Birmingham and the Movement for National Education 1867 - 77

An account of the work and influence of the National Education League

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When writing an account of the work of the Birmingham School Board it seemed to me that a more detailed examination of the part played by the Birmingham Radicals in the educational battles of 1869 and the immediately succeeding years might be of interest. The present work is the result. It is very largely, although not entirely, the story of the National Education League, an organisation which does not seem to have attracted the historian since Francis Adams, its secretary, wrote The Elementary School Contest in 1882.

My main source has been the contemporary press, especially that of Birmingham. No manuscript sources seem now to exist, except the Chamberlain papers, which are not at present available.

The following abbreviations have been used in the footnotes:

- ABG  Arises Birmingham Gazette
- BDG  Birmingham Daily Gazette
- BDP  Birmingham Daily Post
- BES  Birmingham Education Society (BESI: the First Report of that Society, etc.)
- BJ  Birmingham Journal
- BRL  Birmingham Reference Library
- BWP  Birmingham Weekly Post


Place and date of publication of books referred to are given on the first reference only: thereafter the work, where no ambiguity can arise, is identified by the name of its author.
INTRODUCTION

"The fight has not been always the thickest and hardest in Parliament. The work of creating and leading public opinion in the country has been of even greater importance, but it has generally been performed by men of comparatively obscure position, the account of whose efforts is often inaccessible or has perished".

(Francis Adams, of Birmingham)

In the nineteenth century Manchester, not Birmingham, was the home of every liberal movement in English elementary education up to 1869. Maltby, their historian,¹ shows how that city kept the question for several decades before a not very interested nation, and how at the crucial moment it lost its nerve, and allowed its name and prestige to be used by the forces of reaction. My own title deliberately echoes that of Maltby, and I make no apology for using the same motto as he does: for I write of the very men that Francis Adams had in mind.

These men, a group of reformers living in Birmingham at the time that the State, at long last, brought itself to legislate on elementary education, had, contrary to the prevailing thought of the time, a vision of education given, as a human right, to the limit of each individual's ability - an ideal which was not to find legislative expression for another three quarters of a century; and furthermore they had a vision of a classless education which we have still to realise.

¹ S. E. Maltby: Manchester and the Movement for National Elementary Education, 1800 - 1870. (Manchester: University Press, 1918)
They were men who loved a battle for its own sake, and, while trying to show the patterns of thought behind their actions, I have also tried to recapture the immediacy of their experience: for without a sense of the robustness of contemporary political and religious life we cannot understand their bitterness and rage in the face of inertia and complacency. It was an era which loved debate and public meetings. At all levels, from the thronged assemblies in suburban school-rooms and chapels to the Town Meetings and mass demonstrations, men practised their oratory and revelled in the thrust of argument; in addition, the standing rivalries of Liberals and Conservatives, Church and Dissent, League and Union, unlocked the very same partisan vigour in the rank and file of townsmen which today finds vent in the Saturday contests of quite different Leagues.

The Birmingham Radicals' battle-cry was for education for every child in the country: free, universal, compulsory, and provided, not by charity, but by 'the self-governing energy of the people'; the religious question, the rock on which every legislative attempt up to 1870 had foundered, was to be solved first by an 'unsectarianism' which they could never define, and which their opponents, who adopted it after the League had abandoned it, derided as 'Parliamentary Piety', and later by the 'secularism' which Dale urged was alone compatible with true religious education.

Step by step the nation adopted three of the League's four 'means' - no small measure of success: that it has not adopted the fourth, secularism, certainly does not mean that men are never troubled by the reflection that teaching based on an agreed syllabus and given possibly as a matter of routine duty, may have resulted in that 'cold
paralysis of general scepticism' which Dale prophesied, or that the final victory of compromise may not have been the highest gain for religious and moral energy.

But in all the protagonists educational and religious aims were at least reinforced by social, political and ecclesiastical motives. In the 1860's and 1870's a sharp line was drawn between Church and Chapel: the two factions maintained in every town a standing controversy, practically unmitigated by personal friendships or even by business relationships. There still remained, in the words of a contemporary Birmingham observer, who was himself a Churchman: 'even in the great towns, a faint sentiment of social pre-eminence on the part of the Establishment: an irritating consciousness that it has the sovereign and the aristocracy among its members'.

Churchmen tended to feel a social superiority, and Dissenters to claim a moral and intellectual superiority. The Non-conformists' zeal had a certain narrowness of view, not exempt from bigotry: but the attitude of Churchmen was often provocative and contemptuous.

In elementary education the Church's claims had if anything hardened as the century progressed, and it fought for a political control as of right. The National Society showed by its attitude to

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the proposed State Normal School and to inspection, by its refusal to accept a conscience clause, by its struggle against accepting a management clause, by the rigour of its 'Plan of Union', that it was imbued with the idea of the indivisibility of education and of the inalienable right of the Church to provide it.¹ Allied to this claim was a conception of an elementary education, strictly limited in aim and content, bestowed as a charitable boon by one class upon another. All the features of the charity school movement of the eighteenth century were reproduced in the National Schools of the nineteenth; and the educational aim of the National Society was 'to communicate to the poor such knowledge and habits as are sufficient to guide them through life in their proper stations, especially to teach them the doctrine of religion according to the principles of the Established Church and to train them to the performance of their religious duties by an early discipline'.²

Educational reformers were, inevitably, forced into an alliance with the Dissenters; and the Dissenters into an alliance with the secularists.


2. Burgess, pp. 11 and 25.
CHAPTER ONE

The Local Background

In the 1860's, and for several more decades, Birmingham was a small compact borough of a quarter of a million inhabitants, its boundary at most two miles, and in many directions little more than one mile, from the town centre. To the north, Aston and Erdington still lay outside the town, although the narrow strip of Netchells jutted out as far as Salford Bridge. On the east side, Darnel and Ashted constituted the boundary: Saltley, and its Worcester Diocesan Training College, were not yet engulfed. Southwards, fortunate Edgbaston ran out into the country as far as the Bourn Brook: its neighbours Balsall Heath and Harborne lay outside the borough. On the west and north-west the town boundary ran through Rotton Park and Hockley: the countryside began at Soho Hill.

Most of the town consisted of narrow grimy streets behind which lay labyrinthic 'courts' and 'places': both streets and courts were filled with slum and near-slum houses, built often 'back-to-back', squalid and packed, whose cesspools and middens poisoned the wells on which the town still depended. A few wealthy manufacturers were building just outside the borough, on Soho Hill into Handsworth, and in rural Birchfields, for example; but within the town itself, nine-tenths at least of its wealth were concentrated in one suburb, Edgbaston. This was the Mecca of every successful man, and here rose the large houses - it is not absurd to call them mansions - with their high walled gardens, looking out on to
the well wooded fields of Warwickshire. In wealth, Victorian Edgbaston can have been second only to Kensington.

This wealth did not come from one or two staple industries, as in the North, but from a multiplicity of trades and occupations which have always defied classification, carried on for the most part in small workshops employing less than fifty hands. There was no equivalent in the Midlands of the 'cotton barons' of the North: there was, on the other hand, a large class of wealthy men who were, nevertheless, at no great remove from their own work people. Economic and social relations between masters and men were always close.

In the sixties, the Town Council was in the last decade of 'bumbledom' and of the 'Woodman era'. Able men of high standing in the community refused, for the most part, to serve on it. It took the lowest view of its functions, sought economy - of money and its own effort - in all things, and occupied itself with trivia; and even these it preferred to discuss in the comfort of the neighbouring 'Woodman' public house, rather than in the notoriously draughty Town Hall. Aldermen and Councillors, whether Radical or Conservative (and the former usually had at least a two to one majority) were still derisory figures. Yet the movement which was to transform the Council had already begun; there was no sudden change, as is often supposed, when Joseph Chamberlain stepped up to the Mayor's seat in November 1873: able men whose social consciences had been awakened were being persuaded, sometimes much against their inclination, to take office; and there is no doubt
that the movement derived its initial impetus from a small group of non-conformist ministers.¹

For two centuries Birmingham had been a refuge for Dissenters, and by the middle of the nineteenth century they dominated the economic, social, and political life of the town. Unitarians and Quakers in particular played a leading part in all branches of life. Unitarian families such as the Chamberlains, Kenricks, Martineaus and Nettlefolds, Quaker families like those of Lloyd, Cadbury, Baker and Sturge were to Birmingham what squire and parson were to rural England.² But their distrust and dislike of state and civic interference in social matters had to be overcome, and this was the work primarily of Dawson, Dale, Crosskey, and Vince, ministers who all used their pulpits as platforms to rally public opinion, and who preached a new social gospel of state and municipal interference in the interests of general welfare. These four were the leaders of the movement forward from the traditional standpoints of their own political and ecclesiastical ancestors.

Politically, the borough was a centre of radicalism. Its townsmen had a turbulent political history, dating at least from 1832 when the Birmingham Political Union had threatened to march a 100,000 men on London: they were celebrated for the violence


of their riots on minor occasions - and for their ordered determination in great crises. In early 1867 William Scholefield, the Charter Mayor of Birmingham (1838), sat with John Bright, who, since 1857, had found Birmingham a surer base than Manchester, as members for the borough on the Opposition benches in the House of Commons, while the Derby-Disraeli Government prepared its leap in the dark.

Local reaction to the debates on the Second Reform Bill well illustrates the vigour of Birmingham political life. Interest and enthusiasm were high and sustained: both the town's newspapers are filled - column after column, unrelieved by sub-titles, of small type - with accounts of public meetings and demonstrations, with speeches which, often, were admittedly heard only by the reporters. For the opposition, although in a considerable, and seemingly hopeless, minority - seemingly, because it was to have its day in most unexpected fashion - was not disposed to let the Radicals have it all their own way without a fight - on occasion, literally. Yet even the minority preferred to be known locally as Liberal-Conservative, though when its leader, Sampson Samuel Lloyd, a Churchman but a member of the Quaker family of bankers, eventually reached Parliament as Member for Plymouth, he sat and voted with Disraeli's party.¹ The Conservatives, as for brevity everyone else

¹. S. S. Lloyd and his brother G. B. (a Quaker and a Radical, Mayor in 1870) were the last generation to control the bank as a family concern. They were descended from Sampson Lloyd, who fled from the persecutions of Charles II to Birmingham, where his eighteenth century descendant founded the bank. v. The Lloyds of Birmingham (London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., Ltd. 1907).
called them, controlled one of the two principal newspapers, the Birmingham Daily Gazette, which had grown out of the much older Aris's Birmingham Gazette; the Radicals, or Liberals, controlled the far more powerful Birmingham Daily Post (and its weekly offshoot), founded only ten years before, in 1857: both the editor of this paper, John Thackray Bunce, and his leader-writer, William Harris, whom Briggs calls the Abbé Sieyès of Birmingham\(^1\), played a major part in the events of the next decade.

With the Conservative Party lay, almost entirely, the interests and sympathies of the clergy of the Church of England within the borough. And the Established Church was far from inactive: between 1850 and 1900 it doubled the number of its churches in Birmingham\(^2\) - although the clergymen did not, as did the dissenting ministers, play an open and active part in politics until 1870. They were men who laboured faithfully in their unrewarding parishes, yet their lives are not woven into the texture of Birmingham history as are those of the great dissenting ministers. It is not so much that they were not born Birmingham men - scarcely one of the town's leaders at that period was - as that they were products by training of an alien world, and their aspirations inevitably lay elsewhere: for the most part they moved on to more congenial places after a few years' stay.

By contrast, dissenting ministers were the very mainspring of the Radical-Liberal Party and of the town's social-political life;

\(^1\) Briggs, p. 167
\(^2\) Ibid. p. 3
and one was pre-eminent among them: for the rest of the century Dale was Birmingham and Birmingham was Dale; when Joseph Chamberlain entered the House of Commons for the first time he was taunted with being the member for Robert Dale: to which he replied evenly that in that case no man could have a better, wiser, or nobler constituency.

But ten years before Dale came to Birmingham George Dawson was preaching the gospel that it was the duty of the ablest men in the community to serve it. He was 23 when, in 1844, he was invited to Birmingham by the congregation of a small chapel, Mount Zion in Graham St., to become their pastor. Born in London in 1821, he went, like other Dissenters, to Scotland for his degree, and at Glasgow University first made the acquaintance of Crosskey. He began occasional preaching at a small Baptist Chapel at Rickmansworth, where in 1843 he became the regular pastor. He had no training for the ministry, and no ordination was considered necessary by either party. When he moved to Birmingham there were only forty in his congregation; when the deacons had asked him what stipend he wanted his reply was: 'Bread and cheese for the first year; what I am worth afterwards'. His chapel was quickly crowded, but he soon had differences with his congregation over doctrine. The trust deed of the chapel declared that the Minister

1. A. W. Dale, p. 419, and EDP June 28, 1876
2. George Dawson, 1821 - 1876. He is the subject of an article by R. W. Dale in the "Nineteenth Century", August 1877. There is also a biography by W. Wilson: The Life of George Dawson (Birmingham: P. Jones Ltd., 1905). The note on him in the Birmingham Mail, October 15, 1895, occasioned by the final scattering of the congregation of the Church of the Saviour, was evidently written by one who knew him well.
and congregation should judge the fitness of each individual for Communion: Dawson held that the individual was his own judge. He withdrew from the chapel, part of the congregation seceded with him, and together they founded the Church of the Saviour, in June 1845.

For two years they wandered round Birmingham, meeting where and when they could, until they had raised £4,000 to build on a site in Edward St. There rose the Chapel in which Dawson preached for the next twenty-nine years. It seated 1500, and was always crowded: no chance comer could rely on finding a seat. It had no pulpit, and no pews, but a simple platform and benches; Dawson called his discourses lectures, not sermons, and he early discarded the title of Reverend. He demanded for himself complete freedom of thought and belief; he considered that his congregation was united under him for the study of Christian truth: that he himself was a teacher, not the retained advocate of certain doctrines: that it was his duty to aid his people in their studies by giving them the benefit of his own inquiry into the truth of God; the bond that united Dawson and his congregation was therefore prospective rather than retrospective. Many, even Dissenters, looked askance at Dawson's hostility to creeds and theological systems.

He was a 'political Dissenter', and gloried in it. In one of his earliest speeches he said: 'I was born a politician when I was born an Englishman. I love politics. I do not mean the politics of Chartists, Whig, Radical or Tory, but the true study of politics - the history of man and the rights of man - the politics of the New Testament'. It is impossible to find a dividing line
between his political utterances, his lectures, and his sermons. He was a pioneer among Radicals, differing from the older generation in that he was always an exponent of state and municipal action. Unlike most English Radicals too he had a strong interest in foreign politics: he was in touch with Continental Liberalism, and was amongst those who greeted Kossuth at Southampton in 1851, and persuaded him to visit Birmingham, where they sat side by side in triumphant procession through the streets.

He became known throughout all the great towns of England as a lecturer. His style was said to have something of Carlyle, and something of Cobbett; yet he was not an orator: his discourse was the conversation of a brilliant man talking to his friends from a platform. He had a fine physical presence and charm of manner. Although it was inevitable that his opinions, political, social and religious, provoked fierce antagonism - which he took no pains to conciliate, for he was always aggressive - he had remarkable powers of inspiring affection. Almost from the moment that he came to Birmingham he exercised an effect on religious thought and public life which was sustained till his death.

Robert William Dale was also a Londoner. At the age of 17 he entered Spring Hill College, then lying just outside Birmingham on the Dudley Road. In 1853 he was appointed co-pastor at Carr's Lane Congregational Chapel, and on the death of the Rev. J. A. James he succeeded him as pastor.

1. 1829 - 1895. There is a biography by his son, A. W. Dale, op. cit. above, on which the next two or three paragraphs are mainly based.
He was a burly man, heavily bearded (to the great scandal of Nonconformist elders) and addicted to pipe-smoking; he never wore clerical black, and never used the title Reverend. A pugilistic figure, when he rose to speak at a public meeting the vigour with which he pulled off his overcoat was a sure sign of what was coming; and when the meeting was tempestuous, he ploughed through the storm like some great liner shouldering its way through heavy seas. It was as a pugilist that Matthew Arnold saw him: "Mr. Dale is really a pugilist. He has his arena down in Birmingham, where he does his practice with Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Jesse Collings and the rest of his band, and from time to time he comes up to London and gives a public exhibition of his skill. .... The essence of religion is grace and peace. And though no doubt Mr. Dale cultivates grace and peace at other times when he is not busy with his anti-Church practices, yet his cultivation of grace and peace can be none the better, and must naturally be something the worse, for the time and energy given to his pugilistic interludes.¹

He had a genuine and hearty love for conflict for high ends and great issues. He threw himself into struggles with exultant energy: and they were struggles in which in the opinion of many - even of some of his friends - it was not always fitting that a theologian and a pastor should engage. But Dale stated

¹ Matthew Arnold: Last Essays on Church and Religion (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1877) p. 185
bluntly that it was the duty of religious men to take part in politics: 'Those who decline to use their political power are guilty of treachery to God and to man'. He was not content to assert principles, but revelled in the conflict through which principles are applied in action. For him, Christ's authority extended to every province of human energy. To make that authority effective was the supreme duty of the true Christian, who must live in the world, and not apart from it. He considered that all work was sacred in which a man could do the will of God, and God's thought and purpose were as wide as life itself. 'The Christian man is bound so to bear his part here that good shall prevail over evil; he may serve Christ on the polling booth or on the platform, in Parliament, in the Town Council, or on the Board of Guardians'.

By 1870 Dale was the recognised leader of English Non-conformists: but before the main battle was joined in that year this formidable man received the reinforcement of an almost equally formidable ally.

'I have always held that in becoming a minister of religion I did not cease to be a citizen; and have, hence, taken part in the chief political agitations of my day. ... I may describe the end and aim of my political work as having been the promotion of whatever I believed tended towards the full development

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1. In a speech made in 1864, on one of Bright's visits to Birmingham (A. W. Dale, p. 250).
'of individual men and, by consequence, the development of a righteous civilisation'. So wrote Henry Crosskey towards the end of his life. Born in Lewes in 1826 of Unitarian parents, he early decided to become a minister and began his training in Manchester at the age of 16. There his interest in politics awoke. He heard from eye witnesses the story of Peterloo, he heard Cobden and Bright at the height of their powers in the agitation against the Corn Laws, and saw troops bivouacked in the streets. At the age of 22 he began his ministry of four years at Friargate Chapel, Derby, where he founded a school modelled on the suggestions put forward two years previously by Dr. Hook. In 1852 he moved to Glasgow, to begin seventeen years of storm and stress. He was regarded as a heretic, endured much social ostracism, and was in continuous conflict even with fellow-Unitarians - for Unitarianism was in development, and Crosskey was an advanced thinker.

In most cities and towns the Unitarian minister was a lonely figure: theological and social prejudice combined to deprive him of the fellowship to which his intellect and culture would

1. Henry William Crosskey 1826 - 1893. There is a Life by R. A. Armstrong (Birmingham : Cornish 1895). The quotations are from some unpublished autobiographical notes which were available to Armstrong.

2. That is, the teacher was concerned to give secular instruction only but invited ministers of any and every denomination to the school at regular times to instruct their respective flocks. V. W. R. W. Stephens : Life of Hook (London : R. Bentley & Son, 1878) pp. 205 - 207.
otherwise have given him claim. It was most probably with pleasure and relief that Crosskey received the invitation to take over the church at Birmingham, for there his sect enjoyed power, wealth and prestige out of all proportion to their numbers. In 1862 they had built an impressive Gothic building, the Church of the Messiah, in Broad Street, to replace the more humble New Meeting House in which Dr. Priestley had ministered, and on either side of the Church stood its own large day schools. Crosskey arrived in June 1869, and to a man for whom political life was almost a necessity, the atmosphere of the town was exhilarating, almost intoxicating. As Dale described him, he was a man to exult in a storm of hostilities: he was always ardent, always vigilant, never weary, and seldom depressed.

If not yet quite the most eminent, then certainly the most active member of Crosskey's new congregation was the youthful Joseph Chamberlain. He was born in London in 1836, into a wealthy merchant family of Unitarians, very conscious of their descent from a long line of Dissenters, and came to Birmingham at the age of 18

1. There are several biographies, the most notable and recent being that of Garvin (J. L. Garvin: Life of Joseph Chamberlain London: MacMillan, 1932). Earlier biographies that have also been consulted are:-
S. H. Jeyes: Chamberlain, his life and public career (London: Sands and Co., 1903)
A. Mackintosh: The Story of Mr. Chamberlain's Life (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914)
N. M. Marris: Joseph Chamberlain (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1900)
to join the firm of his uncle, John Nettlefold, a screw manufacturer. The next thirteen years were spent mainly in building up this firm, which he came to control. He married into the Kenricks, another Unitarian family of wealthy industrialists. His circle was limited to business, to the congregation and to a few friends. Like other Dissenters of his class, he did much teaching in night schools and Sunday schools. His manner as a teacher was fearsome: he always retained his tall hat, and, in winter, his overcoat, used his umbrella as a pointer, and walked about the room as he spoke rapidly and animatedly. Over these years he slowly learned the art of public speaking at the meetings of Edgbaston Debating Society. Early in 1867 his horizons widened and at the instigation of Dixon or Collings he embraced the cause which was to lead to his political life.

Collings was born near Exeter in 1831, the son of a farm labourer. He himself always believed - with obvious results on his career - that his family were the descendants of peasant proprietors who had been squeezed out of existence as such by the Enclosure Acts of the 18th Century and had become landless labourers.

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1. The only published life of Collings (1831 - 1920) is almost valueless for the present subject and period (Collings and Green : Life of Right Hon. Jesse Collings. London : Longmans, Green, & Co., 1920). The second part of the work, by Sir John Green, is concerned only with Collings' labours for Land Reform; the first part is autobiographical, but when he dictated it, in 1917 at the age of 86, Collings' memory and faculties were obviously impaired.
His life was changed when a distant relative offered to educate him in a private school which he had just started. At the age of 15 he became an assistant in an ironmonger's shop, working, as was then usual, fourteen or more hours a day. He came to Birmingham with a clerkship in a wholesale ironmongery at the age of 19, and in the 1850's was working for his firm till 8 or 9 each evening, then walking home to his lodging in Handsworth and reading till 1 or 2 o'clock in the following morning. His political awakening came, as he records, listening to Kossuth, Cobden and Bright speaking in Birmingham Town Hall. His business career prospered: after a period of commercial travelling in the West Country he became head of the firm in 1864. Three years later he had wealth and leisure enough to think of a career in public life, which he entered under the guidance of George Dixon.

Dixon was yet another who migrated to Birmingham at an early age, and stayed to become identified with it. He was born at Gomersal, in Yorkshire, on July 1, 1820, educated at Leeds Grammar School and privately for two years in France. He came to Birmingham in 1838, entered the house of Rabone, foreign merchants, became a partner in 1844 and later became head of the firm. He

joined the Town Council in 1863, representing Edgbaston ward, and became Mayor in 1866: in politics he was a Liberal, and in religion a member of the Church of England. There was no storm and stress in his private career; he was not one of the under-privileged: his course through life was certain, and eased by parental wealth; his own fortune, by middle life, was considerable, and like many another, he might easily have bought land and joined the squirearchy. Instead, he chose to throw himself into the agitation for a national system of education: indeed, it was he who by his own deliberate action gave the impetus to the whole movement in Birmingham. While the League was in being, he led the Parliamentary struggle; after its dissolution he spent the last twenty years of his life administering the system of elementary education as Chairman of the School Board, even using his private fortune in an attempt to realise locally something of the wider system envisaged by the Radicals in 1869. He was at one with the Dissenters who constituted his allies both educationally and ecclesiastically, for, although an Anglican, he wished to see the Church disestablished. In the course of his mayoralty, however, he was in contact with all local leaders, Churchmen and Dissenters, Conservatives, Liberals, and Radicals, sounding opinion, inspiring discussion and action.

It was an eventful mayoralty, even if it had an inauspicious beginning. His election was sharply opposed because of the short time he had served on the Council. Alderman Osborne, his proposer, admitted that there were many on the Council who had a better right to the honour, and were at least as well qualified for it: but they were unwilling to accept it. Alderman Goodrick was proposed
there and then, but he hastily disclaimed nomination: 'Dixon has served the town for many years, and has been foremost in supporting every great movement with his purse, his influence and his labour. He is not seeking this office, but has been urged into it'.

Obviously Dixon had been one of those who had remained aloof from the Council, but, one of the new men of the municipal awakening, now saw it as an instrument for wider purposes. His purpose was to stir the Council, and the town generally, to action on the 'education question'. Before many months the chance came to him to enter Parliament to further his cause there.

The main pre-occupation of many in Birmingham during the winter of 1866-67 was to keep alive until the Spring. There was a trade depression, coupled with a severe winter: public relief schemes were launched, for the free distribution of soup and bread at street corners. But for those with time and energy, the great diversion was the political meetings held to discuss the Government's Reform Bill. On February 12, 5,000 assembled in the Town Hall and its vicinity to hear Bright describe Disraeli's proposals as an insult. The following month R. W. Dale addressed another meeting: the general tone of his speech, and of the gathering, may be judged from this extract:

'Self-defence is one of man's natural rights: and if we cannot protect our interests in one way, we must protect them in another ..... they (the Government) must take their choice between

1. ABG November 10, 1866.
2. ABG January 19, 1867.
3. BJ February 16, 1867.
'the hustings and the barricades. If they deny us the peaceful weapon by which we desire to protect our interests, they still leave the people the pike and the rifle'.

But the vast meeting held that Easter passed off peacefully, even though the excitement was high. Crowds variously estimated as consisting of 60,000 to 400,000 people were marshalled along eight different procession routes; there were eight simultaneous open-air meetings, and in the evening Dixon led Scholefield and Bright on to the platform of a crowded Town Hall. Birmingham was determined to get, not only votes for its ratepayers, but another member at Westminster. Liberals and Conservatives joined to petition the Government and the Liberals were determined that Dixon should have the seat when it was obtained. The third member was given in July, and immediately the suggestion was made - and supported by such Liberals as Lowe, Mill and Fawcett - that cumulative voting should obtain in three-cornered constituencies. The Birmingham Liberals were again in an uproar: they had fought to increase their representation in Parliament, not to decrease it through two members neutralising each other. The Conservatives in the House of Lords did not adopt cumulative voting: instead, an amendment introduced by Lord Cairns gave each elector in constituencies such as Birmingham two votes, which he might distribute as he pleased among the candidates for the three seats. The Birmingham Conservatives immediately petitioned in favour; back

1. BDP March 23, 1867.
2. BDP April 22 and April 27, 1867.
3. ABC April 27: BDP June 22, 1867.
in the Commons John Bright moved disagreement with this amendment, and when he was defeated by a combination of 65 Liberals with the Government it was hailed as a slap in the face for him: no longer would he be able to speak of Birmingham in the House as though it were a solid mass of advanced Liberals - Sampson Lloyd would be there as a check on him. But the immediate local Liberal reaction was a determination to thwart the intention of the Government at the next General Election. 'If we work things properly,' the correspondence columns of the Post suggested, 'the Conservatives need not get this third seat'.

But Dixon had not had to wait for a general election. William Scholefield who had sat for the borough since 1847, died on July 9. The following day Dixon was asked by the Reform League and later by the Liberal Association to take his place. The Liberal-Conservatives (i.e. Tories) asked S. S. Lloyd to stand: Birmingham was faced with its first contested election for eight years, and Dixon resigned office as Mayor on July 11. Both candidates hastened to publish election addresses. Dixon pledged himself to work for the removal of such obnoxious features of the Reform Bill as the personal ratepaying clause and the inadequate re-distribution clauses, for voting by secret ballot, for the removal of anti-Trade Union legislation, and, 'above all, for a national system of education'. Lloyd's reference to education differed significantly:

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1. HDP July 2, July 8, Aug. 2, 10, 12 and 13; ABG Aug. 3 and 10, 1867.
2. HDP July 10, 11, 12, 1867.
3. BJ July 13, 1867. Foreign affairs had obviously no interest for him. His election address stated that Great Britain could best serve other nations by observing strict non-intervention and pointing out to them as an example 'the results which our own freedom and morality have produced upon our prosperity and happiness'.
he declared himself in favour of 'a large extension to the children of the poor of facilities for education' accompanied by compulsion. But the electors paid little attention to the educational views of either gentleman: the contest was the climax of the fever into which the Reform Bill had thrown political Birmingham. The nomination of candidates took place on July 22 at the Town Hall amidst almost total disorder; a poll was demanded and declared on July 23:

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Dixon's majority 1605

Conservative strength in the town was greater than is often supposed. Lloyd could look forward to the next general election with confidence.

Dixon took his seat in the Commons on July 25. He had gone there, as he had entered the Council, with one purpose, to do something about education. His efforts to do something about it locally were meeting with mixed success. He was finding that he could do little to stir the Town Council. Early in July he brought before it a motion: 'That in the opinion of this Council it is of paramount importance that corporate bodies should be empowered to levy rates for educational purposes, and that there should be established and maintained in England and Wales a national and compulsory system of education'. This motion occasioned much alarm outside the Council, and there were demands for a town meeting before any levy of rate was discussed. Dixon could not get the Council to discuss his motion until September 3, when he presented a memorial

1. BDP July 15, 19, 23, 24, 1867.
signed by 3,500 ratepayers urging immediate local action pending
the institution of a national system. The Council recorded the
unanimous opinion that urgent action was required, and adjourned
the debate for one month. The motion was disposed of at its next
meeting when it recorded its desire for a national compulsory
system, by 35 votes to 15. A committee was appointed to consider
what could be done; and there that particular effort fizzled out.¹

Dixon's move to awaken interest outside the Town Council
was infinitely more fruitful. Shortly after becoming Mayor he
invited Canon Gover, Principal of the Church of England Training
College at Saltley, to give him his views on what should be done.
His answer was published.² He advocated a borough rate, levied
under Act of Parliament, and spent by an Education Board, elected
by the Town Council on the analogy of the Free Libraries Committee,
to establish schools where needed. These schools, and the existing
voluntary schools, must be free. Both types of school should be
rate-supported (receiving from the rates twice whatever government
grant was earned). All schools should have managing bodies, and
the Board should nominate some managers of voluntary schools, but
these must be of the same denomination as the school. The religious
charge of the voluntary schools was to be unchanged and all the
parson's rights in them preserved; in the Board's schools there
should be Bible reading by the teacher, and instruction at stated
times by ministers of religion. Compulsory attendance was to be

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1. BDF July 2, September 4 and 30, 1867.
2. W.Gover: Day School Education in Birmingham (London: Simpkin,
effected indirectly, by making employment illegal before 10: upon
production of a certificate of attainment children between the ages
of 10 and 13 could be employed half-time (alternate days): at 13
all children would be fully exempt.

These proposals were made public on February 1, 1867.
Dixon called a meeting at his house for February 13, to discuss them.
To it he invited Gover himself and the leading clergy of the Church
of England, G. H. Yorke, of St. Philips, the Rural Dean, and Dr.
Wilkinson, Rector of St. Martins; William Lucas Sargent, a manu-
facturer, Liberal in politics, but certainly no Radical, well-known
for his interest in education\(^1\); Timothy and William Kenrick, members
of a Unitarian family of industrialists\(^2\), Thomas Martineau and George
Braithwaite Lloyd (brother of Dixon's opponent in the 1867 election),
both Dissenters; Joseph Chamberlain and John Bunce, Editor of the
'Post'; John Skirrow Wright, another wealthy Dissenter, who was
one of the last in Birmingham to have his goods seized and sold at
auction to pay a church rate\(^3\); R. W. Dale and the Baptist minister

\(^1\) His paper 'On the progress of education' (Journal of the
Statistical Society of London, March, 1867, published in
London, 1867) was a plea for the re-inforcement of voluntary
effort and for the extension of indirect compulsion; it
strongly supported Clerical as opposed to State control of the
schools.

\(^2\) Later members of this family were the first and second Chairmen
of the Birmingham Education Committee. Sir George Kenrick
(who served on the School Board from 1880) and his nephew
Byng Kenrick exercised a paramount influence on Birmingham
education for nearly half a century.

\(^3\) Another Londoner, he came to Birmingham at the age of 12 in
1824, and by the 1860's had made his fortune from buttons.
He was a member of the first three School Boards, and was
elected M.P. for Nottingham in 1880, the year of his death.
Charles Vince; the Inspector of Schools for the Midland area, the Rev. H. M. Capel; Frederick Temple, the Headmaster of Rugby (no one expected to see him at Canterbury in those days); and John Bremner, the honorary secretary of the Manchester Education Aid Society, founded three years previously.¹

After Dixon had opened the proceedings, Bremner read the first paper, on the work of his Society. Capel and Temple followed, reading papers which were later published.² Capel spoke from his official knowledge of the deficiencies of the present provision and gave it as his opinion that the voluntary schools had reached the limit of their usefulness: a new type of special free school must be created which could compel the attendance of the classes which the denominational fee paying schools could not attract - and did not want.³ Temple revealed himself as against compulsion and free schools. Compulsion, he argued, was only intended for the lowest class of the population, which was so opposed to it as to make its operation impossible: and at the precise point on the social scale where the line of the compulsory law was drawn, there would be ugly remarks: the poorer classes notoriously did not value what they did not pay for: finally, the religious difficulty did not exist.

The meeting managed to agree on two points that evening: that an educational rate was necessary, and that 'children of tender age' should not be employed, 'unless due provision be made for

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1. Maltby, p. 95.
2. Addresses on Birmingham Education (Birmingham: E. C. Osborne, 1867)
3. op. cit. p. 5.
their education at school.' It then adjourned to February 22, when it would consider the subject of compulsion and the possibilities of further action. The meeting was hailed with truth as the first step towards an organised effort to improve the state of education in Birmingham.¹

The resumed meeting was held in the Chamber of Commerce, Stephenson Place. Dixon moved a resolution in favour of compulsion, by Act of Parliament, with penalties, as the only means of countering parental neglect. He was immediately opposed by Sargant, who moved an amendment 'that this meeting declines to recommend any general system of compulsory education, but that the Industrial Schools Act, extended by the light of experience, may prove a means of securing the education of neglected children'. This amendment was seconded by Yorke, who revealed that a similar proposition had been agreed to at a meeting of the parochial clergy convened by himself as Rural Dean a few days previously: their opinion had been definitely against compulsion. R. W. Dale supported the original motion, and there was much earnest debate. The meeting adjourned without voting on either the motion or the amendment, probably intending to submit them to a Town Meeting.²

The two factions in the borough were already lining up. If the clergy were against compulsion, the Dissenters were ready to show that another class of society would welcome it. A meeting

² BDP and ABG Feb. 23, 1867. Neither the Post nor the Gazette had any editorial comment. For the effect of the Industrial Schools Act in Birmingham v. infra p.
of some two hundred workmen in the employ of Elkingtons was held in the schoolroom of the Church of the Messiah, and passed several resolutions, affirming that it was the duty of parents to ensure that every child should be educated; that instruction should 'by some means' be made compulsory - and non-sectarian; that a municipal rate was necessary, but that fees, involving some system of relief for poor parents, should be retained.¹

Instead of the Town Meeting, Dixon called a third private meeting, this time in the Council Chamber of the Public Office, in Moor Street; a hint in the Post two days later indicates that he and his associates had resolved not to press the debate on controversial first issues but to proceed to what action was possible. When the meeting opened, Dixon re-stated his motion, which was seconded by Chamberlain; an amendment by Gover, in favour of free schools for neglected children was side-tracked, and eventually Sargant's motion was carried. Dixon then moved the formation of a society to bring into effect the resolutions, and to promote education in Birmingham by any means which seemed expedient. This was seconded by Dale and carried. Achieved so far was an agreement on rating and the principle of the Factory Acts, and a recognition that any attempt to seek agreement on first principles would be useless: it was realised that future action must be practical and confined to the locality, that public opinion - and the Town Council - must be awakened, and that money must be raised; what was not realised was the enormity of the task - 'a few thousand pounds would do all that needs to be done'.²

¹ BDP Mar. 2, 1867.
² BDP Mar. 6 and 8; ABG Mar. 9, 1867.
A town meeting was called for March 13. In the course of his speech, calling for the foundation of an Education Society, Dixon thus described the vision which was to inspire him in the struggles of the next few years, and indeed for the next thirty years: 'It is most important that we shall seek in all educational work that we take in hand, to make the ultimate end of that work a gradation of schools - schools that is, not uniform, not of the same character, but so diverse that they shall be adapted to the wants of every class in the community, from the richest down to the very lowest, and that they shall be so easy of access from the lower schools to the higher that we shall feel that there is not one boy in Birmingham, however low in the school, or however indifferent his parents may be to his education, if he has really those natural powers which will enable him to profit in an extraordinary degree by the advantages offered, who will have anything in the shape of a barrier put in the way of his progress upwards, even to the highest honours of the University'.

The passage is worth quoting in full, because, apart from the sentiment, which is remarkable in view of its early date, it is a fair sample of Dixon's oratory, which even contemporaries found involved and long winded.

Some of his present audience found the sentiment alarming. The clergy were keeping a wary eye on Dixon's friends, and talk of new schools not under their own control was scarcely welcome. Yorke stated bluntly that he could not belong to a society which had for its object the setting up of a new class of schools entirely apart from religious teaching: he was most anxious to assist the
denominational system of education. R. W. Dale replied to him vigorously; large numbers of people in Birmingham objected strongly to the denominational system of education - a remark which was received with enthusiastic applause - and only one third of the inhabitants of the town attended Sunday worship, while their present project required the support of all. But the time of battle had not yet come: in the prevailing spirit of conciliation Dale suggested a device of two distinct funds, one for denominational and one for undenominational schools, and contributors might specify to which fund their contributions should be allotted: if they did not do so, their money would go into a third, general, fund, to be spent at the committee's discretion. This satisfied everyone - the device was later incorporated in the rules of the Society - and a provisional committee was voted into office. Dixon was appointed president, Dale and Yorke vice-presidents, Jesse Collings honorary secretary, and the committee included Bunce, Chamberlain, Dawson, Gover, W. Kenrick, Sargant, Vince, Wilkinson and Canon Michael O'Sullivan, the Vicar-General and leader of the Roman Catholic community in Birmingham. So was launched the Birmingham Education Society. Present at that meeting, although he seems to have taken no part in the proceedings, was the Rev. F. S. Dale, Vicar of St. Luke's, who gradually came to the fore over the next two years as the leader of the Anglican clergy in the town.¹

The Society met again in the Town Hall on March 28 to receive a report from the committee, and to discuss and adopt rules. The members then numbered 91, and £576 had been subscribed. The

¹. BDP Mar. 14, 1867.
committee was drawing up a list of schools whose pupils might be aided: Chamberlain's proposal to include night schools - innocent enough on the surface - immediately raised the religious difficulty. The Anglicans objected that the Society would be aiding schools where the Bible was not read - the minimum religious instruction on which they insisted. It was eventually agreed to aid only those night schools which were attached to day schools approved by the Committee.¹

A further meeting was held on June 17. By this time a paid secretary had been appointed - James Freeman, who was afterwards a pamphleteer for the League, and a 'Visitor', J. H. Aston, and just over £1000 had been promised, either as donations or subscriptions. The provisional Committee was confirmed, and the work of the Society began in earnest.²

It was partly a statistical society, partly a philanthropic body, and, although the impact of the publication of its first report was considerable, it did not agitate or in any way engage in continuous propaganda. It was not designed to be a popular body - an annual subscription of one guinea precluded that. The object of the Society was broad enough: the advancement of education in Birmingham and its immediate neighbourhood, and it defined its methods as follows:

(a) To collect and disseminate information generally.

(b) To take steps to obtain local rating powers.

(c) To secure educational provisions in any legislative provisions for the regulation of labour.

¹ BDP Mar. 30, 1867
² BDP. June 19, 1867
(d) To pay all or part of the fees for the education of poor children.
(e) To raise and distribute funds to enlarge, build or maintain schools.

