationist, on Rochdale's School Board from 1876, its chairman from 1886. This was a sensitive post since between 1889 and 1896 Milton's minister was James Hirst Hollowell (1851-1909), that fierce educationist whose promotion of the Northern Counties Education League made him the stormy petrel of the northern agitation against Balfour's Act of 1902. Since Shaw was Milton's senior deacon he was the man through whom Hollowell's call proceeded.[100] In 1896 Hollowell's daughter Eunice married Shaw's second son Arthur. A year later Shaw died. The *Observer's* obituary naturally referred to his nephew, "probably a future Prime Minister of England".[101]

[97]For the Ashworths, see D.A. Gowland, *Methodist Secessions,* Manchester for the Chetham Society, 1979, pp. 73-80, 87-91; for George Leach Ashworth (1823-1873) see Gowland pp. 86, 157; *Rochdale Household Almanack,* 1874; *Rochdale Times,* 31 March 1900; Mason is Henry Stonor of Granite Hall in W. H. Mills, *Grey Pastures,* 1924 esp. pp. 35-40. Haslam Mills was a nephew by marriage of Isabel Petrie Mills.

[98]for Shaw see *Rochdale Observer* 27 January 1897, Sykes, *Ramsden Street op. cit.,* pp. 101-2.

[99]B. Nightingale, *The Story of the Lancashire Congregational Union 1806-1906: Centenary Memorial Volume* n.d.c. 1906, p. 154.

[100]A repeat (but successful) performance of an abortive attempt to call Hollowell in 1875: Evans and Claridge *op. cit.,* pp. 18, 38-40.

[101]*Rochdale Observer art. cit.*

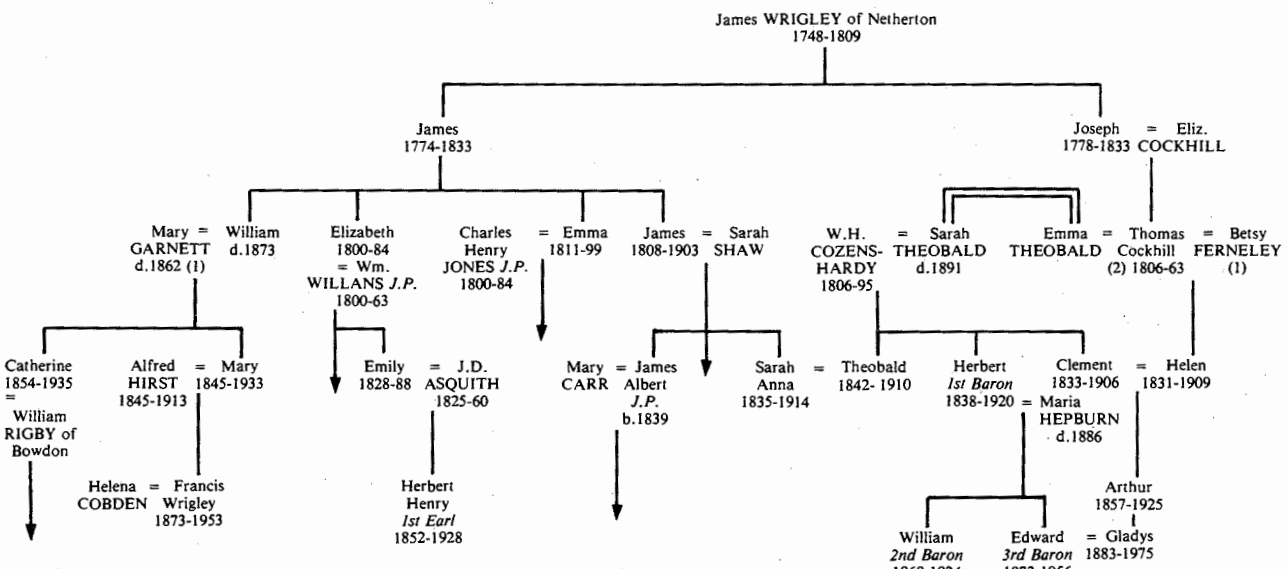
VI

Milton was by then a flourishing church with 297 members, seven of them Shaws.[102] Yet the Shaw connexion barely survived the Great War. The Vale Mills went in 1911, acquired by Kelsall and Kemp along with Robert Kelsall's old mills in Duncan Street[103] William Willans Shaw, a huge man, tall, broad and nicknamed Long Shaw, under whom the chapel floor quivered as he took the collection at Sunday service, died in 1923 and his widow retired to a hydro at Birkdale.[104] Such things were happening in many cotton chapels where changes of generation and attitude masked the more fundamental transformation of the economic structure which had first evoked and then enveloped the chapel response. Yet the changes of generation and attitude were significant enough. When Hirst Hollowell resigned from Milton at the end of 1896 it was to "devote some years to the cause of religious liberty and popular control in Education" and church meeting applauded his "broad catholicity of spirit".[105] Any politically minded minister in Rochdale, Heckmondwike, Huddersfield or Morley could have spoken in this way at any time in the past fifty years, but the context had changed. It had changed sufficiently for a boy reared among such politically minded men and ministers to have become Home Secretary by his fortieth year and a possible future Prime Minister by his forty-fifth. Yet the retrospective picture painted by that boy's biographers is of a constricting, admirable no doubt, northern Congregationalism defining a corresponding brand of Liberalism, with little hint of variety and movement within that Congregationalism or the Liberalism which it frequently prompted.

