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Howard Robert Martin

THE POLITICS OF THE CONGREGATIONALISTS, 1830-1856.

Ph.D. Thesis 1971.

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ABSTRACT.

Seeking the redress of their "practical grievances", a militant minority demanding an immediate assault on the alliance of Church and State, Dissenters anticipated widespread changes after the Reform Act's passage. In 1834 the moderate United Committee took the lead, but as initial optimism turned sour the extremists became increasingly vocal and concessions were made to preserve unity. This provincial revolt was silenced until 1838, for the Whigs seemed willing to satisfy basic dissenting demands. Ministerial incapacity, and increasing ecclesiastical aggressiveness, revived provincial militancy, this phase culminating in the appearance of the Nonconformist, edited by Edward Miall, in 1841. Denouncing the old policies, he advocated an immediate attack on the Established Church and the repudiation of the Whig alliance. Disappointed by the response, he turned to radical politics and the complete suffrage movement. In 1843 Dissenters were united in opposition to Sir James Graham's education proposals. Miall seized this opportunity to launch the Anti-State-Church Association in 1844. Maynooth and education kept dissenting agitation alive during 1845 and 1847, the election of that year being fought on a distinctive programme. The next few years were confused, but electoral successes in 1852 saved the Anti-State-Church Association from collapse, and gave Dissent a parliamentary foothold. Organised by the Liberation Society, Nonconformity became an influential and successful pressure group, a chapter which was ended by serious election losses in 1857. Dissent was politically isolated, and therefore, weak. Its peculiar dogmas, educational voluntaryism and

disestablishment, made it distrustful of radical and liberal politicians, whilst the Whigs, after much heart-searching, had been discarded in 1847. Thus, Dissent contributed to the political confusion of the mid-nineteenth century. Within Dissent the traditional Unitarian leadership was rejected, new and more militant leaders, like Miall, emerging from the confusion.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN FOOTNOTES.

B.Q.R.	British Quarterly Review
C.M.	Congregational Magazine
C.P.M.	Christian's Penny Magazine
C.W.	Christian Witness
E.R.	Eclectic Review
L.M.	Leeds Mercury
N.	Nonconformist
N.E.	Nonconformist Elector
P.	Patriot

INTRODUCTION.

In his History of English Congregationalism R.W.Dale argues that the Evangelical Revival diluted and swamped "the original type of Independent character." As Churchmen from a different Christian tradition, and converts with no religious background joined the churches, so their old spirit changed. Amongst the consequences of this, "Congregationalists ceased to be keen theologians, and they ceased to be keen politicians."

> ..... During the first twenty or thirty years of this century, the best and noblest men in the Congregational Churches were all aglow with the zeal of the Revival..... and they created for their successors a new ideal of the Christian life. In the next generation, the ideal Christian man was one who avoided "worldly" amusements, and freely spent his time and strength in religious work; and among all religious work, evangelistic work had the highest place..... [1]

Politics became the "preserve of the evil one," participation inevitably resulting in loss of spirituality, explained John Guiness Rogers.[2]

Contemporaries of the Revival noted and deplored this development. Walter Wilson was particularly severe in his comments. By 1814 Dissenters, succumbing "to the laxity of principle, and indiscriminate zeal which distinguishes the Methodists," had lost "that peculiarity of character for which their forefathers were so eminent." Denominational union was non-existant for that smelt of sectarianism, whilst, "amidst the rage for charity ..... a decided avowal of nonconformity is considered nothing better than bigotry." The true spirit of nonconformity, Wilson feared, had been dead for a generation, smothered by indifference,

1. Dale, R.W.: History of English Congregationalism, (2nd. edn., London, 1907), pp. 588-92.
2. Rogers, J.G.: An Autobiography, (London, 1903), p. 189.

"enthusiasm," and the false catholicity of the evangelical movement which forced Nonconformists to renounce or neglect their principles. With all this many religious people had acquired "a most unaccountable notion, that the affairs of government should be left to the wicked." Of all the denominations, the Independents had been most contaminated by these new ideals.[1]

Such strictures did not deter the Congregationalists, and antipathy to political activity, to militant avowal of principles, survived into the middle of the century. In 1831 a letter, signed "Alpha," appeared in the Congregational Magazine complaining of political allusions, implying support for the Whig Government and reform, at the May meetings of the various religious societies. Political excitement in the crisis was heated enough, and, rather than stimulating further, the "cautious and self-observant Christian," ought to be watchful "lest an absorbing interest in this important question should seriously injure personal spirituality of mind." Deeply concerned with the effect of political activity on the ministerial character, "Alpha" equally deprecated it in laymen, condemning the various grants from metropolitan dissenting funds to the election expenses of Lord John Russell.

> ..... I think it is sufficiently obvious, that the way in which political character and station is introduced in Scripture, is rather to induce a thankful acceptance of the appointment of God, than active interference in the (often equivocal) improvement of that appointment by human wisdom..... 2

Prominent ministers shared these views. In 1845 John

1. Wilson, W.: History of Dissenting Churches, (four volumes, London, 1808-1814), vol. IV, pp. 547-57.
2. C.M., 1831, pp. 405-8.

Clayton jnr., resigning from his charge at the Poultry Chapel, reminded his deacons and flock of the frequent censures he had suffered because of them. Continually striving to keep politics out of his pulpit, he sought to remain completely aloof from such activities.

> ..... In the execution of my duties, as a minister of the Gospel of Peace, I have completely cast into the shade Whigs, Tories, Radicals, Conservatives, and Destructives, and have been a "total abstainer" from their agitations; being chiefly anxious that they might mourn for sin, and flee to Christ, and that "by all means they might be saved." My aim has been to avoid the political, which is only one form of a worldly, spirit..... 1

Critics alleged that such opinions were a cover for Clayton's own political conservatism. Ten years earlier, after a general election in which Dissenters, laymen and ministers alike, had laboured for a Whig victory, he actually wrote to the Record assuring its evangelical readers that there were very few "political agitators" in the ranks of the Congregational ministry. Most ministers, he stated, believed

> ..... that, excepting on rare occasions, it is well for ministers ..... to abstain from political intermeddlings; having observed that when they become intense partizans, they have usually lost much of the spirit of their Great Master, and have cast a withering blight over their ministerial usefulness..... 2

Another who regretted the intense agitations for religious equality in the thirties and forties, sensing that they had damaged the real spirit of the denomination, was John Angell James, Dale's mentor at Carr's Lane Chapel, Birmingham. There had been too much emphasis on the "civil aspect" of dissenting principles, too little on their "religious bearing." Prolonged resistance to church-rates,

1. Aveling, T.W.: Memorials of the Clayton Family, (London, 1867), pp. 428-30.
2. Record, 19 February 1835.

the formation of defensive societies, had all allowed "the ethereal spirit of our system to evaporate,"

> and have allowed the ardour of our zeal for freedom to dissipate, perhaps too much of the odour of our sanctity. We have exhibited the hero and the patriot, but perhaps not enough of the saint and martyr..... 1

Ministers were not alone in this dislike of political activism. Rufus Lyon, the radical Congregationalist minister at Treby Magna in George Eliot's Felix Holt the Radical found that his congregation opposed him, contending "that a share in public movements is a hindrance to the closer walk..... the pulpit is no place for teaching men their duties as members of the commonwealth."[2] His position cannot have been untypical.

As Dale suggests this was a legacy of the Evangelical Revival, but quietism was also the price of continued toleration, and the freedom to preach. In 1811 Dissenters had had to exert themselves to defeat Lord Sidmouth's Bill to restrict the number of itinerant and licensed preachers. To the high Tory Churchman, the itinerant preacher, often an artisan or small tradesman, was a purveyor of religious and political sedition, threatening the old order of society, and breaking all its taboos. There had been many refusals to license preachers, and attacks on their meetings, in the years before 1811, and the episcopate had made its views known on several occasions. Dissenters had been vigorous defenders of the French Revolution, and the whole body was suspected of sharing this political radicalism. Such was the background to Sidmouth's Bill, and after its withdrawal

1. C.W., 1844, pp. 52-4, 102-4.
2. Eliot, G.: Felix Holt the Radical, (London Panther edition, 1965), p. 70.

there was the strongest possible pressure on Dissenters to disavow any political objectives if they were to retain the free right to preach.

Another consequence of the Revival was that extreme catholicity of operation which Wilson so much deplored. God's work had to be done, the harvest was ripe, and there was room for all denominations to labour together - this was the spirit of its early years. The London Missionary Society, "one of the most characteristic creations of the Revival,"[1] founded in 1795, sought to unite men from all evangelical denominations in the work of converting the heathen. The Evangelical Magazine, and the Eclectic Review were started on this same undenominational basis. In some counties Episcopalians and Dissenters happily co-operated in local itinerant associations, and in many northern towns the denominationalisation of the Sunday school movement did not take place until the 1790s.[2] Yet by the 1820s the London Missionary Society was virtually a Congregationalist organisation, the Evangelical Magazine was edited by two Congregationalist ministers, and the Eclectic by a Congregationalist layman.

Memories of this era of close evangelical co-operation coloured the attitudes of many of the more conservative dissenting ministers, and although the Evangelical Alliance of 1846 had more immediate causes, the roots of that movement for the union of all evangelical Protestants which sprang up in the forties must surely be traced to the undenominational

1. Dale, R.W.: op. cit., p. 602.
2. See, for instance, Murphy, J.: "The Rise of Public Elementary Education in Liverpool: part one, 1784-1818," in Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, vol. 116, 1964, pp. 167-95.

nature of the Revival. Because men like Clayton, James, and Leifchild, to name but three, appreciated what had been lost in the retreat to denominational barricades, they resented and resisted the growth of a new political aspect to Dissent in the thirties which could only accentuate that divide.

Defending himself from attack in the Patriot, Clayton accused that newspaper of descending "from the high and hallowed elevation on which it was originally designed to be placed," by adopting a tone "at variance with Christianity, and calculated to produce an unfavourable impression upon the public mind, in reference to the Protestant Dissenters of Britain." Many of his colleagues, he reported, felt that it no longer represented their opinions, and were particularly concerned

> ..... to liberate ourselves from that kind of sectarian spell, by the benumbing incantation of which, a few of us, even in public stations, have been too strongly bound..... We hesitate not ..... to proclaim our belief ..... that the great cause of vital Christianity will not be effectively promoted by the most dextrous sharp-shooting against each others denominational peculiarities, but by a vivid exhibition of evangelical truth, by the maintenance of the catholic temper which is adapted to inspire, and by the universal coalition of genuine Christians in opposing the Prince of Darkness..... 1

All this gives some substance to Dale's judgement with which we began, but there were other strands in the fabric of mid-nineteenth century Congregationalism. John Guiness Rogers' father, minister at Prescot in Lancashire, took part in all the progressive movements of his time, teaching his son the importance of carrying his Christianity into civic life. In Coventry there was John Sibree, who wrote,

> As a minister of the Gospel, he has ever made the Bible his textbook; and whatever he finds in

1. P., 4 March 1835 p. 68.

> the inspired volume that regards the civil and social condition of his fellow men, as well as their spiritual welfare, he considers himself bound to bring before his hearers on all suitable occasions.1

These men, and many like them, were exponents of that tradition which Dale believed dead, a tradition which the Patriot recalled in its first issue when urging its readers, as the heirs of those to whose efforts "we are mainly indebted for our civil constitution," to participate in the resolving of the Reform crisis.

> The descendants of the Puritans, the inheritors of their principles, both civil and religious, will be inexcusable indeed if, at such a season as that which has now arrived, they should pusillanimously abandon or treacherously betray the cause of national freedom, which they of all men ought best to understand, and the ultimate ruin of which would involve their own political existence.2

During the early thirties the critics of the "no politics" view were becoming more vocal; released from their civil disabilities in 1828, many viewed the Reform Bill as a means of securing full religious equality, perceiving no valid reason for abstaining from the crisis it had provoked. J.Barfett, a minister from Launceston in Cornwall, published a pamphlet in which he vindicated the religious man who actively supported the Bill, completely dismissing that "unfair, illogical mode of deduction" from Scripture that he ought not to interfere in public and political matters. It was "utterly fallacious" to imply that an avowal of Christianity deprived a man of the rights and privileges of citizenship. Scripture defined the christian character, enjoining certain obligations, but it left the individual

1. Rogers, J.G.: op. cit., pp. 17, 22-3, 189. Sibree, J.: The Corn Monopoly condemned by Scripture. A Sermon ....., (London, 1841), p. iii.
2. P., 22 February 1832 p. 4.

in full possession "of his every right both as a Citizen and as a member of the Civil compact." It did not demand a total separation from the world, rendering "indifference to what is passing before and around him a virtue, and the least interference with political events a criminal transgression of his own proper province." A political life should not be deliberately courted, but, Barfett argued, the Reform crisis was an occasion in the nation's history when it was imperative for every man, "especially .... every good man, openly, firmly, and without fear, to record his sentiments; - when silence would amount to crime!"[1]

Replying to "Alpha" in the Congregational Magazine, "Beta" queried his opinion that "the religion of our Lord and Saviour requires that its professors should form a neutral body in the state." Like the leaven, "they are to diffuse right principles through the mass - like the salt of the earth, they are to correct moral putresence, wherever it be found." It was, therefore, a christian duty to intervene in national affairs to reform a system that had spawned innumerable moral evils, "to correct notorious immoralities," which could only cause offence in the eyes of God, tempting his punishment.[2] "Omega" pointed out that political duties and privileges remained with the minister, and should be used to serve religious and moral ends. Too often, Christians "criminally" neglected them, allowing "bigots and infidels" to misrepresent them.

> ..... I argue, then, that there are proper occasions which call for our services..... ..... As a minister and a citizen, I shall

1. Barfett, J.: The Question, 'Ought the Professors of Religion to interfere with Politics?' considered, in a Letter to a Friend, (London, 1832), pp. 3-6.
2. C.M., 1831, pp. 531-4.

> continue to rejoice in the progress of reform, as a measure calculated to purify the morals of the country, and to sweep away many awful corruptions under which the land groans..... 1

Defending Dr. Pye Smith from the strictures of the Record on his presence at a reform meeting in Hackney, the Leeds Mercury outlined the responsibility of every man, "by the law of love to his neighbours, to promote the welfare of the community in which he lives." Nothing was more conducive to this, "than good government, just laws, and a righteous administration of those laws." The Christian, the article concluded, ought to further this cause with all his influence. To abandon the task to others and to providence was indulgence in a "silly" and "criminal" apathy, showing blindness and indifference "to the most important interests of his country."[2]

What of the danger to spirituality incurred by these worldly proceedings? A retreat from public life, prompted by this fear, suggested the Patriot, demonstrated distrust of "their own firmness" by the Dissenters. It was no excuse for neglecting a duty that its execution might lead to temptation. Admittedly the threat to piety existed, but piety was incomplete whilst the world was shunned.

> ..... The Christian is to show his principles, not by leaving the world itself, but by doing all the good he can in it; and that everything which he avoids as too severe a trial for piety, may itself become, and is intended to be, a most salutary exercise and discipline of it. The Christian is the salt of the earth - and that salt must be spread abroad..... The great mark which will discriminate the Christian from

1. ibid., pp. 534-6. The magazine's editor had already recorded that "Alpha's" opinions were "not in unison with our own."
2. L.M., 2 June 1832. Extracts appeared in C.M., 1832, pp. 421-4.

> the worldling will be ..... the motives by which he will be inspired; and ..... the manner in which he will discharge his duties.1

Three years later the editor of this journal remarked slightingly of the Record's praise for the "religious dissenters", that, "we do not find those to be the most spiritual in their taste and feeling, who indolently shrink from their social duties, or who conceal a servile political creed under an affectation of religious obedience."[2]

Otherworldliness provided an inadequate conception of the Christian's role in society as great new vistas of parliamentary and ecclesiastical reform opened up. Civil equality had been granted in 1828; a Reform Act which enfranchised the middle classes would give some semblance of political equality to Dissent. Fresh concepts had to be formulated to meet this eventuality, to bring Dissent out of an era of second-class citizenship, into a world in which it had responsibilities to fulfil and relevant tasks to perform. Thus, a new phenomenom, the political Dissenter, so often reviled in the Tory press, was born, and thrown into conflict with his rival, the deserving and harmless religious Dissenter.

This thesis deals with the fortunes of the "political Dissenters." Its title is somewhat misleading, for there was never a Congregationalist political party, and it is impossible to classify dissenting politics by denomination. Within Congregationalism, however, the whole spectrum of dissenting attitudes can be found, ranging from Edward Miall at one extreme, to John Clayton jnr. at the other. Hence,

1. P., 5 September 1832 p. 264. For a similar view see:- Bennett, J.: The History of the Dissenters during the last Thirty Years, (London, 1839), pp. 354-5.
2. P., 4 March 1835 p. 69.

most of the leading figures in what follows are Congregationalists, for by studying their conflicts and aspirations, their alliances and disappointments, we can draw conclusions about the political development of Nonconformity in general.

1830 seemed a good starting point; the Whigs were in office, and reforms which would give Dissent a greater political influence promised. For all its limitations, the Reform Act was the springboard from which a dissenting political conscience developed. The terminating date was somewhat arbitrarily chosen, but it eventually emerged as marking the last full session of the first Parliament in which Dissenters were well-represented and active. Also, in the 1857 general election, Edward Miall, who had become the personification of political Dissent and its acknowledged leader, lost his seat, thus suddenly curtailing these initial efforts. Nevertheless, through the agency of the Liberation Society, Dissent was, by this time, more politically united than ever before.

There were other reasons for choosing the Congregationalists. They were the largest of the old nonconformist denominations, and, drawing members from the increasingly influential middle class, their leaders succeeded to the political leadership of Dissent as Unitarian predominance was undermined in the thirties.

In 1812 it was estimated that there were 1,021 Congregational churches in England and Wales. 808 of these were in England. By 1835 this had risen to 1,440 congregations (1,840 in England and Wales). Six years later, the English figure had increased to 1,853, and the combined total to 2,316 chapels. The religious census in 1851 found

3,244 churches in England and Wales (2,604 in England alone), offering accommodation for just over a million worshippers. On census Sunday it was estimated that 793,142 people attended services in these buildings. Only the Church of England, and the various Methodist groups had more places of worship, provided more sittings, and had more attenders. The Baptist figures in 1851 were 2,789 chapels, just over 750,000 sittings, and an estimated attendance of about 600,000, whilst there were 371 Friends' meeting houses, and 229 Unitarian congregations.[1]

Congregationalists tended to become politically influential because of the social strata from which the leading members of the denomination, particularly in the large towns, sprang. At the King's Weigh-house in the days of John Clayton snr., sixteen to twenty "full-appointed gentlemen's carriages" waited outside at service time; the chapel of William Bengo Collyer, in Peckham, was occasionally graced by the presence of the Dukes of Kent and Sussex.[2] By 1839 James Bennett had noticed a gradual change; the aristocracy had veered away from Dissent, but the new men, whose wealth had been created by the Industrial Revolution, had joined its ranks.[3] Joseph Parker's first impression of the congregation at Cavandish Street Chapel in Manchester was that,"every man seemed to be looking at me over the top of a money bag." In the eighteen-thirties the social

1. C.M., 1836, pp. 10-2; 1842, pp. 34-8. Religious Census, 1851, (London, 1853), pp. xli-xcl passim; Table 10, p. cxxxvii; Table 23, p. clvi.
2. Aveling, T.W.: Memorials of the Clayton Family, p. 114. Jones, T.: Congregationalism in England 1662-1962, (London, 1962), p. 228.
3. Bennett, J.: The History of the Dissenters during the last Thirty Years, p. 273.

prestige of Liverpool Congregationalism was immense; "a veritable galaxy of local notabilities," that even included James Hope Simpson, "'the Napoleon of Liverpool finance'". Across the Pennines, in the West Riding, Congregationalism was one of the socially acceptable denominations, and in the area's industrial towns the Lancashire pattern repeats itself.[1] In Halifax there was Francis Crossley, the carpet manufacturer, in Bradford, Titus Salt, the inventor of alpaca and builder of Saltaire. Bristol had H.O. and W.D.Wills, London benefitted from the profits acquired by Thomas Wilson in the ribbon trade, and the philanthropy of Samuel Morley, the knitting millionaire, knew no bounds. Such were the patriarchs of ~~the~~ nineteenth century Congregationalism, and though the rank and file could not aspire to their wealth, they had sufficient common interests to share a similar political and social outlook.

Congregationalism was very much a middle class denomination. Algernon Wells recognised this in his often quoted remarks to the autumnal meeting of the Congregational Union in 1848.

> ..... preaching, buildings, ministers, manners, notions, and practices - all have on them the air and impress of English middle-class life. Our Churches have more and more worked themselves into this mould, as time and change have proceeded. Are they not at this time far more exclusively of that class than was the case a century ago?.....2

The Rev. J.Kennedy was even more specific in his assertion of 1872, that, "Our congregations belong for the most part

1. Parker, J.: A Preacher's Life, (London, 1899), p. 143. Sellars, I.: "Congregationalists and Presbyterians in Nineteenth Century Liverpool," in Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society, 1965, pp. 74-85. Ram, R.W.: The Political Activities of Dissenters in the East and West Ridings of Yorkshire, 1815-1850, (Hull University M.A. thesis, 1964), pp. 3-17 passim.
2. C.W., 1848, p. 572.

to the middle middle classes."[1] A hostile critic from Manchester described Congregationalism as "a middle class movement," as a denomination "paying the most scrupulous attention to the mint, anise, and cummin of architectural improvements and sectarian punctilliousness, while the weightier matters included in the Christian's mission are comparatively neglected."[2]

Most Congregationalists were aware of this label, and many were prepared to accept it. Thomas Binney told the Congregational Union, again in 1848, that,

> ..... Our special mission is neither to the very rich nor the very poor. We have a work to do upon the thinking, active, influential classes - classes which fill neither courts nor cottages, but which, gathered into cities, and consisting of several gradations there, are the modern movers and moulders of the world..... 3

Wells, and others who were deeply disturbed by working class reluctance to enter the chapels, realised that the middle class image was a great deterrent. He suggested that there might be a greater sympathy with working class movements, but Miall, and "A Christian Observer" felt that a radical change in middle class employer ethics was essential. Professing christian factory owners, who were no better masters than their worldly fellows, were no advertisement for their faith.[4]

Whether the working classes were alienated from the chapels for political or social reasons, it is clear that

1. Quoted in Inglis, K.S.: Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England, (London, 1963), p. 102.
2. "A Christian Observer": Papers on the Present Condition of Congregationalism in Manchester and Salford, (Manchester, London, undated but possibly 1853), pp. 9-11.
3. C.W., 1848, pp. 294-5.
4. ibid., p. 572. "A Christian Observer": op. cit., pp. 12-3. N., 10 January 1849 p. 21. Miall, E.: The British Churches in Relation to the British People, (London, 1849), pp. 177-228, 291-341, passim.

they were not there in large numbers. True, James James's workmen subscribed to a memorial tablet, erected in Carr's Lane Chapel, on his death in 1852, and Rogers found "working people," "employers," and the "middle class" represented amongst his deacons at Ashton-under-Lyme, but the problem was real enough, and this situation uncommon.[1]

The dissenting press has been a major source for this study. I have relied heavily on the Patriot and the Nonconformist amongst the national weeklies, on the Eclectic Review, the Congregational Magazine, and the British Quarterly Review amongst their periodicals, and on the Leeds Mercury, an influential provincial newspaper, edited by the Congregationalists, Edward Baines snr. and Edward Baines jnr. With the exception of the Eclectic, all these were edited by Congregationalists, as were Christian Witness, the British Banner, and the Sheffield Independent. All tended to reflect different shades of political and denominational opinion, and the Eclectic, despite being edited by the Baptist Dr. Thomas Price from 1837, was widely read in Congregationalist circles.

Circulations are difficult to assess. During its early years the Patriot stumbled from one crisis to another, and when Josiah Conder became editor in 1833, its circulation was only 1,587 copies a week; by the end of 1834 he had raised this to 2,400, and although it frequently fell, it is doubtful whether this was ever exceeded. By the mid-fifties its circulation was well below those of both the Banner and the Nonconformist. Stamp returns for 1853 showed that whereas 131,986 had been purchased by the twice-weekly

1. Inglis, K.S.: op. cit., p. 102. Rogers, J.G.: An Autobiography, p. 112.

Patriot, the Banner had received 202,205, and the Nonconformist 167,000. The circulation of the Nonconformist had increased steadily from its foundation in 1841, despite slight setbacks in 1845 and 1851, and by 1853 it had reached about 3,200 copies weekly. The following year, more stamps were issued to the Nonconformist than to any other dissenting newspaper, surpassing even the Wesleyan Watchman.[1] Stamp returns are unreliable, they could be distorted by one special edition, but they do give some indication of the relative weight and influence of these papers.

Of the periodicals consulted, only the Eclectic and the Congregational Magazine had appeared before 1830. The former began in 1805, on an inter-denominational basis, but, in 1814 a Congregationalist, Josiah Conder, became proprietor, and later editor, of the journal. He continued in this capacity until 1836, selling out to Dr. Price. The latter was the denominational magazine, surviving until 1845 when competition from the Christian Witness made economic publication impossible. Its editor, John Blackburn, minister at Claremont Chapel, resigned, and it limped on for a further five years as The Biblical Review and Congregational Magazine.

The Patriot was founded in 1832. Thomas Wilson and James Baldwin Brown were the signatories of an initial circular summoning a meeting to discuss, "the establishment of a Newspaper devoted to the interests of Religion amongst the Dissenters, in a spirit calculated to do credit to their principles and character." Agreeing on the need for "a

1. Conder, E.R.: Josiah Conder. A Memoir, (London, 1857), p. 273. N., 12 April 1854 p. 306, 31 May 1854 p. 454, 7 March 1855 p. 186.

weekly Newspaper advocating the religious & political principles generally entertained by Evangelical Dissenters & furnishing correct reports of proceedings of Religious & Benevolent Institutions," the London Dissenters decided to raise a guarantee fund of £1,000, any profits being devoted to the support of various dissenting societies. A committee of twelve trustees was to supervise the whole operation, four of whom were to be Baptists.[1] Joshua Wilson's correspondence records its early struggles, and despite Conder's appointment as editor in 1833, at £400 a year, begging letters were still being circulated in the October of that year.[2]

John Campbell was the press baron of Dissent. In 1844 he launched Christian Witness, backed by the Congregational Union; by 1846 average monthly sales were over 30,000. In the same year the cheaper Christian's Penny Magazine appeared, also edited by Campbell with Union sponsorship. It soon had a monthly circulation of 100,000. Campbell was a fiery figure and an eagar controversialist, whose multifarious activities soon caused friction within the Union. A great believer in the power of the press, when approached by the trustees of the Patriot, Campbell jumped at their offer of the editorial chair of a new weekly, the British Banner, in 1848. The greater freedom he now enjoyed accentuated the antagonistic attitude he had engendered in prominent Congregationalists, and the Union's seal of

1. Joshua Wilson papers, in the Congregational Library, envelope H.a.4., "Letters and Papers relating to the Establishment of the Patriot Newspaper, 1831-1834," circulars and manuscript minute books.
2. ibid., J.Conder to J.Wilson, 4 September 1833, protesting against a reduction in his salary; J.Wilson to Samuel Fletcher (Manchester), 7 October 1833; draft of a circular appealing for donations.

approval was removed from the two monthlies, though their profits continued to benefit denominational charities. In the columns of the Banner, Campbell, the champion of the true Protestant faith, lambasted Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists and Congregationalists alike, whenever they threatened it.[1]

Edward Baines snr. became editor and proprietor of the Leeds Mercury in 1801. His second son joined him in the business. Both were active Congregationalists, although the father did not become a church member until 1840.[2] Their comments on dissenting affairs provide a useful provincial counter-balance to the London based national organs, whilst indicating the drift of opinion amongst the middle class Congregationalists of the industrial North. The Sheffield Independent, edited by Robert Leader, another Congregationalist, distantly related to the Baines family, has been occasionally consulted.

Two themes run through the whole thesis. Firstly, there is the conflict within Congregationalism and Dissent over policy. What were the priorities - redress of the practical grievances, or separation of church and state? The traditional leaders in London tended to be gradualist, militant pressure being applied from the provinces, from Manchester in the first instance, and later from the Midlands. In the second half of the thesis the political activities of Edward Miall, of the Anti-State-Church Association, and the Liberation Society, bulk large. Miall

1. Ferguson, R., and Brown, A.M.: Life and Labours of John Campbell, D.D., (London, 1867), pp. 278-322 for his views on the press.
2. Baines, E., jnr.: The Life of Edward Baines, (London, 1851), p. 291.

played an increasingly important part, first as a critic, then as a leader of Dissent, and the origins of the disestablishment movement are at the heart of this internal conflict. Secondly, and closely linked with this, there is the attitude of Dissenters to Whig governments and liberal politicians. The dissenting contribution to the fragmentation of the Liberal party in the fifties was very real, and the thread of alienation and disillusionment can be traced from 1833, ever growing in its intensity.

The Congregationalist reaction to the major political movements of the period - the Reform crisis, the anti-slavery agitation, the Anti-Corn Law League, and Chartism - form the contents of two chapters. Predictably these emphasise the denomination's middle class outlook. A third examines the nature of the dissenting grievances, the dissenting attitude to ecclesiastical reform, and to the establishment question, with particular reference to the thirties.

With the exception of a general chapter on the voluntary education movement, the remainder chronicle the political activities of the Congregationalists in defence of their interests, and in pursuance of their aims as Dissenters. Chapter three examines the events and conflicts of 1833 and 1834, the year of the first concerted campaign for the redress of grievances. This is followed by one on the period 1835-1837, when co-operation with the Whigs bore fruit in the shape of the Registration and Marriage Acts, and an acceptable church-rates abolition scheme. The collapse of the moderate metropolitan leadership, and the rise of an effective militant group, both consequences of

the Whig reluctance to legislate against church-rates, form the content of chapter five. Chapter seven deals with the years 1841-1844, and the formation of the Anti-State-Church Association, whilst the next section takes the story to 1847, contrasting moderate and militant attitudes to the anti-Maynooth agitation, and examining the political reaction of Dissent to the education Minutes of 1846. In chapter ten the fragility of the unity achieved in 1847 is exposed in the differing responses of Congregationalists to the Papal Aggression, and the revived Protestant movement. At the 1852 general election several evangelical Nonconformists were returned to Parliament; chapter eleven records their activities under the auspices of the Liberation Society, culminating in Miall's Irish disendowment motion of 1856, and the election losses of the following year.

CHAPTER 1.

REFORM AND SLAVERY.

Not all Congregationalists were reformers, but it was worth noting of William Thorpe, in his obitury, that he "belonged to that very small class, who unite the characters of Dissenting Minister and High Tory."[1] Moreover, whilst there is little evidence of active dissenting opposition to parliamentary reform, many prominent laymen and ministers publicly advocated it.

Congregationalists had supported Whig reform schemes at the end of the previous century. Thomas Wilson was "a zealous whig, although rather of the democratical than of the aristocratical class ..... jealous of its (the crown's) increasing influence and encroaching power, as well as of the undue preponderance of the aristocratical element in our national constitution. He was a strenuous advocate for a temperate reform in the representation of the people, and warmly sympathised with the noble efforts of the leading patriots of the day to remove those corruptions and abuses ..... which, while they defaced and disfigured, threatened also to undermine the fairest political fabric that the hands of man have reared." Naturally, he backed the Whigs in 1831, presiding over a public meeting in the parish of Islington, held to hail their reform proposals.[2]

Many Dissenters had welcomed the French Revolution.[3]

1. C.M., 1833, p. 330. Thorpe had opposed Roman Catholic emancipation in 1829. He was a minister in Bristol.
2. Wilson, Joshua: A Memoir of the Life and Character of Thomas Wilson, Esq....., (London, 1846), pp. 95-7, 433-4.
3. Bogue, D., and Bennett, J.: History of the Dissenters, Vol. 4, (London, 1812), pp. 189-95. Skeats, H.S., and Miall, C.S.: History of the Free Churches of England, 1688-1891, (London, 1891), pp. 399-401.

True, John Clayton snr. preached a series of sermons insisting on "that rational, just, and religious deference to constituted authorities, so indispensable to the liberty, safety, and prosperity of the empire." This viewpoint was not reciprocated by his ministerial colleagues, and, as a family, the Claytons were known to be of a far more conservative cast of mind than the majority of dissenting ministers.[1]

Political quiescence may have been the price paid for toleration in the early years of the new century, but this was by no means general. In Sheffield the young John Pye Smith temporarily edited the Sheffield Iris during 1796, when James Montgomery was serving a six month sentence for libel.[2] Edward Baines became editor of the Leeds Mercury in 1801. A Whig, he advocated some form of parliamentary reform from the beginning, although he made no specific proposals before 1819.[3] He applauded the Whig scheme as "the glorious measure of Parliamentary Reform," "as excellent and unexceptionable a measure, as replete with positive advantages, and as free from serious objections, as any great constitutional measure that has ever been submitted to an English Legislature." Here was "the Great Charter of William the Fourth."[4] Engaged in every movement in town and county during the crisis, Baines was already prominent enough, by November 1831, to be consulted by Lord John Russell on the respectability of those who would be enfranchised by a £10 qualification in Leeds. Thanking

1. Aveling, T.W.: Memorials of the Clayton Family, pp. 145-50.
2. Medway, J.: Memoirs of the Life and Writings of John Pye Smith, D.D., F.R.S., F.G.S., (London, 1853), pp. 32-6.
3. Read, D.: Press and People, (London, 1961), p. 114. Baines, E., jnr.: Life of Edward Baines, p. 49.
4. L.M., 5, 19 March 1831.

Russell for "the noble and patriotic measure," Baines, in his reply, praised ministerial firmness and wisdom. Liberal politics in Leeds were dominated by Unitarians, but there, and in the other West Riding towns, leading Congregationalists took an active part in the agitation, securing a position which was later to take some of them to Parliament.[1]

The Unitarians took the lead in Manchester, but George Hadfield, "an early and decided reformer, who had not taken much part in public meetings," appeared on a political platform for the first time, whilst Thomas Harbottle, Samuel Fletcher, and James Kershaw addressed reform meetings.[2]

Journalists, manufacturers, solicitors and merchants, these were men of the middle class who could only benefit politically from parliamentary reform. Many dissenting laymen were reformers for such mundane reasons, as well as from political conviction. This is not to disparage the religious motives they voiced. These existed, and were influential, even if they only confirmed the correctness of a social and political decision.

That many ministers shared these views is demonstrated by "Alpha's" lament, in the Congregational Magazine, at "political allusions at recent anniversary meetings."[3] Dr. Pye Smith spoke at a public meeting held in Hackney in May 1832, to protest at the King's refusal to create the peers needed to circumvent Tory opposition to the Reform Bill in

1. Ram, R.W.: The Political Activities of Dissenters in the East and West Ridings of Yorkshire, 1815-1850, pp. 106-26. Baines, E., jnr.: op. cit., pp. 153-62.
2. Prentice, Archibald: Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester, (London, Manchester, 2nd. edn., 1851), pp. 365, 374, 396, 414.
3. C.M., 1831, p. 406.

the Lords, and at Grey's consequent resignation. Soundly berated in the Record and other Tory organs, the Patriot sprang to his defence, and, whilst disapproving of frequent interference by ministers in political matters, pointed out that,

> ..... it was a CRISIS in the history of our country ..... We should be disposed to blame no one, whether Reformer or Anti-reformer, Clergyman or Dissenting Minister, for expressing his sincere conviction of what is right on such an occasion as that. Nay, if he did not do so (though he might excuse his silence under the affectation of religious scruples), we should consider him as little less than a traitor to his country..... 1

A sense of historical tradition and pride tempered and reinforced the opinions of dissenting reformers, and they tried to arouse these feelings amongst the inactive or the indifferent. Modern Nonconformists, the descendants of those who had fought to preserve civil liberty in the sixteenth century, would betray these ancestors if, through apathy or erroneous views, they allowed opposite principles to triumph in the nineteenth century.[2]

Christianity, argued Barfett, was "eternally opposed to everything intolerant," was a "system of pure unsullied truth," whose very "genius is freedom." Religious conviction should, therefore, make the evangelical Dissenter a reformer, inevitably hostile to the iniquities and tyranny of the unreformed system. Then there were the moral grounds on which Christians should support parliamentary reform. The Eclectic indicated these, deploring that there were "any religious persons ..... ranged on the side of that scandalous and pernicious system of fraud and corruption which this measure is adapted to abate."

1. P., 23 May 1832 p. 145.
2. ibid., 22 February 1832 p. 4.

> ..... Were the political benefits of the measure more equivocal than they are, every religious man ought to tremble at finding himself opposed to what must, in its very nature, be a moral benefit to the community, by lessening the temptation to perjury, venality, and corruption among all classes.....[1]

In another article it was argued that the conflict was less one between opposing political parties, than one between rival principles; that the forces of good and evil had lined up to do battle. All the causes and priciples upheld by Christians were on one side.

> ..... On the one side are ranged in dark conspiracy, the corruptionists, the peculators, the abettors of slavery, the enemies of civil liberty, those who think they have a right to do what they will with their own, those who would gladly reduce the people of this country to the condition of serfs, and draw the sword on another crusade of despots. On the other side, we have.... the preponderance of talent, of property, and of public worth, - of every thing that can dignify rank or benefit society, - every name that is known to philanthropy, - the friends of peace, - the friends of education, - the friends of truth, - the Cabinet and the Throne. But, more than this, we feel a cheerful confidence that there is ONE for us, greater than all, who "means mercy to" our "land".....

The immorality of the old system, especially its countenancing of slavery, to the abolition of which Nonconformists were deeply committed, dominated the discussion of these years.[2]

Defenders of ministerial involvement in the reform agitation frequently referred to anticipated reforms the passage of the Bill would introduce. At the individual level, improvements in electoral behaviour were expected, whilst there would be great changes in national institutions

1. Barfett, J.: The Question, 'Ought the Professors of Religion to interfere with Politics?' considered, in a Letter to a Friend, pp. 7-21. E.R., 3s., vol. VI, 1831, p. 443.
2. ibid., vol. V, 1831, pp. 446-459.

and attitudes. Participating in the 1831 general election, "not as 'politicians and party men,' but as those who seek, by their teaching, their example, and their influence, to reform the nation," ministers would find their task greatly eased if the Bill was carried.[1]

Politically, success would strengthen the monarchy, promote order and contentment, and precipitate the downfall

> ..... of an anti-national faction that has for more than fifty years exerted a baleful influence on the interests of this country and of the world, - the abettors and upholders of all that is narrow in policy and corrupt in administration, - of slavery in the colonies, of Orangemen in Ireland, of the Game-laws in England, of despotism abroad, and of peculation at home ... we ..... bless God for that peaceful revolution which has broken up a system that rendered a good government impossible.

This one reform, suggested the Patriot, would "render other needful reforms possible."[2]

Equally, Dissenters realised that the Reform Act had given them a new political influence, that, "If we regard their respectability, numbers, and wealth, they ought to be able to point to more than two or three members in the ..... Commons, who shall more peculiarly represent their opinions."[3] Major reforms expected in 1832 were, "the abolition of slavery ..... a reform of the church ..... an honest, statesmanlike revision of the various branches of our domestic administration."[4]

Of these, the most important and urgent, was the abandonment of the "most hateful national crime," the continuance of colonial slavery.[5] The guilt of this grievous

1. C.M., 1831, pp. 531-6
2. E.R., 3s., vol. VI, 1831, p. 444. P., 29 February 1832 p. 12, 23 May 1832 p. 144.
3. P., 13 June 1832 p. 168.
4. E.R., 3s., vol. VII, 1832, pp. 493-4.
5. C.M., 1830, p. 615.

sin tainted the whole nation, and divine retribution would be visited on all. It was the duty of the christian patriot to "assist in rescuing his country from the dire effects of the impending displeasure of Him who 'executeth judgement for the oppressed, who looseth the prisoners, but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down'....." Loss of empire, loss of trade, and military defeat had been the consequence of participation in the slave trade. Its abolition had been succeeded by a wave of prosperity, but slavery itself had not been repudiated, and once again the nation stood on the brink of ruin, only to be evaded by immediate repentence.[1]

To Congregationalists, slavery was pre-eminently a religious question, and that theme runs through their writings and resolutions. Slavery, in its very essence, was opposed to the principles of Christianity.[2] Significantly, it was in 1824, following the death of William Smith, London Missionary Society agent, in Georgetown jail, after conviction on charges of inciting slaves to revolt, that the religious world first became deeply involved in the question. Throughout 1832 the Patriot claimed that the persecution of Baptist missionaries by the Jamaican planters, following a slave uprising, was indicative of the complete incompatibility of the slave system with the propagation of the Gospel. Planters did not want educated and christian slaves, for these were dangerous. Without emancipation, the missionaries would be fighting a constant battle against their prejudice and obstruction.[3]

1. E.R., 3s., vol. V, 1831, pp. 187-91.
2. ibid., vol. III, 1830, pp. 354ff. Halley, Robert: The Sinfulness of Colonial Slavery, (London, 1833). C.M., 1830, p. 614.
3. P., 14 March 1832 pp. 28-9, 11 April 1832 p. 60, 28 April 1832 p. 84, 27 June 1832 p. 184.

The indignation voiced in 1824 was short-lived. In April 1830 the Eclectic was deploring "the torpor which has seized alike upon Churchmen and Dissenters, Whigs, Tories, and Radicals," "on the subject of that foul stain upon our national character."[1] By the autumn, a new public awareness had become apparant.[2]

On 15 May, 1830, the Anti-Slavery Society abandoned the policy of amelioration and gradualism, adopting one of total abolition. In this resolve they were forestalled by the Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters Association for the Abolition of Slavery, formed on 28 September, 1829, in Leeds. The Rev. Thomas Scales informed readers of the Congregational Magazine that they hoped to follow up "those measures of liberality and justice," passed in 1828 and 1829, with an abolition bill in 1830. The initial meeting was chaired by John Clapham, the Association's secretaries were the Revs. Thomas Scales and Richard Winter Hamilton, and Thomas Plint jnr., all prominent Leeds Congregationalists.[3]

Abolitionists were active in the 1830 general election, the Anti-Slavery Society issueing an Address to the electors. Prior to its appearence, however, Joshua Wilson had advised Congregationalists to withhold their support from any candidate, "whatever may be his pretensions," who refused a pledge to vote for, "if not ..... the immediate, at least ..... the prompt and speedy, complete and final abolition of slavery in the British dominions."[4]

In no constituency did abolition play a greater part than in Yorkshire. Here, Edward Baines proposed Brougham's

1. E.R., 3s., vol. III, 1830, pp. 352-3.
2. ibid., vol. IV, 1830, p. 456.
3. C.M., 1830, pp. 51-2.
4. ibid., pp. 311-2.

candidature in the Mercury, and led the campaign for his return.[1] Brougham, a reformer and an abolitionist, the parliamentary advocate of Smith in 1824, neatly captured the religious vote.

> ..... Amongst the religious and humane of every denomination, and especially among the Society of Friends and the Dissenters, his cause is taken up with uncommon ardour. They view him ..... as the most distinguished champion of freedom of conscience and of the abolition of Slavery. They feel that his return for this county, on the especial ground of his past and promised exertions to wipe out that foul blot .... from our national escutcheon, would be so powerful a manifestation of the public feeling on that subject as would both stir up the whole country to imitate the example of Yorkshire, and would produce an overpowering effect on the next Parliament.....

Anti-slavery societies in Leeds, Bradford, Pontefract and other towns gave him their support, whilst the Yorkshire Protestant Dissenters Association issued a stirring Address to the freeholders. This identification of Brougham with the cause of Dissent and abolition was completed by the presence of Scales and Hamilton at the breakfast held in Leeds to meet the candidates, and at the celebration dinner after the contest.[2] This activity was not exceptional, and the Congregational Magazine purred its gratification that "a determined stand has been made by the Christian electors of the empire, in favour of the Abolition of Negro Slavery, during the late contest....."[3]

Abolitionist candidates tended to be parliamentary reformers; its advocates, if not so already, became reformers too. The slavery issue merged into the general question, its settlement being reserved until reform had been

1. Baines, E., jnr.: Life of Edward Baines, pp. 149-51. Read, D.: Press and People, pp. 119-20. L.M., 17 May 1830.
2. L.M., 24, 27 July, 14 August 1830. C.M., 1830, pp. 445-6.
3. C.M., 1830, p. 612.

effected. Most acquiesced in this postponement, though some felt that the matter was too serious to be shelved in this way; that, though parliamentary reform would make abolition easier, this provided no excuse for discontinuing a constitutional agitation for it.

> ..... While we ..... are discussing the mode in which freemen shall exercise a certain constitutional privilege, Englishmen are holding eight hundred thousand of their fellow-creatures in iniquitous personal bondage. Surely, the first duty of every man, is to wash his hands of a participation in this national crime; and then let him ask for the equivocal boon of the right of suffrage.....