To collect information the Society increased its staff of visitors to eight, and began a complete census of the borough, which absorbed its energies for the next few months. Chamberlain alone of the Committee and officers seems to have immersed himself in its affairs.¹

Parliamentary reform continued to dominate the town's political attention. The education bill of Bruce and Forster then before the House of Commons aroused little comment and no enthusiasm. Not unnaturally, the Conservatives were a little more welcoming than the Liberals. The Bill was permissive, but where adopted by Town Councils, school committees, appointed by them for a term of three years, might aid denominational schools - subject to local inspection and to a conscience clause, the benefit of which had to be claimed in writing - and might provide schools in the districts of the poorer classes; rate aided schools were to be free. The Birmingham Liberals were not yet united on this last point, and the proposed administrative machinery they found faulty: the school committees, when appointed, were autonomous for three years and had unlimited power of precept. Their criticism was just, and it is a measure of the dust and heat of the sectarian battle in 1870 that no one was then concerned that the School Boards of the 1870 Act were placed in the same position. The local

¹ Garvin, I, p. 90.
Conservatives welcomed the Bill as being 'not inconsistent with the aims of the Birmingham Education Society'. There was however little or no expectation that the Government would aid the passage of the Bill, or introduce one of its own: it was known to be satisfied with the present system, which Disraeli described as the best in the world after Prussia - an opinion with which the Birmingham Conservatives expressed their complete disagreement: the Liberals noted that Gladstone declared himself in favour of local rating and management, and concluded that the question of primary education, though it would yet be strangled for a year or two, would be fought out quite soon.

Dale continued by his public speeches to prepare the ground. As early as 1861, at the meeting of the Congregational Union held at Birmingham, he had declared himself as out of sympathy with the voluntaryism of Edward Baines. He was convinced that the State must take over education from all the Churches: the analogies of the past, he contended, were all in favour of the change. With a higher sense of moral duty than the community as a whole the Church had in the past undertaken social services which were really incumbent on all: when society was sufficiently awakened to wish to take over the burden, the Church had passed it over, and had returned to its prime duty. In November 1867 he told an audience of working men - the new electors - that it was their interest and duty, above all other classes in the community, to secure a system of education for themselves and their children. He did not urge

1. BDP May 2; ABG May 4, 1867.
2. BJ July 13: ABG Nov. 30, 1867.
the destruction of the denominational schools: that would be a
gross injustice, and a serious blunder, for they had the experience
of a quarter of a century behind them; but it was unreasonable that
the general education of the country should be made dependent on
the zeal and resources of the religious bodies: about half the
population of the country never attended religious worship: why
should the other half have the duty of originating schools for
teaching the whole nation?¹

The same theme is expressed in a letter to George Dixon,
dated January 2, 1868: "What before all things nine Congregational­
ists out of ten would prefer would be a national system, locally
administered, of secular education. This is what we wanted nearly
thirty years ago and the protest in 1846-47 against all State
interference with popular education was really a temporary departure
from the policy which Congregational Dissenters originally professed.
There are many of us, however, who feel that it would be alike
unjust and inexpedient violently to break up the present schools ....
We have no affection for the denominational system; we should
generally prefer secular schools. ... We are anxious to discover
the best method of conciliating the claims of those who have worked
hard under the present system with what seems to us the imperative
necessity of introducing a broader and bolder scheme".²

The tone of public discussion was becoming sharper.

Early in January 1868 the Chamber of Commerce held a conference on

¹ BDP Nov. 20, 1867 and R. W. Dale: Politics of the Future
(Birmingham: Hudson, 1867).
² A. W. Dale, p. 271.
technical education. With George Dixon in the chair, Mundella was the principal guest and speaker. He maintained that England was already losing its lead over Europe and America, and that any system of technical education, however desirable, was now impossible until a system of elementary education was established.

Birmingham industrialists were anxious to establish a technical school in the town and much disappointment was expressed that the conference could produce no plan. The Liberals could expect nothing from the Government, although Disraeli was now talking of bringing in a measure. Nor did they have any hopes of the bill which the promoters of the recent Manchester Conference intended to put forward. Dixon and Collings had attended this conference—Dixon crossed swords with Forster over the question of compulsion—and the impression they took away was that any bill brought forward by it would serve no purpose other than to instruct public opinion. No private bill could now deal with the matter, which could only be settled by a Government in a reformed parliament, where the effect of the new working class element in the constituencies should be felt. The new voters were little concerned with the religious scruples of the various sects, and would not let them stand in the way of a universal establishment of secular schools. The Conservatives, it was thought, were now ready to give way, as they had given way over franchise reform.

1. BDP Jan. 7 and 8, 1868.

2. The Manchester Education Bill Committee, v. Maltby, p. 107. De Grey and Forster were present.

3. BJ Jan. 18; BDP Jan. 20, 1868.
R. W. Dale's next public speech stressed the need for secularism. He consciously adopted the same position as did the Non-conformists in 1839, when the Melbourne government sought to establish its National Training School, and so he openly challenged the Anglicans, whose great pride it was that they had killed that scheme, and whose great regret it was that they had not managed to abolish the Committee of Council at the same time. Religion and education must be separated: 'A Jew might spell as accurately as a Christian. There was nothing in the handwriting to distinguish between a Catholic and a Baptist: a master might set a copy without conveying his views on original sin'. The State should finance, and its inspectors should examine, secular instruction only.

The day after Dale spoke, February 4, the Town Council committed itself to a resolution in favour of compulsory attendance and borough rating. Dixon complimented it on thus placing itself at the head of corporations in the country. He and Bright had come to Birmingham to address a series of meetings. Bright spoke, on February 4, on Ireland: Dixon 'on one subject only, but that of the most pressing importance'. Educationists could expect a long struggle before them, before the Council received the powers it wanted to levy and administer a rate; there would be bitter opposition from the voluntaryists, but these should reflect that there would still be great fields open to them, in the Council and

1. Burgess, pp. 79 - 80.

2. BDP Feb. 4, 1868. Since 1861 religious instruction was not a grant earning subject: but Dale was thinking in wider terms than this.
its Education Committee: praise was due to philanthropists, but more was due to unpaid public administrators.¹

On the second day of their visit, February 5, John Bright spoke on education. He said that he knew nothing about it except that it was in a deplorable condition, but that he could see no reason for the Government to intervene either by grants or by giving rating powers: existing endowments would be sufficient if properly utilised; he was opposed also to State establishment of Technical Colleges: technical education was not necessary - boys should use their own initiative; furthermore, he deprecated the feverish activity about the education question which he saw around him. The meeting ended in an atmosphere of strain.²

The opposition was amused and intrigued: the Liberal press could trust itself to nothing further than the comment that John Bright did not understand the education question.³ But the extreme Radical George Dawson gave him his answer. Lecturing at the Town Hall on National Education on February 27, he said: ‘John Bright came here recently in the character of a fire engine ... it was a novelty to see him come with his pitiful wet blanket and endeavour to chill the holy zeal of the people for the education of the nation’. Feverish activity, continued Dawson, there was rarely

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1. BDP Feb. 5, 1868. The Birmingham clergy, and local Conservatives, were in favour of rating, and some kind of compulsion, as has been seen. But this was not the national position: the Archbishop of Canterbury had declared himself opposed to both only a few days before (BDP Jan. 30, 1868).

2. BDP Feb. 6, 1868.

3. BJ Feb. 8, 1868.
too much fire in this country - there was not half enough yet for what he wanted done. He wanted revolution, not reform: the present system, misnamed voluntary, for it was really State-aided denominationalism, must be abolished, although he would give it the favour of painless extinction, and there must be one national system, uniform over the whole country; there must be compulsory rating and compulsory attendance, all must pay for the schools, and all must use them; if this was loss of liberty, then he rejoiced to see the liberty to shirk public duties curtailed; there lingered some good and wise men who talked the anachronisms of yesterday - but the Government was not now hostile to the nation; it was the nation acting; education would be rate-aided, in spite of 'some Rip Van Winkle talking the jargon of exploded Voluntaryism'; but to levy a rate while the system was denominational would be to impose a new Church Rate: let the clergy keep to their sphere and leave geography and history and the rest to the State; if they persisted in delaying the establishment of an educational system except on their own terms, they must be swept away.¹ Never again did Bright speak lightly of the education question.

Public debate was growing more acrimonious for two reasons. The information accumulated by the Birmingham Education Society was filling some of those who had access to it with a sense of urgency and of exasperation with opponents, and the Parliamentary scene filled the Liberals with a sense of frustration. Disraeli had succeeded Derby as Prime Minister on February 25. A few

¹. BDP Feb. 28, 1868.
days before this he had revealed, in an answer to Forster, that the 
Government intended to bring in an education bill. In the middle 
of March he was quoted as saying that his measure was ready, and 
that it was not in harmony with the Manchester Bill. This Bruce 
introduced into the Commons on March 17: it was almost exactly the 
same as that of the previous year, apart from the major change that 
its provisions were no longer permissive. Birmingham Town Council 
sent a deputation, headed by the Mayor, Thomas Avery, to Disraeli 
on March 23, to urge him to introduce a complete measure of national 
education. He received it coolly: the Government was about to 
introduce its own measure and meanwhile he preferred not to discuss 
the question. 1

The Duke of Marlborough introduced the Bill in the House 
of Lords on March 24. Its most interesting feature was a proposal 
to create a Minister and Ministry of Education. There was to be 
no system of rating, either general or partial; to meet the case 
of the non-conformists for secularisation, it would no longer be 
required that schools should be connected with a religious body, 
and the measure would enact a conscience clause, acceptance of 
which would be a condition of all grants (hitherto a condition of 
building grants only). The measure, as the Post commented, 
scarcely reached the level of a reasonable compromise between 
reformers and the advocates of the present system. The Minister 
was welcomed, but the accompanying proposal, to embody the financial 
provisions of the Revised Code in the Act, would stereotype his work 
and make him incapable of initiating policy. But without rating

there could be now no step forward: both Birmingham and
Manchester had declared themselves in favour of it - Bruce's Bill
was even then in the Commons, and the hopes of reformers, such as
they were, must rest upon it.¹

At the end of March the Education Society published its
first report, and the local movement entered a new phase.

¹ BDP Mar. 26, 1868.
It was the findings of the Birmingham Education Society in the first year of its operation, and the failure of its report of them to stir the townspeople as a whole to action, which drove the Radicals within the Society to form a new type of organisation with wider scope and more precise aims. For the Report of March 1868, which, like its two successors, was the work of Collings, made quite plain the destitution of the town and the failure of the voluntary system: it is the more valuable as being a document agreed by all the Committee, both Liberals and Conservatives. There can be no doubt of its objectivity. In 1869 the House of Commons called for a report on the educational condition of four industrial towns, of which Birmingham was one. J. G. Fitch, H.M.I. for Yorkshire, was detached from his duties to visit the town and carry out a minute survey, with the help of the Registrar-General's department. This report, published in March 1870, did little more than confirm and give an official seal to the Report of the Society, part of which, including the statistics, Fitch incorporated in his own report and commended to the House of Commons. The two reports, and the pamphlets of Gover and Capel, give us the


2. Return (to the House of Commons) of Schools for the Poorer Classes, etc. in Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester (London: H.M.S.O. 1870).
picture of destitution and failure which presented itself to the
eyes of contemporaries -- or those of them who had eyes to see.

One of the most striking features of this picture is,
however, the fact that large numbers of children of the middle
class received an excellent education free of all charge, whilst
poorer children paid for one practically worthless. The annual
income of King Edward's Foundation was then (1868) £14,000; it was
rising rapidly and within a year or two would be £20,000. It
supported the Free Grammar School in New Street which taught 600
boys for an expenditure of £11,000, and, with the crumbs from this
feast, eight elementary schools with 1274 boys and girls on their
books. (The elementary schools were housed in pairs, boys' and
girls', in Edward Street, Bath Row, Meriden Street and Gem Street).
All these schools were free, and all full. Admission was a great
privilege, and the elementary schools had a waiting list of nearly
1000. They creamed the British and National schools, and their
curriculum was that of the lower forms of a modern grammar school,
that is, it included mathematics, science, English Literature and
French. All were remarkably efficient: the girls' schools were
unique in the whole country. They 'substituted for the small pre­
tences, the spurious gentility, the unmeaning idleness and the still
more unmeaning lessons of the average private seminary a healthy and
useful discipline. To establish such schools in every town would
prove to be the most beneficent of social revolutions'. ¹

All the schools of King Edward were filled by the lower
middle and trading classes. The children of the poor, for whom

¹ Fitch, p. 67
the elementary schools at any rate were intended, were excluded. Not that there were any rules which, except incidentally, excluded poor children: nor was there any religious exclusiveness, for all the schools gave an undenominational religious instruction. The poor simply did not apply for admission. Education in these schools was carried beyond a point which their children could afford to reach - and in most cases indeed began at a level higher than they were able, for one reason or another, to attain. Nor, if one may judge from their performance in other schools, would they have tolerated or survived the strict rules for enforcing attendance. A long waiting list gave the schools a power of expulsion, and absenteeism was rare. Possibly, too, there is much truth in the suggestion\(^1\) that the poor kept clear of these schools for the same reason as they stayed away from church, from a vague notion that the institution was somehow or other intended for richer people, and from a feeling - half modesty, half pride - of unwillingness to intrude where they thought they were not wanted.

In view of later events, it is worth underlining that Birmingham men had before their eyes these eight examples of the efficiency attainable by free, undenominational schools, which could enforce regularity of attendance. The contrast with the main provision in the town was sharp.

In 1869 Birmingham’s population was estimated at 360,846. There was no general agreement as to what constituted school age; the School Boards eventually were required to provide accommodation

\(^1\) Fitch, p. 66
for children between the ages of 3 and 13, although they might compel the attendance only of children aged from 5 to 13. In this latter age group the estimated number of children was 64,787. In the same year the accommodation, in inspected schools, for these children amounted to 23,627 places: the schools had enrolled 25,203 children, and had an average attendance of 16,053: that is, of the pitifully inadequate provision, one third was unused on any given day. The result of the educational effort of these schools, in the concrete terms of the Government examination, was to present 9,923 children, and of these well over a third in the lowest standard. In detail:¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>No. of children presented</th>
<th>% of total presented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3,836</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,558</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,653</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,066</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 9,923 presented, the average number to pass in the three basic subjects was 8,753 - scarcely one third of those who professed to belong to the schools.

The figures quoted are those of Pitch. The figures of the Education Society for school accommodation, numbers on roll,

1. Pitch, p. 31. Standard 6 required the ability to read and take down from dictation an ordinary short paragraph from a newspaper, and the arithmetic of 'bills of parcels'. The appropriate age for this examination was 12.
and average attendance are virtually identical. The Society adopted a very interesting method of judging the worth of the work done in the schools. Collings circularised 220 manufacturers in Birmingham, requesting permission for the Society to carry out an investigation into the educational attainments of its young work people. It was concerned not with the numbers who could be coached up to an examination on a single day, but with those - if any - whose power to read and write and do simple sums was a permanent possession. 88 manufacturers gave permission, and from these the investigator, John Long, the senior lecturer at Saltley Training College, made a final choice of 26, located in different parts of the town, covering a wide range of industries, and of different sizes, so as to have a representative sample of Birmingham factories.¹

Long set the Standard 4 examination of the Committee of Council to 529 young men, and 379 young women, aged 13 - 21. This test was the lowest of the series in which writing on paper was required, and, as the figures just quoted show, one rarely excelled by school leavers. For this last reason, presumably, Long did not use a simple pass-fail criterion, but devised three marks, 'Bad', 'Moderate', and 'Good'. In the event he was almost entirely concerned with the first of these; this, then, is what he meant by 'Bad':

Reading: only monosyllables, or perhaps easy dissyllables. Writing: only the name signed.

¹. BDP Jan. 11 and 29, 1868, and B.E.S. I p. 13 et seq.
Spelling: more than 4 mistakes in 24 words.

Arithmetic: Nothing beyond adding up two or three days' wages at a few shillings and pence a day.

General Knowledge: Nothing more than perhaps the name of this country; that London and Yorkshire are in it; and that Oliver Cromwell fought against a king.

The percentages who were marked 'bad' were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>Arithmetic</th>
<th>General Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only one woman in a 100 was marked 'Good' for arithmetic - that is, had one sum in three correct, with the principles of solution of the other two known. The higher attainment in reading pointed to the work of Sunday schools, and the prevalence of cheap reading matter - but the nature of the reading matter was revealed by the General Knowledge results. 30% of those tested could not write at all: 20% could just sign their name, i.e. the old mark or cross elaborated to save appearances: even those who could write did so with a physical agony - they put out their tongues and their eyeballs glared¹: only 45% had been in day schools long enough to reach the fourth Standard: not one of all those tested had learned the basic subjects well enough to use them as instruments of education.

The comparison between number on roll and average attendance - 25000 and 16000 - reveals an irregularity of attendance in itself a sufficient internal reason for the schools' failure.

1. EDF Feb. 18, 1868
Pupils floated in and out, and migrated from school to school, going the rounds of all those in the district. The comparison between the accommodation in the inspected schools and the average attendance - 23000 and 16000 - shows how far these schools had already outstripped the demand for education. The comparison between the number of children in the borough and the average attendance - 64000 and 16000 - shows how great that demand was. The numbers of children in private schools - in 1869 12,910 on roll and 10,783 in average attendance (both figures are highly suspect, when the character of these schools is considered) - scarcely affect the picture, and in any case these schools, as will be shown, could not be regarded as part of the effective education provision of the town.

Sheer poverty alone compelled many children to grow up in ignorance. All the inspected schools charged fees. George Dawson's school thus announced its terms:

'Reading, writing, arithmetic, dictation, elementary arithmetic

...... 4d. per week.

The above, with geography, grammar and higher arithmetic

...... 6d. per week.

The above, with history, drawing and mathematics

...... 8d. per week.

As the Government does not allow grants on children whose parents employ journeymen or apprentices, the fees charged in such cases will be 8d., 10d., 1/- per week, according to the subjects taught, as already classified'.

1. Fitch, p. 51
This was one of the more expensive schools (on the whole, the Dissenters charged the highest fees, the Roman Catholics the least): the majority charged 2d. or 3d. per week. To families which had little more than a shilling to spend per head each week on food and clothing, this was prohibitive. The Education Society's visitors found that hundreds of families were in such a condition. The following are the particulars of 300 families, taken indiscriminately from their books:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total No. of persons</th>
<th>1842</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average income per head per week after paying rent</td>
<td>1s. 1\frac{1}{2}d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent per week per head</td>
<td>5\frac{1}{2}d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of children of all ages</td>
<td>1322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of children at school</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. at work above 15 years old</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither at work nor at school, above 15 years old</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. at work below 15 years old</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. neither at work nor at school between 3 and 15 years old</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 3 years old</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

80 families, of the 300, belonged to widows and women deserted by their husbands.  

Particulars of the 80:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total No. of persons</th>
<th>494</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average income per head per week after deducting rent</td>
<td>10\frac{3}{4}d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent per head per week</td>
<td>5\frac{1}{2}d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of children of all ages</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of children at school</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. B.E.S.I p. 9
No. at work under 15 : 90
No. at work over 15 : 64
Neither at work nor at school, above 15 years old : 18
Neither at work nor at school, 5 - 15 years : 174
Under 5 years : 64

The very poor had their energies and attentions too fully engaged in obtaining bread to think of sparing anything towards their children's schooling. The Society's visitors found nearly a 1000 children whose lack of clothing would prevent them attending school: in many cases whole families of children were found with nothing that could be called a garment on them.¹

But poverty was not the only reason why the majority of children never even crossed the threshold of a school. The Society established a Free Order system and prepared its own list of recognised schools, which included all which received a government grant and any others in which, besides secular instruction, the Bible was read daily, and from this list parents of children whose fees the Society was paying could choose their school. A large proportion of these Free Orders were unused:

Total issued up to Jan, 1868 : 4,729
Unused : 1,178

As the Society continued its work, and the novelty of Free Orders wore off, the proportion of those unused rose. A later report² showed the number of unused orders as 1640, against 5226 issued:

1. Ibid., p. 17
2. The third and last, issued March 1870. Both the second and third reports were published in Birmingham by Hudson, 1869 and 1870 respectively.
the visitors had investigated the cases of as many of the defaulters as possible, and thus listed the hazards of mid-Victorian childhood in the slums:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>No. of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At work</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kept at home for housework</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In workhouse</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In reformatory</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In orphanage</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Blue-coat school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ill</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No clothing</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused admittance</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharged from schools</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect of parents</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But the last cause probably applied, in the Visitors' opinion, to the greater part of the whole number: if the parents had wanted the children to be in school, they would have been there. One third of the children who had received Free Orders made no use of them; another third made such fitful use of them that the teachers' time and the Society's money were wasted: the remaining third were the most regular pupils the schools had, for they attended on an average for $3\frac{1}{2}$ sessions per week, against the average for all Birmingham of $6\frac{1}{2}$.\(^1\)

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1. B.E.S. III pp. 11-12.
Although poverty, therefore, kept many away, the main reason why children did not go to school was the complete indifference of their parents. A whole class existed which would only be brought to school by a compulsory law.

There was already some compulsion, of an indirect kind, at work, but it did not reach more than an insignificant fraction of children. The Town Council had established a Reformatory under the Reformatory and Industrial Schools Act of 1866\(^1\): the Board of Guardians took up the powers, although not very thoroughly, given to them by Denison’s Act,\(^2\) to pay the school fees of children of people in the receipt of out-door relief. The only Factory Act which applied to Birmingham was that of 1867\(^3\), as all earlier legislation was inappropriate to the local industries; the Workshops Regulation Act\(^4\) which should have had a marked effect in Birmingham, was inoperative: the adoption and working of the Act was in the hands of Town Councils, and not Factory Inspectors, and Birmingham Town Council, from whatever motives, persistently refused to apply the Act, although strenuously urged by members of the reforming party.\(^5\) The following is a summary of the numbers of children brought to school under all the various laws of compulsion, direct and indirect, in 1869:\(^6\)

\[\begin{array}{ll}
1. & 29 & 30 \text{ Vict. c. 118} \\
2. & 18 & 19 \text{ Vict. c. 31} \\
3. & 30 & 31 \text{ Vict. c. 103} \\
4. & 30 & 31 \text{ Vict. c. 146} \\
5. & \text{There were undoubtedly some Councillors who were reluctant to adopt the Act because in the absence of positive educational provision the children would be thrown back on the streets. (BDP Aug. 17, 1870).} \\
6. & \text{Fitch, pp. 114 - 120}
\end{array}\]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under Reformatory and Industrial Schools Act</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Workhouse and Union Schools</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denison's Act</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-timers under Factory Act</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half-timers under Workshops Act</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1365</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(In the same year the number of children who were in school through the efforts of the Birmingham Education Society, and who would not otherwise have been there, was 1,793).

The complete local failure of indirect compulsion, and the failure of a virtually permissive Act, inevitably shaped the thinking of the reformers in the town.

The inspected schools had nearly all been established by the Church or by dissenting congregations. The British Schools - largely maintained by Dissenters - the Ragged Schools, King Edward Schools, and one or two others, 12 in all, were not connected with places of worship, but they were too few to affect the following generalisations.

Provision over the Borough was very uneven. Collings calculated that the average over the whole town was one school place per 12½ of the population: in St. Mary's Ward it was 1 in 7, and in St. Paul's 1 in 28.¹ The clergy and the promoters of Church schools worked on a parish basis, and the parish was a particularly unsatisfactory unit in Birmingham. Edgbaston so drained the wealth of the town that in the other suburbs the presence or absence of a

1. J. Collings, State of Education in Birmingham (Birmingham: Hudson, 1869)
parochial school depended in almost literal truth on the zeal and resources of one man: the incumbents of most Birmingham parishes had no wealthy residents to help them. Edgbaston, which could have found the money for a dozen parochial schools, scarcely needed one.

But even the parish was better than no unit at all: at least the clergy made some attempt to consider the needs of a district and to proportion school accommodation to them. The Dissenters worked to no general plan, and took no cognizance of the needs of a district as such. Their schools were nearly always attached - in the literal sense - to the chapel, which itself was built with a view to the convenience of the congregation. Chapels were most frequently found in the centre of the trading classes and of people in comfortable circumstances: very rarely, a mission chapel, with an attached school, was founded by a rich congregation in a poor district. The Dissenters were strongest numerically in the centre of the town, where wealthy traders still lived over their shops and warehouses: there they built their schools. In the new working class parishes just outside the centre, such as All Saints', St. Matthias', St. Stephen's, and St. Clement's, the only public school was that established by the clergyman, working alone and with very slender resources, and with a heavy sense of responsibility for a large populous district. In the centre aided schools jostled each other; nor was the rivalry only inter-denominational: the parochial schools of St. Mary's and St. Philip's stood, almost facing each other, more than half empty.

The Voluntary System did not, and could not, consider the
needs of the town as a whole, taking notice of moves and growths of population. While leaving many areas destitute, in others it multiplied schools needlessly, without even the advantage of offering parents a real choice, without, for example giving Dissenters the option of attending a school not controlled by the clergy, unless the children walked considerable distances.1

All the schools existed to strengthen sectarian influence, to bring children to church or chapel - all, that is, but four very notable exceptions. The Baptists at Wycliffe (whose pastor was Vince), the Independents at Carr's Lane (Dale), the Unitarians at the Church of the Messiah (Crosskey), and the congregation of George Dawson at the Church of the Saviour, had all publicly repudiated such a motive. Their schools relied on the congregations for financial support, but there was no distinctive religious instruction, the teachers were in no way connected with the chapels, and there was no obligation, express or implied, on the children to attend Sunday school or chapel: Crosskey and Dawson described their schools as Secular, but there was a daily reading from the Authorised Version.2

The method of finance of the two classes of schools, Church and Dissenting, differed sharply. It was commonly assumed in contemporary discussion - and in the debates on the 1870 Act - that the income of an aided school was made up of three elements, government grant, voluntary subscriptions, and children's fees, in

1. Fitch, p. 20
2. Otherwise, before 1870, they would have been ineligible for Government grant.
roughly equal proportions. This was fairly true of the Birmingham Dissenters' schools, but certainly not true of the Church schools.

The figures for 1869 were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dissenting Schools</th>
<th>Church Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grant</td>
<td>£1229</td>
<td>£5849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscriptions</td>
<td>£1474</td>
<td>£2298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees</td>
<td>£1507</td>
<td>£5906</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the latter, subscribers met roughly one-sixth of the annual expenses. Gover complained that these schools were neither the creation of Birmingham men, nor were they maintained by them.

Voluntary subscriptions to all schools in the town amounted, in 1869, to £4,350. 2s. 3d., one fifth of their income, the equivalent of a penny rate. The history of the Education Society amply confirms the conclusion that the well-to-do in Birmingham were quite unwilling to pay for the education of those poorer than themselves, at least on the basis of charity, however administered.

Alone of all the antagonists in 1870, the League took up a position in relation to schools conducted for private profit:

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1. Fitch, p. 24
2. Gover, p. 14
it urged that provision should be made, in legislation, for their inspection and registration. They were thinking not so much of the genteel 'guinea a quarter and extras' type - the numbers of which were fewer in Birmingham than elsewhere, because of the existence of the Elementary Schools of King Edward - but of the hundreds of tiny 'schools' kept in the rooms of private houses. They were registered, and inspected by sample - in no unkindly spirit - by Fitch in 1869. In October of that year, he travelled from one such school to another, testing the oldest children and some of the younger, or, where it was obvious that examination was a waste of time, as in most cases, he tried to get the teacher to talk of his plans and methods.

Some of these schools, the larger, were held in public buildings - chapels, or the disused school room of a church, and so were vaguely regarded in the neighbourhood as being public schools, but the relationship between teacher and chapel was purely that of tenant and landlord; the vast majority were held in the front rooms of private houses. None had any suitable furniture: the children sat on benches or on the floor, writing on broken slates resting on their knees, or taking turns at a table. Sometimes a small group would be formed, as in a Sunday school, but for the most part the teachers had no conception of class teaching: questioning and explanation were unknown: they heard 'lessons' - one or two children at a time reading or saying some task - while the majority of the children sat knitting, scribbling on slates, or in blank helpless idleness. The schools could scarcely be said to have a curriculum, though some advertised long pretentious lists of subjects.
Almost universally, the only reading book was the New Testament, because of its accidental cheapness and accessibility. Religious instruction was almost unknown: occasionally some serious-minded teachers gave Bible lessons or encouraged the children to bring a catechism - any catechism.

The schools existed to satisfy parents: they had to give parents what they wanted, which, often, was nothing. Teachers in private schools were grateful: the fees were always respectfully welcomed; many schools existed because of the desire of the poor to help some worse-off neighbour, a widow or a hopeless cripple. Selectness and propriety were the keynotes of the more pretentious establishments: the prefixes master or miss were carefully used by the teacher in addressing the children, and by the children in addressing each other. Parents liked plenty of needlework in school, and expected useful articles to be made for the home. They liked to see copy books neatly ruled by the teacher, with master in front of the name on the cover; a column of polysyllables had a profound and scholarly look, especially if set for homework.

Attendance was loose and irregular even by the standards of the inspected schools. No rolls or registers were kept, except a little account book to enter the children's payments. The teachers' estimates of the numbers of their pupils were based on those they had seen in the last two or three weeks. The teachers were helpless: they did not know at any given moment who belonged to their school and who did not; so long as each Monday morning brought a sufficient number of children with 2d. or 3d. in their hands, they were content.
Very rarely, some sensible woman was found conducting a useful and modest school, but for the most part the teachers were hopelessly unqualified and unfit, and the men were infinitely worse than the women. The sort of man who was content to sit in a close, dirty room, engaged in the drudgery of hearing tasks, and to receive as his pay the precarious income derived from 30 or 40 boys paying 3d. or 4d. a week, was one who would not be able to earn more in any other business and had probably failed in the attempt to do so. 'Ignorant, dirty, without zest or interest, he was calculated to disgust his pupils with the learning of which he was the representative'.

There could be no greater contrast in spirit as there was between the pretentious private school and the Ragged Schools, where devoted men and women kindly tended the lowest stratum of Victorian child life, the street Arabs. For some of these - about one-tenth of the total, Fitch estimated - the two Ragged Schools in Vale Street and Slaney Street provided some refuge from the miseries of the streets: how to bring all these neglected children of the gutters under proper training was a problem still to be solved.

Such was Birmingham education in the 1860's.

1. Fitch pp. 42 et seq.
CHAPTER THREE

The Foundation of the League

The Society's Report, in the eyes of the Liberals, posed a challenge. Its statistics revealed the scantiness of provision, and its investigation clearly proved the difference between the existence of schools and the existence of education: 'the fallacy of assuming that because we have the one we have the other'.

The old system of schools based on charity was now finally on trial in Birmingham: if its friends could make it work, the case for compulsory rating and attendance would fall to the ground.

In the fourth quarter of its first year, that is, from January to March, 1868, the Society was spending at the rate of £2000 a year. Its annual income was £500, £300 of which came from three subscribers, George Dixon and two industrial firms, who each contributed £100: the remaining £200 came from 150 subscribers. Obviously unless there was a rapid change in the scale of contributions the Society would have to cut down its operations, or close completely. Dixon appealed to the rich, who sent their sons to Rugby at £150 a year: had these men nothing to spare for these destitute children who were perhaps destined to live alongside those Rugby boys, and perhaps to work for them, and create wealth for them? He appealed to the middle classes who used the Grammar School: surely no one who got free Grammar School education for his own son could refuse to help.

1. B.E.S. II p. 9, quoting Lord Lytton on the work of the Society.
2. EDP April 18, 1868
The Grammar School was an institution little loved by the Radicals, although some, like R. W. Dale, of necessity, had to use it for their sons. It was an ancient charity administered by a self-elected Board of Governors: no Dissenter had ever been admitted to it, no mayor, no town councillor, and only one of the six members who had sat in the Commons for the town since 1832, and that one was the solitary Conservative. One political and ecclesiastical party dominated the charity. It came under fire from those of the Anglican clergy who were working with the educational reformers: Canon Gover refused to send his own son there while its funds were so misapplied, while £9000 a year was spent on 600 boys; caustically, he explained that the Education Society had been urged not to demoralise people by paying a 3d. fee for them without the most searching inquiry into their means: 'What an amount of demoralisation must exist in the villas of Edgbaston'.

One parent with a boy there, not improbably Dale himself, suggested that a donation of five guineas should be sent to the Society 'in lieu of his own fees'. He had one follower; in all, Dixon's special appeal resulted in 33 new subscriptions. The Rev. Charles Evans, Head of King Edward's, felt the necessity to put forward a defence: his boys' parents, he asserted, were not wealthy, few had incomes above £300 a year, and most were small shopkeepers. Collings frankly stated his disbelief, at the

1. HEP June 10, 1868
2. Ibid., and B.E.S. II p.13
general meeting of the Society at which the statement was made, as did the Post on the following day: both pointed out that it flatly contradicted Evans' own evidence to the Royal Commissioners on Endowed Schools, whose report had appeared earlier in the year. His fellow priest Gover publicly challenged him to prove the truth of his contention.

George Dixon concluded that no help was likely to come from that source. R. W. Dale bitterly remarked that voluntaryism with the majority meant the liberty to give nothing, and when they preached voluntaryism, they meant that other people should give for them. It was time the middle class and the laity did something: the burden of providing schools had rested on ministers of religion, especially the clergy of the Church of England; why should all philanthropic work be thrown on the congregation, when 200,000 people in Birmingham never went to either Church or Chapel? In September he wrote to the Post announcing that 800 children for whom the Society paid fees would now be thrown back into the streets, and that soon another 2,000 would have to be refused. From then on the Society limped from one quarter to the next, doing a little good: it handed over £146 from the Nonconformist Fund to help build a school in All Saints (to the annoyance of Burges, the Vicar): and in its last year, 1869-70, paid over £760 in school

1. In answer to Qu. 5861 Evans replied that the higher classes in Birmingham sent their boys to his school.
2. BDP Sep. 24, 26, and Oct. 3, 1868
3. BDP June 10, 1868
4. BDP June 4, 1868
fees, its debt then standing at £300. It lingered on through 1869 and 1870, a standing reproach to the town, a huge failure: but one, nevertheless, on which the reformers could base an urgent appeal to the nation to waste no more time.

At Westminster, Disraeli's Government was a long time dying. In May he dropped his Education Bill, together with most Ministerial measures. Rumours of the General Election began - although, as Forster pointed out, the administrative formalities involved in the new franchise and distribution could only, at the earliest, be completed by November. In June, in the Commons, Lord Robert Montagu, the Vice-President of the Committee of Council, painted a rosy picture of the state and progress of primary education; Forster demolished it by quoting the statistics of the Birmingham Education Society; Montagu replied that it was commonly known that the paid secretaries of such institutions 'wrote up' their reports to induce silly women to part with subscriptions. Collings wrote to him asking him for the grounds of his statement, and received a reply that Montagu had not read the Report; whereupon Collings sent a copy of the Report to the Education Department, and the correspondence to the Press.

Both parties in the town were selecting their candidates for the election. Philip Muntz was chosen as the third Liberal candidate: he was a veteran of 1831, and had been for some years in semi-retirement; it was an unfortunate choice: Wright, or Dawson, both of whom had been in the running, would, as things

1. BDP June 1, 1868
2. BDP June 20, 1868
turned out, have served the reformers' purpose better. In the next Parliament two out of Birmingham's three members belonged to the past rather than the present. William Harris, the father of the Caucus, was determined to defeat the minority clause of the Reform Act. Working on the results of a fine canvass, he divided the town into three groups of wards; in Group A the electors were told to vote for Bright and Dixon; in Group B for Bright and Muntz, and in Group C for Dixon and Muntz. Bright's very popularity was a danger, especially in Group C, and voters were warned that they must vote strictly as they were told. It was then calculated that the three Liberals would be returned with 17,300 votes each, and Lloyd, the Tory candidate, defeated with 1600.

The latter was first out with his election address: he was in favour of extending the present system, of compulsion (how enforced was not specified), and would introduce an obligatory conscience clause. John Bright's address was dated from Rochdale: it spoke of Ireland, the Ballot, and the minority clause of the Reform Act, but there was no mention of education. That of Muntz followed: he briefly declared that he would work for a national system of secular education. Dixon elaborated his programme in a speech to the electors of Edgbaston. He sketched the programme of the next administration: the disestablishment of the Irish Church, the abolition of the minority and personal payment of rates clauses, the removal of all disabilities of Dissenters at the

1. BDP July 9, 22, and Aug. 11; BJ Aug. 1; ABG July 25, 1868
Universities, voting by ballot, the protection of trade unions, a re-distribution of seats, and at least one step forward towards national education. So much for the immediate future; he went on to sketch a further programme - one possibly not realised in his life time, but he would be content to spend his life labouring towards it: universal suffrage: equality of suffrage: primary and secondary education for all - free, unsectarian and compulsory: open diplomacy: return of all overseas conquests: the break-up of large estates: re-distribution of wealth by legislation: nationalisation of communications, railways, gas and water: and all class distinctions swept away.¹

The election, as Forster predicted, was in November. In Birmingham the Mayor, Alderman Holland, announced that the nomination would be on the 16th, at the hustings in the open square behind the Town Hall. The speeches of Bright and Muntz on the 13th were both retrospective, of ancient wrongs righted. The former spoke briefly on education in a rambling discourse. After long reminiscences of the battle of the corn laws, he presented his plan for education. He was speaking only of schools for the working class: the country should be divided into school districts, and schools established to fill up the gaps: the present schools would be slowly assimilated to those newly established. There was still some magic in his oratory, for at the end the whole audience rose to cheer him. Dixon, who followed, spoke of his speech as the most powerful of the present conflict: the success of the educationists was now certain, since John Bright had espoused

¹ BDP Sep. 1 and Nov. 2, 1868
their cause. But there were many, Collings amongst them, who saw already that Bright's powers were on the wane. ¹

On November 16, Bright, Dixon and Muntz were declared elected by a show of hands. A poll was demanded by the opposition, and held on the following day. The votes, given by word of mouth, were recorded at each booth in a book. On the 18th the Mayor added up all the books in public - a process which took him one hour - and declared the result to vast crowds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bright</td>
<td>14601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dixon</td>
<td>15098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muntz</td>
<td>14614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>8700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans</td>
<td>7061</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sebastian Evans was the editor of the Conservative 'Daily Gazette'. The Liberals were jubilant: their joy was only clouded by the fact that Bright was not at the head of the poll. ²

Gladstone's majority was 107, the largest since 1832, although he himself was rejected by South-West Lancashire, and had to fall back on Greenwich, which had returned him without his consent. Disraeli resigned on December 2, and a few days later the first Cabinet appointments were announced. The Radicals were not impressed. Two Earls and a Duke, and Lowe Chancellor of the Exchequer were, the Post considered, scarcely counter-balanced even by Bright at the Board of Trade. It was well known that Bright

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¹. BDP Nov. 12, 13, 14 and 16, 1868
². BDP Nov. 16, 18 and 19, 1868
did not want office: a little later he said: 'I surrendered my inclination, and I may say also my judgment, to the opinions and judgment of my friends'. He had yielded to the importuning of those Birmingham Liberals who took pleasure in the mere fact that the town was represented for the first time by a Cabinet Minister. But there were others who acutely remarked that John Bright was no politician: the strife of debate, changes of Ministries, the varying currents of party fortunes, had never presented any charms to his mind; he was, rather, a crusader, a man who had been drawn into political life, not because that life charmed him, but because it was the only way to further great movements. In addition, he was no longer in the vanguard of reformers: he no longer stood alone, or in advance. The Radicals were, in short, placing no great hopes on Bright's elevation.

When the complete list of Cabinet appointments was announced, the Radicals expressed disapproval and want of confidence.