This paper, therefore, has sought to describe a context, to map out a hinterland, in which religion, politics and social background refuse to be separated; which is largely Nonconformist and chiefly Congregational; which is rooted in the seventeenth century although owing more to the Evangelical Revival; which tends therefore to stridency. This hinterland is peopled by men and women who have always been religiously articulate although their material prosperity is a first to third generation matter in the 1850's when our boy is born; but that is to say no more than what would apply to most members of the British urban middle classes. The background of these people is entrepreneurial, largely manufacturing but with mercantile elements. There is also a professional dimension chiefly provided by ministerial sons (or fathers)-in-law, those entrepreneurs of family mobility and connexion. The education which distils their articulateness is a mixture of proprietary and grammar schools at a time when middle class secondary education is undergoing feverish transformation. Theirs was a progress from private to public schools with a significant bunching at Mill Hill School, less because this was a snobbish inevitability than because this was the sensible thing for late Victorian parents of means to do. Inevitably, therefore, there was a convergence with the normal ways of established, class-conscious society. But matters cannot be left there, for the fact remains that we are nonetheless looking in on people who shared a common religious experience for a significant time, all their attitudes coloured by it. We are talking less of *convergence* to established ways than of *accommodation* to them, which is a different thing.

[102] Milton *Roll Book 1867-1899.*
[103] Chapple *art. cit.* p. 37.
[104] So recalled a church member in 1973; information from the late Mrs. M. Willans; Milton Church *Roll Book 1922-1949.*
[105] Milton Church *Minute Book 1896-1907,* 30 December 1896.

Chart VIII: The Wrigleys, Hirsts and Cozens-Hardys



Simply because of their churchmanship, however loosely held, these people have something distinctive to say about the ordering of society. The way they say it may alter with circumstances but not all of them will stop saying it. This prompts the question: what of their ideology?

These are people whose experience, refined by a curious mixture of personal conviction, empirical discovery and practical necessity, prejudices them in favour of a heightened sense of the individual *set in his community*. The key phrase is not self-help but mutual help. The importance of the individual is unquestioned but the fascinating variable is *community:* is it family, or church fellowship, or municipality or state? The answer will define their understanding of mutual duties. These are also people with an enlarged, if often muddled, belief in education, in the life enhancing nature of unimpeded commerce and in the eternal horizons of overseas missions. An international outlook is natural to them, although it may not be that of army officers of pro-consuls let alone diplomatists. The outworking of these concerns is unpredictable save that circumstances prejudice these people in the 1850's and for many decades to come towards the Liberal party and against the traditional methods of statecraft.

This was the background of which any aspiring Liberal leader from the 1880's must be aware, because this would be the basis of Liberal support in the provinces and a growing body of support in the Commons. This was the Asquith context.

Of the families so far considered, one family, the Wrigleys, have appeared merely as noises off.[106] [Chart VIII] Yet they were the cousinhood's over-arching family. Mrs. Alfred Hirst, Mrs. Charles Jones, Mrs. William Willans, were all Huddersfield Wrigleys in varying degrees of kinship, commonly descended from James Wrigley of Netherton (1748-1809). They were a complex, quarrelsome family of farmers turned manufacturers of livery cloth, at Netherton from the 1760's, their daughters useful matches for aspiring youths. From the 1830's to 1870's Ramsden Street provided their religious link and William Wrigley of Springdale was a deacon there for thirty-two years.[107] His nephew, however, James Albert of Netherton, epitomises what happened to the Wrigleys sooner than to the other families, accommodation turning rapidly into convergence. In background and interests (save in one respect: his wife was a Londoner, the sister of J. T. Carr, the idiosyncratic promoter of Bedford Park as first of the artistic suburbs) James Albert was at one with the Hirsts and Willanses: Huddersfield College and Düsseldorf, the family firm, the Bench, presidency of the Huddersfield Amateur Operatic and Choral Societies (singing with the tenors at the town hall's opening), captaincy of the golf club, chairmanship of his local urban district council, promotion of sewage works and cottage homes; but he was also chairman of the brewster sessions, Church and Tory. He claimed to be the West Riding's oldest churchwarden and his sons went to Rugby because his southern wife had clear ideas about a gentlemanly education.[108]

It was not quite like that with the rest of the cousinhood either in religion or politics. Politically speaking Cobdenism still appeared to be their rock. Cobden was

[106] I am indebted for information from the late Mrs. M. Willans and the late Mr. B. Cozens-Hardy; see also Hirst *Golden Days, op. cit.*, pp. 36, 54-55, 57.
[107] Sykes, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-9.
[108] Information from the late Mrs. M. Willans; *Huddersfield Examiner* 17 February 1912.

a personal friend; their firms took prominent stands at the Great Exhibition of which he was so prominent a Commissioner; several of them were members of the Cobden Club from its infancy — Asquith himself only from 1898.[109] Their grandest Cobdenite hour came when the younger George Kemp, whom Ireland had turned Unionist, was cajoled into returning to the Commons as a Liberal in 1910, to sit for North West Manchester, chief of the commercial barometer seats, for which Asquith had been briefly considered a dozen or so years earlier. Kemp was the perfect candidate, enlightened employer and earl's son-in-law, county cricketer and supporter of women's suffrage, fully nature's gentleman and to all intents a real one as well. Kemp did his duty by Free Trade without failing his duty by Unionism. Lured by honour (and the promise of a peerage) he stuck Parliament for two years more and then went. The peerage, Rochdale, followed after a decent interval; and the Liberals never again held "the most famous Free Trade seat in England".[110]

It was in the Hirsts, however, that Cobdenism glowed most consistently. Thus Alfred Hirst's obituary:

> Though a Liberal by family tradition, he was ever ready to criticize his party — especially in recent years; but always with great respect for his wife's cousin, Mr. Asquith, with whom he was in complete agreement on the question of woman suffrage. From the Imperialistic tendencies of modern Liberalism he dissented strongly, and he had no sympathy with Collectivist schemes.[111]

Alfred's son, Francis Wrigley Hirst, was almost a mirror-image of Asquith. To an Oxford career in a brilliant undergraduate set he too added occasional lectures, the higher journalism (chiefly articles for Wrigley Willans's *Leeds Mercury*) and the Bar, which for him too was the North Eastern Circuit. But in the 1890's young Liberal bloods were progressivists, imperialists or both. Hirst, though to the end of his days looking like "a very able, good-humoured, hard-headed man of about thirty",[112] was neither. He followed John Morley's star to the extent of devilling on his *Life* of Gladstone; he was closest to men like that sea-green, many-mansed son and nephew John Simon, whose icy star he later also followed; and his diet was the skimmed milk of Cobdenism. He won the Cobden prize, he married a Cobden great-niece, he later lived on the Cobden property in Sussex and he was secretary of the Cobden Club in its ichabod days. Fresh from Oxford he co-edited a volume of Liberal essays — his was on Liberalism and wealth — for which Asquith, Morley and Gladstone were too canny to write introductions although Asquith protested his agreement in more ways than they might think, Gladstone wished "well to all the efforts you may make on behalf of individual freedom and independence as opposed to what is termed Collectivism", and Morley, to whom the essays were dedicated, was so encouraged "to think of six men like you, with life and the world before you, entering with such vigour upon the paths of sound and manly principle".[113]

[109] Exhibitors in Classes 12 and 15 (woollens and worsteds) included Hargreave and Nussey; Edwin Firth and Sons, John Brooke and Sons, John, Henry and William Shaw; John Wrigley and Sons and J. and T. C. Wrigley; Willans Bros. and Co.; Kelsall and Bartlemore. See also G. H. B. Jackson ed. *A History of the Cobden Club*, 1939 *passim;* Cobden Club *Membership List 1867-70* (with other Cobden material, at Dunford House, Sussex). Henry Kelsall and eight Rochdale Ashworths were among the earliest members.

[110] P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, Cambridge U.P., 1971, pp. 119-20, 160, 189, 277-305.

[111] *Yorkshire Post*, 30 August 1913.

[112] Thus E. C. Bentley, quoted in *D.N.B.*, "Francis Wrigley Hirst, 1873-1953".

[113] Hirst, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-60.

Sound and manly principle meant articles in *The Speaker* ("Pride in our free colonies is a noble and a liberal sentiment. But . . ."), it meant the League against Aggression and Militarism ("we used to predict in those days that imperialism would destroy the Empire"); it meant a life of Adam Smith, a translation of Redlich's classic *Local Government in England* and editing *Common Sense* and *The Economist.*[114] It meant a man convinced, or so it seemed to MacCallum Scott,

> that everyone who differs . . . is either a rogue, or a time-server or a weakling. His political creed seems summed up in Peace and Retrenchment. if he adds 'Reform' it is only in the sense of constitutional reform. . . . His creed is intensely individualist and opposed to all State interference.[115]

Hirst summed that creed up himself as "The magic of private property, the rivalry of business, the invigorating exertion required by fair and free competition, the love of independence."[116] That was in 1935, the year when he became the Cobden Club's secretary, but his influence as a sinewy Liberal publicist had ended with the Great War.

That Cobdenism was no longer universal in the cousinhood was made clear by the Firths. Their uncertainty over the eight hour day in 1892 was natural for West Riding employers of a certain age confronted by Young Turks. It was less natural when the past president of the Elland Liberal Association rejected Free Trade itself, particularly when he was also president of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and the Liberal Prime Ministers's first cousin, presiding at a specially convened meeting at the Hotel Cecil to discuss fiscal measures against Germany should peace break out. This notable was Sir Algernon Firth, and although he was taken to task by another family connexion, Theodore Taylor, the M.P. for Radcliffe, who could speak no less authoritatively as a West Riding manufacturer (representing a Lancashire constituency) who had prospered in difficult times despite the tariffs of jealous competitors, the political ark of the covenant was irreparably broken.[117]

In chapel at least, for those who remained, there was a more successful accommodation of differences resolved into positive movement. Here the milk of Evangelical Congregationalism was pasteurised into that of communal conscience. There was the almost insensible broadening of views and rerouting of enthusiasms, impressionistic rather than rigorous, encapsulated in the title of Isabel Mills's book of reminiscence: *From Tinder-Box to The "Larger" Light.* It was not quite insensible because there was *fracas* at the Huddersfield heart of the cousinhood when a change of ministry at Ramsden Street in the late 1870's apparently signified changes of doctrine too. The trust deeds were invoked, whispers of heresy led to lawsuit and secession, with Charles Henry Jones and William Shaw ranged as trustees against James Edward Willans, Charles and Alfred Hirst (the offending minister's wife was a Hirst) and the bulk of the congregation. Asquith of course was well away from it all, but his brother-in-law, William Wooding, who had endured similar whispers at Shrewsbury, came to preach for the secession, whose minister, some years later, buried Asquith's mother.[118]

[114] *Ibid.* p. 196, 199, 202; and *D.N.B.*
[115] M. Bentley, *The Liberal Mind 1914-1929,* Cambridge U.P. 1977, p. 184.
[116] *Ibid* p. 154.
[117] Roberts *op. cit.* p. 295; G. A. Greenwood, *Taylor of Batley,* 1957, pp. 68-9. His conversion to Tariff Reform began in 1896; but he held local Liberal office for some years thereafter. *Heckmondwike Herald and Courier,* 19 December 1909.
[118] Binfield *op. cit.* pp. 158-160.