Their early downfall was predicted if the Whigs delayed, or betrayed "the cause of humanity and justice by any pusillanimous compromise."[1]

After the passage of the Reform Act the anti-slavery movement revived, intensified in the religious world by the treatment meted out to the Baptist missionaries in Jamaica, and by the impact of William Knibb's personal tour of the country on their behalf. The questions of dissenting grievances and church reform took second place, although the opinions of candidates in the 1832 general election were ascertained. The Congregational Board renewed its 1830 resolutions, "earnestly" beseeching "the members of this denomination to support only such candidates as are pledged to its (slavery's) immediate and entire abolition."[2] Leading London ministers, Baptist and Congregationalist, including John Blackburn, John Burnet, Dr. Bennett, Robert Halley, Dr. F.A.Cox, Dr. Price, and Charles Stovel, attended the meeting which constituted a

1. E.R., 3s., vol. V, 1831, pp. 185-213.
2. C.M., 1832, pp. 694-5.

central corresponding committee to advise and guide abolitionists during the election.[1]

The Patriot spoke very little of dissenting grievances; in its columns the major electoral issue was abolition, total and immediate abolition.

> ..... It will be a noble and generous use for a people to make of their newly acquired rights as freemen and citizens, to employ them in extending the empire of liberty, and in sending to a reformed Parliament such representatives only as will carry into our colonies the work so auspiciously commenced at home. If, therefore, in the last election, all the friends of British emancipation took a pledge of reform, so in the next, let all the friends of negro emancipation take a pledge for the entire and immediate abolition of slavery. 2

Dissenters were even advised not to vote for Joseph Hume in Middlesex, but for Lord Henley, who had pledged himself on emancipation, a matter on which the former demonstrated a "lamentable inconsistency."[3] Some felt that the editor was showing inconsistency himself in this instance. Hadfield was to write,

> ..... It was to me a subject of deep regret that the Patriot opposed Hume who had uniformly been our friend & supported Henley who had voted against the repeal of the Test Laws. I gave up the paper in distaste from that date..... 4

R.H. published the views of candidates in Kent and Tower Hamlets.[5] By the end of November the Patriot could claim that, by persecuting the missionaries, the planters had roused the whole religious world against themselves.[6] In Manchester, Hadfield later affirmed, his discovery of

1. P., 14 November 1832 p. 344.
2. ibid., 18 July 1832 p. 209, 8 August 1832 p. 232, 15 August 1832 pp. 240-1, 5 September 1832 p. 265.
3. ibid., 10 October 1832 p. 304, 28 November 1832 p. 360.
4. Joshua Wilson papers, envelope H.a.10, George Hadfield to Joshua Wilson, 21 January 1833.
5. P., 12 September 1832 p. 273, 10 October 1832 p. 307.
6. ibid., 21 November 1832 pp. 352-3.

E.J.Loyd's vote against Smith in the 1824 division, had cost the Tories the election. Abolition was again pressed by the Leeds Dissenters, Hamilton proposing the toast to emancipation at the victory dinner.[1]

Much was expected from the new House, containing "a much larger number of decided abolitionists ..... than were ever there before."[2] A special general meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society unanimously adopted a declaration demanding immediate and total abolition, an objective long advocated by dissenting organs. An article in the Congregational Magazine, comparing the gradualist and militant arguments, warned the emancipationists "to take care that no compromising and unsatisfactory measure receive the sanction of the British legislature."[3] When the Government finally revealed its intentions there was considerable disappointment. The Congregational Magazine, the Patriot, and the Leeds Mercury all urged their readers to campaign for the withdrawal of the unsatisfactory aspects of the proposals, and for their replacement by total and immediate abolition.[4] Dissenters were equally critical of the final Bill, taking particular exception to the grant of £20 million in compensation to the slave-holders, to be paid immediately, not when they had fulfilled the requirements of the measure. Many regarded the ending of the arbitrary power of the master, and the granting of religious freedom, as important advances, and all expected the planters to speedily realise the

1. The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield M.P., (manuscript copy in the Manchester Central Reference Library), pp. 119-20. L.M., 22 December 1832.
2. C.M., 1833, p. 62.
3. ibid., pp. 217-22.
4. ibid., pp. 387-8. P., 11 May 1833 p. 168, 15 May 1833 p. 177. L.M., 18 May 1833.

disadvantages of the apprenticeship scheme, and to demand its abandonment, before the seven year period was over.[1]

The Patriot was alone in recommending abolitionists to disown the Act. In Leeds, it was described,

> ..... with all its faults, as one of the most splendid monuments of national virtue and legislative wisdom that ever engaged the attention of any Parliament.....

whilst the Congregational Magazine was "far from concurring in the absurd opinion of those who maintain that the proposed measure will do little or nothing for the slave." This was, however, only qualified praise for an Act which was generally deemed unsatisfactory.[2]

Disillusionment with whiggery was beginning to set in. Dissenters had been reformers, many from conviction, but some had supported the Reform Bill as a means to a moral and religious end, the abolition of slavery. Knibb's campaign, and the difficulties experienced by the missionaries, came at an opportune moment, enabling militant emancipationists to argue in terms with which the bulk of Dissenters could sympathise. Slavery was an evil because it hampered missionary work, and it was the missionary societies which were the most successful and popular products of the Evangelical Revival. By attacking their agents, the planters had turned the ire of the chapels against themselves. Excitement and anticipation were pushed to the limit. It is no wonder that the Government measure generated some feeling of frustration, especially as reports of the failure of the apprenticeship system began to filter

1. C.M., 1833, pp. 447, 502. P., 17 July 1833 p. 248, 24 July 1833 p. 257, 31 July 1833 p. 265. L.M., 20, 27 July, 3 August 1833.
2. P., 17 July 1833 p. 265. L.M., 3 August 1833. C.M., 1833, pp. 447, 502.

through from the West Indies in 1835. Suspicion of Whig collusion with planter interests seemed confirmed.

CHAPTER 2.

THE DISSENTING PROGRAMME OF THE THIRTIES.

Other anticipated consequences of the passage of the Reform Act were that Dissenters' grievances would be redressed, and a start made on the work of church reform. Regarding the political issue as finally settled, the Patriot stated,

> ..... It now remains to be seen whether ecclesiastical reforms ..... a reform as extensive as the corruptions we complain of - will be granted to the just demands of the people.....

Previewing the new session in 1833, the Congregational Magazine argued that, with the abolition of slavery, church reform was the question of deepest public interest, asserting that "the House is almost universally favourable to it." In the North, the Mercury added, "Church Reform is amongst the leading demands made upon a Reformed Parliament by a people long and deeply impressed with a sense of the abuses of the establishment."[1]

The dissenting press had taken a keen interest in the reform movement within the Church of England in the years before 1833, examining the publications of the reformers in long articles. Always they returned to one point - no reform of the Establishment, no comprehension of Dissenters within the Church of England, was possible unless the alliance of Church and State, the root of all the evils, was repudiated.[2] This view was not confined to the thirties. Twenty years later, Edward Miall dismissed as hopeless the

1. P., 19 May 1832 p. 136. C.M., 1833, p. 62. L.M., 26 January 1833.
2. C.H., 1830, pp. 369-75, 489-96, 545-50. E.R., 3s., vol. IV, 1830, pp. 113-31; vol. VI, 1831, pp. 1-28; vol. VII, 1832, pp. 512-22.

schemes of another generation of church reformers for much the same reason.[1] Meanwhile, in 1834, James Matheson, Independent minister at Durham, expressed this opinion well in a pamphlet, addressed "to the pious members of the Established Church."[2]

After outlining the evils to which the State connexion exposed the Church of England, including patronage, provocation to Dissenters, indiscipline, indifference to spirituality, and legislative control,[3] he explained the steps that had to be taken to make a religious reform feasible. Parliament, containing some anti-religious members, and others with a vested interest in the patronage system, was an effective bar to all essential change. Patronage was the Church's greatest bane, responsible for a situation which no amount of minor tinkering could remedy. Separation of Church and State was the only real solution, restoring to the people the right of choosing their own pastors. How, he wondered, could any "pious Episcopalian" refuse to co-operate in a movement, which, by freeing episcopacy from state control, would leave it at "liberty to arrange and perpetuate all that is excellent in its liturgy or doctrines."[4] The political character of the episcopate offered another obstacle to improvement. The great marjority, wrote Matheson, were not evangelicals, were opposed to the spread of spiritual religion, and with an entrenched interest in the maintenance of patronage, were equally

1. N., 8 May 1850 p. 369, 9 July 1851 p. 537, 13 July 1853 p. 549, 14 December 1853 p. 997, 29 March 1854 p. 257, 6 June 1855 p. 437.
2. Mathetes (James Matheson): Religious Reform impracticable, without Separation from the State: an Earnest Appeal to the pious Members of the Established Church, (London, 1834).
3. ibid., pp. 5-27.
4. ibid., p. 30.

hostile to the extension of the popular voice in the selection of ministers. Never, he affirmed, would the bishops "be men likely to seek a religious reform" of the Church, until "they are themselves men of God, decidedly attached to the doctrines of the Gospel." Election by the people, or by presbyters and people together, would ensure this. Then, they would pass their time in their dioceses, and not in Parliament. But, he emphasised in his conclusion,

> ..... these things can never be accomplished, till Episcopacy be set free from State control, and the people have their natural and moral rights restored to them. Before a religious reform can be achieved, it is plain that the present system must be abolished..... 1

The Eclectic approved of his arguments, noting,

> ..... The separation of the Church from the State would not in itself include the needed reform, but it would remove the chief obstacle, and bring on the emancipation of the Church from its secular bondage..... 2

In his widely publicised scheme of church reform, Lord Henley proposed measures against non-residence, pluralism, the inequitable distribution of church revenue, abuse of patronage, the frequent translation of bishops, and their having seats in the Lords.[3] One reviewer considered it to be "temperate, yet faithful remonstrance and counsel." The Patriot described it as being, "in every respect a most creditable performance," adding, however, that Henley had not gone far enough.[4]

A blast against Henley was written by R.M.Beverley. In his Letter to ..... the Archbishop of York....., published in 1831, he denounced "gold-getting" bishops,

1. ibid., pp. 30-2.
2. E.R., 3s., vol. XI, 1834, p. 406.
3. A Plan of Church Reform, (London, 1832).
4. E.R., 3s., vol. VII, 1832, p. 515. P., 19 May 1832 p. 136.

dismissed the religion of the state church as "a mere theatrical ceremony," and mocked the theological education provided for the clergy at the universities, together with the lives they led in their parishes. His solution was simple.

> ..... Let all tithes be abolished, and all church-property be confiscated. Let the Church of England be set on one footing with all the other sects in the land. Abolish the Ecclesiastical courts. Repeal every act of Parliament that has been passed from the reign of Edward VI to the present reign in favour of the Church. Dismiss the bishops from the House of Lords; but all other matters relating to the future state and government of the Church, leave entirely to the clergy, to be by them decided as they shall think proper. The State must repudiate the Church, and the Church the State. It must be an entire separation and divorce, without a prospect of union at any future period.1

Giving faint praise to Henley's proposed exclusion of the bishops from the House of Lords, he condemned his plan as a "partial cure," as a shrewd attempt "to save the revenues of the priesthood." The people, he asserted, "never will rest satisfied till the Church of England is entirely separated from the State, its property confiscated, and the Clergy put on a footing with all Dissenting Ministers in the kingdom, being supported by the voluntary contributions of those persons who desire their services."[2]

Beverley's religious affiliation is difficult to trace. It seems certain that he was brought up a Churchman. His fierce attacks on the Church of England were accompanied by secession, and in February 1832 he was preaching in Salem

1. Beverley, R.M.: A Letter to his Grace the Archbishop of York on the present corrupt State of the Church of England, (London, 3rd. edn., 1831), p. 37. The pamphlet ran to at least seventeen editions.
2. ibid., A Letter to Lord Henley on the Deficiencies of his Plan of Church Reform, (Beverley, 1833), pp. 3, 31-3.

and Albion Congregational chapels in Leeds.[1] By 1837, however, according to one reviewer, he had moved very close to the Society of Friends.[2]

His relations with the Congregationalists were far more complex than Salter suggests.[3] Admittedly his works were not reviewed in the Congregational Magazine, and L.S.E.'s charge that Dissenters had applauded the publication of the Letter to ..... the Archbishop of York ....., was hotly denied.

> ..... Mr. Gathercole is pleased to call "The Eclectic Review and the Congregational Magazine the chief organs of dissent." If Dissenters "exerted themselves to the very utmost to push those pamphlets into circulation," why did not the Eclectic recommend them? Why was our review silent about them? Let him produce a commendatory passage from our pages, if he can - yea more, let him ask Mr. Beverley himself whether some of the leading dissenting ministers have told him that they could not approve of the spirit of his publications..... 4

A review in the Eclectic noted the "bald, coarse, Cobbett-like style of attack," but deprecated its unfairness, its partiality, and the absence of a liberal spirit.

> ..... Good sense and good feeling revolt against advocating or conducting measures of reform in the spirit of a criminal prosecution, or making the alleged crimes of the clergy the pretence for alienating the church revenues. There is but too much truth in the Writer's exposure of jobbing corruption, and other abuses connected with the Church of England; but in his inferences

1. L.M., 25 February 1832. These were the leading Congregational chapels in Leeds. Edward Parsons was minister at the former, and Richard Winter Hamilton at the latter. In 1834 Beverley published the text of a sermon in celebration of slavery abolition, preached at the Independent Chapel, Scarborough.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. I, 1837, p. 89.
3. Salter, F.R.: "Political Nonconformity in the Eighteen-thirties," in Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 1952, pp. 138-9.
4. L.S.E. (Michael Augustus Gathercole): Letters to a Dissenting Minister of the Congregational Independent Denomination, containing remarks on the principles of that sect....., (London, 1833). C.M., 1835, p. 57.

> and prescribed remedies, he has very far overshot his mark..... 1

The Patriot repudiated Beverley's political views, regretting that, "they are characterized by a violence and ultra-ism which will lessen the effect and influence of his writings."[2]

Yet in the North, Dissenters gave Beverley a more accommodating welcome. Not only did he preach in their chapels, but the Leeds Mercury hailed his Letter to ..... the Archbishop of York ..... as "a most severe and cutting exposure of the manifold abuses and corruptions of the Church of England ..... bold, honest, and uncompromising."[3] Copious extracts from this, from his Second Letter to ..... the Archbishop....., from the reply to Henley, and from his Letter to the Duke of Gloucester on the corrupt State of the University of Cambridge, appeared. Agreeing that Churchmen might find the last of these "offensive and acrimonious," the Mercury pointed out that Dissenters "will generally think that, however Mr. Beverley may sin against conventional courtesy, he calls things by their right names."[4] Those who heard his sermons were pleasantly surprised by his seriousness and piety, whilst the Leeds journalists defended him, replying to his critics.

> ..... Those who represent him as a mere factious sower of schism, actuated by self-conceit and a levelling spirit, are quite ignorant of the man. We think Mr. Beverley's natural facetiousness may some times get the better of sound judgement, and his hostility to the abuses of the Church may be carried somewhat further than strict discrimination would warrant; but he is in advance of the age in which he lives as to his close investigation and thorough knowledge of the errors

1. E.R., 3s., vol. VI, 1831, pp. 16-7.
2. P., 6 November 1833 p. 377.
3. L.M., 16 April 1831.
4. ibid., 9 February 1833.

> he exposes, and his boldness and honesty are worthy of unqualified admiration..... 1

George Hadfield, the Manchester Congregationalist, hoped that Joshua Wilson had read "Mr. Beverley's reply to Lord Henley, which I think is excellent."[2] At the great Manchester Dissenters' meeting of 5/6 March, 1834, he averred that, "the country felt deeply indebted to that gentleman" for his work.[3] During the previous November he had been distributing Beverley's Letter to the Duke of Gloucester ....., which "gratified me exceedingly," in the North, securing notices of it in the local press.[4] There was some foundation for the suspicions of Churchmen respecting the close relationship of Beverley with at least one active section of the dissenting community.

Union of Church and State also prevented comprehension. John Riland visualised a Church, reformed in its liturgy and institutions, to which Dissenters could adhere, thus creating a common Protestant front against Rome. Later, Arnold suggested that the future of a state church lay in its catholicity.[5] But Congregationalists, who dissented from the Establishment on principle, were not prepared to compromise those principles to underpin a tottering edifice, or to satisfy the latitudinarian instincts of a few clergymen. Reviewing Riland, one critic explicitly stated that no Dissenter could consistently incorporate himself within a Church which was sustained by an alliance with the

1. ibid., 25 February 1832.
2. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, George Hadfield to Joshua Wilson, 28 January 1833.
3. Report of the Speeches delivered at the Public Meeting held in the Exchange Room, Manchester, on ..... Wednesday, March 5th, 1834, and ..... on the following ..... Evening ....., (Manchester, 1834), pp. 17-23.
4. Joshua Wilson Papers, loc. cit., George Hadfield to Joshua Wilson, 2 November 1833, George Hadfield to R.M. Beverley, 7 November 1833.
5. Arnold, T.: Principles of Church Reform, (London, 1833). Riland, J.: Ecclesiae Deus et Tutamen ....., (London, 1830).

state. It was all very well for church reformers to revive Usher's scheme, but times had changed, and what was acceptable in the seventeenth century was no longer applicable.[1] As the Eclectic pointed out, there was "a wide distance between any principles of church reform and the 'principles of Dissent.'"[2]

Dissenting comments on the actual reforms proposed in Parliament were scathing. The Archbishop of Canterbury's Plurality of Benefices Bill was a "most miserable substitute for reform" which leaving the real abuses completely untouched, deluded the people with the appearance of concession.

Only the "incredulous" might anticipate an efficient remedy from Peel's Ecclesiastical Commission. It was not easy to forecast its recommendations, but the Patriot confidently and cynically predicted that they would not include the exclusion of the bishops from the Lords, the reform of the patronage system, the equalisation of episcopal incomes, the abolition of tithes or church rates, the abolition of sinecures, nor the material improvement of the condition of the working clergy. But then, it was foolish to expect the patient to perform a painful operation on himself.[3]

The Commissioners's first Report, it was alleged, only submitted trivial amendments, with the intention of delaying or circumventing the demand for a more substantial reform. Its later proposals were "trumpery". Both the Established Church Bill, and the Ecclesiastical Revenues Bill were

1. C.M., 1830, pp. 103, 493.
2. E.R., 3s., vol. IV, 1830, p. 131.
3. P., 28 March 1832 p. 44, 11 February 1835 p. 44.

condemned by the dissenting press. The United Committee protested against the latter because provision was made for the disposal of the ecclesiastical surplus without reference to the maintenance of existing buildings, and it was to this purpose, as a ready substitute for church-rates, that Dissenters wished it to be directed. The bills were "Mock Reforms," and the whole structure of the Commission an "ecclesiastical humbug" designed to gull the lower clergy and churchmen into the belief that something was being done. These reforms were designed "to settle comfortable incomes on all the bishops," to increase their authority over the clergy, and to prevent the appropriation of the surplus as a replacement for church-rates. Moreover the Commission was to be made permanent, invested with "arbitrary and unconstitutional powers, such as have never been vested in such a body since the days of Star Chamber." Dissenters were urged to support the resolutions of the United Committee, and to communicate with their representatives immediately. Ministers were, "Lending themselves in disgraceful subserviency, to plans and measures of ecclesiastical reform, as it is termed, which, when they come to be understood, will expose them to storms of indignation and contempt from opposite quarters, that will render their position anything but enviable." Russell had "degradingly" allowed himself to become the advocate of a scheme, wholly Tory in conception, whilst substantial reform measures, after long Commons delays, awaited defeat in the Lords. In the Commons, Edward Baines "spoke earnestly" against the powers being given to the renewed Commission.[1]

1. ibid., 25 March 1835 p. 92, 16 March 1836 p. 92, 13 July 1836 p. 268, 20 July 1836 pp. 273, 276, 27 July 1836 pp. 281, 284; C.M., 1836, p. 532. Baines, E., jnr.: Life of Edward Baines, p. 224.

Dissenters took an interest in church reform because they believed it to be essential if the country was to receive any spiritual benefit from the episcopal church. They tended to underestimate the difficulties facing the reformers, and exploited the state of the Church as a weapon in their battle against establishment. Their own solution was simple, but unrealistic; genuine reforms, following the dissolution of the alliance of Church and State, was their harsh prescription. This was a remote possibility. They knew this, but to sustain their arguments internal reform had to be impossible. As later events were to demonstrate, this was not the case. Deceived by their own prejudices, many Dissenters misjudged the situation.

It was inevitable that the passage of the Reform Act should be succeeded by a dissenting agitation for the redress of their outstanding grievances, to give complete civil and religious equality to the members of all denominations. Reckoning that their strength lay in the middle classes enfranchised by the Act, the dissenting press argued that it had provided them with a powerful political weapon. A contributor to the Congregational Magazine optimistically opined that the time had come, "when they may hope to commence the harvest for which they have long laboured," and wrote of "the justice of a Reformed Parliament." It was, he added, "both a point of honour and a matter of conscience, that they should claim from the members to be elected for the New Parliament promises of support." He listed six desirable measures:- the entire repeal of all obsolete penal laws restricting religious liberty, a national system for the registration of births, an alteration in the marriage laws, the right of

interment in parochial burial grounds with a dissenting form of service, relief from church-rates, and the abolition of tests at the universities.[1] The times seemed propitious, but their promise was illusory.

In March 1833 the "United Committee on Dissenting Grievances" was formed, consisting of twelve members of the committee of the Dissenting Deputies, twelve from the General Body of the Ministers of the Three Denominations, three from the Associate Scotch Synod, and three from the Protestant Society. At the beginning of May there was little to report, though the Committee had decided to express its dissatisfaction with some of the clauses in John Wilks's Registration Bill. As yet, the Committee was receiving negligible support from the dissenting world.[2] On June 18 it issued a circular letter, aware "that considerable anxiety exists amongst Dissenters in the country, as to the progress which has been made towards the attainment of their object." It contained the resolutions of 11 May, specifying "the practical grievances under which the Protestant Dissenters of this kingdom now labour." These were:- compulsory conformity to the Book of Common Prayer in the marriage service; liability to pay church-rates and other ecclesiastical dues; the liability of dissenting places of worship to be assessed for poor rate; no legal registration of dissenting births and deaths; denial of rights of burial in parish churchyards by their own ministers; exclusion from the national universities, and the lack of a charter for the new London University.[3]

The Deputies had turned to the registration question

1. C.M., 1832, pp. 703-4.
2. P., 4 May 1833 p. 152.
3. C.M., 1833, pp. 444-6.

after the successes of 1828, Robert Winter, their secretary, preparing a "Plan for a General Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths throughout the Kingdom to be consolidated into one Metropolitan Registry." Agitation was postponed during the Reform crisis, but, in April 1832, acting on his own initiative, Lord Nugent introduced a bill for the Registration of Births into the House of Commons, readily adopting amendments suggested by the Deputies. His departure for the continent prevented any progress, and in the next session, John Wilks, who had successfully exempted chapels from poor rate, produced another abortive bill. Neither was completely satisfactory, for the Deputies wanted births, deaths, and marriages to be dealt with in one comprehensive measure.[1]

Dissenters complained that the only legal register of births was the parish register of baptisms. Many chapels maintained their own baptismal records, and a central register of births was kept by the Deputies at Dr. Williams's Library, but judicial decisions in 1812, 1821, and 1823, merely served to emphasise that this latter had no legal validity.[2] Thus, to secure a legal registration, Dissenters had to have their children baptised in the parish church, a step which many scrupled to take, and which was impossible for the Baptists. As the Dissenters continually explained, this question of registration was not solely a dissenting issue; the existing system was totally inefficient, and legally unsound. The date of baptism was not the date of birth, and in all serious legal matters it was the latter

1. Manning, B.L.: The Protestant Dissenting Deputies, (Cambridge, 1952), pp. 262-3.
2. ibid., pp. 255-61.

that was required. This, then, was a national question needing a national solution, a civil register of births, and preferably also, of deaths and marriages.[1]

At marriage, too, Dissenters were forced into conformity by Hardwicke's Act of 1753. Designed to prevent clandestine marriages, this made all marriages illegal except those regularly celebrated by the clergy of the Established Church. Prior to 1753 marriage in the meeting house was not uncommon, as the public contract made by the parties was deemed a legal marriage, even though the validity of the ceremony was not recognised by law. By making marriages outside the parish church illegal, the Act unwittingly gave Dissenters a new grievance. After the repeal of the penal statutes against Unitarianism in 1812 a new problem had to be solved. Unitarians could only participate in the marriage service with the rankest hypocrisy, and several bills to relieve them from this duty were placed before Parliament by William Smith, the Unitarian M.P. The Deputies were still negotiating in the early thirties, but with no success, and, in 1831, following a meeting with the Unitarian Association, it was agreed to shelve further action until the political crisis had resolved itself.[2]

Joshua Wilson attempted to stir the Trinitarian Dissenters against this "flagrant infringement of Religious Liberty, a direct violation of the very principle of

1. The Case of the Dissenters, in a Letter addressed to the Lord Chancellor, (2nd. edn., 1834), pp. 10-3. Andrew Reed wrote this, Reed, A. and C.: Memoirs of the Life and Philanthropic Labours of Andrew Reed, D.D....., (London, 1863), pp. 194-9.
2. Manning, B.L.: op. cit., pp. 271-3.

Toleration".[1] Previous efforts, he complained, had been rebuffed by their apathy, a phenomenon " neither honourable to their character, nor consistent with their principles," for, like the Unitarians, they objected to the form of marriage service contained in the Book of Common Prayer.[2] Wilson then explained the religious objections to it, and argued that marriage was purely a civil and secular matter, the magistrate having overstepped himself by making it a religious solemnity. He did not deny the divine sanction for matrimony, nor did he object to the contract being accompanied, or followed by, "pastoral admonition," and a service to implore the divine blessing. All that the State could legitimately demand, however, was "'previous caution, public noteriety, open celebration, and a well-attested record.'"[3] In conclusion, he urged Dissenters to seek a comprehensive bill,

> ..... enacting that no religious ceremonies of a formal or special nature shall hereafter be necessary to the validity of matrimonial contracts; but that parties of all descriptions may be allowed to celebrate their marriages, either without religious ceremonies, or with such as are consistent with their principles and agreeable to their consciences..... 4

Wilson was thanked for this endeavour

> ..... to remove the veil, whether of ignorance, prejudice, superstition, or political expediency, by which the true character of the marriage ceremony, as by law established, has been partially concealed from view, and a spirit of unscriptural indifference to its onerous and disgraceful yoke superinduced through the whole body of Trinitarian Nonconformists. 5

1. Wilson, J.: An Appeal to Dissenters, on their submitting to the Obligation imposed by the Law for the religious celebration of Marriage, according to the form prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer, (London, 1831), p. iii.
2. ibid., pp. 3-5. Wilson had previously written an article on this question, which appeared in the Congregational Magazine during 1828.
3. ibid., pp. 17-20.
4. ibid., pp. 45-6.
5. C.M., 1831, p. 241.

Whilst there was general agreement on the desireability of a change in the law, Congregationalists were divided as to its form and to what extent marriage should be a civil rather than a religious ceremony. Some, regarded it as a civil ceremony only, with which ministers should not become involved by being given the responsibilities of registrars, and consigned it entirely to the sphere of the civil magistrate. Others seconded this, but pointed out that until there was a considerable change in public attitudes it was expedient to ask for the extension of the privilege of celebrating marriages to dissenting ministers as a lesser evil than those created by the existing system. In the meantime, Dissenters who felt conscientious scruples were either advised to make a public declaration preceding the service, could not marry at all, or made an expensive trip to Ireland, where Hardwicke's Act did not operate.[1]

At its meeting on April 7, 1831, the Lancashire Congregational Union pledged itself "to support any proper and legal steps for the purpose of enabling the English Dissenters to celebrate marriage in that way which shall best accord with their own principles and views on that subject.....;"[2] In July, 1832, the Committee of the Congregational Union counselled Dissenters at the ensueing general election,

> .....to connect with the exercise of their elective franchise, an effort to secure the support of their future Representatives to a measure for such alteration in the law relating to marriage, as will save the Dissenters from being compelled

1. ibid., 1832, pp. 611, 670-1; 1833, pp. 352-4, 406-8. Conder, G.W.: Memoirs and Remains of the late Rev. Jonathon Glyde....., (London, 1855), pp. 49-50.
2. C.M., 1831, p. 317. Hadfield proposed this resolution, and during 1832 he was discussing with Wilson the form a bill should take.

> to worship contrary to their consciences, at the altar of the Church of England.[1]

In Ireland dissenting pastors were allowed to perform burial services within the parochial burial ground; this right was sought for the English Dissenters.[2] Dissenters objected not only to the non-recognition of their own orders, but also to the forms and phrasing of the Prayer Book Service. An additional grievance was that the clergyman could refuse burial to those who had not been baptised according to the rites of the Church of England. Many of the cases the Deputies dealt with were refusals of this nature.[3] It was all very well for Churchmen to suggest that Dissenters should provide their own cemeteries; often the land was not available, or the congregation could not afford the outlay; and Dissenters argued that since they paid their contribution to the maintenance of the churchyard they ought to have an equitable share in its use.

Dissenters condemned the injustice of church-rates, which were a compulsory payment in aid of the Established Church, levied on a group outside that Church who maintained their own chapels on the voluntary principle. From the end of 1832 local resistance to church rates, and conscientious refusal to pay, spontaneously spread through the country, the editor of the Congregational Magazine considering that this outburst of opposition "cannot but lead to a speedy abolition of this and other vexatious wrongs."[4] Dissenting optimism was sustained by Parliament's abolition of church cess in Ireland. This was regarded as an equivalent to church-rates, and on grounds of

1. P., 18 July 1832 pp. 205, 209.
2. The Case of the Dissenters ....., pp. 16-7.
3. Manning, B.L.: op. cit., pp. 286-302.
4. C.M., 1833, p. 576.

right and justice these were seen as parallel cases.[1]

The final "practical grievance" of the Dissenters was their virtual exclusion from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, for both required subscription to the Thirty Nine Articles at some point in the undergraduate's career. The Eclectic Review later claimed that this was a Unitarian, rather than a general dissenting grievance, and that the policy adopted in 1834,of seeking admission through parliamentary enactment, had been erroneous, merely aggravating ecclesiastical fears and delaying the redress of more pressing injustices.[2] A charge that dissenting interests had been sacrificed to the social ambitions of a small but influential sect came easily after the Unitarian secessions from the London committees, but both the Eclectic and the Patriot, whilst resenting the stigma attached to exclusion, assured Churchmen that few dissenting parents would entrust their sons to the Universities until there had been a thorough moral reformation within their walls.[3] The corrupt state of the older Universities was one reason why Dissenters were advised to petition against their probable exclusion from Durham University; it had not had time to degenerate.[4]

Dissenters had been active in the foundation of University College, London, the Deputies purchasing ten £100 shares; Thomas Wilson was a member of the first council from 1825-7, and on his resignation was succeeded by his nephew, John

1. P., 18 July 1832 p. 208, 13 February 1833 p. 52.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. V, 1839, p. 20.
3. ibid., vol. II, 1837, pp. 1-27, 121-37. P., 18 June 1834 p. 220, 6 August 1834 p. 276.
4. P., 15 January 1834 p. 19, letter of James Matheson.

Remington Mills.[1] Congregationalists were given academic appointments, Robert Vaughan as Professor of History (1834-43), Samuel Kidd as Professor of Chinese (1837-42), Henry Rogers as Professor of English Language and Literature (1836-9), and John Hoppus as Professor of the Philosophy of the Mind and Logic (1829-66). The granting of University status to this institution would alleviate to some degree the stigma of exclusion. The Congregational Magazine stated the case to its readers in 1833, urging them to petition for a charter.

> We think it the duty of every well-wisher to learning to support such an institution; but there can be no doubt that it is both specially the duty and the interest of Protestant Dissenters to do so. Shut out by selfish bigotry from Oxford and Cambridge, the London University offers them ample opportunities of giving their own sons the advantages of a learned or scientific education; while in accordance with their avowed principles, and with the dictates of nature and piety, they keep the religious education of their own offspring in their own hands.2

The principal obstacle to progress appeared to be dissenting apathy.

These were the "practical grievances" of the Dissenters. By 1837 only the registration and marriage questions had been settled, and even then not entirely satisfactorily. The Whigs made two unsuccessful attempts to resolve the church-rates issue in 1834 and 1837; the former was rejected by the Dissenters, the latter abandoned by the Government after the general election, although this only forestalled ultimate defeat in Parliament. Several fruitless attempts were made by individuals to open Oxford and Cambridge, although London University did eventually get its Charter

1. Manning, B.L.: op. cit., pp. 380-1. Wilson, J.: A Memoir of the Life and Character of Thomas Wilson ....., pp. 431-3.
2. C.M., 1833, pp. 227-8, 248, 800.

in 1836. Needless to say, the form this took did not meet with full approval. The burial question had not been touched. The fruits of four years fairly sustained agitation were not very substantial, though two most pressing and general grievances had been eased.

There was another complaint - the union of the Church with the State - Establishment. On the whole, Congregationalists were agreed that their ultimate objective was its abolition, but there were deep differences over the means to that end. Establishment was unscriptural, and therefore wrong; it was harmful to the country's religion; it was injurious to the State; it divided the community; it was, therefore, inexpedient.[1] The religious duty of the magistrate was "to give all countenance, aid, and protection to religion that human laws can give, without assuming a lordship over conscience, that belongs not to Caesar, and losing sight of the just limits and proper ends of civil government - the protection of personal rights, the social welfare of all classes, and the peace and quiet of the community."[2]

Establishment, Andrew Reed contended, had a pernicious influence on a church, breeding pride and contempt in its members, and attacting the worldly into its service through the avenues of patronage, and the temptation of lavish endowments. This was disadvantageous to the general state of religion in the land, since the falsity and errors of the Established Church were regarded by the atheist as representative of all churches, and of Christianity, and, therefore, as a justification for his unbelief. A greater

1. The Case of the Dissenters ....., pp. 24-46.
2. E.R., 3s., vol. XI, 1834, p. 63.

evil was that the errors of the Established Church were perpetuated, and the people continually deluded.[1] Under the voluntary system, as Thomas Binney pointed out, the erroneous minister soon lost his following and support, whereas in the Establishment, "a sort of immortality is conferred on ignorance,imbecility, and error." However "dangerous and destructive" a minister's doctrines, he was the legal and legitimate incumbent of a parish, and could not be displaced by his parishoners. Deserted they might be, but he and his church stood as "the only authorised provisions for instruction and worship, though it presents nothing but the monument and mockery of both....."[2]

Convinced of the system's rigidity, alarmed by the anti-evangelical nature of the majority of the clergy, Binney's famous denunciation of the Church of England follows with a logical inevitability.

> ..... It is with me, I confess, a matter of deep, serious, religious conviction, that the Established Church is a great national evil; that it is an obstacle to the progress of truth and godliness in the land; that it destroys more souls than it saves; and that, therefore, its end is most devoutly to be wished for by every lover of God and man. Right or wrong, this is my belief 3

Binney gained little for his pains, save the abuse of the Tory and Church press, and "a some-what unenviable notoriety" amongst Nonconformists.[4] Many must have agreed with him, although it was 1837 before a defender ventured

1. The Case of the Dissenters ....., pp. 28-33, 37-40.
2. Binney, Thomas: An Address delivered on laying the first stone of the new King's Weigh-House ....., (London, 1833), pp. 9-10.
3. ibid., "Appendix," p. 20.
4. Hood, E.P.: Thomas Binney, his Mind, Life, and Opinions, (London, 1874), p. 18.

into print.[1] Nevertheless many London ministers were angered by this supposed disgrace to the Dissenting interest, Mr. Hunt of Brixton informing a ministerial meeting in the Congregational Library, "'Mr. Binney has betrayed us. More than fifty clergymen have declared their refusal to shake hands with him.'"[2]

Other critics of the Establishment explained that the religious instruction of the people was merely an incidental side of its activities. It was created to govern, not to teach, to "repress the free progress of knowledge, not to advance it; to keep down fanaticism and puritanism, not to build up piety." Compromising with the State, the clergy had become, "an order of magistrates, wholly unfitted, for the most part, to be teachers of the people." Here was the nakedly political aspect of the Church of England. "Stripped of its proper character" as a religious institution, the Church had become "a mere secular corporation, odious alike for its extortion and its intolerance." Only a fundamental reform, and separation from the State could make it "efficient as a scheme of instruction."[3]

Andrew Reed alleged that the Establishment was "injurious to the State itself." Writing towards the end of 1833 he reviewed the preceding years, confidently citing evidence of a natural alliance between Toryism and the Church, conspiring to overthrow the Liberal government. Dissent, possessing no links with the State, did not threaten it as Episcopacy did; this connection, and the vested interest

1. C.M., 1833, p. 355, where it is described as a "cardinal doctrine of modern dissent," that all establishments promoted more evil than good.
2. Waddington, J.: Congregational History 1800-1850, (London, 1878,) p. 385.
3. E.R., 3s., vol. XII, 1834, pp. 70-1.

it had created, made it dangerous. A Church separated from the State would no longer be a barrier to the progress of liberalism, or a menace to the Administration's survival. He gave this advice and warning.

> ..... Let our Government then be wise. Let it deprive the Church of its civil power; and it will increase in the inverse proportion its religious power. This act would have, at once, a double effect; it would convey a great benefit to the people and redeem the State from as great an evil. I deprecate, for the sake of a Government I admire, an opposite course. They have found things as they are, and so far are not responsible; but let them confirm them on their present principles, and then let them prepare to suffer as the first victim. The eagle will then fall; but it will be by an arrow feathered from its own wing.[1]

The union of Church and State was a source of injustice to those who dissented from the Establishment. From it originated all the inequalities in society based on religious belief. Herein lay the more personal aspects of dissenting hostility to the Established Church - "the predominant evil is that of UNIFORM, EXPRESSED, IMPLIED, DEGRADATION."[2] Toleration was resented, because of its implication that powers of persecution lay in reserve, that liberties were a privilege, not a right. Claiming "an absolute equality with all classes of their fellow subjects," Dissenters had to oppose the alliance of Church and State and advocate its dissolution.[3]

Union of Church and State was, therefore, inexpedient, an assertion frequently justified by reference to the admitted abuses and anomalies of the Irish Church Establishment, and its obvious failure to perform an

1. The Case of the Dissenters ....., pp. 34-7.
2. ibid., pp. 24-7.
3. The Designs of the Dissenters, a Letter to the King, by a Protestant Dissenter, (London, 1834), p. 25. This pamphlet was written by Josiah Conder.

evangelising role.[1]

Establishment was also wrong. No foundation for it existed in the New Testament, or in Christianity's early history, and Nonconformist propagandists never tired of proclaiming that its corruption had commenced with Constantine's protective embrace. The Church became a secular institution, though Christ's Kingdom "was not of this world." Assuming the headship of the Church, the ruler committed a grave sin by usurping the place of Christ. Any theory of establishment and royal supremacy was regrettable, because, if allowed, the monarch could establish error as easily as truth, and often did - either Mohammedanism, Hinduism, Catholicism, or any other religious perversion.[2] The "political alliance" between Church and State had to be dissolved,

> ..... as being injurious to both parties, and, in its very nature, as Mr. Binney contends, "anti-Christian:" - contrary to the genius of Christianity, and hostile to its free propagation. The religious alliance between the Church of Christ and the State, every pious Dissenter, in common with every pious Episcopalian, must wish to see drawn yet closer and closer. But that is an alliance which an Establishment was never yet found adapted to promote 3

The dissenting alternative to Establishment was Voluntaryism, every denomination supporting itself on equal terms out of its own resources. This was scriptural, this was expedient, since it avoided the pitfalls of Establishment. In stating its practicability to fulfil the national need, the dissenting press frequently contained articles on the statistics of religious provision, seeking to demonstrate that the voluntary system of the Dissenters had done far

1. E.R., 3s., vol. XI, 1834, pp. 47-51; vol. XIV, 1835, pp. 318-31. P., 22 March 1832 p. 36.
2. The Case of the Dissenters ....., pp. 40-6.
3. E.R., 3s., vol. XI, 1834, pp. 72-3.

more to meet the spiritual needs of a growing population and of expanding towns, than its compulsory rival.[1]

Binney prophesied that the controversy was nearing its crisis point. Indifferent to Church reform, he unequivocally enunciated the dissenting objective.

> ..... We wish the entire and absolute dissolution of Church and State; the Establishment, as such, terminated; the episcopal community to become an episcopal denomination, on a perfect equality with every other ..... The dissolution ..... of the existing anti-christian "alliance" between Church and State is the object at which Dissenters will aim, and aim at on serious, sacred, religious grounds; identifying it with the honour of God, the peace of his church, and the universal advantage of mankind. This, however much it may include, is the one thing, which, in the coming conflict, will be sought by them.....

Success would secure the redress of all other dissenting grievances. This was a conflict in which no Churchman or Dissenter could remain neutral.[2]

The Congregational Magazine greeted this defiant stand with enthusiasm. Three years previously it had declared its own support for the basic dissenting doctrine on the establishment question, and, in 1831, whilst refuting the Quarterly Review's charges of republicanism, it had explained what was meant by separation. Dissenters did not desire to seize the Church's supremacy for themselves. They did not wish to despoil the Church to enrich themselves. They merely sought the abolition of all distinctions, the placing of all Christians on an equality. Why, the reviewer argued, should a declining minority force an active majority to sustain its particular form of worship. Divided amongst

1. ibid., 4s., vol. I, 1837, pp. 201-9. C.M., 1832, pp. 811-23; 1834, pp. 781-4; 1837-8, series on the "Moral and Ecclesiastical Statistics of London."
2. Binney, T.: An Address delivered on laying the first stone of the new King's Weigh-House ....., pp. 23-4.

themselves, enfeebled and corrupted by this monopoly, it was impossible for Churchmen to maintain their privileged position for much longer. Disestablishment seemed possible within the forseeable future.[1]

In 1829 the Society for Promoting Ecclesiastical Knowledge had been formed. Its object was the publication and distribution of literature on tithes, church establishments, and the principles of Dissent. Its founders included prominent metropolitan Congregational ministers, John Pye Smith, James Bennett, Andrew Reed, John Blackburn, John Burnet, Thomas Binney, Robert Vaughan, Arthur Tidman, and John Hoppus, together with the historian Benjamin Hanbury. Samuel March, Dr. Cox, and Thomas Price were amongst the Baptists involved.[2] Some doubted the wisdom of this step, possibly because it was part of a general drift to a greater sectarianism within the religious world. Conder actively worked to restrict its sphere of influence.

> "As I detested the 'World' newspaper, so I eschew the Ecclesiastical Society, and all its works, and glory in having induced Vaughan and others to retire from it."3

Outspoken speeches at its annual meetings alarmed many, although Thomas Wilson occupied the chair in 1831. By 1834, however, the absence of leading London ministers and laymen from these meetings was noticeable. On that occasion the chairman was Dr. Baldwin Brown, the speakers, John Brown of

1. C.M., 1830, pp. 244-9, 301-5, 409-14, 468-73, 579-84; 1831, pp. 629-30; 1833, pp. 817-21.
2. Dale, R.W.: History of English Congregationalism, pp. 633-4. Skeats, H.S., and Miall, C.S.: History of the Free Churches of England, 1688-1891, pp. 471-3.
3. Waddington, J.: Congregational History, 1800-1850, p. 548. Thomas Wilson defended the Society from a clerical critic, asserting that it was not the intention of its organisers "to subvert or injure the Established Church." Wilson, J.: A Memoir of the Life and Character of Thomas Wilson ....., pp. 435-7.

Wareham, W.Deering, a Hampshire minister, George Hadfield, the Baptist minister Charles Stovel, the Congregational ministers, Thomas Gawthorne (Derby) and Joseph Gilbert (Nottingham), and William Howitt. This was a much less impressive list than those of 1829 and 1830. As the London moderates withdrew, so the tone of these meetings changed markedly.[1]

This declaration of principle and intention was not accompanied by a more positive attempt to end the alliance of Church and State. Already, by 1830, differences of opinion on how, and when, separation was to be effected, were emerging. Reflecting the moderation of its editor, the Eclectic recommended the publications of the Society to its readers, whilst deploring the partisanship exhibited by many of the writers. Having urged Dissenters to drop the controversy in 1829, until they might expect an unprejudiced hearing, two years later this same journal argued that, though the Church of England was under assault, and ill-prepared to defend herself, Dissent was not in a sufficient state of scriptural purity to take a justifiable advantage of the opportunity.[2]

The advice of 1829, responded to with "fierce indignation" on the part "of some ultra-Dissenters", was reiterated in 1832,[3] and in a review of Stovel's Letter to ..... Lord Henley, containing remarks on his plan of Church Reform, the Eclectic completely dissociated itself from the claims, methods, and objectives of the militant Dissenters.

> With those who maintain this extreme opinion it is known that we by no means agree: for though

1. C.M., 1830, pp. 333-4. P., 19 May 1834 p. 174.
2. E.R., 3s., vol. II, 1829, p. 496; vol. VI, 1831, pp. 193-4.
3. ibid., vol. VIII, 1832, pp. 303-4.

> we must concur in nearly all that may be urged as to the evils connected with existing ecclesiastical Establishments, we are not prepared to jump to the conclusion, that 'the voluntary principle' ought to be exclusively relied upon; that all endowments are purely mischievous; or that any principle of injustice is necessarily involved in the existence of a religious establishment.....