1. BDP Dec. 22, 1868
2. BDP Dec. 8, 1868
3. John Bright's biographer is G. M. Trevelyan (Life of John Bright, London: Constable & Co. 1913) whose pronouncement 'His promotion had great symbolic value, for all men saw that the barriers of privilege had fallen' (p. 402) is not borne out by contemporary comment. Nor is Garvin's judgment, that the non-conformists and educationists were relying greatly on his influence during the months November 1869 - January 1870, when Forster's Education Bill was known to be under Cabinet consideration, (Garvin, p. 107).
They well knew Gladstone's difficulties, and stated them almost without bitterness, as matters of fact. He contended with difficulties 'which must always exist when, as in the case of England, the composition of a Government is largely decided by family connection, or class influence'. These difficulties were acute when the Premier himself was not from any of the great houses - he had to be careful to placate them. But the 'families' had yet to learn that there was a new element in politics which would sooner or later have to be allowed to direct the force it had created. In this Cabinet, there was no break with the past: it contained six peers as well as the Marquis of Hartington, and the commoners, with three exceptions, were safe men, in whom the Whigs could delight. The exceptions were Gladstone, Bright and Lowe. The latter's language and actions during the Reform debates alienated him from the Radicals: he was neither an agreeable colleague nor a safe ally. Only Gladstone and Bright could be said to represent and sympathise with popular feeling. The Cabinet

1. Yet there were some who always believed that he was with them on the education issue. Thus R. W. Dale considered in 1867 that he was the one man in the House of Commons with the genius, practical knowledge and courage to carry through a great educational reform (Dale, Politics of the Future, p. 9). His speeches at Liverpool in January 1868 showed that he was in favour of a unitary system of primary education - and the reform of secondary (v. A. P. Martin, Life and Letters of Viscount Sherbrooke, Vol. II, pp. 331-2, and 338. London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1893).
lacked 'the earnestness, just touched with enthusiasm, which a
Liberal Government should possess at this juncture': it was not
calculated to lift legislation above routine; 'there is no use in
disguising it, the party of action is not represented in the
Cabinet strongly enough to realise the hopes or to satisfy the
just requirements of earnest reformers': Gladstone's majority was
won by a class which was still shut out from office. 1

Those who were, in Bright's phrase, in a fever about
education, placed no great hopes in such an Administration;
fortunately, there was little likelihood that it would attempt to
legislate in 1869: even before the Queen's speech on February 16
it was known that Irish Disestablishment and Disendowment had
pride of place, and that the only educational measure likely to
reach the Statute Book in that session would relate to the endowed
schools.

The situation, then, in Birmingham, at the end of 1868
may be summarised thus: the Radicals, with the triumph of a
Reform Act behind them, were as fiery as ever: their success in

1. BDP Dec. 10, 1868
Gladstone's Cabinet of 1868 consisted of Lord Hatherley (Lord
Chancellor), Earl de Grey and Ripon (President of Council),
the Earl of Kimberley (Privy Seal), Bruce (Home Office), the
Earl of Clarendon (Foreign Office), the Earl Granville
( Colonies), Cardwell (War), the Duke of Argyll (India),
Lowe (Exchequer), Childers (Admiralty), Fortescue (Ireland),
Goschen ( Poor Law), the Marquis of Hartington (Postmaster
General), and Bright (Board of Trade).
Forster had expected a seat; Bright was universally expected
to resign after a few weeks; his marked physical deterioration
now excited general comment.
(BDP Dec. 14 and Dec. 29, 1868)
the 'vote as you're told' election gave their leaders their first
taste of the power wielded by those in control of an organisation
which could maintain an effective discipline over a large electorate.
There was, in the town, a widespread awareness, as never before,
of educational destitution, and a general recognition that the voluntary system had in the past failed and was scarcely likely
in the future to meet the requirements of the town - that, indeed, the Education Society had finally exposed the sham of voluntaryism;
there was a growing impatience amongst the reformers, at the need, hitherto accepted, for compromise on fundamental issues with the generality of the clergy, who were increasingly regarded as an obstacle to progress; there was disgust with the selfishness and indifference of the middle-class generally, as well as a realistic appreciation of the difficulties and the apathy of the lower;
there was a realisation that even after shooting the Niagara of the Second Reform Act the Radicals were insufficiently and ineffectively represented in a Government so constituted that it was unlikely to introduce radical educational legislation - although something could always be hoped for from the traditional Whig latitudinarianism - unless pressure from inside and outside Parliament could be brought to bear on it; and finally it was realised that there was at least one year in which this might be done.

Into this situation erupted the energy of Chamberlain. He was the first to rebel from the sorry modesty of the Education Society. A document dated 1867, quoted by Garvin, contains the detailed plan for a more advanced movement entitled by him the
National Society for the promotion of Universal Compulsory Education. It set forth the principles on which a national system must be based:

1. That it is as much the duty of the State to see that the children are educated as to see that they are fed.

2. That the right to education ought not to be restricted by any religious tests.

3. That the enjoyment of this right ought not to depend on the caprice of charity or the will of parents.

The objects of the Society would be to collect and disseminate information as to the state of education in Great Britain, to publicise and defend the principles of the Society by means of public meetings, and to urge on the Government the duty of immediate legislative action. From these premises it followed that the action of the Society would be extended to secure:

1. Free education, at all events in cases where parents are unable to pay.

2. Unsectarian education in all cases where new schools are established or supported by the National Treasury.

These new schools should be supported by local rates, and be under local management and Government inspection. They must be unsectarian: 'The nation cannot justly be called on to support schools which are in part devoted to the propagation of sectarian views'. Their establishment should be imperative in districts insufficiently supplied: 'the education of the poor must not be suffered to depend on the chance circumstances of their neighbourhood to a charitable squire or clergyman'.

1. Garvin, p. 92
Chamberlain was still quite unknown: he dated his own entry into public life from the General Election of 1868, in which he played a small enough part as a member of Dixon's committee. With the election out of the way, he and Dixon returned to education. Dixon accepted his idea of a national society, and wrote to leaders of the Manchester Education Bill Committee asking them to extend their organisation so as to become national instead of local: Manchester, in his opinion, ought to have headed, and was entitled to head, a national movement. For whatever reasons, these gentlemen declined the invitation, and Birmingham set about forming its own national society.  

Again there was a series of meetings at The Dales in Edgbaston, Dixon's house. On January 7 a provisional committee was set up; a sub-committee drew up a programme, and on February 2 the formation of the society was announced. Chamberlain's title had to go - there was no room for another National Society - and the new organisation was called the National Education League. Its object was stated to be the establishment of a system which should secure the education of every child in England and Wales. It took six propositions as its basis: local authorities should be compelled by law to provide schools, finding the cost from rates, supplemented by government grants: that all rate aided schools should be under local management, unsectarian and free of all fees to pupils: and, finally, that accommodation, once provided, local

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1. For the Manchester Education Bill Committee, v. Maltby p. 106
2. HDP Dec. 11, 1869. This invitation and refusal were not made public for some twelve months. (v. infra p. 105)
authorities must be required by law to compel attendance. The
League advocated that there should be no interference with existing
schools, but that deficiencies in accommodation must be supplied.
Dixon was the chairman of the provisional committee, Collings the
honorary secretary; there was no mention of Chamberlain.¹

Local reaction was not favourable. Correspondence
began in the newspapers urging opposition; it was the parents'
job to pay for education; once admit the duty of the State in
this respect, then the provision of food and clothing would become
a public charge, which in its turn would lead to communism, and
'to the position when private property will not be worth six months'
purchase'.² After a few days mention of it ceased altogether:
the Times had merely announced 'Another movement for the extension
of education' and for the next few months it was an underground
movement.

It was not education, but Irish Disestablishment, which
concerned Birmingham in the first half of the year 1869. When
the Lords opposed Gladstone's Bill the town was in an uproar, and
there was talk again of 1831. A town meeting on June 14 was the
occasion of the first public speech of Chamberlain's career, a
scathing attack on the House of Lords and a warning of its
impending abolition. Sampson Lloyd attempted to reply but the
noise in the Town Hall was such that he was powerless: He stood,
with arms folded, grimly facing the uproar, for a whole hour and a

¹. BDP Feb. 2, 1869. Times Feb. 4, 1869
². BDP Feb. 8, 18, 25, 1869
half. Each time the Mayor attempted to put Chamberlain's resolution to the vote, he was held down by the Conservatives on the platform — in spite of the attempts of the Liberals to rescue him. There was open warfare on the platform. The Mayor refused to dissolve the meeting, and Lloyd refused to sit down, although urged 'as a magistrate' to do so by the Town Clerk. Police then invaded the platform, and Dr. Sebastian Evans, the Editor of the Gazette, was 'placed under restraint'. All this time the noise in the main body of the Hall was deafening. A blackboard was brought in, and the Mayor began to write the resolution on it: a concerted attack by the Conservative leaders swept him from the Chair. Police fought to restore him to it: his lips were seen to frame what men imagined were the words of the resolution, which was then carried amidst uproar.

Vast open air meetings were held in the town throughout July. Later that month, the Commons returned the Bill to the Lords, refusing their Amendments, and Salisbury led an angry attack on Gladstone; the Post did not hesitate to report that the younger peers, returning to their places after dinner, were flown with both insolence and wine. Even the complete surrender of the Lords on this Bill did not stop the continued agitation for the abolition of their House.¹

Something, if not all, of this fever was to infect the education question over the next few months. George Melby, the member for Stoke, and Dixon had attempted in March, to move a

¹ EDF June 14, 15, July 19, 22 and 23, 1869
Select Committee of the House to investigate the educational condition of the industrial towns. Fawcett, of their own party, moved an amendment urging that any inquiry was superfluous: let Forster get on and legislate. The latter agreed that the time for inquiries was past, yet nevertheless promised a departmental survey of four towns - a promise which resulted in the work by Fitch quoted above. In his speech Forster revealed his preoccupation with the difficulties of the subject: he would not injure the present system, and compulsion was too difficult - its enforcement would bring un-English incidents.¹

Meanwhile the League was at work, and a first list of membership was issued on May 15, 1869. The Provisional Committee had flown high and wide. The names of 25 M.P.s included Miall and Mundella: Huxley and Galton were pre-eminent amongst the leaders of the academic world - although it was noticeable that the Scottish Universities' and London's representation far outweighed that of Oxford and Cambridge. The Birmingham names included the industrialists Henry Wiggin, the Tangye brothers, and the Kenricks; Dawson, Vince and Crosskey led the non-conformists: Dale as yet held aloof. All these members, the circular stressed, had not all committed themselves to all the 'means' of the League. A list circulated in June contained 714 names, and by August the League had a coronet to boast of, that of the Earl of Portsmouth. By September 1st the essential organisation of the League was in

¹. BDP March 13 and 15, 1869.
being. It had 1400 members, drawn mainly from London, next from Birmingham and then from other industrial towns. It was hopelessly weak in the counties, especially those which were exclusively rural: in the whole of Nottinghamshire there were only 2 members, and in Cambridgeshire 6, of whom 3 were members of the university. The 1400 members provided a complete cross section of the professional classes - the Law, the Universities, Public and Grammar School teachers, the educational Inspectorate, Medicine; industrialists were heavily represented, and the trade societies (i.e. unions) came in one by one: such leaders of the embryonic Labour movement as Green and Applegarth were two of the earliest members. The numerical strength of the League was to increase enormously beyond this 1400, yet all the elements which were attracted by the League are here already: the intelligentsia, the Dissenters, large scale employers in the industrial towns, the leaders of organised skilled labour, - and Radical politicians; these classes, which are not, of course, mutually exclusive, always constituted the main strength of the League.

The leadership remained firmly in Birmingham hands. The Provisional Committee consisted as yet entirely of local men, including Bunce, Harris, Crosskey, Dawson, G. B. Lloyd, Vince, Wright, the Kenricks, and Wiggin. (It contained, except for Dixon, not a single member of the Established Church.) Headquarters were in Birmingham - the League had, by the beginning of September, a Central Office, at 47 Ann Street, and a paid secretary,

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1. The Council House now stands on the site: Ann Street disappeared when Victoria Square was created.
Francis Adams, a Yardley solicitor, who later (1882) wrote the expert account of the League's activities, 'The Elementary School Content'. It had an organisation which bore witness to the direction by the eminently successful men of business which Chamberlain and Collings both were. It had a complete apparatus of printed forms for all its purposes, and it was able to secure the immediate imprint of lengthy circulars. From the beginning it had ample funds. Before any general appeal to the public was made, £1200 was contributed by the organisers; later, when a list was opened, a subscription of any amount was accepted - it aimed at being a mass movement - but the real sinews were provided by the system of covenants, initiated in the first few weeks by ten leading Birmingham men, who each contracted for £1000, over ten years.¹

For, from the beginning, it anticipated a long campaign. It differed radically and consciously from any of the previous education movements, and from any of its contemporaries, in that it contemplated a complete national system. As early as May 1869 inspired leaders in the Birmingham press spoke of the emergence of a new school of educational reformers, who were viewing the problem as a whole. The provision of an adequate number of primary schools was, with these men, only the first step: the endowed schools were to be brought in line with the needs of the country and to them were to be added technical schools; Universities, increased in number, were to have all ecclesiastical restrictions removed, and

¹. There is a collection of circulars, forms, etc. in the Birmingham Reference Library.
all these institutions, primary and grammar schools and universities, were to be 'so linked together and so lead out of each other' as to provide a path for all, of the necessary ability, to tread. This was 'not a dream of the Millenial future': the nation could have this before the present Parliament died a natural death.¹

The League's conception of an 'end on' series of schools - as opposed to the idea of parallel secondary and elementary education which prevailed until 1944 - was elaborated by Collings in his book 'The American School System and the Establishment of Common Schools in England'.² He envisaged four stages of education, all free - a national system of public schools; from the primary schools at 10 or 11 children could go to grammar schools, thence at 15 to high schools, which led on to universities.

The same work contained an attack on the attitude of the clergy to educational legislation. Collings challenged the widely held assumption that no system of schools could be adopted which was not agreeable to the clergy: no body, in his view, could continue to claim, by virtue of their office or profession, any right to prescribe conditions on which education should be given or withheld. If a man put his son to learn a trade no church stepped in and demanded permission to teach him at the same time certain theological opinions - why should this be done when it was a question of teaching reading, writing, history? No future legislation should be framed to avoid giving offence but, whatever the offence

¹ BDP May 22, 1869
² Published in Birmingham in 1868: several editions of it appeared in the next four or five years.
given, to secure the object aimed at: all compromise should be refused.¹

The League anticipated hostility from the clergy, and can scarcely have expected to disarm it by its reiteration that the existing schools were to be left untouched, nor by its adoption of unsectarianism - a compromise policy which was a source of weakness to it, and which it was itself later to denounce. The Birmingham clergy met in August 1869 and formed their defence association. The inaugural meeting of the Birmingham Education Union was held on the 18th, with Kynnersley, the Stipendiary Magistrate, in the chair. The clergy were headed by their nominal leader Yorke, and by their actual leader F. S. Dale, the Vicar of St. Luke's; the laymen by Alderman Manton, the only representative of the Council, and by Dr. Sebastian Evans, Editor of the Gazette and one of the defeated candidates in the 1868 election.

It was frankly admitted that the Union was forced into existence by the League. The latter, without yet having held a single meeting, had become such a formidable body that the clergy felt impelled to give an explanation to public opinion for holding aloof from it, and to offer its own counter-proposals. Their opposition to the League's programme stemmed simply and admittedly from their desire to retain control of the elementary schools: control by local government would be followed swiftly, as they saw it, by the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church; in fact the League's real and only aim was seen by some as Church spoliation, with elementary education used as a stalking horse.

¹ op. cit. pp. 17, 18, 44 & 49
Free, rate-supported schools were therefore to be opposed, although the rates should provide free school orders for necessitous children (it was calculated that a 1d. rate, yielding £4,000, would suffice). The Education Department should give larger building grants in industrial areas, lower its building standards and discard its rules with regard to the employment of certificated teachers; this would enable the Church to fill the present gaps; the acceptance of a conscience clause would pave the way for compulsory attendance, if this later were found desirable.\(^1\) The Birmingham clergy were reconciled to the inevitability of a conscience clause, and about this time F. S. Dale approached the National Society inquiring if it were modifying its attitude to this question: he received an evasive answer.\(^2\)

Chamberlain leapt openly to the attack. The nation could never be provided with schools by extending the present system, since under it the initiative lay not with Government but with private charity. He spoke with contempt of such clergy who could only see in the proceedings of the League an attempt to undermine that monopoly of endowment which provided them with comfortable livings. Education could not be the virtual monopoly of one sect: non-members of the Church of England formed half the nation, and they had a right to a say in the disposal of funds for

\(^1\) BDP Aug. 19, 1869

2. Burgess, p. 193. The National Society did not agree to surrender on the conscience clause issue until February 1870, and then only privately: publicly it continued to oppose it, and, even more vehemently, the time-table conscience clause, \((\text{ibid, pp. 194-5})\). Burgess calls the author of this inquiry 'the Rev. Dr. Dale': surely not a confusion with the great R. W.?
education. The clergy were despairing too soon, when they thought that their schools would be forced to close; other sects, he reminded them, had maintained schools without Government aid; but assume they did die out, who would suffer? Neither pupils, nor parents, nor the nation. Free schools once established, the working man would sooner pay his rates and taxes than fees, to be at best a participant in charity. The free ticket system would stigmatise paupers: 'It cannot be too emphatically laid down that education is the right of every child born, and not a boon dependent on the caprice of charity'. He warned the clergy not to place themselves again, as so often in the past, on the side of conservatism, and seek to thwart the people's will, and rattled his money bags: the League had £10,000 and 1500 members 'and we shall take care that our views are fully represented and the decision of the whole country taken on them, before we close the agitation we have now commenced'.

The battle was now on - but these were only the minor skirmishes before that set-piece attack, the League's first annual general meeting. Preceded by months of careful preparation, it was the first public League meeting of any sort to be held, and filled two whole days. A special circular, issued a week or two previously, had given the report of the provisional committee, including the organisation it had devised. Membership then stood at 3500, including 40 Members of Parliament and 340 ministers of religion. (These were nearly all non-conformists: several men

1. EDP Aug. 21, 1869
in Anglican orders joined the League, but almost without exception they were university and grammar school teachers; the beneficed clergy was always to be found in the opposition. ¹

The internal organisation of the League was designed to give its real direction to the Executive Committee and its Chairman. Dixon was Chairman of the League, and its titular head, and Collings its honorary secretary. A Council was formed, consisting of all members of the League who were in the House of Commons, all donors of £500 and upwards, and one representative from each branch; this body, over 300 strong, met very infrequently, - only once during the whole course of Forster's Bill through Parliament. The Executive Committee consisted of the officers - Dixon, Collings, and Jaffray the treasurer, - and forty members, thirty of whom were named and given power to co-opt the remaining ten. Of the thirty, sixteen were Birmingham men. The Chairman of this committee - Dixon present or not - was Chamberlain; an inner committee - of officers - (again presided over by Chamberlain) met at least weekly to conduct the affairs of the League.

The first general meeting was held at Birmingham on October 12 and 13, 1869. The stage-management was impressive - reception rooms and information centres were established at the railway stations to help members coming from other parts; but, once having reached the conference room, it was made plain to them

¹ An exception was Archdeacon Sandford, Rector of Alvechurch.
that their business was only to listen and to rubber stamp decisions already taken. There would be discussion only on the means of the League, not on its objects, and the discussion took the form only of a brief debate after the reading of a formal paper from the platform. The officers and constitution were confirmed, and the Executive Committee was instructed, as it desired, to prepare a Parliamentary Bill. This business was dealt with without discussion: members were told that they were not to discuss, all the work was already done, and lines of action were laid down. Not unnaturally, the meeting, as the Post put it, had an air of business about it from the first. Yet enthusiasm ran high during the whole two days of speech making, while paper after paper was read on compulsion, free schools, and unsectarianism.

It was this last which provided the only note of discord. As its enemies were quick to point out, the League soon had a religious difficulty within its own ranks. Dixon defined the official unsectarianism as the 'omission of these particulars of religious instruction which differentiate the conflicting sections of the religious world of this country', i.e. the agreed syllabus yet to be achieved. But the general tone of the meeting was in favour of secularism, advocated, amongst others, by George Dawson, in what the Post described as the speech of the day. The Times reporter noted that the one certain passport to applause was a favourable reference to secular education. But the secularists, however reluctantly, for the present gave way.

At this series of meetings a precise and definite creed
was promulgated and ordered to be embodied in a Bill: there was
no loophole left for compromise, and none was intended. The pre-
vailing spirit of the League was uncompromising, even intolerant,
and fiery. Dixon, who might really have been expected to under-
stand a fellow-Yorkshireman a little better, declared his resolution
to make no terms with Forster, whose power - apart from his
inclination - to pass a League measure was doubted. Dixon promised
him a national agitation, to rouse the people and called on him to
lead it: 'Give us what we want, and we'll support you'. But if
Forster hesitated to transfer education from a voluntary and
denominational basis 'to the basis of taxation and the self-governing
energy of the country, then it will be our duty to say ... that we
can no longer follow him'. Such a transfer was a task that the
League would perform: 'with you as our leader, if you will, but
if not, in spite of you'.

Such language was impolitic. Even if it had a giant's
power, it was unwise to use it thus, to antagonise one of the few
friends it could possibly have in the Administration. And the
League had still to prove that it had a giant's strength. Powerful
forces were rallying against it. An almost incredible alliance of
Anglican clergy and Roman Catholic priests was forming a counter
society, to be launched at Manchester in November. If denominational
education was going to die in England, it would die hard. Already

1. The League published the proceedings of its first general meeting -
a volume of some 200 pages - in Birmingham in 1869. v. also
men were warning the League that it should moderate its spirit, if not its eventual aims, and seek to influence the passage of a Bill which all knew to be imminent: if it would not obey the ordinary rules of political action, it was riding for a fall—a fall which might well harm the educationists' cause.

But the League was being driven by a political ingenuity. Chamberlain honestly believed that the sheer logic of his case would be overwhelming. It had only to be presented: reiterated maybe, to awaken dormant minds, but convincing in itself. Opposition would only continue from the priests, whose self interest was obvious. (Chamberlain's anti-clericalism had a Voltairean acerbity.) Of the force of inertia, of custom, of prejudice, of religiosity—to put his opponents' case no higher—he had no conception. He was like a man in blinkers, unable even to see any point of view but his own, unable even to see the pit at his feet.

He rode rough shod over old friendships. Canon Gover had felt unable, back in January, to assist in inaugurating the League. He selected October 13, from whatever motive, to announce this publicly, and to send the correspondence to the press. The League contemptuously advised him to join the opposition society—it could do with some help. Dr. Hart Burges, the Vicar of Bishop Ryder's, a slum parish on the boundaries of Aston, who had long laboured to support four or five parochial schools, preached that 'the system of the League was one which could not have the approbation of the Almighty'—an accusation of godlessness to which the League grew accustomed; on the present occasion it
replied tartly, but on the whole effectively, that it could not
discuss such a proposition: it did not presume to have any
familiarity with the counsels of Heaven.

The level of the counter-arguments put forward by the
Birmingham Education Union was indeed calculated to exasperate men
who saw a national system of schools as the remedy for the
surrounding degradation and destitution which filled them with
compassion and alarm. Compulsion, urged the Union, would not
work: it had not worked anywhere else: people went to school in
Prussia because it was a national habit, not because of a compulsory
law: would the League be good enough to explain - it must pardon
other folks' stupidity - for whom would schooling be compulsory?
Surely they were not thinking of middle class children - such a
degrading law could scarcely be applied to them. And who would
compel? The police, obviously: and how could the policeman know
whether the youth playing in the streets was really not on the
books of a school or was just having a half day off? Anyway, the
parents would hide their children.

Pathetically, it bemoaned the fact that Dixon had rung
the death knell of the present system. Education was no longer
to be associated with the clergyman, the parsonage, the annual tea-
party, the parish church: it was to be relegated entirely to the
policeman, the magistrates and the prison. And things were all
right as they were: people were getting an education from books
and newspapers. But there was a ray of hope: the League was
allowing the Government little freedom in this matter - under
pain of immediate displacement it had to accept their bill; was
it not just as likely that the Government would disown them, and
that out of all this clamour some measure acceptable to the Church
would emerge? Anyway, Dixon was a man of one idea: such men
were bores, and he would be well advised to talk of anything
rather than education - even his wealth.¹

Persistently, it claimed that the League's educational
zeal was hypocrisy. Fundamentally, it alleged, the agitation of
the League was an attack on the Church and to make this it was
prepared to wreck all the existing schools, to revolutionise
educational policy, and to strike religion out of the curriculum:
this was why the League was supported by the Dissenters, who were
prepared to subordinate their own religious principles to further
an attack on the Established Church. Men like Dixon, urged the
Union, imagine they lead because they are put in front: they are
not hypocrites, but dupes. The Dissenters were out to disestablish
and disendow the Church of England - as they had just served the
Church of Ireland: their campaign for elementary education, equally
with their pretended concern for academic freedom in the Univer-
sities, had this sole ultimate aim (a reference to Gladstone's
University Tests Bills).

More shrewdly, the Union foresaw that almost any attempt
to pass an education act would seriously weaken the Liberal party,
composed as it was of elements irreconcilable: on any measure apart
from Irish Church and Land Reform, and that certainly any attempt
to pass a bill framed on Dixon's principles would lose the Govern-
ment the whole of the Irish vote.²

¹ BDG Oct. 13, 15, 22, Nov. 3 and 16, 1869. ABG Oct. 16, 1869
² ABG Nov. 20, 27, 1869
The formation of the Birmingham Union in August was followed in November by the inauguration of a more widely based organisation with the same aims, the National Union, whose head-quarters were in Manchester. F. S. Dale led a Birmingham deputation to its conference in that city on November 3 and 4; the Post sent its reporter who wired back a cheerful account of Lord Robert Montagu, the egregious ex-Vice-President, addressing a Town Hall half-full of parsons and maintaining that the picture of educational destitution was a phantasm, produced by juggling figures.

The historian of the Manchester movements, Maltby, points out the essential characteristics of the Union. It originated nothing, but served only to rally forces of conservatism. It was an excrescence on Manchester, which was not the centre of its power nor its originator; it had no boldness, no originality. It seems obvious that Manchester was chosen because of its long association with education reform movements, but the real heir of these, in Manchester, was the Education Bill Committee.

The National Union was politically Conservative, despite the adherence of Cowper-Temple and Edward Baines, and it undoubtedly represented an enormous mass of inert public opinion. Its list of coronets was impressive. By 1870 it claimed two archbishops, five dukes, one marqués, eighteen earls, and innumerable bishops and barons: but these notabilities, as the League pointed out, never attended a meeting, and subscribed at most four or five guineas to the Union's funds. The Union, indeed, was always in financial trouble: it had no guarantee fund and the highest

1. Maltby, pp. 114 - 115
individual subscriptions were three of £100 each.

This Union originated in a letter of invitation and a programme drafted by Colonel Edward Akroyd, M.P. for Halifax, and sent out on October 1, 1869 by William Stanyer, an Anglican clergyman who became the paid secretary. Its programme was simply to preserve the existing system, to require denominational schools in receipt of Government aid to accept a conscience clause, to extend the Factory Acts to agriculture, and to make Denison's Act of 1862 compulsory. The Union claimed that little extra legislation would be required, that no burden would be placed on the rates, that indeed under the factory system the earnings of children would pay for their education.¹

Colonel Akroyd had devoted more thought to education than one might suppose. He was the author of a pamphlet on the 'Factory System of Education',² being concerned to show how it might be extended to farming. He himself had several schools attached to his factory - for 900 half-timers, 230 full timers, and 300 infants. The advantage of the half-time system was, in his view, that there was no cost of enforcement: it was incumbent on the employer to obtain the weekly voucher to prove attendance. Wherever a Factory Act was introduced, he claimed, there was no shortage of school accommodation, for it was in the interests of

¹ Report of Educational Conference at Manchester, November 3 and 4, 1869 (London: Longmans, Green, 1869).
² E. Akroyd, Extension of the factory system of education to the agricultural classes (London: Longmans, Green, 1870)
employers of labour to provide it. In the smaller hamlets a convenient cottage house often answered every purpose: 'I have tried the experiment with satisfactory results in a village in the East Riding of Yorkshire. An ordinary room in a cottage with a brick floor and a fireplace comfortably accommodates a group of about 20 children. The same place is used as a club room in the evening, where the farmers' lads can sit and smoke'.

Akroyd knew that he had to persuade farmers that a half-time system would work to their advantage. Half-day attendance was out of the question, because of the distances involved: alternate days would not be a happy arrangement because of the farmers' dependence on the weather; and of course, during harvest all school attendance would naturally be suspended. The most feasible regulation would be one requiring a hundred days school attendance in each year from the ages of 8 to 13; this would hardly interfere a single day with the exigencies of the farmer, who would always have first call: only if he did not require the services of boys would they go to school, and if he found in the course of the day that he required more boys to drive carts, then he had only to let the schoolmaster know. Such a system of school attendance could benefit the farmer, as he had only to pay the boys for the time they were at work, and his labourers would be more intelligent.

Such was the level of thought which opposed the League, and, of course, the Union opposed the League on every one of its points. It objected to local rating on the ostensible grounds that religious bodies would thus be paying twice, in subscriptions
and rates: it opposed free schools because they would diminish parental responsibility, and declared unsectarian religious teaching to be impossible. Speaker after Speaker, at the Manchester inaugural conference, in the rotund periods of the Victorian pulpit (most began by deploring the absence of the laity), and with a wealth of quotation from the Latin and Greek, denounced the League as visionary, impracticable, hypocritical and atheistic.

The League carried its campaign to places where the ancient authors brought but little sweetness and light, the town halls of the industrial regions, and to nearly every dissenting chapel in the country. By November every sect except the Wesleyan Methodists had declared its support for the League, and the Methodists were divided. The adhesion of R. W. Dale to the League on November 12 was of the first importance, because of his great influence amongst Dissenters. He had held aloof for one reason, his disapproval of free education: like Fawcett the Cambridge economist, he now joined, reserving his position on that point, and reinforced the already formidable leadership. He and Dixon, Collings and Chamberlain, travelled the length and breadth of the country throughout November, December and January addressing wildly enthusiastic meetings. The Central Executive in Birmingham had made contact with every parliamentary borough in England and Wales: local sympathisers would first establish provincial committees and then general meetings to establish a branch of the League. A formal meeting on the lines of the Birmingham conference was then arranged and one of the four leaders - if the place was large enough, if not, some lesser light was sent - made
the speech of the evening. The process began on October 26, when Dixon spoke to the newly formed London branch (whose chairman was Sir Charles Dilke, the extreme Radical and Republican): later, he spoke, for example, at Leeds, on December 1, and at Manchester on December 4, on the same day that the City Council debated and passed a resolution in favour of the League's principles. Chamberlain spoke for the first time outside Birmingham at Leicester, towards the end of November.\(^1\) R. W. Dale convened regional meetings of Nonconformists, as, for example, that at Leeds on January 18; and every dissenting congregation became in effect a League meeting.

By the end of the year Birmingham had identified itself with the elementary education movement in the eyes of the rest of the country even more than it had been identified with franchise reform; and it had achieved what had never been done before, and has never been done since: education became the prime topic of public discussion, and educational reform had become the most urgent issue before the country.

All the sound and fury was not confined to League meetings. Bishop Ullathorne, virtually the Roman Catholic Bishop of Birmingham, addressed a Town Hall meeting called to state the Roman Catholic

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1. Leicester Journal Dec. 3, 1869. The Journal was obviously Conservative and Clerical in its sympathies. It devoted a leader to a bitter attack on the League and Chamberlain; it reported the meeting however as one of high enthusiasm, presided over by the Mayor, and attended by all the Radical leaders of the town.
attitude to the proposals of the League. It was attended by 5,000 people. The Catholic standpoint could indeed hardly need stating. Dixon's proposed schools would be un-Christian and Godless: Catholics opposed local control, and local rating, for the Roman Catholic ratepayer would have a special grievance, since his children could not possibly attend Board Schools. The League's advocacy of compulsion was represented as a device to force all Catholic children into Protestant schools, having obliged the Catholic schools to close: they would then be brought up as heretics. With feigned weariness the League reiterated, in a Post leader the following day, its desire to see more schools provided and all children sent to the one of their parents' choice. The Times also devoted a leader to Ullathorne and denounced his speech as rabble rousing.¹

Roman Catholicism generally at this time, in England, roused feelings of fear, hatred and contempt. In the newspapers of the period one is struck by the frequency of alleged nunnery scandals, the extraordinary immunity of such obscene slanderers as Murphy, who provoked the 1867 riots in Birmingham - Dixon was criticised as an enemy of free speech because he had refused to let him do so in the Town Hall, - and the constant ridicule of the Pope and the hierarchy in England. Yet opposition to the League

¹  BDP Nov. 16 & 17 and Times Nov. 18, 1869. Ullathorne, if the Times' description of him can be believed, was a Longram-like figure, plausible, suave, stubborn, speaking with an ingratiating worldly candour, whose mind was so accustomed 'to colour what it looked upon, that it can now never describe things as they are'. 
brought Anglican and Roman priests on to the same platform, an alliance that the League decried as unholy; and it viewed with sardonic amusement the sight of two priests standing side by side at a public meeting, each professing to believe that the other taught a damnable and damming heresy, and each supporting the other's claim to public funds with which to do it.
Forster's Bill

The League was keeping a wary eye on Forster. On the face of it he was a man after its own heart. He was born of a Quaker family; in youth twelve hours daily labour in the mill were followed by an evening devoted to self-improvement, and when leisure came with success it was devoted to public work. He was associated with every one of the Manchester movements, from 1847 to 1868: he was elected to Parliament for Bradford in 1861, a fiery young Radical at whom the elder Whigs shook their heads in despair. He reached office in 1868, and, although the Birmingham Radicals welcomed his appointment, they had, curiously enough, little faith in him almost from the start. Dixon's reference to him at the League's first general meeting, on October 13, has been quoted. Three days before this, Forster wrote in his diary some notes on a memorandum he was preparing for the Cabinet; he came down definitely against the Birmingham plan: 'The complete logical machinery of the League would quickly undermine the present schools, would relieve the parents of all payment, would entail upon the country an enormous expense, would drive out of the field most of those who care for education, and oblige the government to make use solely of official or municipal agency'. His idea was to strengthen existing schools

1. The only biography is that of Wemyss Reid (London: Chapmont Hall, 1888) written almost immediately after Forster's death in 1886. Reid, the editor of the Leeds Mercury, was a close friend of Forster, and anti-League: his book is eulogistic and partial. He and Chamberlain were bitter enemies throughout their careers (Garvin I p.307).
2. V. Maltby, passim.
by increased grants and supplement them where necessary by local agencies: these new schools should be neither secular nor denominational; he favoured direct compulsion and the retention of fees. The storm which burst about him in February 1870 was therefore not entirely of his own making, for the basic plan underwent considerable, although not fundamental, change in Cabinet (of which he was not a member) before he presented it to the Commons.

His public speeches at this time were, as he well knew, closely examined in the hope that they would afford a glimpse of the Government's intentions. Indirectly, he revealed much. The word compromise, of which he became increasingly fond, infuriated the League. 'Mr. Forster seems to look upon the question as if it were an affair, not of the State, but of two opposing interests, between whom it is the business of Parliament to mediate, and to make things pleasant all round. He does not appear to see that there are really two opposing principles at work - that the reformers believe it to be the work of the State to provide secular teaching, and to compel all children to be taught - leaving religion to the churches; and that on the other hand, the advocates of the present system contend that it is the duty of the State to give money to the churches, and, under due supervision as to quality, to allow them to give secular and religious instruction together. How is it possible to compromise between these principles?'

They began to fear a compromise measure, and urged its rejection. A feeble bill could be a national misfortune, if it

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1. BDP Nov. 12, 1869.
reached the Statute Book. The League's own bill would be introduced, and if that did not pass, the question could wait twelve months. The services of Forster as an umpire were not required; let the nation decide. There were indeed persistent rumours that the Government intended to postpone legislation - a course the League tended more and more to favour. It knew that it had to rouse the country to move Forster and the Cabinet in their direction, and that its only hope was to do that. It had no reliance whatsoever on John Bright. There is no evidence at all in the press of the period of any activity on his part, no reference to him by the League's leaders - or indeed by anyone else. The illness which caused his retirement for three years, and from which he never fully recovered, already had him in its grip; his collapse in February 1870 came as no surprise to the League: Collings had long before remarked on his physical and mental deterioration; his lack of understanding of the education problem - his lack of interest in it - must have been clearly apparent to such an observer as Chamberlain. Both Trevelyan and Garvin, in their lives of Bright and Chamberlain, seem to hold the view that the League was living in a kind of fool's paradise, that it imagined that its case was being enthusiastically and energetically urged within the Cabinet by the senior member for Birmingham. All the evidence points to the opposite conclusion. 1

1. EDP Dec. 1, 6, 13 1869, and Jan. 12, 1870. Bright made a speech in Birmingham on Jan. 10, 1870, but it contained only a short reference to education - scarcely any speaker on any topic by that time could avoid the subject altogether; his main theme was Irish Land Reform. The Times (Dec. 1, 1869) hinted that there was a party within the Cabinet favourable to the League, and that its leader was Lowe.
Early in the new year Forster came down publicly against the League. Speaking at Bradford on January 17, he announced that he thought the time opportune for legislation; this was the occasion of his remark that he would canter through the religious difficulty - he would not allow the religious question to stand in the way of a settlement, nor any economic difficulty. Nevertheless, he went on, the League itself wanted ten years before it thought its principles could be realised: he was not going to wait ten years before he legislated, but would carry what he could now. In other words, a partial measure 'which would command the assent of all those whose real and chief object is the education of the country'. The Birmingham Conservatives seized on his speech with relief and joy: no praise was too high for the man who obviously believed, as they did, that the League's object was disestablishment and disendowment.¹

The League had now presented its aims in the form of a Parliamentary Bill, to be introduced early in 1870; it was made known in the press on December 18, 1870, and by pamphlets. The Bill was prepared by the Executive Committee, each member of which had received a printed circular, containing a draft Bill which formed the basis of their subsequent meetings on December 3 and 9; he was requested to state suggested amendments in writing: no other would be debated. In all, three drafts of a bill were printed before the Committee produced the one it published.²

¹. BDP Jan. 19 and BDG Jan. 20, 1870.
². BRL. (Misc. League Papers).
The administrative machinery was first considered. The proposals of the published bill were to establish local education authorities in boroughs and towns by causing Town Councils to appoint School Boards partly or wholly from their own bodies, i.e. virtually the education committees of the 1902 Act. In rural areas the Boards were to be directly elected by the ratepayers, on the analogy of the Boards of Guardians. Earlier drafts, unpublished, have some interesting suggestions. The first draft provided for the establishment of a Ministry of Education and the appointment of a Minister, and made the county the unit of administration, for rural areas. School boards as they existed after the 1870 Act, were considered in the second draft, with the variation that one-third of the members should retire annually.

In all drafts, the local education authority was given power to levy a rate - a limit of 2d. in the £ being discarded after the first draft. They were to establish and maintain 'National Rate Schools', and register all school children. These schools were to be of various grades: the first draft specified two, of which the upper was virtually a grammar school as the term is now understood, except that classics could form no part of the curriculum; an amendment of Crosskey, that higher grade schools should be endowed with university scholarships was rejected, as was the idea of maintenance grants, though all schools were free.

The final draft ordered school attendance for all children aged 6 to 14. Earlier drafts had been more tentative: the relevant clause in the first draft might have been framed by the Union, containing as it did merely the provision that children under ten might
not go to work, and those between 10 and 14 would have to attend school half-time, and even this law would be suspended during harvest time. School attendance, in the final bill, was defined as attendance at a school in receipt of a government grant or at a private school which was considered satisfactory by the Board. Private schools were to be inspected, and if approved, registered: they were required to keep accurate records, which were at all times to be at the disposal of the local education authority and H.M. Inspectorate.

The system of enforcement was elaborated in some detail — obviously to allay public alarm. Attendance Officers would issue two formal warnings, as necessary, before issuing a summons to appear before the School Board. Only if this failed would a summons to appear before a magistrate be issued. Fines would vary from 1/- to 20/-: imprisonment was not mentioned.

The recruitment and training of teachers were not overlooked. The final draft called for the establishment of unsectarian normal schools. Earlier drafts provided for the establishment of two grades of teacher, those trained and certificated by the local authority, and those certificated by the government, after further examination: the latter only would teach in the higher grade schools; the inspectorate was to be open to teachers.