Nonetheless it remains tempting to see such *fracas* as primarily a question of generation and personality. The secession (which took the name Milton, an odd choice in the light of that other, older, secession, Milton Rochdale, where William Shaw was now prominent) remained Congregational however self-consciously advanced, and its activities and slant were widely reflected in the West Riding. There, where ministerial and congregational personalities were at one, intelligent, successful men conditioned to turn thought into action and to judge accordingly, movement was a broad-bottomed affair across the frontiers of faith, politics and social conscience. The point is nowhere better illustrated than at St. Mary's Morley.

The Morley which had rebuilt the Old Chapel as St. Mary's in 1883 and was now proceeding to fill it with a carved teak pulpit, a large Exhibition organ and forty years of stained glass, was the Morley whose Congregational notables preferred Mill Hill to Bramham College, and whose civic pride was reflected in borough status in 1885 with a town hall seven years later, its corridors lined with likenesses of St. Mary's people. Titus Salt and Herbert Asquith, who moved away, were not the only boys to make good. Charles Scarth of Scarthingwell (1846-1921), head of Scarth and Sons (he had three, and nine daughters), made good and stayed on as member and deacon of St. Mary's, chairman of the School Board, town councillor and several times mayor. His was an Asquith knighthood (1914).[119] It was almost inevitable that for eighteen of Scarth's civic years Morley's M.P., A. E. Hutton, should also be a Congregationalist, a Bradford wool man, on Asquith's list for a peerage in 1910 should the constitution demand it, and it was entirely natural that the town hall from which election victories were announced should be opened by Asquith, Home Secretary now, who used the occasion to ruminate on Farnley Wood, concluding that since an archival foray had not *disproved* that his ancestor had been hanged and quartered he too descended from men who knew how to die for their faith.[120] Eighteen years later, in July 1913, Asquith received Morley's freedom and even the local Irish and Tories flew flags while four thousand red, white and blue programme waving children massed in the school yard to form WELCOME and more children massed to form H.H.A. and West Riding mayors and mayoresses crowded steeply up the town hall steps. There was a garden party at Morley Grange and the mandatory visit to Croft House.[121]

Asquith's Morley memories were of Sunday school processions (Rehoboth versus St. Mary's as it were) and Crimean jollifications, but this cheering prosperity did not reflect that Morley; it reflected a town whose horizons had been expanded no less than his and whose chapel community stood to the fore in this. Scarth of Scarthingwell sent a son to John McClure's Mill Hill School; Hutton, Morley's M.P., was an Old Millhillian himself and a Trinity Cambridge man; and the agent in such expansion was the minister at St. Mary's from 1877 to 1883.

William Edward Anderton, who was almost Asquith's exact contemporary, was the son of a Cleckheaton worsted spinner, the brother of an Inner Temple barrister, and a Cambridge first in Moral Sciences. The Andertons loomed large at Providence Place Cleckheaton, which was next to their mills, and in the Yorkshire Congregational Union and it was W. E. Anderton's ministry at Morley which saw

[119] *Who Was Who 1916-1928.*
[120] For A. E. Hutton (1865-1947) see A. H. Robinson "A Man of Faith and Works", *Congregational Monthly,* January 1972 p. 4; H. Spender, *Herbert Henry Asquith* n.d.c. 1915, p. 2.
[121] G. Wood, Morley, *op. cit,* pp. 335-9, 345. I am also indebted for information to Mr. G. W. Atkinson.

the building of a church to hold 850, the growth of membership from 68 to over 170, a mission hall built by way of choir concerts and *tableaux vivants,* with a school for poor children, Christian Endeavour and Young Crusaders. His ministry also saw a steady trickle of members from Rehoboth, the Joshua Asquiths among them. Anderton became a marriage connexion of theirs.[122]

Morley was Anderton's first ministry (and he was not their first choice) and he moved on to Woodford Green where he ministered to the Spicer family in a carriage and pair church. There too he healed divisions, promoted action and increased membership, all of it on a larger scale.[123] Then he retired, almost blind, in 1905, and there is in his obituary a touch both of class and of failure: ". . . in the early ripeness of his manhood, he gave from the pulpit, with the beauty of a great simplicity, the rich fruits of a cultured and scholarly mind", and then, *à propos* his people's gift of Masson's *Life* of Milton, "there was in him the same high purpose of the Puritan, the same deep love of liberty, and the earnest desire to serve with tongue and pen the cause of public righteousness."[124]

Such churches, and such churchmen, expressed in microcosm that progressive element which was so marked in Edwardian Liberalism, although perhaps in Yorkshire it was overborne by the dead weight of the old guard of manufacturers fighting in Liberal caucus what they gallantly forebore in Congregational chapel.