Stovel's petition, that

> ..... Parliament ..... would be pleased to consider in what way the property now held by Government for the support of a State religion, may be disposed of for the relief of the poor and the liquidity of the national debt.....

was utterly repudiated, and his demand for the appropriation of all Church property deplored. It was not justified by "religious principles," and "it is on religious grounds alone, that we feel disposed to come forward in the capacity of Dissenters." To employ "unfair weapons against the Establishment," weapons which "may break in the hands of those that wield them, and wound them," was dishonest and regrettable. The article was an appeal for moderation, and a lamentation at the quietude of its exponents. The infusion of "fanaticism into the elements of debate and strife that are now in action" was regarded with "dissatisfaction and dread," mingled with sorrow that "good and wise men should be betrayed into expressions savouring of bigotry and violence."[1]

Doubts were voiced in the Eclectic, by Conder himself, of the adequacy of the voluntary principle to immediately meet the complete spiritual requirements of the country. It was an efficient means of religious instruction, but a mass of the community lay outside "the beneficial operation of our ecclesiastical systems," and Dissenters were ill-prepared "at present ..... to perform the work which the

1. ibid., pp. 525-40.

Establishment was intended to discharge." This was no reason to abandon their principles, but it was a fact which "ought to moderate the boastful tone of those who advocate them as the panacea of all the evils of society."

Dissenters had nothing more to fear from the State, whilst their "ancient oppressor" had lost popular favour, but religion was still, in the common mind, associated with the Establishment, and the Eclectic anticipated that it would fall together with that institution. Dissenters had a great responsibility, for their actions would determine the fate of Christianity. Hasty and intemperate attacks on the Established Church would encourage the rise of infidelity, whilst making the Church more resistant to all necessary reforms.

> ..... upon the Dissenters, the duty seems more especially to devolve, at such a crisis, to stem the torrent of infidelity, by setting up the banner of the Cross. Any particular demonstration of hostility to the Established clergy at this moment, would not only wear the character of ungenerous and vindictive policy; nay, more of a confederacy with those whose disaffection is envenomed by irreligion, and stimulated by interest; but it must tend to hinder those necessary reforms and wise concessions which the spirit of the times calls for, and which, if no boon to the Dissenters, would be at least a benefit to society.[1]

This may have been representative of the views of leading London and provincial Congregationalists, and the plea for moderation appeared in the Congregational Magazine of May 1832.[2] There were other opinions abroad, and Conder noted the disapproval his articles in the Eclectic generated in Essex.[3] Whilst the Eclectic and the Congregational Magazine tended to slip the separation issue

1. ibid., vol. VII, 1832, pp. 136-7.
2. C.M., 1832, pp. 306-7.
3. Conder, E.R.: Josiah Conder. A Memoir, p. 274.

into the background, and argued about "practical grievances," a more militant breed of Dissenters, less influential because opposed by the denominational organs, were stirring themselves, particularly in the North West. George Hadfield was not alone in viewing the election and the meeting of the first reformed Parliament as an ideal opportunity for Dissent to strike at the great grievance of Establishment, with the support of the majority of the people whose hostility to it had been intensified by episcopal opposition to the Reform Bill. United, and true to their principles, he was confident that Dissenters could overthrow "that great bane to the progress of vital religion."

> ..... I am inclined to think that this question may be so conducted as to draw with it a vast amount of public opinion, both in England, Scotland, & Ireland. If ever the public mind becomes enlightened on the subject nothing can save the church property, or prevent it being a glorious instrument, I trust, for promoting the best interests of men after it has ceased to be a secular establishment & become a religious one..... 1

This, then, was the programme - redress of practical grievances and disestablishment. It was unfortunate that different groups within the denominations had differing priorities, for this created much unnecessary division, and weakened the agitation for the more accessible objectives. Hadfield represented one wing of the Congregationalists, who demanded an immediate attack on the Established Church; Conder was the mouthpiece of the more conservative Londoners, who, by their proximity to the seat of government, had links with the Whig families, and made the deepest impression upon them. Disestablishment tended to be a drag on the rest of

1. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 15, 19 January 1833.

the programme. There was much in this with which liberal statesmen and Churchmen could sympathise, but once the cry of separation had been raised the ranks of Churchmen closed against all concession, and, since the Church counted for more, the politicians became increasingly reluctant to legislate against it in favour of Dissent. Perhaps the London committee-men recognised this danger; certainly, they attempted, somewhat unavailingly, to quieten the strident cries of the extremists.

CHAPTER 3.

THE POLITICS OF GRIEVANCE, 1832-1834.

Heartened by the optimistic climate that surrounded the passage of the Reform Act, Dissenters expected immediate relief from the new Parliament, the moderates trusting to the goodwill of the Whigs, whilst the extremists, having no confidence in the Government's intentions, tended to ally with the more radical Members of the new House. All realised that union was essential for success, but this was difficult to create and proved most uneasy when achieved. The Patriot stated the obvious when it appealed for a new sense of purpose amongst Dissenters.

> When will Dissenters act with the necessary energy, with that unity of purpose, with that promptitude and simultaneousness of movement which become a powerful party? When will they cease those insulated, convulsive, unconnected efforts, which prevent the accomplishment of any great objects, and which rather resemble the involuntary twitches of St. Vitus's dance than the vigorous, well-directed, harmonious movements of a healthful body?..... 1

The abolition of colonial slavery proved the key issue for the religious public in the 1832 election campaign. True, the Congregational Union committee recommended the pledging of candidates on marriage law reform, and "the claims of Dissenters on a Reformed Parliament" were canvassed in the Congregational Magazine,[2] but the Patriot jumbled the dissenting questions with others, and one was plainly emphasised above them.

> There are several topics peculiarly interesting to dissenting electors, which they will do well to urge upon candidates; more especially, church-rates - the Marriage Laws - the obervance of the Sabbath - and COLONIAL SLAVERY - on all these they can speak strongly, without the slightest danger of

1. P., 18 July 1832 p. 208.
2. C.M., 1832, pp. 703-4.

subjecting their motives to suspicion.[1]

When the Leeds Dissenters met to memorialise the cabinet at the end of 1833 several speakers explained that, "while our constitution imperatively demanded renovation, and the injured sons of Africa sighed for liberty," they had not deemed it politic or "humane" to "press their particular hardships on the attention of Government and the Legislature." These matters satisfactorily settled, there remained no obstacle to an intensive agitation.[2]

Hence the campaign for the redress of grievances opened somewhat spasmodically at the end of 1832 with the Baptist Board passing resolutions explaining the principles involved, and expressing complete confidence in the willingness of Government and Parliament to relieve them. In the December, the Congregational Board set up a special committee on grievances.[3] Early in January a deputation presented Grey with a list of claims drawn up by the committee. In an hour's interview with the Premier, "courteous attention" was given to the matters laid before him, and a written statement of facts and principles requested. This document dealt with the grievances connected with the Marriage Laws, registration, burial, the assessment of chapels for poor rate, and church-rates. Justifying this step, the Congregational Magazine argued that "it was alike due to our denomination and to his Majesty's Government, at the moment when they were considering the question of Church Reform, to inform them, that the Dissenting community still have claims upon the justice and gratitude of the government and country." The

1. P., 1 August 1832 p. 224.
2. L.M., 7 December 1833.
3. C.M., 1832, p. 709; 1833, p. 57.

deputation spoke as Congregationalists, not as representatives of Dissent, but the Board decided that immediate action was essential - that a valuable opportunity would be lost if an approach had been delayed until the various denominational boards and committees had met.[1] This step was welcomed by both the Patriot and its readers; the grievances discussed were "the chief points upon which the Dissenters of England are looking for redress and relief to the justice of a Reformed Parliament." No mention was made of disestablishment.[2]

If there was general support for the Board in the press, they had their critics amongst the militants. Hadfield wrote indignantly to Joshua Wilson:

> It vexes me sometimes to see how little of the wisdom of this world, I mean in a good sense, some of our good men, and especially ministers, have. In the name of patience what have they been about in their interview with Lord Grey? They have done the buss. effectually. Ten times more than all they ask he wod have granted & now he will never give them what they ask. I protest against their acts being considered as those of the denomination, & I can hardly express to you in terms which alone I wd employ the shame and disappointment I feel. They have contributed not a little to place us, the Dissenters in England, far below the Irish Catholics.....

Assuming that no real reform of the Church could emanate from a cabinet stuffed with the good things of ecclesiastical patronage, "but such as will be wrung from them," he deplored the extent of the concessions made to the Prime Minister. Surely, he continued,

> ..... If the Dissenters were true to their own Interests & principles, & united in their demand for justice that great bane to the progress of vital religion wod be put down.....

A "glorious opportunity," he feared, was about to be sacrificed. Gradualism provided no answer, for the matter

1. ibid., 1833, p. 121.
2. P., 23 January 1833 p. 28, 30 January 1833 p. 36.

was urgent and pressing. Granted time and health, he would gladly launch a national campaign.

> ..... That a Church Establishment is needed I deny, & a secular, political & robbing church is wicked - that there ought to be perfect separation of Church & State - that the public property in the church, the tithes especially, may be legally & righteously resumed by the State, & applied to useful, instead of injurious purposes, I wod demonstrate.....

Hadfield trusted that Wilson would devote his freedom "to a purpose which ..... involves the best religious interests of your country."[1]

George Hadfield was born in Sheffield of good dissenting stock in 1787. He had a merchant background, his brother, Samuel, becoming Master Cutler. The Hadfields were active in the affairs of Howard Street Independent Chapel. In 1809 George Hadfield went into partnership with a Manchester solicitor, and was soon deeply engaged in the business of the Congregational denomination in Lancashire, being secretary of the County Union in 1810, and a founder of the Blackburn Academy six years later. Rushholme Road Chapel in Manchester was practically his own creation, and he was a liberal benefactor to benevolent and denominational causes; as treasurer of the Lancashire College appeal, he launched the fund with £1,000, adding several more sizeable sums before completion, and he contributed £500 to the educational fund opened in 1843. In 1824 he was one of the leading protagonists in the Manchester Socinian Controversy, and he instigated the campaign to restore the Hewley Charities to the Trinitarian Dissenters. A Liberal in politics, he was active in the reform agitation in Manchester, canvassed

1. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 15 January 1833.

for Richard Potter at Wigan in 1830, and was a member of Poulett Thomson's committee. A militant Dissenter, almost the epitome of the "political Dissenter," he was an active separatist, making this part of his programme when he contested Bradford in 1835.[1]

Cobden characterised him as "our Cromwellian friend",[2] and he had much of his earnestness, sense of mission, and self-will about him. James Griffin, the first minister at Rushholme Road, who knew Hadfield well, wrote of his "integrity of christian principle", and his unswerving adherence to the path of duty which often gave "to his decisions and proceedings an appearance of self-will and ruggedness of temper". Determined to achieve all the objects he sought, he tended to be impatient "with the hesitancy of more calculating minds, and less tolerant of what might seem to him a want of earnestness and zeal than was desirable both for his own peace of mind and for the promotion of the ends which he had in view". His was a straightforwardness and force of character "inspired and ennobled to a degree that was really sublime by the fear of God."[3]

Here was a man unlikely to acquiesce to the expedient policies advocated by the London leaders, a man unable to compromise his principles for the redress of the mere "practical grievances". There were others like him in the country, and a clash with the metropolitan outlook was inevitable. In Manchester his principal coadjutors at this

1. The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield, M.P., passim; Waddington, J.: Congregational History, 1800-1850. p. 423; C.M., 1844, p. 82.
2. George Wilson Papers, in the Manchester Central Reference Library, Richard Cobden to George Wilson, 4 October 1852.
3. Griffin, J.: Memories of the Past. Records of Ministerial Life. (London, 1883), pp. 271-4.

time appear to have been those radical Unitarian politicians and leaders of Mancunian liberalism, the Potters, Archibald Prentice, editor of the Manchester Times, and the minister at the United Secession Church Chapel in Lloyd Street, William McKerrow.

The recipient of Hadfield's abrasive letters, Joshua Wilson, was the son of Thomas Wilson, who had retired from his successful ribbon manufacturing business to build chapels, aid weak causes, and run Highbury College. Joshua and Thomas Wilson were probably the most prominent London Congregationalist laymen. Both were members of the Committee of the Deputies, and possessed considerable political influence within Dissent. Hadfield's friendship with Joshua sprang out of the Hewley Charities lawsuit, in which they were both deeply involved.

Within a week of his letter of protest, Hadfield was writing again, urging Wilson either to stop the memorial the committee was preparing at the premier's request, or "..... to get the real point raised....."

> Why not state at once broadly and roundly, aye and honestly too, that they hold and maintain that Church & State cannot be united & that tithe is applied to a ridiculous system & ought to be applied to a useful one, the exigencies of the State.....

An "impolitic" memorial, he added later, could do "much to injure our cause."[1]

Simultaneously Hadfield was attempting to organise a parliamentary pressure group. On the 19th he related how he had called on Richard Potter, M.P. for Wigan, who was "willing to go with us to the fullest extent. He sees the thing eye to eye with me." On his advice he had written to arrange a

1. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 19, 21 January 1833.

meeting with Mark Philips, M.P. for Manchester, and Joseph Brotherton, M.P. for the new Salford constituency.[1] Two days later he sent Wilson Potter's London address, explaining that he was anxious to see him, and that "he offers to introduce you to Mr. Hume & he has no doubt that that Gentm. & all the party that intend to adopt him as their leader will gladly further the object." Joshua was asked to persuade his father to visit Hume, whom "I am sure you wod find .... a ready advocate." Potter had also suggested that a Dissenters' corresponding and parliamentary committee should be formed.[2]

Nothing transpired. A week later Hadfield was still pressing Wilson to accept Potter's offer, still enunciating his own hopes and fears.

> ..... I am sure you will be put into the ways of getting an amount of parliamentary influence that will surprise you. Mr. Potter strongly recommends that the Dissenters shod. unite in one great point of attack & that all persons shod. join in assisting it. That one point shod. be the severance of the Church and State. The country is quite ready for it, if we do our duty. Let me therefore earnestly recommend you to get the matter forwarded. I trust your father will do what the community expects from his wellknown character. Mr. Potter only requires assistance & he can move more influence than you are aware. He fears that we shall be a rope of sand & have no regular plan of proceeding & be disunited amongst ourselves, & I fear this too, but it is not too late if set about.

A statement of dissenting grievances had been dispatched to Poulett Thomson, the other Manchester M.P., requesting him to support "a perfect plan of church reform - that is - a separation between Church and State." Confident in the state of public opinion, Hadfield could assert, that if Government produced such a scheme,

> ..... they wod be supported to the same

1. ibid., 19 January 1833.
2. ibid., 21 January 1833.

> extent as they were in the reform bill. Less than this will make it contemptible in the eyes of the church, & will dissatisfy the Dissenters ..... If the London Dissenters wod bestir thems. in the right way I think we have such an opportunity as will never occur again, but I stand in doubt of them 1

Suspicion of their motives, and mistrust of their sincerity were intensified by the Londoners' failure to seize this opportunity. Such opinions were not new. In March 1832, J.W.Morris of Leicester had expressed a lack of confidence in the "political energies of the London Dissenters," too long accustomed to "half-measures, half-words and sentences."[2]

It was soon apparent that Government would first have to deal with the Irish Church. Hadfield wanted Dissenters to move in this direction themselves.[3] Progress was negligible. In the middle of February he was still exhorting Wilson "to urge on our body not to let the present opportunity slip." In its Irish Church reform proposals the Government had adopted the principle of appropriation, "a precedent that will lead to all those measures which I recommend." Dissenters might learn from O'Connell's success. He had acted "wisely in giving no Quarter, until the great principle was conceded to him." The Irish had secured their objectives; to be consistent, the Ministry should grant the same privileges to the English Dissenters - here was another occasion for action:

> ..... This is the time to stir, & if they suffer their privileges to be placed in a lower scale than those of the Irish Catholics they will deserve to wear the Indignity. It will be a fair

1. ibid., 26 January 1833.
2. ibid., envelope H.a.4, J.W.Morris to J.Wilson, 17 March 1832.
3. ibid., envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 28 January 1833.

> position to take viz. to insist being allowed all the same privileges as are to be granted to the Irish Catholics - all below that wod be degrading & intolerable. I hope the Ministers will grant this at least to the best friends they have ..... in the Empire..... 1

Ireland soon provided another opening, notice being given of a motion for the exclusion of Irish bishops from the House of Lords. "Now if you London Gentm. be in earnest there is as firm an opporty. as you can have to serve the cause of religion," wrote Hadfield. If Shiel were defeated, he argued, "we shall be cursed with jobbing Bishops perhaps for ever," for if the Irish were saved, the English would require very little defence. Ministers, he suggested, would sympathise with any attempt to rid them of "their old & bitterest foes in the Lords," even if they ostensibly opposed it. Enthusiastically, he pointed out that there was still time to ally with the Irish, and to organise petitions and agitation through the columns of the Patriot and the Congregational Magazine. Lancashire was ready to move if London set the example.

> . ..... I am convinced the Irish Members wod thankfully accept your cooperation, & they in return wod. serve us hereafter, as they did on the test laws. I strongly recommend you to set about it in good earnest, & I think you will find so general an expression of sentiment in favour of exclusion as will surprise & gratify you. It is as nice a point of attack as can or will be desired, & I hope you and your friends will not suffer it to escape. On hearing from you that you intend to take it up & informing me when it is likely to come on I will put things in motion here..... 2

Hadfield eagerly seized on these Irish issues. Co-operation with the Irish Members could be turned against the Church of England, whilst any defeat for establishment in Ireland would have repercussions in England. In this

1. ibid., 15 February 1833.
2. ibid., 23 February 1833.

outlook, Hadfield anticipates the tactics of the Liberation Society in the fifties. An assault on the bishops had the added advantage of attracting political radicals into the disestablishment movement; skilful propaganda and instruction might convert them into earnest separatists.

Nothing was done. No more articles on grievances appeared in the Patriot, though letters were printed urging Dissenters to exert themselves if they desired any redress, and castigating the failure of London to provide a lead and an example.[1] The Congregational Magazine was lavish in its condemnation of supineness, explaining that Ministers would not initiate legislation spontaneously for the benefit of a particular group. With their numerical and moral power clearly understood in the Commons, it was the duty of Dissenters to petition and lobby their representatives. An example of a "practical grievances" petition appeared. Dissenters, this journal contended, had to help themselves. Beset by the problems of office, the Ministry had little sympathy with them, and no time "to remember those friemds who proved staunch supporters in the crisis of their fate." Pressure had to be exerted, the general apathy shed, and unity, with central direction, created.[2]

Despite the charges of inactivity the metropolitan Dissenters were hoping to remedy this unsatisfactory situation, and on 13 March the Patriot announced that a United Committee was being formed. Concerned with the "practical grievances", it did not meet with the entire approval of Hadfield and the militants.

> ..... I will freely own to you that in my

1. P., 6 February 1833 p. 44.
2. C.M., 1833, pp. 187, 192, 502.

> opinion the objects sought for by your plan are much below what the Dissenters are entitled to expect from parliament and my fear is that by asking so little we shall not only risk our great leading principles but even risk the little that we ask for. I do hope and trust that the deputies will take a broader and a much more extensive view of the matter and petition upon the great principles that divide us from the Church..... 1

Acquiescing for the moment, Hadfield busily organised the collection of signatures for the Manchester and the Salford petitions on Dissenters' grievances, making the arrangements for their presentation in the Commons. He reported a great eagerness to sign, adding, "It is impossible to mistake the state of public feeling here on all that concerns the Church. The first opportunity there is of eliciting it, there will be a great manifestation of sentiment against the secular policy of the Church." The Manchester petition received 2,429 signatures, including nearly all the dissenting ministers. "The Methodists of course refused to support us, but Dr. McAll read it in the pulpit to his congregation." Copies of the petition were circulated in neighbouring towns, and Hadfield suggested that the Salford petition should be printed in the Patriot as an example of what was required, together with a request that other petitions should be sent up, and Members briefed.[2]

The United Committee's resolutions on grievances and policy appeared in the Patriot on 15 May, being distributed through the country in a circular issued in June. The fourth resolution went completely counter to the strategy Hadfield had been advocating, and indicates a clear split between

1. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 11 March 1833.
2. ibid., 11, 16, 23, 30 March 1833. The Manchester petition dealt with the "penalties attached to nonconformity, and all civil disabilities and distinctions on account of religious profession and belief."

London and active opinion in the North-west. Hadfield never doubted the constancy of the Wilsons, but they had to compromise and conciliate to secure unanimity on a Committee whose Unitarian members were not hostile to the establishment principle.

> That this Committee, although deeply sensible of the importance of other just and reasonable claims upon the Legislature, decidedly recommend, that in all petitions to Parliament prominence should be given, and the chief exertions of the body directed to the removal of specific and practical grievances peculiar to Dissenters, and directly affecting religious liberty.

The Committee did not demand the suspension of all operations for obtaining relief from "grievances more directly affecting conscience," but the "most pressing and important grievances" were the inequities of the Marriage Law, church-rates, and the liability of chapels to poor rate assessment. Confident in the cabinet's liberality, the Committee urged Dissenters to petition and make their views known before their church reform proposals were finalised.[1]

The Patriot praised the expedient character of the resolutions.

> They are, in our judgement, characterized, as the deliberations and determinations of such a body ought to be, at once by prudence and firmness; having for their object, practical measures of relief at the earliest period at which, in the present posture of public affairs, such relief may be attainable..... 2

A deputation visited Grey. It consisted of the Unitarians, William Smith and the Rev. Robert Aspland; the Baptists, Henry Waymouth (chairman of the Committee of Deputies, and of the United Committee), and Dr. Newman; and the Congregationalists, Thomas and Joshua Wilson, James Baldwin Brown, and the Rev. Arthur Tidman. They left with the

1. C.M., 1833, pp. 444-5.
2. P., 15 May 1833 p. 176.

impression that no church reform measure would be introduced during the 1833 session because of pressure of other business. Hence, they did not recommend an immediate general effort for the redress of grievances. A Marriage Bill had, however, been prepared, and this was to be pressed on the Legislature, together with the other grievances, early in the 1834 session. The early presentation of petitions was, therefore, essential, and the Committee advised that local societies and committees be formed in large towns to correspond with them. By June these had already been constituted in several places, including Liverpool and Stroud. In May the Congregational Union had given the United Committee its seal of approval, unanimously passing a series of resolutions supporting its objectives, though stating the scriptural arguments against Establishment.[1]

Hadfield was unhappy with the Committee's activities. In July he complained to the Rev. Joseph Turnbull of Brighton that, it was "really trifling" with the endowment issue "to put forth the five points as cardinal principles, whereas they are mere fingers to the great question, and involve very little in them, at least comparatively." Nevertheless, he anticipated that "our natural leaders" would eventually shed this reluctance to assert principles and their consequences, would even be willing to suffer the reproaches of "the Church party" for advocating them. In the meantime, he and his friends were considering the advisibility of "some Individual or Society ..... publishing some Manifesto or declaration of our rights not merely to the five points raised by the Deputies, but to accomplish the religious peace

1. C.M., 1833, pp. 379-81, 445-6.

of the country by placing us on terms of perfect equality, which can only be done by withdrawing the present system of favoritism shewn to one Sect in England ....." John Pye Smith knew of the proposal and would be in communication with Turnbull; would he and his colleagues, continued Hadfield, be willing to produce this publication, guaranteed against financial loss by the Manchester solicitor? The document should contain a complete exposure of ecclesiastical abuses, including university tests, patronage, sale of advowsons, "the monstrous wrong" of an annual appropriation of £7 million to one sect, "the injustice & scandal of allowing Bishops to sit in parliament" where they protected corruption and sought to topple the Whig Administration, and, finally, it was essential to display the falsity of Blomfield's claim that three-quarters of the population were Churchmen. The whole should be completed with a clear demonstration "that the tithes & other property derived from the State is State property & applicable to the burdens of the Country, & that no greater service wod be done by the State for Religion than by resuming it....."[1]

These differences over policy were reflected in the Patriot during October. Dissenters , the editor explained, "wish to see the Church of England emancipated from the State", believing that all the good done by that Church was in spite of this connexion. Since the "whole question of the alliance must undergo Parliamentary discussion;" Dissenters had to instruct Members in their principles,and to inform them of the evil nature of the establishment system, so that they had the means "of coming to a righteous

1. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to Joseph Turnbull, 29 July 1833.

and religious decision on the momentous question." Dissenters had no right to dictate to Parliament on matters of church reform, or about the settlement of church property. These were matters for Church and Parliament to decide themselves. Dissenting objections to establishment were religious, not political, and the Government had been much misled as to their demands and opinions.

> Let not his MAJESTY'S Ministers suppose, on the one hand, that the redress of a few petty vexatious grievances is all that they care about; nor, on the other, let the voices of Dissenters be heard mingling with the clamours of the Radicals. Let it not be supposed, that Dissenters wish the bishops "turned out" of the House of Peers, as a punishment for their opposing the Reform Bill; or that they desire religion to be separated from the State, because they conscientiously desire <u>that</u> to be divorced from the State, which is <u>not</u> religion, nor, in such connexion, conduicive to religion, but which, while wearing the name of a church, is but a secular corporation invested with the worst of monopolies, a monopoly of instruction.1

Dissenters, it was implied, should abstain from any political movement for separation, merely contenting themselves with a statement of their views. But Hadfield had already attempted to badger the London moderates into alliance, first with the parliamentary radicals, and then with the Irish. This expression of the moderate position strengthened his antipathy to the <u>Patriot</u>. Trusting that, in time, it might become "a Paper worthy of the cause it espouses", he deplored "such a letting down of our principles, & at a time when everything is so important". Dissenters, he stressed in a letter to R.M.Beverley, should only accept "equality in all respects, & a total withdrawal of State power or authority in matters of religion",

1. P., 16 October 1833 pp. 352-3, 23 October 1833 p. 360, 30 October 1833 p. 369.

together with the appropriation of the church revenues to secular purposes.[1]

Others were equally critical. The Rev. John Kelly, Congregationalist minister in Liverpool, queried the Patriot's view on the disposal of church property.[2] On 13 November the editor commented that, the paper "has ..... been exposed to some obloquy, and to a little gratuitous spite" for recommending that Dissenters should act on principle alone, restricting separation to its religious confines, disavowing alliance with radicals and others.[3] Certainly there was considerable dissatisfaction with Conder's editorship, although James wrote from Birmingham, on hearing a rumour that Beverley was to replace him, appealing for his retention.[4]

With a new parliamentary session due, a decision on tactics was essential. The Patriot might dissociate itself from the political sentiments of Beverley,[5] but during the autumn he was a guest of the Wilsons at Highbury. On the 18th October "several of the London Independent Ministers (including Dr. Bennett & Mr. Burnet)", dined there, having been invited "for the purpose of meeting him & conversing on the duties of Dissenters at the present Season". Hadfield was not present, but Wilson assured him that the article by "Mancuniensis" from the Manchester Times, had been read, with passages from Hadfield's accompanying letter, "as an introduction to the business".

1. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to R.M.Beverley, 21 October 1833.
2. ibid., envelope H.a.4, Rev. J.Kelly to J.Wilson, 15 November 1833.
3. P., 13 November 1833 p. 384.
4. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.4, J.A.James to J.Wilson, 29 December 1833.
5. P., 20 November 1833 p. 392.

Three matters were discussed. It was agreed that a "spirited & eloquent tho' at the same time plain & popular Declaration should be immediately prepared exhibiting the great principles on which Nonconformity is founded," and presented to the United Committee, every care being taken to ensure its adoption. This was to be widely circulated, and made the basis of a vigorous agitation to obtain a substantial advance towards full religious liberty by the end of the session. Beverley concurred that it would be neither prudent nor politic for Dissenters to play a leading part in the movement to exclude the bishops from the Lords, but it was agreed that they should privately use all their influence in support of those who sought a reform of that House. Rippon's motion was preferred, and it was thought desirable to inform him of the benevolent neutrality of Dissent. Finally, as a demonstration of dissenting strength, it was suggested that a delegate meeting be held in Exeter Hall.[1]

Hadfield's reply was through a letter to Beverley, to be shown to Wilson. He agreed with Beverley "that the best point of attack will be on the Bishops, whose presence in the Lords is an Insult to the people of Great Britain & Ireland". With good management the Dissenters, many Churchmen, the Irish and the Scots might be mobilised on this issue; he had already written to Conder suggesting that this topic be raised in the Patriot. An exclusion petition in Manchester, he estimated, would get 30,000 signatures, the opposition to their presence in the Lords being almost universal. On this issue the religious and the political were united. But, he continued,

1. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, draft of a letter from J.Wilson to G.Hadfield, 18 October 1833.

> ..... I confess I do not see the harm of our appearing prominent in the work. How can we do otherwise? My opinion is that the Public will go with us, as they must know that we have no Interest to serve but a public one, & that we do not seek to pull down one church establishment in order to set up one for ourselves. It will be more honest to state the facts fully & openly, otherwise they will say that we are indifferent to it; & if it be said that we support it privately, they will say we do it clandestinely and hypocritically, & in either case our influence will be lost or mitigated.....

Willing to subscribe to the declaration, Hadfield doubted whether the United Committee would go far enough. Like all the provincial militants, he suspected that leading Londoners had a fear of "losing credit with great people by broadly asserting what everybody knows is the real tendency of our Principles". A "half-hearted measure," he warned, "will do no good whatever."[1]

The next letter in the series suggests that Joshua Wilson was trying to steer a middle course, hoping to find some common ground on which the London moderates, whose mouthpiece was the Patriot, and the militants, represented by Hadfield, could coalesce. Already there had been a decision to support the attack on the bishops, a concession to the militants; but this was not to be done openly, a concession to gradualist opinion, which wanted to keep the alliance question out of the political cockpit. He now proposed that the United Committee be left to deal with the practical grievances, putting a "brief but spirited announcement of great principles & of those final & ultimate claims which necessarily" proceed from them, in their declaration, whilst a distinct, non-sectarian association should be formed "to aim directly & immediately at the Severance of Religion from its unhallowed alliance with temporal interests & secular

1. ibid., G.Hadfield to R.M.Beverley, 21 October 1833.

politics". Beverley had suggested that this society be named the Wycliffe Union; Wilson toyed with the Wycliffe Church Reform Association.[1] Undoubtedly the object behind all this was to maintain unity, and yet allow each party to go its own way.

The proposed formation of a society to agitate the establishment question owed much to the example of Scotland, where Dissenters were far in advance of their English counterparts. A vigorous voluntaryist movement had sprung up in 1832, the first Voluntary Church Societies being founded at Glasgow and Edinburgh before the end of that year. By the beginning of 1834 there were twelve of them.[2] The controversy soon influenced dissenting opinion in England, the Scottish pamphleteers, on both sides, being given copious reviews in their press. In Manchester, William McKerrow worked with Hadfield, and the Scots were highly regarded by the latter. Most major industrial and population centres had Scottish communities, and it was easy for them to transfer their own controversy to an English environment, merely replacing established Presbyterianism by established Episcopacy. Hadfield and McKerrow had been discussing the formation of a Voluntary Church Society in Manchester as early as January 1833.[3] In March, a Patriot correspondent urged the following of the Scottish lead, anticipating that the formation of a society in the capital would encourage provincial Dissenters to do likewise. In June it was announced that a Society had been constituted in Newcastle, a town in which the various

1. ibid., draft of a letter from J.Wilson to G.Hadfield, not dated.
2. C.M., 1834, pp. 201-10.
3. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 21 January 1833.

Scottish denominations were strong.[1] Wilson's proposal must be regarded as a precursor of the British Voluntary Church Association, and eventually of the Anti-State-Church Association.

Hadfield's reply, if any, has not survived. On the 7th November he wrote much less confidently. Although he intended visiting Potter to "consult him whether we cannot stir in the cause of church reform," although a deputation was preparing to lobby Poulett Thomson when he was next in Manchester, and although he was considering organising a public meeting which he wanted Beverley to chair, he felt that the situation was critical, and feared that the establishment question would come before Parliament without the public mind being adequately prepared for it.

> ..... Many of my friends think with me that it wod. be a great thing to put off the Question for a year or two & then everything wod. be better prepared & the People wod. have time to declare themselves.....

He still regretted that the English lagged so far behind the Scots and the Irish. The former, McKerrow reported, were amazed by the quiescence of the English Dissenters.[2]

Wilson regarded this as an admission by Hadfield that the moderates and gradualists were correct in their assessment that the time was not yet ripe for a "grand attack" on the Established Church. He outlined his views on the policy to be adopted during the session with more confidence.

> ..... <u>Much</u> I am persuaded we may attain next session - by grasping at all I fear we shall get just nothing - whereas if content to proceed (ourselves, I mean in our peculiar & separate capacity as Dissenters) gradually, all we gain will

1. P., 6 March 1833 p. 76, 3 July 1833 p. 220.
2. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to R.M.Beverley, 7 November 1833.

> be but a stepping stone to further acquisition in the cause of Complete Religious Liberty. My idea in short is this. Let us immediately assert our right to full Equality & take the most active & vigorous measures to ease ourselves (next session) much nearer to the same level now occupied by Episcopalians.1

This was a misinterpretation of Hadfield's views. On the 9th November he wrote to Beverley enclosing a letter for insertion in the Patriot. Would, he asked, Beverley and Wilson use their influence with Conder to get it accepted, "for I am not without fear of being refused."[2] Conder complied with the request.

Opening with a lamentation at dissenting inactivity "at this critical juncture" when principles had to be asserted and rights claimed, the letter summarises the position adopted by Hadfield in his earlier letters to London. Government, unwilling to concede anything to Dissent, its members possessing vested interests in the Church, would concoct a reform plan, "the tendency of which will be decidedly unfavourable to our interests, and will consolidate the political power and influence of the dominant sect". Dissenters had been Whig supporters for too long; their loyalty had been ill-rewarded, whilst they had more than repaid the debt owed for emancipation in 1828. Continued dependence on Whig gratitude was unrealistic; it was time they worked for themselves. Again anticipating the fifties and sixties, Hadfield spoke of the need for an alliance of English, Scottish, and Irish Dissenters against Establishment, whilst deriding the puny achievements of the 1833 session - an Act relieving places of worship from liability to poor

1. ibid., draft of a letter from J.Wilson to G.Hadfield, 9 November 1833.
2. ibid., G.Hadfield to R.M.Beverley, 9 November 1833.

rate assessment which would benefit the Church far more than Dissent. Asking for too little, neglecting great principles, Dissenters had gained nothing worthwhile.

> ..... I fear we have even misled the Government itself by asking for trifles, when we ought to have been contending for great principles. What signifies a small church-rate, when we should be contending against a corrupt State Church? What is the trifling amount of poor's-rate levied upon a very few of our chapels, in comparison of millions of pounds annually expended on a secular and dominant clergy?.....

Five points had to be contested - the separation of Church and State, the exclusion of bishops from Parliament, the repeal of all laws granting compulsory powers to raise any ecclesiastical revenue, university reform, and the alteration of the marriage, registration and burial laws. These were "just and reasonable requirements", which no Government could long resist, and which some members of the cabinet were prepared to concede. Their adoption would lessen no man's liberty, but, by placing all on an equal footing, would conduce to a general "fraternal and patriotic sentiment". Dissenters, the natural leaders in the "glorious cause" of religious equality, did not fully appreciate their political power and position, yet the whole country awaited their initiative.[1]

Hadfield had intended to bring the policy debate out into the open, hoping that pressure of opinion might force the United Committee onto a bolder course. In this he was disappointed, for the letters which he provoked favoured the gradualist outlook, criticising his counsel and views. True, Beverley supported him, asserting that Dissenters had fallen below the standards of their forefathers if the aims of the

1. P., 13 November 1833 p. 387.

Committee satisfied them. It was generally known that Dissenters sought separation, and it was equally apparent that no Government would grant this voluntarily, though the Whigs would doubtless deal with the marriage and registration grievances. In these circumstances an attitude of no confidence should be adopted, and active measures commenced, including the formation of a second London committee, with the object of securing the dissolution of the alliance between Church and State. Gilbert Wardlaw expounded the militant's view of the nature of church property, and other correspondents welcomed Hadfield's pronouncement.[1]

But the majority were hostile. D.S. queried the wisdom of making an immediate assault on the Establishment, since the inevitable defeat would make the redress of other grievances less attainable. Several writers argued the inadvisability of opposing and weakening an Administration consisting of "the best government friends we have ever had, or can, at present, be likely to obtain." "A Layman" alleged that the extremists had overrated the political power of Dissent, and underrated the temper of the Deputies. Possessing great influence with Ministers, they were intent on a policy, the redress of practical grievances, which all the signs indicated would be successful. Separation could not be abandoned as an ultimate objective, but, since Governments would not grant this, since Parliament would not sanction it, since Dissent could not expect to win a general election on it, since, in fact, the country was not ready for it, there seemed little point in quixotically pressing the issue.

Joseph Jarom considered it wrong to condemn Ministers

1. ibid., 27 November 1833 p. 402, 18 December 1833 p. 423.

if they had failed to legislate for a group, when the whole empire was their responsibility. Dissenters were advised to abstain from any separation agitation, concentrating their efforts on evangelism. Such a movement, prompting suspicions that they were acting from unworthy motives, would merely injure piety. Time, and eventual popular enlightenment, would effect disestablishment without their involvement. It was, however, legitimate to seek the redress of those grievances directly affecting Dissenters - church-rates, the inequitable marriage, registration, and burial laws.

> ..... Let ..... the Dissenters act coolly - show that they are reasonable and generous - be the steady supporters of an enlightened and liberal Government - give no countenance to designing demagogues and senseless agitators - pursue a straightforward, peaceable, and consistent conduct, and they will continue to occupy the high ground on which, at present, they are placed, and increase in their numbers, their worth, and their influence.

Others doubted whether Dissent was sufficiently united to launch a separation agitation, and "A Minister" stressed the work of instruction which had to be undertaken before the country would respond to it.[1]

Hadfield's letter also appeared in the Leeds Mercury. Baines commented that it asked for nothing more than "strict justice and perfect religious freedom". Pessimistic about the success of an immediate separation campaign, he was confident that, "almost every other measure which the Dissenters wish to attain may be carried as soon as they choose seriously to exert themselves". Ministers were willing to give way; it only needed Dissenters to petition, and they would obtain relief from church rates, a general registration, and reform of the marriage law in the 1834 session. There was, therefore,

1. ibid., 27 November 1833 p. 402, 11 December 1833 p. 415, 18 December 1833 p. 423, 25 December 1833 pp. 431-2.

no sympathy with Hadfield's suspicions of the Ministry, or with Beverley's belief that they would betray the Dissenters, by evading their rightful claims.

> ..... There has never been a Ministry disposed to do a tenth part so much as the present on behalf of the Dissenters; but we certainly expect nothing from Ministers, beyond what liberal Churchmen would grant. They are connected to the Church by too many ties, and they will naturally be averse to take anything from the Church, without a strong motive. They will introduce a measure of Church Reform, but it will doubtless be intended to strengthen the Establishment, not to weaken it. Nor are we disposed to call Ministers dishonest, because they differ in opinion from ourselves as to the expediency of Church Establishment.....[1]

Until the Leeds by-election took over its attention, the Mercury carried several articles on the grievances of the Dissenters, and the tactics they should adopt, urging them to memorialise the Government, and to petition Parliament. Ministers were advised to "trust those who are the hereditary supporters of civil and religious freedom", rather than to conciliate the high church party, and were reminded of the debt of gratitude owed to those, "who in every crisis have proved their most active and efficient friends, and the best friends of all kinds of Reform".[2] Robert Leader, made similar exhortatory and admonitory remarks in the columns of his Sheffield Independent.[3]

Conder, meanwhile, remained silent though on the 20th November he had warned the London moderates, and the "numerous intelligent and respectable Dissenters", that if they did not take the lead in a

> 'calm, sensible, and dignified' agitation, such as 'the country expects from them,' they will be inevitably drawn into an agitation of another

1. L.M., 16 November 1833.
2. ibid., 30 November, 7 December 1833.
3. Sheffield Independent, 7, 28 December 1833.

> character, - into a collision they might now render harmless - into a storm they might have ruled and directed, had they seized the reins of occasion, instead of being dragged away by them. That among the Dissenters of this kingdom, especially in the North, there are numbers of political radicals, who would glory in the name, is undeniable .....

Only positive action could prevent the identification of Dissent with political radicalism and fanaticism.[1]

Whether exasperated by this, or by the Patriot's other sins, Hadfield, when forwarding a letter from John Clapham of Leeds to Wilson, made a scathing attack on that journal. No wonder, he fumed, there was a lack of subscribers, and a perpetual struggle to keep the paper solvent. Clapham's note outlined the decisions of a breakfast party he had held, attended by the leading Congregationalist and Baptist ministers and laymen of Leeds, to discuss the best means of removing dissenting disabilities. Their projected public meeting, Hadfield claimed, was only one example of the provincial readiness to take the initiative if London declined to lead.

> ..... You may now, my dear Sir, safely assure your friends in town, that their country friends will do the work without them. Besides the Leeds affair I have reason to know that the church question will be handled as it shod be by the friends of religious liberty out of town. The London Gentm. may take it up or not, on correct principles - they may make a virtue of necessity if they please - all we shall ask is that they will not betray the cause by misleading the Ministers ..... [2]

This was precisely the situation the Patriot desired to prevent.

In mid-December it made its contribution to the debate. With contacts throughout the country, Conder felt entitled

1. P., 20 November 1833 p. 392.
2. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, John Clapham to G.Hadfield, 25 November 1833; G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 27 November 1833.

to speak with some precision of the diversity of opinion amongst Dissenters, and of the weakness of the critics of the official leadership.

> ..... we affirm, that the great body of the Dissenters in town and country are not prepared to go all the length of our Scottish brethren, or to assume an attitude of hostility to the present Government; and that, if the Patriot should lend itself to extreme counsels, the inevitable result would be, a disastrous schism, more fatal to their strength than even their past supineness.....

This assessment was blunt, but accurate. The Patriot pleaded for unity, division merely providing "a cheap triumph" for Dissent's enemies. Moderation and caution were the qualities demanded. Dissenters should conceal none of their opinions, but their actual claims for relief ought to be reasonable, for any attempt to impose their principles on the nation "would only sustain an inglorious defeat". By tempting "an unequal and ambiguous contest" Dissenters would abandon all the moral advantages they possessed. Behind this article lay a desire to counter the "mischievous efforts" of others to set the London and provincial Dissenters at variance.

This need for unanimity was reiterated the next week. Yet, whilst deprecating unjust and impolitic attacks on the Government, the Patriot reminded Dissenters that they had a duty to avow their principles, and to make their position clear on the ecclesiastical questions likely to come before Parliament. These included tithes, church reform and the continued existence of the alliance of Church and State, but a "political agitation" should be restricted to obtaining the redress of the practical grievances.

> ..... Dissenters have, as the depositories of what they deem scriptural principles, a duty to discharge, quite apart from their own demands and expectations; and that is, to convince the majority of the nation that the alliance between

> Church and State is not an advantage to the commonwealth. That this conviction is gaining ground, both within the Church and without it, we have the fullest assurance. Political agitation, however, cannot forward this object. It is not a point to be carried, but a truth to be established..... 1

The Congregational Magazine adopted a gradualist stance for three reasons. Firstly, a concentration on the more definite and distinct issues would promote unity and give the voice of Dissent a greater weight with Ministers. Secondly, although the grievances were a purely dissenting interest, the alliance of Church and State affected the whole community, and had to made into a national, not a sectarian issue. Finally, the editor argued that a more vigorous agitation of the principles involved would win many converts, thus making an eventual attempt at separation both justifiable and feasible. In 1834 such an endeavour would be a feeble demonstration, revealing Dissent's divisions and its political weakness. Convinced of the Government's willingness to respond to an effective appeal, there was a warning against impetuosity in his conclusion.

> Let us, then, bend our united energies on those objects which more immediately affect us, and which, by unanimity and vigour, we may immediately attain. By attempting more we may for the present lose all. Let us be taught, at length, that unanimity is of essential importance in every considerable enterprize; we have suffered much from the want of it hitherto; let us be resolved to postpone our immediate predilections to obtain it. It is of little importance that we have justice and right on one side, if we will not wait the opportune moment, and make use of the proper means by which we may attain our objects.

Separation was impossible until "the great mass of our country men shall call for it as loudly as ourselves."[2]

There were two main divisions of opinion amongst

1. P., 18 December 1833 p. 424, 25 December 1833 p. 432.
2. C.M., 1834, pp. 62-4.

Congregationalists. In the provinces, particularly in the North, there was a vocal section who, arguing the necessity of an immediate assault on the Establishment, distrusted the intentions and good faith of the Whigs. The denominational leadership, in London, and the journals which represented their views, had complete confidence in the willingness of Ministers to meet dissenting demands if sufficient pressure were exerted, hence, they sought the objectives which seemed attainable - the redress of grievances - urging a postponement of the separation movement until the times were more propitious. These temperate counsels could not satisfy the militants, and they accused its advocates of timidity, servility to Whig politicians, and over-sensitivity to the good opinion of London society. These prejudices hardened during 1834 when the unsatisfactory Whig marriage law reform and church rates proposals were unveiled. They were evidence of the bankruptcy of the gradualist policy, said its opponents, and, even of divine displeasure with it.

Joshua Wilson had never concealed his adherence to gradualism, but, throughout the autumn, he had tried to reconcile the divergant elements within Dissent. At the beginning of January his letter on the position and duty of Dissenters appeared in the Patriot. A prominent London Congregationalist, a member of the United Committee, this must be regarded as a semi-official document, as the final word of the metropolitan leadership before the campaign opened.