Amongst other miscellaneous provisions, a School Meals Service was deleted from the first draft, in which authorities were empowered to 'establish schools in every poor district where, in addition to the primary instruction, some plain food is given to the children every day'. There were no welfare or health provisions in the final draft.
The clauses concerning religious instruction - which obviously would excite the keenest scrutiny - varied little from draft to draft. The National Rate Schools were to be unsectarian: the League's Bill provided that 'No creed, catechism, or tenet peculiar to any sect shall be taught in any National Rate School': School Boards could however grant the use of school rooms out of school hours to ministers to give denominational instruction, provided that it acted impartially. In the ordinary business of the day the Bible was not excluded, nor was any religious instruction forbidden which could be based on a syllabus agreed amongst the denominations. Amendments proposed by the London Committee and Applegarth that the Bible and all religious teaching should be banned were defeated.

Linked closely with the religious question was that of the Board's relationship with existing schools. Here it must be stressed that the League's Bill, unlike Forster's and the subsequent 1870 Act, provided for the establishment of local education authorities over the whole of England and Wales, and duplication of accommodation was not contemplated.

Existing schools could be handed over to the School Board, which was free to accept or reject them: Boards could purchase such schools. The Board was responsible for enforcing attendance at these schools, equally with its own. In single school areas, where the Board compelled the attendance of children, they were not to receive denominational instruction, unless parents requested it in writing. Where managers were willing to accept this limitation, Boards had to pay from the rates a proportion of the school's
expenses, up to one third. All existing schools, if they were prepared to admit children free and work under a time-table conscience clause, imposing no disabilities on children withdrawing, should receive a two-thirds grant from the Government; (Rate Schools received a similar grant).¹

The League urged that its object was neither to destroy nor to supplant the present system; it recognised voluntary and denominational zeal: but this had not covered the ground. It offered its Bill to stimulate discussion: its machinery might be improved - in which case the League would be delighted - but in the end, sooner or later, English education would be based on its principles.

The opposition remained unconvinced. The Birmingham Union met towards the middle of December and F. S. Dale addressed a packed Town Hall. The progress of education, he urged, in the last fifty years had been striking and delightful: why try experiments? The League's scheme was degrading, for it was shameful to a man to accept help from the parish (i.e. to use a local authority school), but not so to accept charity from neighbours (i.e. the voluntary subscriptions). Its scheme was irreligious, for it did not make religious instruction compulsory, and it was well known that the lower orders could not be trusted to ensure the religious education of their children. On compulsion, the Union had no views, except that it was monstrous to send a man to prison because he did not agree with Mr. Dixon as to the value of book learning.

¹. All the drafts are preserved in Birmingham Reference Library: the final draft was published in BDF Dec. 16, 1869.
The Union opposed free schools. They admitted that such schools were possible in America, because rich and poor attended them. But they were unthinkable here: not even the middle class would want to use the elementary schools. What justice was there in taxing a clerk earning a hundred pounds a year to send free to school the children of a collier earning 5/- a day, unless free middle class schools were also provided? Free schools, as the Rev. Charles Evans, Head of King Edward's, explained, were not a good thing, except King Edward's, which had a waiting list of 1200: it was not that they were pauperising, but they were a very expensive way of doing things. Anyway, fee paying denominational schools would not be able to survive with a free League school in the next street.

Dixon, at least, amongst the League leaders just did not believe this last point. Some voluntary schools in the towns (and only the urban areas were likely to be affected) might close, depending on their situation and efficiency: but there was a strong probability that many, if not most, could evolve, behind their protection of a fee, into higher elementary or secondary schools.

But the Union refused all comfort. It was opposed to the League on one fundamental issue: opposition on minor issues - rating, compulsion, fees - followed as a matter of course. The root cause of its objection to the League's plan was the implication in it that the State had no right to show any preference for any religious opinion or sect.1

For this reason, they did not think that the Parliamentary history of Dixon's Bill would be long. On the second reading it

would be thrown out by several hundred votes: at most, fifty votes would be cast for it - and Bright's would not be amongst them.

There were two attempts to reconcile the warring factions. The Manchester Education Bill Committee wrote to Dixon, suggesting joint action, the League to support the Committee's Bill. He refused. In his reply he revealed that he had, back in January, suggested that the Committee should expand into a national organisation. If they had agreed, the League would not have been born in Birmingham. But they refused, and remained a local committee, their number insignificant, and as a body scarcely known outside Manchester. The League now comprised 4000 leading men in all parts of the country, including over 40 members of Parliament and 400 ministers of religion. It had 42 branches in operation, and 64 in course of formation. Its subscription list exceeded £33,000. More than twenty meetings in every important town in the country had endorsed its programme. Its strength grew daily. Dixon consequently made it quite plain that Mahomet would have to go to the mountain.¹

It was Chamberlain's turn next to flex his muscles and rattle his money bags. Writing to the Times three weeks later to reject scornfully a suggestion that the Union and League should attempt to compose their differences, he revealed that the League's membership had grown to 5,000 and its subscription list to £50,000. He was set for a ten year agitation: compromise with the Union was impossible, for it represented the priests, and its object was evident enough, the political and theological advantage of the Church of England in England and of the Church of Rome in Ireland. He revealed also that there was a growing body of opinion within the League in favour of

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¹ BDP Dec. 11, 1869.
secularism; let the Union accept unsectarianism while it could.¹

One branch of the League, that of Merthyr Tydvil, did secede on this issue; it objected that the League proposed to compel children to attend denominational schools, to enforce Bible reading, and to double the grants given to existing schools, on certain conditions. Its own policy was one of secularism.

The League pursued its middle way, though Chamberlain and probably Collings would have preferred to go immediately to extremes; Dixon, and, as yet, Dale restrained them. They all well knew that secularism would inevitably be misrepresented and misunderstood. Their adherence to unsectarianism did not, for that matter, prevent them from being personally attacked as irreligious and hypocritical. It was an age of religiosity. The following tract for the times must have stirred many an honest heart, over the Christmas firesides of that year, to indignation against the wickedness of the League.

Presented in metrical form, entitled 'A League Scholar: No.173' the story opens with the narrator daydreaming over his fire on Christmas Eve. Suddenly he saw a picture:

'There rose up a house .....  
A dismal house which I knew was a school;  
A school in St. Pancras Guardian style ...

... over the doorway, and cleft by a crack  
Was the one word League, grim lettered in black.  
'Twas the dimmest house the world e'er saw:  
Where to pray to God was to break the law

Next door to this was the teacher's house:

Very shabby genteel was the coat he wore.  
His hair was grey, for the League was turning him into an administrator:

I wish the Board knew the trouble they give:  
What with Bills and reports 'tis a burden to live.

¹ Times Jan. 1, 1870.
A small boy enters and presents himself as 'No. 173': the implication obviously being that in the great Board schools of four hundred pupils children could only be known by an administrative number. He reveals that at home he is called Tommy, and the kindly old man offers him some warm bread and milk.

Tommy had been turned away from his own home, by a Mrs. Murden, whose present status in the household is left vague, but who, according to the boy, has designs on father, a widower:

And she says, says she: 'You may hook it and pack
For your Pa's gone out, and he won't be back'.

Tommy at first was not alarmed:

For I thought he was out on the Rodney again.

But:

'No' says she ...

'For the Policeman have had him before the Beak
At the orfice today and they've given him a week'
So I says, what for? - 'Why' she says, 'you fool,
'Twas along o' his keeping you home from school.
They've fined him,' she says, 'three times afore.
And they've quodded him now, and won't fine him no more!'

As Tommy tackles his milk, and the schoolmaster is allowed a glass of beer, they talk on:

Do tell me, teacher, what all on it means,
I don't mean the bells and the holly and show,
But what's Christmas, that's what I want to know.

But the grey man sat with his hand on his knee
Eying Tommy a-hundred and seventy three.
No tenet of creed or sect may be,
He said inwardly, taught in the secular free
And rate paid schools of the League by me.

Tommy persists:

Who was He, teacher,
And who was His Father, and what did He do?

But the teacher was silent. His heart might bleed
But to teach one tenet of sect or creed
Was to break an Act of Parliament rule
Of the rate paid secular free League school
.... he sighed: 'Tis the Act of Parliament.

Tommy dredges up some memory at this point of a history lesson on
King Charles I and his Parliamentary troubles, and is struck with a
flash of illumination:

But just now when you told me you couldn't teach
About Christ and the rest ...
I think as I know pretty well what you meant: Why, they've killed Him by Act of Parliament.

Almost nightly throughout January Dixon addressed meetings
in the North and Midlands. In the ferment of discussion, two trends
now become more and more obvious. The League no longer wished for
early legislation, and an ever growing section within it was dis-
contented with its own Bill. The very success of the League's
agitation was making it re-consider its time table. It no longer
thought that ten years would be necessary to realise its principles:
it might do so within one or two; it doubted whether the Government
was prepared to go far enough, as yet, but a few more months of
agitation might produce the irresistible pressure it was always the
League's aim to create. It is doubtful if that was Dixon's own view -
he himself was uneasy at the growth of the secularist party inside his
League - but it was certainly the view of his henchmen. As a matter
of Parliamentary tactics they wanted Irish Land Reform - which they
knew to be preoccupying both Gladstone and Bright - out of the way
first; and they also felt that a Ballot Act should be on the statute
book before it came to the election of education authorities. The
view was now urged on Forster that the nation was far from agreed on
first principles and that he was wrong in supposing that the religious

1. BDG Dec. 24, 1870. The Gazette's Editor, Dr. S. Evans, was the author.
difficulty would not be met. It was hinted further that his motive now in hurrying to produce a bill was a desire to advance his own career.

Meanwhile positive alarm was growing amongst Dissenters at the provisions in the League's Bill which concerned existing schools. A free denominational school in a village, it was felt, would be all powerful; a conscience clause was regarded as all but useless - would the Anglicans be willing to hand over their schools to the Roman Catholics, under its protection? - and the only alternative left was secularism. This feeling was particularly strong in Wales, and everywhere this party was reinforced in its view by the obvious indifference, manifested at nearly all of the League's meetings, of the men whose children would be likely to use the new schools to the whole question of religious instruction.¹

On February 8, the Queen's speech announced - as expected - the intention to reform Irish land laws, and promised the early introduction of a bill, already prepared, for the enlargement, on a comprehensive scale, of the means of national education. The League stated that no mere patchwork would be acceptable: at the very least the outline of a system must be adopted: if this were not done, its agitation would continue. The Birmingham Union foresaw a compromise which would please no one: the League, it thought, was too powerful to be overlooked, yet it was known that the Cabinet was out of sympathy with it.²

On the following day the retirement of John Bright from public life was reported: the Radical party was without a leader.

¹ BDP Jan. 31; Feb. 5 and Feb. 7, 1870.
² BDP and BDG Feb. 9, 1870.
Forster was not easy to listen to: he had a disagreeable, semi-patronising air which friends and opponents alike found intolerable in large doses. The House was therefore by no means full when he introduced his education bill for a first reading on the evening of February 17. It differed in details but not in fundamentals from the eventual Education Act of August, 1870. The system of elementary education was henceforth to be dual: the voluntary schools were to be retained and the State, working through elected local bodies, would confine itself to aiding those schools and filling in the gaps of provision left by them; the bill introduced no other changes: fees were retained, and the thorniest questions of all, religious instruction and compulsion, were remitted to each locality for it to decide as it might think fit.

The Education Bill proposed to divide the country into School Districts which would coincide with the municipal boroughs or the civil parishes. The Government would take powers to ascertain the deficiency of school accommodation and give notice of it to the existing agencies (i.e. the denominations). If after twelve months the deficiency were not remedied School Boards would be elected, by the town councils in the boroughs and by the select vestries in the counties, with power to levy a rate to establish and maintain its own schools and to aid any schools. Denominational inspection was to be abolished: all schools in receipt of a government grant would be required to adopt a conscience clause, the benefit of which had to be claimed in writing: on the other hand no school was required to give religious instruction; no restrictions were placed on School Boards as to the nature of the religious instruction, if any, to be given in
schools established by them, except the observance of the conscience clause; Boards could if they wished remit fees on the grounds of poverty and could establish free schools, with the consent of the Education Department, in necessitous areas; they could if they wished make bye laws to compel the attendance of children between the ages of 5 and 12.¹

The immediate reaction to the Bill, in the House, was favourable. Mundella, a member of the League, considered that it contained the germs of a perfect national system: Cowper-Temple, President of the Manchester Union, eulogised its tolerant and comprehensive spirit. Sir John Pakington, the official spokesman for the Conservative Opposition, welcomed the Bill, whilst regretting that in some directions it did not go far enough: he urged, for example, the creation of a Ministry of Education. Dixon welcomed it. He expressed gratitude to his friend Forster for having introduced a measure that evening which he felt persuaded 'would give satisfaction to the country and which fully redeemed the promise on the subject of education which was contained in the speech from the throne'. He was to be unjustly twitted for these words during the next few weeks by critics who overlooked the formality of a First Reading in the Commons and the exception which he took to the Bill in the rest of his speech. He attacked the period of grace, as a waste of time: he urged the separation of religious and secular instruction - no other satisfactory conscience clause could be devised: he attacked permissive compulsion and the retention of fees. He too, like Sir John, wanted a Minister of Education which should be a full-time job.

¹ BDP Feb. 18, 1870.
As Dixon left the House that evening, with a group of friends, jubilant, to attend a League meeting to discuss the Bill, few can have anticipated the coming storm. Only Lord Robert Montague had sounded a sour note: for him, the Bill was totally unnecessary - there was no educational destitution.¹

Reaction outside the House was far more mixed. In Birmingham, the Conservatives thought but little of the Bill. The Gazette compared it to the Irish Land Bill, which was 'manifestly the work of a keen, subtle and intense, if somewhat restricted, mind'. But the Education Bill revealed that its author had a good heart and a conscientious desire to act for the benefit of the country, but that he was also destitute of any real grasp of the subject or of anything approaching to genius. Forster was painstaking: his Bill was dry, prosaic, wanting in breadth and originality; every proposal was an old familiar friend. Its main features fell in with the scheme of the Union: it went therefore in the direction the Conservatives would wish, but they were not satisfied with it.

This summarised the views of many educationists, such as Gover, who were not committed either to League or Union: who were anxious for rating, and so welcomed the Bill, but also for compulsion and some other body but the Town Council as the local education authority, and for whom therefore the Bill did not go far enough.

The Conservatives could not understand Dixon's satisfaction. Forster, they claimed, was diametrically opposed to the League; Dixon wanted to place ultimate responsibility for education on the State: Forster declared that it was the duty and the privilege of the

¹ Times Feb. 18; BDP Feb. 19; BUP Feb. 19, 1870.
parent. Rating and a mode of compulsion manifestly destined to be inoperative were the two sole points in which the Bill approached the measure of the League. Dixon had come to grief: Forster's Bill was not even a compromise.¹

The League's immediate comment was restrained. It admitted that its opponents were jubilant - 'prepared to welcome any Bill, however faulty, which deals a blow at the Heathen party'. Nothing much had ever been expected from Forster: but so far as the League was concerned, the Bill might pass, provided that one or two essential amendments could be made in Committee. The greatest defect of the Bill was the remission of the religious question to the local authorities: over most of England this placed the Dissenter in the hands of the clergy; this provision the League would fight, but with that exception the Bill could be accepted as a great advance on anything any Ministry had formerly advanced.²

Plainly, both sides were surprised and puzzled by Forster's Bill: both had expected something quite different. The League's Executive Committee in Birmingham might tell Bunce to put the best face on it that he could, in the Post, but in reality they knew that Forster had dished them. On the 18th the Committee met, and within two or three hours a circular was on its way to every branch of the League, requesting views on the Bill, and, to settle any doubts in recipients' minds, setting out the Executive's objections at length. The only point the League had gained so far was that local education authorities were to be established and to have rating powers. Everything else was still to be fought for. Dale stated permissive

¹. ABC Feb. 19, 1870.
². EDP Feb. 19, 1870.
compulsion meant that no compulsion could be adopted in the very areas
which were not deficient of school accommodation; permissive sec­
tarianism meant that religion would be dragged through every school
board election; apart from these major defects there was the even
more fundamental one that the Bill was class legislation: it would
perpetuate class differences and the eleemosynary conception of
elementary education.¹

The Bill was reprinted in full in the Post on February 21, ,
and a stormy League meeting on the 23rd, addressed by Crosskey, who
then took the lead for the first time, called on the Council for
strong action. On the following day the reactions of most branches
were known; that of London was typical: three vital amendments were
essential before the Bill could be accepted even as a temporary
settlement, universal school boards, direct compulsion and separate
religious instruction.

The Executive Committee met in Birmingham on February 24th.
Joseph Chamberlain was in the chair: 'George Dixon was also present'.
Its first decision was to drop its own bill, and seek to amend that of
the Government. The wisdom of this move is debatable. Forster's
bill put the League's opponents in such a position of strength that all
concession could well come from their side and they were therefore
able to appear reasonable: the League was bound to appear demanding,
intractable and hard to placate. But there was on the other hand a
real danger that the Government bill would be passed as it stood: it
was exactly such a measure as the Conservative Party might itself have
enacted, if it had ever dared. The League foresaw accurately that
the Opposition would vote with the Government.

¹ League circular dated Feb. 18, 1870 (BR).
The meeting then formulated the amendments for which the League would fight. It must be noted, however, that they are concerned mainly though not exclusively with sectarian and social aspects of the contest, perhaps naturally, in the shock of the Dissenters' realisation that they had to fight again over ground which they thought had been won: yet it is a pity that there was no mention at this point of the most interesting features of the League's own bills, the Ministry, a national plan of teacher training, an educational ladder from the primary school to the University.

The Government Bill provided that Local Education Authorities - School Boards - could come into existence only in areas where there was a deficiency of school accommodation: in the very districts, therefore, where there were enough school places there could be no means of compelling children to fill them; this illogicality was not, in fact, remedied until the passage of the Elementary Education Act of 1876. The League wanted School Boards everywhere, although for wider reasons than that of compelling school attendance. Moreover, it wanted them immediately; the Bill gave the denominations a year's grace and provided for two inquiries: as much as three years, or half a school generation, could thus be wasted, and to no purpose, for the denominations were not likely, according to the League, to do in one year, or in three, what they had failed to do so far. The League want further, invoking principle rather than expediency, and claimed that it was against the national interest to allow any period of grace and any consequent extension of the denominational system, which would proportionately hinder the establishment of a national system.

Forster's Bill, in its first form, was particularly acceptable
to the Conservatives because it proposed that school boards, other than in municipal boroughs, should be elected by select vestries. These were restricted bodies, chiefly self elected, especially obnoxious to Non-conformists as they consisted usually of persons open to landlord and clerical influence. Unless the Government was prepared to violate the fundamental principle of no taxation without representation, school boards, in rural areas, would have to be elected directly by the ratepayers, and, because of the social influence and power of squire and parson, the League amendment further required that election should be by ballot.¹ In Boroughs, the Government Bill provided that school boards should be nominated by Town Councils, and to this, since the latter were popularly elected, the League had no objection. Dixon, in fact, particularly urged that Town Councils should be entrusted with education.²

On compulsion, the Government Bill provided that where boards existed they might adopt bye-laws to compel school attendance. The League amendments required universal school boards, immediately elected, with an obligation on them to compel attendance. To leave the decision to localities would lead to inequalities: in many districts school boards would be hostile, ignorant, or interested, and would not allow the school to compete with the labour market; an unfair burden would be placed on more public-spirited boards; the League insisted that the decision should be made by Parliament; it

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1. The Ballot Act (35 and 36 Vict. c.33) was not passed until 1872. It was the work of Forster: all school board elections after that date were conducted in accordance with its provisions.
2. In the House of Commons, July 19, 1870.
was Parliament's duty to legislate, and the school boards' duty to administer. As an instance of the comparative failure of permissive legislation the League cited the Free Libraries Act, which had been in operation for thirty years, and had still not been adopted by several of the largest towns.

Forster's Bill retained fees. He himself had been thought, if only because of his advocacy of Bruce's Bill, to favour free schools: now it was supposed that the Cabinet had over-ruled him wrongly, for he had had a change of heart. The League's amendment would have abolished all fees.

But the most important amendments, in the League's view, were those which concerned religious instruction. The Government Bill would permit School Boards to decide what religious instruction (if any, for secular schools would henceforth be admissible to grant) should be given in their own schools, and to aid all denominational schools in their areas.¹ All schools in receipt of Government grant would have to adopt a conscience clause allowing parents to withdraw children from religious instruction, upon giving notice to do so, in writing. To all of this the League took exception. To remit the religious question to localities meant that the election of School Boards would turn upon theological or ecclesiastical questions; the sects would contend to gain control over Boards, and in the towns it might be possible for a local education authority to be Anglican one year, Non-conformist in another, Roman Catholic or unsectarian in another; the religion taught in board schools might change from year to year or even disappear. In the denominational schools the religious

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¹ That is, they could aid all schools, or none, but not some.
teaching would be that of the founders. But Boards which chose to aid them would have no powers of supervision or inspection over the religious or any other teaching in them. Rate-aid to denominational schools the League saw as a new scheme of endowment, of concurrent endowment admittedly, but with the Anglican Church receiving the lion’s share. In country districts it was not even concurrent endowment, because there was only one school in the parish. In these areas schools would be handed over to one denomination, the Established Church, and the School Boards could make grants equal to the whole of their expenses. Dissenters would be obliged to pay for the maintenance of the Church School: they could be forced to send their children to it, and to submit them to religious teaching, unless they contracted out in writing. (It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the conscience clause was expressly framed thus to take advantage of both the apathy and the illiteracy of the labouring poor). The Dissenters found it particularly galling that they were required thus to ask for exemption from religious instruction. The Government laid the onus on them: they had to take the initiative, to assert rights and expose themselves to probable penalties: the Non-conformist was forced to appear 'the odd man out'. Dissenters firmly believed that they had equal rights with Anglicans, that the days when they were merely tolerated were over, and that all men were now equally established in the eyes of the law: yet this new Bill would compel them to ask favours once more. All children, it was contended, had equal rights in all schools in receipt of a government grant: none should have to beg the favour of exemption from the religious teaching of the Established Church; the League proposed therefore a time-table
conscience clause, with religious instruction entirely separate from
the secular, and with children at liberty to attend it or not, as
their parents directed them.  

At the same meeting, on February 24, 1870, the League's
Executive Committee decided to ask Gladstone to receive a deputation
from them and was in communication with the Prime Minister on February
26. Meanwhile Adams was, as ordered, passing precise instructions to
the League's Branches. A general alarm was sounded: the Government
and the Conservatives could and would pass the Bill as it stood, and
its defects, men were warned, were not apparent at first reading.
(The President of the League was thus let down lightly) Branches
were required to send delegates to the deputation to the Prime Minister;
to organise a door-to-door canvass for signatures to the League's
petition (Adams had the forms all printed ready to accompany his
instructions); to hold public meetings immediately (the Executive
Committee would send a speaker if it were the first meeting of a branch);
to consult with the Non-conformist ministers in their districts;
finally - and the first rumble of the big artillery is now heard - to
bring pressure on their Members of Parliament, and to warn them of the
probable political consequences of the treatment of the Non-conformists.  

The great activity in Ann Street did not escape the amused
observation of the League's opponents in Birmingham. A parody of the
proceedings at the Feb. 24th Committee meeting appeared in the press:
although caricature, it throws light on the temperament and capabilities
of the leading personalities.

1. League circular dated February 25, 1870 (ERL) and also League
   Monthly Papers, March, 1870.
2. League circular Feb. 25, 1870 (ERL).
'Joseph Chamberlain (takes the chair): Well, gentlemen, here's this precious mess of the government. My opinion is that Forster has regularly sold us. George Dixon: That's a strong way of putting it - a little too strong I am inclined to think. The matter stands in this way - Forster is not merely acting in his individual capacity but as the representative of his colleagues in Her Majesty's Government; and so, being obliged to consider what it is that they might have some probability of being enabled to carry, he is necessarily compelled to resort to a kind of what might be described as - Jaffray (briskly): compromise. George Dixon (reflectively): Well, not so much compromise as accommodating his plans partly to both sides and partly to neither'. And so on, until the Chairman can stand it no longer: 'Joseph Chamberlain: Good, that's settled. Mr. Adams, please enter it upon our minutes and order an agitation at once'.¹ The more they reflected on the Bill the more furious the Dissenters became: their anger was bitter since the attack came from their own political allies, the Whigs within the Liberal and, as they saw it, from a turncoat 'Radical ex-Dissenter'.² Some blamed Gladstone for having 'dished the Dissenters': 'as if to compensate the Anglican

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¹ Birmingham Town Crier, March, 1870.
² Forster had been expelled from the Society of Friends for marrying outside that sect.
'Church for the loss of prestige she had sustained by Irish Dis­
establishment, he did his best to hand over to her the elementary
education of England'. Others, including Chamberlain, put the blame
on Forster: 'If you see Mr. Forster you may safely tell him that he
has succeeded in raising the whole of the Dissenters against him, and
if he thinks little of our powers we will teach him his mistake'.
Crosskey, Dale, Dawson, Vince called a private meeting of Non-conformist
ministers and laymen to consider what action should be taken. A
public meeting, to which representative Dissenters from the rest of
the country were to be invited, was arranged for March 2, to be held
in Carr's Lane Chapel. It was decided to form an organisation charged
with the specific task of watching Non-conformist interests, and of
doing battle for them, in relation to the Government's education policy,
both towards elementary and secondary schools. Dale was the leading
spirit in thus forming the Central Non-Conformist Committee; prior to
the publication of Forster's Bill the questions at issue were mainly
educational, and he was content to leave them to the League; now
sectarian interests were so involved that he felt reluctant to leave
them entirely to be urged or protected by an organisation which
included every diversity of Protestant creed and agnosticism. He and
Crosskey were the joint honorary secretaries: needing a paid secretary
they stepped round to the shop of a Birmingham draper and requested the
owner, Francis Schnadhorst, to take on the job, thus launching him on
his eventful career.

3. EDP Feb. 26 and March 3, 1870.
A town meeting was held on March 7 to discuss Forster's Bill. The Town Hall was packed and the meeting after much oratory approved all the League's proposed amendments. No Tory ventured to be present: as the Gazette leader expressed it, sensible men declined 'to walk down thieves'alley after dark'. The opposition, in fact, was jubilant, even cocky. It had now adopted Forster's Bill, and was taunting the League with the failure of its campaign over the winter. In Birmingham, it considered the Bill would be inoperative, for no destitute districts would be found: if any were, before a year elapsed some voluntary body would step in and erect a school; in Birmingham there would be no compulsion, no secularism, no local board. In the last resort, if one district of the town did remain without sufficient schools, it was absurd to suppose, thought the Union, that the whole apparatus of Board, Board School, police marching children to school, would be allowed to operate, while in the next street children were free to go or stop at home as they wished. In their exhilaration the Conservatives overlooked where their argument led them. They had been afraid - and the Irish Church Act was always in their minds - that Forster, in their own words, 'would knock down the educational pillar of the Church'; and now they rejoiced at his 'confirming it, and making it impregnable'.

The ecclesiastical issue dominated the stormy Town Meeting. Dixon was absent, and, quite unrestrained, Chamberlain and R. W. Dale both made scathing attacks on the Church which, in their view, cared little how good or bad education was so long as it had control of it.

1. BDG March 9, 1870.
2. BDG Feb. 21 and March 7, 1870.
There was some lip-service to the Government: Chamberlain was not yet ready for a break - but he threatened, if the bill became law as it stood, a campaign such as the country had never yet seen, the result of which would be the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church. Dale spoke with bitter contempt of the sanctimonious tone of the clergy and the Conservative party, who were saying that even Gladstone could not be expected to legislate in the exclusive interests of the Non-conformists; Dale denied that they had asked for this: there had been little enough legislation devoted to the Dissenters, and that little scarcely to their liking. 'What we ask for is education and the best possible education at any cost for every child in England. But not even at the bidding of a Liberal Minister will we consent to any proposal which under cover of an educational measure empowers one religious denomination to levy a rate for teaching its creed and maintaining its worship. On this point compromise, concession, is impossible. Our decision is irrevocable ... we are determined that England shall not again be cursed with the bitterness and strife from which we hoped we had for ever escaped by the abolition of the Church Rate'.

Before the publication of Forster's Bill the Dissenters were, except possibly in Wales, ready to accept the necessity of rate-aiding denominational schools, if those schools were in turn ready to accept a time-table conscience clause and a measure of supervision by a popularly elected education authority: they were ready, in January 1870, for what in fact did eventually come about in 1902. By March, when the cry of Church Rates had been raised again, with all its

1. EDP March 8, 1870.
emotional overtones, the climate had changed completely, and the three decades of resistance to rate-aid are the measure of Forster's clumsiness in presenting a Bill the effect of which would have been, over most of the country, to have given rating powers virtually to the Church itself.
Gladstone had little interest in the question of public education, and no conception of the depth of feeling which it aroused in others. With one important exception he acquiesced rather than led during the preparation and passage of Forster's Bill. Throughout the life of the Administration, he was personally immersed in other matters, especially those of Ireland: from his perfunctory approval of Forster's Memorandum in November 1869 to the most erratic dissolution of the century in January 1874 he acted with an Olympic indifference to his opponents which was not the least cause of their rage and fury. Only once was he roused, when, at the end of the debates on Forster's Bill, he turned all his guns on to the unfortunate Miall, the leader of the Non-conformist section of his party. But he was far closer to the League in thought than either he or they realised. Garvin gives the general estimate of Gladstone when he states: 'On this issue the Prime Minister's mind was the negation of Non-conformity. No man had less appetite for unsectarian Board Schools'. ¹ He was led to a conclusion which he either could not or would not impose on the rest of the Cabinet. He had early shown himself much concerned for the integrity of religious instruction: 'I am not friendly to the idea of constraining by law either the total or the partial suppression of conscientious differences in religion, with a view to fusion of different sects whether in Church or school'. ² He had always urged the Church of England to adopt a conscience clause ³ - the first step, logically,

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¹ Garvin I, p. 106.
³ Ibid, pp. 299 - 300.
to a secular system. Writing to Lord de Grey on November 4, 1869, approving generally Forster's Memorandum he asked: 'Why not adopt frankly the principle that the State or the local community should provide the secular teaching, and either leave the option to the rate-payers to go beyond this sine qua non, if they think fit, within the limits of the conscience clause, or else simply leave the parties themselves to find Bible and other religious education from voluntary sources?'¹ This was virtually the 'secular solution', not adopted by the League itself until 1872.

Evidently Gladstone's influence on the Cabinet and Forster on this issue was not dominant. The Cabinet Minister responsible for education in 1869 and 1870, until Forster's elevation, was Earl de Grey, the Lord President of the Council.² As a young man he had flirted with extremist social movements: he had joined the National Public School Association, but his zeal for secularism quickly cooled. His Political Memorandum of 1853 showed that his radicalism was already full of Whig reservations;³ by 1869 he was on the extreme right wing of the Liberal party. In the spring of that year he told the House of Lords that 'it would be unwise on the part of the Government to throw aside or waste any of these means (i.e. the Voluntary Schools, which Earl Russell had just been disparaging) which are now at the disposal of the country'.⁴ Outwardly a staunch Anglican, he was, in

1. Ibid., p. 300.
2. Created Marquess of Ripon in 1872 for his work in settling the Alabama dispute.
3. Maltby, p. 66 et seq.
5. House of Lords, March 8, 1869.
1874, to amaze the political world by his conversion to Roman Catholicism. He was a man of mediocre ability in debate or administration, and implacably opposed the Radicals during the first few years’ working of the 1870 Act. Forster's Bill had been drawn up, in December 1869, in de Grey's house in Carlton Gardens.

The League had asked to see Gladstone, and he agreed to receive a deputation on March 9. Throughout the morning of that day some four hundred members of the League assembled at the Westminster Palace Hotel and in the early afternoon went in procession - 46 members of Parliament, twelve mayors and the delegates from 96 localities, headed by Dixon - to No. 10 Downing Street. Spirits were high, undamped even by the dingy room allotted for the meeting. All had to stand, and every inch of space was occupied: some mounted a side board, and others stood on the wainscotting, elbows on the lintels of doors. There was set aside for the Ministers and speakers a small space enclosed by chintz covered sofas containing a small table with a sofa behind it. After a few moments Gladstone entered, accompanied by de Grey and Forster: he looked careworn and abstracted. He stood at the table, his lieutenants on his right, Dixon on his left. For over an hour he remained thus, listening to the speeches: occasionally he made notes or smiled at some allusion, and once he laughed outright, when Chamberlain hinted that if the Ministry was in any doubt as to the depth of feeling in the country on the education question generally it had but to give the League a little more time. De Grey seemed to consider himself a spectator: Forster stood with military bearing, occasionally consulting his papers; neither spoke, although invited to do so by Gladstone.
Dixon introduced the deputation, spoke of the rapid growth of the League and of the bases of its power, the support of the Non-conformists and of the working classes. He confessed that the League was not unanimous on two important points - free schools and the choice between unsectarianism and secularism - and handed over to Chamberlain.

This was the first occasion that these two men came face to face: it seems to have roused neither premonition in the older man, nor trepidation in the younger. Chamberlain began by amplifying what Dixon had said of the strength of the League - indeed correcting him on one point; he claimed that all important towns were pro-League, as were the trade societies: the League spoke for the non-conformist world, although the latter had a separate organisation, and for the working class. If Gladstone had any doubts of the feeling of the country, let him but give the League a few more months.

This somewhat minatory exordium was followed by a resumé of the League's objections to Forster's bill, and then, after a brief speech by Dilke, Mundella spoke on compulsion. He claimed that it was the experience of all those who had studied the education of other countries that without compulsion nothing like a good education was secured. The State of Massachusetts had a system of permissive compulsion: those districts which took advantage of their powers secured a 90% attendance at school, but elsewhere the figure rose little above 50.

The League had been charged with exaggerating the educational destitution of the country: it was impossible to describe it, let alone exaggerate it. When the report on the condition of the four largest industrial towns ordered by Parliament should be published it would be
found to be 'the most black and appalling page in the history of our country'. England must be compared with other nations that had adopted compulsory education - here Gladstone spoke for the first time to ask which countries - especially the Confederation of North Germany and Switzerland.

The next major contribution was from Charles Vince, speaking on the religious clauses of Forster's bill. The School Board in each district would be a Convocation, but with a reality of power: it would be an ecclesiastical council, with authority to enforce its decrees; there was a certainty of school rate distrains; not only were contests between Non-conformists and the Church to be dreaded, but the differences latent in the Episcopal Church itself would be forced into prominence.

Gladstone, in beginning his reply, recognised Chamberlain's supremacy in the delegation and in the League - 'Mr. Chamberlain, who I may consider as in some sense being your chairman, - the representative of you all' - hinted at his own pre-occupation with other matters, and asked for the League's solution of the religious difficulty. Chamberlain read to him the section of the League's bill which dealt with this: whereupon the Prime Minister retorted that the powers of the Board, to let schoolrooms to sects would introduce into Boards and Councils an element of religious contention; and he would not be satisfied with Chamberlain's fencing that the clause provided that no undue preference should be given to one or more sects: he had no doubt that the object of the clause was to achieve perfect impartiality, but in practice, in administration, considering the few suitable times and
the large number of sects that existed in some districts, the Board might be open to some of the very same evils foreshadowed by Vince. Chamberlain had to admit that there was no answer to this, and Gladstone selected that moment to dismiss the deputation. They had revealed their minds to him; whilst he, except possibly by implication in forcing Chamberlain to admit that the League's solution was incomplete, had revealed nothing.¹

The following day Dixon gave notice of an amendment on the Second Reading of Forster's Bill - an amendment drawn up by the League Members of the Commons; it related only to the religious question, and ran: 'That this House is of the opinion that no measure for the elementary education of the people will afford a satisfactory or permanent settlement, which leaves the question of religious instruction in schools supported by public funds or rates to be determined by local authorities'.

The tactics of this amendment were as clumsy as its wording. Its fundamental ambiguity was immediately pounced upon: like Landseer's lions, and some said like the League itself, it contrived to look all ways. To move an amendment at all on a Second Reading was highly unusual, as the League well knew: to select one issue only, and that the sectarian one, inevitably coloured the charge against them that they were not so much concerned with the education of children as with the relative rights of religious bodies. The Post published a hurried disclaimer, two days later, stressing that the League's other amendments would be brought forward at the Committee stage: but the mischief was done.²

¹. BDP March 10, 1870. The League later published a verbatim report of the proceedings (Birmingham: 1870).
². Times March 18: BDP March 14, 1870.
The Dissenters' rage was growing: Chamberlain typified their mood when he attacked all conscience clauses in the Town Council debate on Forster's bill: they smacked, he said, of toleration and he was no longer in the mood to be tolerated by anybody. Why should Dissenters have to go cap in hand to parson and request as a favour that he should not teach his religion to their children? Conscience clauses were in most cases illusory, and in all degrading. Let Gladstone listen to those who had carried him into power, and allow Dixon's amendment to be carried: if he joined with the Tories to refuse it, then the consequence would be to shatter the Liberal party.

Their language was intemperate, but their case was strong. They had been told that the religious question would not be allowed to stand in the way of a settlement, and now they saw bitterly what that phrase meant. All the sacrifice, of conviction and of pride, was to come from them, and to bolster a system the measure of whose efficiency in Birmingham was the 256 children out of 64000 who were taught in 1869 to read, write and cipher with tolerable accuracy. For it was at this juncture (March 1870) that Fitch's report was published, and the ammunition it provided was not wasted.¹

At a carefully controlled ticket meeting in the Town Hall - for Lloyd never risked again such an experience as he had had the previous summer - the Birmingham Union met and gave its support to Forster's bill. Lloyd presided, Yorke and Charles Evans were the principal speakers. The Union deplored the fact that working men were thronging the League's meeting: they were being misled against their true friends, the landowners and the clergy: and it bitterly

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¹. Times March 18; BDP March 14, 1870.
attacked unsectarianism and secularism.¹

Other meetings were not so decorous. On March 13 Manchester Town Hall had to be cleared by the police after League and Union partisans had come to blows. Against the background of this and similar meetings Dixon moved his amendment in the House. He dwelt on the fact that in many of the endowed schools the religious instruction was unsectarian - he quoted Evans' practice at King Edward's - and as a consequence there was no problem in the field of secondary education: he was at a loss to understand why elementary education could not be treated similarly, and thus enable all men, Anglicans and Dissenters alike, to work together harmoniously to get the children where they should be, in school, and to teach them something when they had got them there. Forster replied, in effect, that remission to localities was the only solution, as each Board would be in touch with local opinion: meanwhile, he regarded Dixon's move as one of hostility towards his measure. The aloof and sardonic voice of Robert Lowe was heard, reproving both men: Dixon could scarcely be thought to oppose the measure, since it was he who at the moment rightly expressed the newly awakened zeal of the nation for education - but why in turn was he arguing over such trivialities and at this time? The Government had not nailed its colours to the mast: 'Let us go into Committee and argue the matter out'.

For three nights the debate continued, the Opposition growing more and more apathetic and contemptuous, and the Government more and more impatient. Gladstone wound it up by asking Dixon to withdraw his motion, since it had served its purpose of airing the

¹. EDG March 15, 1870.
whole question: he did not want the spectacle of the Opposition and
the Government in the same lobby against a minority of his party.
He declared himself ready to re-model the Bill in Committee, and to
devide a 'real' conscience clause. Upon this Dixon asked leave to
withdraw his amendment, but when the Speaker put the formal question
the Conservatives roared out their refusal, and the motion was
negatived without a division. The Times remarked upon the Opposition's
discourtesy, but 'it must be confessed that its patience has been much
tried'.

The League was heartened by the debate: the whole country
was talking about a difficulty which Forster had said did not exist;
it had a fight on its hands, and was careless of how much noise it made.
It had a feeling that Gladstone would move in their direction, and noted
with pleasure the dismay of their opponents at the Prime Minister's
reference to a 'real' - which was universally accepted as meaning a
time-table - conscience clause. The League chose to interpret his
stated wish not to see the Ministry and the Opposition in the same
lobby as a promise that he would not use the Conservatives' acceptance
of the Bill to impose an unjust settlement. The public support of
Lord Russell was welcomed, because of his influence with the Whigs.