The Lightcliffe church is a case in point. Never quite losing its reputation for social exclusiveness and coldness it yet responded from 1881 to twenty-five years and three pastorates of vigorous redefinition. The entire diaconate resigned in 1883 when confronted by a young man in his twenties who would lecture on A Workman's Life, Women's Work in the World, or Christ and Art, but the young man stayed on for another nine years and church meeting promptly voted him an increased stipend.[125] In 1906 Lightcliffe's minister, a Cambridge man in his later thirties, resigned to devote himself to the Liberal Party in Yorkshire. He wrote a novel, *The Ascent of the Bostocks,* and a play, *The Bargain,* as well as *The Task of the Liberal Party* and *The Case Against the Lloyd George Coalition.*[126] The point about this is less that it marks a headlong secularisation of the evangelical impulse, which is arguable, than that it demonstrates the bracing of the Asquith hinterland by those professionals called to articulate its conscience at the very time that Asquith is becoming his party's natural leader. "It is the sacred duty of every man to live in the world with all the passion, enthusiasm and earnestness he can muster. Religious teaching has been too much expectation and too little present life and duty", Samuel Pearson told Lightcliffe in the 1880's.[127] "Temperance, thrift, education, patriotism" wrote Harold Storey after his Lightcliffe pastorate twenty years later, rehearsing old catchwords and reclothing them. "— these things are all possible to citizens whose material circumstances are above the line of penury. To those who live below that line they are impossible. And it is surely the first business of the State to give the citizens 'a chance' by progressive and cumulative legislation that will help them to cross the line."[128]

[122]St. Mary's Morley *Book 8, Book 43; Morley Observer* 23 February 1884.
[123]R. L. Galley, *The History of the Woodford Green United Free Church,* Woodford 1968, pp. 31-5.
[124]*Congregational Year Book,* 1938, p. 658.
[125]D. H. Mason *Ten Thousand Sermons, op. cit.,* pp. 22-3.
[126]*Ibid* pp. 27-31; *The Halifax Junior Liberal Magazine,* undated cutting c. 1911; I am grateful to Mrs. H. A. Woodland for this reference.
[127]Mason *op. cit.* p. 23.
[128]*The Halifax Junior Liberal Magazine, art. cit.*

Of course there was muddle in this and a determination to have the best of all worlds. Algernon Firth told the Lightcliffe Bazaar in 1890 that their "religion was worth nothing if they could not pay for it", but he followed this businessman's black-and-white six years later with regrets that the church was not doing more outside work to make other people happy.[129] Happiness and getting what you paid for was a natural equation for late Victorian Congregationalists and Liberals to make. From the older ministerial generation Simeon Dyson closed thirty years sturdy combination of "courage with caution" at Upper Chapel, Idle, by sitting under the hot social gospeller Rhondda Williams at Greenfield, Bradford.[130] Dyson's son William Henry — another of the Asquith generation — carried Zion Wakefield "triumphantly through a difficult period of transition" in the late 1880's via a Brotherhood of eight hundred and a Sisterhood of a thousand, with what his obituary called "a real genius for interpreting the newer knowledge of the Bible".[131] From the intermediate ministerial generation Thomas Nicholson, who had married a Goldthorpe during his first pastorate at Providence Place Cleckheaton, was regarded as Rotherham's Liberal leader and Arthur Acland's local right hand man. In 1894, when Acland was Gladstone's Vice President of the Council for Education and bracketed with Asquith as a man to watch, Nicholson addressed the Yorkshire Congregational Union on "A Democratic Church for a Democratic Age": at Huddersfield.[132] Eight years later one of Nicholson's old Providence Place laymen, Arthur Anderton, returned to that theme when congratulating Rhondda Williams on Greenfield's jubilee:

> Perhaps the most marked difference is to be found in the answer we should give to the question, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Fifty or sixty years ago individualism prevailed. . . Now we have come to the conclusion that there are many things that can be done better in association (hear, hear) . . . If the ideal of a church is lowered it is sure to have a very injurious effect on other institutions outside the church, and especially on institutions in connection with our municipalities, and in connection with our national life; and I am most anxious to speak to the young people here on the necessity of taking a keen and earnest interest in their municipal, in their political and in their national life. I am anxious that the church should not lower the tone of other institutions . . . Fifty years ago there was very little idea of a municipality taking up the work which it is taking up to-day. Our waterworks, our gasworks, our electricity works, our trams — these and other things are very much better managed in the interests of the people than in the interests of private individuals. These matters will require the attention of the best men of the community, the attention of men permeated with Christian principle. If men are to attain the best government we must be actuated by Christian principles . . . . . With regard to education, what a change in our system . . . what we have recognised is not that every parent is responsible for his child's education, but that the State is responsible . . . it behoves the young men and young women also — for wives have their influence on their husbands — to see to these important matters. All these things are calling for the best endeavour that can be put forward, and I have been disheartened sometimes

[129] Information from Mr. D. H. Mason.
[130] *Congregational Year Book*, 1905, p. 159.
[131] *Ibid*, 1919, p. 72.
[132] *Congregational Year Book*, 1933, pp. 240-1.

during the last ten or twelve years by the falling away in the matter of public service on the part of our young men.[133]

And where stood Asquith in this, for so far the story has been entirely a matter of Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark? The constraints of personal ambition and the social complexities enjoined from the mid 1890's by marriage to Margot are not our present concern.

It is our concern to stress that the affinities enjoined by his first fourteen years remained strong for his first forty and could not thereafter be ignored as long as personal ambition survived, and that there was more to those affinities than the stridencies of the Nonconformist Conscience. If the bickerings of religious sects passed him by, those of political sects could not, and the two were not always separable.