Advising an open avowal of all dissenting principles and their consequences, Wilson agreed that a statement of them ought to appear in all petitions and memorials, their

prayer, however, being limited to "the redress of our grievances". Confident that the "season had arrived 'for breaking every yoke' of this kind", that the cabinet was prepared to favourably consider their demands, he asked for a "vigorous and united effort" to strengthen Dissenters' allies in the Government. Indeed, "by speedily making a public and unequivocal demonstration, both of our strength of feeling and determination", Dissent could virtually control "the movements of the Cabinet itself". The Whigs wanted to do justice, and deserved some credit for this; though Dissenters had to agitate their cause for themselves, this was no reason for deserting "our natural leaders and ancient allies".

As for disestablishment, any adoption of "carnal weapons" would tarnish an objective that had to be achieved by "Christian means", by calm discussion and appeal to Scripture. "..... Let us not," he appealed,"by rash and unadvised measures, attempt to precipitate the final result." The other way, separation would be a victory of "truth and reason, justice and liberty, and, above all, of pure, simple, and genuine Christianity," not of one sect or party over another.[1]

Wilson's points were recapitulated by the United Committee in their "Brief Statement of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters". Opening with a protest against Establishment, the Committee listed the grievances, recommended the formation of local associations and the preparation of petitions, which, whilst containing a profession of principles, restricted their immediate demands

1. P., 1 January 1834 p. 3.

"to the Redress of practical grievances". Conder, underlining the Committee's concern with unity, anticipated that this "temperate but firm" document would "satisfy the most excited, without alarming the timid", vindicating the metropolitan Dissenters "from the suspicion of supineness or timidity on the one hand, or of rashness and violence on the other".[1]

This was the beginning of the official campaign. Before the end of January a deputation saw both Grey and Russell, their confidence in the Government's good intentions being strengthened by the meeting. In this promising situation, the Patriot hoped that "no injudicious displays of extreme opinion" would give an advantage to the opponents of Dissent.[2]

This proved a vain hope. Hadfield was bitter and sarcastic in his "grief & disappointment" at the Committee's recommendations,

> ..... to petition for the redress of comparatively trifling grievances, and even to venture so far as to suggest to us to talk about great principles, which they themselves acknowledge, yet they enjoin us to take no step whatever to promote them, but to exclude them altogether from the prayer of our petitions! This is to me unaccountable, but Earl Grey was, no doubt, very civil to the deputation for 20 minutes together! He was even kind! It is true he would promise us nothing; but he must not be embarrassed until he is strong enough to unite with the lovers of a corrupt Church & set the Dissenters at defiance. There maybe great wisdom in all this, and there may be many influences stirring in the bosoms of the Gentlemen of mixed sentiments, who usually assemble in Red Cross Street, which common observers cannot understand.

Again, he called for an assault on the presence of the

1. ibid., 8 January 1834 pp. 12, 13.
2. ibid., 22 January 1834 p. 28.

bishops in the Lords.[1]

There were other signs of provincial discontent. Leeds Dissenters were the first to meet, in December, and their gathering was moderate enough. There were no wild speeches, the first resolution merely stating that, "as Protestant Dissenters we consider the civil Establishment of Religion, and the compulsory support of it, to be unauthorised by the law of Christ, and inconsistent with the plainest dictates of Equality & Justice". Other resolutions outlined the "practical grievances", and a memorial based on them, to be presented to the premier, was adopted. Halévy's description of this as "the most imposing demonstration"of the Dissenters is an exaggeration, and he wrongly suggests that the first resolution was an intrusion into the ordered plan of the meeting. Read in conjunction with the speeches, the resolution was no more than an avowal of basic principles, proposed by Richard Winter Hamilton, and George Rawson, a leading Congregationalist layman. More provocative was a Brighton meeting which decided to set up a United Committee, and to submit a memorial to Grey based on Hadfield's five points.[2]

More militant and disquieting was the Nottingham meeting on 8 January. The first resolution, hostile to Establishment, was moved by the Rev. Joseph Gilbert, minister at Friar Lane Congregational Chapel, whilst William Howitt proposed a second, condemnatory of episcopal legislative functions. Two more resolutions dealt with the other

1. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to the Editor of the Patriot, 13 January 1834. On the 18th January Hadfield authorised Wilson to destroy this protest.
2. P., 11 December 1833 p. 413; L.M., 7 December 1833. Halévy, E.: The Triumph of Reform, 1830-1841, (London, paperback edition, 1961), p. 151.

grievances. In a memorial drafted for the benefit of the cabinet, the history, inexpediency and failure of Establishment were explained, and the advantages of abolition described. Dissenters, the memorialists added, were "prepared to call for this abolition as a measure of common justice ..... of sound policy on the part of a Christian legislature ..... and of benefit to the Episcopal Church itself....." Like Hadfield, they believed that "these sentiments will be found to be those of the bulk of the British population, and that nothing can long resist their being carried into practice." Other "most unquestionable rights" demanded mingled the expulsion of the bishops from the Lords with the redress of the "practical grievances". A deputation presented it to Grey, who regretted the high ground taken.[1] Hadfield, however, greeted it as "the most able and decisive Memorial that has yet been presented to the Premier of England on the subject of our claims and grievances". 3,000 copies had been sent to Manchester for distribution.[2]

Writing to the Patriot to justify a proceeding totally opposed to the recommendations of the United Committee, Gilbert recorded that the representatives of ten denominations sat on the platform at "the largest and most respectable meeting I have seen in Nottingham". Only the Wesleyan Methodists and the Unitarians were absent. Surely, he argued, it was the duty of Dissenters to state their principles and their objectives plainly, and, since the only approach to Parliament was by petition, "why not .....

1. P., 15 January 1834 pp. 23, 24, 29 January 1834 p. 39.
2. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to the Editor of the Patriot, 13 January 1834; G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 18 January 1834.

in manly honesty and Christian firmness. ask precisely for what, I will not say we want, but what the public good and public right demand?"[1]

Conder made four points in an editorial reply. Since the impact of petitions depended on their brevity and directness it was "quite absurd" to fill them with exposition of abstract principles. Secondly, to ask for the dissolution of the alliance of Church and State was to demand "nothing tangible", but Parliament could only deal with a "practical grievance". Thirdly, without representatives in Parliament, to urge separation was to invite rejection and defeat - "paper representatives" would not obtain a hearing. Finally, and most important, although nearly all Dissenters agreed on the nature of the practical grievances, there was not the same unanimity on the abstract issues. Like the United Committee, the Patriot's "main solicitude" was to maintain unity in face of opponents anxious to "divide and disperse" the Dissenters. With this objective in mind, the Committee had "acted wisely and recommended the only safe and prudent course". Militancy could only end in a severe rebuff.[2]

Prominent ministers of the old school, however, were advising their congregations to follow the counsel of the United Committee. James advocated prudence, agreeing that any attempt to precipitate separation would fail, whilst injuring the Administration, strengthening the Tories, and delaying much needed reforms, including the redress of Dissenters' grievances. He supported the gradual approach.

> ..... Until the Union can be dissolved by the diffusion of sound scriptural sentiments,

1. P., 22 January 1834 p. 27.
2. ibid., 29 January 1834 pp. 36-7.

> both among the people and the legislature; both within the Church and without it, most of the sober and reflecting members of our different denominations are quite averse from making the attempt by the force of political agitation. Let our efforts be directed to the extension and consolidation of our own liberties, leaving the church, if it is to be pulled down, to pull down itself, or the church and the state to do it between them.

He preferred the various Birmingham congregations to act independently, rather than in concert. Clearly there was an element in the town's Dissent to which he took exception. This was probably the Birmingham Dissenting Deputies, whose chairman was another Congregational minister, the Rev. Timothy East; in January 1835 he publicly dissociated himself, his church, and congregation from any share in its politico-religious activities. James did not want his own congregation to give currency "to the slander which has been so industriously circulated, and is greatly received, that we are after all more of a political than a religious body".[1]

In London, John Clayton jnr. wrote almost apologetically to Bishop Blomfield, explaining that the noisy activists were not really representative of Nonconformist opinion.

> ..... Permit me to assure your Lordship that not only are there many hundreds of citizens by whom I am immediately surrounded, but a large mass of both ministers and their people in London and in the country, who totally disapprove of the violent and pugnacious procedure which a few vehement partisans now adopt and pursue; and we hope we shall not be confounded with those, whose tempers are our dishonour, and some of their measures injurious to their true interests..... [2]

1. ibid., 21 January 1835 p. 20. Dale, R.W.: Life and Letters of John Angell James, (London, 1861), pp. 166-9. James, J.A.: A Pastor's Address to his People, on the Principles of Dissent, and the Duties of Dissenters, (London and Birmingham, 1834), pp. 54-9.
2. Blomfield, A.: A Memoir of Charles James Blomfield D.D., Bishop of London, (London, 1863), pp. 200-3.

From the columns of the Patriot it is apparent that the recommendations of the United Committee were generally followed. Petitions and memorials contained fulsome statements of principle, and avowals of separation as the ultimate objective, but immediate relief was sought from the more specific inequities which Dissenters suffered. An example of the correct form of petition appeared in the Congregational Magazine. Even the Associated Independent Churches of Manchester and Salford stuck to this formula, and both the Congregational Union and the Congregational Board set good examples.[1] It seems that the militants acquiesced in this as a test of Government sincerity. Convinced of their duplicity, they could wait until the failure of the moderate policy had been revealed, and then expect to attract widespread support. The Nottingham Appeal, the great Manchester meeting, the formation of the Ashton-under-Lyme Church Separation Society all followed the announcement of Russell's unacceptable marriage law reform proposals. Until the middle of March the London leaders were clearly in control, and the Congregational Union's committee could send a vague and evasive reply to the secretaries of the Glasgow Voluntary Church Association, when they attempted to rouse English Dissenters against the Establishment.[2]

The first disappointment of the parliamentary session was the omission of any reference to Dissenters' grievances in the King's Speech, though Conder noted that the results of the previous session had far exceeded the promise of its opening statement of Government intentions. A supplement rectified the defect, but both the United Committee and the

1. C.M., 1834, pp. 118, 177. P., 26 February 1834 p. 66.
2. C.M., 1834, pp. 53-5, 116-8.

Patriot reminded Dissenters of the need to force Parliament to consider their grievances, and the Government to act, by inundating them with a flood of petitions and memorials.[1]

A scheme to reform the Marriage Law was the first fruit of the agitation. It had a hostile reception, Russell's outline of the bill being viewed with "dissatisfaction and disappointment". The Committee,of the Congregational Union condemned its "manifest subserviency to ecclesiastical authority, and its apparent disregard of the just claims and feelings of the Dissenters at large", whilst the United Committee dismissed the final draft as "altogether unsatisfactory".

The grounds of opposition were manifold. The principal ones were, the retention of the publication of banns in the parish church; unsatisfactory arrangements for the licensing of chapels; and the liability of the minister to keep a register, transmitting copies, with a fee, every three months to the diocesan registrar. Conder was particularly incensed at this clause. Diocesan registers, he complained, were notoriously badly kept, and Dissenters were to be compelled to pay for "these slovenly records", since the Government was "too weak or too timid to provide an efficient system of national registration". Dissent was being penalised yet again. On 17th March the United Committee resolved that Dissenters could be given no effectual relief from the grievances of the Marriage Laws unless a uniform and comprehensive system of registration was introduced.[2]

The final draft of the Bill was presented to Parliament

1. P., 5 February 1834 p. 44, 12 February 1834 p. 52.
2. ibid., 26 February 1834 p. 68, 5 March 1834 p. 73; C.M., 1834, pp. 247-9.

on 12th March, but Russell had already expressed his willingness to withdraw it if the Dissenters persisted in their disapprobation. It contained no major modification of the original proposals. "A more instructive illustration could not be desired, of the essential injustice of the Church and State system," commented the Patriot, since the "best apology" for this "bungling and deceptive measure of relief", was that the existing system admitted of nothing better.[1]

All this tended to cast doubts on the good faith of the Whigs, who seemed to be compromising their liberalism to satisfy the prejudices of Tory clerics and of Churchmen. The Government was warned that "such temporizing measures" would cost it "the high place it held, at the last general election, in the esteem and confidence of the Protestant Dissenters".

> There are many who are tempted to believe that those noble individuals in the Cabinet, who, in former days, so warmly advocated the interests of religious as well as civil liberty, are either sacrificing their old friends to their former Tory colleagues, or are crouching before the haughty power of the hierarchy.2

In a Lords debate on Dissenters' grievances on 3rd March, Durham elicited from Grey the admission that several other dissenting claims deserved consideration, and the promise that redress would be offered. A church-rate measure was promised early in April, but the Patriot predicted that if ministers contemplated anything less than total abolition, "they would just succeed as in Lord JOHN'S proposed Marriage Bill, in alienating their friends without conciliating their enemies, by a middle course savouring of pusillanimity

1. P., 19 March 1834 pp. 92-3.
2. ibid., 26 February 1834 p. 68 C.M., 1834, p. 186.

more than of wisdom or sound policy".[1] This prophecy proved accurate.

A fortnight later the editor suggested that official attitudes towards William Brougham's Registration Bill, "will ..... put beyond all doubt, whether there exists on the part of the present Ministers any honest disposition to afford substantial justice to the Dissenters, or whether they have been hitherto mistaking for statesmen those who are after all but place men". The impression left by the debate on Divett's church rate motion was inauspicious, and led to the melancholy conclusion,

> ..... that nothing spontaneous can be anticipated by Protestant Dissenters from his Majesty's Government, who seem unfortunately afflicted with a strange vis inertiae in all that relates to the interests of their old friends and faithful allies, and to content themselves with empty declarations of unaltered goodwill, while they do nothing for their relief.....[2]

The dissatisfaction voiced here soon produced other manifestations of discontent. It was claimed that the defection of Dissenting votes cost Sir John Campbell his Dudley seat in an election consequent on a government appointment. Radicals deserted him because of ministerial policies whilst a reporter explained, "The Dissenters were not so warm in his cause". Although, he added, "The great majority of them ..... were in his favour, and were his firmest friends".[3]

Meanwhile, a Church Separation Society had been formed at Ashton-under-Lyme. The fourth resolution at the inaugural meeting, proposed and seconded by the Congregationalists

1. P., 5 March 1834 p. 76. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, vol. 21, 992-3.
2. P., 19 March 1834 pp. 92, 93.
3. ibid., 5 March 1834 p. 76.

John Cheetham and Thomas Mason, advised "the friends of religious liberty",

> ..... in consequence of the introduction into Parliament, by Lord John Russell, of a most paltry, inefficient, and unsatisfactory Bill for the relief of Dissenters.....

to withdraw

> their support from the present Administration, unless measures of a more liberal character be brought forward.

This was to be an undenominational society, whose object was "the employment of all lawful and Christian means to obtain the immediate and total separation of the Church and the State, throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the Colonies, so that all penal statutes affecting religious opinions, and all compulsory payments for religious purposes, shall for ever cease in His Majesty's dominions." At least three Congregationalist ministers participated in these proceedings; John Sutcliffe of Ashton, G.Hoyle of Stalybridge, and J.Massey of Hyde; John Cheetham was a local cottonmaster and Congregationalist, as was Thomas Mason. Others involved were Charles Hindley, a Moravian, and soon to be M.P. for Ashton, the Rev. J.R.Stephens who was expelled from the Wesleyan Methodist connection because of his association with the Society, the Revs. C.Morrell, W.Ford, F.Newberry, and Mr. J.Dean. John Howard was in the chair.

A Bolton petition of the "Independent Dissenters" complained of the five grievances, expressed "regret and disappointment" with Russell's Bill, and requested the Commons "to dissolve the unhallowed connexion between Church and State..... as the only means by which they can obtain the full measure of their just rights as British

subjects".

Confronted by this flurry of provincial militancy, the Patriot, despite its own criticisms of the Whigs, offered a gentle warning against rash and heedless actions. The Whigs were still the only political friends Dissent had.

> We must intreat our friends..... not to suffer themselves to be hurried into proceedings that may savour of petulance or vindictiveness..... We are aware that a sentiment is gaining ground, that more concession might be expected from the fears of the Tories, than from the courage of the Whigs; but if it were possible that Dissenters could lend themselves to the sacrifice of their old oppressors, they would be sacrificing their patriotism to an equivocal and shortsighted policy. It is, in fact, the Tory leaven in the present Cabinet, that prevents the adoption of more liberal and manly proceedings.1

Manchester pronounced at the beginning of March. The public meeting of Dissenters lasted two evenings, and its theme was the separation of the Church from the State. The first four resolutions dealt with aspects of this question, and the first prayer of the petition was that, "the connexion between Church and State may be dissolved with the least delay practicable, that there may be a repeal of the Act of Parliament which authorises the Prelates of the Established Church to sit in the Upper House". The Patriot regretted the absence of "the names of the leading Dissenting Ministers of Manchester", wishing "that all parties of orthodox Dissenters had been enabled to unite on such an occasion in the expression of a common sentiment....." Thomas Harbottle, a Congregationalist, took the chair, Hadfield, James H.Hulme, and John Dracup moved or seconded resolutions, but with the exception of McKerrow the

1. ibid., 12 March 1834 pp. 81, 84

ministerial speakers were Unitarian or Baptist.[1] Although they had collaborated in the preparation and presentation of a memorial to Grey at the end of 1833, the leading Congregationalist ministers took no part in this demonstration.[2]

This gathering had not been unheralded. On 13 February a special meeting of about eighty Dissenters, of all denominations, with Harbottle in the chair, had pledged themselves to use their utmost exertions to obtain separation.[3] The March meeting was one consequence of this. Hadfield anticipated that the separation movement would be given a new momentum by the decision of the Manchester Dissenters to act. Now, he wrote, Dr. Heugh's suggestion that a travelling lecturer on voluntaryism be appointed, was feasible; he even proposed that Drs. Wardlaw, Heugh, and Reed be requested to tour the country together in this capacity. The insulting nature of Russell's proposals "carved from Lord Sidmouth's bill," did not surprise him; it was all the Dissenters deserved. The London friends, he gently remarked, had left "us sadly in the lurch".[4]

Separation petitions were adopted by meetings at Chard, Rochdale, and Oldham. At Stalybridge, John Cheetham declared that recent events had taught Dissenters the futility of expecting redress of grievances, and that the only course

1. Report of the Speeches delivered at the Public Meeting held in the Exchange Room, Manchester, on ..... Wednesday, March 5th, 1834, and ..... on the following ..... Evening .....; Manchester Guardian, 8 March 1834; P., 19 March 1834 p. 93.
2. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 9 December 1833.
3. P., 19 February 1834 p. 57; Manchester Guardian, 15 February 1834.
4. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 15 February, 3, 8 March 1834.

open to them was "one of union, firmness, and decision, and, following the example of their brethren in Manchester, at once to demand the redress of that practical grievance which was the source of all others - namely the connexion between the Church and the State....." Two thousand signatures were appended to The Appeal of the Nottingham Dissenters to the Dissenters of England, on the Necessity of Earnestness and Union at the present Crisis. This too, argued the case for an immediate separation campaign.[1]

At this crisis, the orthodoxy of Conder was questioned. Raffles and Kelly, as secretaries of the Liverpool Association of Trinitarian Dissenters, wrote to Wilson complaining of the "objectionable" nature of certain articles in the Patriot. In mid-March even Wilson was doubtful; he wrote to his fellow-trustee, Thomas Challis,

> I have recd a letter from Mr. Matheson this morng. He has been conversing with the leading Dissrs in Manchester & Liverpool, where he finds a general fear of Mr. C---'s being 'unsound' on the great question of the Voluntary Support of Religion. I confess to you that I cannot help having my doubts and fears - I am sure unless he be quite orthodox on that point he cannot permanently continue Ed. of the Patt if it is to be the organ of Evangelical Dissenters. My Father I know is very much afraid of his proving unsuitable in this essential respect.....[2]

Four days later Hadfield was informing Wilson of Manchester's dissatisfaction with the poor coverage of the Dissenters' meeting in the Patriot. A recent meeting of the United Dissenters' Committee, formed at the general meeting, he reported, had "passed by acclamation" a motion thanking

1. P., 19 March 1834 p. 90, 26 March 1834 pp. 98, 107, 2 April 1834 p. 115, 16 April 1834 p. 130.
2. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.4, Dr. Thomas Raffles and Rev. John Kelly to J.Wilson, 1 March 1834; J.Wilson to Thomas Challis, 18 March 1834.

the Christian Advocate and disowning the Patriot. Hadfield had not been responsible for this, but had previously decided to cancel his subscription to the latter, and to take the former.[1]

To counter these attacks, a long article on separation, and the voluntary principle appeared in the Patriot in April, which concluded: "It may suit the purpose of certain parties to pretend that we are only half-hearted in the cause; but we shall not on that account refrain from showing ourselves what we ever have been, the decided and unflinching advocates of the Voluntary Principle".[2] Prior to this the erroneousness of a policy which had sought redress of grievances, leaving the Church untouched was almost admitted. Establishment was "the great grievance" and if reform was incompatible with its survival,

> .....if it must be the Establishment as it is, dominant, exclusive, and incorrigible, or no Establishment, - Dissenters have no alternative but to unite as one man in seeking that from this great grievance they and the nation may be speedily delivered.[3]

For the moment the pressure for a separation agitation was almost completely confined to the Manchester area and Nottingham. The Leeds Mercury reported no meetings in the West Riding at which this matter was urgently debated. When the Leeds Dissenters met to hear the report of their delegates to the London Conference in May, a "numerous" committee was formed to protect Dissenting interests, but, "The decided sentiment of the meeting was, to use every constitutional effort to obtain the redress of the practical

1. ibid., envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 22 March 1834.
2. P., 23 April 1834 p. 137.
3. ibid., 2 April 1834 p. 112.

grievances of Dissenters, but to use neither intemperance of language nor violence of conduct, and not to mix up the question of a separation of Church and State with that of practical grievances".[1] The Mercury had always been a moderate voice. In the aftermath of the Manchester meeting it had made a reasoned appeal for the gradualist policy, arguing that militancy could only harm Dissent and delay the redress of the practical grievances. Suggesting that there was every prospect of success if they acted firmly and prudently, the editor warned Dissenters that extremism - the demand for separation - would only consolidate the opposition to their claims by rousing up all "the strength, all the prejudices, and all the fears of the Church, in battle array against you". This was a "speculative" issue, which could only prevail through the progress of reason, not through an all out assault which would "convulse the nation". Legitimate pressure might be put on Ministers, who were reminded that Dissenters "were their best friends and absolutely indispensable supporters", but it was foolish to "convert your friends into your enemies", to "urge the willing steed to an impracticable performance".[2] Disestablishment could not be forced on either Church or State; it was folly to imagine it could, and self-defeating to try.

The Patriot, too, deprecated the false position in which Dissenters were placing themselves, adding that this was the "inevitable result of that false position in which Government have placed themselves".

..... No Minister can serve two masters. He

1. L.M., 17 May 1834.
2. ibid., 8, 15 March 1834.

> must choose between the Church, as the patrimony of the oligarchy, and the people. If Lord GREY has not firmness enough to make this decision, he must make way for a bolder, if not a better man; for one who will have courage enough to carry through the great reforms upon which the nation is intent, or temerity enough to refuse all concessions, and to attempt to coerce the House of Commons and the people into acquiescence in the restored reign of Toryism 1

This alienation from the Administration was aggravated by the announcement of Althorp's church rate proposals. Hadfield had predicted that these would be "a mere delusion", like the Marriage Bill, "a transference of the present mode to some other by which the same money can be got, vastly more pleasantly to the Church and clergy, and of the public purse."[2] The accuracy of this forecast was soon apparent.

Althorp explained his plan to the Commons on 21 April. He proposed the entire abolition of church rates, with an annual charge of £250,000 on the land tax as replacement. This would be used for the maintenance and support of parish churches and chapels, being disbursed by the Commissioners for Building Churches. Considerable opposition was voiced by radical and dissenting Members of Parliament, Edward Baines snr. declaring that the scheme "would not be acceptable to the great portion of the Dissenting community".[3]

Here was another "break-down of character" by the Ministry, who were informed that it "will not be one whit more acceptable than the Dissenters' Marriage Bill; and we trust it will have the same fate". The Congregational Magazine wrote of "this most unsatisfactory measure", whilst the Mercury thundered against its basic injustice. The

1. P., 2 April 1834 p. 112.
2. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 22 March 1834.
3. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, vol. 22, 1012-1063; Baines's speech, 1056-7.

United Committee, the Deputies, and the Protestant Society, all made their protests. Hadfield recorded that he had "written to our Committee", urging them "to do their utmost to stir up the community in the North".[1] On Saturday 10 May a deputation from the Dissenters' delegate conference saw Althorp to explain their objections. It consisted of the Congregationalist ministers, J.A.James, Joseph Gilbert, Dr.Redford (Worcester), G.Griffiths (Long Buckley), the laymen Samuel Clapham, Edward Baines M.P., Richard Ash (Bristol) and James Baldwin Brown. John Wilks M.P., Henry Waymouth, the Baptist chairman of the United Committee, and Robert Hunter were the other members. Althorp was unyielding, confident that the majority of Dissenters would support him. This same assertion had been made in the Commons when the Chancellor of the Exchequer unfolded his scheme; then, the Patriot had replied indignantly,

> ..... How could Lord ALTHORP imagine - and he must so have imagined, because he says so - that the commutation of any part of the Church-rates into a land tax would satisfy those who object, upon principle, to any species of compulsive payment in support of the Establishment? Why did he not consult those who could have undeceived him?.....

Two days after the interview with the Minister, the United Committee resolved that, rather than see the proposals become law, they would prefer things to remain as they were.[2] The Government persevered, the final draft of the Bill being published at the end of June.

There was a long list of objections, but all centred on the injustice of perpetuating a compulsory payment in

1. P., 23 April 1834 p. 136, 30 April 1834 p. 141; C.M., 1834, p. 315; L.M., 3, 10 May 1834; Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 24 April 1834.
2. P., 23 April 1834 p. 136, 14 May 1834 p. 169.

support of the Church. The Bill was a recognition and reassertion of "the unjust and obnoxious" principle of taxing all denominations for the benefit of one favoured sect; by pretending to abolish half of the amount collected in church rates, it sought to circumvent the increasing tendency to parochial economy which promised to effect a greater saving. There was, in any case, no guarantee that the sum drawn from public funds would not grow. The wisdom of giving new duties, and permanence, to the irresponsible Church Building Commissioners was queried. It was unjust to extend compulsory support of the English ecclesiastical Establishment to Ireland and Scotland, but this would be one effect of the measure. Moreover, the revenue of the Church of England was ample to provide for its needs, whilst the wealth of Churchmen was immense, and easily sufficient to maintain their own places of worship. In an article at the end of July the Patriot attempted to prove that the Bill violated the basis of the constitution, since it contravened the principle of no taxation without representation, by taking the right of consent or opposition from the parishoners assembled in the vestry. There was general agreement that "the ..... bill will be obviously a new rivet of Church and State", and this, added the Mercury, "is one of the strongest reasons why those who regard the union as beneficial neither to religion nor the cause of good government should protest against the measure".[1]

Immediate consequences of Althorp's statement in the Commons were the confirmation of the militants in the correctness of their strategy, and the giving of an

1. ibid., 23 April 1834 p. 136, 2 July 1834 pp. 236-7, 23 July 1834 p. 261; C.M., 1834, pp. 315-6; L.M., 3, 10 May 1834.

irresistable impetus to the movement for a delegate meeting in London.

Writing from Manchester, Hadfield hoped that this latest "insult" would at last drive the Londoners into adopting the "great question":

> ..... I told you they wod. do nothing for us & you see I am correct. The marked insult of refusing to do for Dissenters what they granted the Irish Catholics has settled them forever in public estimation. After all this I hope the London Gentm will now act decisively & the only way to do this will be to moot the great question. If this had been done before Ministers wod. not have ventured to treat us in this way..... 1

When the Manchester United Dissenters' Committee reviewed Government policy towards the Dissenters, they recalled Grey's declaration that he would uphold the union of Church and State, noted the vested interest of the cabinet members in church patronage, and concluded that "no effectual relief from the grievances under which Dissenters labour is to be expected from his Majesty's Ministry, as it is at present constituted". Their "Dissenting brethren" were asked to "unite in increased efforts for the purpose of obtaining, by legal and constitutional means, the entire separation of Church and State". To implement this, an electoral policy was recommended which implied a complete break with the Whigs. Dissenters were advised "to circulate information on their great fundemental principles", to persuade the electorate "to act in concert at all ensuing elections, with the determination of returning to Parliament such Members only as will support measures for speedily but peaceably effecting the separation of Church and State".

Conder adopted a more moderate tone, although he, too,

1. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 23 April 1834.

admitted that Ministers had done nothing for Dissenters, who, therefore, owed them nothing; that "to expect anything from the spontaneous favour or justice of His Majesty's present Ministers would ..... be fatuous ...."; that a dishonest policy had cost them the respect of the Dissenters of England. But the Patriot had never expected the cabinet to grant Dissenters everything they demanded, least of all separation, and deprecated a political opposition to the Government. Only Dissent could lose by a change of ministry, whilst "a steady application of their moral strength, and the adoption of constitutional measures" might force concessions from the Whigs. In any case,

> ..... what patriotic and religious Dissenter would wish to revenge his past disappointment on Ministers at the expense of those public interests which would be endangered or prejudiced by the accession to power of either the Corruptionists or the Radicals.

For these reasons the Patriot would continue its support of the Administration.[1]

The Baines family gave similar advice, warning that a breach between the Dissenters and the Government would end the liberal ascendancy, indefinitely postponing all further reforms. At least the Whigs had admitted the grievances were genuine, and were attempting, albeit "clumsily and timidly", to redress them. "In time", the Mercury optimistically suggested, Dissenters would "gain everything from the Whigs, except the separation of Church and State". A Tory administration, the only viable alternative to the Whigs, would do nothing for them. Self-interest, and the national interest, dictated the maintenance of the Whig alliance, although the politicians had their part to play in this too.

1. P., 7 May 1834 pp. 149, 152.

> ..... we are confident that the furious hostility shown by both the Universities during this week towards his MAJESTY'S Ministers will induce Dissenters to cherish their alliance with the great Whig party, to which alone they can look for justice to themselves, to Ireland, or to the colonies. We hope, on the other hand, that Ministers will now feel how much they owe to the Dissenters, and that they will not offend them for the sake of propitiating their implacable and bigotted enemies among the Church.1

Already, the political dilemma of Dissent is apparent. On the one hand, the liberal section in Parliament will not implement and adopt all they demand; on the other, the Dissenters are not strong enough to make their point effectively independent of a party alliance. Moreover, if this alliance is abandoned, the political principles on which they claim to stand are threatened. In the thirties this is reflected in the disillusionment experienced with Whiggery between elections, followed by conformity at the elections to prevent the triumph of opposing political principles.

The second consequence of Althorp's plan was the summoning of a general assembly of dissenting delegates. This was not a new idea. In the autumn of 1833 it had been discussed by the Wilson circle, and the Sussex Dissenters had urged the United Committee to organise a general conference.[2] On the 18th March the Deputies of the Independent and Baptist Denominations of Birmingham resolved to propose to the United Committee,

> that a general assembly of one or more deputies from every large town be assembled in London, the 14th of April next, for the purposes of ascertaining the general feeling of Dissenters, and defining a general plan of operations, to act

1. L.M., 17 May, 14 June 1834.
2. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, J.Wilson to G.Hadfield, 18 October, 8 November 1833 (both these are drafts).

> upon the Government and the members for their respective towns and counties, to secure the redress of all practical grievances .....

Simultaneously, an anonymous letter, signed "An Independent Dissenter", was circulating in London recommending this course of action.[1]

In reply, the United Committee counselled against a general conference "as unseasonable and inadvisable" whilst negotiations with Government and M.P.s were still taking place. Nevertheless, they promised that if "any sufficient occasion arise to justify their convening such a Meeting .... this Committee will not hesitate to take the steps requisite for that purpose". Both the Patriot and the Congregational Magazine agreed on the inexpediency of a national meeting, though the former suggested that the capital's Dissenters ought to hold their own united demonstration.[2] By mid-April the Patriot was convinced of the need for a general assembly.

> ..... Such a meeting appears to us to be now indispensable, in order to ascertain and to demonstrate to the Public, that unity of sentiment which we are persuaded pervades the great mass of the Dissenters, and to defeat the base attempts that are made to divide them, or, if that cannot be done, to make them seem divided. We feel assured that our friends in the metropolis would feel greatly relieved and strengthened by the opportunity of concert with their country brethren .....

Early May seemed a convenient time; the benefits anticipated were the attainment of "a mutual understanding", and the facilitating of "a harmonious plan of operation."[3]

As a display of unity, the meeting was threatened from the beginning. On 8 April, Hadfield wrote,

> As far as I can judge I do not think our

1. P., 19 March 1834 p. 89; C.M., 1834, p. 248.
2. P., 26 March 1834 pp. 97, 100, 2 April 1834 p. 112; C.M., 1834, p. 251.
3. P., 9 April 1834 p. 120, 16 April 1834 p. 128.

> Comee ..... will send a deputation to London unless it be on the chief point & on the best & most immediate way of effecting it 1

The exact purpose of the meeting was a matter the Patriot evaded, and when the delegates assembled they were divided into two distinct camps. The United Committee, which had called the conference with an ill-grace, wanted to limit its business to the redress of specific grievances, ignoring the separation issue.[2] The Manchester Committee rejected this policy, and although a deputation was sent, consisting of the Rev. J.R.Beard, Thomas Harbottle, George Hadfield, Alexander Kay, Charles Hindley and George Inglis, their terms of reference were very closely prescribed.

> 1. To endeavour, in concurrence with such other Deputies from the Country as will aid their efforts to obtain from the Committee of United Dissenters in London, a distinct and public Declaration that they will seek to obtain a separation of the Church from the State.
> 2. To act with the London Committee, and the Deputies from the Country, (in case such a Declaration be obtained) in devising such plan as shall be thought most likely to attain that end, and in carrying those plans into effect.
> 3. To endeavour, (if the London Committee shall decline to make such Declaration), to procure a Public Meeting of the Deputies from the Country, and of the London Dissenters, to petition for a separation of Church and State.
> 4. To concur in any measures that may be agreed upon for obtaining redress of what are generally known as by the name of the Practical Grievances of the Dissenters, on the express understanding, however, that in any Memorial to Government, Petition to Parliament, Resolution or Public Declaration of any kind, it be made to appear that such redress is looked for only as a means to the great end which this Committee has in view, an entire Separation of Church and State.

Nottingham's delegates were bound by similar instruction.[3]

In fact, the meeting, and the appearance of unity were saved

1. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 8 April 1834.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. V, 1839, p. 19. Dale, R.W.: Life and Letters of John Angell James, p. 586.
3. P., 7 May 1834 p. 156, 10 May 1834 p. 163.

by compromise, but it was the United Committee that surrendered most ground.

The delegates assembled in the London Tavern on 8 May. Edward Baines M.P. was called into the chair. As proprietor of the Leeds Mercury his views were well-known, and he opposed a declaration in favour of the separation of Church and State, as being liable to obstruct, rather than hasten, the removal of the practical grievances. John Angell James moved the official resolution dealing with these. He did not attend as a delegate of the Birmingham Association, by whom he was thought too moderate, but as the representative of his own congregation. On his arrival at the hall, Robert Winter approached him on behalf of the United Committee, explaining,

> "..... we want a MODERATE MAN from the country to move the resolution we have prepared, and knowing you to be such, it is our wish that you should be entrusted with that business. We go only for a redress of specific grievances, but do not touch the question of separation of Church and State. There are some delegates from Manchester and Nottingham who wish to go further, but we cannot consent to it."

Colonel Addison seconded. Neither were representative of the temper of the provincial delegates present. Harbottle attempted to move a more militant resolution before James spoke, and he proposed it as an amendment to the official one. He threatened that, although they did not wish to divide the meeting, the Manchester delegation would withdraw unless "the great principle of separation between Church and State" was recognised at its commencement. Gilbert seconded this amendment, giving a similar warning of the intentions of the Nottingham delegates. James recorded that only a few opposed the amendment and that, to save the conference from division, it was suggested that he should adopt the sentiment

of the amendment into the original motion. He agreed, provided it was understood as a mere "'declaration of principles; for, if it were intended to embody it in a petition at the present moment, he should oppose it ......'" The resolution then became,

> That this meeting recognizes the great and leading principles of full and complete separation of Church and State, as the true basis on which equal rights and justice can be secured to all classes of His Majesty's subjects.

The official motion, moved by Conder, and seconded by Thomas Wilson, was then carried.

> That this meeting cannot but express their deep regret that the reasonable expectations of Dissenters, founded on the admission of His Majesty's Ministers of the justice of their claims, and of the repeated assurances of a desire on their part to grant relief, have been frustrated by Lord John Russell's Dissenters' Marriage Bill and by Lord Althorp's propositions respecting Church Rates, - the only measures which the Government have hitherto introduced into Parliament for the relief of Dissenters.

The speakers congratulated each other on this display of unity, but Richard Foster (from Cambridge) moved an explanatory amendment to the first resolution to allay the fears of Government, Church and aristocracy, all of whom, he alleged, anticipated violent measures. The speeches demonstrated considerable disillusionment with the Whigs, that there was very little agreement on the means to achieve the desired ends, and that there was a growing militancy, John Sibree claiming that a separation candidate would win Coventry.[1]

Before dispersing the conference recommended the

1. ibid., 10 May 1834 pp. 162-3, 14 May 1834 p. 167; Dale, R.W.: op. cit., pp. 585-8; Baines, E., jnr.: Life of Edward Baines, p. 197. Both Baines and James defended moderation at the annual meeting of the Protestant Society, P., 21 May 1834 pp. 185-9.

formation of voluntary church societies in London and the provinces. This was not a new idea, and an article in the Congregational Magazine, together with letters in the Patriot, had taken it up in the spring. The latter expressed the practical fear that unless London seized the initiative, others might, "in whose prudent management we should feel less confidence, and that the cause of the Dissenters would be greatly injured in consequence".[1]

On 9 May an influential group met in the Congregational Library to discuss the organisation of a Voluntary Church Society. Its proposed structure was clearly influenced by Wilson's thoughts of the previous autumn, and his father chaired this preliminary gathering. Membership of the Society was not to be confined to Dissenters on the one hand, or opened to "any motley assemblage of political agitators", on the other. The object was,

> ..... to give a definite and religious character to the exertions of all who unite in holding the voluntary constitution of Christian churches to be a fundamental principle of the New Testament; and who embrace and abide by the inference inseparable from this principle, that the maintenance of the Christian Ministry ought to be based on voluntary support.

A committee was appointed to prepare for a public meeting to launch the British Voluntary Church Society. The majority of the speakers were Congregationalists - Dr. Baldwin Brown, Thomas Morfell, President of Coward College, John Blackburn, John Kelly from Liverpool, Thomas Stratten from Hull, Thomas Harbottle, Conder, and John Brown of Wareham; the others were the Baptist Charles Stovel, and Hugh Heugh from Scotland, who gave the meeting the benefit of his own

1. C.M., 1834, pp. 201-10; P., 7 May 1834 pp. 151-2.

experiences. The inaugeral public meeting lasted over two evenings - the 19th and the 25th May - and Congregationalists dominated the committee it approved. Seeking to unite all evangelical Christians who maintained the voluntary principle, and to disseminate information, the Society had no political aims, hence James could appear on the platform.[1]

Through this new Society, with its provincial auxiliaries, the metropolitan leaders hoped to regain their control of the dissenting agitation. In Lancashire and in the Midlands, their limited objectives had not attracted the militants, who, following the failure of the official policy, had secured considerable national support. The moderates sought to give this new excitement "a safe and holy direction". Demonstrations like that of 12 May at the London Tavern, when Hume chaired a meeting of the Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty, assembled to petition Parliament for the dissolution of the alliance of Church and State, were not favoured in polite circles. Daniel O'Connell, James Silk Buckingham, W.J.Fox, Dr. Bennett, William Howitt, Charles Stovel and D.W.Wire were the speakers, surrounded by a galaxy of radical M.P.s on the platform.[2]

Unfortunately, the Society was not an effective agency. It did little to further the separation movement, or to direct it. A feature of the thirties is the impotence of the societies formed to propagate the voluntary principle, and by April 1835 "A London Minister" was inquiring of its fate in the Patriot. A series of lectures was given in the winter of

1. P., 7 May 1834 p. 152, 10 May 1834 pp. 163-4, 4 June 1834 p. 201.
2. ibid., 7 May 1834 p. 152, 10 May 1834 p. 164, 14 May 1834 p. 169.

1835-6, but this was preaching to the converted, and even they complained of inadequate publicity.[1] Nationally the separation movement subsided at the end of 1834, killed by the need for union with Whiggery to defeat Toryism, and by the growth of the anti-church rates agitation, which provided an issue on which most Dissenters could safely ally. The movement did not revive until the forties, and then only when it had a sound provincial base. The Anti-State-Church Association was not the creation of metropolitan Nonconformity.

When the "long and unprofitable" session ended, nothing had been achieved. Ministers had abandoned their unsatisfactory Bills, G.W.Wood's Universities Admissions Bill had been defeated in the Upper House after overwhelming success in the Commons, and William Brougham's Registration Bill had made no progress. This was a sorry reward for much labour and exertion.

Each group gave differing explanations for this failure. One reviewer suggested that Dissenters had acted too late, after the cabinet had made its legislative plans for the session, and that their agitation had made no impression on Ministers for this reason. The gradualists, however, advanced one main cause for the session's fruitlessness; the effect on Churchmen of the precipitate advocacy of separation, creating

> ..... a far greater degree of hostility to the concession of their acknowledged claims than would otherwise have been felt, and ..... (furnishing) ..... the Ministry, who were but too ready to avail themselves of it, with a plausible pretext for regarding Dissenters with suspicion 2

1. ibid., 8 April 1835 p. 110, 23 December 1835 p. 428.
2. C.M., 1834, pp. 354-6.

This opinion was echoed in a letter of Dr. Joseph Fletcher, minister at the Stepney Meeting. Petitions demanding the immediate dissolution of the union of Church and State had far exceeded the necessary explanation of abstract principles.

> ..... 'over-doing' has always been worse than 'under-doing'; and I fear the resolutions of Manchester and Nottingham have greatly retarded the progress of our cause 1

There was some justification for this claim, but the moderate demand for redress of grievances would probably have aroused as much active opposition from Churchmen. Uncertain of themselves, suffering from radical assaults, any challenge to the Established Church had to be resisted vigorously; enunciation of principles, requests for disestablishment, which were not openly repudiated by the leaders of Dissent, merely made the challenge more pressing, and alienated the sympathies of moderate Churchmen.

A later commentator was to allege that Unitarian social climbing had decisively consolidated the opposition of Churchmen to dissenting demands. Wood's Bill had alarmed them; without this error, church rates would have been abolished in 1834. This over-optimistic assessment of the climate of opinion in that year was, however, tempered by a condemnation of the Government's "temporising, indecisive, evasive, and haughty conduct towards the Dissenters".[2] The Whigs were not prepared to grant everything Dissent sought, and they failed to comprehend the dissenting attitude of mind, the product of years of second class citizenship, which rejected all compromise.

1. Fletcher, Joseph, jnr.: The Select Works and Memoirs of the late Rev. Joseph Fletcher, D.D. Volume 1, Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence, (London, 1846), p. 432.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. V, 1839, pp. 20-2.

The militants contended that greater progress would have been made if Ministers had been fully informed on dissenting objectives and principles. This outlook was reflected in Hadfield's letters, and in his speech at the annual meeting of the Ecclesiastical Knowledge Society.

> ..... in justice to those who sent me ..... nothing less than the separation of the Church from the State would satisfy the Dissenters of the country. (Cheers) Talk of redressing grievances, indeed, when a mighty principle was to be discussed! He was sure that Earl Grey would never have countenanced the introduction of such bills as those of Lords Russell and Althorp, if he had been made acquainted with the great principles for which alone Dissenters contended. (Hear) What the great leaders of the Protestant Dissenters were about, he could not tell, that his Majesty's government was not made acquainted with the principles and demands of the Dissenters 1

Excessive, uncompromising militancy, however, did much to discredit the dissenting movement with sympathetic Churchmen, and the Whigs were unlikely to disestablish the Church of England at the behest of a vocal minority.

Conder, despite the session's legislative unproductiveness, felt that some progress had been made in preparation for a renewed campaign. Firstly, Government had made "an experiment" of how far it was possible to ignore and postpone dissenting claims; this would not be repeated. Secondly, M.P.s and the public had been instructed by the long extra-parliamentary agitation, and, since none of the grievances could be remedied without benefiting the whole community, it had "become more apparent than before that their cause is the cause of the people". Finally, the separation issue had been broached in the Commons - the ice had been broken.[2]

In October the Patriot was clearing the ground for the

1. P., 19 May 1834 p. 174.
2. ibid., 27 August 1834 p. 300.

next assault, and defending the role of the United Committee. It agreed that separation was bound to be discussed, and could legitimately be agitated, but that it was not within the sphere of the Committee's activities.

> ..... All that we wish to point out to our country friends, is, that Government could neither invite the opening or discussion of this question, nor does it lie within the province of the Committee of Dissenting Deputies to agitate it. ..... (it) must be taken up in other quarters....