The wild tone of the League's next great meeting alienated
many reasonable men, however. It was held in London, at St. James' Hall, on March 25. The young firebrand Dilke was in the chair, and
the speech of the evening was that of John Stuart Mill. It was

2. EDP March 21: BDG March 21, 1870.
3. Times March 25, 1870.
openly declared by him that a secular system was wanted, and the voluntary schools would be allowed to continue only until they had been replaced. He was wildly cheered - as was Fawcett when he said that he would sooner wreck the Bill than have permissive compulsion for a generation - and Dixon was forced to speak in general support of him. Their opponents again made the most of their chance: in their view, the wolf had thrown off the sheep's clothing. Vernon Harcourt tried to come to their rescue by pointing out that the relevant amendments, down in the names of Winterbotham and Dixon, still aimed at a timetable conscience clause in all schools (Clause 7) and unsectarian teaching in Board Schools (Clause 14).

In this period, between the Second Reading and the Committee stage, the Central Non-conformist Committee was increasingly active. All over the country ministers had placed a copy of a petition against the Bill in their chapels - 8,000 people signed in four days, amongst them 1200 Congregationalist ministers, 950 Wesleyan (a sect which was still holding back), 900 Baptist, and 250 Unitarian. This petition was presented in the House by Miall. In April, Dale and Crosskey headed another deputation to Gladstone, to present the Dissenters' case.

Birmingham teachers were also speaking their mind on the controversy. Their meeting was convened by the Birmingham Union and presided over by the Earl of Harrowby. Three questions were submitted to it - how far was the religious difficulty felt by parents, ought the schoolmaster to be the teacher of religious truth within the school, and what would be the effect of a timetable conscience clause. That the

1. Times March 26 and April 12, 1870.
2. BDP March 21 and April 12 and 15, 1870.
schoolmasters answered all these questions in an anti-League sense was a foregone conclusion. Nearly all were products of the denominational colleges, nearly all were employed by the clergy, and were speaking in the presence of their masters. They protested too much, in answering the first question, and proved that the mass of parents were totally indifferent to religion and religious teaching: and there were interesting incidental revelations. Capel, H.M.I. for the area, was present, and spoke of acts of petty tyranny in one-school parishes, which had caused him on occasion to threaten to withhold grant, and of the reluctance of parents to make religious objections; he expressed his opinion also that teaching religion would do the schoolmasters good - and that parsons could not teach.

One of the few men present who might have been expected to take an independent line was one G. B. Davis, Headmaster of the British School in Severn Street. He was in the service of a body which insisted on undenominational teaching, and had had an unusual career. He was one of the first pupil teachers under the 1846 Minute, and, although an Anglican, had been trained at Borough Road. His first post was the headship of an endowed grammar school at Woburn, and subsequently he had been an inspector of schools in the West Indies. At the Union's meeting he tended to obtrude his views. When asked by the Chairman if he would feel his influence impaired if he were forbidden to refer to religious sanctions except at the time devoted to religious training, he replied: 'I should feel it a restriction on my liberty as an Englishman, a Christian, and a schoolmaster (cheers). I should feel it a base and irreligious attempt to prevent me from exercising

that moral influence which I ought to have over the children for their
good'.

This expression of opinion is of interest because Davis became
Clerk to the Birmingham School Board in 1870, and was responsible for
implementing its policy of secularism from 1875 onwards.

Chamberlain wasted few words over the teachers and their
conference: men recruited, trained and employed by the present system
were not the teachers he visualised as working the state schools of
the future; but he did give them a strong hint that if they were so
anxious to do the parson's work, then self respect should make them
aspire to something like the parson's rate of pay.¹

Meanwhile doubts were being expressed about the likelihood
of any education bill becoming law in 1870. Apart from the pressure
of other legislation - the Irish Land Bill still blocked the Commons -
there was such a wealth of amendments - over 100 - to the 80 clauses of
Forster's Bill, that there seemed a danger that it would be talked out.
Most of the amendments stood in the name of Liberals. George Dixon
was to move for universal school boards (Clause 4); a time table
conscience clause, without consequential disabilities, for all schools
receiving government grant (Clause 7); on Clause 14, which related
exclusively to the new rate provided schools, Dixon was associated
with Jacob Bright, of Manchester, Baines, of Leeds, and Candlish, of
Sunderland, in various amendments designed to make these schools
unsectarian; he was to move for free schools, on Clauses 17 and 22;
Mundella, of Sheffield, was to move that the compulsory clauses should
become obligatory; Morrison, of Plymouth, wished to abolish the year
of grace - whereas Cowper-Temple, the Liberal member for Hampshire,

¹. BDP April 25, 28, 30: BDG April 25, 26: ABG April 30, 1870
wished to increase it to 18 months; Hibbert, of Oldham, was to move that vestries only, and not select vestries, should be the electoral bodies in the rural areas, and that Clauses 10 - 11 - 12, which barred the immediate creation of School Boards while various inquiries were conducted, should be deleted. The only notable amendment from the Opposition was that of Sir Massey Lopes, South Devon, who wished to limit the educational rate to 1d. in the £.¹

In the face of this, Gladstone's amendments, when at last they came on May 27, looked like a deliberate insult to the Radicals. He conceded the popular election of school boards in the rural parishes, a time table conscience clause, and the abolition of government inspection of religious instruction. The Radicals regarded the first amendment as trifling - as the Bill stood, there would be no rural school boards to elect - and the second was welcome as far as it went: it was a good clause to impose on the present denominational schools and the Board Schools of the future, but it still left Boards free to give sectarian teaching. It seemed to the Radicals that the Prime Minister had ignored all the agitation in the country, all expression of opinion from the towns, and was determined to carry the Bill in alliance with the Anglicans and Roman Catholics.²

Dale called a meeting of the Central Non-conformist Committee, in the library of his chapel in Carr's Lane, for May 30. It decided that it was now the duty of Non-conformists to oppose the passage of the Bill which not only failed to provide a scheme for educating the people, but had the positive dèmerit of originating a new element of strife, and to work for a purely secular system - i.e. the complete removal of religious instruction from the school curriculum. Two

1. BDG April 19, 1870.
2. BDP May 28, 1870.
amendments designed to effect this were down in the names of two non-
conformist M.P.'s., Candlish and Winterbotham, both members of the
League: these, if adopted, would have forbidden the teacher in rate
aided schools to give any religious instruction beyond a reading from
the Bible, without explanations or comments. All congregations
throughout the country were urged to use every means to bring home
their dissatisfaction to the Government: all petitions, demonstrations,
deputations, were to be repeated: every Liberal M.P. was to be
communicated with.

The Dissenters could only interpret the Government's action
as a challenge; as a reiteration of Forster's intention to make the
elementary school of the future, over most of the country, an appendage
of the Established Church. An amendment designed to make religious
teaching undenominational was expected, and would have silenced most,
if not all, of the opposition. When it did not come, they strongly
suspected that someone in the Cabinet - in fact Gladstone himself -
aw the defects of unsectarianism, and might yet be able to persuade
his colleagues that the only way to preserve the integrity of religious
instruction was to remove it from the province of the education
authority and its teachers.¹

This line of thought had several consequences. There was a
renewed personal attack against Forster, which Dale and Chamberlain
sustained for the next decade: Dale began, in his speeches and sermons,
to equate unsectarianism with indifferentism: and the League itself
was thrown into some confusion.

A moderate element within the League was still speaking and

¹. BDP June 4, 1870.
acting as though its aim was an 'agreed syllabus solution' - as the Times urged. Dixon himself was inconsistent. He was personally never convinced of the necessity for excluding religious instruction from the curriculum, but he allowed himself from now on to be swept along on the extremist tide. At the meeting of the Council of the League on June 15 he was still speaking of the exclusion of creeds, catechisms and formularies from the rate aided schools: it was Chamberlain who proclaimed that the League now insisted on the entire separation of religious from secular instruction (and it was Fawcett who made a speech in favour of disestablishment).¹ On June 1st Vernon Harcourt, who was working with the League but was not a member of it, had tabled an amendment in the House designed to secure unsectarian religious teaching. It ran: 'That provision should be made to secure that to all schools deriving assistance from public rates such religious teaching as may be given therein should be undenominational in its character and confined to unsectarian instruction in the Bible' (it called also for compulsion and universal school boards). Cowper-Temple, the President of the National Union, gave notice of his intention to move an amendment to Harcourt's resolution: he invited the House to leave out all the words after 'schools' for the purpose of inserting the words - 'hereafter established by means of local rates, no catechism or religious formulary which is distinctive of any particular denomination shall be taught'. The Union disowned Cowper-Temple's amendment, and the League disowned Harcourt's.²

On June 10, at a meeting in the House of Commons, Dixon and

1. BDP June 15 and 17, 1870.
2. BDP June 1 and 17, 1870.
the other League M.P.s. agreed on an amendment which could be supported by both League and Non-conformist Central Committee. It was tabled in the name of Henry Richard, the son of a dissenting minister and member for Merthyr Tydvil, the town which, back in January, had found the League's official policy too conservative. It ran: 'That without desiring to interfere with the continued receipt of grants by existing schools, subject to an efficient conscience clause, this House is of the opinion that in any national system of elementary education, the religious training should be supplied by voluntary effort and not out of public funds'. A few days before this, in Birmingham, the Executive Committee of the League had announced its intention to raise a special fund of £10,000 (£1,000 of which was already contributed, at the meeting when the decision was taken,) to fight the religious question to an end.1

The Government announced the Parliamentary arrangements for the passage of the Bill on June 13. The Committee stage would begin on June 16, and the House would hold additional morning sittings from June 17. When the Commons assembled on June 16, the Conservatives were solidly united behind the Bill, and the Liberals were divided into several groups. One, whose strength could only be guessed at, would vote with the Ministry and the Opposition. Another group was known to be in favour of Cowper-Temple's amendment, which excluded the teaching of catechisms and formularies, but not the teaching of dogma: yet another - Jacob Bright's party - was taking its stand on the amendment to permit Bible teaching which would not favour any one sect: finally, there was the League.

1. BDP June 4 and 14; BDG June 8, 1870.
The House was full and charged with tension. Proceedings opened with the presentation of petitions, by Baines and Dixon, for and against the Bill - huge bundles of paper, carried with difficulty to the table - and even the officials, it was recorded, looked interested as Gladstone (the occasion was too important for Forster) rose to make a statement. After a few bitter words about the impossi-

bility of constituting a 'new religious code by the authority of Parliament', he announced further Government amendments. He adopted Cowper-Temple's amendment - no catechism or religious formulary distinctive of any one denomination should be taught in rate-aided schools: the tie between local board and voluntary schools would be severed, i.e. the denominational schools were not to be aided from the rates: a time table clause was to apply to all Government aided schools: there would, after a period of grace, be no further building grants: the Privy Council grants to schools were to be increased by 50½, i.e. from one third to one half of their expenses.

The House was completely taken aback: members were flustered and perplexed; the changes amounted to a new Bill and bewilderment was almost complete. Gladstone sat down without a single cheer. Disraeli rose to protest that what was virtually a new Bill could not be introduced in this manner. Cowper-Temple's amendment, he claimed, changed the character of the measure completely: no schoolmaster could

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1. When Harcourt and Cowper-Temple put down their amendments the provision whereby school boards would be enabled to aid all schools in their areas was still in the Bill. Harcourt's restriction on religious teaching was meant to apply to all such schools: that of Cowper-Temple was intended to apply only to schools established by the boards, that is, the denominational schools could receive rate aid without accepting any restriction as to the nature of their religious teaching.
teach Scripture without introducing explanations and inferences; these opinions would not be those of a priest or a minister, but they would be those of a schoolmaster: 'You are contemplating the establishment of a class who must be endowed with great abilities, and who certainly will have to perform most important functions and to exercise great powers, and I want to know in the present state of affairs where these schoolmasters are to be found. You will not entrust the priest or the presbyter with the privilege of expounding the Holy Scriptures to the scholars, but you are inventing and establishing a new sacerdotal class'. He expressed the general bewilderment at the Government's tactics, and was loudly cheered by both sides of the House.  

The League instantly rejected the amendments as unsatisfactory. Cowper-Temple's clause could not be accepted, since it did not prevent sectarian instruction. Gladstone made it clear that it was not intended to do so: he refused Harcourt's amendment, which specifically provided for unsectarian teaching, on the grounds that such a term was incapable of definition; Cowper-Temple's clause, as the League had seen immediately on its introduction, did not prohibit the teaching of sectarian creeds and tenets, but only the teaching of catechisms and formularies which were peculiar to one sect: such catechisms and formularies as were peculiar to more than one sect might, by inference, be taught, and any might be freely used in schools; to cap the argument, the Dissenters claimed that it was possible even to teach Papal Infallibility without reference to any catechism or formulary. The words 'creeds and tenets', as in the League's Bill, would, at one time, have satisfied them: but now the argument had advanced a stage further. Forster reminded them

1. BDP June 17 and 18; ABG June 18; Times June 17, 1870.
of the age of the children they were legislating for: that it was the intentions of the clause to permit the teaching of the simple elements of common Christianity. It was pointed out also, a little cynically, that the badges of sectarianism were removed by Cowper-Temple’s clause, and it was these that created the animosity rather than the dissensions themselves. But all counter argument was in vain: the League was riding too furiously. If ‘common Christianity’ was the object of the clause, then it was extremely badly worded; but Gladstone had rejected such a conception: the whole Conservative Opposition rejected it: and so now did the League.

The League further opposed the increased Government grant to denominational schools. This would theoretically permit such schools to be conducted on the basis that voluntary subscriptions need provide only one-sixth of their annual expenses: in some cases, this element would be considerably less. The proposal would have the effect of strengthening and perpetuating denominationalism. The Times summed up the situation thus: ‘The agitation of the last two or three months has been one continued protest against the spread of denominational education, and the Bill, as amended and re-amended, promises to assist what the voice of the nation rejects.’

Before the House adjourned on the evening of the 16th Dixon and the League M.P.’s. had met and formulated a counter amendment, put down in the name of Henry Richard.

The Birmingham Union was no happier. The Government, in Gladstone’s phrase, ‘had carefully observed the manifestation of opinion on this subject out of doors’. In other words, the Union claimed, he

1. Times (Editorial Comment) June 16, 1870.
2. EDP. June 17, 1870.
had truckled to the agitation of the League, with the result that he
had knocked remorselessly out of the Bill all Forster's safeguards for
the religious character of the education to be given. 'We doubt
whether a parallel to this change of policy is to be found in the later
annals of political treachery'. Cowper-Templerism was to them the
negation of religion. The Union could not understand why the League
was still protesting: Gladstone, in their view, had altered the Bill
fundamentally in the direction of their original measure.1

Richards moved his resolution - in favour of a system of
secular schools, leaving religion to voluntary bodies, and of compulsory
attendance, - on June 20. Forster made it plain that the Government
would not again change the religious clauses, even if such refusal
involved the loss of the Bill. No other measure on the Statute Book
can have been drenched in such floods of oratory as the 1870 Education
Act, and it was June 24 before the House divided on this amendment: it
was defeated by 420 votes to 60. It was plain that the Government
would need Tory votes to get the Bill through comfortably: and the 60,
if they could form a compact group might be able to kill the measure
by adopting delaying tactics. Nine days had been spent on the motion
to go into Committee.2 Through those hot afternoons - a 'morning'
sitting began at 2 p.m. and ended at 7 p.m. - member after member spoke
without contributing a single new idea. When one sat down, half a
dozens contended for the Chairman's eye. Well might Sir John Pakington
causically observe that he would not endanger the Bill even by speaking
at length in its favour.3

1. BDG June 17; ABG June 18, 1870.
2. BDP June 21 and 25, 1870.
3. Times June 22, 1870.
The Government would not do the one thing which would have stilled the clamour: they would not make it plain that no further increase in the number of denominational schools was contemplated, nor that the local education authorities would be unsectarian. The Committee stage dragged on through June and early July. Radical amendments were one by one defeated by a coalition of the Opposition and the Ministerialists; a motion for the compulsory universal creation of school boards was defeated by 303 to 112 on June 27, but the concession that any district might apply to the Privy Council for the immediate election of a Board, without waiting through the period of grace and the subsequent inquiries, was obtained, and it was under this procedure that the earliest boards came into being. Though the mechanism of a time table conscience clause in a one-room school made the League hesitate at the last moment about Clause 7, it was generally agreed that Clause 14—Cowper-Temple's clause—was the great hurdle. The League stood now on Jacob Bright's amendment—that religious instruction should be neither for nor against any particular sect or sects. Gladstone made it plain that if this amendment were carried he would drop the Bill: it was defeated 253—132—the largest minority vote cast: 132 Liberals voted for the amendment, 121 against. The League now regarded the struggle as hopeless. Dixon's amendment for free schools had been defeated two days previously—it had secured only 32 votes: his own philanthropic work in Birmingham had been quoted against him, as an example that a Free Ticket system could work. Only compulsion remained to be decided: and that was a foregone conclusion.¹

The Ministry's front was not quite unbroken: G. O. Trevelyan,

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¹ EDP July 4: Times July 2, 1870.
a junior Minister at the Admiralty, resigned as a protest against the treatment of the Radicals. But Forster's cheerfulness was unbearable. 'Never was a man more self-satisfied. He cannot keep his satisfaction to himself but continually while talking in Committee breaks into a kind of chuckle ... He needs something sobering and saddening to chasten him. His irrepressibility requires to be taken down a peg. He is perpetually hungry to distinguish himself'. There were wry faces when he entered the Cabinet on July 3.

Mundella's amendment - directing, instead of permitting, school boards to make bye-laws to compel the attendance of 'children of such age not less than 5 not more than 13 as may be deemed advisable' was defeated on July 8 by 138 votes. 92 Liberals voted for it, and 230 of the coalition against. A motion, put forward by Candlish and Dixon, that Government grants should be inadmissible for schools established after the passage of the Act was defeated, 190 - 70, on the 12th. Against these two defeats could be set only the adoption, without a division, of the method of cumulative voting in the election of school boards: Fawcett and Winterbotham, both of the League, spoke strongly in favour of it, and the move, designed to give representation to minorities, was in general line with Radical thought.

The famous debate of July 14 was on the question of the use of the ballot. The League wanted a secret ballot to elect School Boards, but was prepared to accept the half-loaf that Forster agreed to, of voting by ballot, not necessarily secret. The Opposition objected

1. G. M. Trevelyan's Life of John Bright, written more than 30 years later, still reflected the bitterness and heat of these days.
2. EDP July 2, 1870.
3. EDP July 9, 12 and 15, 1870.
strenuously to the introduction of the principle of a Ballot Act by
the side gate of a schedule of an Education Act, and continued to say
so throughout the night. Fourteen divisions on the question were taken -
the mechanics of each division took 15 minutes - until, at 4 a.m., a
member moved that 'the gas be extinguished', for it was then broad day­
light; ultimately the Opposition gave way and members went home at
5.30 a.m.1

At the end of the Committee stage, now reached, Forster's
Bill had nearly reached its final form. Local education authorities
would be called into existence in all areas of school deficiency, and
might, if the inhabitants wished, come into existence anywhere; in
boroughs they were to be nominated by Town Councils, partly but not
wholly of their own body, and elsewhere they were to be elected by the
ratepayers by cumulative voting. These authorities - School Boards -
had various powers, all subject to the approval of the Education Depart­
ment. They could make bye-laws to compel attendance: they could
establish free schools in necessitous areas, remit their own fees, and
pay the fees of other (i.e. denominational) schools in respect of poor
children: they could raise loans and issue precepts without limit on
the rating authority, which was bound to honour them. The religious
education which their schools might give - if any - could not include
any catechisms and formularies distinctive of one denomination, and was
subject to a time table conscience clause. Schools already in existence
were in no way under the authority of a school board, but they also had
now to accept the conscience clause as a condition of annual government
grant. There were to be no building grants after March 31, 1871,

1. EDP July 15, 1870.
except to those who had applied before December 31, 1870. The annual
government grant to any school could not exceed its income from other
sources: there was no grant payable in respect of religious instruc-
tion, nor would that subject be inspected by the Education Department.

In the Report Stage in the Commons - July 19 - Forster's
amendment that in boroughs the School Boards should be directly elected
by persons whose names were on the burgess roll, and not by Town
Councils, was carried. Dixon and Mundella spoke against this. The
Third Reading, on July 21, was marked by a bitter scene between Glad­
stone and Miall, a member of the League and the spokesman for the
Dissenters. After Dixon had, with some anger, commented on the way
the Government had courted the Opposition in order to pass its Bill,
and after he had, to the mocking laughter of the House, promised an
amending Bill in the next session, Miall rose and accused Gladstone of
a breach of faith: the Dissenters had been humiliated and the Govern­
ment could no longer count on their support. The Prime Minister was,
for the first and last time on the whole question, moved to an exhibition
of feeling. If the Dissenters had formed any expectations, he said,
they had chosen to delude themselves; if they could no longer reconcile
it with their consciences to support him and his Government, then for
God's sake let them take that support elsewhere.¹

The remaining Parliamentary history of Forster's Bill excited
little attention; after monopolising public interest continuously for
nearly six months, education was replaced by the moves of the French and
Prussian armies to the Rhine: wars in that age had the charm of novelty.

¹. Times July 23; EDP July 23, 1870.
In the Lords one amendment of consequence was made - the League's ballot came out (so much for the all-night sitting): the Commons agreed, and Royal Assent was given by Commission on August 9. The session ended on August 10, and Lords and Commons, for the most part, repaired to the grouse moors.¹

The Birmingham Union exulted in its triumph. Dixon, it was thought, had cut as sorry a figure as his worst enemies could have wished: 'This mighty regenerator of England's educational system found himself shivering in the lobby with a few score of avowed secularists - his League in fragments, its work unaccomplished and its true principles discovered at last ... If Dixon had had less honesty and more brains his success would have been greater: as it is, he was too honest for his moderate abilities to have any chance of success when applied to such a shuffling scheme as that of the so-called "National Education League". The League, it thought, was on its last legs, and men would soon hear no more of it.²

The Union had much to rejoice over: contrary to the general expectation of all parties in January, the Church schools had been re-endowed in perpetuity. The League in effect had wanted Parliament to establish National Schools of such excellence that others would have had to conform to them: the Voluntary Schools would have been absorbed in a national system. Its real complaint was that the Government had wasted the whole mighty wave of educational enthusiasm which its campaign had created: that Forster had frittered away an impulse which

¹ The Lords had also wished to cancel the power given to School Boards to establish free schools in poor districts: the Commons insisted on this clause staying in.

² BDG July 13, 1870.
would have carried the Ministry over any obstacles. The educational
enthusiasm of the League had been interpreted as an attack on the
Church: the League might well have retorted that the one was bound
to involve the other; and certainly its ranks included many who would
scarcely have been displeased if the establishment of a national system
resulted in a weakening of the social influence and prestige of the
Church. It is scarcely conceivable that the Cabinet could have
expected the Dissenters to acquiesce quietly in the permissive
sectarianism of Forster's Bill at a time when Church rates and Irish
Establishment had just been swept away, when Gladstone himself had
already introduced one abortive Bill to abolish University Tests: the
inevitable and sole effect of such a proposal was to force into pre­
dominance, to the exclusion of all else, the sectarian issues latent
in the education question.

The League had failed. Such advances as a time table con­
science clause and the abolition of denominational inspection were
gains which might have been expected from any Liberal Government at
any time. What the League had not achieved was its gradation of
primary and secondary schools, free from the taint of charity and
gladly used by all as a right; what Forster had riveted on the country
instead was, on the one hand the eleemosynary denominational school, and
on the other, as a 'pis aller' if that failed, the penal machinery of
the Board School.

Bitterly the League realised that religious animosities had
prevented the founding of a national system. Yet it still believed that
such a work might be done piecemeal: even while Dixon was fighting the
last skirmishes of the lost battle in Parliament, Chamberlain was
wounding a new call to action.
CHAPTER SIX

The first School Board election in Birmingham

Its enemies forecast its imminent dissolution, yet the League remained in being for another six and a half years. Obviously it could not sustain its agitation at the level it reached in the first six months of 1870, but again and again it used its strength - which had not yet reached its peak - to make education and the allied sectarian question topics of the first political importance. Several themes run throughout these years.

The League's personal feud with Forster continued unabated. The Vice-President was in fact not at all the sort of man given to conciliate his critics. He had blundered into the position of seeming to care more for his enemies than his friends, and went on to prove that a Quaker origin is by no means incompatible with a militant spirit.

Dr. Guiness Rogers, of Birmingham, long after gave his personal reminiscences of 1870: 'There was a plain outspoken Yorkshire bluntness about him which could very easily become extremely offensive. He was indifferent to the courtesies. Vital differences could never have been bridged over by grace of manner, but it is certain that the tone which the Minister adopted made his own task more difficult and infused a needless bitterness into the discussion'. The League was powerful enough, after four years of strife with the Education Department, to thwart Forster's personal ambition in 1874 to succeed Gladstone as leader of the Liberal Party: the breach was only partly healed in 1880 when R. W. Dale recorded that he had spoken for Forster in Bradford:

'Christian charity could go no farther'.

2. Ibid., p. 451.
Indeed, it took six years of Disraeli to re-unite the Liberals after the League's electoral campaign which culminated in 1874. For Chamberlain determined early to bring down Gladstone. On July 16, 1870, he wrote to Dixon: 'I would rather see a Tory ministry in power than a Liberal Government truckling to Tory prejudices'. Lashing out after his defeat in Birmingham four months later he was ready to attack everything, the monarchy included. He and Dale determined to destroy the Liberal Party, which, as they saw it, had been false to the principles on which it was based.

They both bitterly attacked the Church whose sectarian ambitions, whose proselytizing zeal, constituted, in their eyes, the great and sole obstacle to the establishment of a system of schools and the creation of an efficient and honourable teaching profession. The denominational schools were a sham: 'For our enormous expenditure we get in reality nothing in return. A few hundred schoolmasters - choir leaders, presentors and grave-diggers - eke out a miserable living by the aid of the system. A few gentlemen of culture travel about the country, and once a year all the schools in the kingdom are brushed up to receive them, and the scholars are made to look clean and decent'. The Anglicans were urged to do as the Dissenters did, that is, as soon as a Board was established, offer its schools to it, that they might be efficiently conducted. If the Church did not cease to thwart social advance then: 'Henceforward it will not merely be a question of University Tests Bill, nor will it even be a question of the religious endowments in elementary schools; the axe has been laid to the root of the tree, and the great question will be the disestablishment and disendowment of the English Church'.

2. League Papers, Oct. 1875.
The 25th clause of the 1870 Act\(^1\), the implications of which escaped everyone until F. S. Dale, early in 1871, submitted in the Birmingham School Board a resolution to enable it to take over the work of the nearly defunct Education Society, became, in Disraeli's phrase, the symbol of the question, whether the school should be controlled by local government or by the churches. The League was accused in its own day, by Fawcett for instance, of wasting its energy in a miserable dispute over a trifle, energy which it should have spent to secure, instead of, as it came about, to thwart, compulsion.\(^2\) But to the League the clause - exacerbated by the unlimited power of rating given to School Boards - was the key to a position. When opponents - or friends - called it a small matter, the League could reply that 'so were Hampden's twenty shillings'.\(^3\)

Dixon, patently sincere, a modest and moderate mind, came to appear more and more as the nominal chief of a masterful and bitter faction. Session after session he submitted his hopeless Bill for compulsion and universal school boards; each year the debates grew lengthier, until it was fairly admitted that he had converted both

\(^1\) It permitted school boards, at their discretion, to pay the school fees of poor children at any public elementary school of the parents' choice. This power could become a means of rate-aiding denominational schools. The Clause was numbered 23 in the Bill, and on July 1st in Committee in the Commons Clauses 23 to 25 inclusive were agreed to without debate.


friends and opponents to his principle - but not to his machinery. Meanwhile Chamberlain, with greater skill but as yet in a less exalted debating chamber, sought to convert his contemporaries to that point in the League's programme dearest to him - free schools.

All this lay in the future as, in July 1870, Chamberlain determined to save what he could from the wreck of his great hopes. It was obvious that the measure now virtually law embedded his principles - even secularism - but permitted them to be ignored in administration: equally obvious that there was at least one place in the country where these principles would not be ignored: Birmingham School Board should become the model for the rest of the country. From Birmingham the League would send out advice on how to elect a Board and how that Board should organise its schools. Chamberlain and his lieutenants burned now to prove themselves practical administrators and educationists, in order, amongst other things, to add weight to their agitation.

It was fitting that the town which had so distinguished itself in reference to the whole question should be the first to begin to operate the Act. On August 12 Birmingham Town Council announced that it proposed to apply for the election of a School Board, under Section 12 (which obviated all inquiries and waiting periods). A resolution instructing the Town Clerk to this effect was debated on August 16, and carried by 36 - 8, after the defeat of a delaying amendment from the Conservative Councillors. Chamberlain dominated the debate: the League, he said, was certain to have the majority in Birmingham, and the sooner he could get the Act into operation the sooner he could get it amended. He had to be patient while De Grey and Forster finished
their holiday, so Sandford informed him via the Town Clerk: meanwhile, the Education Department ordered the Town Council to carry out yet another survey, and sent an official to Birmingham to work out details of the election. It was not until September 20 that the Council was told that a Board of fifteen members must be elected in the following November.¹

The Birmingham Union had no stomach for the fight. F. S. Dale 'representing a private meeting of a few friends of scriptural education' approached Collings and asked him to call it off: if the Union could have five seats, it would yield the rest to the League, and so avoid an election. Such an arrangement would certainly have been upset by some minority candidate - even if F. S. Dale had already taken the Catholics into account - but in any case the League was in no mood for it. It credited the Union with a desire to make better terms for itself than a contest would give it, and stated bluntly that the difference in principles between them were too great to admit of a compromise. The Birmingham Board, it was intended, should not include a single 'educationist' who had ulterior sectarian aims: on the other hand, there must be several representatives of the working classes, to smooth over the introduction of compulsion, which, coupled with the retention of fees, was going to cause trouble.²

¹ EDP Aug. 13, 17, and Sep. 21, 1870.
² EDP Oct. 8; BWP Oct. 8, 1870; the League pamphlet Cumulative Method of Voting (London: Simpkin Marshall, 1871) p. 12 gives details of F. S. Dale's offer, which were not made public at the time.
In the country parishes and small boroughs round Birmingham, the clergy were trying to prevent the election of a school board at all. The incumbent of Smethwick, for example, convened a meeting in the National School Room 'To consider how the present deficiency may be best supplied so as to avoid the necessity of establishing a School Board under the new Education Act'. Chamberlain attended this meeting, and before it could really get under way moved an amendment calling for the immediate formation of a board, which he caused to be carried by 54 votes to seven. The meeting began to disperse, but upon the protest of its convener, the original resolution was put, and lost by an even larger majority.¹

A vigorous directive to the League's branches on this subject was prepared by Chamberlain. Appearing first in the form of a letter to the Post, it was reprinted as a pamphlet and widely circulated. In it he accused the clergy of setting out to prevent the operation of the Act, over the whole country outside the industrial towns. To do this they had only to show that a Board was unnecessary, and therefore all the members of the League were instructed to inform themselves as to the returns of accommodation that the Department had called for, to verify them, and correct them publicly if necessary. Clause 5 of the Act required that the educational provision should be 'efficient and suitable'. The League advised its members that the first of these requirements would rule out practically every private adventure school, and if any attempt were made to include such schools in the returns the facts bearing on their condition and management should be immediately

¹. BDP Oct. 5 and 15, 1870.
reported. Lord Robert Montague spiked the League's guns on this point, by drawing from Forster a policy statement that 'A dame's school, or a school held in a private house, may supply efficient instruction within the meaning of the Act'; and in fact the early Reports of Birmingham School Board, in calculating the borough's accommodation, solemnly recorded the opening and closing of a number of such institutions.

The second point on which Chamberlain warned his followers was that the word 'suitable' must be construed as having some reference to the religious statistics of a district as well as to the situation of schools. But in every case, and under all circumstances, even where there was acknowledged to be sufficient, efficient and suitable school accommodation, members of the League should still agitate for the formation of a Board under Clause 12. 'In urging the universal establishment of school boards, we are supporting the principles of popular government and local control, we are resisting the extension of a system by which national funds are entrusted to private agencies for distribution, and we are claiming for the representatives of the parents and ratepayers powers without which the education of the poor in this country must always remain inefficient and partial'.

Amidst all the noise, both sides, Union and League, forgot to select their candidates for the contest which was anticipated in November. The formal precept on the Mayor to proceed to an election of a school board within 28 days, received from the Education Department

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1. BDP Oct. 21, 1870. Earlier League circulars had given similar instructions and warnings more briefly (League Circulars August 27 and September 7, 1870. B.R.L.)
on November 4, caught both sides unprepared. The League looked forward to the election with relish, as men are apt to look forward to contests they are certain to win. The excitement, it thought, would be healthy: popular debate informs the public mind: men get to know one another, prejudices are cleared away, and whichever side wins or loses neither feels any the worse to the other 'for having had a manly contest on questions of principle'.

League and Liberal Party were, in Birmingham, synonymous - or so Chamberlain wished it to appear; accordingly it was the General Committee of the Birmingham Liberal Association - the Four Hundred - which met in the Town Hall on November 7, to nominate candidates. The meeting was a private one, no reporters were present, and only a short account of it appeared in the press. Rumour, and later events, indicated that it was against some opposition and ill-feeling that Chamberlain finally got his way. The Committee nominated fifteen candidates - i.e. one for each seat on the Board, and chose the names by election from 38 submitted at the meeting. The published list, which was not in alphabetical order, placed Chamberlain's name first, and Dixon's second. The remaining thirteen were all men of the League - Collings, R. W. Dale, Vince, Dawson, Wright, Croskey and the lesser known George Baker, a manufacturer, Henry Holland, a Wesleyan Minister, William Radford, a clerk, William Middlemore, Chairman of the Central Non-conformist Committee, James Cooper, a manufacturer, G. B. Lloyd, of the banking family, brother of S. S. Lloyd, and Mayor of the Borough, and finally Archdeacon Sandford, Rector of Alvechurch. He and Dixon were the only members of the Church of England in the list, which did

1. EDP Nov. 5, 1870.
not contain one single member of the 'labouring classes'.

Birmingham, as other places, then had an organisation which sought to place 'Labour' candidates in the Town Council and in Parliament. This organisation, the Labour Representation League, now met in some indignation, and reminded the Education League of its earlier professions as to the necessity of having working men - in the social and political sense - on the School Board. Chamberlain and Collings attended their meeting, and attempted to talk them round by telling them that their procedure had been faulty - they had not sent a deputation to the Four Hundred - and by appealing to their loyalty: unity was essential to defeat the opposition. The Labour League complained in return, with some bitterness, that the onus of dividing the Liberal Party was always put on the working man. At a late hour the meeting adjourned to a following night. Collings attended the second meeting alone, and heard its Chairman, one Lampard, give the League advice it would have done well to heed. The League, said Lampard, was making a cardinal error in running fifteen candidates. Parliamentary and local Government elections showed that one third of the electorate was opposed to the Liberal Association. The result, therefore, on the showing of the last election, would be that ten Liberals and five of the opposition would be seated. But this election was unique: not only was there the method of cumulative voting, unpredictable in its operation, but religious factors would operate. Neither the Wesleyans nor the Roman Catholics (who, in national politics, were with the Liberals) would vote for the Fifteen. By running so many candidates the League would

1. BDP Nov. 8: BDG Nov. 9, 1870.
dissipate its strength and fail to carry its due ten; in fact, it
would hand over Birmingham to a Church of England School Board.
The Labour League could be no party to such a policy, would nominate
three candidates of its own, and 'plump' for them. Collings had
attempted to interrupt this speech several times; when finally they
would listen to him he rejected the contention that the League could
not carry fifteen seats, and told his audience that they were too class­
conscious: the Education Act had been passed for the whole community,
not for the working class alone.

The immediate sequel to this promising speech of Lampard was
anti-climax. On November 14 the committee of the Labour League met
privately and decided not to take any organised part in the election.
It gave no reasons. Two independent working men candidates were
nominated, and subsequently defeated.\(^1\)

The Union accused the League of using the Liberal Association
as a catspaw: but it, too, sought to nominate candidates indirectly,
using the fairly transparent fiction of a 'Committee of friends of
Scripture Education'. Perhaps because of its initial standpoint, the
Union thought that some such cover was necessary. This committee,
which later disclaimed all connection with the Conservative Party, met
on November 8, and selected eight candidates, all Churchmen. Sargant,
the only Liberal, and S. S. Lloyd were joined by three little known
laymen, John Hopkins and Alfred Elkington, both manufacturers, and John
Gough, a licensed victualler (who gave two fine slogans to the 'roughs'
at the election: 'Beer and the Bible', and 'Gin and Jesus'); there
were three clergymen, Dr. W. Wilkinson, the Rector of St. Martins,

\(^1\) BDP Nov. 11 and 14: BDG Nov. 14 and 15, 1870.
The independent candidates, by the closing date for nominations, reduced themselves to five. To the two working men, David Kirkwood and John Raffles, who might be expected to draw votes away from the Fifteen, were added John Nelson (the nominee of the Wesleyans who specifically disowned Holland), and Sebastian Evans, both of whom would, if elected, vote with the Clerical Eight; finally, but certainly not of least importance, if only because he was the only independent to be successful, the Roman Catholic community nominated its Vicar-General, Canon Michael Sullivan.

By contrast, for example, with London, or with Manchester, where there was a maze of independent candidates, Birmingham's first School Board election was primarily, therefore, a contest between two parties. But no other issue but the sectarian was raised between them: and on this issue, by this time, both parties were in a hopelessly illogical position.

The League's unsectarianism now meant merely a Bible reading, without comment or explanation. At the second Annual General Meeting there had been a move to replace the word unsectarian with secular, in the League's 'means'. Unsectarian religious education was impossible to define: the term arrayed against the League both the logical minded, who taunted them with lack of consistency, and the religious: whatever it meant to a religious man, it certainly did not mean reading a chapter of the Bible a day to a class of school children, beginning presumably

1. BDF Nov. 9: BDG Nov. 23, 1870.
at Genesis 1:1. and working steadily through (the Union calculated on the League's behalf that four years would be required). The League knew that such readings were valueless but it had not the courage of its convictions: it knew that any commentary would risk offending some sect, but it would not accept the responsibility and the consequences of forbidding the Bible in schools. To advocate that the Scriptures, as Chamberlain put it, should be 'the only book banished by law from the schools' was to give their opponents too powerful a weapon. Both Dilke and Chamberlain admitted that this was their only motive. At the meeting referred to, on October 25 at the Queen's Hotel in Birmingham, Sir Charles Dilke admitted his own sympathy with secularism but advised its rejection at that moment because of the impending School Board elections. Chamberlain objected to change at that time because, as he said, it would disintegrate the League. 'It is inexpedient to make the change now, but it might be necessary to do so later'—words which his opponents could and did seize upon to sustain a charge of dishonesty. At the meeting Chamberlain had his way, and the Bible was retained, to still sensitive consciences. Throughout the election campaign the League Fifteen fell over themselves to insist that they would not vote to exclude the Bible from the schools. But the teacher was not allowed to give any explanations—to avoid sectarian teaching—and the reading itself was subject to the conscience clause, to protect Roman Catholics and Jews.  

The Union rightly saw the issue as one of 'Bible or no Bible'.

(Lyrics were composed to be sung at the Union's meetings: 'We won't

1. BDP Oct. 10 and 26, Nov. 12 and 16, 1870.)
give up the Bible'). F. S. Dale defined the Union's policy as 'simple and broad Bible teaching' but was not prepared to say what he meant by that. He urged that Scripture teaching need not be sectarian and that the Union, not the League, stood truly for unsectarianism. It had much to live down on this matter. Its original attitude had been that any vital religious teaching had necessarily to be denominational, and as soon as it attempted to define closely its new position it had to agree that there was 'no such thing as absolutely non-sectarian training'. There was no agreement between the sects on all points - there was scarcely full agreement on a single one. It agreed that secularism was the only logical solution in the schools, then recoiled in horror, and in effect said that there was a Common Protestant Christianity which it could not define, 'but let us be reasonable and let us trust the teacher'.