In March 1885 Edward Leatham, Huddersfield's M.P., John Bright's brother-in-law and Quaker turned State Churchman, replied in all seriousness to the charge that to date only one mechanic and one working man had been returned to Parliament:

> I should have accepted the circumstance as a triumphant proof of its [the system's] success. The working classes have shown a rare discretion . . . It is by this process that we have arrived at the vigour of Democracy, without experiencing what I may term the shock of its brute force. . . . This is the very meaning of election. We elect, not the random elements, which in their infinite variety are to be found scattered everywhere upon the surface, but what is best and soundest; and it is only on this grand hypothesis that this House is honourable, or that it is any honour to sit in it.[134]

Such political Calvinism was, for example, the secret of Rochdale's vigour and success, for the Rochdalian grandees, the Ashworths and Petries and Kelsalls, as John Vincent has demonstrated, dominated by virtue of public consent: "they were a responsible *élite* rather than a ruling class".[135] It was more than that, for this was the principle which, under Divine guidance no doubt, animated Congregational and Baptist churches, if not most Nonconformists. This was also the principle which motivated Asquith's Liberalism, with its fine sense of the mutual reaction of legitimate interests. There is room in it for radicalism, pragmatism and flexibility but not for democracy; its concept of respect and responsibility is too great for true democracy. Stephen Koss has drawn suggestive parallels between the political response of Asquith and those of Lord Liverpool, Peel and, especially, Gladstone.[136] Theirs was the Westminster tradition to which Asquith became completely assimilated; but Asquith's mature political responses may also be seen as a natural development from what this study has called his *hinterland.* If there was something Nonconformist about what Stephen Koss calls Asquith's tendency to interpret moral issues in pounds, shillings and pence, so there was in his prime political quality, that of distilling other men's genius, of being "a fulcrum, balancing discordant opinions, and mediating between them", transcending and thus

[133] *Greenfield Congregational Church Bradford, 1852-1902: A 'Souvenir' of the Jubilee Celebration Services,* 1902, pp. 53-4.
[134] quoted in A. Jones, *The Politics of Reform 1884,* Cambridge U.P. 1972, pp. 105-6.
[135] Vincent, *op. cit.,* p. 110.
[136] Koss, *Asquith, op. cit.,* pp. 99, 88, 101-3.

transmitting *all* Liberal tendencies.[137] That, more than prophecy, is the art of the Congregational minister, and Asquith was a connoisseur of sermons.

Prime Ministers are seldom left in peace by their past. Asquith showed some sense of this when, in addition to the earldom of Oxford, with Asquith in tow, he chose as his secondary title that of Viscount Asquith of Morley. He could no more quite shake off his early Congregationalism than he could quite shake off the West Riding. In 1864 his mother moved down to St. Leonard's on Sea where, in November, she joined the Congregational church with whose minister, Andrew Reed, Sir Charles Reed's brother, there were mutual if distant family connexions.[138] William Willans and Herbert Henry Asquith followed their mother in membership in 1867, presumably during school holidays, and their sister Evelyn in 1869.[139] It was thus, through the Congregational church, that Evelyn met her husband William Wooding and that Herbert met his first wife, Helen Melland, for Wooding was recovering from a bruising pastorate by teaching in a St. Leonard's boys' school and Helen Melland came occasionally to visit her orphaned Kelsall cousins.[140]

Such encounters with their consequent commitments were more than mere social accidents, although Asquith did not renew his commitment to church membership. In his Hampstead days he would be among those urging R. F. Horton to come to Lyndhurst Road, but he would do so as a member of the congregation, not of the church.[141] Later still Nonconformity would be for him a matter for state Liberal occasions or asides in letters to close women friends. "We are going this afternoon to the Nonconformist Thanksgiving at the Albert Hall", he wrote to one of them, Hilda Harrisson, on 16 November 1918.[142] But the following day he repeated this Nonconformist experience, for he went to worship at Westminster Chapel. The presence, a week after the signing of the Armistice, at a Congregational church, of the man who had brought Britain into total war, was profoundly suggestive; so was the presence of his companion, the Honble. Mrs. Keppel, whose opulent beauty was as outmoded in the sudden post-war world as the Nonconformist Conscience had felt it to be before the lights went out.[143]

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[137] *Ibid*, pp. 76, 75.
[138] Information from Mr. K. Moore and Mrs. L. D. O'Nions; Andrew Reed's sister-in-law, Lady Reed, was the aunt of Mrs. Wrigley Willans.
[139] Information from Mr. K. Moore.
[140] Spender and Asquith, *op. cit.*, p. 42; I am indebted to Mr. K. Moore, Mr. J. Creasey and Revd. A. M. Hill for information about Wooding for whom see also *Essex Hall Year Book*, 1919, p. 110.
[141] R. F. Horton, *An Autobiography*, 1917, p. 55.
[142] D. MacCarthy ed. *H. H. A. Letters of the Earl of Oxford and Asquith To a Friend, 1st Series 1915-1922*, 1933 p. 83.
[143] Westminster Chapel, *Visitors Book 1905*. 1905-.

PURITAN VERSUS SEPARATIST: A NEW LETTER

Although most of the printed works in the puritan-separatist dialogue of the early seventeenth century survive, few private communications between members of the two groups remain. Tucked away in a manuscript volume at Sion College, London, is one letter of this correspondence, which was probably written between 1609 and 1625.[1] In this note, a puritan named Dionis Fitzherbert admonishes a woman who belonged to John Robinson's separatist congregation at Leiden in the hope that she would return to the church of England.

Mutual antipathies marred relations between these two groups. On one hand, since separatists were former puritans who had left the Anglican communion to seek full and immediate religious reformation, puritans regarded them as impatient schismatics whose rashness jeopardized the cause of national ecclesiastical reform. Puritans also looked upon these defectors from their ranks as deserters of Anglicanism in its hour of need.[2] On the other hand, separatists often viewed puritans as moral cowards who acknowledged their church's corruption but lacked the courage to leave it for the difficult and dangerous path of separation.[3] As evidence to support this accusation, they cited the preaching of "forward" puritan divines.[4] These ministers' denunciations of the state church impelled some of their listeners to draw the logical conclusion that it was so sinful that it must be abandoned; yet, when these people embraced separatism, they found themselves attacked by these same men.