To remain "united" it was "absolutely essential" for its activities to be confined to the practical grievances, since its Unitarian members were pro-establishment. Angered by the Hewley Charities litigation, the London Unitarians were already beginning to withdraw from the metropolitan committees; moreover, "some leading Unitarians" had "warmly resented" the resolutions and speeches at the May conference. The split, which ended in secession two years later, was developing, and Conder was attempting to stave off further attacks on the moderation of the United Committee which might bring it out into the open. Provincial militancy threatened the fragile unity of the London committees.[1]

William IV's dismissal of Melbourne in November changed the whole situation. The new Administration was Tory; moderates and militants were re-united by their hostility to common political and ecclesiastical foes. Disappointment and disillusionment with Whiggery was momentarily forgotten as the ranks of liberalism closed to offer a united front to the protagonists of reaction. Conscious of their new political strength, it was inevitable that Dissenters would use this at the approaching general election, and that religious issues would play a considerable part in its outcome,

1. ibid., 8 October 1834 p. 348; E.R., loc. cit., pp. 22-3.

as the Church sought to resist their challenge.

Two of the recurrent themes of dissenting politics appeared in these years. First, there was the frequently voiced provincial distrust of the London leaders; the fear that they were betraying the cause, because they did not wish to lose their aristocratic and influential social contacts. Secondly, the provincial Dissenters were far more concerned with separation than their metropolitan brethren, although in the early thirties the activists were effectively confined to the North-West, and Nottingham. Overall, there is evidence of a growing dissatisfaction with the Whigs; a conviction that Dissenters have been unfairly treated by their old allies, that the alliance should be repudiated, and a new combination sought. Greater understanding, and more realistic and acceptable legislative schemes would have prevented this, whilst depriving the militants of the support they were able to muster by the end of 1834. Apathy, as John Sibree remarked, would destroy the separation movement once the majority felt that their grievances were being fairly redressed.[1]

1. P., 5 February 1834 p. 44.

CHAPTER 4.

LONDON TAKES THE LEAD,

1834-1837.

The dissenting view of history since the sixteenth century was a simple one. Civil liberty and religious freedom characterised periods of Nonconformist or Whig ascendancy; religious intolerance and political reaction typified the years of Tory rule. Whig "hereditary attachment" to the principles of civil and religious liberty had caused "a bond between that great aristocratic party and the large portion of the middle classes who have adhered to the tenets of Nonconformity" to develop. This was the basis of the Whig party. Recent achievements of this alliance included the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, Roman Catholic Emancipation, the Whig return to office in 1830, and the passage of the Reform Act two years later.[1]

Although the Unitarians provided the main channel between Government and Dissent, leading Congregationalist ministers and laymen had contacts, both social and political, with the Whig hierarchy. Dr. Fletcher was frequently consulted on the nature of dissenting principles, on their objectives, and on the acceptability of proposed reforms. In a letter to his sister, in June 1834, he reported that he had breakfasted with John Pye Smith at the "Hon Miss Fox's", where he had met Spring Rice, the new Secretary for War,

> ..... and after an agreeable hour or two we went to Holland House, and saw Lord H's library, and had a pleasant interview of nearly an hour with his Lordship, and departed. Spring Rice expressed his high sense of the service rendered him at

1. E.R., 4s., vol. V, 1839, p. 3; vol. IX, 1841, pp. 578-603, "Toryism versus English Liberty - an Argument from History." P., 19 March 1840 p. 180.

> Cambridge by the Dissenters. - We had several topics up, and I must say, that all that the Ministry can do, they are willing to do, but their difficulties are immense.1

The high esteem in which the Whig leaders were held was shown in the old Congregational Library, where, together with a portrait of Thomas Wilson, there hung those of Lord John Russell and Lord Holland.[2] On the latter's death in 1840, the General Body of the Ministers of the Three Denominations of Protestant Dissenters sent resolutions of sympathy to his family, and the Congregational Magazine's obitury concluded with the lament that Protestant Dissenters had lost "the most tried and steady advocate of their civil and religious rights during the present century".[3]

William's abrupt dismissal of Melbourne on 17 November, 1834, reanimated these old loyalties, shaken by the apparent Whig disregard of dissenting claims. The United Committee met on the following day, and passed resolutions regretting the King's action, and stating the policy to be adopted at the expected general election.

> ..... this Committee confidently anticipates from the Protestant Dissenters throughout the Empire, the most decided and uncompromising opposition to that political party who have avowed themselves the unflinching opponents of their interests ..... and ..... this Committee relies also on all classes of Dissenters for the immediate adoption of measures best calculated to ensure the return, as Representatives to Parliament, of men liberal and enlightened in their views, the tried friends of Religious Liberty, National Improvement, and Universal Freedom.

Gratified that "our friends in London, who have sometimes

1. Fletcher, Joseph, jnr.: The Select Works and Memoirs of the late Rev. Joseph Fletcher, D.D. Volume I ....., pp. 407-11, 434.
2. Stoughton, John: Reminiscences of Congregationalism Fifty Years Ago. Prepared for the Jubilee Meeting of 1881, (London, 1881), p. 29.
3. C.M., 1840, pp. 906-7.

been thought to lag behind, are, in the present instance, the first in the field, as they ought to be", Conder outlined the steps which had to be taken. Local committees should be formed in every constituency where Dissent was strong. A central committee was being organised to aid these local bodies in the selection of suitable candidates for their votes, and would welcome information on all local developments.[1]

Within a week, the London Committee,"formed for the purpose of maintaining the Claims and promoting the Interests of Protestant Dissenters at the anticipated General Election", published its Address. Despite disappointment that the Whigs had "tardily and inefficiently supported" dissenting demands, the Committee possessed a "cheerful confidence" in "their undiminished attachment to the interests of truth, justice, and liberty", and a "vivid and grateful recollection" of their past services. Protestant Dissenters had a twofold task. Firstly, to "present a bold and determined resistance" to those candidates who had opposed the legislative redress of their grievances; and, secondly, to disregard any candidate who refused a pledge to facilitate this. Congregationalists must have dominated this Committee, for it met in the Congregational Library with Thomas Wilson as chairman, T.H.Boykett, another Congregationalist, as secretary, and had the Patriot office as its postal address. Many of the Londoners were prepared to give Peel a trial. The only Unitarian present at the United Committee's meeting of 18 November opposed its resolutions, whilst there was no representative from that denomination on the Parliamentary Committee.[2] By the end of the year several local committees

1. P., 19 November 1834 p. 396.
2. ibid., 26 November 1834 p. 404, 3 December 1834 p. 413.

had been formed, and, together with those which survived from the earlier agitation, issued aggressive resolutions and began to organise the dissenting vote in their constituencies.[1]

The nonconformist press saw no reason for the change of government. William's action was a direct challenge to the Reform Act, and to the principles of civil and religious freedom it upheld. Grimly, the Tories were accused of attempting to make the new constitutional forms "subservient to the old spirit of feudal despotism". Readers were urged to use their rights, not to betray the public trust of the franchise by neglect, but to emulate Tory organisation, to manifest that same spirit which had abolished slavery, sent missions to the heathen, and fostered the great religious institutions, "in giving effect to the provisions of our reformed constitution, so as to secure the return of such representatives, as being the right men, can alone be expected to support right measures". Unless this was boldly done, they could not expect any benefit from recent legislation.

A Tory return to power would be accompanied by a resurgence of high church bigotry and intolerance. By mid-December the Patriot sensed its beginning. Hamstrung by these attachments a Tory administration could not consistently expedite the ecclesiastical reforms Dissenters desired. In his Tamworth Manifesto Peel reminded Dissenters that he had supported Althorp's church rates proposals, had not opposed Russell's Marriage Bill, and hinted at a willingness to make some concessions to them, short of the abolition of University disabilities. "The Dissenters," remarked Conder,

1. ibid., 3 December 1834 p. 409, 10 December 1834 pp. 417, 420, 17 December 1834 p. 425, 24 December 1834 pp. 433, 436.

"will be able to estimate, from these large concessions, the degree of gratitude for the past, and of confidence for the future, due from them to the right hon. Member for Tamworth, the now First Lord of the Treasury." The Deputies dismissed his assurances as worthless, whilst the Manchester Committee resolved that they gave "no rational hope, that any measures will be adopted by the present Cabinet, which will satisfy the righteous claims of Dissenters".[1]

Peel failed in this bid to attract Dissent. In a series of virulent resolutions the militant Birmingham Deputies denounced the Manifesto as "a crafty manoeuvre to conciliate the good opinion of the Dissenters, by holding out promises of relief, but in a form so vague and jesuitical that we feel the demand for 'a fair trial' ought to be refused to this wily politician". Only by "an extraordinary species of political profligacy and hypocrisy, as would prove injurious to the morals of the country", could men, who had constantly opposed the claims of the Dissenters, offer satisfactory measures to them. A pact with Toryism was reprehensible, and impossible.

> ..... to avoid a participation in the guilt and disgrace of political profligacy and hypocrisy, and to convince those who are comparatively ignorant of the character and principles of Dissenters, that we are not to be beguiled by flattery, nor duped by cunning, we will never seek the redress of our grievances from the hands of the present Administration; and if they should bring forward the bills of relief alluded to in the Manifesto of Sir Robert, we will instruct our Representatives to reject them as unworthy our acceptance.

This meeting closed with a pledge to oppose any candidate,

1. ibid., 19 November 1834 p. 396, 26 November 1834 p. 404, 10 December 1834 pp. 420-1, 17 December 1834 pp. 428-9, 24 December 1834 pp. 433, 436, 7 January 1835 p. 1; E.R., 3s., vol. XII, 1834, pp. 507-17; vol. XIII, 1835, pp. 45-53.

"who will not distinctly and unequivocally avow his utter detestation of Toryism". In its second address, issued at the dissolution, the Parliamentary Committee was milder, but as determined. Dissenters were warned of the invidiousness of accepting from the Tories that which they had repudiated when proffered by the Whigs. Electors were urged not to betray their own interests by succumbing to intimidation or bribery, not to be

> .....beguiled by the general professions of newly made Conformists, who, to secure a present purpose, renounce the bigotry they have ever practised; and who, to be honest in your cause, must prove recreant to their own principles and faithless to their friends.

Protestant Dissenters had to "contend with an ardour worthy of the cause, for the rights of truth, and the liberty of conscience". In the North, the Whig Leeds Mercury went further, by counselling its dissenting readers to place their own claims in the background,"not to remember so much that they are Dissenters, as they are Englishmen interested in good and cheap government", and "to vote for honest Reformers".[1]

The advice issuing from London was generally followed, the vigour of the Parliamentary Committee was appreciated, and Dissent made a real impact at the General Election.

> ..... the chief merit of the well-organized exertions which had so important an influence upon the subsequent elections , is due to the "Dissenters' Parliamentary Committee", ... by whom a correspondence was opened with local associations throughout the country. Dissatisfied as the Dissenters had reason to be with the Whigs, they did not hesitate for a moment to declare themselves the determined opponents of the Tory restoration; and they united heartily with the liberal party in returning candidates of popular principles.[2]

1. P., 31 December 1834 p. 442, 7 January 1835 p. 4. L.M., 13 December 1834.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. V, 1839, p. 23.

Replying to the Record's attack on "political Dissenters", the Patriot proudly boasted that Dissenters, "almost as one man", had opposed "the disastrous change in his MAJESTY's counsels", that men, "the most eminent for piety, the least disposed to political agitation, have, at this crisis, taken the most decided and active part ....." There were exceptions, including the Rev. John Clayton jnr., who wrote to the Record explaining his own views, and asserting that the majority of ministers did not share the opinions of active political Dissenters, but he was a noted conservative.[1]

Furthermore, in the April elections necessitated by the Whig return to office, the Patriot enthusiastically supported Russell, "the champion of reform and religious freedom", in South Devon, whilst the Deputies asked all Dissenters to give him all the assistance, both moral and financial, that they could. Henry Waymouth, their chairman, was one of the treasurers of the election fund raised for him in London. Even Hadfield, highly critical of the Grey Administration in 1833 and 1834, was working on Poulett Thomson's committee in Manchester.[2]

Despite the evidence of the general election, Peel still attempted to conciliate Dissent, during his short premiership. Early in January he interviewed Edgar Taylor (Unitarian), John Pye Smith and John Clayton jnr. to ascertain which marriage law reform scheme Nonconformity would find acceptable.[3]

1. P., 21 January 1835 p. 21. Record, 19 February 1835.
2. P., 22 April 1835 p. 124, 29 April 1835 pp. 129, 132. J.B.Smith Electoral Papers, Manchester Central Reference Library, G.Hadfield to J.B.Smith, 13 April 1835.
3. P., 7 January 1835 p. 4, 21 January 1835 p. 20. Pye Smith informed Peel that, no matter how much he offered Dissenters, he would find it impossible to support him politically.

In March he introduced a Bill which would have permitted all who did not wish to be married by an Anglican clergyman to contract a civil marriage before a magistrate, although banns still had to be read in the parish church, and the parochial clergy were responsible for the registration.

The Bill was received with mixed feelings. Exception was taken to the creation of an "invidious distinction", between Churchman and Dissenters, "fixing on the Dissenting body at large the badge of perpetual inferiority and disgrace". Critics condemned a law which, whilst allowing the Churchman a religious ceremony performed by his own minister, left the Dissenter with the civil magistrate. Conder anticipated that Methodists and Evangelical Dissenters, accustomed to a religious ceremony, would refuse to comply with these "offensive and degrading conditions". The compulsory appearance of both parties to a civil marriage before the magistrate to declare their dissent from the Established Church on oath, was a further "degradation", and the continued clerical registration an "insuperable obstacle"to acceptance. This discrimination, he argued, "would tend to exacerbate and inflame ..... sectarian and party differences". And yet, the scheme was a "decided improvement" on Russell's, and there was a temptation to, "Take it - with a protest against all that is objectionable in it ..... it recognizes a great principle, and will pave the way for its further application". Leicester's dissenting ministers welcomed the proposed civil marriage ceremony, which removed all responsibility from the minister of religion, and several others wrote in a similar strain.[1] Peel's resignation solved

1. ibid., 25 March 1835 pp. 89, 92-3, 1 April 1835 pp. 101, 102, 8 April 1835 pp. 105, 110-1. C.M., 1835, p. 263.

this dilemma.

With the Whigs back in office, an early redress of outstanding grievances was anticipated. By the end of May, however, because of the difficulties they were encountering, the Patriot advised that all claims should be held in abeyance until corporation reform had been carried. This counsel was seconded by both the Manchester Times and the Leeds Mercury. On 29 June the United Committee warned Melbourne that continued delay in reforming the marriage laws "might be attended with serious consequences in the event of a general election". Within a week Russell made assurances that the Government would introduce remedial legislation early in the next session, and the United Committee recommended Dissenters "to acquiesce in this inavoidable delay", and not to impede the progress of the Municipal Corporations and Irish Tithe Bills. Welcoming this decision, the Patriot noted the importance of local government reform to Dissent.

> ..... The fact is, that one of the most vexatious grievances under which Dissenters labour, which was nominally redressed by the repeal of the Corporations Act, will not be substantially and bona fide remedied, till the Municipal Corporations Bill shall have taken effect 1

A major effect of the 1835 Act was to open the municipalities to the Dissenters, thus completing the process of emancipation begun in 1828. After the first elections, the Congregational Magazine noted that "a very large number of Dissenting gentlemen of property, intelligence, and true piety" had entered local government. The new council lists

1. P., 29 April 1835 p. 132, 27 May 1835 p. 188, 3 June 1835 pp. 196-7, 8 July 1835 pp. 233, 236. Manning, B.L.: The Protestant Dissenting Deputies, p. 276.

from Bury, Bristol, Boston, Cambridge, Chester, Colchester, Hull, Ipswich, Liverpool, Leicester, Leeds, Northampton, Nottingham, Malden, Saffron Walden and many other places contained familiar names. There were 23 dissenting councillors at Hull, and 40 at Leicester, where there was a political revolution in the council's complement. Leeds had ten successive dissenting mayors after the passage of the Act, five Unitarians, two Methodists, a Baptist, a Congregationalist, and a Roman Catholic. The first mayor of Chester after the reform was a Congregationalist who shocked local society by refusing to attend the corporation services in the cathedral, preferring Queen Street Chapel and the ministrations of Samuel Luke. Concomitant with this political upheaval, some anticipated a new era of corporate probity and sound administration.

> ..... if we rejoice at the success of our party, we rejoice still more for our countrymen, who will be under the protection of men of known character and unwearied benevolence; charities for the poor will now be righteously administered, and the wants of the necessitous and the claims of the untaught will not be heard in vain 1

Ministers were expected to fulfil their obligations in 1836 by concentrating on the redress of grievances. Nevertheless, the dissenting press warned of the dangers of complacency, and urged Dissenters to turn the recess to advantage. "Now you have your representatives amongst you ..... let them know that your equitable claims are not again to be deferred to meet the convenience of any government." Whilst retaining their confidence in the cabinet's good faith, at their annual meeting the Deputies recommended the

1. C.M., 1836, pp. 67, 94. Patterson, A.T.: Radical Leicester, (Leicester, 1954), pp. 214-5. Ram, R.W.: The Political Activities of Dissenters in the West and East Ridings of Yorkshire, 1815-1850, pp. 182-6.

preparation of congregational petitions, and that local committees should contact Members. On 5 January the Essex Protestant Dissenters met at Braintree. There was an agreed limitation of the scope of the meeting to the redress of the "practical grievances", though Samuel Courtauld did attempt to raise the separation question. It was not thought prudent to agitate that issue. Everything was very reminiscent of 1834 with a memorial to the Cabinet, and a petition to the Commons being drafted. Enthusiastically the Patriot called upon Dissenters throughout the country to follow this example, to show the Government

> "..... that the Protestant Dissenters of this kingdom are agreed in earnest; - that they both understand their rights, and are determined upon peaceably attaining them; - that, without being factious agitators or political partisans, they are united in the assertion of those principles of civil and religious freedom which have been transmitted to them as a sacred trust by their forefathers.....1

If the sentiments were those of 1834, the response was not. There was no general movement in the country; the columns of the Patriot did not record the resolutions of countless meetings, only the Protestant Society and the Chatham Dissenters thought it worth while to make the effort.[2] In Manchester the renewed appeal from London was almost ignored. Hadfield wrote to inform Joshua Wilson that a public meeting would be held to petition Parliament to separate Church and State in Ireland, but that,

> As a Committee I think we shall take no share in the petitions (or at least a very subordinate one) for the relief of the ..... grievances, as we think the London Gentm will do all that & something more, so, we will

1. C.M., 1835, p. 705; P., 30 December 1835 pp. 433, 437, 13 January 1836 p. 10, 20 January 1836 pp. 17, 20.
2. P., 27 January 1836 p. 28, 17 February 1836 p. 49.

> leave it in their hands. I have reason to believe that many of the large towns will do the same as we do.....1

The Whigs honoured their pledges, and by the end of the session both Registration and Marriage Bills had passed into law. The former, an essential preliminary to a satisfactory settlement of the latter question, was uncontroversial. Although Russell's new marriage law reform bill was regarded as an improvement on all previous proposals exception was taken to the provision for the registrar's attendance at chapel weddings, and not at those in church, as an additional "invidious and humiliating distinction" between Dissenter and Churchman. A further source of resentment was created by the Lords' amendment compelling notices of application for a marriage outside the parish church to be read before the Poor-law Guardians. The Deputies, however, successfully opposed their proposal that a declaration of dissent from the Established Church should be made before the magistrate. Higher fees payable for a non-church wedding were an added defect, which the Deputies considered would prevent poorer Dissenters from benefitting under the Act. Nevertheless the metropolitan organisations all passed their resolutions of gratitude, the United Committee explaining that "these invidious distinctions were not introduced by the Ministers".[2]

1. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 18 January 1836.
2. P., 17 February 1836 p. 52, 24 February 1836 p. 60, 29 February 1836 pp. 68, 69, 2 March 1836 p. 76, 9 March 1836 p. 84, 16 March 1836 pp. 89, 92, 17 August 1836 p. 308, 24 August 1836 p. 313. C.M., 1836, pp. 202-3. Manning, B.L.: The Protestant Dissenting Deputies, pp. 276-7. Several Patriot correspondents saw much merit in the separation of the civil and religious aspects of the marriage ceremony inherent in the compulsory attendance of the registrar at a chapel wedding.

The state of the marriage laws remained a minor grievance, and the issues raised by the new laws were occasional topics of correspondence and articles in the columns of the nonconformist press.[1] An amending bill made little progress in 1837, but church rates now came into the political foreground. This was an issue the Ministry could not evade. Their approach, and achievement, or the lack of it, were to shape dissenting attitudes towards them.

Congregationalists denounced this parochial tax as unjust. Voluntarily maintaining their own places of worship, they saw no justification for Churchmen to levy a rate on all inhabitants of a parish, irrespective of their religious affiliations. Their exertions in support of their own religious institutions, commented one critic, had set an example, "which the wealthier portion of the nation ought not to be ashamed to follow", and, by supplementing the national provision for religious worship, Dissenters had "fairly and nobly earned an exemption from all charges".[2] Most rested their opposition and passive resistance on the plea of principle. If Establishment were unscriptural, to be consistent, Dissenters had to resist its manifestations whenever they touched them. One was their liability, with all other parishoners, to be assessed for a rate to support the church fabric, and the worship there performed. Many argued that voluntary payment was a breach of divine law, and an implicit recognition of an erroneous system; it was irrelevant that refusal to pay broke human laws.[3] By the late thirties

1. E.R., 4s., vol. XIII, 1843, pp. 381-409.
2. ibid., vol. I, 1837, p. 14.
3. P., 7 November 1832 pp. 336-7, 27 April 1836 p. 143, 10 October 1836 p. 396; N., 26 January 1842 pp. 49-50. E.R., 4s., vol. VII, 1840, pp. 349-51; vol. IX, 1841, pp. 108-112.

the dissenting press sensed a growing intolerance within the Church on this issue, exemplified by its inceasing resort to the Ecclesiastical Courts to enforce its demands. Here was a direct challenge to the principles of toleration on which the constitution rested. This was all part of that resurgant high churchmanship which sought to compel Dissenters to pay their rates as a form of "ecclesiastical homage". It provided additional grounds for resistance.

> ..... knowing, as we do, that that impost is now sought to be enforced in connexion with novel pretensions hostile to popular freedom, and upon grounds which, if acted upon consistently, would sanction the most oppressive intolerance, - now that the boldest pretensions to sacerdotal domination are accompanied with schemes of Church-extension of the most exorbitant injustice, and this at a time when the doctrines of the Reformation are openly impugned in the schools of Oxford, - at such a period, tacit acquiescence in the continuance of an unjust taxation, revolting to religion, and as disgraceful to the Church as it is degrading to the Dissenters, - is not only to make ourselves a party to our own wrong, but also to countenance claims which ought to be resisted to the utmost ..... [1]

Unscriptural and unjust, church rates were an "offence against Christianity", which was misrepresented and slandered by attempts to force all men, Churchman, Dissenter, or unbeliever, to contribute to the maintenance of the parish church. Opponents of a rate were not responsible for the degradation of Christianity where contests became violent, as at Rochdale in 1840. Desiring to purify it, they had a duty to challenge "the anti-Christian pretensions" of the clergy, and to inform the unbeliever that they did not portray the true spirit of Christianity.[2]

Members of the Society of Friends had been passively

1. E.R., 4s., vol. I, 1837, pp. 14-5. P., 29 November 1839 p. 772, 3 August 1840 p. 540, 20 August 1840 p. 580.
2. P., 20 August 1840 p. 580.

resisting payment for more than a century, preferring to suffer distraint of their property. It was not until the thirties that other Dissenters turned to this example. Prior to this the right of the Church to levy a rate had rarely been questioned, opposition tending to take the form of attacks on the legality of a particular rate. Dissenters in large towns, however, were not inactive. At Sheffield, local Unitarians organised an opposition which had the sympathy of the vicar and many Churchmen, and, in 1820 church rates were abandoned. In neighbouring Leeds Edward Baines snr. was the moving spirit behind a resistance which began in 1815, but which, at first, only sought the publication of accounts to ensure that a legal rate was levied. Opposition was not to the principle of the rate itself, Baines telling the vestry meeting in 1818 that he did not wish "to deprive this edifice in which we are assembled, of anything that is necessary to its proper reparation". There was no denial of the churchwardens' right to lay a rate for customary purposes, provided that it was not excessive. In 1827 they successfully prevented the expenditure of £146 on new churches, but the right was only contested in 1837 when Dr. Hook sought funds for the restoration of the parish church. By then the Dissenters had controlled the vestry for four years, and no rate had been allowed since 1833. Elsewhere in the West Riding there does not appear to have been much serious opposition before the forties.[1] Vigorous resistance at the vestry meeting did not commence in Manchester until 1833, when George Hadfield took the lead, and it was 1835 before the voluntaries were triumphant. Resistance became

1. Ram, R.W.: The Political Activities of Dissenters in the West and East Ridings of Yorkshire, 1815-1850, pp. 194-226.

increasingly more common after 1830; before that year acquiescence was the normal state.

But how far could this resistance be taken? In November 1832 the Patriot reported that the Rev. Thomas Stratten, a Congregationalist minister in Sunderland, had refused to pay his rate, and had had his goods distrained upon. Granting that the decision to pay was a matter for the individual conscience, the editor clearly sympathised with Stratten.

> .....we confess that we are inclined to think that Dissenters ought to feel (and would feel, if they consistently carried out their principles) that conscience demands that they should not voluntarily support with their property what they deem the cause of error, any more than they would countenance it in any other way.....[1]

Joshua Wilson, however, whilst acknowledging that he had acted from the highest motives deplored Stratten's stand as an unnecessary provocation, and queried the validity of the Patriot's arguments. Feeling bound to pay his rate as long as the law remained unaltered, Wilson suggested that this involuntary and indirect support of "the offensive system" was very different "from active, personal compliance with corrupt or superstitious worship, the demand of which is a flagrant invasion of the rights of Him who is 'the sole Lord of worship'". The most scrupulous conscience ought to be satisfied by the handing of a written protest to the collector, or its possible publication in a newspaper.[2]

Under Conder's editorship, the Patriot advised Dissenters not to"resist the authority" of the vestry, once a rate had been granted. The Congregational Magazine suggested that refusal to pay was only justified on the strictest conscientious grounds, and although it was the duty of

1. P., 7 November 1832 pp. 336-7.
2. ibid., 14 November 1832 p. 341.

Dissenters to attend the vestry and to attempt to defeat the rate by the constitutional means provided, a legal rate should be paid.[1]

As the impetus of the provincial movement against church rates developed, so the Patriot's attitude underwent a gradual change. By 1836 this journal was arguing the full case for passive resistance, confident that, if

> "..... but a million of Protestant Dissenters simultaneously become willing but protesting sufferers from clerical exaction,.... the Church - so fond of the compulsory principle - will soon be compelled to relinquish her rapacious demands, and to draw, with whatever reluctance, from her own hidden treasures....."

At Coventry, John Sibree pointed out that dissenting demands would not be taken seriously as long as voluntary payment continued, and this public meeting pledged itself to adopt the course "so long and so honourably pursued by the Society of Friends". Militant opinions were voiced when the Leicester Voluntary Church Association was launched. They were not unique.[2]

A fluent exponent of another viewpoint was Edward Swaine, a London whipmaker, and deacon at Craven Chapel. He maintained that all legal taxes, for whatever object, had to be paid. Passive resistance to payment was therefore totally unjustified. Those who defended resistance to a bad law, or to taxation in aid of error, were striking at the very roots of society, the logical result of a general adoption of this attitude being its collapse, and the triumph of anarchy. Although Dissenters were right to seek the abolition of church rates through Parliament, they had no right to oppose

1. ibid., 5 June 1833 p. 201. C.M., 1833, pp. 704, 805-7.
2. P., 27 April 1836 p. 143, 27 July 1836 pp. 281, 287. Sibree, J.: The Law of Church Rates explained, and the Duties of Dissenters recommended, (London, not dated, but 1836).

a rate requested by the proper authorities, for legitimate purposes, unless the vestry could prove the demand unnecessary, excessive, or in any way illegal. The parish meeting had no power to decide on the goodness or badness of the law which enforced the rate. Activated by the highest motives, Dissenters were wrong in principle, "wherever they have sought to evade the levy or the payment of church rates upon the score of conscience....."

Swaine was not, however, a dissenting apologist for Establishment, explaining that the denial of the right of Dissenters to exemption from church rate implicit in his arguments merely strengthened the case against the principle of a national church. Church rate was a subordinate question, and agitation should be directed not against it, but against the continued existence of the State Church. Until this was overthrown, all must support it.

> Let then Dissenters see her, with law her sanction, a justified injustice, holding and to hold, so long as she has being, in one hand authority to exact from all, and therefore those who believe her existence to be a wrong, the means of her support, extension, and continuance; and, in the other, a brand wherewith to affix on recusants "sons of faction"; and they will see that justice itself has decreed the term of their oppression to be commensurate with her term of life. They will see that she cannot be lenient without being unjust; that she cannot be just without trampling on right, and that not to be a burden, she must cease to be at all.....1

The roots of the agitation that mushroomed into existence during the thirties were an entirely spontaneous reaction to the failure to obtain any concession from the

1. Swaine, E.: The Shield of Dissent; or, Dissent in its bearings on Legislation....., (London, 1839), pp. 59-94; Law and Conscience: or the Duty of Dissenters on Church Taxes....., (London, 1844). Also his letters in P., 12 December 1832 p. 379, and in N., 2 February 1842 p. 66, 16 February 1842 p. 98, 9 March 1842 pp. 146-7.

Government. Vestry opposition was not confined to the metropolis, and other heavily populated centres where Dissent was strong; it was successful in semi-rural areas with a strong Dissenting tradition, or a local Dissenter prepared to chide the rest out of their apathy and acquiescence. An example of this occured in Essex, where Samuel Courtauld guided the resistance in the three parishes of Braintree, Bocking, and Halstead. In 1833 the Congregational Magazine recorded vestry successes in Newcastle, Gateshead, Nottingham, and in several London parishes, but also at Chard, Tavistock, Taunton, Gloucester, Colchester, and in two Canterbury parishes.[1] As the pace of the agitation intensified Dissenting journalists, and the Church-rates Abolition Society, whose local committees were to organise and direct parochial opposition, frequently reminded Dissenters that they could abolish church rates by vestry action, without waiting for legislation.[2]

The press gave full coverage to vestry contests, to the proceedings in the magistrates' courts where distraint orders were made, and to reports of the invasion of resisters' homes. The Patriot began a "Church Rates" column, attention being drawn to interesting cases in editorials. The Nonconformist seized every opportunity to publish stories discreditable to the Church.

At all levels of national life the church rate contest embittered relations between Church and Dissent, a bitterness exaggerated by the small amounts involved. In May, 1835, John Childs, a Congregationalist printer of Bungay, was

1. C.M., 1833, p. 805.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. VII, 1840, pp. 357-9; vol. IX, 1841, pp. 108-12. C.M., 1836, pp. 805-8. P., 22 June 1836 p. 236, 22 September 1836 p. 357.

imprisoned in Ipswich jail, to become the first church rates martyr, for reasons which were purely "vindictive", placing "the fatuity and the implacable malice of the Tory priesthood in a striking light".[1]

Churchmen feared that the abolition of church rates was the first step in a scheme to overthrow the Church of England. This explains their hostile reaction to the Government's proposals in 1837, and contributed to the growing militancy of high-churchmen at the end of the thirties. The Baineses and Conder promised the Church great dividends in goodwill and new respect after abolition, but their assurances did little to detract from the fiery declarations made elsewhere.[2] Edward Miall told the inaugeral meeting of the Leicester Voluntary Church Association that their extinction would be an important advance towards the separation of Church and State. Hadfield used the platform given him in the vestry for expounding his views on establishment in general, and at the end of his three year's campaign these remarks were generating great enthusiasm.

> ..... The meeting was comparatively very orderly but the cheering was very great at the close & when (during my address) I started my advocacy of the church and state separation.....3

Participation in resistance was not universal. In July 1841, a rate demand was defeated at the poll in South Hackney by one vote. This parish contained a "number of wealthy, ease-loving, Conservative Dissenters", and not unexpectedly, the rate was approved at a further poll in

1. P., 20 May 1835 p. 173.
2. ibid., 9 February 1837 p. 92, 13 February 1837 p. 100, 16 February 1837 p. 108. L.M., 11 March 1837, 23 November 1839, 15 February 1840.
3. P., 27 July 1836 p. 287. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 8 July 1835.

December. This Church victory was attributed to "the disgraceful apathy of certain leading Dissenters", some of whom "as we are informed, actually recorded their votes in favour of the iniquitous impost".[1]

Apathy was an old problem. As early as 1834 the Patriot had castigated the moderates who, by abstaining from direct involvement in the vestries, were allowing the extremists to take the lead. At Manchester some had even polled for the rate, thus prolonging the struggle, misleading the Church, and "making themselves parties to her injustice". Parochial agitations were unpleasant, but without them no relaxation could be expected. Two years later the example of the Revs. John Savill and H.March of Colchester, men "whose characters are at the farthest remove from that of political or polemical partisans", was recommended to the quiescent. If they could attend,and address, an anti-church rates meeting, there was no "plausible excuse" for a "pusillanimous neutrality". As South Hackney demonstrated, such appeals had limited effect, whilst those who lived in towns freed from the tax tended to be indifferent to the plight of less fortunate brethren.[2]

Melbourne's administration was expected to make a final settlement of this issue, partly as a matter of justice, partly as a return for electoral services. At the beginning of March, 1836, Russell informed the Commons that he would introduce a measure after the Easter recess. The Patriot warned its readers of the need to organise, and to present their views to the Home Secretary, lest he make the same mistake as Althorp,

1. P., 16 December 1841 p. 836.
2. ibid., 10 September 1834 p. 316, 1 October 1834 p. 340, 14 September 1836 p. 341, 10 November 1836 pp. 468-9 19 July 1838 p. 468.

> ..... in imagining that the diminuation and commutation of the tax, in a form which would render it a fixed burden, less capable of being efficiently resisted, could prove satisfactory .....

Total and immediate abolition was the only acceptable solution. Silence might be interpreted as a willingness to accept something less.[1]

By May it was becoming doubtful whether Ministers would make a move, and apparent that if they did their scheme would be unsatisfactory in this essentisl requirement. Conder reminded them of their pledge, and informed them that church rates were more than a Dissenting grievance. It was a national one, all being taxed, "in order to supply the Aristocracy with handsome ecclesiastical architecture". Arguments against any commutation to the Consolidated Fund were revived, and the "disgraceful inconsistency" of granting to the Irish what was refused to English Dissenters, noted. An emphatic resolution came from the annual meeting of the Congregational Union, the Protestant Society followed in a similar strain, and the United Committee warned Dissenters to be ready with their petitions of protest. The Patriot hoped for a general assembly whilst so many provincial Dissenters were in London for the May meetings, and recommended the preparation of petitions, demanding "immediate and total abolition".[2] On 20 June Russell confirmed the lesser of these fears, by announcing that the Government would not legislate that session.

Ministerial prevarications awakened latent distrust. In March Hadfield had revealed his own misgivings to Joshua Wilson.

1. ibid., 9 March 1836 p. 84.
2. ibid., 4 May 1836 p. 148, 9 May 1836 p. 156, 16 May 1836 p. 172, 18 May pp. 177, 178-9, 180, 23 May 1836 p. 188; C.M., 1836, pp. 384, 457-8.

> ..... He (Russell) will do nothing for us that he can help. I fear that Ministers are at heart our decided enemies, & will do no more than they can avoid doing. The Marriage bill has occupied 3 years, & the attempt to settle church-rate will certainly be such as (if it be as I expect it will) I hope will be indignantly repelled by the Dissenters. With what haste did Lord Melbourn on his return to power make his peace with the Church & renew the Commission?.....

Edward Baines snr.'s advice to the annual meeting of the Protestant Society, that Dissenters should curb their impatience, suggests that a considerable anti-Ministerial feeling was stirring. Even the Patriot's attitude towards the Whigs was ruffled.

> ..... the conduct of Ministers, their seeming friendliness, and actual want of sympathy, force from us the confession, that we cease to look upon them in that light alone in which we had desired, and still desire to regard them, as friends whom we can trust. Upon the question of church-rate they are to be trusted no longer. Relief from this grievous impost, this unjust exaction upon the Dissenters, is not to be expected - even from a Whig Administration - unless we take the business into our own hands, and deal with the Whigs as we would have done, long ago, with the Tories.1

These suspicions were justified. Melbourne was generally unsympathetic to the Dissenters' cause, whilst Lord Ebrington informed the Protestant Society that he would not vote for complete abolition. Russell's tentative proposals put before the cabinet in April did not meet the full dissenting claim, but Melbourne, Lansdowne, Minto, and Palmerston all concurred with them. The last noted, that "Lord John Russell's reasoning in reply to the Dissenters' objections to an indirect contribution to Church Rates is conclusive".[2]

1. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 14 March 1836. P., 11 May 1836 p. 165, 18 May 1836 pp. 178, 180.
2. Gash, N.: Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics, 1832-1852, (Oxford, 1965), p. 70, footnote 1. Russell, R.: The Early Correspondence of Lord John Russell, 1805-1840, Volume II, (London, 1913), pp. 184-5. P., 18 May 1836 p. 178.

Before the session ended Russell was forced to admit that the Government's measure would only be a "regulation" of church rates. The Patriot exploded, indignantly spurning this offer.

> ..... what have we Dissenters to say in behalf of Ministers? - nothing. What have they done for us, Dissenters? - nothing. We have been received and discoursed with civilly, and that is all. The Registration and Marriage Bills ..... are matters of general legislation, and by these Acts ..... we shall be benefitted only incidently. The greatest grievance, the continual, daily, master-grievance, of which we complain, is church-rate. ..... We desire and claim the total abolition of church-rate - upon this we insist. His Lordship need not trouble himself on our account, with any "measure" which he is pleased to call a "regulation". We can "regulate" the church-rate ourselves - we can abolish it.1

With the session barren, the centre of agitation reverted to the parishes, where opposition in the vestries was to be accompanied by massive refusals to pay.[2] A highly organised demonstration of dissenting feeling was essential if the outlook of Government was to be changed. The Church-rate Abolition Society was formed to meet this need. A provisional committee was constituted by mid-August, and on the 13th September this decided to form an anti-church rates association in London, "having for its object to take all constitutional means for effecting the abolition of church-rates, without commutation". The inaugeral meeting of the new Society, on 19th October, was "one of the largest in point of numbers, and the most effective as a demonstration of public opinion, that has ever assembled within the walls of the City of London Tavern". Speakers included Joseph Hume, Daniel Whittle Harvey, William Ewart, Benjamin Hawes, and T.S.Duncombe, all, except Ewart, M.P.s for metropolitan constituencies. Charles Lushington, M.P. for Ashburton, took

1. P., 27 July 1836 pp. 284-5.
2. ibid., 22 June 1836 p. 236, 17 August 1836 pp. 305, 309.

the chair. John Easthope, to be returned for Leicester in 1837, moved the fifth resolution. Other speakers were the Revs. John Burnet and Thomas Adkins (from Southampton), John Childs and Conder, all Congregationalists, and John Howard Hinton, the Baptist minister.[1]

The Society was dominated by the moderate opinions of the London Dissenters. Its office was at 5 Bolt Court, home of the Patriot; Richard Peek, a Congregationalist who was soon to be sheriff of London, was chairman. The ubiquitous T.H.Boykett was secretary. Congregationalists were in the majority on the committee of twenty. At the end of September the provisional committee had issued an Address recommending the immediate formation of local associations, the holding of public meetings, the preparation of petitions, the selection of delegates, the testing of local Members of Parliament, and a "firm, peaceable, conscientious, passive resistance to the payment of this unjust impost". Hence, before the formal inaugeration of the Society, local associations had been constituted in Colchester and Beccles, and co-operation promised by the United Committee, the Manchester United Dissenters' Committee, and the Essex Dissenters' Committee. The movement's pace accelerated after the publication of the committee's Address on 1 November, a process aided by its dispatch of a deputation, consisting of John Burnet, Andrew Reed, and James Bennett, supported by Boykett and willing provincials, into the country.[2] This

1. ibid., 17 August 1836 p. 309, 24 August 1836 p. 317, 14 September 1836 p. 341, 20 October 1836 pp. 417, 418-9, 420, 422-3.
2. ibid., 31 August 1836 p. 329, 14 September 1836 pp. 337, 342, 22 September 1836 p. 357, 10 October 1836 p. 393, 13 October 1836 p. 401. C.M., 1836, p. 734. Reed, A. and C.: Memoirs of the Life and Philanthropic Labours of Andrew Reed, D.D....., p. 218.

hectic activity culminated in a delegate meeting at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, coinciding with the opening of Parliament.

Nearly 400 local associations or congregations sent delegates, "to concert the best means of breaking the last link of that ecclesiastical bondage under which our forefathers so long groaned, - by the abolition of Church-rates". The proceedings were strictly confined to this objective. When the separation question was raised by two Birmingham delegates, Peek reminded the assembly of the decision to keep to one subject, and the matter was dropped without any controversy. There was some acrimonious debate of the Regium Donum, and on an amendment recommending the pledging of electoral candidates on church rate abolition, but these were minor differences, and there were no manifestations of that mutual distrust so apparent at the general meeting of 1834. Unity was real, even Manchester sending its delegates, though an influenza epidemic prevented them from attending. Delegates lobbied their Members of Parliament, a deputation saw Melbourne and Russell, and the week was crowned by a "most brilliant" public meeting, attended by fourteen liberal or radical Members of Parliament. Sir Culling Eardley Smith made his platform debut as a champion of voluntaryism, whilst James Mursell and John Childs, who were soon to be castigating the London committee, were amongst the dissenting spokesmen.[1]

The point at issue between the Government and the Dissenters was not the injustice of church rates, but the nature of the "substitute". Dissenters and their allies had to guard against, and fight, any attempt by,

1. P., 2 February 1837 pp. 73, 76, 77-80, 6 February 1837 pp. 81, 82-7.

> ..... the Aristocratic party to throw the burden of upholding the parish churches and chapels upon the public revenue, and thus, in effect, to convert a fluctuating, and precarious, and well-nigh abolished rate, into a permanent endowment, at the expense of that large portion of the nation who dissent from the Establishment; and thus to rob the people, in order to augment the revenues of a plethoric and luxurious hierarchy .....

To this extent, the Abolition Society was "strictly one of protection and self-defence". The Patriot, believing that the existing revenues of the Church were sufficient to provide this replacement, condemned the Report of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners which claimed that they were not, and Russell's support for it.[1] Consequently, the ministerial proposals outlined by Spring Rice on 3 March, 1837, were enthusiastically received. They promised the abolition of church rates, and the appointment of a special commission to administer cathedral property, which, by improved management, was expected to yield a surplus of £250,000 a year. Together with pew rents, this would furnish the "substitute". "We are happy," wrote Conder, "to be able to express our cordial approbation of its general features; and we feel assured that we shall be authorised, when the plan becomes known, to express the grateful acknowledgements of the Dissenting body to his MAJESTY'S Ministers for this just, healing, and well-considered measure." It was, in the words of the Abolition Society committee, a "just, wise, and conciliatory measure".[2]

The bishops were publicly hostile, whilst the Whig gentry, Anglican in sympathy, were disapproving. Hence, on a motion in favour of the proposals, the Government's majority slumped to 23. Although this was described as a "signal

1. ibid., 4 May 1836 p. 148, 20 October 1836 p. 420.
2. ibid., 6 March 1837 p. 148, 9 March 1837 p. 153, 13 March 1837 p. 161, 16 March 1837 pp. 169, 173. C.M., 1837, p. 271. E.R., 4s., vol. I, 1837, pp. 380-1.

defeat" for "Bigotry, Party hostility, and Private Interest",[1] it was a clear sign that the measure would have a difficult time in the Commons, where on party issues the Ministers claimed a majority of 80.

The struggle now reverted to the country. The press, the Abolition Society, and the United Committee all advised the summoning of meetings, and the forwarding of petitions in support of the proposals. This was a step dictated by "duty" and "interest". Ministers deserved "the untiring, zealous, and grateful support of every friend of religious liberty". Gratitude to them, as well as "respect for your principles", demanded "vigorous and united efforts in withstanding the spirit of intolerance and division by which your rights are stubbornly resisted".[2]

2,328 petitions backed the proposals, but the Government's majority on the motion to bring the bill up fell to 5. More Whig Members had been pushed into opposition by a nation-wide agitation that seemed to threaten the very basis of the national Church. Optimistically, the editor of the Patriot described the division as "by no means disheartening", but the Leeds Mercury was more realistic when it wrote of a Tory victory.[3] In an impossible position, the Ministry attempted to postpone a final decision, Russell announcing a plan to appoint a Select Committee to inquire into the mode of granting church leases; an abolition measure would follow the presentation of its report. Conder regretted the Bill's abandonment, but a pledge by Parliament, favouring abolition, had been given, and the inquiry would vindicate the

1. P., 16 March 1837 p. 172.
2. ibid., 16 March 1837 p. 173, 20 March 1837 pp.177, 180, 30 March 1837 pp. 204-5.
3. ibid., 25 May 1837 p. 332. L.M., 27 May 1837.

calculations on which the Government's scheme had been based.[1] The motion setting up the Committee was carried on 12 June, but the premature end to the session caused by the King's death, saved the Administration from further embarassment.