The Birmingham clergy, walking thus warily in a stronghold of Dissenters, were not helped by the speeches of some of their national leaders. Contemporaries did not see Cowper-Temple's clause as the rock on which unsectarian religious teaching could be founded, to bring peace to the schools. Leading Churchmen, as for example Wilberforce, Bishop of Winchester, explained that it was only meant to exclude formularies, but 'a religious schoolmaster might teach everything in any one of the creeds of the Church and not violate a single letter of the Act'. And the Non-conformists did not see why they should have to help to pay his salary to do it - especially when he seemed to be performing his other duties somewhat inefficiently.

1. BDG Nov. 26, 1870.
2. BDP Oct. 13, 1870.
Indeed, the League was not prepared, as F. S. Dale ingenuously urged, to trust the teacher, if only because of the nature of the institutions where most of them got their training. It dismissed as rubbish the contention solemnly advanced by the Union that in the name of academic freedom all teachers must teach whatever is in their minds as regards religion — no matter what the age of the children. It easily forced Dale to admit that the teacher cannot be trusted completely: at some point, with some men, an employing authority would have to tell them to teach to that point, and not beyond it.¹

And so the wrangle went on, in the Press, at innumerable public meetings — ten a night was the average, in November: religion was, as the League had foreseen, dragged through the very market place. Men of sincere religious conviction and of the highest intellect and morality dominated both sides: each faction knew in its heart what the only solution was, for the sake of both religion and education, and each recoiled from it.

The election day itself, November 27, found all parties exhausted, and passed off quietly. The booths were open from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., and many factories opened an hour later that morning. Procedure was very lax. Voting papers — 50,000 of them — had been sent to the ratepayers by post. But duplicates and spares abounded — the Gazette recorded with pious horror having seen a hand cart loaded with them being pushed down New Street to the Liberal Association offices. Voters had to fill in their papers and hand them in at the booths. For the most part they were not required to identify themselves, and there were no

¹ EDP Nov. 23, 1870.
precautions against impersonation. Many voters were illiterate, and relied on the ubiquitous canvassers to fill in their papers for them—and often these gentlemen were none too scrupulous about the voter's own choice of candidates. Accusations of malpractice were freely bandied about—even between the leaders of each side, and, if they were true, probably cancelled each other out. At three o'clock the boxes of papers were handed over to Alderman Prime, the Returning Officer (the Mayor was a candidate) and his tellers began their work.

So difficult did they find it that no result was announced until December 1. But incredible news was leaking out during those days: what had seemed to be a foregone conclusion now seemed to be in doubt, but no one was quite prepared—if we except Mr. Lampard—for the final catastrophe. Canon O'Sullivan headed the poll—the Catholics could easily have put two men on the Board,—and he was followed closely by S. S. Lloyd: the first Liberal was in the seventh place. The whole of the 'Ecclesiastical Eight' were elected, and the Liberal Fifteen became the League Six—Chamberlain (who did little better than scrape home in the thirteenth place), Dixon, Dale, Dawson, Vince and Wright.1

Few 'leaders' can have been more difficult to write than that which appeared in the Post on the morning of December 2. The League had been free with its advice to its branches on the principle of cumulative voting: 'Great care must be taken as to the proper division of the votes, ... in this matter, the Central Office will be at all times willing to render advice and assistance'.2 So it had cautioned the faithful back in August, and now Mecca itself had fallen. It blamed

1. EDP Dec. 2, 1870.
2. League Circular, August 27, 1870. EEL.
everything but its own greed and over-confidence - the minor candidates, the hours of poll, 'fancy franchises' and manipulation of the voting papers - and finally challenged the Eight to try the effect of levying a Church Rate in Birmingham.¹

The Union hailed the result as triumphantly vindicating the Christianity of Birmingham, but spoiled the effect of this by frankly confessing that it was a bit surprised at it. After a long hoot of derision and triumph at the League, it reassured the town that it need not be apprehensive at the victory of the Church: 'Although the Board might use its schools to teach Church doctrines, it will not', and concluded with a solemn Te Deum.²

The simplest analysis of the voting revealed what was never in dispute, that the Liberal Fifteen received a majority of the votes cast, and that a majority of the voters at the election voted for them: approximately 14000 people voted for each of the Fifteen, and about 9000 for each of the Eight. The minority had handled the whole affair with great dexterity. There had been talk about Union modesty in only claiming eight seats, and leaving seven 'for other friends of scriptural education', but the plain fact was that the Union had remembered 1868 and had decided to take a leaf out of the Liberal Association's book: it had a 'vote as you're told' election of its own. It divided the town into eight sectors and via the Churches issued instructions to the electors to give two votes to each of seven candidates, and one to the eighth: the eighth name, of course, being a different one in each sector.

¹. BDP Dec. 2, 1870.
². BDG Dec. 2, 1870.
Not unnaturally, the League took a violent dislike to the principle of cumulative voting: it afterwards claimed that it had deliberately run fifteen candidates not so much because it wanted every seat, but so as to thwart that principle. But it is noteworthy that it never repeated the experiment: eight - on rare occasions nine - candidates were enough for it at all future elections of the Birmingham School Board.
CHAPTER SEVEN

The League Becomes Secular

There was a parallel between the positions of Dixon and Sargant: the latter, a Liberal but at one with the Clericals, was proposed by them as Chairman of the School Board, and he received the six League votes, lest worse befall: then the minority ostentatiously refrained from voting for S. S. Lloyd, who nevertheless became Vice-Chairman. Sargant does not show well during the next three years, although it must be admitted he had much to contend with. An indifferent speaker - yet he wielded a waspish pen - he had no relish for debate, and at times his control over the Board - and the public gallery - was non-existent.

The situation was not without piquancy, and Birmingham settled down to enjoy it. The deliberations of the Board were reported in full, and each meeting was the subject of an editorial article. In these early days it used the Parish Offices (of the Board of Guardians) in Paradise Street, and always played to capacity. The Board Room was likened to the Black Hole of Calcutta: members complained that the air was poisonous, and even the Post had to ask its followers to be less vociferous - and to break fewer benches. When, in August, the Board broke up for its summer holidays, there was general regret, that for a time the town would not enjoy the fortnightly tournament to which it had grown accustomed.

There is little doubt, also, that Chamberlain and R. W. Dale, at least, of the minority, enjoyed the situation to some extent, after the shock had worn off. Both loved a fight, as much, almost, as the
cause, and now they fought a brilliant rearguard action, containing
for as long as possible their adversaries' policy, while contriving
to advance their own. The Eight complained pathetically that they
were made to feel interlopers, as though they had no right to be there:
and were told brusquely that that was precisely the position, that
they were there on sufferance and were due to go at the first opportunity.
F. S. Dale was the ablest of the majority, and its real leader, but he
was far from being a match either for the intellectual force or the
oratory of his namesake; and always the torrential energy and debating
skill of Chamberlain dominated the assembly.

Parliament in its wisdom, said the League, has remitted
certain fundamental questions to us, (instead of making up its own
mind, as we asked): very well, then, School Boards must not rush in
where legislators fear to tread, the public must be informed, let us
air these matters, let us debate. And debate they did: the habit
of sustained utterance was no strange one to any of the Six, and
R. W. Dale in particular thought nothing of addressing the Board for
an hour, for two hours, at a stretch, while Sargant writhed - and
eventually gave in. The majority sought on two occasions to introduce
some kind of guillotine into the Board's standing orders, and each time
failed. S. S. Lloyd gave notice at the meeting on March 22nd, 1871,
that he intended to bring forward a motion to limit all speeches to
15 minutes: at the end of that time a speaker could only continue if
permitted to do so by a two thirds majority. The League gleefully
reduced this procedure to its obvious absurdity, and the inept Lloyd
played into their hands by speaking for 22 minutes, with a clock
staring him in the face, to introduce his motion on April 12. The
debate on it lasted three hours: no other business was transacted, and finally, in despair, Lloyd withdrew his motion. Sargant incautiously tried to speak to it after it was withdrawn, and was brusquely told by Chamberlain that he was out of order.1

If Lloyd, whom no one liked, is excepted, the only personal tension to develop round that table was that between Sargant and Chamberlain. The older man was in the seat which Chamberlain had earmarked for himself, and he could not forbear reminding him of his lack of experience in public affairs. Now, as Sargant was about to explain his own sympathy with Lloyd's motion, Chamberlain, who had been on the Town Council some fifteen months, ruled him out of order on the strength of that body's rules of procedure. Sargant accepted this at the time, but later countered by introducing into the School Board the Town Council's own Standing Order, that any member might propose 'next business', and that this proposal must be voted on without discussion. This Standing Order, after an altercation between the two men, was adopted; Vince immediately gave notice of his intention to introduce a motion to rescind it; and so strong was the feeling outside the Board at this attempt, as it was seen, by the Clericals to gag the ablest and most popular speakers in the town, that again the majority gave way, and a month later allowed the minority to abolish the Standing Order.2

The first cause of all this contention between League and Union was the principle involved in the differing orders of priority for the Board's work which each wished to adopt. It was revealed at the Board's second meeting on December 22, 1870. Hopkins suggested that the first work of the Board was to take over the work of the Birmingham Education

1. BDP April 11 and 13, 1871.
2. BDP June 8 and July 6, 1871.
Society, and pay poor children's fees at existing schools. Dixon differed: the first work of the Board, in his submission, was to survey the town, determine its educational needs, and proceed to supply them. Although he had, with his private fortune, sustained the Voluntary Schools through the Education Society, he would not use public funds for the same end, nor turn a public body, as he put it, into a relief agency for denominational school managers.

The Clericals were persistent. F. S. Dale raised at the next meeting, on January 4, both the questions of compulsion and payment of fees. The League affected amazement at this sudden conversion to two of its own principles. The Birmingham Union had opposed both: compulsion, it had claimed, was needless, unjust, un-English, and impossible. The League recalled the pledge of T. C. Kynnersley that, if asked as a magistrate (he was the Stipendiary) to send men to prison because they did not agree with the League as to the value of book learning, he would refuse: and it now looked, it said, as if his clerical friends were going to give him an opportunity to redeem that pledge.1 Dixon reminded the majority of the work it had to do - so far it had not even appointed a clerk, and the Education Department had already, on December 27, ordered the Board to make a census and prepare a development plan - and the proposal was dropped for a month.

When F. S. Dale, at the beginning of February, formally moved the appointment of a committee to prepare bye-laws to enforce compulsion and pay fees, Chamberlain greeted the proposal with uncompromising hostility, and moved an amendment to supply, by hiring and building, free schools under the Board's control. This was seconded by Dixon, and the debate was continued on February 15, when R. W. Dale made what

1. BDP Jan. 6, 1871.
was called an 'exhaustive' speech and a memorial of protest was presented to the Board from the managers of all the non-conformist day schools. No other business was possible till this question was out of the way. On March 15 Chamberlain’s amendment was defeated 9-5: immediately R. W. Dale rose to propose another: Sargant ruled that he must not speak to it, and Dale merely read his amendment, that a committee be appointed 'to consider whether immediate payment of school fees for destitute children is economical and desirable, and to consider compulsion'. To everyone’s surprise Sargant seconded this himself: the Board divided equally on it, and it was carried by Sargant’s casting vote. The League was jubilant, for, in addition, R. W. Dale managed to get a committee appointed reasonably inclined to his view - two Churchmen, O’Sullivan and three Non-conformists.

This committee reported to the following meeting:

(a) that it was neither economical nor desirable to pay fees until bye-laws were prepared and approved,

(b) that it was not possible to enforce compulsion until additional accommodation was provided by the Board, and

(c) that preparation of the bye-laws was to be begun at once.

F. S. Dale immediately opposed the report. Sargant, a member of the committee, confessed that he did not agree with it, but there was no fight left in him. The first part was carried by his casting vote (one Church member - Gough - was absent), and the second part unanimously. Having achieved so much, Chamberlain and R. W. Dale then refused to serve on the bye-laws committee, and walked out from the meeting. Having successfully forestalled rate aid to the Church
schools under Clause 25, they would not give the appearance of condoning it under Clause 74. ¹

The Committee therefore consisted only of Clericals, Dale, its chairman, Sargant, Lloyd and Wilkinson. It presented its bye-laws at the end of April; they provided for the compulsory attendance at school of all children between the ages of 5 and thirteen who lived within one mile of a public elementary school, with full time exemption at 10 to those who had passed Standard IV and half time exemption at the same age to those who had passed Standard III: the Board would remit or pay the fees of indigent children to a weekly maximum of 4d. for boys, 3d. for girls and 2d. for infants (under 6). Discussion began on May 10. Chamberlain opened it with a lengthy speech in which he said he could see no reason for haste, and that he had only had his copy of the bye-laws five days, and had not had time 'to go into them'. R. W. Dale suggested deferring the whole matter till October. They were out-voted 9 - 6, and the preamble was carried. Dale and Chamberlain then walked out. Dixon was obviously distressed at their intransigence and admitted he did not approve of their course of action. O'Sullivan and Sargant moved a deferment for two weeks.

On May 24 Chamberlain initiated a long discussion to defer all further consideration till November: when defeated, the minority

¹. The school boards derived their power to make bye-laws from Clause 74 of the 1870 Act. Sub-section 5 of this clause enabled them to provide in their bye-laws, if they wished, for the remission or payment of school fees. The boards had therefore two methods of using the rates to assist children to attend denominational schools: under their own bye-laws, if they adopted the power, and, quite independently of their bye-laws, under the 25th Clause.
took no further part in the proceedings, and the bye-laws were passed. The League Six watched with sardonic amusement as O'Sullivan attempted in vain to get permission for Catholic children to absent themselves from school until after religious instruction had been given. (The practical difficulty of working any conscience clause in the prevailing type of one-room school made this a point of some importance.)

The adoption of these bye-laws was a defeat for the League, after a delaying action of six months' duration. It was not one that it was disposed to accept quietly. Dr. Wilkinson, a man of peace, gave his pledge that the bye laws would not be enforced until the Board's own schools were available, but F. S. Dale refused to commit himself. Chamberlain stated bluntly that to enforce them would be to risk a riot, and that his sympathies would be with the rioters. He had no intention of relying on the Board's decision not to apply its bye laws, and decided that the time had come to move to a larger battle ground.¹

The Central Non-Conformist Committee organised on June 6 a protest meeting which began in the Lecture Room of Dale's chapel in Carr's Lane, and was transferred to the chapel itself half way through the proceedings. Dale was in the chair and Chamberlain made the principal speech - a highly inflammatory one. The bye laws of the School Board were, in his opinion, a revival of the principle of Church Rates: the State exceeded its duty when it singled out any sect for support: the agitation against Church Rates had not been confined to words, - let the opposition beware of history repeating itself. He was sceptical as to the existence of a class of working men who desired

¹. EDP Feb - May 1871. League Paper April - June 1871.
their children to attend a denominational school, although he had no doubt that many would send them to secure peace from the attentions of 'the old regiment of curates, beadle, readers and bible women which had been seen at the election'. Moreover, he urged, there was no end to the sects: the new endowments would not stop at the Churches of England and Rome, but every little sect in the town could claim the same privileges; judging by Manchester, which had already begun payments under Clause 25, the annual cost to Birmingham could be £5,000, the equivalent of a ½d. rate, - half of the contemplated eventual rate.

His position was, briefly, that while supporting the parents' right to have whatever religious instruction for his children that he desired, he denied his right to make the rate payer pay for it for him. Dawson put the same point when he said that rates could only be used to provide secular subjects, and that religious instruction should be given voluntarily to those who wanted it, by those who loved it.

The agitation was transferred to the Town Hall. Jesse Collings, at a Town Meeting, moved the resolution to associate the town with the Non-conformists' protest, and to resist the education rate as long as it was used for sectarian schools. Chamberlain tried to keep in the background on that occasion, but the meeting refused to disperse until he had given another fire-eating speech. Two weeks later, on July 10, the Union held a ticket meeting in the Town Hall to support the bye laws; the Dissenters countered by simultaneously holding an open-air meeting: three thousand of them surrounded the Town Hall and listened to speeches from a temporary platform erected where now the memorials of Priestley and Chamberlain stand.

Forster had already told the Non-conformists of Liverpool
that he was tired of deputations; possibly for this reason it was his nominal chief de Grey, now Marquess of Ripon, whom R. W. Dale and his protest party now saw on July 18. Dixon introduced the delegation, and Dale presented his petition, from some fifty dissenting congregations (all those in the town except the Wesleyans) against the Board’s bye-laws, or more specifically, against the power adopted in them to pay fees at denominational schools, and against Clause 25 of the Education Act. Ripon’s answer was curiously inept. The justification of Clause 25, he said, was to provide a parent with choice of schools under a compulsory law, and it was not equitable to enforce compulsion without such choice. Dale had merely to point out that compulsion would, therefore, always remain impracticable outside the industrial towns to reduce him to incoherence.¹

Gladstone asked Dale to let him have a statement summarising the Non-conformists’ objections to Clause 25, and this was published by the League.² It quoted his own stated intention (in the House of Commons on June 16, 1870) to sever altogether the connection between the Boards and the Voluntary Schools: the clause ran therefore counter to the policy of his government; parents were quite indifferent to denominational teaching: they would even, in Dale’s experience, change from a Protestant to a Catholic school to save a penny a week on the fee; the Dissenters objected to the trend the Education Department was taking in administration in urging Boards to use Clause 25 powers,⁵ although these could only benefit the Anglican and Roman Churches, since

¹ BDP July 1871, passim, and Central Non Conformist Committee Occasional Papers No. 1, July 1871.
² League Paper, August, 1871.
⁵ e.g. in the Birmingham area, in the case of the Walsall School Board (BDP Sep. 1, 1871) and of the Wednesbury School Board (Times Sep. 30, 1871)
the Dissenters had stated their intention to hand over their own schools to the School Boards; they objected to the clause because the ratepayers had no representation, as such, on the management of voluntary schools; and finally, they reminded him, the clause was causing a split in the Liberal Party.

Unless the Government gave way over Clause 25, at least, they were prepared to widen that division. Forster-baiting had begun. The minister had always maintained that his policy rather than the League's had the support of the industrial towns, and that he was not afraid of an appeal to the constituencies. If he really had no fears, he picked his ground with extraordinary caution. It was January 1871 before he went to Bradford, and then to a meeting called by himself, and not by the Liberal Association. He did not invite Miall (his fellow-member for the town) to accompany him, and his speech, giving an account of his year's work, was interlarded with references to his membership of the Cabinet, and the honour thus done to the town. His chairman, moving a vote of confidence specially devised beforehand in unusual terms to skate over the thin ice, asked the meeting to thank Forster for 'the full and clear account' of his laboure: his constituents would have none of it and from the body of the hall an amendment was moved, and carried in heavy silence, censuring Forster for the sectarian nature of his Bill and the method he adopted to get it through the House of Commons.

The Post had its own reporter at this meeting, and the League, overjoyed, fired another round in its leaflet war: 'The Appeal to the Constituencies'.

1. A collection of the League's leaflets, which were many and pungent, is preserved in Birmingham Reference Library.
Robert Lowe's Lucifer Budget gave Dixon his chance. The proposed tax on matches was highly unpopular with the Radicals - especially as it was intended to finance a panic re-armament - and he had a rebel party into the same lobby as the Conservatives to throw out the Budget. The Prime Minister was appalled at this 'illegitimate combination' but the League reminded him of his words to Miall: they had been told to take their support elsewhere - and they had. 'We regret to see a Ministry which was once the choice and hope of the people in this humiliating condition; but if we are left to a choice between Mr. Gladstone and good legislation, the selection will have to be made'.

It was Dixon's only tactical success. League policy, as settled at the meeting of the Executive Committee in February 1871, required him to oppose the New Code of the Education Department when it should be laid before Parliament. It was this Code which would implement Gladstone's promise to increase by one half the grants to the voluntary schools. It was published on February 22, and by accident or design placed the League in a cleft stick. Capitation and examination grants were increased, but the latter were made far more difficult to earn. The old Standard I disappeared, the remainder were down graded and a new Standard VI introduced: this called for 'reading with fluency', 'writing a theme or a letter', and 'sums as high as fractions'; the number of attendances that qualified for presentation was raised from 200 to 250, and no attendance could be counted unless it consisted of at least two hours' secular instruction. The League was amused at this last adjective, but could not conceal its admiration of the whole

1. BDP April 29, 1871.
Code which 'in every respect but one, deals well and boldly with elementary education'.

The exception was the increased subsidy which theoretically made it possible for a voluntary school to be conducted without subscriptions, leaving as the only function of the managers 'the patronage of appointing teachers' - a revealing phrase. But the League doubted whether in fact the schools would get as much money as before, and calculated as examples its effects on two Birmingham schools, St. Martin's and Bishop Ryder's. (The choice was not accidental: both incumbents were on the School Board.) These schools, in the previous academic year, had 1,511 pupils on their books; of these, 422 were presented for examination, as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
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<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>204</td>
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<td>II</td>
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<td>V</td>
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<td>VI</td>
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Of the total, 64 failed, but it was not known in which standards: it was however quite obvious that under the New Code - which came into force almost immediately, and which would upset the teachers' current calculations about their pupils - these schools would lose a half of their examination grant, unless and until their standard of work improved.

But the League was convinced that the voluntary schools were an obstacle to be removed: it did not want to improve them and render their continued existence more likely: eventual efficiency, it maintained, lay in their painless extinction. Therefore Dixon moved that
the proposed attendance grant of 6/- be reduced to 4/-. The League's Executive Committee met in Birmingham on March 8, and arranged a joint deputation, with the Central Non-conformist Committee, to Forster.

R. W. Dale, Dixon and Chamberlain saw him on March 11 for 'a lengthened private interview'. But Forster was in a position of unusual strength: two days earlier he had rebuffed a deputation from the National Education Union which had also protested against the New Code - the standard was too high, it had complained, and two hours' secular instruction was too long to go without religious instruction. The State, said Forster, was quite neutral in religion.

When Dixon divided the House he lost by 232 - 66, but large numbers of Liberals abstained. The League printed the Division List, and sent it to all its branches - castigating both those who kept quiet, like Jacob Bright, and those who, like George Melley, a Liberal and a Non-conformist, voted against it.¹

The League then began an agitation for the repeal of the method of cumulative voting. It asked its branches if they knew of any cases where a minority had been put in power through its machinations (Chamberlain had little sense of humour), and Dixon gave notice of a Bill, which came up for a Second Reading on July 12. It had of course no chance of success, nor did Dixon expect it, but he did hope to divide the House. He quoted no other examples of a minority victory but Birmingham², and was at pains, very unconvincingly, to defend the Liberals there from a charge of foolish greed - the Times on the previous

1. BDP March 1871 (passim) and League Circular March 15, 1871 (BRL).
2. There were minority Boards at least at Manchester, Newcastle and Wolverhampton.
day had likened them to the boy in the fable grasping a handful of
dates in the jar; more pertinently, he argued the advantages in
government of two major as opposed to a multiplicity of minor parties,
and urged the House to 'sweep away these philosophical excrescences
and innovations'.

The Radicals as a whole were in favour of some system of
proportional representation, and on this occasion they deserted Dixon:
the Bill was rejected without a division. He was told that he repre­
sented merely a set of discontented agitators in Birmingham: Winter­
botham, with whom the League had fallen out because he had dared to
join the Government, went so far as to declare that cumulative voting
had justified itself in Birmingham. Dixon denied that he had been
pressed by the local Liberals, and maintained that he introduced the
Bill at the request of F. B. Potter and Jacob Bright, members for
Manchester, whose names were on the back of it. He was utterly
unconvincing. Sargant summed up the almost universal sentiment:
'The League, like a fractious child, set about kicking the stone over
which it had wilfully stumbled'.

The League's Parliamentary tactics had been singularly inept,
and its prestige was at a low ebb. It launched, at the end of July,
another attack on Forster, who had given the House some statistics of
the working of his Act. By then, 96 boroughs, with a population of
4½ millions, had begun to operate it: if London were added, 8 millions

1. W. L. Sargant: Essays of a Manufacturer (Birmingham: H. Allen, 1872)
p. 18. Also EDP July 14 and 17: Times July 15: and League Paper
August, 1871.
were under the Act, leaving 12 millions outside it. The League urged men to look at the state of the children behind these statistics. Birmingham, for example, at the time of the new law being introduced 'was ready for immediate action ... and what has been gained? Not a school, not even a scholar, but a new local institution which affords a fortnightly entertainment to the burgesses'.

Whatever Forster's deserts, this was not quite fair to the Birmingham Board or to the League leaders themselves. The real work was being done by a committee of the Board - the Committee of Inquiries - of which Chamberlain was Chairman. A survey of the borough was made and a development plan published early in June, a document of some 50 pages, the first to appear of any Board. But in the first week or two of the Board's existence Dixon and Chamberlain were urging it to build for 5,000 immediately - in obvious localities. The latter claimed in April that but for delays by the Education Department the Board could have been building, and at the end of the month - he and Dixon had been in direct communication with Forster - permission was given to build for 5,000 children immediately: the first concession, the League commented, to be wrested from the Department.

But the minority on the Board could not persuade it to adopt a vigorous policy of hiring temporary buildings, nor could it persuade it to accept a number of schools, Government inspected, which were offered to it, either freely or at a nominal rental. In the campaign of 1870 the Birmingham Union had, like its National counterpart, made

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1. BDP July 31, 1871.
2. BDP April 27, 1871.
much of the point that its policy involved the fullest utilisation of existing resources. Its action therefore in relation to the offer excited much interest. The schools were, of course, those of dissenting congregations, most notably those of Dale, Crosskey (in which Chamberlain had taught) Vince and Dawson, the very schools which Fitch had noted in 1869 as expressly disavowing all sectarian ends. The offer of them, in May 1871, was the result of the policy adopted by the Central Non-conformist Committee in October 1870. Then R. W. Dale had said that the non-conformist congregations should make it clear that they were no longer responsible for the education of the community, but he foresaw that the School Board would want to use their school rooms for a time.¹

He was then thinking of course of a very different Board: in May 1871 it was fully anticipated that the 'Sacerdotal' Board would decline them. The schools were all offered on one condition, that the nature of the religious instruction given in them should not be altered: this consisted of a Bible reading without note or comment.² The majority on the Board referred the matter to its solicitor, for a ruling on its competence under the Act. Sargant went privately to see him, and the advice eventually given was that the Board could not accept schools subject to any conditions, as this would bind its successors. Chamberlain refused to accept this, and succeeded in getting the solicitor to attend a Board meeting, but was unable to shake him.³

¹. BWP Oct. 22, 1870.
². BDP May 25, 1871.
³. BDP June 22 and July 6, 1871.
The matter came up for final disposal at the beginning of November. Wright and Dixon moved that counsel's opinion should be taken. The majority opposed this, and so, in disgust, did Chamberlain and Dale. The Board, in their view, was rejecting the schools on other than legal grounds, and they wished to emphasise that view: it was absurd to waste more public money. The schoolshad cost £10,000 to build, and what man of business, asked Chamberlain, would stop at the first unfavourable legal opinion given when such a sum was involved: and as for binding successors, the managers were offering their schools on any tenure the Board cared to stipulate. The majority, driven into a corner, advanced the view that the Board must have absolute control of schools on which it spent the ratepayers' money. Chamberlain, hardly able to believe his ears, asked them to remember that the next time that Clause 25 came up for discussion.1

He did not have to wait long. At the Board's meeting on November 22, after a six-hour debate, the majority went back on its pledge not to enforce compulsion until a choice of school should exist. Dr. Wilkinson of St. Martin's, and his Churchwarden Gough refused to vote, and the motion was carried 7 - 6: a further day's debate was needed to settle the machinery of compulsion. Chamberlain warned the Board of the effect of this move on the Town Council. A few days later, speaking at Manchester - where the School Board was paying fees to the denominational schools under Clause 25 at the rate of £1500 per year - he announced that Birmingham Town Council would not honour the precept of the School Board: somewhat unnecessarily he added that Birmingham ratepayers would refuse to pay the educational rate.2

1. EDP Nov. 9, 1871.
2. EDP Nov. 23 and 30, 1871.
The first conflict between the Council and the Board in Birmingham was resolved early in 1872. Meanwhile the League had made an important change of policy. At the third Annual General Meeting, held in Birmingham on October 17 and 18, 1871, it showed that it was more uncompromising than ever. George Dixon, in his speech, revealed that there was a movement within the League to dissolve it, because of its gains. He opposed this, saying that the League should continue in being until every district had a School Board, until all denominational schools were publicly managed, until compulsion was universal, and the religious difficulty solved. This was the first occasion on which the League openly said that it would place all elementary education under popularly elected authorities: 'Voluntary schools, hampered by religious or sectarian aims, are not likely to give that quality of education which most enlightened educationists now demand'. Dixon developed his argument from efficiency at some length. The League's duty was to raise the level of basic instruction in the elementary schools, to enable their leavers to take their places in the secondary or science schools, or at any rate to enjoy a life long literacy, instead of sinking back into barbarism and ignorance.

Other speakers - especially Chamberlain and Crosskey - continued the personal attack on Forster, accusing him of bias in the administration of his Act: the Education Department brought pressure to bear, they said, on the Boards in towns to aid the denominational schools, but did nothing to counter the clergy's resistance to the formation of Boards in the rural areas. Both Crosskey and R. W. Dale widened the attack to take in most of the present Liberal party, and called for its disruption: the same theme was developed at the
conference of Non-conformists at Manchester in January 1872, when Chamberlain called upon all Dissenters to abstain from voting at the next election for any candidate who would not pledge himself to amend the 1870 Act.\footnote{Report of Third Annual General Meeting of the League (Birmingham: 1871) and BDP Jan. 26, 1872.}

In a circular issued by the Executive Committee on January 19, 1872 the League amplified the method by which the voluntary schools should be brought under local control. Its new policy required - as did its former - that there should be popularly elected education authorities covering the whole country. Only schools under the control of such authorities would be recognised as public elementary schools: all existing schools which wished to continue to receive government grants would have to be handed over to the local authorities, for their use during the hours of secular instruction, which would be provided by them, but, outside those hours, the buildings would be retained by the denominations with which they were connected. In all schools established by the local authorities periods entirely separate and distinct from the time allotted to ordinary school teaching might be set apart for instruction in religion on weekdays: such instruction was to be given by the denominations at their own cost and by their own teachers.\footnote{League Circular Jan. 19, 1872. This was amplified by a second circular, dated Jan. 22 (HRL).}

The League thus adopted the full secular programme from which it had hitherto, from expediency, shrunk, finally renouncing what it...
now called the 'phantom' of unsectarian religious education. The change had come in the end with startling suddenness. As late as November 20, 1871 Dixon had sent correspondence between himself and Earl Russell to the Times for publication: in it he had expressly assured Russell (his latest recruit) that the League did not favour secularism. Peter Taylor, M.P. for Leicester, had resigned from the League in disgust at this statement: and Dixon's action may well have sparked off the internal conflict which resulted in the League clarifying its mind on this issue - the only one on which it can be accused of muddled thinking.

The new policy seemed to strengthen the League. There was only one resignation from the Executive Committee: the number of its Branches continued to increase (during 1872 from 515 to 450), and the income from subscriptions to the general fund rose from £3,000 to £4,000. The Annual Meeting in 1872 approved the Executive Committee's action with enthusiasm.
Chapter Eight

The Religious Difficulty, And Another Election

At the end of November 1871 Chamberlain had made it plain that if the School Board enforced its bye-laws, to compel attendance at school, with the consequent remission of public funds to denominational school managers, Birmingham Town Council would refuse the Board's precept, and, if the Board attempted to collect its own rate, he would organise wholesale refusals of payment, and thus force distraints.

His speech (at Manchester) was soon followed by refusals by one or two leading Non-conformists in their localities to pay their rates. The first case on record is that of Harvey Adams, a china manufacturer of Stoke-on-Trent, who declined to pay the sum of 4/6d. levied on him by the Overseers of the Poor on the precept of Stoke School Board. In the same month, January 1872, William Warburton, a member of Salford School Board deducted the amount stated to be for education on his rate demand note and paid the balance. The League briefed counsel for both men, but the magistrates were unimpressed and issued distress warrants. A few similar cases followed, and were dealt with in the same way: a distress warrant would be issued, a chair or a table taken from the man's house and sold for the few shillings needed. As persecutions and martyrdoms go, the world's history has seen worse. 1

All eyes were on Birmingham, where the issue would be fought out. On February 6 the Town Council refused to honour the School Board's precept for £4,000, by 42 votes to 12. The Education Act of 1870 had provided for such an eventuality: section 56 gave the School

Board, upon default of the rating authority, power to collect its own rate 'without prejudice to any other remedy'. If the Birmingham Board adopted the first procedure, then the Town Council would organise wholesale refusals - an obvious trap into which the Board was unlikely to fall. It was far more likely to seek some 'other remedy', that is, make an appeal to the courts. If it did this, as was known from the beginning, it could force the Council to collect the rate: but, as the Post broadly hinted, not even the Queen's Bench could then make Birmingham rate-payers pay up quietly. Either way there would be a row, which was just what Chamberlain and his lieutenants wanted.¹

A week later, on the School Board, Chamberlain proposed that the Board should rescind its bye-law to pay fees. The majority was not ready to climb down this far, but the debate did make it clear that it was in no hurry to begin payments to the schools. At the following meeting Wright took up this hint and suggested that a second application should be made to the Council (on which of course he sat): he thought that the precept would go through if it were understood that no fees would be paid in that year. He was seconded by Wilkinson (of the majority) who stated his intention of neither voting for nor against payment of fees in that year. Sargant accepted a suggestion of Dawson and Dixon that deputations of the Board and Council should meet and arrange terms. Some way out of the deadlock had to be found quickly, for the Board had no reserve of funds, and its Banker and Treasurer, G. B. Lloyd, was already declining its cheques.²

¹ BDP Feb. 6 & 7, 1872.
² BDP Feb. 29, 1872.
Both sides selected the more neutral of their members to meet, and reporters were excluded. The result was a victory for the Council. The Board gave an undertaking not to employ any part of the money to pay fees, and the Council announced its intention to honour the precept.  

Almost simultaneously Forster, in the House of Commons, made it plain that the Government would 'modify' Clause 25 in the next session. The League chose to interpret 'modify' as repeal, and concluded that though it might have twelve months' hard work before it, there was a prospect of solid advance as its reward. Nevertheless, its own Bill to repeal Clause 25, introduced by Candlish on April 24 was defeated by the usual combination of Ministerialists with the Conservatives: 115 Liberals voted for repeal.  

The issue did not become acute again locally until January 1875. On the 15th of that month Sargant moved that a precept for £13,500 should be sent to the Town Council: Chamberlain moved, and lost, an amendment that the Board should give a pledge not to use the money to aid denominational schools. In the absence of this pledge, the Council refused the precept: the majority on the Board declined to wait until Forster declared his mind in the Commons, and took up the undoubtedly correct position that the Council had no right whatsoever to impose any conditions on the Board. Deadlock was reached by the end of February: but the Board had a reserve of funds, and was determined this time to have its rights. On the motion of Lloyd the solicitor was instructed to take all necessary steps to obtain payment. The latter's first move was to write to the Town Clerk asking him 'what

1. BDP March 9 and 15, 1872.  
2. BDP March 7 and League Paper April, 1872.
steps the Council proposed to take to avoid litigation'. The Council chose to interpret this as showing a desire on the part of the Board to re-open negotiations, and it appointed a committee to see the School Board. Little tact was shown in its composition: the inclusion of Councillor Jesse Collings (secretary of the League) - who even then was engaged in an acrimonious public correspondence with F. S. Dale - was particularly undiplomatic.

When the Board received this deputation (April 9), Sargant made it immediately clear that he would not negotiate, nor even discuss the matter. Privately, he instructed the Board's solicitor to brief the Attorney-General to apply to the Queen's Bench for a mandamus. On April 25th the Court ordered the Town Council to state the reasons for its action. Having heard them, it decided that it was against the public interest to leave the Board to levy its own rate, and ordered the Council to pay immediately as much of the precept as it could out of any funds which it had at its disposal, and the remainder as soon as possible. The Court thus anticipated the Council's next move, which was to levy a special rate - of 2½d. in the £ - to meet the School Board's precept: the Town Clerk however at last succeeded in getting his advice taken, and the Council with as good a grace as it could muster, began to pay up.

Several other authorities had followed Birmingham's example in refusing the precept - notably Sunderland, Portsmouth, Rochdale and Nottingham - and had been awaiting the Court's decision. The Dissenters' only hope now was that Forster would repeal Clause 25: this hope disappeared in June, when his long-awaited Bill appeared; in it, he proposed merely to transfer the obnoxious powers to another
local authority - the Guardians of the Poor - but then, to crown the League's discomfiture, he intended to make them obligatory. Although it won its battle to make Forster drop this proposal, the League was as far from repeal as ever. Nevertheless, in Birmingham, it was able to ensure that the Board's victory over the Council was an empty one: Chamberlain's threats of wholesale refusals and riots if Messrs. Wilkinson, Burges, and Dale used the rate to aid their own and their friends' schools were still danced before the Board, so that it never dared to put into effect its own bye-laws on compulsion.¹

The town was indeed stultifying itself. The Board's first school - that at Bloomsbury - opened in March; it had accommodation for nearly 1000 children: 30 presented themselves. This event had cast its shadow long before. In April 1872 Hopkins, of the majority, introduced a set of rules to regulate religious instruction in the Board's own schools. Birmingham was the last of the large towns to adopt a scheme: most had followed that of London, which Hopkins now submitted. It provided for a hymn and the Lord's Prayer in morning assembly, and for the Bible to be read and taught daily: Sections 7 and 14 of the 1870 Act (the conscience clause and the 'Cowper-Temple' clause) were to be duly observed, and in addition the Bible teaching was to be such that it would not tend to attach children to any particular denomination.

¹. BDP Jan. 25, Feb. 11, 27 and 28, March 27, April 2, 5, 10, 25, 25, May 6, 9, 21, June 4 and 14; BDG March 27, April 2, 10, May 9 and June 14, 1873. For an account of the passage of the Elementary Education Act of 1873 through Parliament see below, page 211.
The regulations tried, therefore, to achieve an unsectarianism on which all parties, in 1870, had turned their backs — although the League was the last to do so. By now the League’s conversion was complete: R. W. Dale was at one with Archdeacon Denison — and with Gladstone — in believing that if teachers did not seek to attach children to one denomination the only ultimate effect would be to detach them from all denominations. Neutrality in religious teaching was, to Dale, impossible: he could conceive of a type of teaching which would satisfy the proposed regulation, but he believed it would have a fatal effect on the religious life of the country.

The discussion on Hopkins’ motion filled the Board’s meetings from April 10 to June 5, and was the last of the great debates on first principles to take place during the tenure of the Clerical Majority — indeed its only successor was the debate on Free Schools staged by Chamberlain in June 1875. There were some interesting side-lights and revelations. Sargant told the Board — what of course they well knew — that his own children went to a secular school, where religion was never taught (the Proprietary School at Five Ways, which was soon to merge into a newly established Grammar School of King Edward which took over its building). But this, he went on, was perfectly all right in the case of his and other middle-class children: they came under religious influences elsewhere. But the teaching of religion in the elementary schools was a regrettable necessity: there was no other way of getting at that class of children. F. S. Dale admitted that the Church had never reached them, and that the Board Schools were perhaps its last opportunity of doing so.

Chamberlain’s mood was savage. At the beginning of the
debate he proposed an innocent looking amendment: the teaching, he suggested, should not only not seek to 'attach to': it must also not tend to 'detach from'. The majority accepted this, welcoming it as a sign of a more constructive attitude: but to Chamberlain, a Unitarian, the amendment heaped the final impossibility on the head of the teacher. At later meetings he taunted F. S. Dale with 'this washed-out Christianity' and challenged him to produce 'this new Gospel according to St. Luke's'. But as the debate went on, the League was made to realise that Dissent, on this issue, was not solidly behind it even in Birmingham. The advertisement columns of the Post on May 14 carried a notice protesting against the exclusion of the Bible from schools, and calling for unsectarian teaching. It was signed by 400 non-conformist ministers and laymen, whom the Post's leader reluctantly called 'influential'. They were chiefly Independents and Wesleyans: there were a few Quakers, but not a single Unitarian.