Given each party's hostile perceptions of the other, the fervour which suffuses Fitzherbert's appeal to "Mistress W." is understandable. In their controversies, puritans and separatists were often more bitter toward each other than toward their common episcopal adversaries.[5] Frustrations, hardships, and misunderstandings shortened tempers and sharpened language. No better illustration exists of the Biblical proverb that "a brother offended is harder to winne then [than] a strong citie, & their contentions are like the barre of a palace."[6]

* * * * * *

TO MISTRESS W. AT LADEN[7]

Good Mistress W. I receaved a letter long since from yow, therefore I crave pardon for my slacknes in writing againe; my occasions indeed being such as I doubt not, were they knowne unto yow, would very well excuse me with you. I see well yow have

[1]Sion College MS. ARC/L40.2/E47, fols. 41 *recto*-42 *recto*, Sion College, London.

[2]For an interesting opinion on these points, see Henoch Clapham, *The Syn, against the Holy Ghoste: Made Manifest from those grounds of Faith, which haue bene taught & received by the Faithfull in England, & that for those 40 y*[ears] *togither vnder the prosperovs raigne of my Soveraigne Lady & Quene Elishabet. Which may serue for a rayning in of the heady, & yet for a spur to slouthfull Spirits* (Amsterdam, 1598), sig. [A 1 *verso*]. See also William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism. Or, the Way to the New Jerusalem as Set Forth in Pulpit and Press from Thomas Cartwright to John Lilburne and John Milton, 1570-1643,* New York 1938, pp. 180-182.

[3]Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts 1630-1650: A Genetic Study,* Cambridge, Mass. 1933, 60-72.

[4]Leland H. Carlson, ed., *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, 1591-1593,* Elizabethan Nonconformist Texts, vol. vi, 1970, p. 317.

[5]Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts,* p.68.

[6]Prov. 18:19 (Geneva version.) Geneva 1560.

[7]In the text given here, punctuation and capitalization have been modernized, and abbreviations extended. Superior letters have been reduced, italics omitted, and quotation marks added where appropriate.

not forgot our often reasoninges about your seperation. I must, and ever shall with out better proofe then [than] your bare coniecture, affirme yt to be impossible to prove that Titus was an euangelist in that perticuler cense as yow take ytt; or that he did not ordaine elders as a bishopp, but as an euangelist.[8] I would to God yow & many with yow had loved the Church of England but half soe well as yow ought to have done; [then] this curious prying into her faultes, if she have any in this kind, had never been, but God had receaved to His infinite glory farre more prayse and thanks for His rich mercyes towardes her. Shall I or can I thinke of for saking that mother in whose bowells I was conceyved by the mortall word of truth, and by whose breastes I am nourished to the hope of eternall life; whome yow (alas that I should speak yt) her ungratefull & unkind children can not in vtmost evill will but say that she holdes the faith aright? Where is the charity then [that] Luther (looke [in] your own booke) so earnestly commendes; that suffreth all thinges, the purity of faith presu[r]ved?[9] God doth know how truely I speake yt: I have this twenty yeres and more, day and night, I will not say how painefully nor through how many and manifold temptations, I have sought out the truth through a world of controversies, yet did never see iust cause but to admyre and cleave to, yea, & love the Church of England as I doe dearely (I hope as the balls of myne owne eyes, or whatsoever is dearest to my sowle), not but that I thinke she may have her spottes & blemishes, — which with my owne I hartily bewayle and lament. Farre be such pride from vs. But I assure my self yt can never be proved that there hath or can be in any tyme a iust seperation from any such a church as she is. I have read over the Scriptures not so little as fifty or threescore tymes (God knowes with how true a desire to know the truth); yet could never see the least stepps of such a seperation. Then know what yow have done: gone from a church that nourisheth thousandes that loves [*sic*] the Lord Jesus to their mortality. And can such a church be held execrable that believees and holdes euery point of the fayth once delivered to the scaints, that receaves every truth of God according to her knowledg, and that practizeth every commaundment of God according to grace given her? And can she be for saken? Who can but wonder att this? And for saken by her owne children for her outward forme onely. If yt were granted that she were soe deformed as they make her, which who will graunt them, are ~~all~~ not all other thinges whatsoever but dependances upon theis? Why doe yow leave her then that hath soe sound a foundation? O then examyne well what yow have done, and be not ashamed to confesse that yow may erre. Why, if your mother be ragged or torne, sick or deformed, come with your prayers & teares to heale and amende her; but fly not from her as uncleane who onely trustes in the pretious [precious] blood of Christ Jesus to cleanse her from all synne. In a word, I must needes feare [that] they never truely felt the power and force of her profession that could love her soe little as to leave her upon soe weake groundes. Pardon me if soe good a zeale make me speake playne; yet yf yow can produce either example or precept out of the Holy Scriptures to for sake or seperate from such a church as yow have done, although I cannot promise to see Laden yet I must confesse my self to be much dece[i]ued, and would to God I could be as truely confident of your retorne to her as I am assured yow can find noe warrant from God or His Word to depart away from her. Happy had yt been for yow (all of yow, I meane) if yow had lived among

[8]Titus 1: 5-7 (Geneva version).