At the ensuing general election Dissenters had good reason to support the Ministry. True, many were critical of the old Whig alliance. Hadfield had written that, "It is useless to conceal the fact that Ministers are not deserving of the confidence of Dissenters .....", whilst Childs had been corresponding with other provincial leaders, suggesting that if Dissenters "shall act on the belief that Lord John or any ministry will do them justice - if they are confiding - they will be destroyed". Disaffection was such in 1836 that Conder had to warn his readers that a quarrel with Ministers would only play into the hands of their mutual enemies.[2]

Despite their misgivings of 1836, the London leaders had never really lost confidence in the willingness of the Whigs to redress the church rates grievance. The inaugeral meeting of the Abolition Society disavowed any animosity towards the Ministry, and at the beginning of 1837 the Patriot was emphatic that "the present Ministry will support, nay will introduce, a measure for the abolition of the hated impost". There were warnings of dire electoral consequences if Ministers appealed to the country with the issue unsettled, but in March this confidence seemed perfectly justified.[3]

Now Dissenters owed the Government a new debt of gratitude. Dr. James Baldwin Brown hoped that this would be repaid at election time, "that in every constituency in which

1. P., 29 May 1837 p. 340.
2. ibid., 24 August 1836 pp. 317, 318. Joshua Wilson Papers, envelope H.a.10, G.Hadfield to J.Wilson, 7 May 1836.
3. P., 23 January 1837 p. 53.

they had votes they would endeavour to support Ministers, and those who adhered to them in both Houses. (Cheers)....."[1] The Eclectic Review asserted that it was the "civil duty" of Dissenters to sustain the Government until victory was achieved.

> ..... In the event of a dissolution of Parliament, let every Dissenter be at his post, and, except in cases where Tory collisions would endanger the cause of general liberty, support no candidates who will not pledge himself to give his vote and interest for the total abolition of church-rates ..... [2]

With the election imminent Dissenters were warned of the efforts being made by the "ultra-radical" press to make them dissatisfied with Ministers. Doubting whether Roebuck was a good exchange for Russell, the Patriot confidently claimed that,"the Dissenters in general are not prepared or inclined to take this course, or to put their faith in those who would counsel it". This was an election in which the religious man could not remain neutral. A Conservative victory would threaten every gain made since 1832, whilst the Queen's known predilections were an added inducement for the loyal subject. "Never," remarked the Patriot, "were the dictates of loyalty and patriotism more happily in unison. The people have but to rally round the royal standard in defence of their own rights and interests, against an opposition Church, and a sordid, disloyal, Hanoverian faction."[3]

It has been suggested that there was no attempt to organise the dissenting vote for the Whigs as in 1834-5,[4] but the machinery created then was revived. An electoral

1. ibid., 18 May 1837 p. 317, speech at the annual meeting of the Protestant Society.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. I, 1837, p. 385.
3. P., 29 June 1837 p. 412, 6 July 1837 p. 428.
4. Cowherd, R.G.: The Politics of English Dissent, (New York, 1956), pp. 95-6.

address, awakening "historical associations fatal to the cause of Toryism", emanated from the United Committee.[1] Within a week the reconstitution of the Protestant Dissenters Parliamentary Committee was announced, and on 18 July it issued its Address. Dissenters were urged to give their "decided preference to candidates who will support in Parliament Her Majesty's Government". All who would "obstruct the settlement of the church-rate question, by resisting the just and healing measure brought forward by Her Majesty's Ministers", should be rejected.[2]

Professor Cowherd has suggested that, "the union of Radicals and Dissenters on a platform of the ballot, triennial Parliaments, and the exclusion of the bishops was enough to win several important constituencies".[3] Neither the Patriot nor the Eclectic Review recommended the pledging of candidates on the exclusion of bishops from the Lords; for them, as for the Parliamentary Committee, qualifications were support for the Administration, for the abolition of the West Indian apprenticeship system, and for the ministerial church rates scheme. If the Committee's Address represented the "spirit which animates ..... the metropolis", then it was far less radical than Professor Cowherd would imply.[4]

It is true that the dissenting vote in Leeds went to Sir William Molesworth, as well as Edward Baines. But Molesworth was the candidate of the more politically radical, mainly the Unitarians, and the joint-candidature was agreed to by the Whigs, "contrary to their own inclination," to

1. E.R., 4s., vol. II, 1837, p. 214. P., 10 July 1837 pp. 430, 436.
2. P., 13 July 1837 p. 444, 20 July 1837 p. 460
3. Cowherd, R.G.: loc. et op. cit.
4. P., 10 July 1837 p. 436, 13 July 1837 p. 444, 24 July 1837 pp. 468-9. E.R., 4s., vol. II, 1837, p. 94.

prevent a split in the local liberal ranks. Disagreeing with Molesworth on several issues, the Bainses sank these differences in the common cause,

> ..... whilst the questions on which we concur with him, especially those relating to the claims of Ireland and those of the English Dissenters, are at this moment practical and pressing questions, involving the stability or the removal of his Majesty's Ministers, and the character of the Administration by which the country is to be governed.1

Throughout his book Professor Cowherd overestimates the political homogeneity of Dissent. Other examples from the 1837 election illustrate the diversity. At Leicester William Biggs, a Unitarian, organised the campaign of John Easthope and Samuel Duckworth, whose platform included household suffrage, the ballot, triennial parliaments, the abolition of church rates, justice to Ireland, repeal of the corn laws, and amendment of the new Poor Law. The Leicestershire Mercury, the organ of the militant and radical Congregationalists and Baptists of the town, was disappointed that the questions of disestablishment and Lords' reform were ignored.[2] But at Tiverton, where an active United Dissenters' Association managed the political affiliations and manifestations of Dissent, the Nonconformists voted solidly for Palmerston, with none of the radical overtones found in the East Midland borough, marching in a body to the hustings, preceded by bands and banners, and led by the local Baptist and Congregationalist ministers.[3]

The election results were not favourable for the Whig Ministry. The Patriot attributed this to the exploitation of

1. Baines, E., jnr.: Life of Edward Baines, p. 234; L.M., 1 April 1837; Ram, R.W.: The Political Activities of Dissenters in the East and West Ridings of Yorkshire, 1815-1850, pp. 136-171, passim.
2. Patterson, A.T.: Radical Leicester, p. 223.
3. P., 21 August 1837 p. 530.

the Chandos clause by the Tories in the counties, and to the Liberal neglect of the registration. Dissenting apathy in some quarters was condemned, the example of the Tiverton Association recommended to others, and the necessity for careful work on the register emphasised.[1]

From the vantage point of 1839 one critic blamed the United Committee for failing to follow up their Address adequately.

> ..... Never had there been an election which demanded more strenuous and well-organized exertions on the part of the Dissenters to maintain their vantage-ground against their powerful and now irritated politico-religious opponents; for, on no former occasion had they been exposed to so direct a trial of their strength, with so little aid from the liberal portion of the aristocracy ....

Dissent could have been better organised and prepared, but an important contributory factor in the Whig losses in the counties, was the reluctance of the Whig gentry to co-operate with the "liberal portion of the constituencies", influenced by a "haughty jealousy or distrust of their former supporters". This was the political backlash created by the Whig Churchmens' dislike of the Church-rates Bill. Essex, where nine Conservatives, and only one Liberal, had been returned, was cited as an example.

> ..... The Dissenters of Essex form two-fifths of the population, - a minority so powerful as to awaken the jealousy of the landed interest; and hence the very Whigs have played into the hands of the Conservatives. Essex has been lost, partly owing to the aristocratic supineness or treacherous neutrality of Lord Western, and the defection of the Barings; partly through the impossibility of producing from its bigotted gentry a decent liberal candidate. Why are the Dissenters to bear the reproach of inertness of defection, when the great political party in the protection of which they have been accustomed to confide, can no longer supply worthy representatives or competent leaders? 2

1. ibid., 14 August 1837 p. 516, 17 August 1837 p. 524, 24 August 1837 p. 540.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. V, 1839, pp. 30-1.

This opinion illustrates the tension that developed between Nonconformists and the Whigs in the ensuing years. Ministers had discovered the unpopularity of their church rate proposals during the parliamentary session, and the election results confirmed this. Politically, church rates abolition had become too dangerous, and the election was, in effect, a defeat for dissenting aspirations. In these years Dissenters became increasingly disillusioned with their Whig allies, as they procrastinated, and resisted attempts to settle this question, and to carry out other political reforms. Whig Churchmen were not intolerant, but they were not prepared to initiate measures which threatened the future of the Church of England. As the Whigs drew away from Nonconformity, the militants, moving towards a separation agitation, drew away from the moderate London leaders, who found themselves politically impotent, and under renewed attack from the provinces.

CHAPTER 5.

THE REVIVAL OF MILITANCY,

1837-1841.

Ceaselessly reminding the Whigs of their recent political debt to Dissent, the London leaders campaigned for the re-appointment of the Committee on Church-leases as Parliament reassembled at the end of 1837. Ministers were assured that nothing less than complete abolition was acceptable.

> ..... This measure cannot be abandoned, not merely without losing the support of the Dissenting body, but without a violation of that implied pledge to that body to which Ministers may attribute the majority they at present possess.

If the Committee was not re-appointed, the Government's only honourable and consistent course was to re-introduce the Abolition Bill. After all, the Abolition Society had only acquiesced in the original decision to withdraw it after long consultation with its parliamentary supporters, and in the belief that the inquiry would strengthen their case.[1]

Government prevaricated, despite warnings that, "the feelings of the opponents of church-rates will be deeply wounded, and their confidence in the integrity of Her Majesty's Ministers upon the whole subject seriously diminished". Confidence was restored when, on 3rd May 1838, Russell moved the appointment of the Committee, although some reservations were still being voiced when the Abolition Society held its general meeting.[2]

The Committee's report was published at the end of October, abolitionists judging that it completely vindicated Spring Rice's original calculations. At first the Patriot

1. P., 20 November 1837 p. 740, 27 November 1837 p. 756, 12 February 1838 p. 100, 24 January 1839 p. 52.
2. ibid., 12 April 1838 p. 233, 9 May 1838 pp. 301-4.

hoped for immediate legislation. Then, since further inquiry could not prevent a settlement, and impelled by a curiosity to know more of "the mysteries by which bishops have become possessed of enormous wealth", of "the injury to the nation which the present system inflicts", and of "the secrets - the interior and hidden workings of Ecclesiastical jobbery and corruption", its editor anticipated the Committee's reconstitution in 1839 with some satisfaction.[1] The session began fairly auspiciously. A deputation from the Abolition Society had a successful interview with Spring Rice, and the Committee was renewed early in February, thus, as the Patriot had pointed out, allowing time for legislation before the end of the session.[2]

All hopes of a legislative settlement vanished as the Administration became progressively weaker. Returning to office after the political crisis of May, Conder argued that their survival depended on the production of liberal reforms, including the final extinction of church-rates. It was soon apparent that the Government had no intention of introducing a measure that session, and that there was little prospect of them doing so in the foreseeable future. Conder, who had never expected Ministers to abandon a measure to which they were pledged, was disconcerted, and forecast disastrous political repercussions.

> ..... we have been disappointed. Ministers have resolved to keep the Church-rate question in abeyance; and by this resolution they have lost the strongest hold they had upon the support of the liberal Churchmen and the Dissenters of this kingdom.3

The situation had been aggravated, and a new issue raised,

1. ibid., 1 November 1838 p. 708, 8 November 1838 p. 724.
2. ibid., 14 January 1839 p. 28, 21 February 1839 p. 116.
3. ibid., 27 May 1839 p. 356, 6 June 1839 p. 381.

by the imprisonment of John Thorogood, in the previous January, for contempt of the Consistory Court of the Diocese of London. A Chelmsford cobbler, he had refused to pay a rate of 5/6d., and, contesting its validity, the local magistrates passed his case onto the Ecclesiastical Courts. Cited to appear, Thorogood failed to do so, and was committed to prison. It was soon realised that unless he purged his contempt by submission to the court, he could not be released. Payment of the rate, and costs, which he, in any case, refused to countenance, was not enough.

Together with two incidents in Wales, this case revived the whole question of the Ecclesiastical Courts. In 1832 Commissioners had recommended the abolition of all inferior courts, and the removal of all criminal jurisdiction from the superior courts. Nothing had been done. At public meetings throughout the country, and in their press, Dissenters now demanded complete abolition.

> ..... The Ecclesiastical Courts have been a disgrace to us as a protestant state; and have been a sarcasm upon the British constitution. A bench filled by ignorant judges, men necessarily ignorant of the laws - rendered by their profession sycophants and dependents, and what is worse, active partizans; - a bar without qualifications; a court, the jurisdiction of which is defined by no general law; Englishmen tried, condemned, and imprisoned by process of these courts without a jury! From the reign of Charles II (to ascend no higher) to the incarceration of Thorogood, cases of the most flagrant wrong and barefaced power, have occured in connection with these odious tribunals, and few will refuse to join in a pean over their fall.1

Russell's announcement that he would move for leave to bring in a bill to implement the 1832 recommendations came to nothing, and on 24 July T.S.Duncombe asked the Commons to petition the Crown to exercise its prerogatives

1. E.R., 4s., vol. VII, 1840, p. 197. P., 4 November 1839 p. 725.

and release Thorogood. Russell suggested that he was trying to revive powers that the Glorious Revolution had sought to destroy, but the House did agree that Thorogood ought to be freed. Duncombe withdrew his resolution, and a Bill was introduced, making six months imprisonment a sufficient purge for the contempt. A Lords amendment ensured the payment of costs and the rate before the prisoner could be released. Thorogood refused to do this, and it was not until 10 November, after twenty-two months of martyrdom, that he was liberated, costs and rate being paid by an anonymous doner. Within a week William Baines had been shut in Leicester gaol for a similar offence.

Meanwhile, the attempts to find a legislative solution of the church rates question, continued. On 11 February, 1840, Duncombe outlined his bill to exempt Dissenters from payment. This provided for the immediate release of Thorogood, the abolition of all powers of imprisonment for non-payment of rates, and the exemption from liability to pay of all who signed a declaration of dissent from the Church of England, as long as they accepted disqualification from the affairs of the vestry. His motion to bring in the bill was unexpectedly defeated, Russell's opposition being decisive. Sorrowfully, Conder asked,

> ..... was it gracious of the noble Lord, - was it consistent with his previously declared sentiments upon the subject of Church-rates, - was it respectful to the vast body of Dissenters, to whom, by this Bill, essential relief would have been given, to resist a motion for its introduction?.....

His "sneer" at John Thorogood, and his attack on the voluntary principle was unnecessary. This policy could only alienate his best supporters, without propitiating

the Church.[1]

Sponsored by the Leicester Voluntary Church Association, John Easthope prepared to bring in another exemption bill during the session, but time ran out, and the motion was withdrawn, Ministers, the Patriot suspected, welcoming the respite.[2] Easthope produced a second bill in the 1841 session. Conder was gratified to find, that this was an abolition, and not a mere exemption measure, leaving the Church to find its own rate substitute. He had previously condemned the exemption proposals of the previous session as inadequate. Dissenters opposed to church rates on principle and to the compulsory support of religion, could only be satisfied by their complete abolition. Exemption was a half measure, sustaining parochial animosity, because there were Churchmen who objected tp the system, and creating another civil distinction on religious grounds.[3] Easthope's motion was not debated until 25 May and any prospect of further progress was forestalled by the dissolution, but the Patriot felt that the bill could be a valuable electoral test of candidates' opinions.[4] Doubtless influenced by the imminence of the general election, the Government offered no opposition to this motion, and it was carried in a thin House. Russell however had been very evasive in February, Melbourne had informed Brougham that Ministers did not intend re-introducing their 1837 proposals, whilst the former had opposed the Leicester Member's motion on the imprisonment of Baines. The Whigs had done very little to restore their tarnished reputation in the dissenting world.

1. P., 10 February 1840 p. 92, 13 February 1840 p. 100.
2. ibid., 9 July 1840 p. 484.
3. ibid., 25 January 1841 p. 52.
4. ibid., 25 May 1841 p. 364.

To the Protestant Dissenter the detention of Thorogood and Baines were mere manifestations of a new spirit that was pervading the Established Church, threatening civil and religious liberty, and the results of the Reformation. A review of Gladstone's State and Church in the Eclectic, opened with a call to arms - "Englishmen! the battle of the Reformation is to be fought over again.....". Fortunately the throne was not occupied by a Charles II or a James II likely to sympathise with the opinions and theology of Gladstone and Dr. Hook of Leeds.

> ..... It is abundantly evident that they are both, with a host like-minded, as hostile to religious liberty, as they are to the doctrines of the Reformation; and that nothing would so much gratify their ambitious arrogance as to see us all again delivered over, in a yoke of bondage, to the tender mercies of the priesthood, before which even the sovereign authority of the State would soon be taught to bow, to ask leave to be.

The extension of Roman Catholicism was no real danger, explained the Patriot, the most ominous threat to the reformed religion arising "from the affinities between Church-of-Englandism and Romanism".

> ..... The Church of England is the last hope of Rome. Her present posture and pretensions, her relentings towards Catholicism, her stern and haughty bearings towards other Protestant denominations are viewed, by the adherents to Popery, with undissembled satisfaction, as auguring well for their cause.....

The Protestant Dissenters of England, as the only Protestant body capable of making effective reply to Rome, had "the task of upholding the PROTESTANTISM OF EUROPE", had an especial duty to combat the errors of the Oxford movement. The Dissenters stood alone, solitary bulwarks of society, against all ecclesiastical and Puseyite attacks on political and religious liberty,

> ..... with the whole force of the aristocracy

> and the hierarchy against them, with the Press almost entirely on the side of their opponents, and with an undefined mass of Chartism, Socialism, and Popular Ignorance embarrassing and impeding their best efforts, like a malaria in the neighbourhood of an entrenched army.1

This is the background against which the formation of the Religious Freedom Society must be viewed. Following the appearance of the Lay Union for the Defence of the Established Church in May 1838, Conder asked his readers why Dissent should not learn from this example, and form a self-defensive society.

> ..... we trust that it will do much good by impressing the Dissenters with the absolute necessity of framing some similar plan of combined operation for the protection of their own interests. Fas est ab hoste doceri. We have long been sensible of the evils resulting from not having such "centre of union or arm of power"; and when the Church-rate agitation shall have passed away with the cause, there will still be an imperative call upon Dissenters for both union and stedfastness in resisting the insolent or invidious encroachments of Prelacy and Toryism.2

The Religious Freedom Society owed its creation to Josiah Conder. He believed that the lack of a permanent organisation to maintain and further dissenting principles was the greatest deficiency of Dissent, and the source of its weakness. The Society was to remedy this unfortunate situation.[3] Elsewhere, however, particularly in the North, he was suspected of seeking "to supersede all ..... irregular plans and operations".[4]

A plan for a General Union for the Promotion of Religious Equality was published early in November, 1838.

1. E.R., 4s., vol. V, 1839, pp. 32-3, 365; vol. VII, 1840, p. 162. P., 25 October 1838 p. 692, 22 November 1838 p. 756, 7 January 1839 p. 12, 17 October 1839 p. 684, 19 November 1840 p. 788, 23 November 1840 p. 796. C.M., 1840, p. 341.
2. P., 17 May 1838 pp. 324-5, 24 May 1838 p. 340.
3. Conder, E.R.: Josiah Conder. A Memoir, pp. 284-6.
4. Waddington, J.: Congregational History, 1800-1850, p. 548.

Its text suggests the defensive nature of the proposed society, outlining the threat to religious librty from "an ecclesiastical restoration".

> The necessity for active and well-organised efforts to maintain our constitutional liberties against Ecclesiastical usurpation, is becoming every day more and more apparent. The aggressive attitude assumed by the High-Church party, - the revival of the semi-Popish dogmas and extravagent claims of Laud and Sacheverall, - the uncompromising intolerance and fanatical bigotry of the Oxford Tract party, - the vexatious attempts to renew the obsolete terrors of the ecclesiastical courts, - the recent formation of a political "LAY UNION", for the express purpose of defending the compulsory and exorbitant claims of the Established clergy, headed by a committee comprising several members of Parliament, - these indications of determined animosity on the part of the votaries of the Hierarchy, leave no option to those who value, as their dearest birthright, liberty of conscience, and who maintain the supreme authority of the Holy Scriptures as the only Rule of Faith.

The Society's object would be "the recognition and maintenance of that Civil Equality of all religious denominations to which the abolition of the Sacramental Test and the repeal of other penal and restrictive statutes were intended to raise all British subjects in this country....." By bringing "enlightened public sentiment" to bear on Parliament, it was hoped to influence the decision of politicians on the issues confronting them involving the union of Church and State - tithes, church extension, church-rates, national education, the universities, and colonial church endowments. Dissenters, the recipients of recent extensions of religious and civil freedom, had an obligation to defend them from encroachment, and a duty to advocate principles of which they were the "conservators". A central committee would keep a wary eye on legislation, and act as an advice bureau for country Dissenters.

In a long editorial, Conder explained the necessity for

an effective organisation of dissenting strength to maintain their distinctive principles, pointing out that amongst all the denominational and general societies that existed, there was not one, excepting the Church-rate Abolition Society, "for the protection of our civil rights, uniting the friends to the cause in town and country". The new union was to be unsectarian, and answered a genuine need for a body "to maintain the ground that has been gained by legislative concession".

> ..... The fact is, that such "active and well-organised efforts" to bring the moral strength of genuine Protestantism to bear upon our political affairs, has only been too long delayed. Thanks to the Lay Union, neutrality is now out of the question, and supineness must be viewed as sheer cowardice or treachery. Our enemies themselves cannot complain that we now prepare for the impending conflict, since they have already taken up their position in the field.....[1]

Moreover, if the plan were "firmly supported by liberal Churchmen and Protestant Dissenters", it would "lead to an organisation more effective against the encroachments of Popery, and the incalculable evils which proceed from High-church dogmas, than any other in modern times".[2]

Events re-inforced these arguments. John James, an Independent, was imprisoned for failure to pay the costs incurred in a suit brought against him by the vicar of Llanelly, in the ecclesiastical court of St. David's, for non-attendence at the parish church during his year as churchwarden. The Patriot exclaimed,

> Will it, after this, be said that THE GENERAL UNION FOR THE PROMOTION OF RELIGIOUS EQUALITY is unnecessary?

and contained an article on the incompatibility of an

1. P., 12 November 1838 pp. 732-3.
2. ibid., 22 November 1838 p. 756.

intolerant church, with a tolerant state.[1]

Other organs of the dissenting press viewed the desirability of a General Union in much the same terms as the Patriot. Defence was needed against the over-assertive claims of the Church, and against its pressure on civil and religious liberties. Political awareness was an essential duty of the religious citizen, to ignore which was "to be a traitor to those principles which are identified with the advancement of Christ's kingdom, and to that cause which is the last and best hope of the world".[2]

Support for the scheme came from all over the country. The first local auxiliary was formed at Bristol on 19 November, a committee was set up in Nottingham, a county association for Huntingdonshire; other early auxiliaries were at Wareham, Coventry, for Bedfordshire, and at Preston. When the final plan of the Religious Freedom Society was published in April, 1839, there were already thirty-one local branches, and four corresponding societies.

Launched at a delegate meeting in the King's Head Tavern during the second week in February, the Society's outlook was revealed when its list of officers was printed. Charles Lushington, M.P., was chairman, John Remington Mills his deputy, Richard Peek was treasurer, Charles Hindley, Dr. Thomas Price, J.Rundle, M.P., and Edward Smith were the auditors, and Conder was secretary. Churchmen sat on the Central Committee, for example Benjamin Hawes, M.P., Sir Charles Style, M.P., and Captain Moorsom, although the

1. ibid., 22 November 1838 p. 756.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. V, 1839, pp. 31-40; C.M., 1838, pp. 823-4.

majority were either Baptists or Congregationalists.[1]

This Society was designed neither to separate Church and State, nor as a means of rousing Dissenters against the Whigs.[2] True, the third fundamental resolution of the Society was an avowal of the voluntary principle.

> That the State establishment, by which any particular church or sect is selected as the object of political favour and patronage, and its ministers are invested with exclusive rights and secular pre-eminence, involve a violation of equity towards other denominations, create serious impediments to the propagation of the Gospel, prevent religious union between the favoured and the excluded sects, and are the occasion of inevitable social discord.

But, Conder explained,

> ..... It is, certainly, not intended as an aggressive movement, as the Address unequivocally explains. It is not formed for the purpose of propagandism. The Fundamental Resolutions are the basis of the union which is contemplated, not the assertion of its objects. It is, however, manifest, that upon no other principles than those which are affirmed in the Resolutions, can even a defensive stand be made against the further encroachments of the Church and State party.....3

The complement of the various committees, provisional and otherwise, made an aggresive policy unlikely. They included Churchmen and Dissenters prominent in the militant activities of the forties, but Dr. Cox, John Howard Hinton, Dr. Price, and John Burnet, were counter-balanced by men like John Blackburn, who was to oppose the Anti-State-Church Conference, the Wilsons and John Remington Mills, all of whom kept out of the later movements. A moderate middle course, and the defence of existing interests, was the only realistic unifying policy.

1. P., 26 November 1838 p. 761, 10 December 1838 p. 793, 24 December 1838 p. 825, 27 December 1838 p. 833, 3 January 1839 p. 1, 10 January 1839 p. 17, 15 April 1839 p. 237.
2. Cowherd, R.G.: The Politics of English Dissent, p. 154. Gash, N.: Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics, 1832-1852, p. 75.
3. P., 17 January 1839 p. 36.

If the Society were formed to organise Dissenters against the Whigs, this hostility would have been reflected in the columns of the Patriot; it was not. Edward Baines was a member of the Central Committee, and he was unlikely to support a Society with this aim. When he expressed his opinion on this matter at the Religious Freedom Society dinner in 1839, his sentiments were re-echoed by his fellow-diners.

> ..... I am far from being pleased with everything which Her Majesty's present ministers do; but then this weighs with me, who shall we put in their place? I say, press the present ministry as hard as you will; keep them up to your point as fully as you can; but take care, if you put them out, who you have got ready to supply their places. (Hear, hear.) 1

The electoral policy of the Society,

> To co-operate, by information or advice, in promoting the return to Parliament of suitable representatives attached to the principles of religious liberty, and entitled to the confidence of the people.

was not directed against any political party, least of all the Whigs.

Through its Parliamentary Committee the Society scrutinized all legislation, and all legislative proposals, to protect dissenting interests. It undertook to fight the case of David Jones (another Welsh Dissenter imprisoned for the same offence as John James), in the Commons, and organised Thorogood's parliamentary advocates. During 1839 the Central Committee carefully examined the Government's education proposals, and in the following year led the dissenting opposition to Inglis' Church extension motion. The Patriot urged the local associations to act as registration societies, and during the 1841 general election the

1. ibid., 16 May 1839 pp. 334-6.

Central Committee attempted to adopt the role performed by the specially created committees in 1835 and 1837. The Society aimed to protect the interests of the country Dissenters, to remove their grievances, and to expose all the ways in which religious equality and liberty were thwarted. It was not an aggresive society, and the Leicester militants were highly suspicious of it.

It was dissolved in 1843. Although there were 60 affiliated provincial auxiliaries in 1841, and applications for assistance were received from 70 places, there was considerable apathy. Despairingly, Conder noted that the Society "has hitherto been crippled in its movements from no other cause than the dearth of public spirit and political intelligence, and an improvidence as to their own highest interests on the part of the Dissenters of this country".[1] His son blamed the Dissenting body in general for its failure. Organisation could not be imposed where there was no desire to co-operate. A later critic judged that it collapsed "for lack of practical wisdom and strength of leadership".[2] There is truth in both of these conclusions. Essentially the Society died because it did not provide dynamic leadership, and had no single definite objective. It failed to tap the enthusiasm of the activists because its programme was too mundane and unexciting.

Politically, the Society did not strengthen Dissent, nor did it contribute to the fulfillment of any of its aspirations. Following years in which Dissent had apparently been a powerful political force, feared by its opponents, and able

1. ibid., 10 May 1841 p. 308, 18 October 1841 p. 700.
2. Conder, E.R.: Josiah Conder. A Memoir, p. 286. Skeats, H.S. and Miall, C.S.: History of the Free Churches of England, 1688-1891, pp. 490-1.

to persuade governments to listen to, and act upon, its demands, the years after 1837 were particularly frustrating, disillusioning, and depressing. Many reasons were advanced for this state of affairs.

Surveying the 1830s the Eclectic concluded that the breakdown of the old Whig alliance had thrown Dissenters onto their own resources, exposing the realities of their political position. Still sharing general principles with the Whigs all common objectives had been achieved by 1832, and the interests of the Whigs in power diverged from those of the party they led.

> ..... For the first time, their political strength or weakness has been made apparent, even to themselves; and they are not yet fully aware either of their altered position, or of the necessity under which it lays them of seeing to their proper interests. Is it to be wondered at, then, that they should exhibit, at the present moment, a feebleness of purpose and action arising from want of discipline and inexperience, and the entire want of any party organization?

This political feebleness was accentuated by the Unitarian secession from the London committees in 1836. This had been welcomed on religious grounds, and differences over means and ends had long made co-operation difficult. Unfortunately most Dissenters, finding politics distasteful and irreligious, had been happy "to leave everything connected with parliamentary matters to the management of Unitarian representatives", who had the ear of Whig politicians. Politically the secession was crippling, for Dissenters were,

> .....now, as a body, placed in much the same predicament as a landed proprietor, ignorant of business, who, having turned off his steward, has no one to look after his estates. The Dissenters, though not deficient in head or heart, have not yet found their hands.1

1. E.R., 4s, vol. V, 1839, pp. 2-4, 25-6.

The politicians, relying on the Unitarians, constantly overestimated the importance of the secession. It was even suggested that the alienation of Dissenters and Whigs dated from 1836, for "Ministers instructed by their Unitarian friends view the great body of Dissenters ..... as powerless and contemptible, without organisation, without political consequence, without even formidable numerical strength, or competent leaders....."[1] If Dissent was to be politically influential, it had to organise itself, had to act for itself, and had to find its own representatives.

Reviewing the 1840 session, the Patriot was able to catalogue the signs of this diminished political influence. Government had abandoned church-rate abolition, ecclesiastical courts had not been reformed, violations of religious liberty in workhouses remained unredressed, the Non-Parochial Registers Bill had made no progress, and, whilst Dissenters had no share in educational policy, a compact had been made with the Church on the appointment of inspectors. Humanitarian pressure for further reforms in the West Indies was ignored. Whigs and Liberals alike neglected Dissent because it appeared to be politically powerless. Dissenters alone, by their own exertions, could remove this misapprehension.[2]

"Organise, organise, organise" had been the Patriot's slogan after the 1837 general election. Three years later there were still lamentations that, though Dissent was "an immense, intelligent, and essentially united body, possessed of great talent and strength, arising from the force of their principles, and the energy with which, when fairly roused, they can contend for them..... they are a body not only

1. P., 17 February 1840 p. 108, 16 April 1840 pp. 244-5.
2. ibid., 27 July 1840 p. 524.

without political organisation, but without any share or direct influence in the legislation and government of their country". Indeed, by 1840, they were "in a more defenceless, unsupported, and precarious circumstances than they have been placed in since the Tory reign of terror". Complacency, and quiet confidence in the Whig and Liberal Members of the Commons, together with a belief that "a sudden demonstration", or an "occasional agitation" would carry their objects, had contributed to this state of affairs. Hence they had no permanent organisation. Beyond exhortations to support the Religious Freedom Society and to make its auxiliaries responsible for registering electors, Conder suggested nothing more than the old expedients, which had already been found wanting - local meetings to pass resolutions "temperately" expressing dissatisfaction with Russell's speech on Church-rates, the presentation of petitions protesting against Inglis' "motion for extinguishing Dissent by church-extension", and the memorialising of local Members of Parliament.[1]

Since the principles of Dissent were imperfectly understood in the Commons, it was logical for Dissenters to return representatives who could explain them, in fact, to send fellow Dissenters to Parliament. Success would disprove the assertion that Dissent was politically powerless, and the right men were available.

> ..... Men are to be found, worthy of upholding the cause of Civil and Religious Liberty, who would obey the call of a right-minded constituency to serve them, though not rich enough to buy a seat, or to pay the expense of a contest.....[2]

The Eclectic had raised this matter as early as 1833, a

1. ibid., 24 August 1837 p. 540, 24 February 1840 p. 124, 9 April 1840 p. 228, 29 June 1840 p. 460, 15 July 1841 p. 484, 18 October 1841 p. 700.
2. ibid., 26 February 1838 p. 132, 26 March 1838 p. 196, 27 February 1840 p. 132, 7 December 1840 p. 828.

reviewer complaining that there was no Member qualified to conduct any discussion on the establishment question. Absence from the House was an obvious sign of political weakness, inviting contempt and neglect. There were some Dissenters in Parliament - John Wilks was "an able representative" - but most were Unitarians, and could not "either politically or religiously" represent the orthodox Dissenters.[1] If in London the orthodox resented the assumption that the Unitarians were their representatives, Hadfield, despite his involvement in the Hewley case, was prepared to co-operate with any who went for disestablishment. There was a growing emnity between the two groups and it is perhaps significant, that very rarely did a Unitarian M.P. appear on an orthodox Dissenting political platform in London, although D.W.Harvey, Mark Philips and Dr. Bowring were involved in the anti-church-rates meetings of 1836-7. Another Dissenting M.P. who seems to have had little contact with the London leaders, was Joseph Brotherton, M.P. for Salford from 1832, and a Bible Christian minister; Charles Hindley, a Moravian and M.P. for Ashton-under-Lyme from 1835, was becoming increasingly active in dissenting circles by 1837, moving the second resolution at the anti-church-rates meeting, sitting on the evangelical committee appointed to watch over the Government's educational proposals in 1839, and on the Central Committee of the Religious Freedom Society, of which he was one of the auditors. John Wilks, who had worked hard for the redress of grievances from 1832, did not seek re-election in 1837, because of ill-health. With so few Dissenters in Parliament it was inevitable that they should turn to liberal evangelical Churchmen, like Charles Lushington, Andrew White, and Sir Charles Style, and to political radicals

1. E.R., 3s., vol. X, 1833, pp. 320-3.

like Hume, Duncombe, Benjamin Hawes, O'Connell, Benjamin Hall, H.G.Ward, and William Ewart. These, and others like them, frequently appeared on dissenting platforms and committees.

Where they were numerically strong Dissenters could react powerfully to censure their representatives. Despite pledges to his dissenting constituents in Tower Hamlets, to the regret and surprise of their press, Stephen Lushington opposed Duncombe's Bill. A Member for a metropolitan borough where they were numerous, he was vulnerable,[1] and at the next general election in 1841 the Dissenters brought forward Major Fox.

> ..... his name was in the first instance brought forward by parties in the Dissenting interest,.... the Dissenting ministers of the borough are among his warmest supporters, and ..... the principal Church-rate recusants of Hackney are taking a leading and active part in promoting his return. If, therefore, the Dissenters of the Tower Hamlets will convince public men that their claims must be attended to, let them secure the election of the late Lord HOLLAND'S worthy son,.....2

Prudently, Lushington did not contest the seat. Fox himself was unseated six years later because of his own fickleness. The evangelical Dissenters did attempt to remedy this parliamentary weakness. In June 1832 Thomas Wilson was asked to contest Finsbury.[3] The spring of 1837 witnessed a serious attempt to persuade John Burnet to give up his ministerial work, and enter Parliament. A committee was formed, a guarantee fund of £5,000 promised, but Burnet changed his mind.[4]

No Baptist appears to have fought an election in this decade, and only two Congregationalists did so, Edward Baines,

1. ibid., 4s., vol. VII, 1840, p. 356. P., 13 February 1840 p. 100
2. P., 21 June 1841 p. 428.
3. Wilson, J.: A Memoir of the Life and Character of Thomas Wilson....., p. 435.
4. P., 2 March 1837 pp. 140-1. Reed, A. and C.: Memoirs of the Life and Philanthropic Labours of Andrew Reed D.D. ...., p. 348.

three times successfully for Leeds, and George Hadfield, unsuccessfully at Bradford in 1835. The latter fought his campaign as a voluntary, aided by the presidents of the two theological colleges in the constituency, all the ministers, and most of the Dissenters. At the nomination he was proposed by Robert Milligan, the leading Congregationalist layman in the town. His programme included complete religious freedom, triennial parliaments, franchise extension, the ballot, repeal of the corn laws and of taxes on knowledge, the exclusion of bishops from the Lords, the abolition of Church-rates, the emancipation of the Jews, the ending of proxy voting in the Lords - a very radical list. He came at the bottom of the poll; Hardy, whom he was brought in to oppose, polling 611, Lister 589, and Hadfield 392. This defeat was attributed to the lateness of his intervention, and to the difficulties involved in getting a united front with Lister's committee. Clearly, too, his "dissent" was against him. The "church in danger cry" was raised, and Whigs, and even Tories, split for Hardy and Lister to keep him out. His free trade views, moreover, did not meet the approval of local manufacturers.[1]

Baines sat for Leeds from 1834 until his resignation in 1841. A moderate liberal, almost a Whig, he always regarded himself as being independent of any party. An old free-trader, his views on further parliamentary reform were limited to the introduction of the ballot, and those views on Dissenting policy conformed with the outlook of the London committees. Even they, however, were embarrassed by his claim, during the

1. The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield, M.P., pp. 127-8. J.B. Smith Electoral Papers, G.Hadfield to J.B.Smith, 26 December 1834. L.M., 10 January 1835. Ram, R.W.,: The Political Activities of Dissenters in the East and West Ridings of Yorkshire, 1815-1850, pp. 158-9.

debate on Spring Rice's Bill in 1837, that, the majority of Dissenters did not desire the separation of Church and State.[1] Despite disagreeing with the Whig governments on several issues, he never went into open opposition, and never moved when he thought that to do so might lead to their overthrow. When approached in February 1835 about joining a radical club, he informed his colleague that, ".... I always had considered the Whigs the mainstay of the country, that I still consider them so, and that, with these sentiments, I must adhere to that party....." Again, in 1838, despite his opposition to the Administration's Canadian policy, he declined to support Molesworth's censure motion on Glenelg, the colonial secretary, because it could "have an injurious effect upon the Administration generally, to whom I thought the country under great obligations," and which he would do nothing to displace, convinced that only a Tory government could succeed them. Two months before this, his son had written to Francis Place deploring the violence of the speeches of Leader, Molesworth, and others, against the Government.[2] This attitude recurs in the political advice he gave to Dissenters - oppose, and turn out the Whigs by all means, but beware of what would replace them.[3]

Baines' moderation and whiggery were bitterly resented in some quarters. The Leicestershire Mercury's comment on his absence from the House when Duncombe moved his motion for the

1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, vol. 38, 932-4.
2. Baines, E. jnr.: Life of Edward Baines, pp. 207-8, 244. Place Papers, B.M., Add. Mss. 35,151, ff. 51, Edward Baines jnr. to Francis Place, 2 January 1838.
3. P., 9 May 1838 pp. 301-4, Baines at the annual meeting of the Church Rates Abolition Society; 15 May 1839 pp. 325-7, 16 May 1839 pp. 334-6, where there are accounts of Baines' speeches at the annual meeting of the Protestant Society and at the Religious Freedom Society dinner.

release of Thorogood, was harsh.

> ..... we hear that the motion of honest "Tom Duncombe"was unpalatable - from its straightforwardness - to this milk and water gentleman, who is hand-in-glove with the London Committees; and who, like those mighty champions - when anything decisive is to be done, - is non inveniri.1

An article in the Nonconformist charged Baines with much of the responsibility for the contempt with which politicians viewed Dissent.

> Of Mr. Edward Baines ..... we shall only say, that amiable and praiseworthy as he may be in all private relations, as the reputed representative of dissenters he did infinite mischief to those whom he professed to serve. Political men might look to him in vain for any correct development of the leading principles of dissent..... what he did not do, as the leader of dissenters, and what he did, served very considerably to bring that body into utter contempt, and expose them to a soubriquet so often applied to them by members of the legislature, descriptive of nothing but arrant imposture.2

The London leaders, however, had full confidence in Baines, who frequently appeared on their political platforms, in their committees, and at their society meetings.

Baines' loyalty to the Whigs was not untypical. During 1838 the Patriot criticised their prevarications over the West Indian apprenticeship question, and their lack of opposition to a bill which, by closing a right of way across Kensington Common, would have enabled its promoters to open a race course. But its editor offered no condemnation of the decision to drop the appropriation clause of the Irish Tithe Bill, "because we think it was, from the first, little better than appropriation humbug", and affirmed his support for a Government, whose collapse would be calamitous for the country.[3] When the Whigs finally fell from office in 1839, he remarked,

1. Leicestershire Mercury, 3 August 1839
2. N., 12 January 1842 p. 17
3. P., 26 February 1838 p. 132, 2 April 1838 p. 212, 3 May 1838 p. 284, 24 May 1838 p. 340, 28 May 1838 p. 352, 10 September 1838 p. 588.

> ..... we are bold to say, a better Government, an Administration of more enlightened and patriotic principles, Great Britain has not seen in modern times.[1]

The "FINALITY heresy" had been a great mistake, and the unwillingness of the cabinet to adopt popular measures had weakened it, but boldness, and the inclusion of popular men would rectify this. This was the view given in 1838.[2] The advice had changed little when the Whigs returned after Peel's abortive attempt to form a government. A popular reforming programme was advocated, and those radical journalists who persisted in attacking the Ministry were reminded that, whatever its faults,

> ..... it <u>is</u> the Government of our Country; to which, <u>as such</u>, whether Liberal or Conservative, we owe some respect..... further, we avow our conviction that, taking the whole course of their administration, - in reference to Irish affairs, Colonial affairs, Foreign affairs, Fiscal matters, Trade and Economical Reforms, - the present Liberal Government is not only the most liberal, but the most religious also, and in all respects the best that has ever presided over the destinies of Great Britain.....[3]

This outlook did not satisfy all Congregationalist, or Dissenting opinion, the attack on the London committees stemming from the belief that, because of the Whig opinions of their members, they were restraining the church-rates agitation, so as not to embarrass the Government.

Early in 1839 the <u>Patriot</u> had to defend the Church-rate Abolition Society from the charge that, "the subject has been put to sleep by some mysterious collusion of the Church-rate Abolition Committee with the Government". A long leader vindicated the committee's parliamentary activities since

1. <u>ibid</u>., 9 May 1839 p. 308.
2. <u>ibid</u>., 20 August 1838 p. 540, 10 September 1838 p. 588, 8 April 1839 p. 220.
3. <u>ibid</u>., 27 May 1839 p. 356, 29 August 1839 p. 572, 23 September 1839 p. 628.

1836, especially its acquiescence in the appointment of the Select Committee on Church-leases, and the delays this had led to during 1838. Resistance would have encouraged Governments to abandon the whole scheme, "and have prevented disclosures connected with church property, of the last consequence to the nation". Meanwhile, contacts had been maintained with the opponents of church-rates in the parishes, advice and encouragement being given to the local agitations. "Upon the ground of these facts", Conder concluded, "we now ask whether the Society which has effected all this is not entitled to the gratitude and the confidence of the country?".[1]

Towards the end of February, Robert Besley resigned from the committee, complaining, in a letter to the Sun, of financial mismanagement. Conder alleged that the real reason for this resignation was his inability to find a seconder for votes of censure on the Ministry and the Patriot. Only then had he made "the sudden discovery" of financial maladministration. Conder further suggested that Besley had been persuaded to make this attack in the Sun by John Childs, a leading critic of the committee, who was touring the country campaigning against it, and the Religious Freedom Society, discouraging the formation of auxiliaries in the areas he had visited. His hostility to the Patriot stemmed from the support given by that paper to the Government's Canadian policy.

Replying to these charges, Childs admitted his dissatisfaction with the management of the Patriot; its"implicit adherence to the present Ministry has raised a painful suspicion, in almost every emergency interesting to Dissenters". Others, he claimed, sympathised for he had received several

1. ibid., 21 January 1839 p. 44, 24 January 1839 p. 52.

letters "lamenting your demonstrated inefficiency, and inquiring as to the practicability of founding an organ of Dissenting principles". By acquiescing to the Church-leases Committee, the Abolition Society had "betrayed the cause they undertook", allowing the Government to wriggle out of a difficult situation. He charged the committee with giving Thorogood bad advice, and with being indifferent to his fate; he vouched for the veracity of Besley, and denied that he had stumped the country denouncing the London societies.[1]

All these accusations were taken up in Leicester, the new centre of militancy.[2] There had been a vigorous local anti-church-rate agitation in two parishes, led by Edward Miall and James Mursell; in 1836 a Voluntary Church Association had been formed. Mursell had succeeded Robert Hall at Harvey Lane Baptist Chapel in 1826; politically a radical, he had been actively engaged in the movements for parliamentary and municipal reform. Later, he supported the points and principles of the Charter, and was involved in the complete suffrage movement. His friends were amongst the "Forward Nonconformists", his closest ally being Miall. Both were extreme voluntaries, and frequently, over their own "smoking churchwardens ..... would be busy disestablishing all other churchwardens in the world, except the two which glowed with their burnt offerings". Miall had been called to Leicester from Ware in 1834 by the church and congregation of Bond Street Independent Chapel. The son of a schoolmaster, his ecclesiastical and political views were deeply influenced by his Baptist colleague. A visit to

1. ibid., 7 March 1839 p. 148, 11 March 1839 pp. 156, 159.
2. For a good account of events in Leicester see, Patterson, A.T.: Radical Leicester, pp. 247-259.