The Regulations were of course passed, on June 5. Running through the speeches of the opposition there had been one unanswered question: how all this was going to affect the appointment of teachers. The answer came in quite the most extraordinary episode of the whole controversy. 1

A committee of the Board appointed its first teachers in the following December, and the candidates appeared before the full Board,

1. The debate on the Regulations was reported verbatim in the press April - June 1872 and was published by the League as a pamphlet (Religious Instruction in Board Schools, London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1872).
for final confirmation of their posts, on January 15, 1875. Chamberlain determined to question them on their methods of conducting religious instruction so as not to give denominational teaching. The majority suggested that if the business was to be anything but formal, the press and public should be excluded. Chamberlain objected to this, in the case of the men, although willing to spare the women candidates a public ordeal; by his questions he hoped to make certain points for which he wanted the fullest publicity. When the first candidate entered he went straight to the point: 'Would you think yourself justified in teaching the doctrine of the Trinity?' F. S. Dale interposed to try to save him, but Chamberlain easily forced him to admit that he was a Trinitarian, and that his teaching would tend to detach Unitarian children from their sect: the candidate, Mr. Bell, took final refuge in a policy of Bible reading only. Another, Mr. Hayman, assured the Board that he would explain only those parts of the Bible which were universally received. Chamberlain asked him what these were, and as the answer was a long time in coming reminded him that even such a doctrine that the miracles show the divinity of Our Lord was controverted by some. Hayman agreed, but, he said, 'by a small minority'.

Chamberlain: Would you then disregard small minorities?

Hayman: I should give two opinions.

Chamberlain: Are you qualified to do this? Could you give the Unitarian view of John 1?

The candidate obtained his release by a frank confession of ignorance.

Mr. Cooper, the next man in, told the Board that he had been placed first in the First Class at Battersea College. It did not save
him. When asked how he would conduct a scripture lesson, he said that he would give the 'plain meaning' of the words in the Bible.

O'Sullivan: What would you take to be the plain meaning of the passage 'This is my body' and 'This is my blood'?

Again F. S. Dale interposed, and protested 'on the grounds of public decency'. Mr. Cooper said that he did not expect to be able to answer every disputed question; he would look for guidance in the works of the great divines. Both O'Sullivan and Chamberlain pounced together: what divines? Cooper, by now utterly distraught, replied: 'The great divines of the Church of England'. From then on he took refuge in such statements as 'That is a difficult question' or 'I must have time to consider'. One section of the Board was urging him to answer, the other to remain silent. Members were openly arguing amongst themselves: the gallery was in an uproar, as laughter and cheers greeted the candidates' discomfiture.¹

The 'Scene at the Birmingham School Board' not unnaturally excited a certain amount of sharp criticism. The London Daily Telegraph, although putting the blame basically on the Education Act, suggested that as Birmingham possessed a Bull Ring, it should use it for future interviews of candidates for posts in its schools. Chamberlain felt it necessary to defend himself. In a letter to the Daily News printed on January 18, he explained that his object was to show the inconsistency or insincerity of the professed intention of the Church Party to secure undenominational teaching at the public expense. The teachers ultimately appointed belonged to the Church of England and to various dissenting denominations including Unitarian and, he said,

¹. BDP Jan. 16: League Paper February, 1873.
'it is evident that if they are left free to expound the Bible in their own way, or to give, as one of them expressed it, "the plain meaning" of controverted texts — with or without the assistance of "the great Church of England divines" — the most opposite and irreconcilable views of religious truth will be taught in the Board Schools at the public cost'.

This episode was immediately followed by the re-opening of the Clause 25 dispute which, as has been seen, reached its climax in May. The sands were now running out for the Board, but the Clericals were determined to do everything possible to retain power. The 'committee of friends of scriptural education' of October 1870 had remained in being as the Scriptural Education Union, the heir of the Birmingham Union. Its guiding spirits were F. S. Dale and Sargant, and it opened its electoral campaign as early as June 1875. The Liberal Association announced on July 14: that its General Committee (the Four Hundred) would meet to select its candidates: it also announced that Francis Schnadhorst had been appointed its secretary, to re-form the Association with which he was going to fight the November elections to the Town Council as well as the School Board election. By chance, Union and League announced their candidates simultaneously. The Union put forward the majority on the present Board, less Gough and Hopkins who were unwilling to continue: their places were taken by W. H. Greening and G. Heaton. The Union's 'platform' was to maintain religious instruction in Board Schools 'in conformity with the Act', to pay fees at 'any school', to support the recognition of the present voluntary schools, and to oppose any increase in rates caused by adopting

the policies of the League. The Liberal Association nominated Elizabeth Sturge, the 'Six' on the present Board, and Jesse Collings: their policy was that of the League.¹

Public meetings began at the end of October but general interest was as yet concentrated on John Bright's speech at Bingley Hall on the 22nd², and on the municipal elections. The latter maintained the same balance of parties on the Council: 15 Liberals and one Conservative had gone out, and the same numbers were returned. Of 64 Aldermen and Councillors, 51 were Liberal, 12 were Conservative and one was 'unclassed'. Chamberlain was elected Mayor for the following year.³

The sectarian issue had intruded into these contests to some extent, but once they were settled the town gave itself up to electioneering in real earnest. Both parties worked at full pitch: the borough was covered with a cloud of canvassers and agents, meetings were held by the hundred, placards and handbills were distributed by the thousand. What the jargon of the time called 'mural literature' abounded. The Union made free use of Biblical texts and pictures as placards, displaying them, as the Dissenters noted with severe disapproval, even in the beer and gin shops. Both parties claimed an august supporter. The Union displayed a large picture of Queen Victoria presenting a Bible to a scantily clad dark-skinned gentleman, which merely provoked the inquiry which of the 'Bible Eight' the darkie

¹. BDP June 20, July 14, Sep. 15 and 25, 1875.
². Infra, p.
³. BDP Nov. 5, 4, and 11: BWP Nov. 15, 1875.
portrayed. The League countered by publicising an extract from the 'Journal of Our Life in the Highlands' in which Victoria recorded a visit to a school where children received sectarian instruction separately, each group from its own minister: 'This' she commented 'is truly Christian and ought to be the case everywhere'. This was too much for the Bible Right: the Union organised a squad of men to scrape this poster off the walls as soon as it was put up. 'Forged' pamphlets also abounded. One called upon all the 'Republicans of Birmingham' to plump for the 'Republican Mayor': others urged all the working men to plump for Chamberlain as 'the middle class will leave you in the lurch again'.

The Radical leaders tried to put before the town what, in their view, were the real issues of the election. 'The education controversy demonstrated every relation which the State held, or ought to hold, with regard to its citizens; it involved a consideration of the connection between the secular government and the ecclesiastical authorities, of the raising of taxation and its legitimate expenditure, and of the exercise of compulsory powers over the children and their parents'.

The clergy dwelt much on the godlessness of the Liberals: they would not, it was urged, allow the school-teachers the liberty of explaining God's word to the children, nor allow a parent too poor to pay fees to choose a school where the Bible was taught. The contest, said the Rev. Dr. Burges, in a state of high excitement, is to settle the question 'of whether the Lord God shall reign in the land'. In a further speech in prophetic strain he warned Birmingham that the curse of God would lie on England if the work of the League
were carried out. On Sunday, November 16, the day before the election, most clergymen preached political sermons. At St. George's, the incumbent announced that 'the angels in Heaven were waiting for the decision'. But the clergy made a tactical error in sending out their voting cards on that day: 'From morn till nearly evening of the Lord's Day the unhappy postmen groaned beneath the weight of the Clerical voting cards, delivered, in the name of religion, to a scandalised public'.

Voting day itself was again quiet. Rather more than half the constituency voted, and on the 19th the wits were asking if the Almighty had sent in His resignation. Schnadhorst's arrangements worked perfectly and all eight Liberals were packed together at the top of the poll, above even the Catholic candidate O'Sullivan. An analysis of the voting revealed that the Liberal Association could have carried 11 candidates, who would each have received 26,000 votes: the 8 Tories received some 24,000 each. The latter had repeated the organisation of voting, based on the parish, which had served them well in 1870. Schnadhorst based his plan on the wards, each of which had three candidates allotted to it: electors were told, quite firmly, to give five votes to each of their three, and put all questions as to persons on one side; they had resisted the opposition's fairly obvious tactics of trying to induce large-scale plumping for Chamberlain, which might well have lost the party its tail.

Six of the eight clerical candidates were successful, the six who had sat on the First Board. Miss Sturge and Collings were therefore

1. BDP Nov. 19, 1873
2. BDP and BDG November, 1873.
the only newcomers at the gathering on December 3. O'Sullivan was plainly in a state of high amusement at the neat reversal of roles, and took an early opportunity to remind 'the former minority' of their argument that the Board should work by general agreement: before long he had occasion also to compliment them on a newly-found brevity of speech. F. S. Dale proposed Chamberlain as Chairman, and all voted in favour except Sargant. The new Board then ruthlessly set about reversing the policy of its predecessor. There was no desire, no need, the Post explained airily, for such debates as had diversified the First Board: public opinion was now informed, and the ratepayers had laid down the lines of the Board's policy.

By the end of the year all the decisions had been taken. All capitation grants were withdrawn from the Industrial Schools founded by the Church: new bye-laws were adopted which included power to remit fees, but not to pay them: any outstanding offers from voluntary managers to hand their schools over to the Board were accepted: and, finally, the teachers employed by the Board were forbidden to give any religious instruction whatsoever, or even to hold the usual assembly to begin the day with a hymn and prayer. This rule, slightly modified in 1879 by the introduction of a daily Bible reading 'without note or comment', was in force until 1900.¹

So far as the Board was concerned, the schools were secular; nevertheless, persons or organisations who wished to rent the school-rooms to give religious instruction were invited to put in their applications.

¹. BDP and EDG Dec. 1873.
Under continuous fire from his namesake, R. W. Dale had begun to form the Birmingham Religious Education Society in September 1875. Its purpose was to recruit volunteer teachers, pay all incidental expenses - rent to the Board (9d. per pupil per year) and transport, - organise preparation classes for its teachers, provide them with books, maps, and pictures, and to prepare an 'agreed syllabus' of those truths 'held in common by the churches generally known as evangelical'. In spite of the term 'agreed syllabus' Dale made it clear that the teaching would not be undenominational: the essence of his scheme was that the teacher should be free to speak all that was in his heart.¹

The first opposition came from a Radical and a Quaker. G. B. Lloyd wrote to the Post denouncing the scheme as illegal, since it departed from the principle that Board Schools should not be used for sectarian purposes. (He gave his own view on the solution of the religious difficulty: tell all priests and pastors of every size and colour to get off the School Board and to keep out of the school.)²

Meanwhile the parochial clergy had been meeting and finally expressed their views through F. S. Dale. The scheme was both illegal and impracticable, and they would have nothing to do with it; they well knew the difficulty of recruiting and keeping efficient teachers for their Sunday Schools: but supposing this and the legal difficulty to be overcome, it was scarcely desirable that schools should become centres of the most bitter sectarianism. F. S. Dale could see no other practical way but to use the regular paid teachers, under the

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1. BDP Sep. 16, 1873.
2. BDP Oct. 9, 1873.
authority of the Board.

R. W. Dale dealt first with the legal issue. Any ratepayer had the power to object to the use of the Board's Schools, for any purpose, out of school hours, as defined by the time-table: the courts then had the duty to rule on his objection. But Dale was keeping out of that entanglement; religious instruction could be given within school hours, subject to compliance with the Education Act. His Society planned to enter the schools twice a week, between the hours of 11 and 12 (later changed to 9 and 10). As for the recruiting difficulty, F. S. Dale was too pessimistic: one hundred mature responsible teachers were already available; but if the Christian sects could not seize their opportunity, the fault would lie in them.

He was immediately met with the objection that if his Society worked within the time-table, Section 14 (the Cowper-Temple Clause) would apply to it. He agreed, but that Section excluded only catechisms or formularies. 'It does not exclude, it was never intended to exclude, the characteristic doctrines of particular denominations. Under that clause no teacher, voluntary or official, could use the Racovian Catechism, but it does not prevent the teaching of Unitarian doctrines: it forbids the use of the Church Catechism, but does not forbid the teaching of Baptismal Regeneration'.

The opposition was silenced, if not convinced. But R. W. Dale had his facts and his law right. Forster, in his speech at Liverpool at the end of November, to which further reference will be made, said that, although he disliked the scheme, Birmingham School

Board could try its experiment.¹

It is important to distinguish between the Board’s scheme and Dale’s Society. The latter was an organisation of convenience, of a few dissenting sects, mainly Independents and Baptists. The Wesleyans for the most part held aloof, but they were not of great influence; they had again put forward their own candidate at the School Board Election of 1873, and he had been at the bottom of the poll. The Unitarians, in spite of their influence in the town and on the Board, also took no part: they were not interested in attempting to teach their doctrines to school children. A very few members of the Anglican Church joined the Society and worked with it.

So far as the Board was concerned, however, the Society was only one of what it hoped would be the many applicants to operate its scheme. It was prepared to receive applications from other organisations and individuals. Thus it was open to the incumbent of a parish to undertake either in person or through his curates and other assistants the religious instruction in all the Board Schools in his parish - or rather to such of the children in them as wished to attend his lessons. He would be free to draw up his own syllabus and might teach every distinctive doctrine of his Church, provided that he did not teach any catechism or formulary that the Church alone used.

The Anglican clergy would have nothing to do with it. They refused to join Dale’s Society, and refused to form one of their own. With solitary exceptions they refused to act individually and teach in their 'own' Board Schools. On December 31, 1873 James Eagles, the Vicar of St. Bartholomew's handed over all the National Schools of that parish

¹ BDP Nov. 27, 1873.
to the Board at a nominal rent, provided that he had the use of the
rooms on Sundays and could provide a teacher of the 'plain truths of
the Christian religion' at such times as the Board saw fit. Dr.
Wilkinson, Rector of St. Martin's, and a member of the clerical minority
on the Board (he had noticeably held aloof from his fellow candidates
in the 1873 election) later handed over his Parish School in Park St.
on the same terms. 1

But this did not solve the problem presented by the Board
Schools now rapidly rising under the new Board, each of three depart­
ments providing for a 1000 or more children. This field was almost
entirely left to Dale's Society: one clergyman only, the Vicar of St.
John's, Ladywood, began teaching, at the end of 1875, in one department
of one school. In January 1876, after nearly two years' working of
the scheme, the School Board had ten schools in operation, that is,
thirty departments: the Religious Education Society gave instruction
in fifteen of them, and the Vicar of Ladywood in one more. Attendance
at classes was voluntary, and out of approximately 10,000 children on
the roll of the Schools, 3,252 were in average attendance at them.

Both Dale's Society and the Board's scheme were attacked as
failures. Francis Close, the Dean of Carlisle, led the way in the
Times of January 1876, initiating a campaign to induce Parliament to
make religious instruction compulsory, on the grounds that a small clique
of doctrinaires was robbing the children of Birmingham of their birth­
right. Other observers could not understand why the 'regular paid
teachers' of the Board Schools were not allowed to handle Dale's 'agreed
syllabus'. To them he, and Chamberlain, had a simple answer. The

1. EDP Jan. 1, 1874.
teachers in the Board Schools were chosen solely on the grounds of their fitness to give secular instruction, and the Board had no occasion to inquire into their theology (the three pioneer headmasters who had survived their baiting of three years before must have smiled a little wryly at this): the Board was under no necessity of placing excellent and enthusiastic teachers of arithmetic and English grammar in the dilemma of either seeking other work because they felt unfitted to teach religion, or, as was more likely, of subordinating conscience to interest and consequently giving a dangerous instruction, worse than useless. At the back of the Board's mind, too, was always the knowledge of where these 'regular paid teachers' had, as pupils and students, in all probability received their training: the League always advocated the establishment of municipal unsectarian day training colleges.¹

Dale refused to admit that his Society had failed. He had 150 teachers, and covered half the ground: Non-conformity had never been so presumptuous as to suppose that it would have to do all the work. If the Board's scheme failed, then that failure would lie at the Anglicans' door, but nothing could be deduced from it. If the Anglicans worked side by side with the Dissenters (and the scheme could be enormously advantageous to them, but, as conditions were fair, Dale would not complain at that) and the scheme did not succeed, then failure could be adduced as an argument in the great controversy. He defended the quality of the work done, and here he was on difficult ground. To his surprisingly naïve contention that his teachers were as good as those in the Sunday Schools, even the friendly Times replied that that

¹. Dean Close's letter was published in the Times of Jan. 19, 1876. It evoked a leader on Jan. 21 which was on the whole favourable to the League, or, at least, to a suspension of judgment.
was most probably truer than it would wish.¹

F. S. Dale from the very start maintained that the scheme would fail because of the difficulties of discipline which the voluntary part-time teacher would encounter in the schools, and with which he would lack both the training and the status to deal. Dean Close hinted that the children were handed over to the Board's teachers 'in a fine state of disorder'. At the second annual meeting of the Society in February 1876 the following cautious phrase reveals much: 'The experience of two years had enabled many of them to acquire excellent control over the scholars, and a facility in imparting knowledge they did not at first possess'. It is not impossible that the clergy were thankful that their principles required them not to participate. It was one thing for a parson to step into his small National School, in which his word was law, and hear the children - the sons and daughters of those accustomed to acknowledge his social superiority - repeat their catechism, with the 'regular paid teacher' in deferential attendance: but he might well be chary of entrusting his dignity to the mercies of a roomful of the children of the type which the efforts of the School Attendance Officers were relentlessly sweeping into the schools from the streets in the later 1870's; single-handed, without the aid of any of the customary sanctions, volunteer teachers - occasional visitors - in the conditions that then obtained, had an impossible task.

The staffs of the schools, in their own interests, resolved the situation in the only possible way, by taking over all the work except the actual talk to the children. They marshalled the children

¹ Times, Jan. 21, 1876.
into the classrooms, or more usually, because of the Society's shortage of teachers, into the Hall, and stayed throughout the lesson or service. The Board did not require them to do this, and for the most part they did not want to do it: nevertheless they preferred doing it to having the task of calming the school down afterwards.

Over the years, in the comparatively few schools concerned - for the Society's strength declined rather than grew - the distinction between these hours and the rest of the time - table was obscured: to parents and children they were part of the arrangements of the Board, and attendance on those mornings at 9 o'clock was much the same as on any other.

The Board might later close its eyes to this helping hand given by its servants, but in 1876 the issue was too hot for any of the 'regular paid teachers' to wish to meddle. In that year a Conservative Government was legislating for the elementary education of the people, and the National Society and the Manchester Union, holding up Birmingham as a godless example to the nation, were hopeful that Parliament might give the direct order to the schools which in fact they did not receive until 1944. The Elementary Education Act of 1876 was the climax, or the anti-climax, of the League's battle in Parliament from 1871 onwards.

1. Jenkyn Brown, the son of a dissenting minister who was one of Dale's chief aides on the Central Non-conformist Committee, has left an interesting account of the late working of the system. (A. L. J. Brown: Experience in Birmingham Board Schools. Birmingham: Hudson, 1899)
Chapter Nine

Dixon, and others, in Parliament

It was Dixon's fate, during the first period of his Parliamentary career, from 1868 to 1876, always to be in the minority on any division on an educational issue. Even after he had convinced the House of Commons of the need for compulsion, the honour of introducing a bill to give it effect was denied him: men could forgive him for much, it seemed, but not for his friends.

Immediately on the passage of the Education Act of 1870 Dixon gave notice of his intention to introduce an amending bill in the following session. In the event he contented himself with his amendment to the Revised Code which was debated on March 10 (see above p.178). The year 1871 saw a necessary reaction after the high pitch of national agitation in 1870: the League's branches were mainly concerned with the formation of school boards, and the League's Headquarters were fully occupied in trying to control the Board which it had formed.¹

But at the General Meeting held in Birmingham on October 18 and 19 1871, Dixon showed that the League was as fiery and as uncompromising as at its inception. The League would never relax, he said, until every district had a School Board, until the management of all schools aided by taxation had been placed in the hands of the representatives of the people, until compulsion was universal, and the religious difficulty a thing of the past.²


Dixon was speaking with more vehemence than was his custom: he was opposing a movement within the League to dissolve it 'because of its gains'. Nevertheless, the order in which he stated his objectives was impolitic, and highly unfortunate in its results: he was always to labour under the suspicion that his advocacy of compulsion was only a cover under which he would foist his school boards on an unwilling countryside. And though he might put the religious difficulty at the end of his speech, it was well known that it loomed largest in the eyes of many, if not of most, members of the League, and in fact the only Parliamentary Bill the League introduced in the session of 1872 was the one to repeal Clause 25 (above, p. 190). Dixon himself moved a resolution in March, that the Education Act of 1870 was defective in its provisions and inefficient in its workings. Forster countered with an amendment that there had been insufficient time to judge. The debate was notable only for the promise given by Forster of an amending bill in the session of 1875: he spoke of compulsory local authorities and compulsory attendance as things certain to come, and of some 'modification' of Clause 25. The Opposition's cheers, which had punctuated his speech up to this point, abruptly ceased. Nevertheless, he was sure of his majority - which mostly sat opposite to him, as the Post sourly commented, and Dixon was defeated 323 - 98.¹

In January 1875 the League re-opened its campaign on a national scale. Dixon intended to move in the Commons that 'in order to be acceptable, any Amendment of the Elementary Education Act must provide for the general election of school boards, the general

¹ BDP March 6 and 7, 1872.
compulsory attendance of children at school, and the unconditional repeal of the 25th Clause. Public meetings were held in all industrial towns where this motion was put and carried: Dixon himself made a successful tour of the West Country, where League influence, except in Bristol, was not great. 1

The motion was down for debate in the House on March 7. Early that month, however, Gladstone asked Dixon to postpone it until the Government brought in its own measure: from this the League felt entitled to suppose that the new Bill would be in their direction, and consequently there was no rejoicing at all at the Prime Minister's resignation (after his defeat on the Irish Universities Bill) on March 13. The Post praised his firmness and self-respect, and expected him back in office strengthened: the Birmingham Liberal Association sent him a message of support. Plainly the League supposed Gladstone committed to repeal of the 25th Clause, and in addition the Dissenters still hoped for other legislation from him which they certainly would not get from Disraeli: the Burials Bill, for example, was even then in the Commons. Gladstone was in fact back in office within a few days, but whether strengthened is another matter. 2

A Government Bill was expected after the Easter recess. But, tired of waiting, the League asked Dixon, in early June, to bring in his motion. He was forestalled in the event by five days: Forster introduced a bill to amend the 1870 Education Act on June 17. This bill had been promised in the second week of February as one of the leading measures of the Government: bitterly the League now saw the

1. Times January 17, 1873, and League's Executive Committee Report 1875, p. 5.
2. BDP Feb. 26, March 14 and 17, 1873.
reasons for delay. Even such a master of cheerful cynicism as Forster, it was argued, might well hesitate to introduce such a measure except at the end of a session, when there was little time to organise a national agitation: the Ministry, the Opposition and the House of Lords would pass this bill without debate. It had no provisions for the general establishment of School Boards, nor for effecting compulsion: it was mainly concerned with tidying-up administrative and departmental matters, and the only provision which involved any principle was the proposal to transfer Clause 25 powers from the School Boards to the Boards of Guardians.¹

The League interpreted the Bill as a plain statement that by the present Ministry and in the present Parliament nothing would be done to create the national system it wanted, the essential bases of which were universal school boards and compulsion. The scheme to modify Clause 25 was a familiar project. Not only was it a trick to make it more difficult for Non-conformists to protest, but the transfer was evil in itself, in that it brought needy parents a step nearer to pauperism: on these grounds it had been dismissed as a possible solution by the League's Executive Committee in the previous December, and a joint deputation of the League and the Central Non-conformist Committee had in fact seen Gladstone in the same month to give him their objections to it.²

Forster's proposal, which the League and the Dissenters could now only regard as a formally thrown gage of battle, was, in detail, as

¹ BDP and BDG June 14: Times June 15, 1875.
² League's Executive Committee Report 1875, pp. 5 - 6.
follows. His bill was to be read with the principal Act (of 1870),
the 25th Clause of which was repealed: also repealed was the whole of
Denison's Act. This had given power to the Guardians to provide for
the education of the children of pauper parents receiving out-door
relief, but it expressly enjoined that it should not be made a condition
of allowing relief that children should be sent to school. In favour
of both the repealed section and the Act would be substituted the pro-
vision that where out-door relief was given to parents of children
aged 5 - 13, it was a condition of such relief that the children
attended school, and the Guardians could give further relief as necessary
to effect this. It was further provided that parents who were not
paupers, but were unable to pay fees, could apply for help to the
Guardians whose duty it was to give it: this fee relief was not to be
deemed parochial relief. It should be noted that the 'Clause 25 powers'
which had been optional for the School Boards were obligatory on the
Guardians.

This link between the school and the workhouse was as hateful
to the League as was the link with private charity: again and again it
had called on Forster to lift legislation to the level of his great
subject, instead of relying on a series of paltry expedients. It was
this spirit that it determined now to fight. The Executive Committee
met on June 23, and circularised all School Boards and Boards of
Guardians. A protest meeting was held in London on July 1, presided
over by Dixon, and attended by John Bright. This was his first public
re-appearance, although he had quietly resumed attendance at the House
of Commons in the previous February. In a speech supporting the
League's present stand he went out of his way to stigmatise the Education
Act of 1870 as 'the worst Act passed by a Liberal Government since the
Reform Bill of 1832'. Nevertheless, he counselled the Radicals and
the Dissenters not to break with the Government.¹

Forster bowed to this storm. On July 17 he announced in the
Commons that Clause 3 of his Bill would be modified so that only the
enlargement of Denison's Act relating to pauper children would stand:
the proposal to repeal Clause 25 of the 1870 Act, transferring the
powers to the Guardians and making them compulsory, was dropped. He
made it plain that he still thought that the Government was right, but
admitted that the strength of the opposition had astonished him: most
School Boards - even the Conservative Board of Manchester - were against
it, and Boards of Guardians had for the most part strongly opposed the
proposal to embroil them. But, a week later, on the Committee stage
of the Bill, he showed that he was as adamant as ever on the main
issues: Dixon's amendment for universal school boards and compulsion
was defeated 129 - 45, and that of Candlish to repeal Clause 25 by 200
to 98.²

A bye-election cropped up at Bath while Forster's Bill was
before the Commons. The League decided to turn its standing threat
into reality, and intervene. It was a Liberal seat, and the local
Liberal Association had selected Captain Hayter as their man. The
League sent one of its travelling agents, T. P. Allen, to the city, to
press him for his views on Forster's Bill. Hayter refused to give

¹. Ibid., pp. 8 - 9, and League Circular July 1873.

². Times July 18 and 23, 1873. Forster revealed that only 22 Boards
out of 563 had adopted Cl. 25, while 64 had specifically declared
against it by adopting Cl. 17 ('remit') but not Cl. 25 ('pay').
them, or even to see Allen. The League thereupon invited J. C. Cox, a member of its Executive Committee, to stand. Several more attempts were made to make contact with Hayter, without success. Cox and Francis Adams, the League's secretary, arrived in Bath on June 20. They were immediately met by Hayter's agents, who tried to persuade Cox to withdraw, hinting, it was alleged, that force would be used. Cox refused, and tried to hold a public meeting that evening in the Guildhall. In the riot that ensued Hayter's followers attempted to throw Cox and Adams - both blinded by the pepper thrown over the platform - through the windows to the mob outside: they were saved by the police. Spasmodic rioting between the two Liberal factions continued until June 25, when Hayter gave way: in a letter to Caldicott (Head of Bristol Grammar School and the League leader in the West Country) he gave the required assurances that his vote would be with Dixon. Cox withdrew, but too late to save the seat: the Tory candidate, Lord Grey de Wilton, was elected by 51 votes in a poll of 4200. Although the general trend of all bye-elections at this time was in favour of the Tories, there is no doubt that the League was responsible for the Bath fiasco. Early in October Lord Grey de Wilton succeeded to his seat in the Lords: this time the League chose not to interfere, for reasons given below, and Captain Hayter recovered the seat for his party.1

In July the League was in a state of savage exhilaration. Chamberlain boasted that his agents had visited and 'organised' every constituency in England and Wales, and that the Bath tactics would be repeated again and again: he cheerfully accepted the charge that he was

breaking up the Liberal Party. When John Bright, at the League's meeting on the 1st had denounced the 1870 Act he was wildly cheered; but when he counselled them not to break with the Government he was listened to 'in respectful silence'.

The return of the senior member for Birmingham to the public scene created something of an embarrassment and an enigma. Chamberlain was never deceived: in early March he had written to Dilke 'I am afraid he has only come back to the House to prop the Government'.

But unless and until Bright committed himself against the League he could not afford to break with him. On August 8, it was announced that he was re-entering the Cabinet. The Post recalled his reluctance in 1868, and concluded that some pressure must have been brought to bear on him now, for him to risk his health again: one issue alone was splitting the Liberal Party - was John Bright the medium of reconciliation? The Times saw that Gladstone's Ministry gained in strength by 'the accession of a great name' but doubted that his influence on the Cabinet in educational matters would defeat Forster's. (This return to office so soon after his speech on the 1870 Act would almost irresistibly suggest some understanding between him and Gladstone; the incredible fact was that he had joined the Cabinet unconditionally.)

Two or three days after the event he wrote to the Prime Minister with obvious misgiving: he had been reluctant to enter the Government because of the education question, and could not break with his non-conformist friends - he urged Gladstone to get rid of Forster, to improve the feeling in the party.

1. League Paper July 1873.
3. Times Aug. 8 : EDP Aug. 9, 1873, and Morley, L. of Gladstone p. 509 for Bright's letter, not, of course, made public at the time.
This letter was dated August 12. On the same day Chamberlain wrote to Morley, saying that he and Dale were going to Rochdale to see Bright and ask point-blank what assurances had been given to get him in the Ministry: if there were none, then he intended to oppose him at the election (i.e. at the bye-election then incumbent on members raised to office). If this contest had taken place, it would without doubt have been the most interesting in Birmingham's history. Unfortunately, he changed his mind. At a long interview on August 14 it was obvious that no pledges had been given and that Bright, from the point of view of his own career - of his own integrity - had made a blunder; nevertheless, Chamberlain and Dale evidently decided as a matter of tactics to affect to take his re-entry to the Cabinet as a sign of an intended reconciliation.

This attitude they maintained against accumulating evidence until the end of November. The Executive Committee announced from Birmingham on August 22 that it was of the opinion that the Government, alarmed at the League's electoral policy, was ready to heal the breach by passing an amending bill: that policy would therefore be suspended, although preparations for resuming and extending it were to be made 'with a view to the approaching General Election'. At the end of September the Committee decided 'in the absence of distinct information as to the intentions of the Government' not to hold an Annual General Meeting, of the type which each year from 1869 to 1872 had seen - rallies of one or two days' duration - but to call a meeting to transact formal business only.

1. Garvin I p. 140.
2. BDP Aug. 22 and League Circular Sep. 1, 1873.
3. League Circular Sep. 25, 1873.
Gladstone, with Olympic indifference, almost in absence of mind, struck at the Dissenters once more. On holiday in August at Hawarden he attended a parish meeting called to discuss ways and means of providing more school places - the existing voluntary school saw to the needs of some four-fifths of the children of the parish. Almost incredibly the Prime Minister decided to address the meeting. No reporters of course were present, but someone sent a summary of what he said to the press. The Times had a second hand version of this summary in its issue of August 18, and commented on it at length. Gladstone in effect told the meeting that voluntary schools were so far superior to other types that the parish should exert itself to the utmost to close the gap and prevent the formation of a school board. This was recognised as a bitter if not a final blow for the League: if John Bright had ever had any intention of helping them, it was obvious that he had now not the power, for Gladstone himself had pronounced against him.1

Chamberlain wrote to Gladstone and curtly asked him if the Times had reported him accurately. The reply was that it had not, to the extent that his recommendation had been founded on the local circumstances of Hawarden which the telegraphic summary had not set out. With this the League had to be content: the Post grumbled that if Gladstone had no intention of an amending Act it was futile for Bright to go back to the Cabinet - but that conclusion was perhaps too large to build upon the foundation of 'a few remarks of a man on holiday'. What the Post could not talk its way round was the fact that the Prime Minister had definitely come down on the side of the voluntary school,

1. Times August 18, 1873.
and had advised his parish - a not untypical one - to have nothing to do with a school board.¹

The League persisted in treating Forster as its sole enemy, and urged Gladstone to move him to some other position in the Cabinet. Only his ecclesiastical opinions divided him from all Liberals, and he should be given a post where they could do no harm: the religious policy of the Education Department could be changed, and the party re-united with a new programme (Chamberlain had one ready). A formal pronouncement was expected, and Bright's address to his constituents was eagerly expected.²

When it came hopes were roused. Bright made it clear that his own principles were unchanged, and that when he found himself unable to advance them he would leave the Ministry. His re-election to his seat (he had become Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster) passed off without incident or comment. Three years of seclusion had not lessened the glamour of his name or even his influence: he still had to be reckoned with - he was probably a Godsend to a Cabinet weakened by constant defeat at bye-elections - but to Chamberlain and his lieutenants, the leaders of the new Radicalism, he was antiquated, a relic of a school of thought now superseded.³

He came to Birmingham to deliver, on October 22, one of the most famous of his speeches, to an audience of some 15,000 including a

1. BDP Aug. 19 and 25, 1873.
2. BDP Sep. 2, 1873. The Fortnightly Review of September 1873 contained Chamberlain’s article on 'Free Land, Free Labour, Free Schools and Free Religion'.
3. BDP Oct. 8; BDG Oct. 8; BDP Oct. 2; Times Oct. 1, 8, 20, 1873.
dozen fellow M.P's. He was preceded by Wright and Chamberlain who each professed to believe that the meeting would mark the long looked for revival of the Liberal Party. Bright's speech was mainly on the educational issue. After his denunciation of the 1870 Act in the previous August he had naturally enough been reminded that he had been a member of the Cabinet which must have considered this legislation in draft form. He now dealt with that point. 'I was not in Parliament when the bill was passed. It was not at any time so far as I remember submitted to the Cabinet whilst I was in the practice of meeting with my colleagues'. The bill should have been published, for public discussion, before it was presented to the Commons: its great fault was that it was a measure to encourage denominational schools: 'It ought to have been a bill in my opinion to establish Board Schools'. Clause 25 was an evil principle, and must go: the foundations of a wider system must be laid, for it was impossible to educate the people through the sects 'whose miserable squabbles filled every School Board contest, to the exclusion of educational issues'.

The League might be delighted at hearing such sentiments from a colleague of Forster, but while the latter still held office no one expected a change of policy. Further, Bright was immediately taken up on his denial of responsibility. A letter signed Amicus Veritatis appeared in the Times on October 25. It was widely believed to be written by Forster himself: it came at any rate from someone with access to Cabinet records. It showed that Bright was present at all the Cabinets held from the beginning of November 1869 to February 4, 1870.

1. EDP and Times Oct. 23, 1873.
the last held before the opening of Parliament, when the matter of the
Queen's speech was settled: Parliament met on February 8, and the
Bill was introduced on the 17th. Did Bright expect the public to
believe, continued his challenger, (a) that the principles of the Bill
were not settled in the Cabinet in 1869 (b) that the chief details of
the Bill were not settled before February 8 and (c) that the Bill
itself had not been seen by every member of the Cabinet before February
9, the day on which Bright left London.¹

Bright's answer was the only possible one: he had been too
ill to notice much of what was happening at the Cabinet meetings he
attended, and such energies as he had were given to another bill.
'The only document which I can recollect to have received and read is
the draft bill of the date January 2, 1870, of which I think it is but
fair to say that my impression at the time was rather favourable than
otherwise. I was at that period, in the fortnight before the breakdown
in my health, not able to give attention to it, being harassed with
the Irish Land Bill ... and by the feebleness which I felt to be
increasing upon me. I do not remember any discussion as to the
principles or details of the Bill; but I have some recollection of a
conversation as to whether it was desirable to proceed with the Bill.
To me it seemed that the Land Bill was enough for the session. I
think, after reading the letter of your correspondent, I must be, to
some extent, mistaken as to what took place at the end of 1869 and
January 1870, but what I have said at Birmingham and now is precisely
what I remember. But as to the changes and concessions made during

¹ Times Oct. 25, 1873.
the session of 1870 which alone I seriously condemn, I knew nothing of
them for many months after they were settled ... but for them the 25th
Clause would have given no offence. Nonconformists would have been
patient while the schools were gradually being brought under the con­
trol of the Boards ... If however I were responsible for those changes,
I hope, after the experience of three years, I should be willing to
confess my error'.

Forster's speech at Liverpool the following month made it
clear that he had won the battle in the Cabinet and that neither he nor
Gladstone had changed his mind on any single issue. He vigorously
defended both his Act and its timing: with the sole object of getting
children to school, he said, he had effected a compromise and ever since
had been attacked by extremists in Birmingham and in the country parishes.
He defended Clause 25, rejected secularism, and did not think that the
experiment then beginning in Birmingham had any chance of success.

The League's Executive Committee met the following day and
decided to put forward three bills in the 1874 session - for compulsion
(Dixon), repeal of Clause 25 (Candlish) and free education (Dilke),
There was no mention of Bright. An editorial in the League's Paper
for December contained a long and bitter attack on Forster.

The school board elections of November and December were not,
on the whole, favourable to the League. In such towns as Bradford,
Leeds, Nottingham, there were, as expected, decisive Liberal victories,
but nowhere was the policy of secularism adopted. The Conservative -
Clerical Board at Manchester was re-elected. The London School Board election had been fought on the sectarian issue – High Church even opposing Low in some areas – and the denominational party had gained ground: on a critical division it would be difficult to say which way the Board would decide. The League's brilliant victory in Birmingham was the greatest blow it dealt at the opposition. The Times sourly cautioned the League to go slowly, since even there it had only a majority of one (a curious misreading of the situation): the Telegraph drew the conclusion that 'not only the result of the election, but the size of poll and the concomitant enthusiasm, showed that Birmingham wanted a national and consistent system of education'.

The League had made its arrangements for another campaign of public meetings in the principal towns – Dixon had already begun his tour – when Gladstone amazed everyone by dissolving Parliament, then in recess. His Government and party were weak and disunited: he had been expected for some months to make some move of reconciliation and announce a new programme. His election address was now vague and colourless, and had one concrete proposal only, the abolition of the income-tax. While the imagination cannot resist playing happily with the effect of such a manifesto on a mid-twentieth century election, the middle-class Radicals in 1874 greeted it only with rage and contempt. The League immediately formulated its shibboleth: any Liberal candidate who refused to pledge himself to repeal Clause 25, to extend the system of local authorities, and to refuse Parliamentary grants to new denominational schools was to be denied the true Leaguer's vote; the Non-conformist Committee called upon all Dissenters to take similar action.

2. EDP Jan. 28, 1874.
The issue in Birmingham was soon settled. S. S. Lloyd, the only Conservative with a ghost of a chance, betook himself to Plymouth, where he was elected: Bright, Muntz and Dixon were returned unopposed. Chamberlain had to look elsewhere for a seat, and his choice had fallen on radical Sheffield. He was defeated, and his rejection by such a town was regarded, by the Times for example, as a 'significant rebuff'. His choice of constituency was unfortunate. There were two seats, and undoubtedly one of them would go to Mundella, a fellow-Leaguer; but Sheffield had a John Bright of its own, Roebuck, a veteran of 1832, who had grown more and more Whiggish in retirement. He now emerged with the declared intention of doing the interloper from Birmingham out of his seat. The local Tories refrained from putting up a candidate, and at the election voted for Roebuck and Mundella. In addition, a few hundred dissident Radicals refused to accept the verdict of a trial vote between Chamberlain and their own man, Alderman Allott, and insisted on nominating him. Even so, Chamberlain's poll was within a few hundred of Mundella's.1

Garvin gives the above account of Chamberlain's failure, but does not give the reason why there should be such a strong local animosity to him. Just over two years before the League in typically ruthless fashion had outraged Sheffield local pride. For some time the Central Executive had considered the Sheffield branch to be inactive and lukewarm. A League agent was sent to investigate, and in course of conversation with Walter Knox, the secretary, discovered that he was a

deviationist and not fully in agreement with League policy (he disagreed on the 'free'). Collings wrote conveying the suggestion of the Executive Committee that he should resign his key position. Knox pointed out that he was responsible to a Sheffield committee, not to Birmingham, and refused. His own committee passed a vote of confidence in him: William Bragge, the chairman, said that he was no believer in Infallibility, either in Rome or Birmingham. A general meeting of the Sheffield branch was called: Francis Adams wrote to say that Collings and Thompson (the agent) would attend, and Sheffield replied that they were not wanted. The Executive Committee then circularised all Sheffield members directly with copies of the correspondence, and Adams severed communications with the branch until it had another secretary. Appeals from Sheffield to Dixon met with the reply that it was a matter for Chamberlain. The Sheffield committee resigned, and all the local organisation of the League ceased to exist. In April 1871 both Sheffield's major newspapers published the correspondence with scathing comments on 'Birmingham Shams'. 'Instead of having promoted the interests of the League in Sheffield the officers in Birmingham have given the organisation its death-blow here'.