[9] The reference here is unclear. For a statement from Luther's works on this point, see "Treatise on Good Works, 1520," ed. and trans. W. A. Lambert, and James Atkinson, in Helmut T. Lehman, gen. ed., *Luther's Works* (American edition), 54 vols. Philadelphia 1958-67, pp. xliv, 35-37.

our poore afflicted brethren, where the sharpe scourge of persecution would have kept yow from theis weake variances with them that love yow soe well, where yow should have felt by experience how farre we are departed from Babilon, who gladly would overwhelme us all; soe truely doth she feele we are not onely gone but fly out of her. Although yow upbrayd your freindes still with "goe out of her my people,"[10] who [(]blessed be God) hat been a spetyall [special] meanes to draw yow, and (to speake noe more then [than] truth) all the reformed churches in the Christian world out of that spirituall bondage, who ever one of them, I doubt not, doe and may bow there heades in thankfulness to this glorious church yow for sake and despise, soe much hath God magnified her. And I doubt not but yow see cause enough, alas, too much, to pray to God to contynue that His favor to her and by her in this most needefull tyme of His church; or els even teares of blood will proclayme to all the world the great workes God hath done by her, which Lord, for thy Christes sake, still cease not to contynue untill Babilon be rewarded as she hath rewarded vs. To the which I hope yow are not soe farre gone from vs, at least in affect[i]on, as not here to ioyne with vs in saying "Amen."

ff [Dionis Fitzherbert]

MICHAEL E. MOODY

[10]Rev. 18:4 (Geneva version). This passage was a favourite of the separatists. They interpreted it as God's direct command to forsake false churches.

REVIEWS

Archbishop Grindal 1519-1583: The Struggle for a Reformed Church. By Patrick Collinson. Pp. 368., Cape, London, 1979, £13.50.

Professor Collinson hinted that he saw the Elizabethan age as a lost opportunity for the building of a more comprehensive and more evangelical kind of English church in his account, published in 1967, of the *Elizabethan Puritan Movement.* His intention in this biography is to show Edmund Grindal's importance "as a symbol of all that was best and of so much that might have been in the episcopal leadership of the English church and Reformation". He succeeds brilliantly in this task. The book is written with all the fastidiousness, grace and elegance that his writings have led one to expect. It is securely founded on a mastery of the ecclesiastical sources of the period and the sensitivity of an experienced scholar to the nuances of every document brought to bear on Grindal's life. The publishers are to be congratulated too on a sumptuous format, with ten illustrations and splendid endpapers reproducing the opening lines of Grindal's famous letter to the Queen.

The essence of Grindal's puritanism, Collinson finds, was his sense of reformation as a "process of ceaseless edification". The test of all nonconformity for him was whether there were valid pastoral reasons in justification of it. We are shown how Grindal used his powers of patronage to advance creative and dynamic men, first in the bishopric of London then in the archbishopric of York. Collinson carefully indicates the complexities of the conflict over the surplice and square cap in 1566-7, making sense of Grindal's behaviour over the issue and explaining how he both exhibited pastoral responsibility in his handling of the crisis and yet became in the next years a "relentless opponent of separatist puritanism". The account of the quarrel with Elizabeth is equally clear: it includes an exemplary unravelling of the

court politics of Grindal's disgrace. The book is full of fascinating asides, such as one on the teeming life of Old St. Paul's, and it contains some important revisions of Sir John Neale's work on Elizabethan parliaments. In a challenging epilogue, which opens with a commentary on Richard Baxter's verdict on the archbishop, Collinson argues that the developments which followed his death in 1583 were "the product of the failure rather than of the success of the English Reformation, a failure which Grindal's career seems to epitomise". This biography will delight and enormously stimulate anyone who is interested in the origins of the English dissenting tradition.

ANTHONY FLETCHER

Six Men and A Pulpit. Compiled by Donald Hilton, Pp. 74, The United Reformed Church, Princes Street, Norwich, 1980, £1.50 (plus 40p postage and packing).

Only a bold church could do this; only a remarkable one could get away with it. Princes Street Norwich is both. For just over one hundred and sixty years Princes Street has flourished as a city centre church attracting large and at times influential congregations to sit under weighty preachers. There have been six ministers, differing in rhetoric but not in impact, and something of the forceful continuity of this Free Church apostolic succession may be gleaned from an odd fact: Sydney Cozens-Hardy sat under ministers one to five, his son Basil Cozens-Hardy sat under ministers two to six.

Donald Hilton, the present minister, has compiled twelve sermons, two from each of the six. To read them is not just a task of pious antiquarianism. Certainly the preacher's *accent* has gone, and words which once sped home now seem merely wordy. Even so, there remains the poetry of Sydney Myers (1942-1970) which so impressed this reviewer when as an undergraduate he heard him on one of the rare occasions when Myers could be enticed from Princes Street. John Alexander's "Appeal to Christians on the duty and importance of communion with the Church", preached in 1837, is still pertinent despite his torrential rhetoric. George Barrett (1866-1911), of course, is in a class apart and not even changing fashion and scholarship have managed to dethrone him. The conclusion to his massive New Year sermon preached in 1879, must have overwhelmed his congregation into a silence where eternity beckoned.

Donald Hilton modestly places himself among the foothills of such preaching. He is wrong; Princes Street remains a church where the Word is powerfully broken.

J.C.G.B.

"Towards The Mark": The United Reformed Church, Kirkham, A Short History 1805-1980 has been attractively produced, illustrated and with twelve pages of text. Copies are obtainable from Mr. J. W. Wilson, M.B.E., 4 Myrtle Drive, Kirkham, Preston, for 60p. (inc. postage).