Scotland in 1837, when he met the leading Scottish voluntaries, seems to have been equally formative. Both men were vehemently and sincerely opposed to the State Establishment of religion; both were determined to end that system, and were highly critical of those Dissenters who shelved the issue as an "abstract proposition".[1]

Locally, they spoke eloquently on the platform, and wrote articles for the Leicestershire Mercury, which had been founded in 1836 to represent the radical political viewpoint in the town. Under Mursell's influence the Baptists were superseding the Unitarians "as the shock-troops of local Radicalism", and the editor of the new journal was a member of his congregation.[2]

During the spring of 1839 the points Childs had raised were pressed in several leading articles.[3] At the end of May two longer editorials appeared, condemnatory of the London committee system. In brief, they alleged that the country Dissenters, and the cause of Dissent, were being betrayed by the Whig Londoners, and demanded the abandonment of the centralised method of agitation.

Dissent, the first article began, could throw a great weight onto the political scale, but despite numbers, talent, and courage, their grievances had not been redressed. Successive Governments could not be blamed for this, since they were necessarily hostile to "complete redress", and to the voluntary principle. The responsibility for slow progress, and for the contempt with which politicians viewed Dissent,

1. Mursell, A.: James Phillippo Mursell. His Life and Work, (London, 1886), pp. 26-58. Miall, A.: Life of Edward Miall, (London, 1884), pp. 1-36.
2. Patterson, A.T.: op. cit., pp. 230-1.
3. Leicestershire Mercury, 9, 16, 23 February, 9 March 1839.

lay with those who had made "the highest of all causes" the mere "paltry engine for the miserable purposes of a miserable court faction"; lay with "a clique in London", who had "shirked" the "vital principle" of Dissent, ready to defer all their claims, "to uphold a Whig Ministry".

> ..... Look at their course of proceeding, - with high-sounding names, and vast pretensions to confidence, they have for years played the game of a faction. They are all of them Whigs - whiggish - and what has the Voluntary Principle in common with that faded party? Nothing - yea, more, they are, as well as the Tories, its avowed enemies.
>
> Their organ, the peddling Patriot, displays its mere whig wares, with a mighty self-complacency; and there may be a few who are dupes enough to regard its trimming and shuffling, as indubitable signs of the prodigious prudence, and profound policy it affects.

The records of the various London societies were scrutinized. Since 1832 the Deputies had "done nothing more than enact the part of slavish Whig tools, ready to agitate for the Whigs, when the Tories were in; and just as ready to keep quiet, to keep in the Whigs ....." The Protestant Society's "doings and deservings are as great a mystery as its receipts and expenditure", but then its secretary was the Whig, Wilks. As for the Church-rate Abolition Society, "it issued forth with a flourish of trumpets, and it seems to go on in a sort of Tom Thumb apotheosis". As if this was not enough, "the London agitation-monopolizers" had created a new organisation, the Religious Freedom Society. In the process they had yet again betrayed their principles, for how could "a State-Churchman and a Voluntary join hand-in-hand for what the Dissenters mean by Religious Freedom?"

> ..... The London Tavern was the lively scene on Wednesday week of its initiatory orgies. The bantling was christened some months before; but its first public cry or scream was heard at this feed; and who were the sponsors? Charles Buller stood for godfather, and Charles Lushington for godmother. - With whom do the members of this

> Society avow an alliance, but with downright Church-Establishment men. Is this the way for Dissenters to progress? Are the men who took prominent part at that dinner likely to advance the cause of Voluntaryism? Not a whit of it. They advocate Establishments, they claim "liberty to profess such as their opinion", and this, they call Religious Freedom! Is this honest? We confess our regret at finding some good men and true, giving countenance to a Society putting forth the principles they avow, - yet backing it with such FRIENDS. The whole concern is a rank Whig job.

Dissenters could expect nothing more from the London committees, than "to be played off in the great game of party, to keep in the Whigs, or to keep out the Tories". The country Dissenters should stir themselves to terminate the centralised system of operation.[1]

The second article argued that Dissenters would obtain greater concessions from a Tory Ministry, because then agitation would be continuous, than from the Whigs. Yet blinded by their own political preferences, the London leaders

> ..... return with added zest, to the dirty dirty work of bolstering up the Whigs, wallowing in the mire of political filth till they are not to be distinguished from the hireling adherents of the Government. This is the exact position in which the country Dissenters are placed by the London bodies, this has been felt not only in the provinces but in London also; and the new Patriot scheme to lure back the confidence of the majority of Dissenters, is the consequence of this being openly and loudly expressed, but the Religious Freedom Society is just as much worthy of that confidence as the bodies which have lost it 2

Leicester Dissenters were convinced that the time had come to repudiate the Whig alliance. The principles of complete religious liberty, which logically terminated in disestablishment, were incompatible with a whiggism in which preservation of the Church Establishment was a

1. ibid., 25 May 1839.
2. ibid., 1 June 1839.

cherished principle.

> ..... Here, then, the true Dissenter and the Whig are in diametrical opposition; and, while they may co-operate for certain measures, they are acting on widely different principles, and must, ere long, openly separate. Shall the former, then, servilely keep back his principles, because the latter is in power? We say, no![1]

At a Leicester meeting, held in support of Thorogood, in November 1839, this new division became public. Miall accused dissenting Members of Parliament of indifference to his fate, censured the metropolitan churches and leaders for failing to take any positive action on his behalf, and mocked the Religious Freedom Society, that "dined, made a little splutter, and then went to sleep". Compared with the language of George Legge, the Scottish minister of Gallowgate Independent Chapel, this was moderate. He denounced the "white-livered, pigeon-hearted, addle-headed, power-worshipping, rank-admiring, money-loving, knee-cringing, mealy-mouthed, lick-spittle Dissenters" of London.[2]

Conder welcomed the meeting, but viewed the language used with "dissatisfaction and regret". There was no justification for the charge of indifference; the London committees,and the Religious Freedom Society, had tried to get Thorogood's case debated in the Commons, being thwarted by repeated postponements. He doubted, moreover, whether much more could have been done - Parliament had no jurisdiction over the Ecclesiastical Courts, the only remedy for a contempt being to purge it by submission. This vindication closed with a personal attack on Childs, accusing him of spreading dissension and suspicion amongst the country's Dissenters.[3]

1. ibid., 2 November 1839.
2. P., 21 November 1839 p. 766.
3. ibid., 28 November 1839 p. 780.

Thorogood himself soon joined the new movement, alleging, in a letter to the Sun, that he had been given misleading advice by Boykett, the Abolition Society's secretary. A meeting of Dissenters in Edinburgh witnessed further attacks on the Patriot and the London committees. These signs of an impending collapse of the system were welcomed by the Leicester men.[1]

At the end of the year, the Leicester Voluntary Church Association committee issued an "Address ..... to the Dissenters and Friends of Religious Liberty in Great Britain and Ireland". Opening with a long protest against church rates, it proceeded to explain how they might be abolished. Resolving "to pursue our object steadily, without accommodating our purpose to the temporary convenience of any administration, or any political party whatever", the committee invited the co-operation of all friends of religious liberty. It proposed that completely independent anti-church rates associations be formed in every town in the country, thus preventing "the centralization of influence which must always more or less result from placing a general fund under the control of any committee, or from delegating to one association authority to represent the opinions of the rest". There was to be no delegation of responsibility, and no salaried officers would be appointed. One association would act as a corresponding and co-ordinating agency, but this would be the limit of its responsibilities. Signatories, on behalf of the committee, were Mursell, Miall, William Baines, and J.H.Davis.[2]

Here was a positive attempt to end the centralisation

1. ibid., 28 November 1839 pp. 778, 780, 19 December 1839 p. 828. Leicestershire Mercury, 21 December 1839.
2. P., 23 December 1839 p. 836.

complained of earlier in the year, and the Leicestershire Mercury greeted it as such.[1] The Patriot entirely concurred with the recommendations, adding that,

> ..... Its framers appear to be not aware that this plan has already been realized to a great extent; and they have very evidently adopted notions on the subject of centralization which are not warranted by experience or fact.

In a series of articles the editor proceeded to defend the whole societies system, both religious and secular. Results proved that London had not betrayed Dissent. Financially the capital bore the whole burden, the Deputies receiving no funds from the country, the Protestant Society very little, the United Committee asking for no subscriptions, and the Abolition Society scarcely obtaining enough to pay its officers, whilst "'their too confiding country friends' content themselves with looking on and blaming their supineness....". The accusations emanating from Leicester could only sow dissension, their fabricators evidently labouring under,

> ..... strong prejudices and injurious misapprehensions ..... and their jealousy of some mysterious power vested in a Committee-ocracy has ..... predisposed them to listen to busy-bodies, whisperers, and retailers of slander, such as have infested the church in every age, or to the angry misrepresentations of offended parties bent upon gratifying their spleen or spite .....

The only difference that Conder could detect between the new scheme, and that of the Abolition Society, was the removal of the centre from London to Leicester, the involvement of ministers in its management, and a willingness to work without the funds on which the latter was dependent. Otherwise, their mode of operation, through local associations, was identical. There was a final word for the Religious Freedom Society. Formed to encourage local effort, it was

1. Leicestershire Mercury, 4 January 1840.

"a federal union for the purpose of mutual protection, which, if the Dissenters are true to themselves, may in some measure compensate for their being so inadequately represented in the senate, and for the political weakness resulting from disorganisation and disunion".[1]

Leicester's challenge, and the threat to unity, was taken seriously. At the end of February, 1840, Conder led a three man deputation from the Religious Freedom Society, which travelled to the town to confer with the local committee,

> It being thought advisable, on public grounds, to come to a good understanding with the reverend Radicals of that place, and to put a stop to the petty warfare they were waging against London committees.

Two meetings took place, and a "tolerably satisfactory conclusion" was reached. In consequence of this a letter from Miall appeared in the Patriot explaining that, to avoid a clash of interests, his committee had requested Easthope to postpone his church rates motion to enable the Religious Freedom Society to rouse Dissenters against Inglis' resolution on church extension.[2]

The Patriot was not alone in regarding the events in Leicester with some disquiet. To the Leeds Mercury the attack at the November meeting was "unwise and unjust - unwise, because it creates divisions where there ought to be union, and unjust, because it imputes blame where praise is deserved". Its editor confidently asserted that Ministers were "the zealous friends of the extinction of church-rates", but were hamstrung by their parliamentary weakness. Neither did the Commons advocates of the dissenting claims, who had

1. P., 23 December 1839 p. 837, 26 December 1839 pp. 844-5, 30 December 1839 p. 852, 6 January 1840 p. 12.
2. Conder, E.R.: Josiah Conder. A Memoir, pp. 315-6. P., 13 April 1840 p. 233.

left no avenue unexplored to secure Thorogood's release, merit censure. The Eclectic, however, admitted that many of the charges were justified.

> ..... There has been too much of mere whiggery, too much of the leaven of ministerial influence among us. Our energies have been depressed by political partizanship. There has been a want of open, manly expression of opinion; an unworthy attempt to wrap up our prejudices in ambiguous phraseology, and to merge the advocacy of truth in the effort to obtain redress of our practical grievances .....

Provincial mistrust of the London committees was understandable, but co-operation was essential if anything worthwhile was to be achieved.[1]

J.M.H. advised Dissenters to be patient with Ministers, and to persevere in pressing their demands upon them. It was "absurd" to distrust the metropolitan committees, their critics possessing an exaggerated "notion of what may be accomplished by baiting and badgering Ministers and Members". Their speeches, their assumption that separation was the overwhelming issue with others, as with themselves, betrayed the ignorance and inexperience of these provincials. Time would temper this spirit, and like the Manchester agitators of 1834, the Leicester men would learn the wisdom of "patiently waiting the fulness of time", and recognise that Dissenters "must be led by our metropolitan brethren".

He found it impossible to "convict" the Whigs "of any of that indifference, negligence, mismanagement, or whatever else it may be called, which too many of my brethren seemed disposed to charge upon them". Though Churchmen, they had done much for Dissenters. They had not deserted them over church rates, setting up the Committee on Church-leases, though the small majority in favour of the 1837 proposals,

1. L.M., 23 November 1839; E.R., 4s., vol. VII, 1840, pp. 359-60.

and the known hostility of the Lords, were sufficient justification for abandoning the matter. Distrust was a poor reward for the odium Ministers had incurred in the cause of Dissent. The national interest, and self-interest, both demanded a continued confidence in the Administration. National prosperity and stability depended on their retention of office, and Dissenters could not expect any alternative Government, Chartist or Tory, to be friendly to their claims.[1]

Russell's opposition to Duncombe's Church-rates Bill seemed a thorough vindication of the anti-Whigs. "The mask" had been lowered, and the contempt in which Dissent was held revealed. Continued trust in him and his party "would be deliberate treachery to the cause of religious freedom".[2] Several warnings had been given by the Eclectic of the dangers of placing "too implicit confidence" in Ministers.[3] Now it seemed

> ..... as though his lordship was supremely concerned to disencumber himself of the confidence of the Dissenting body, yet was restrained by the mannerism of his rank from plainly telling them to be gone. Their intellects, if we mistake not, are sufficiently clear to understand his meaning, and he may yet find that they have complied with his desire.

Dissenters had to abolish church rates for themselves, in the vestries; "here ..... the battle of religious liberty must be fought, and thanks be unto God, it may be fought in security and with triumph".[4]

Though dismayed by the speech, Conder regarded it as a

1. J.M.H.: The Whigs and the Dissenters. A Letter to Edward Baines, Esq., M.P., (London, 1839). Attributed to John Middleton Hare, a London Baptist, who was to become a sub-editor on the Patriot, and one of the first secretaries of the British Anti-State-Church Association.
2. Leicestershire Mercury, 22 February 1840.
3. E.R., 4s., vol. II, 1837, p. 213; vol. VII, 1840, p. 201.
4. ibid., vol. VII, 1840, pp. 345-60.

"Providential occurrence", designed to awaken the dissenting world from their apathetic reaction to the renewed demands for church extension at public expense, against which determined governmental resistance could no longer be guaranteed. But the Patriot did not turn against Ministers. Dissenters did not "have so much to complain of at their hands as some of our friends appear to imagine", and they were reproached for that lack of unity and public spirit, which had contributed to the crisis. The fault of the Whigs lay in their unwillingness to legislate away the anomalies of the registration clauses of the Reform Act, which, exploited by the Tories, had created the parliamentary stalemate which made further reforms impossible. In this situation too much had been expected of Ministers, and there was no reason to repudiate the alliance. Dissenters had a two-fold task. Firstly, to work on the registration, and to demand the protection of the ballot, to build up a decisive Liberal majority in the Commons; and secondly, to assert their principles for themselves, and, by continuous advocacy of religious freedom, strive to keep Ministers from "the measureless contempt and perpetual ignominy" of abandoning it.[1]

Russell's speech was condemned by meetings of Dissenters at Stroud, West Bromwich, and Bradford.[2] Only in Leicester, where such an eventuality had long been anticipated, were they completely unruffled. But the dilemma of Dissent manifested itself. If the Whig alliance was repudiated, and the Ministry fell, Dissenters could expect no advantage from a Radical administration, unsympathetic to their claims,

1. P., 13 February 1840 p. 100, 2 March 1840 p. 140, 19 March 1840 p. 180.
2. ibid., 20 February 1840 p. 113, 2 March 1840 pp. 137, 142-3.

and even less from a Tory cabinet, hostile to them. So, the Patriot, probably representative of the majority in this, evaded the confidence issue, outlining ways in which the alliance could be revived and made politically more effective.

Meanwhile steps were being taken in Leicester to launch a journal to advocate the distinctive principles of Dissent, and to make them the cornerstone of any future agitation. By the late thirties the separation movement seemed dead. Journalists still recognised disestablishment as the logical termination of their principles, but the British Voluntary Church Association was defunct, and Manchester, the old militant centre, remained quiescent, mistrustful of anything from the capital.[1] The expedient policies of the gradualists reigned supreme.

Their journal still occasionally defended separation. Baines' remarks in the Commons in 1837 were condemned, and, in 1840 the example of Leeds, where a meeting to petition for the separation of Church and State had followed one to protest against Church extension, was recommended to others. But at Leeds it was Samuel Smiles who moved a separation amendment at the first meeting, and although all the town's Congregationalist ministers attended this gathering, John Eustace Giles, the minister of South Parade Baptist chapel was "almost the only Dissenting Minister present" at the second.[2] Neither were Robert Vaughan's Thoughts on the Past and Present State of Religious Parties in England allowed to pass without remark.

Vaughan hoped for better relations between Church and

1. McKerrow, J.H.: Memoirs of William McKerrow, D.D., (London, 1881), p. 139.
2. P., 29 May 1837 p. 340, 13 April 1840 pp. 233, 238-9, 27 April 1840 pp. 265, 268, 270-1.

Dissent, and his book is a history of the voluntary churches in a moderate and persuasive tone. The passages to which exception was taken were in the long Dedication to Bishop Blomfield, in which Vaughan attempted to interpret the claims and opinions of the Dissenters for him. Although, he wrote, Congregationalism was opposed to the civil establishment of religion, in seeking to correct the prevalent error the circumstances of the time and place had to be taken into account. No rational Dissenter could expect any government or legislature in England, to approve the extinction of the Established Church. But if circumstances made the survival of an establishment inevitable, the existence of a minority dissenting from it, required that it "should be one of moderate pretensions". In effect, Vaughan was pleading for an acceptance of the status quo by both parties, the "coercionists and the voluntaries", since both were so evenly matched and confident in their own views, that "absolute victory could not be achieved on either side without a frightful loss to both". Dissenters, he asserted, were generally prepared to accept the Established Church as the Church of the majority, "according to the real state of things in England", but not as embodying the religion of the nation, provided that no further grants of public money or exclusive privileges were made to it.[1]

One reviewer agreed with Vaughan's "salutary and liberal admission," but questioned "the strict propriety and soundness of conceding so much to the subsistence, under any circumstances, of a dominancy which, if our doctrine be

1. Vaughan, R.: Thoughts on the Past and Present State of Religious Parties in England, (London, 1838), pp. vi-xxi, 60.

indeed scriptural, is an instrument of mental bondage, and presents an obstruction to impartial liberty, and to the free operation of divine truth....." There was some suspicion that Vaughan had abandoned the Dissenters's cause "on the principal question which justifies their separation from the Established Church, namely, its union with the state". The Nonconformist dealt with him harshly. Its reviewer deprecated his recognition of the right of a majority to establish their religion; his plea for charity was dismissed as misleading - it was charitable to expose the errors of the establishment, not to smother them with mutual fellowship.

> ..... It is not of God - it is of man. It must eventually fall. It is doomed to perish. Let us keep aloof - not take shelter under its walls - and foreseeing the danger, let us incessantly urge those within to come out and be separate. This, we presume to think, is the true Christian spirit.

A perspicacious and sympathetic contributor to the Eclectic, however, whilst disapproving of Vaughan's apparent abhorrence of agitation, did defend him from the charge of being an apologist for establishment.[1]

In a letter to the Eclectic, Vaughan explained his views more fully. Although a minority regarded establishment as unscriptural, they could not prevent the adoption of the opposite principle by the majority, though they could modify its manifestation.

> ..... The work ..... as I apprehend, which now devolves upon us as Dissenters, is to make use of our strength so as to restrict the application of the Church Establishment principles to as narrow limits as possible, labouring, in the meantime, to propagate those principles, the tendency of which, as they take a sufficient hold on the community, will be ~~able~~ to displace all such Institutions, by methods of diffusing the truth more consonant with the religion of the New Testament.....

1. C.M., 1838, p. 452; E.R., 4s., vol. IV, 1838, pp. 393-407. N., 27 May 1841 p. 131.

Democratically, the minority had to make itself the majority, before it could legitimately expect to overthrow what it opposed.[1]

Another London minister, Dr. James Bennett, described the first duty of Dissenters as being, to"ask temperately and respectfully, indeed, but firmly and incessantly, for the entire dissolution of the unhallowed, unauthorised, and pernicious alliance". Unlike Vaughan, though he recognised that to achieve this with the consent of the majority "must be our noblest aim", he did not recoil from a minority agitation;

> ..... but, failing this, we should seek to accomplish our object at the smallest possible cost of mortification and discontent.....[2]

Vaughan's views must have reflected some moderate London opinion, and they are important, because in 1845 he was to found the British Quarterly Review to counter the growing militancy of the Eclectic. Perhaps, with prickly consciences stirring in Leicester, the London leaders could never have expected to permanently smother any agitation on the separation question. Certainly, in the preface to his second edition, Vaughan sorrowfully recorded that his own hope in 1838, that ecclesiastical controversy was subsiding as the forward Dissenters reverted to a"defensive policy" of combining against practical grievances, had been dashed by the actions of churchmen; in particular, by the plans for church extension being advanced in Scotland, by Dr. Chalmers' lecture series in London sponsored by the Christian (Influence) Society, and by Blomfield's order to the evangelical clergy

1. E.R., 4s., vol. IV, 1838, pp. 725-7.
2. Bennett, J.: The History of the Dissenters during the last Thirty Years, p. 113.

in his diocese, to cease their co-operation with Dissenters in the London City Mission.[1]

The Deputies replied to the Chalmers lectures by importing Dr. Wardlaw from Glasgow, to give a complementary series on the voluntary principle.[2] Later in 1839, Sir Culling Eardley Smith, an evangelical Churchman, provided the inspiration behind the Evangelical Voluntary Church Association. Unsectarian and non-political, its promoters hoped that it would unite evangelical Churchmen and Dissenters in opposition to Establishment, but, political activity being debarred by its constitution, the society merely sought to influence opinion by the diffusion of information. It organised lecture courses, published pamphlets, and for two thirds of 1840 took over the back page of the Herts Reformer as the Christian Reformer,[3] before launching its own periodical, the Voluntary, in 1841. Smith, who moved from the Church, into Congregationalism, and then back again, financed the Association, and when he dissolved it in 1845 to further the Evangelical Alliance, it owed him a considerable sum.[4]

Both the Eclectic and the Patriot welcomed the new Association, although the latter did not see how politics could be kept out of a question, that was as political as it was religious. This was, however, irrelevant, if the banning of politics attracted pious laymen and ministers who had stood aloof from other, more political movements. The Association did attract men of this type, although it also

1. Vaughan, R.: Religious Parties in England: their Principles, History, and Present Duty, (London, 1839), pp. x-xxxi.
2. Manning, B.L.: The Protestant Dissenting Deputies, pp. 389-90.
3. Herts Reformer, 29 February 1840 to the end of the year.
4. C.W., 1846, p. 86.

had members who were moving towards the more advanced position. John Blackburn and John Leifchild were balanced by Dr. Cox, John Burnet, John Campbell, and John Pye Smith. But the Association did not obtain a wide following, and it utterly failed, as Conder had predicted it would, in its design of allying Churchmen and Dissenters on the voluntary principle.[1]

The Association, commented the Eclectic, sprang out of a new spirit that was stirring amongst Dissenters.[2] To Miall and Mursell in Leicester the manifestation of that spirit in London was a very poor thing. Sometime during 1839 it was decided to publish a weekly newspaper for the "faithful and persistent exposition" of the principles of civil and religious liberty, something which neither felt the Patriot provided. Mursell asked Miall to edit it whilst they were waiting for a connection on Rugby station, after an unsuccessful foray to London, where men like Price, Cox, and Hinton, all Baptists, had declined the editorial chair. He had already offered his resignation to his church, and was able to spend the winter of 1840-1841 canvassing the country to obtain support for the Nonconformist. The Dissenters of the North West gave him much encouragement, Hadfield and Robert Halley, minister at Mosley Street Chapel, in Manchester, the Revs. John Kelly and Charles Birrell in Liverpool, and the Rochdale Friends of Religious Liberty, being particularly helpful. Significantly, all warned him

> 'to keep myself clear from London Society; all regard that as the greatest peril I shall have

1. E.R., 4s., vol. VII, 1840, pp. 365-82. P., 2 December 1839 p. 788. For the Association's failure to achieve its basic objectives, see the letter from Campbell to Eardley, quoted in full in C.W., 1846, pp. 86-9.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. X, 1841, pp. 8-9.

to encounter.'1

The London Dissenters had not risen in the estimation of the Northerners.

With its defiant motto, "The Dissidence of Dissent, and the Protestantism of the Protestant Religion", the Nonconformist issued forth to do battle with the Establishment and dissenting apathy on 14 April 1841. Its very name was a challenge to the Church, and to those London Dissenters who had founded the Patriot, choosing a name that emphasised the respectability of Dissent, rather than its distinctiveness from the rest of society. In the "Address to the Readers", Dissenters were reprimanded for fighting for themselves, rather than for truth, for attacking issues on the periphery, not the great question at the centre of affairs. Defeat on a minor matter had caused despondency, because "the noble daring, the indomitable will, the lofty enthusiasm, which earnest attachment to a great principle invariably calls forth", were lacking. Exertion for petty objectives had ceased to seem worthwhile.

> The time is now come, either to give up the cause of religious liberty in despair, or to strike a blow "at the heart of affairs" - to abandon the ground of expediency, and resolutely to take up that of principle. Before dissenters can hope to make way they must make the basis of their operations national rather than sectarian - must aim not so much to right themselves as to right Christianity. The union of church and state is the real evil against which their efforts must be directed. In labouring to sever this unseemly connexion they will serve the nation, they will aid religion, and they will free themselves.

Exposure of the essential wickedness of the national establishment of religion was a primary objective of the new journal, as it sought to arouse those who ought to oppose it

1. Mursell, A.: James Phillippo Mursell. His Life and Work, pp. 85-6. Miall, A.: Life of Edward Miall, pp. 37-49.

on the highest grounds, from "the fatal apathy with which they regard its continuance and extension".[1]

The early issues denounced the gradualist policy, and dissenting inertia. Weakness was attributed to the adoption of that "cant phrase", redress of practical grievances, as a political slogan. There was no intelligible principle behind this programme, and it had failed to unite Dissent. Only a definite object, based on principle - "THE ENTIRE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE" - could make it politically united and strong. Frequent failure demonstrated how feeble the old policy had left Dissent, whilst the seeming selfishness of putting self before truth had excited the contempt of politicians. As punishment for this mistake, grievances remained unredressed, and new ones had been created.[2]

Dissent had a mission - to free Christianity from the bondage of the aristocracy. Deplorably, because of its political connotations, this issue had been too frequently evaded. This was a shameful indifference, for whilst Dissent was inactive, not even instructing its children in its principles, "priest-craft" extended its sway. Responsibility for much of this "present weakness and humiliation", alleged Miall, lay with the dissenting ministers, for despite the growth of "that life destroying upas", despite the plentiful evidence of the evils of Establishment, they made no protest, and no effort to enlighten their flocks. Leaders in the "sacred mission" to shatter the distorted image of Christianity set up by the aristocracy, ministers were unaware of their influence, power, and responsibilities. The Church gave a false impression of strength and unity, but its

1. N., 14 April 1841 p. 1.
2. ibid., 14 April 1841 p. 1, 21 April 1841 p. 17.

opponents were potentially stronger, ministers leading "two millions of England's most virtuous, most intelligent, most truth-loving inhabitants", and upholding a principle of incalculable power. These resources had to be used. Miall urged them to meet together in special assembly during the May meetings, to issue a solemn declaration, before the Establishment was overthrown by a revolutionary and infidel violence, injurious to the Christianity with which it was associated. Separation was no mere abstract question; it was eminently practical.[1]

Conder's Patriot contained no comment on Miall's Nonconformist, either critical or complimentary. The divisions within Dissent were, however, a source of great bitterness, and this was exacerbated by the contrasting reactions of moderates and militants to the imprisonment of William Baines. A member of Miall's church at Leicester, he and twenty six other dissenting residents of St. Martin's parish had refused to pay a church rate, challenging its validity. The churchwardens chose to make an example of Baines, and, cited from court to court, he was eventually imprisoned for contempt of the Court of Arches in November 1840. This had long been anticipated, both in Leicester and in London. Whilst in prison Baines was fêted like a hero.

At a public meeting in Leicester, Miall argued that Baines' incarceration was proof that the moderates had gained nothing but indifference and contempt for Dissent, by their silence and inactivity. He, Legge, and Mursell all urged Dissenters to rise against the Established Church, to fulfil

1. ibid., 28 April 1841 p. 35, 5 May 1841 p. 49, 12 May 1841 p. 73, 19 May 1841 p. 97, 27 May 1841 p. 121, 2 June 1841 p. 145, 9 June 1841 p. 161, 30 June 1841 p. 209.

their divine mission - only then would they have peace. At a similar meeting in January, 1841, attended by Easthope, Wynn Ellis (Leicester's two Members of Parliament), O'Connell and Hume, Mursell levelled the old accusations at London, advising his audience not to trust the leaders there.

> ..... The gentlemen who meet in Bolt-court - a narrow place in London - (laughter) - these gentlemen are on terms of considerable intimacy with the Lushingtons, and the Lushingtons are intimate with Lord John Russell, and so Lord John takes his impression of Dissenters from those gentlemen who misrepresent us 1

Of the London journals, only the Eclectic Review expressed any sympathy for Baines, whole-heartedly supporting him, and recommending to its readers the imperative duty of exercising passive resistance to the payment of church rates, and of proclaiming the voluntary principle at every conceivable time, and in every conceivable place, even suggesting the formation of electoral clubs devoted exclusively to its promotion.[2]

"A Balance" submitted that Baines had been greatly mistaken in his course of action, this explaining the apparent indifference of many Dissenters to his fate. Admittedly, he had exposed much that was evil in the Ecclesiastical Courts, and it was shameful that a Church could imprison a man, but his actions had been very inconsistent. By appealing against the validity of the rate to the Ecclesiastical Court, he had not only recognised the validity of church rates in general, but had also acknowledged the jurisdiction of that Court, and by doing so had made the question a legal, not a religious one. Then, he had conscientiously refused to attend the Court when cited before

1. P., 23 November 1840 p. 795, 28 January 1841 pp. 63-4.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. IX, 1841, pp. 101-14.

it, almost, noted another critic, as if deliberately seeking to provoke some reprisal. Many Dissenters viewed this "juggling" with conscience as immoral, hence, whilst respecting Baines' motives, they could not willingly support his cause. Ecclesiastical Courts were no new grievance, but, despite resenting their existence, Dissenters had always recognised them in marriage and probate cases; habit made it difficult for them to understand Baines' reasoning.[1]

The Congregational Magazine's reviewer found it impossible "to resist the force" of "A.Balance's" arguments, in spite of "a deep conviction that Mr. Baines generously placed himself in his present position in the hope that his domestic privations and personal sufferings would illustrate the hateful character of that system to which he is conscientiously opposed, and hasten the day when such outrages upon equal justice and the rights of conscience shall cease for ever". Neither did the Patriot defend him.

> ..... highly as we respect the man and his motives, we must regret the false position in which he has placed himself by taking his stand on a legal objection, instead of making his refusal to pay a simple matter of conscience..... 2

Miall was appalled by the apathy, and the criticisms. "A.Balance", the dissenting press, and the London leaders were all attacked. The latter, he alleged, put more importance on defending ettiquette and maintaining external appearences, than on the vindication of fundamental principles. He found it impossible to comprehend how they could remain indifferent to the fate of a man who was merely

1. "A.Balance, Esq., of Middle Temple": Leicester Gaol, (London, 1841). This was by Thomas Binney. Another critic, for similar reasons, was William Lindsey Alexander, a Congregational minister in Edinburgh, P., 5 April 1841 p. 220, 26 April 1841 p. 271.
2. C.M., 1841, pp. 415-20. P., 28 January 1841 pp. 60-1, 29 March 1841 p. 204.

putting into practice principles they all professed, by conscientiously declining to acknowledge the magisterial authority of the Church. The critics' suspicions were, however, justified, Miall admitting that the original resistance in St. Martin's parish had been planned with the eventuality in mind that all the protesters would be cited before the Ecclesiastical Court, and would be imprisoned for contumacy, the object being to arouse Dissenters to action against church rates at a time when the matter appeared to have been shelved, and when leading men were discouraging agitation.[1]

Active support for Baines was confined to Leicester and its immediate neighbourhood. Public meetings were held in that town, and a petition was sent up from Market Harborough. There were no meetings in London, although the matter was discussed at the general meeting of the Religious Freedom Society, where,Miall sorrowfully recorded, there was an almost complete lack of sympathy with the prisoner.[2] All this widened the breach between the militants and the moderates. At a public breakfast in honour of Baines, following his release, speaker after speaker deplored the general attitude, urging Dissenters to deal with "the master grievance, the fountain head and cause of all those grievances that vex and outrage the dissenting community, and engender nothing but strife and confusion in the social state - the alliance of church and state". Again, the metropolitan leaders and the Whigs were virulently denounced by Childs.[3] The difficulties, seemingly solved in the spring of 1840, had re-emerged, and now the moderates were becoming increasingly resentful of the

1. N., 14 April 1841 p. 2, 21 April 1841 pp. 17-8, 28 April 1841 pp. 33-4, 9 June 1841 p. 162.
2. ibid., 14 April 1841 p. 2, 12 May 1841 pp. 73-5.
3. ibid., 28 July 1841 pp. 274-8.

assaults of "a disreputable faction".

In this situation, it was impossible for Dissent to present a united front at the 1841 general election, as it had done in 1835, and had attempted to do in 1837. The increasing disenchantment with liberal politicians would have made a similar approach unthinkable, "Philax" reporting that most West Riding Dissenters were paralysed by a "sullen distrust of the whole Whig party", because of their courtship of the Tories and the Church.[1]

Conder rebuked those who spoke of neutrality at a future election, pointing out that a Tory Government would not help Dissent, and that the character of the House could only be changed if the franchise were exercised. Support for the Whigs, however, could not be completely uncritical. A new reform programme, comprising corn law repeal, the ballot, and the abolition of church rates, was needed first, to re-unite the liberal groups.[2]

The Whig adoption of corn law reform, and of free trade, altered this. Now "the Friends of Religious Freedom" were urged to make "common cause with the enemies of Monopoly, in favour of the social comforts and religious rights of the poor". Although this was the "paramount" issue at the impending election, the Patriot reminded Dissenters not to hold their own grievances in abeyance, not to give their votes except "on honourable and righteous terms".

> ..... Do not put a disgrace upon your principles, by crouching to supercilious opponents or slippery and hollow friends. The next Parliament may be a long one or a short one ..... other questions than the budget must be determined in it; and, if the Dissenters neglect their duties and their interests now, let them not, hereafter, complain of

1. P., 19 April 1841 p. 255.
2. ibid., 4 February 1841 p. 84, 3 May 1841 p. 284.

~~complain of~~ the just consequences.

By the eve of polling advice was becoming more emphatic. Neutrality was folly, since the Tories were consistent only in their hostility to Dissent. Steady progress could be guaranteed under the Whigs, but a Tory Government might take from Dissenters all the rights they possessed. Redress of grievances had been "flippantly disregarded", but, for "all their faults, the present Ministry have shown themselves . . friendly to us, and we know their opponents to be ours".[1]

The Eclectic spoke in similar terms. Critical of the Government's policies, of its "finality" doctrine, and of its past indifference to dissenting claims, it found their budget proposals "worthy the acceptance of the nation". Patriotism required that Dissenters relegate their own grievances to second place.

> ..... Our first duty is to resist the enemy who is battling at our gates .....

The cabinet had neglected the Dissenters, but each needed the other, and, "however they may trifle with us in their days of fancied security", the Whigs knew that they depended on Dissent for political survival. Once the Tory monopolist was defeated, "we will then assert in terms more emphatic than ever, our distinctive and scriptural claims".[2]

A contrary opinion was voiced by the Nonconformist, which questioned ministerial sincerity. The 8 shilling duty was "a chess board move, to postpone the lose of the game" at the hustings, though Miall doubted whether it would stir up anything but an artificial enthusiasm; the people were not gullible enough to be deceived by it. As trustees for the

1. ibid., 6 May 1841 p. 300, 31 May 1841 p. 380, 28 June 1841 p. 445.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XI, 1841, pp. 111-3.

voteless millions, electors had a great responsibility; national prosperity depended on them, and they should demand that candidates pledge themselves to total and immediate repeal of the corn laws.[1]

Miall's views on dissenting policy were equally decided, and equally anti-ministerial. Why should Dissenters, he asked, "the bone and muscle of the liberal party", whose claims and interests no Administration had consulted or considered, except under pressure, "make sacrifices for the ministry?". If concessions were to be made, "why is it not made by the little fragmentary section of the Whig party", by the minority which usually enforced silence on the majority? A pledge to abolish church rates, to fulfil old professions, was required if the divisions of the liberal party were to be repaired. Without this, Dissenters, "disgusted with their shuffling policy in regard to this matter", would abstain at the general election, a voting loss which Ministers could ill afford.

There was little confidence in the Whigs as agents in the crusade for religious freedom. Russell's own past proved that he was not a man in whom the voluntaries could trust, whilst ministerial treatment of Easthope's Bill was a mockery, demonstrating the contempt in which they held Dissent.

> ..... A church-rate abolition bill is allowed to be brought in, when it cannot possibly advance a stage further. Civil things are said ..... respecting the rights and claims of protestant dissenters. A division is avoided where it would answer no good purpose, and everything is managed as comfortably as may be on the eve of a general election.

1. N., 5 May 1841 pp. 57-8, 12 May 1841 p. 82, 19 May 1841 p. 105, 27 May 1841 p. 128, 16 June 1841 p. 186, 23 June 1841 p. 201.

A vote for the Whigs was a vote wasted.[1]

The dissenting press did agree that votes could only go to candidates who made some sort of pledge to support their claims, particularly the abolition of church rates. At its general meeting the Religious Freedom Society recommended that all candidates, irrespective of party, in every constituency, should be questioned on church rates, the Ecclesiastical Courts, Church extension, and the payment of workhouse chaplains. Conder suggested that Easthope's Bill might be used as a test of candidates' intentions, and that the local auxiliaries of the Religious Freedom Society take the lead in eliciting their opinions. At Hull, Nottingham, Chatham, Newcastle, Gateshead and Preston, the local associations did this, ascertaining the views of candidates on a wide range and variety of issues.[2]

At its meeting at the beginning of June, the West Riding Baptist Association advised its members only to support those candidates for the county who gave satisfactory assurances on church rates, the future of the Ecclesiastical Courts, the liberation of Baines, and Church extension at public expense. Prior to the meeting, the Rev. J.E.Giles had written to Lord Morpeth requesting a statement of his opinions on these matters, and explaining why the West Riding Baptists felt alienated from the Whigs. Several letters passed between the two men as Morpeth's views were unravelled. Here, enthused Miall, was the way to create respect for dissenting aspirations. The other three Riding candidates were catechized, and the Rev. H.Dowson corresponded with the candidates for Bradford on the Association's behalf. Giles also publicly

1. ibid., 19 May 1841 pp. 97-8, 27 May 1841 pp. 121-2, 2 June 1841 pp. 145-6, 9 June 1841 pp. 161-2, 30 June 1841 p. 210.
2. P., 10 May 1841 p. 305, 26 May 1841 p. 364, 17 June 1841 p. 420, 24 June 1841 p. 436, 28 June 1841 p. 446.

interrogated William Aldam, Hume's colleague as candidate for Leeds, on these matters.[1]

It is interesting that the first denominational association to adopt a political role should be a Baptist one. Their Union had always been more advanced than that of the Congregationalists, passing resolutions in favour of separation when the Congregational Union was still warning its members of the dangers of overstepping the bounds of legality in their resistance to church rates.[2] Significantly, the Baptists were strong in Leicester, and many of their ministers in the East Midlands were to be prominent in radical political, and militant dissenting movements. In the West Riding the Congregationalists did not act as a body at this election. The Leeds Mercury made no comment on the activities of the Baptist Association, devoting itself entirely to the free trade issue. Even if the Leeds Congregational ministers approved of the Baptist initiative, they were not the type of men to imitate it; after all, they had not attended the Leeds meeting to petition for separation of Church and State in 1840.

After the election Dissent seemed to be politically weaker than ever. With the Whigs soundly beaten, they could expect nothing from the victors. Riven by division, Dissent was in no position to exert a significant influence on parliamentary affairs. Provincial militancy, quiescent since 1834, had re-emerged with greater vigour following the failure of the Whigs to abolish church rates. Militancy was

1. ibid., 28 June 1841 p. 442. N., 16 June 1841 p. 179, 23 June 1841 pp. 193-5.
2. P., 13 December 1838 p. 801, 3 May 1839 p. 281 for the Baptist resolutions. C.M., 1839, pp. 405-6, for the Congregational Union.

a reaction to this, a reaction against the inability of the London committees to influence the Government, and a response to the growing assertiveness of the Church. These factors combined to create a sense of frustration, heightened by an electoral structure which gave Dissent, a substantial minority in the community, inadequate representation in Parliament. To shout, to be extravagant, was a way of drawing attention to the grievances under which Dissenters laboured, whilst this militancy ensured that they were not merged into the anonymity of the general mass of liberalism, but maintained a distinctive identity. Metropolitan leadership, apparently willing to abandon this distinctiveness to keep the Whigs in office, was unacceptable to the activists. Gradualism was rejected with its advocates. The new programme was forceful and direct, seeking immediate concentration on securing the separation of Church and State. Alliance with the Whigs, moderation, the leadership of London, had all alike been discredited by 1841. Ironically, the provincial militants soon learnt that if their view was to prevail, they had to make London, though its Dissenters might be hostile to them, their headquarters. Hence Miall moved from Leicester to launch the Nonconformist as a direct challenge to the self-appointed and acknowledged natural and national leaders of Dissent. Little headway had been made by the summer of 1841. Miall's radicalism appealed to few Dissenters, and it was to be some years before he became the unchallenged leader of Nonconformity. The militants were an able and vocal group, and they were to turn the events of the forties to their own advantage, directing a disillusioned, dispirited, and apathetic Nonconformity into new paths.

CHAPTER 6.

CHARTISM, THE ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUE, THE COMPLETE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT, AND DISSENT.

Miall brought a new political fervour into dissenting journalism. The Nonconformist took up radical causes and agitations previously shunned by the older organs of opinion, his political extremism perfectly complementing his dissenting militancy. Believing that the country suffered from too much government, rather than from too little, restriction impeding trade and commerce, crippling industry, and paralysing religion, Miall argued that the state's sole task was the protection of the life, liberty, peace and property of all its subjects. To effect this end, Miall advocated "a fair and full representation of all."[1] This, and the means by which he hoped to achieve it, caused as much controversy in dissenting circles as his advice on their own policy. But before turning to a detailed examination of Miall's political schemes and views, there was one movement of the forties which most Congregationalists supported, and in which many ministers became involved - that for the repeal of the corn laws.

Edward Baines jnr., whose father had condemned the laws from their introduction in 1815, was probably the most active Congregationalist in the League, writing to Cobden in 1842, "In one way or another, I am continually attacking the corn laws." On behalf of the League, Cobden thanked him two months later, for the "energetic appeals" he had made in the Mercury. Commenting that "the League really think nothing more suitable has been produced," George Wilson

1. N., 14 April 1841 p. 1.

eagerly ordered 150,000 copies of his open letters to Russell, from the Mercury, when Baines offered to issue them in pamphlet form. In 1844, Wilson inquired as to the cost of 5,000, 10,000, 15,000, and 20,000 copies of his letters to Lord Harewood.[1] The correspondence which passed between Baines and Cobden shows that he was at the hub of all the League's affairs in the West Riding.[2]

Other Congregationalists were active to a lesser degree on League platforms, on the League Council, or as contributors of sizeable subscriptions. George Hadfield had attended the meeting convened by Archibald Prentice in September 1838, which gave birth to the original Manchester Anti-Corn-Law Association. Though the pressure of other business, particularly the Hewley Case and Lancashire College affairs, prevented his active support, he gave generously to the League funds, and was one amongst the "Leading Nonconformists" from all parts of the country, who wrote to encourage Samuel Morley in his work for Pattison, the free trade candidate, in the City of London by-election of 1843.[3]

1. Baines, E., jnr.: Life of Edward Baines, pp. 86-7. Cobden Papers, B.M. Add. Mss., 43664, ff. 134-5, E.Baines jnr. to R.Cobden, 27 October 1842; ff. 136 R.Cobden to E.Baines jnr., 17 December 1842. George Wilson Papers, Manchester Central Reference Library, E.Baines jnr. to G.Wilson, 10 March 1843. Baines Papers, Leeds Central Reference Library, G.Wilson to E.Baines jnr., 11 March 1843, 6 April 1844. The pamphlets were:
Reasons in Favour of Free Trade in Corn, and against a Fixed Duty: In Three Letters to ..... Russell....., (Leeds, 1843), and, Five Letters to the Earl of Harewood, President of the Yorkshire Society for keeping up the Price of Bread and the Rent of Land, (Leeds, 1844).
2. Cobden Papers, B.M. Add. Mss., 43664, ff. 129-197 covers the correspondence of the two men from 1842 until 1845. The Baines Papers include letters from Cobden and Bright on League affairs, and there are a few letters in the Wilson Papers.
3. Prentice, A.: History of the Anti-Corn-Law League, (London, 1853) pp. 69-70. The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield M.P., pp. 132-4. Hodder, E.: The Life of Samuel Morley, (London, 1887), p. 77.