So Chamberlain had to be content with being King of Birmingham, while Forster topped the poll at Bradford. He was disowned by that town's Liberal Association, whose chairman wrote to the Times on February 2 to say that a large representative meeting had adopted two other candidates. Forster, and yet a fourth Liberal, Ripley, stood independently. The local Tories decided that they had no need of a candidate,

1. The last act of the Sheffield branch of the League was to have this correspondence, etc. printed (Sheffield, 1871) and circulated.
and ostentatiously supported Forster and Ripley, who were easily elected.¹

The general issue was clear enough by February 6, when Gladstone resigned. In the course of the election he had to some extent recanted. Speaking at Woolwich on February 1 he said that some provisions in the Education Act were 'capable of immediate modification—especially those which have created uneasiness entirely out of proportion to their real importance'. 'I think the 25th Clause is capable of being re-considered and my opinion is that it ought to be re-considered'. Robert Lowe, also, put forward a plan on February 8 to repeal Clause 25, and find the necessary money from private charity (as had in fact been done in Birmingham from 1871 onwards). The ministry was too late. The League worked to such effect in the constituencies that over 300 out of the 425 Liberal candidates gave the required pledge and the Liberal vote was split in at least twenty constituencies to let in a Tory.

The Times growled at the obstinate wilfulness of a small section of the Liberal party in pressing its own crotchet to the prejudice of the main cause. The revolt of the Dissenters and Radicals was of course only one reason for Gladstone's defeat in 1874, and the defeat itself can in any case be exaggerated. His majority of 100 in 1868 had increased to a peak of 120 in August 1870, and had then declined to 66: Disraeli's majority in 1874 was just over 60. But the Liberals were downcast out of all proportion: Gladstone withdrew from Parliamentary life and declared his intention of resigning the leadership of his party.²

The League refused to join in the general defeatism and abasement. It had worked to defeat the late Government because it considered

¹. Times Feb. 2 and 5, 1874.
². Times Feb. 2, 9, 10, 15, 21; EDP Feb. 2, 7, 9, 1874.
that only in opposition could the party be reconciled: the education struggle could now be conceived in simple party terms. A clear majority - 167 - of the Liberals in the Commons favoured repeal of Clause 25, to the retention of which Disraeli in his election address at Buckingham on February 10 had committed his party: like the League, he saw it as the symbol of a great question. The electors of Bradford had made it clear whence Forster drew his strength. If the Liberals could get over the sectarian hurdle they had a chance of re-uniting on the education issue as a whole. But more than ever, now they were in opposition they needed a vigorous leader, and to the lack of one can be attributed largely the deadness of the next two sessions. If Gladstone resigned the only obvious candidate was Forster, under whom it would be impossible to unite the party. With a refreshing note of belated realism the Post dismissed as absurd the suggestion of Bright: 'neither by temperament nor state of health is he fitted for the work'. The immediate upshot was that Gladstone retained the leadership, but was very rarely seen in the Commons.1

The first League bill in the new House was brought in by Henry Richard (Candlish had not sought re-election). On June 17 he moved to repeal Clause 25, putting forward two arguments. 'From past experience of bitter suffering, of prolonged persecution, of centuries of pains and penalties, we have been driven to the adoption of a distinct and definite principle, which we feel ourselves bound consistently to maintain and jealously to guard ... the principle is this, that ... in whatever concerns man's relations to his Maker, the secular authority had better stand aloof. To the neglect and violation of this principle

1. BDP Feb. 20 and 27, 1874.
we believe must be ascribed some of the most terrible scenes in history'.
He could not believe in the sincerity of those who urged that a parent's
right of choice must be respected. 'There can be no conscientious
objection to the multiplication table' and reverence for any man's con­
science was a new born thing in the minds of most of those who defended
the Clause.

In addition, he continued, everyone knew it was in the Act by
mistake. The Non-conformists in 1870 had believed Gladstone when he
had said that all connection between the Boards and the Voluntary Schools
would be severed: and Gladstone himself believed that he had done this;
Richard asked the House now to remedy the accidental error of a Minister.
Forster rose, not to deny the error, but to rejoice in it. The sum of
£5,000 had been involved in 1875, nearly all paid to the Anglican Church:
his only object had been to get the children to school, and it was not
right that a poor person should not have the right of choice. Sandon,
the new Vice-President, rose only to say that he rested the case for the
Government on the speech of Forster which might have been delivered from
the Government benches.

The Bill received 128 votes and was defeated by 245. By
calculating pairs and absent known sympathisers the League, for its own
comfort, stretched this 128 to 146: 76 Liberals, of whom 36 were Irish
members, had voted with the Government. Fourteen members of the late
Administration voted for the bill, including Lowe and Hartington - the
blind fanaticism of 1873 had become the sagacious policy of 1874 - and
three, including Forster, against it. 1

1. BDP June 11; BWP June 15 and 20; Times June 11; League Circular
June 23, 1874.
Dixon moved the Second Reading of his Elementary Education (Compulsory Attendance) Bill on July 1. It provided for direct compulsion up to the age of ten, the age at which children came under the Factory Acts: school boards would be established in every district to enforce this. In his speech he selected facts from the Education Department's Report for 1872-3 as a commentary on Forster's reiterated claim that his sole object had been to get the children to school. In England and Wales there were 14,082 civil parishes outside boroughs, and 224 boroughs: of this total of 14,506 School Districts only 822 had Boards. Of the 822 Boards, only 274 had adopted bye laws for compulsion. Of the 2½ million children in the country aged 7 - 13, only ¾ million were presented to the Inspectors for examination (i.e. had attended for at least 25 weeks in the year) and the majority of these were presented in Standards fitted for children below the age of 10. The League, said Dixon, could rest its case on the evidence provided by the very Minister who now led the opposition to the only cure. Wherever compulsion had been tried, it was slowly but surely proving effective: in Birmingham, after some six months' operation, it had resulted in there being 36% more children in the schools, and it had cost the equivalent of a rate of ¾d. in the £. Finally, Dixon stressed that although school boards were the only effective means of enforcing compulsion that he could see, he was not tied to that machinery: his bill was for compulsion, and if the House would agree to go into committee on it, they could discuss the method of establishing it.

Birley, Chairman of the Manchester School Board and a member of the Manchester Union, moved the rejection of Dixon's Bill. He revealed that he was now, as a result of his experience in Manchester,
a convert to the principle of compulsion (as was his Union), but England had no use for school boards: men were tired of the acrimony and expense they caused, and they were prone to apathy, incompetence and jobbery.

Two only of the thirteen speakers in the debate were against compulsion. Both Cowper-Temple and Forster accepted it, but were against the school boards which were 'viewed with distrust in the countryside'. Sandon regarded universal school boards as the main principle of the Bill, and compulsory attendance as merely a by-question in it: the Government could not assent to the principle of compulsion until it saw its way to the machinery for carrying it out. His speech was interpreted as an 'indefinite postponement' and the Bill was thrown out on a division of 320 to 156. Forster and Hartington voted for the Bill: no member of the former Government voted against it: a total of 42 Liberals (including 27 Irish members), led by Cowper-Temple, did so, however.¹

The debate represented a considerable advance in public opinion. Both antagonists, League and Union, were now agreed that there could be no educational progress without some public law to get children to school and keep them there. This was a complete change of heart on the part of the Union. The actual proposal which Dixon put forward, however - with its corollaries of full and half-time exemption for the brighter children from the age of ten - was a temporary lowering of the League's sights. Even the Conservative Party, it was felt,

¹ Times and BDP July 2, 1874. Report of League Executive Committee, 1874.
might in time be induced to bring in its own measure - if only a stalling one, while it had the power to effect compulsion on its own terms. The Liberals, on the other hand, had still a long way to go to achieve unity - if, indeed, they ever could on the education issue.

Chamberlain was now convinced that the League's struggle was hopeless in the foreseeable future. In an article in The Fortnightly Review of October, 1874, he gave it as his opinion that the education problem had now to stand over; Forster had not only failed to canter over the religious difficulty: he had increased it so much that no one else was likely to be much more fortunate than himself. 'The evil done by the Act of 1870 is for the present irreparable. The League has the melancholy satisfaction of finding their condemnation of Forster's compromise vindicated by results, and the unalloyed pleasure of watching the success of their own scheme in Australia .... But at the present moment they can hardly, as practical men, expect the acceptance of their views by the whole party' although they might fairly insist on the repeal of Clause 25. The rest of the article is taken up with an analysis of the causes of the continuing - or rather increasing - weakness of the Liberal Party and the search for a programme on which all sections of it could unite.¹

But the League remained in being; Dixon employed its elaborate organisation over the winter of 1874-5 to gather material to support his Bill, and it demonstrated its vigour early in 1875 by asserting its wishes over the party leadership. On January 16 Gladstone announced his resignation as leader of the Liberal Party. The Radicals

¹. The article was reprinted in EDP Oct. 1, 1874.
immediately made it plain that, whoever succeeded him, it would not be Forster. The Non-conformist Committees of London, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Bristol and Birmingham met under the chairmanship of J. S. Wright (Chairman of the Birmingham Liberal Association, and Chamberlain's vice-chairman on the School Board) and stated bluntly that if Forster were elected the Non-conformists would secede from the party. The League's Executive Committee met on the following day and announced its opposition.¹

Chamberlain made it clear that apart from keeping Forster out, he had no interest in the question: the honour of leading a party which had neither a policy nor an organisation was a barren one which the Radicals were content to leave to the Whigs and the trimmers; the matter, as he pointed out, excited no interest outside the London clubs: the Trade Union Congress had just met and had not a word to say on it. But Forster's claim - and he had powerful backing - was unthinkable: 'if the united efforts of the Daily News and the Standard can effect it, Forster is to lead as many of his friends on both sides of the House as may be willing to follow him in fresh fields and compromises new': his qualifications for the post were that he was a bad speaker and 'with a majority of 100 at his back passed the worst Liberal Bill since 1832'.²

Dale wrote to the Times on Jan. 22, exonerating Bright to his own satisfaction and proclaiming the irreconcilable hostility of the Dissenters to Forster. The latter bowed to this storm, and withdrew his candidature on February 1. The following day the Liberals met under

¹ BDP Jan. 16 - 22, 1875.
² A letter to the Examiner, reprinted BDP Jan. 25, 1875 and as a League pamphlet.
John Bright's chairmanship and elected Hartington. This was, said the Times, a notable triumph for the Birmingham malcontents, and was a striking illustration of the power of a vigorous organisation: no one knew the numerical force of the Birmingham party, but of its influence there was no doubt.\(^1\)

All this no doubt helped the League to feel a little better, but, in Forster's phrase, it did not get the children to school, and it was he who went in to the attack first in the new session, although it was on information collected by the League. Indirect compulsion had at length been applied to the countryside by the Agricultural Children's Act,\(^2\) which provided for a half time system for children aged 8 - 12. But there was no means of enforcing the law - no inspectors had been appointed - and it was everywhere defied. Forster made an urgent speech for compulsion: 'But even he failed to conquer the fears of his former educational allies' although he told them that 'the more you refuse to do justice to the country children the more you will play into the hands of the party represented by the hon. member for Birmingham'.\(^3\)

Dixon, supported as in 1874 by Mundella, introduced his bill once more on June 9, and, as was expected, lost, but by a majority of only 91 (255 - 164). With a wealth of detailed evidence from the towns and countryside he pleaded a case which, as he said, was already won: the Ministry would soon have to yield, and if they did not like School

\(^1\) Times Feb. 2, 1875.
\(^2\) 36 and 37 Vict. c. 67.
\(^3\) BWP March 6, 1875.
Boards, they must devise some other machinery. Sandon made it plain that he did not like them, and gave a hint that he was thinking of decreasing their number (boards were then indissoluble). The League was reasonably content with the debate and the vote. Both Lord Hartington and Forster had spoken and voted with Dixon, and it was now plain that compulsion would come in the next Liberal Administration.¹

Sandon's hint was disquieting but soon forgotten. The denominationalists were in fact going over on to the offensive. Up till 1874 they had adopted the attitude that the settlement of 1870 was sacred: but from the beginning of 1875 there was an agitation to repeal the Cowper-Temple clause, for powers to dissolve boards, for compulsion enforced by the managers of the voluntary schools, and for compulsory religious instruction. The monthly papers of the National Society contained long reasoned articles attacking the principles of the League. In the issue of February 1875 the case against free schools was argued: State aid to elementary schools, it was urged, must be confined to supplementing the efforts of the poor themselves: in an ideal state the people would pay the whole cost of the education of their children: 'We approach the ideal as nearly as we can. The upper and middle classes do pay for the whole of their education except so far as they benefit by the gifts of former munificence. The state only intervenes in the matter of education when we reach those classes who cannot provide so good an education as the interests of the nation require; and then it intervenes no farther than is necessary .... so far from desiring free education we should like to see the poor contribute still more

¹. EDP June 10, 1875.
largely, to the expense of their children's education'.

In the following month a long report of a speech by the Archbishop of Canterbury resumed the arguments against school boards in rural areas, the most powerful of which was that the parish was too small a unit to provide a capable and intelligent group of men to do the work - and the Archbishop gave instances of parishes where boards had been abandoned, so far as was legally possible. The April issue contained an attack on Birmingham for prohibiting religious instruction in its schools. In July there was an attack on direct compulsion, which, it was claimed, had failed, and an argument for the extension of the half-time system; but there was a significant rider: even if universal compulsion were now thought desirable, it did not follow that school boards were necessary to get it enforced - the Boards of Guardians would do just as well (and, of course, their powers would be limited).

The National Society held that school boards were brought into being to educate the street Arabs, the lowest and most degraded classes of children in the industrial towns: if they would be content to carry out that work, the Church was not disposed to put obstacles in their way: but the claim of the civic authority to have the great mass of children under its influence would be resisted: 'The Act of 1870 was not a settlement which the country can permanently accept'. It was in vain that liberal minded Churchmen who were also educationists, such as the Bishop of Manchester (James Fraser, who had been an assistant commissioner on the Duke of Newcastle's Commission), advised the clergy

2. Ibid., March - July 1875.
3. Ibid., July 1875.
to come to terms with the boards - he forecast that within 25 years they would be universal - and hand over the financial burden of secular instruction, making, as the 1870 Act allowed them, their reservations as regards the teaching of religion.¹

The League anticipated a reactionary Bill in the session of 1876. Dixon, speaking at the Birmingham Town Hall on January 23, gave a strong hint that for personal reasons he would be greatly relieved to resign his seat, but said that he intended to fight Sandon's bill through all its stages. The Queen's Speech on February 8 promised another Education Act, which, it was generally anticipated, would be for universal compulsion on conditions acceptable to the clergy. The Archbishop of Canterbury, heading a deputation to the Lord President (the Duke of Richmond) made it clear, a few days later, what those conditions would be. The Church proposed that compulsion should be extended by giving powers, in the absence of school boards, to the 'existing authorities' (i.e. the denominational managers), that the annual grant should no longer be limited to one half of the total income of the school, that subscribers to voluntary schools should not be required to pay the education rate, and that legislative provision should be made to dissolve superfluous boards.²

The League's Bill was down for April 5, and as Sandon refused to be prodded by Mundella to fix a date for his own measure, Dixon moved, for the last time, the compulsory attendance at school of children between the ages of five and ten. He went to the root of the problem,

1. Fraser was speaking at Liverpool (in January 1875) where, in his opinion, education had not advanced since 1870 (Times Jan. 18, 1875).
2. BDP Jan. 24, Feb. 9, 14 and 19, 1876.
the absence of effective local government machinery over most of the

country. In the towns he urged that the powers and functions of
School Boards and Guardians should be merged into those of Town Councils,
and new bodies, county councils, should be created for the rural areas.
Until popularly elected local authorities came into being, the Non-
conformists in the countryside would resent compulsion. His Bill gave
the local authorities - whatever they were - no rights in relation to
the existing school, nor did it even ask that Dissenters should have a
Board School as a choice (Dixon could not forbear reminding the House
of the Clause 25 controversy and the "parental right of choice so much
thrown at us a few years ago"). It was the League at its most modest:
the Liberal vote for the Bill was 160 - almost the same as in the pre-
ceeding year. The Tories and the Irish defeated it by 121 votes.

John Bright spoke in the debate, only to reveal how wide was
the gap that had always separated him from Dixon. It was, he said,
possible to give too much education and to too high a level: teach a
lad to read and write and do his sums, and then if he has any talent
he will get on.

Sandon asked the House to reject Dixon's Bill because it was
one for school boards, and the officials of his Department reported to
him that there were constant struggles all over the country to prevent
their formation; one cause of this hostility, he said, was the dread of
being treated as Birmingham had been treated by its Board. He declared
that his own Bill would separate 'the cause of education' from a 'system
of inevitable boards'.

1. EDP and Times, April 6, 1876.
Five weeks later, introducing it in the House, he thanked John Bright for his description of the desirable level of education, which he had accepted and made the duty of parents to realise. Parental responsibility was the keynote of his Bill. To everyone's surprise, he rejected all direct compulsion, and gave as his reason the fact that Dixon's Bill had been rejected in three sessions - blandly overlooking of course how he had drawn the hobgoblins of school boards across the issue and that the Bill had been rejected on a Conservative Whip. Instead, he proposed to extend indirect compulsion, and reach the conscience of the parents through their pocket. No children might be employed under the age of 10 (in 1877, 9) and only between the ages of 10 and 14 if they could produce either a certificate of education - Standard II was modestly prescribed - or a certificate of attendance, for which the eventual requirement, in 1881, would be 250 attendances in each of the five preceding years: interim requirements were for the same number of attendances in each of the two preceding years in 1877, and so on. These provisions would not apply wherever a half-time system was in operation, and School Boards could still enact by-laws based on the 1870 Act, which was not disturbed. The enforcement of this legislation - i.e. to see that children were not illegally employed - was mandatory on School Boards, and, where these did not exist, on Town Councils or, in rural areas, the Boards of Guardians. These last two bodies were enabled to delegate their new function to School Attendance Committees, not necessarily of their own body.

Direct compulsion was proposed only in the case of 'wastrel', i.e. continuously neglect, children. Permissive compulsion was extended to non-School Board areas by enabling Town Councils, in the
boroughs, at their own discretion, and the Guardians in the rural areas, at the request of the parish concerned, to enact bye-laws. The sectarian issue was only touched upon by the proposal to give Clause 25 powers to the Guardians in non-School Board areas, and make them obligatory upon them.¹

Reaction to Sandon’s Bill was far from violent – disappointment was the chief feature on all sides – and for the first time since their foundation there was a difference between the reactions of the League and the Central Non-Conformist Committee.

The League was glad that the religious issue was not raised: if the ultra-denominationalists did not carry their agitation into effect by seeking to amend the Bill, then, with whatever faults, it could pass, as representing some advance. The League was in fact relieved, for it had expected far worse. As protests, it asked Dixon and Dilke to move amendments for direct compulsion and free schools, on the Committee stage. It stated its objections to the proposal to allow Guardians to appoint School Attendance Committees not of their body – obviously fearing that in the rural areas this would hand over compulsion to the clergy. It deplored the low educational standard envisaged by the Bill, and the fact that new education authorities with such limited powers were being established.²

The Central Non-conformist Committee met to consider the Bill on May 26, under Dale’s chairmanship. It endorsed the objections of the League and went beyond them. The Bill, it protested, violated religious liberty by establishing compulsion ‘at the crack of the parson’s

¹ BDP and Times May 19, 1876. BWP May 27, 1876, has a reprint of the Bill as introduced.
² BDP May 25: League Paper June, 1876.
whip' in areas where the only school was the Anglican one: all grants of money to schools under ecclesiastical management were wrong in principle. The League now expressly dissociated itself from this condemnation of the voluntary principle, considering that even the Non-Conformist Committee could have little expectation of any practical outcome. The League set itself two objects which it thought attainable: when the Commons went into Committee it would try to secure full powers for the new education authorities, and direct compulsion. If these were not gained, the Bill would be neither much harm nor much use.¹

On June 13 Dixon announced that he had decided to retire from Parliament - his wife was now incurably ill - and would do so when he had seen the Government Education Bill through the Commons. On June 16 the Post Leader proclaimed that directly the resignation of Dixon had been announced, the town 'turned instinctively' to Chamberlain: on the 19th it announced (without giving its authority) that Dixon would not wait for the Committee stage of Sandon's Bill. Chamberlain booked the Bingley Hall for a meeting on June 26. On June 20 he resigned the Mayoralty (which he was holding for the third year). Dixon might fairly have complained that he was being rushed: he let himself be carried by the tide and resigned on June 22, and Chamberlain was returned unopposed on June 27. In a wide ranging speech to his constituents that evening education was only mentioned in the most general of terms. He had no intention of joining in any debate that session.²

Dixon's cause passed to Mundella, who moved, on the Second Reading of Sandon's Bill, for general direct compulsion: he had, of course, to wait four years before he moved it successfully. He was,

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¹ EDP June 8, 1876.
² EDP June 13, 16, 19, 20, 23, 28, 1876. League Paper July 1876,
for the present, unable to secure even that the School Attendance Committees of the Guardians could initiate bye-laws at their own discretion.

Sandon's Bill took on a far more reactionary character in Committee, so that John Bright was moved to deliver a speech of the most extraordinary bitterness, and Chamberlain was induced to change his mind. Two amendments were put down at the end of June: Cowper-Temple proposed to revise Section 14 of the 1870 Act (his 'own' clause) so as to permit the use of the Apostles' Creed, and the Conservatives proposed the compulsory inclusion of religious instruction in the curriculum of all grant-aided schools. The League was not disturbed at these amendments: it did not anticipate Government support for them.

The Committee stage of the Bill began on July 10. Shortly afterwards Sandon introduced an amendment to increase the Government grant to voluntary schools to a maximum of 17/6d. and removed the condition that this grant must be equalled by income from other sources (fees and subscriptions). Forster led the opposition to this, on the grounds that voluntary subscriptions would no longer be indispensable, and the last vestiges of popular control of these schools would thus be removed. He was defeated, 185 - 100. Henry Richard's amendment, to place all public elementary schools under public management was lost 317 - 99.

Sandon next accepted an amendment to provide for the dissolution of School Boards which did not own a school or a site (some 30 to 40 out of 600 were in this position). He was showing his hand with a vengeance: the House was now told by one member of the Government after another that it was being asked to assist in the development of
voluntary effort and end all extension of the School Board system.
John Bright rose to his feet and stunned the House into shocked silence
by a revelation, in language which Dixon could never have achieved, of
the feeling amongst the Dissenters. He gave utterance not only to
their pent-up irritation against the Church but against the whole
social order with which the Church was connected. He spoke of seeming
trifles, the pinpricks inflicted on the Dissenters by many landlords,
the dismissal of labourers and of tenant farmers, the boycotting of
Dissenters' shops, their exclusion from the bench of magistrates, the
childish injustices inflicted on their children in matters of great
importance to childhood, school treats and prizes; and finally he
taunted the Cabinet and virtually the whole Conservative Party with
refusing to defile themselves by ever including a Dissenter within
their ranks.

No one answered him, no one supported him. Sandon's new
clause was passed 221 - 140. Forster was more successful in opposing
the amendment for compulsory religious instruction. He strongly dis­
approved, he said, of the action of Birmingham School Board, but he
would not force religion upon it. Cowper-Temple withdrew his amendment,
being advised, he made it clear, that the 1870 Act did not preclude the
教学 of the Apostles' Creed, since it was in use by more than one
denomination.

Dixon's last speech in Parliament had been to accept Sandon's
Bill, for what it was worth, as far as the League was concerned. But
this was a new Bill, and Birmingham stirred once more. A deputation,
of 30 Radical M.P's. and of Liberals from some 40 local Associations,
assembled at the Westminster Palace Hotel on August 2 preparatory to
going to Devonshire House to see Hartington. Chamberlain addressed them, gave them their orders, and told them that it was proposed to ask Hartington to divide on the report stage of the Bill, or on the Third Reading, as a formal protest, from the Liberal Party, against Sandon's reaction. The extension of voluntary schools, he urged now, was not merely a Dissenters' but a citizens' grievance: the Liberal Party must adopt the principle that popularly elected representatives share in the management of the voluntary schools - in fact, taxation to be accompanied by representation.

But when the deputation was received by Hartington in the ballroom of Devonshire House, Chamberlain remained silent, and in the background. Dilke introduced the deputation, which was not, he said, one from the League, and called on John Wright, Chairman of the Birmingham Liberal Association (and a member of the League's Executive Committee) to speak. Wright developed Chamberlain's theme. Hartington, with considerable tact, made it clear that his first duty was to prevent the Liberal Party from disintegrating further, and he thought that a considerable section of it would decline to follow his lead if he did as the deputation asked: he did agree however to move a resolution to re-commit the Bill. He later found that the rules of the House did not allow him to do this, and he could only move, as the most formal of protests, on the Report Stage, that new principles counter to the settlement of 1870 had been introduced.

Sandon's reply was easy: George Dixon had been trying to upset the compromise of 1870 ever since it was made. These expressions of opinion over, the Bill should then, according to general expectation,
have gone quietly through. Instead, a back-bench Conservative chose to revive a slumbering controversy. Lord Robert Montague, the Vice-President in Disraeli's first Administration, who had told the Commons in 1868 that Jesse Collings' account of educational destitution in Birmingham was a figment of his imagination, and who had since been converted to Roman Catholicism, now proposed an amendment that in those districts where School Boards declined to use their Clause 25 powers, the duty of doing so should be given to the Guardians. Forster opposed this, as did Sandon; both were unwilling to re-open the controversy. After one or two speeches (including one from Sampson Lloyd) in favour, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Stafford Northcote, threw over Sandon, and accepted the amendment for the Government. This mine was sprung on August 3. The Liberals under Forster's leadership fought it until 4.30 a.m. the following day, dividing the House ten times and eventually securing an adjournment.

The debate was resumed on Friday August 4. Sandon stated his intention of amending his own Clause 14, which provided that the Guardians should pay school fees of indigent children 'not being resident in the district of a School Board': he now proposed to give his clause general application by leaving out the last phrase. Montague in delight withdrew his own motion. Forster belatedly recognised his own child and went over to the Tories once more. The House, weary of the matter, was impatient for a Division when it was seen that Chamberlain was on his feet. There was instant silence as he began a calm defence of a body not in the best of odours with the House, the Birmingham School Board. Chamberlain said that he looked with alarm at the new proposal, and foresaw endless agitation. The religious difficulty, in
his experience in Birmingham, was one never felt by parents, teachers, or children: let the priest and parson stand aside and no more would be heard of it.

His speech had no effect on the issue: Sandon's amendment was carried 175 - 77, - the final defeat of the secularists. On the following day, the Bill passed through its final stage in the Commons: Forster left the House without voting on the Third Reading, but after delivering an elaborate eulogy of the measure, to point his revenge on the League, for years of opposition, and the loss of the Liberal leadership. Nevertheless, the only solid concession gained from Sandon had been won by him, in Committee: the new School Attendance Committees had to be appointed by Councils and Guardians 'of their own body'. John Bright's nightmare vision of Dissenters' children being driven into the schools at the crack of the parson's whip was not to materialise.¹

¹. Times, EDP and League Papers June - August 1876. The Bill became law on August 15 (39 and 40 Vict. c. 79).
CHAPTER TEN

The League is Dissolved

Despite his words in the Commons, it is highly improbable that Chamberlain was surprised when the Education Act of 1876 failed to split the land. It was condemned as an educational measure by Birmingham School Board, and by some others, but there was no agitation. The Clause 25 controversy had been finally smothered. The League's Monthly Papers for the rest of 1876 contained a mixture of empty threats and downright defeatism. Its final demise would come as no surprise and would occasion little comment.

The Birmingham scene had changed. Of the Conservative-Clerical party Lloyd, who gained a seat in the Commons in January 1874, refused to attend any meetings of the Board on which his party was in a minority, and consequently was disqualified as a member in November, 1874. Sargant relinquished his seat on the Board in the same manner in July 1876. F. S. Dale and Burges both left Birmingham, for preferment, early in 1875, although they continued to attend occasional meetings of the Board during that year, until their successors were elected in November. F. S. Dale left amidst what seem to have been genuine expressions of regret on the part of his Radical opponents. He had fought with ability for what he believed to be right, but no pettiness or rancour had ever clouded his personal relations with his opponents; as Chamberlain's successor as Chairman of the Committee of Inquiries - the working component of the first Board - he had revealed administrative ability. The Radical-
Dissenting party had lost by death two stalwarts: Charles Vince, the Baptist leader, in October, 1874, and George Dawson in December, 1876. In this latter month, Dixon became Chairman of the School Board; Chamberlain, who no longer had a seat on it (yet he remained a member of the Town Council) was at Westminster.

Political life in Birmingham over the winter of 1876-77 was at a very low ebb. 'We stand at a dull dead level .... the Parliamentary sky is not so much calm and clear as leaden and oppressive in its greyness.' When Parliament met in January 1877 it seemed to the Birmingham Radicals that 'it was doing so merely because it was the appointed time, not because of any need. No one thought of measures of importance: neither enthusiasm on the one hand nor resistance on the other could be expected, no great question was pending.'

From 1873 onwards the annual general meetings of the League had been formal affairs, to receive the reports of the Executive Committee and to approve accounts. The report given to the meeting in November 1876 was entirely retrospective, and in the following March the Committee issued a circular announcing the closure of the League: a final meeting of the members - the offices of the League were large enough to accommodate all those who attended - on March 28 approved the Committee's action, and the League ceased to exist. The interment took place with scant ceremony and indecent haste,

1. BWP Jan. 27 1877.
2. Times March 7; BDP March 29 and 30, 1877.
without even a funeral sermon: but the real decision had been taken long before.

The reasons which the Executive Committee advanced for this step convinced no one. The work of the League, it said, in so far as legislation had not already effected it, could be left to the Liberal Party as part of its general work: there was no necessity for a separate organisation, which might give the appearance of disunity. The Liberal Party in Parliament had however not accepted the League's policy, and so long as it included Whigs and Irish Catholics no League Bill would ever be advanced by it.

The League was dissolved because Chamberlain's ideas and ambitions had become national in scale. As a Member of Parliament he had no wish to be, as Dixon had been, a man of one question. As early as 1873 he wrote to Morley that he had long been of the opinion that 'there is not force enough in the education question to make it the sole fighting issue.' After the great agitation of 1869-70 the interest of the Trade Unions and the working classes in education had waned rapidly. In Birmingham the Labour Representation League had been alienated at the School Board Election in 1870, and had sustained its hostility to the Radicals: Dixon, for example,


4. The League was always careless of how many enemies it made: it was in friendly relationship with the National Education League of Ireland, an imitative body, whose object was to preserve the existing unsectarian system in that country.

5. Gravin I p.146.
had been contemptuously refused a vote of thanks on his retirement from the House, and there was much talk at the same time of opposing Chamberlain with a Labour candidate. In March 1874 the latter had contemplated widening the League's programme, beyond education, to bring in the Trade Unions. He rejected this idea, but obviously had drawn, perversely, from the General Election of January 1874, the lesson that independent organisations battling for one single point were more likely to damage the main cause than to advance their own. He decided therefore to create one master-organisation which would take over the policies of special bodies such as the Reform Union, the Land Reform Association and the Education League, an electoral organisation whose strength should be popularly based on the country as a whole and whose headquarters should be in the provinces, away from the Whigs, the Whips, and London clubland.

When he received the windfall of Dixon's seat in July 1876 Chamberlain speeded up his plans, and early in 1877 all was ready:

'We are just going to issue the League dissolution circular, announcing at the same time the formation of the Federation of Liberal Associations, with Headquarters at Birmingham and the League officers as chief cooks.' The tentacles of the League had reached far and wide and there were at the inaugural meeting of the Federation delegates from 93 associations, all re-organised on the model of Birmingham Liberal

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6. BDP Oct. 1 1874.
Association (a pyramid of committees based on the universal suffrage of party members): Manchester was the only notable absentee, for, to ensure Birmingham's supremacy, it was, to begin with, expressly excluded.

Chamberlain was lucky in his time. Gladstone had just sprung into action on the Eastern Question, and it was obvious that he wished to resume the leadership of the Liberal Party. Chamberlain jettisoned his nominal chief, Hartington, and invited Gladstone to Birmingham to inaugurate his Federation. Gladstone accepted, and came in April.

Only the League was, in fact, submerged in the new body, and it provided not only the chief cooks (Chamberlain, Collings, Wright were president, secretary and treasurer: William Harris was its executive head and Francis Schnadhorst its paid secretary) but also the organisation, for the League can claim to be the fore-runner of modern party organisations.

The machinery and the energy of the League had always been the envy of its opponents. The National Society complained that, notwithstanding the parochial organisation of the Church, it was never able to stir up anything like the enthusiasm or the united action which the League could command. The Times suspected that, like a stage army, the League, by noise and simple organisation, produced an effect far beyond that which its actual numbers would warrant.

It had always ample funds at its disposal - a system of covenants guaranteed the bulk of its annual income, and enabled it to take on long term commitments. But it did not make the mistake of relying on the Birmingham capitalists; it aimed to be a popular movement and a subscription of any amount qualified for membership: in the published lists offerings of 6d. and 1/- appear side by side with the annual hundreds of Dixon, Chamberlain, Lloyd and others.

In 1870 the income of the central organisation (i.e. disregarding local subscriptions retained by the branches) was £6,400. This dropped in the reaction of 1871 to £4,000, but in 1872 the figure reached £7,000, in 1873 £7,300. Hereafter, income declined to £6,000 in 1874 and in its final year the League raised only £4,600.

It was never likely to expire for want of funds within the ten year period for which it was originally founded: in 1874 for example it carried forward a surplus of £1,600.

Printing bills absorbed a good proportion of this income, in some years as much as a third. The League's Publishing Committee under the direction of Bunce, Editor of the Post, poured out a stream of pamphlets, leaflets, verbatim reports of debates on the League's principles and off-prints of speeches in Parliament. A monthly paper (for which no separate accounts were published) appeared from December 1869 to March 1877.

9. Figures of income and expenditure have been approximated to within a few pounds. They are given exactly in the balance sheets published by the Executive Committee. Mid-Victorian values must be borne in mind.
The League's annual balance sheet reflects the scope and nature of its operations. In 1870 £400 was spent on the hire of halls and other expenses incidental to public meetings. In the following year this dropped to £200, in 1873 it rose to £300 and shot up to £1100 in 1874, the year of the General Election. Salaries paid by the League to its employees rose from £800 in 1870 to £2000 in 1872 at which figure they remained until 1874, then to drop to £1200. Expenses listed as for 'Travelling' show a similar pattern.

The League was by no means prepared to rely on the voluntary spirit and enthusiasm of its branches, numerous as these were - 141 were claimed in 1870 rising to a peak of 450 in 1872 - or of bodies working with it, such as the Trade Societies. (The interest of these organisations in the question of education quickly cooled. The Executive Committee's Report for 1870 claimed the support of 20 Trade Societies, but that of 1871 has no mention of them, although it lists other organisations which had supported it in the course of the year.) To keep its branches up to the mark, and to carry out its own designs, the central office employed paid agents, directly responsible to it.

Control of the League was in the hands of four men, the principal members of the Committee of Officers: they were Chamberlain, Collings, Bunce and William Harris. They met as a group twice weekly, and one or the other of them was each day in the League's office. Their work was regular and unremitting, whereas the frequency of the meetings of the Executive Committee - at most monthly - tended to vary with the intensity of the national campaign. Thus it met only five
times during 1871, when no national agitation was possible: in the same year the Committee of Officers reported that its work was exceptionally heavy. Its nature can be seen from the standing instructions issued to its agents.

The first of these, H. B. S. Thompson, T. Paynter Allen, and D. Evans (this last a dissenting minister) were appointed in 1871. Evans' area was Wales, the other two shared England between them. Their orders were to promote conferences, lectures, and public meetings. In May 1872 a new sub-committee of the Executive was formed - the Electoral Committee. Its chairman was William Harris, who, after initiating its work, resigned for a time because of ill-health, but was back again in 1874. This committee took over control of the agents, and gave a new direction to their work. Their number was increased: early 1872 saw twelve full-time agents travelling round the country, and their work was supplemented by part-time local agents, each responsible for an area. By 1873 every part of England had been reached, and every Parliamentary borough had been canvassed; the employment of travelling agents was then discontinued, except that of Paynter Allen who was retained to carry out special investigations, and the League covered the whole country with thirteen full-time agents, each responsible for an area: Thompson, for example, had his headquarters in Newcastle-on-Tyne and was responsible for Northumberland and Durham.

Their instructions were to forward the work of the League in all the obvious ways, by forming new branches, re-organising dormant branches, arranging public meetings, collecting subscriptions and distributing the publications of the League. They were enjoined
to correspond with local newspapers, and urge members of the League in their area to harass their M.Ps. They had to initiate and sustain agitations to form School Boards, and had to provide advice and assistance as to procedure. All disputes affecting education had to be reported regularly to the central office, especially where it seemed to the agent that legal assistance was required. Finally, and of most importance, they had to canvass every portion of their district and seek interviews with all the leading Liberals; they had to obtain full information respecting all persons who had special local influence, and make reports on them to the Central Office, where dossiers were compiled. The path on which Chamberlain was set becomes obvious.

When the League as such was dissolved it had achieved none of its objectives, not even compulsion, which had seemed within its grasp until Sandon introduced his Bill in 1876 and revealed the strength of the reaction. All its great hopes of 1869 - a Ministry, National Normal Schools, a gradation of primary grammar and high schools, the removal of the taint of charity, of condescension and even of the workhouse from the elementary schools - all these had faded; the League had been side-tracked and had had to fight a sectarian battle thrust upon it, in order to show, what should have been self-evident, that local subsidies to denominational schools were impossible unless these schools accepted some measure of local popular control.

10. Reports of Executive Committee 1871-76.
The clergy remained very jealous of their rights, in defiance of logic and their own true interests. Once the time-table conscience clause had been accepted, then the clergyman had everything to gain by handing over his school and the burden of its maintenance to a board, reserving his right to give full denominational instruction in it: that they failed to do so can only be explained by their reluctance to return as visiting teachers where formerly they had ruled as masters. More adroit men indeed might have seen that in many if not most parishes a board of five members could not fail to be under their own control and would give them powers and opportunities to further education which they had never possessed before. But all argument was in vain: boards, League, secularism combined to form one of the most troublesome hobgoblins ever to haunt the English countryside.

It is a truism that the voluntary schools received a fatal blow in 1870, and that in so far as the League merely opposed that system Dixon and his followers had only to wait for the certain fruits of victory. But this was by no means plain to all contemporaries: the period of grace stimulated the denominationalists to extraordinary activity, and the application of compulsion by school boards filled their schools. On the surface they flourished.

And in any case, patience is not the first characteristic that springs to mind when one thinks of the League and its leaders; yet patience was perhaps the only weapon which would avail, for, in the last analysis, the enemy the League fought was not the 1870 Education Act, or the Establishment, or even Forster, but the habits, customs and prejudices of the English people.
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