Hadfield's letter of congratulation to Morley after the result reflects the religious aura which tended to surround the repeal movement as Dissenters, and particularly ministers, became deeply committed to it. Trade restrictions were human laws, confounding the benevolent provisions of the Deity for "mutual intercourse and active goodwill" amongst the races of mankind.[1] As early as January 1839, the Eclectic had been exhorting "the professedly religious world" to declare against "the evils inflicted by the remnant of feudal barbarism contained in the restrictions on the commerce of the different branches of the human family." By the spring of 1841 the normally conservative and non-political Congregational Magazine was pressing its readers to support the Whigs at the pending general election, following "the dictates of conscience, maugre all the influences and intimidations." Repeal was important economically, but the abolition of monopolies "were to be prized by Christians mainly for their benevolent and moral aspects, and as tending to the abolition of that 'narrow and heart-burning system of prohibition, alike dissatisfactory to the people abroad and the people at home!....."[2]

Where as the older organs of Dissent were prepared to accept the Whig concessions, the Nonconformist proclaimed that christianity demanded complete and immediate repeal. Acquiescence in the fixed duty scheme meant putting allegiance to Russell before "securing to the indigent, but industrious, the opportunity which God has freely given them, of earning by their own labour and skill a comfortable subsistence."

1. Hodder, E.: op. cit., p. 78.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. V, 1839, p. 98. C.M., 1841, p. 450.

A wise vote would enable the Christian to do good to their fellow men, and to prevent civil disruption and confusion. By voting for repeal, a dissenting elector would fulfil the divine commands to aid the poor and feed the hungary.

> All the subscriptions made during the last twenty years for the relief of the destitute, summed up into one amount would be a small thing, a mere trifle, compared with the abolition of monopolies. A man may do more by his vote at the next election, to mitigate human suffering, than he has done by his purse all his lifelong. 1.

Both the Patriot and the Nonconformist encouraged and welcomed the growing ministerial involvement in the anti-corn law movement.[2] Their associations passed resolutions of condemnation, and individual ministers of all denominations were active on the platform. William McKerrow, at the instigation of George Wilson, "was the first christian minister in England who identified himself with the movement." His first major speech was at Manchester Town Hall on 19 March 1841, when he seconded a resolution moved by Cobden, who anticipated that his example would be followed "by the great body of our Christian ministers." Robert Halley, the Congregationalist, and John Birt, the Baptist, were prevented from making their speeches by a Chartist disturbance. John Legge Poore and James Gwyther, both Congregationalist ministers, and Francis Beardsall, another Baptist, were also on the platform.[3] John Pye Smith addressed the general meeting of the London Anti-Corn-Law Association a few days later, and at the election took great pains to ensure that his votes in the South and in the West Riding were used to

1. N., 2 June 1841 p. 153, 16 June 1841 p. 185, 23 June 1841 p. 201.
2. ibid., loc. cit. P., 20 May 1841 p. 348.
3. McKerrow, J.H.: Memoirs of William McKerrow, D.D., p. 91. P., 29 March 1841 p. 204.

further "the great cause of light and peace, truth, honesty, well-regulated liberty, the temporal salvation of our country, and the great increase of advantages for the spread of the Gospel."[1] There were reports of speeches by John Burnet and Samuel Green, a Baptist minister, in Lambeth, and by John Howard Hinton at another London meeting. At Stroud the Rev. Benjamin Parsons, who toured the Forest of Dean lecturing on the evils of the corn laws, apologised for his late arrival at a meeting already addressed by two dissenting ministers, explaining that he had been conducting a meeting on the subject in his own chapel.[2] Northern ministers were not behindhand. The Baptists Henry Dowson, James Acworth and Francis Clowes, together with Congregationalists Jonathon Glyde, Walter Scott, and William Clulow, attended an anti-corn law tea in Bradford. On 4 June an extraordinary meeting of the General Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers of the Three Denominations condemned commercial restrictions, welcoming the Government's policy change. More decidedly, the Midland Baptist Association's annual meeting adopted an immediate repeal petition.[3]

Ministers preached sermons on the Christian's duty in relation to the corn laws in chapels up and down the country; Thomas Binney was one.[4] Pye Smith told the London Association that if ministers

> ..... referred to the precepts contained in

1. P., 1 April 1841 p. 215. Medway, J.: Memoirs of the Life and Writings of John Pye Smith ....., p. 446.
2. P., 31 May 1841 p. 384, 3 June 1841 p. 387. Hood, E.P.: The Earnest Minister. A Record of the Life and Selections from Posthumous and other Writings of the Rev. Benjamin Parsons, of Ebley, Gloucestershire, (London, 1856), p. 269.
3. N., 28 April 1841 p. 44, 16 June 1841 p. 184, 23 June 1841, p. 205.
4. P., 24 June 1841 p. 439, where A---- C---- L---- urged its publication.

> the Old Testament, they would find that denunciations against no class of crime were so frequent or so solemn as those against persons who oppressed the poor.....

Old Testament texts formed the core of many of their sermons. John Sibree likened the English scene in 1841 to the state of Jerusalem as described in Chapter 5, verses 1-13 of the Book of Nehemiah, and quoted Proverbs 11, verse 26:

> He that withholdeth the corn, the people shall curse him; but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it. 1

In the spring of 1841 McKerrow had suggested that the League should produce an address to the ministers of religion. Nothing resulted, though Cobden had hoped that the Manchester minister would draft it, if Pye Smith declined to do so.[2] In July a circular was issued over the signature of George Thompson, inviting the Manchester area ministers to meet to discuss the wisdom of convening a ministerial anti-corn law conference. McKerrow was prominent in these preliminary arrangements, but Robert Halley attributed the original idea to J.W.Massie, minister at Chapel Street Independent Chapel, Salford. Twenty-eight ministers gathered on 12 July, and, with only one dissentient voice, though with several doubting adherents, decided in favour of such an assembly. A committee of nine was selected, and an "Address to the Ministers of all Religious Denominations throughout the United Kingdom" was issued the following day. Separate letters, signed by McKerrow and Massie, were sent to the Moderator and clergy of the Established Church of Scotland, and to the Wesleyan Conference, then meeting in Manchester. Those attending were requested

1. Sibree, J.: The Corn Monopoly Condemned by Scriptures. A Sermon .....
2. McKerrow, J.H.: op. cit., pp. 104-5

to make surveys of conditions in their towns, and the Conference opened on 17 August. Confident that the gathering could only benefit the League cause, its leaders placed the full facilities of its office and administrative machine at the disposal of the organisers. The sessions were exceedingly well managed; no discussion was allowed, merely the proposing and seconding of resolutions, and the receipt of information. "As an effort of generalship," commented Halley, "nothing could have been more complete." Publication of a full report of the proceedings was sponsored by the League, and Cobden, realising the debt owed for the publicity given to League aims, for the new religious aura which surrounded them, and for the fillip given to the cause after the disastrous election results, wrote to Wilson enquiring whether, "the League ought to pass a complimentary vote of thanks to messers Fletcher, McKerrow, & Massie?"[1]

Nonconformist and Patriot unanimously supported the Conference scheme, though both doubted the wisdom of its being purely ministerial. Nevertheless, both defended it from the criticisms of the Spectator and the Times, Conder asserting that no men were better able to discuss the corn laws than ministers, "conversant with the actual conditions of the working classes, of whom nine-tenths at least of their audience are composed." Miall viewed the issue in its moral aspects, and ministers were best placed to trace these. The League had proved that unemployment was produced by the corn laws,

1. McCord, N.: The Anti-Corn-Law League, 1838-1846, (London, 1958), pp. 104-7. Waddington, J.: Congregational History, 1800-1850, pp. 560, 563. G.Wilson Papers, R.Cobden to G.Wilson, 22 August 1841. N., 21 July 1841 pp. 262-3, 28 July 1841 p. 288, 4 August 1841 pp. 298-9, 11 August 1841 p. 314 for the various circulars.

> ..... Dissenting ministers ..... reason out by fact and illustration a further conclusion— that when want of employment becomes general, religion and religious institutions, the object of their especial care, lamentably decline. Why should they not supply this further link in the chain?....

Anyhow, a firm ministerial protest would arrest the alienation of the working classes, regarding indifference as aquiescence in oppression, from religion.[1]

Correspondence columns in the Leeds Mercury and the Patriot tell of the opposition to the Conference within dissenting ranks. Universally condemning the corn laws, these critics either denied that ministers should involve themselves in political issues, or objected to the synodical character of the assembly. "Laicus" submitted that the Church had already tarnished its purity by over entanglement with the world,

> ..... Let her not further sully her reputation, and become a church militant in the battle-field of politics, by descending to become a party to such a conflict as the present.....

Charles Wicksteed, Unitarian minister at Leeds, condemned the exclusively clerical composition of the gathering, assuming that this would deter many from attending. Richard Winter Hamilton replied to this, vindicating his right to speak out in a ministerial capacity, and in combination with others. The arguments dragged on long after the Conference was over, centring on the doubts of Gilbert Wardlaw.[2]

1. P., 19 July 1841 p. 492, 26 July 1841 p. 508, 2 August 1841 p. 524, 9 August 1841 p. 540, 12 August 1841 p. 548. N., 21 July 1841 p. 265, 28 July 1841 pp. 280-1, 4 August 1841 p. 301.
2. P., 2 August 1841 p. 527, 9 August 1841 p. 540, 16 August 1841 p. 558. The Letters and comments in the Leeds Mercury are reported in the last two. Wardlaw's first letter appeared, 16 August 1841 p. 558, and the editor closed the correspondemce, 7 October 1841 p. 676.

The Patriot urged "every church and congregation" to send their own ministers; where they were unable to afford this step, "impoverished by the cruel monopoly," then district delegates might be selected.[1] Even the Congregational Magazine hoped that "a goodly multitude of faithful, godlike men," would assemble at Manchester. Blackburn's additional advice, for which he was rebuked by Halley, was probably less palatable to the leaguers. They were counselled,

> ..... not to clamour for a particular measure, that will only transfer money from the purse of one wealthy class of oppressors to the coffers of another; but boldly to speak to "the Millocracy" - as well as the aristocracy - to "cotton lords" - as well as landlords - "What mean ye that ye break my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord God of Host." Let them seek in "the spirit and power of Elias" fearlessly to denounce those "who keep back by fraud" "the hire of the labourer," and with the prophet Jeremiah to pronounce a heavy "Woe unto him that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work." [2]

636 ministers eventually arrived in Manchester; about 100 indicated their intention of attending, but failed to do so, whilst about 800 more gave written support. 274 of the attenders were Congregationalists, and 182 Baptists, these two denominations providing the largest contingents.[3] The whole spectrum of Congregationalism was represented by those who attended, or gave support in other ways. John Leifchild, Dr. Reed, Dr. Fletcher, Thomas Raffles, John Campbell and Ralph Wardlaw all sent letters; Robert Vaughan was present; Pye Smith read the opening address; amongst the radicals, there were Parsons and Sibree, who was shouted down for breaking the political neutrality of the assemblage. Thomas Scales and Hamilton arrived from Leeds, all the Manchester

1. Ibid., 26 July 1841 p. 508.
2. C.M., 1841, p. 596
3. P., 23 August 1841 p. 571.E.R., 4s., vol. X, 1841, pp. 345-6.

ministers seem to have participated, and there was strong representation from other manufacturing areas. It is difficult to assess how many were there on their own account, how many as the representatives of their congregations, or as the mouthpieces of prominent local manufacturers. The Rev. William Malden of Chichester, told his congregation of the Conference at the end of his sermon, and was immediately invited to attend at the congregation's expense by the deacons. Dr. McCord, however, has produced evidence to suggest that the expenses of some were met by local industrialists, regardless of religious persuasion.[1]

Some of those who attended had their private doubts concerning the Conference's nature, fearing its possible effects on denominational reputations. Halley had attended the original July meeting in Manchester, giving a reluctant vote for the plan, strongly objecting to "its being exclusively clerical." Resentful that he was claimed as one of the Conference's sponsors, though he had declined a place on the organising committee, he explained his misgivings in an interesting series of letters to John Blackburn. Apprehensive that "the measure will be rash, ill-considered, prepared by Mr. Thompson, and supported by hosts of the various sections of Methodists and our minor brethren," he sought advice from Blackburn and the Londoners - should he ignore the Conference, or should attempts be made to "regulate it"? By 3 August, despite the pressure brought to bear by leading members of his congregation, Halley had decided to "pay no attention to it."Eventually, like Richard Fletcher, he overcame his misgivings, and attended, "anxious to make the thing as good as possible." His qualms were unfounded, and his conciliatory

1. P., 2 August 1841 p. 524. McCord, N.: op. et. loc. cit.

suggestion solved the problem of prayer at the beginning of the Conference sessions. Nevertheless,

> ..... I felt rather jealous for the honour of our own body, and did not quite like the multitude of sects with which they were mingled, and the persons of all sorts who called themselves preachers.

Halley's complaints suggest that the Conference's organisers worked very quickly, to present critics with a fait accompli. Massie's precipitancy, and unwillingness to consult the Congregationalist body in general before putting the scheme into operation was regretted.[1]

The dissenting press gave the Conference a rapturous reception. It had exceeded all the Patriot's expectations; riveting the attention of the nation on Manchester, it had revived the hopes of thousands, whilst in its resolutions,

> ..... great truths were affirmed by the representatives of fifteen hundred churchs, to be promulgated to the nation as the testimony of religion against the impious laws which nullify the provisions of a merciful Creator, and subject large bodies of human beings to penury and wretchedness.

The assembly, Miall exulted, had made repeal a "business of the heart," a question of humanity, to which the nation could respond with far greater feeling than to a mere matter of economics. Principle had not been compromised for party purposes, and as "a powerful antidote to the drug with which Whig policy would have charmed the country asleep," the immorality of the food laws had been exposed. For the first time, too, religious men had examined the state of the oppressed in their own country, and had met with a favourable response from the working man. If ministers had adopted this spirit twenty years before, "instead of the paltry, cowardly antipathy to every imputation of being political" that class

1. Waddington, J.: op. cit, pp. 557-564.

would not have been lost to religion, would not have succumbed to infidelity and Owenism.[1]

Energetic follow up was essential if the impact of the Conference was to be maintained. Both the Eclectic and the Patriot recommended a general observance of 6 September, the day chosen as one of prayer and humiliation, and the preparation of petitions for "an utter and immediate abrogation of every statute which robs the poor, curses the land, and dishonours the God whom we profess to serve."[2]

Reports of meetings addressed by ministerial delegates to the Conference, of 6 September services, and of ministerial and chapel lectures soon appeared in the columns of the press. Similar conferences were held in Edinburgh and Southampton, and congregational memorials requesting the Queen not to prorogue Parliament until the state of the country had been discussed, were drawn up. At the end of September Massie wrote to Wilson outlining a plan for the general submission of congregational petitions and memorials, and for increasing League funds by involving congregations in active work. The scheme found favour, and in October a letter from Massie to members and supporters of the Conference appeared.[3]

Despite the exhortations of the Patriot, the London ministers failed to follow "the noble example of their brethren in other parts of the Kingdom," by making "a united public testimony against the demoralising and destructive tendencies of legal restrictions on the wise and bountiful

1. P., 23 August 1841 p. 572. E.R., vol. X, 1841, pp. 345, 358. N., 25 August 1841 pp. 345-6.
2. P., 30 August 1841 p. 588, E.R., 4s., vol. X, 1841, pp. 360-1.
3. B.M. Add. Mss.,43663, ff. 139-141, J.W.Massie to George Wilson, 24 September 1841. P., 21 October 1841 p. 710.

arrangements of Divine Providence." Vaughan even wrote an open letter, directed at those metropolitan ministers who doubted the extent of the distress in the North, but all to no avail. Slowly the old provincial suspicions of London reasserted themselves. One "Country Minister" alleged that,

> ..... snugly seated in their carpetted parlours in their suburban retreats, the Metropolitan Ministers see not, feel not, the privations of their brethren in the country, the destitution of their flocks, and the wide-spreading flood of wretchedness which is fast overwhelming the length and breadth of the land.

Another described the "amazement as well as grief" with which the inertia of the London ministers and congregations was regarded in the provinces, warning that if they wished "to preserve a shadow of influence" over them, the capital's Dissenters would have to set an example of united action.[1]

"A Congregationalist" and John Clayton jnr. defended the Londoners from these charges of apathy and indifference to the plight of the poor. Perhaps the latter gave the real reason for the resistance of the more conservative to the pressures being put on them.

> ..... we have a conscientious objection to band ourselves in societies to instruct Government how they are to legislate on secular subjects; and deem it our duty, to keep within what we think to be the limits of our proper province, as the pastors of the flocks over which we preside. 2

The Manchester Conference of 1841 had two roots. Amongst a certain section of the religious public there was a growing conviction that the corn laws were immoral, were opposed to divine precepts, and contributed to national demoralisation and irreligion. Searching for a propaganda coup to divert

1. P., 6 January 1842 p. 12, 13 January 1842 pp. 30-1, 17 January 1842 p. 36, 20 January 1842 p. 43, 27 January 1842 pp. 60, 62, 3 February 1842 p. 77.
2. ibid., 3 February 1842 p. 78.

attention from the defeat inflicted on the free trade principle at the general election, the League leaders, having already tentatively contemplated a ministerial movement, decided to recruit this developing opinion into the League's ranks. In Massie and McKerrow, they found two ministers, who, sharing these views, were prepared to work actively for the League. For it, the Conference and its aftermath was an unqualfied success, although the Eclectic exaggerated with its claim that "from its assembly may be dated the most rapid and most certain progress of the cause."[1]

The initial impetus was not sustained. About 300 attended the ministerial meeting to mark the opening of the Free Trade Hall in Manchester in February 1843; there were few prominent Congregationalists amongst them, though Reed, Leifchild, and Pye Smith sent their apologies. An address to ministers, advocating public and private support for the League and its agents was, however, issued.[2] Ministers continued to participate in League meetings throughout the country, but after the spring of 1843 the religious world became increasingly pre-occupied with other, and for it, more immediate questions. Pye Smith probably typifies the attitude of the vast majority of nonconformist ministers, when, in 1846, after repeal, he had his copies of the League journals bound, having inscribed on the spines, "THE TRIUMPH OF JUSTICE," and "PRAISE BE TO GOD."[3]

Miall was highly critical of the League leaders and their policies. His attitude to the established political

1. E.R., 4s., vol. XI, 1842, p. 352.
2. P., 2 February 1843 p. 74, 6 February 1842 pp. 86, 87.
3. Medway, J.: Memoirs of the Life and Writings of John Pye Smith....., p. 451.

leaders of the middle classes parallels, in many respects, that adopted towards the established leaders of Dissent. there is the same expert assessment of their policies, the same charges of time-serving and compromise with whiggery when they ignore his advice. The League was always recognised as a great teacher, laying the foundations for changes Cobden could not conceive of, but he never regarded it as a sufficiently powerful political machine to wrest its objectives from a corrupt aristocratic Parliament. The Nonconformist and the League differed on the right means to achieve the desired end - commercial reform. Miall, moreover, although admitting the need for repeal, did not "discern in that measure a panacea for the national evils." Complete suffrage was essential if labour was to be defended from the "encroachments of capital," and freed from "chevaux-de-frise of harassing and oppressive enactments."[1]

As Parliament and the anti-corn law delegates assembled in London at the beginning of 1842, they were reminded of their responsibilities, and warned of the dangers of compromise on anything less than complete repeal; parliamentary repealers were advised to resist all Whig blandishments, and to refuse to succumb to a party manoeuvre in supporting Russell's fixed duty motion. But Cobden went into the lobby with the Whigs, and failed to obtain a debate on the distress or any constructive action. This, argued the Nonconformist, would be the last ineffectual attempt of the League to obtain its objectives through the existing parliamentary machinery. Declining attendance at the Conference betokened middle class despondency whilst increasing references to suffrage

1.N., 10 August 1842 pp. 544-5, 17 August 1842 p. 561, 8 February 1843 p. 89, 29 October 1845 pp. 740-1, 22 July 1846 p. 469.

extension indicated the "growing conviction in the public mind, that the aristocracy can only be put down by an agitation, having for its basis the abolition, not only of a single branch of monopoly, but of monopoly in its very source." And yet despite these signs, despite the counsel of the Nonconformist, Cobden and his colleagues refused to abandon the seemingly hopeless parliamentary struggle, refused to adopt a policy which would bring them inevitable success, by placing themselves at the head of a movement for a "full,fair, and free representation of the people."[1]

Once again, in 1843, after the disastrous December conference of the Complete Suffrage Union, the League survived as the only active anti-aristocratic force. Miall doubted its chances of success, and was soon condemning Cobden's abuse of the power he had forged in the country when he voted with the Whigs on the fixed duty issue. Debates on the corn laws in 1843 and 1844 seemed designed to demonstrate the accuracy of the Nonconformist's assessment of the impossibility of securing repeal under the existing system of representation.[2] Nevertheless, the League's plan of agitation unveiled at Covent Garden at the end of September, 1843, was welcomed, dissipating all misgivings concerning the firmness of the movement's leaders. Even so, Miall did not expect the League to make a great impact in the constituencies, and, anticipating the defeat of William Brown in the South Lancashire by-election, explained its "great practical mistake." The free trade principle did not

1. ibid., 9 February 1842 pp. 88-9, 16 February 1842 pp. 105-6, 23 February 1842 p. 121, 13 July 1842 pp. 480, 27 July 1842 pp. 512-3.
2. ibid., 11 January 1843 p. 25, 22 February 1843 pp. 120-1, 17 May 1843 p. 361, 27 March 1844 p. 197, 3 July 1844 pp.484-5.

move men sufficiently to win constituencies back "from a usurping oligarchy."

> ..... We ..... grieve to see a continued disposition manifested in high quarters, to keep that question in a state of perfect isolation, and to recognise, in a simple profession of desire for repeal, virtue enough to atone for a denial of every other just and enlightened principle of policy, and for the infliction, in other shapes, of any amount of distress upon mankind. It will not succeed, simply forasmuch as it ought not to succeed. 1

Miall's political philosophy was exceedingly class conscious, and the villains were the aristocracy. Since the Conquest they had, "as a class, been oppressors of the people, and disloyal to the crown," insidiously usurping its authority, and diverting the patronage, power and profits of government into lordly hands and pockets. Whilst the people had been creating national wealth and greatness, aristocracy had wasted it away, blighting "by their selfish management the great and glorious results to human freedom and happiness, which would have proceeded from the patriotic sacrifices and struggles of the people." All the institutions of Church and State were devised to fulfil their class purposes. The Church of England, a piece of political machinery, designed to strengthen aristocratic hold over the classes below them, provided places for supernumerary members of their families. Colonies, maintained at public expense as "warrens" for the aristocracy, would be friends and good customers if emancipated. Aristocracy gave society its militaristic bias, Miall cynically suggesting that the war scare of 1848 was provoked by a need for more jobs, as well as fear of the people; the collapse of aristocratic power would be succeeded by the reign of universal peace. Class

1. ibid., 4 October 1843 pp. 681-2, 28 February 1844 p. 133, 29 May 1844 pp. 404-5.

legislation pervaded the proceedings of an aristocratic parliament, landlords successfully reducing their tax burdens, and increasing the values of their estates, by forcing all to buy the "necessaries of life at the dearest market, because that is the only market which is patent and licensed." "In the selfishness and misgovernment springing from the great monster evil, the monopoly of legislation," were to be found the source of all national ills.[1]

Two aristocratic factions dominated the political scene, both seeking place, but never at the expense of their own class interests. Russell adopted free trade principles, but was patently insincere; this was a party manoeuvre to retain office, and "for exclusive, aristocratic purposes" would not be taken beyond speech-making, as the Tories fully understood. In the new Parliament, Miall expected this collusion to become open, expected the Whigs to betray their middle class allies.

> ..... Party interests are not at present considered so valuable as the interests of the aristocracy as a class. Sir Robert Peel is not to be pressed by his opponents - monopoly is not to be seriously attacked.

Russell's address to the City electors, the Nonconformist asserted, implied an effective pledge "not to harass the tories." They had allowed the Whigs a long enjoyment of the perquisites of office; now it was their turn.[2]

As a politician, Miall saw no good in the Whigs. Their political virtue and principles were jettisoned when in

1. ibid., 14 April 1841 p. 9, 21 April 1841 p. 24, 28 April 1841 p. 41, 5 May 1841 p. 57, 12 May 1841 p. 82, 14 July 1841 p. 241, 11 August 1841 p. 314, 15 September 1841 p. 392, 2 February 1842 p. 74, 1 May 1844 p. 292, 29 December 1847 p. 909, 12 January 1848 p. 12.
2. ibid., 19 May 1841 p. 105, 14 July 1841 p. 248, 28 July 1841 p. 281.

office to retain it, whilst in opposition, having "to meet a strong power without being able to wield against it the strength of truth," they were inevitably weak, "a party without backbone." Toryism was openly aristocratic, whereas Whiggism deceitfully attracted the middle classes to cheat them for party and class ends.

> .....Toryism is the highwayman, who presents his weapon and demands your purse. Whiggism is one of the swell mob who, under cover of obliging a passenger, thrusts upon him a spurious article, and cheats him of his cash. In the one you may sometimes discover a redeeming trait; in the other - never. It is the child of compromise - and skulking is its vocation.

Professedly the disciples of Fox, modern Whigs were apostates, repudiating his principles whilst "trading on his renown." Greatness of character and aim died with him; "insincerity and incapacity" combined in his successors "in a rare perfection." In Parliament, the Reform Club was an ever present threat to the political virtue of men who were elected because of the principles they stood for, and not because of alliance with Whiggery. Advising them to form the nucleus of an independent party, Miall warned Roebuck, Cobden, Crawford, and Bowring to "stand clear of whig influences."[1] In any case, the Whigs were the great exponents of that policy of over-government which the Nonconformist so much deplored.

Aristocracy sought to delude the people into acquiescence by granting them the forms of representation, but feudalism was democracy's "unkind step mother," desiring to keep it weak. The Reform Act was one stage in the struggle between the two, one rising to manhood and strength, the other "now withered into senility." A revival of old customs and

1. ibid., 14 July 1841 p. 249, 23 March 1842 p. 185, 28 September 1842 p. 656, 28 June 1848 p. 475.

attitudes had thwarted democracy's search for a House "that would understand its wants." There was much talk, "but no relief, no removal of galling, starving restrictions." Instead Parliament gave "cold iron and brickwalls - good police establishments and triple-guarded union-houses." The Act was a mere "barmecide."[1]

Amongst the people, Miall sensed a growing intelligence. Middle class knowledge was spreading to the workers, the arguments of the League were applied to every unjust tax, and all deplored the "twaddle" spoken in the Commons on political economy, exposing the appalling ignorance of Members. Men of all classes were beginning to appreciate that, in the past, whilst aristocracy had "uniformly cultivated the arts of destruction," "commerce and the arts of production" had sprung from the people. They comprehended that the "eight hundred millions of aristocratic debt, to the payment of which their thews and sinews have been mortgaged even before they were born," the game laws, corn laws, "wilful trespass-laws, and the tread-wheel rupturing laws," religious persecution, and many other evils were the result of class legislation, "the great MONSTER MONOPOLY."[2]

Growing in political wisdom, popular patience did not imply indifference or apathy. Distrustful of either party, once the universal crash, an inevitable consequence of "vicious, selfish, aristocratic legislation," came, they would demand the reorganisation of society, and all its institutions. "Conventional privileges" would be abolished, monopolies of legislation, of religion, of food, would be terminated, only those institutions based "on truth and

1. ibid., 21 April 1841 p. 24.
2. ibid., 28 April 1841 p. 41, 11 August 1841 p. 314.

justice" being allowed to survive this searching examination. Writing in 1841, Miall feared that the admirable calm of the people, and the moderation of their best leaders, would break if there was a bad harvest or a financial collapse before the winter. "Society will ..... have reached such a state of inflammability, that the slightest spark struck out from the collision of parties will produce an explosion." The responsibility for a situation, when Britain could be compared with France on the eve of the Revolution, lay with the class legislators; these were "the real revolutionaries."[1]

At this critical juncture in the nation's history, the middle classes held the key. By placing themselves at its head, they could guide the developing popular movement into peaceful and constructive channels, or, by allying with aristocracy, they might delay the final catastrophe, though aggravating its intensity. Miall despised the middle class reverence for aristocracy, but he hoped that as a consequence of the overwhelming defeat inflicted on them at the general election, they would "unlearn all the fond and foolish notions they entertain of whig statesmanship and patriotism, and all the contemptuous and unfeeling ones they have of late indulged in reference to our industrious population." The latter had successfully emancipated themselves from the "slave spirit," but it still pervaded the middle ranks of society, which were losing their remaining influence over the lower orders, who were becoming increasingly alienated from their natural leaders. At the beginning of 1842 Miall outlined the choice that lay before the middle classes.

..... We must shortly decide for the

1. ibid., 14 April 1841 pp. 9-10, 7 July 1841 pp. 232-3, 11 August 1841 p. 312, 25 August 1841 pp. 346-7 15 September 1841 p. 392.

> aristocracy or the people. If we have the first, we are certain of national decay, and we expose ourselves to the chance, neither improbable nor remote, of national convulsion. If we choose the last, we shall get rid of the restrictions which now threaten us with destruction, and command the best possible position for guaranteeing the sacredness of property. The oligarchy must fall. It is with us at the present moment to determine whether it should fall by peaceful or by violent means. By uniting ourselves with the labouring classes, we may guide them - by standing aloof from them, we leave them under the control of any demagogue who may aspire to place himself at their head.

It was essential for "the middle and poorer classes to shake hands," but Miall doubted whether even starvation would drive the latter into an alliance on middle class terms. Corn law repeal was the middle class objective; they could not reasonably expect an aristocratic legislature to concede this; the people sought their political rights. By making this demand the bond of their union, the middle classes would reconcile their fellows, would create an irresistable force that "might dictate terms to any House of Commons."[1]

On 13 October 1841 Miall commenced a series of articles in "an attempt, honest however feeble, to bring about a better understanding between the middle and the labouring classes." A dispassionate effort "to dispel misconceptions, to conciliate mutual good-will, to smooth down all asperity of feeling, to dissipate groundless fears" would not, he believed, be altogether in vain. Reconciliation, he began, could only be based on a "full, unreserved and cheerful concession to the labouring classes, of the electoral franchise." A barrier of misapprehensions and fears surrounded this subject, but this disagreement was"unnatural." Working class violence had been "a terrible mistake, a great crime,"

1. ibid., 14 July 1841 p. 248, 22 September 1841 p. 410, 6 October 1841 pp. 441-2, 19 January 1842 pp.40-1.

but there were extenuating circumstances, and middle class censure had been over severe, ignoring the long and patient sufferings of the poor. That the demand was reasonable was the vital factor, not the means by which it was promoted.

Miall regarded the suffrage as a natural right, to which the unenfranchised ought to be admitted. In their exclusion, might had triumphed over right, and, by adopting false principles, the middle classes were responsible for this injustice. Dominating the electorate, they could effect the essential change. Middle class consciences were too easily salved by an attribution of the ills of the working class to aristocratic selfishness, forgetting that aristocratic power depended on middle class votes.

> ..... The labouring classes are deprived of justice not so much by those whose interest it is to wrong them. ..... as by those who possess the power to right them, but refuse to exert that power. .....

Morally there was no case for withholding the franchise, indeed, the middle classes had a moral duty to repair past ommissions. Equally, limitation could not be justified on grounds of expediency, for the suffrage was "a right to which their exists an equitable title." Reparation of this wrong would benefit the middle class, the working classes providing "the additional aid necessary to compel the surrender of the common foe."

> ..... We think that so long as they remain where they are, they cannot succeed - we are sure they ought not to succeed - and we venture to assure them, that men anxious to overtake justice for themselves, are never more impeded, than when they refuse to lay aside their own injustice to others.

Complete suffrage was Miall's slogan - meaning the extension of the suffrage to every mature male, untainted by crime, of sound mind, not dependent on the State for

subsistence, and able to prove a six months residence qualification. Infinitely preferable to a compromise like household suffrage, it would not lower the electoral body "in intelligence or respectability," it was based "on the principle that rights belong to man and not to property," and it would be a final settlement, healing "the unhappy divisions at present rending society in twain."

Moral gains would flow from this concession. No longer feeling socially inferior, the working class would seek education, acquiring a new self respect, a new dignity, a new morality, even ceasing to view religion as a weapon of the oppressors. More expediently, it would remove the inducements to physical violence, consolidating the enlightened middle class leadership of the reform movement, destroying the influence of "mere demagogues." Finally, the series closed with three articles dismissing common objections to suffrage extension - the ignorance of the working class, their supposed susceptibility to bribery, and their alleged revolutionary designs.[1]

Meanwhile, Joseph Sturge, suspicious of League waverings over the fixed duty issue, had written to Cobden seeking a guarantee that complete abolition would not be abandoned. Having decided that it was hopeless to expect justice for the working class from the present House of Commons, he promised, if the assurance was not forthcoming, to donate the remaining £100 of the £200 reserved for League funds, to an association,

> ..... whose object is by peaceable and

1. ibid., 13 October 1841 pp. 456-7, 20 October 1841 pp. 472-3, 27 October 1841 p. 489, 3 November 1841 p. 505, 10 November 1841 pp. 520-1, 17 November 1841 p. 536, 24 November 1841 pp. 552-3, 1 December 1841 p. 509.

> christian means to secure such representation of the people as the golden rule of "doing to others as we would they do unto us" entitles them to claim. 1

Miall acknowledged Sturge's doubts, and reiterated his arguments in favour of organic reform. Once carried, the parliamentary deadlock would be broken, and the measures necessary to create "a great, a prosperous, and a happy nation" might be put into effect. At the general election the country had patently been "put up for sale and knocked down to the tories," and the disgraceful scenes witnessed then, amply justified reform.[2]

On the 17 November the Council of the League was due to meet in Manchester. The Nonconformist reviewed the future of that body, advising the council members that they were at "the very crisis of the conflict," and that, by bold decisions, they might obtain "the enthusiastic support of the labouring millions" for their cause. "Parliamentary pottering" would excite nothing but contempt; now, "the boldest course has become the wisest."

> ..... Now for one master-mind and lion-heart to take the lead - and seizing upon the banner of COMPLETE SUFFRAGE to summon all classes to one mighty effort for freedom! The moment is auspicious - the movement will elicit acclamation from the most unexpected quarters - thousands of waverers will become decided - vast masses of now buried and neglected opinion would quicken into activity - a junction would be effected between the now divided sections of society - and this nation would send up to heaven a united shout of joy such as would shake the aristocracy with utter dismay. 3

At the meeting's end, Sturge invited all interested in organic reform to attend a separate conference. Many did

1. Richard, H.: Memoirs of Joseph Sturge, (London, 1864), p. 292.
2. N., 6 October 1841 pp. 435, 441-2, 13 October 1841 p. 458, 10 November 1841 p. 520.
3. ibid., 17 November 1841 p. 536.

so, and it became apparent that there was a willingness to launch a new reform movement provided it was kept distinct from the League. Sturge and William Sharman Crawford, radical M.P. for Rochdale, were deputed to draft a declaration which the delegates would sign if they approved of its contents, issuing it with a general invitation for signatures. Published in mid-December, the Declaration immediately became a new rallying ground for the disillusioned middle class reformers. These events were "the first flush of dawn after a long political night."[1]

Miall and Sturge had moved independently to the same conclusion. Some contact between the two was inevitable, and the Birmingham Quaker had Miall's articles on class reconciliation published in pamphlet form, recommending them "to the candid and impartial consideration of those who wish to be guided in their political, as well as religious conduct, by the precepts of the gospel." At the beginning of 1842 Sturge adopted the Nonconformist as the organ of the new movement, a relationship formalised by the General Committee of the National Complete Suffrage Union five months later, Miall hastening to assure readers that editorial independence would not be infringed by the arrangement.[2]

Cobden, who had no intention of the League being diverted from its primary object, suspected that the Nonconformist was "Joseph's feeler," regretting this lapse from "its practical character by turning aside from questions of commercial reform, which it advocates ably, to the impracti-

1. ibid., 24 November 1841 p. 552. Richard, H.: op. cit., pp. 301-2. Hovell, M.: The Chartist Movement, (London, Manchester, 1925) deals with the complete suffrage movement, pp. 240-50.
2. Reconciliation between the Middle and Working Classes, "Introduction." N., 5 January 1842 p. 3, 25 May 1842 p. 359, 1 June 1842, p. 386.

cable (at present) theories of the suffrage." Bright put him right.

> ..... As to the Nonconformist, thou art mistaken in fancying J.Sturge has influenced it. J.Sturge did not subscribe to it, and I believe has no hand in it. Miall writes his own mind I know. 1

The movement flourished, the Manchester Declaration being signed at meetings all over the country; a provisional committee, to co-operate with similar bodies in other towns, was formed at Birmingham. Union was to be based on the principle that the suffrage was the right of every sane, non-criminal, adult male; minor points would be settled once the strength of the movement had been assessed, and a delegate conference summoned. By February the committee was recommending the promotion of a national memorial, to be presented to the Queen at the time of Crawford's organic reform motion, and that the delegate conference be held in Birmingham to coincide with these events. Arthur Albright, the committee's secretary was able to give an optimistic report to an enthusiastic meeting in the town, whilst the local complete suffrage canvass obtained 16,000 signatures, including those of 4,000 electors. In its third circular, the committee called for simultaneous meetings of signatories to the Declaration or the Memorial, on Easter Monday, to elect conference delegates, who, it was hoped, would settle the precise details of the measure to be submitted to Parliament.[2]

Miall welcomed this activity, condemning those who, like William Biggs with his Midland Counties Charter, attempted to launch other reconciliation movements.[3] The events of

1. Trevelyan, G.M.: The Life of John Bright, (London, 1913), pp. 66-7.
2. N., 2 February 1842 pp. 69-70, 23 February 1842 pp. 120, 123, 2 March 1842 pp. 139-40, 9 March 1842 p. 155.
3. ibid., 5 January 1842 p. 9.

the parliamentary session seemed to vindicate all his predictions. Surely, he wrote, Peel's sliding scale proposal "will open the eyes of the dullest sighted, as to the futility of all efforts to wring from the oppressors a remedy for oppression." Again, he asked, "whether the course we have proposed..... we have advocated unflinchingly for months past, be not the only feasible one which remains open to sincere patriots?" A nation wide series of simultaneous meetings, he suggested, to give "a full and unmistakeable expression of a nation's will," would attract the vast majority of working men, and inflict "a staggering blow upon our present oppressors, from the effects of which it would be impossible for them to recover." Wisely pursued, he predicted, this movement might secure "for ourselves and our countrymen, A FREE, FULL, AND FAIR REPRESENTATION," within a year. To safeguard their own interests, he stressed yet again, the middle classes had no real alternative but to turn to principle, and appeal to the people.[1]

Local complete suffrage associations were advised to confine themselves to one objective, this being a firmer basis for an agitation than the mingling of a number of related issues, the great defect of the People's Charter. To harmonise means and ends, working men should be given a full share in the management of these associations, whilst "trading politicians, ever foremost when a cause is popular, should not be placed in positions of prominence." Electors ought to be canvassed, and candidates selected for the next election; complete suffrage could only be achieved if the constituencies were won over. As Easter approached, there

1. ibid., 16 February 1842 pp. 104-5, 23 February 1842 pp. 120-1.

were reminders of the aims of the meetings, and counsel as to the temper both classes should adopt.[1] There was fulsome praise for the doings of the provisional committee, the Nonconformist especially welcoming the decision to hold the delegate conference in Birmingham, and not in London.

> ..... Its movements will in consequence be more free, less liable to be swamped by trading politicians, and if carefully reported, more influential, than if held in the metropolis....

By March, it forecast that the question would soon become "a national one, and all classes of honest reformers will soon swell its ranks."[2]

Working class reaction was crucial to the movement's future. It soon became apparent that it would not be easy to steer them onto a new course, divorced from the Charter. William Lovett told a meeting of complete suffragists in London on 11 February, of his willingness to join any union of the classes based on the Charter, and to abandon any points that were proved to be "non-essential," but, he reminded them, details were important, and could not be neglected. At the great Birmingham meeting Sturge read a letter from Lovett, in which, while advising all Chartists to support the memorial to the Queen, he stated his own reluctance to associate with a movement adopting the indefinite complete suffrage programme. The hostile attitude of the Northern Star, edited by Feargus O'Connor, made the position of moderates like Lovett, ready to reach some accomodation with Sturge, more difficult.

Miall himself approved of the principles embodied in the Charter, "without a single exception." He was, however, critical of its blending matters of principle with "matters

1. ibid., 23 February 1842 pp. 121-2, 16 March 1842 p. 169.
2. ibid., 2 March 1842 p. 136, 9 March 1842 p. 152.

of opinion." At the same London meeting addressed by Lovett, Miall remarked that of the six points, only the first was a right, though it "carried within it the germ of all the rest." Indeed, because of its merging of "so many and such various political ingredients" the Charter was "a serious mistake." Concentration on the suffrage issue alone would allow moral arguments to be deployed which could not be evaded, but the Charter contained too many appendages "behind which people run to hide their dislike of the great principle of equal political rights."[1]

At the end of 1841 Miall reminded the working class that union would depend on concession from both sides, suggesting that they would "act most unwisely, and we may add overbearingly, to stickle for all the minor matters which it may seem expedient to promote." Lovett's speech gave ground for optimism, the Nonconformist anticipating that the delegate conference would satisfy working men of the "earnest sincerity of the 'new move.'" In articles designed for its working class readers, the Nonconformist argued that union was in the interest of both parties. Recognising this, the middle classes were ready to make concessions, and by adopting complete suffrage had acknowledged the basic principle of the Charter, virtually accepting, in consequence, the remaining five points. Gratification of class feelings would "peril the liberty and future prosperity of a vast empire upon matters of trivial significance." Union was essential, and the middle classes should not be rebuffed "by charges of selfishness and insincerity," nor should the working classes act on "the dictation of any individual, be his

1. *ibid.*, 24 November 1841 p. 552, 5 January 1842 p. 9, 16 February 1842 pp. 108-9.

influence what it may." They had to examine the scheme on its own merits, not follow the whim of misguided leaders.[1]

Miall was not disturbed by the selection of several Chartists as delegates to attend the conference, expressing his own willingness to accept the six points as the basis of the new movement if such was the decision of the assembly. Since, however, only a united people might grapple successfully with the aristocractic establishment he trusted, that factious proceedings would be avoided, that there would be no "inflexible adhesion to technicalities and detail."[2]

A very mixed company gathered in Birmingham for the meeting. Bright was the most prominent Leaguer present; there were anti-O'Connor Chartists like Lovett, Vincent, O'Brien and Lowery; Miall, John Childs and Mursell represented radical Nonconformity. Crawford was the only M.P. to attend. Miall took a leading part in the proceedings, moving the opening resolution on class legislation and intervening several times in the debates, often at critical junctures to prevent disruption. Most of the middle class delegates agreed with the six points, and there was no difficulty as these were individually laid before them in separate resolutions. There was some dispute over annual parliaments, but Miall's compromise resolution, postponing a decision until after the first parliament elected on complete suffrage principles had met, was unnecessary. Unfortunately, though accepting the substance of the Charter, delegates would not adopt its name. Lovett, during the morning session on 7 April, moved that the Charter be discussed at a future conference amongst other reform schemes, and that, if approved, it

1. ibid., 24 November 1841 p. 552, 16 February 1842 p. 104, 23 March 1842 pp. 184-5, 30 March 1842 pp.200-1.
2. ibid., 6 April 1842 pp. 216-7.

should be taken as the movement's basis. He argued that since the Charter meant too much to the working class to be discarded, it was the only possible bond of union. Miall agreed to second him, justifying himself by indicating the difference between assenting to consider the Charter, and adopting it as a standard, which he would have opposed. Nevertheless, he doubted the wisdom of raising the issue in this way, hoping that a modified resolution would prove acceptable. If the working class delegates

> ..... would have consented to have united on great principles, which invoke in them considerations of truth and justice only, leaving matters of detail to be amicably arranged hereafter ..... bringing forward nothing which has on it the stamp or badge of party, I think they would have carried forward the great objects they have at heart much more rapidly, and to a much more successful issue, than can now be expected. (hear, hear, and cheers) .....

The debate was acrimonious, Lovett at length consenting to move a less provocative amendment. Bright was amongst the critics from the floor, whilst Sturge, in the chair, expressed his regret that a matter of detail had been forced on the meeting although all the essential points had been conceded. Before breaking up, the delegates set up a new organisation, the National Complete Suffrage Union, with its executive committee sitting in Birmingham.[1]

Miall enthused at the conference's successful outcome, gratified that one of his "primary objects," the reconciliation of the classes, had been achieved. Working class attitudes were the only blemish. Their reluctance to trust middle class sincerity, exemplified by their needless pressing of the points of the Charter in their entirety, could only

1. Report of the Proceedings of the Conference of Delegates of the Middle and Working Classes held at Birmingham, April 5, 1842, and the three following days. (London, 1842).

delay the fulfilment of the common objectives. Despite regretting some of the conference decisions, the Nonconformist admired the wisdom with which concessions had been made, promising to use its influence to secure their widespread adoption, by the middle classes to preserve the greater cause of national union against class legislation. Compromise on minor matters was a small price to pay for a substantial good.[1]

Opponents of the movement seized on the conference's cession of the six points as vindication of their allegations that the Sturgeites were crypto-Chartists. Amongst the most vocal Congregationalist critics of the new move were the Baineses, through the Leeds Mercury, "par excellence," in Miall's opinion, "the representative of whiggery". Sardonically, he wrote of a "new alliance - the Northern Star and the Leeds Mercury hand in hand", explaining that both sensed the undermining of their influence as "the reign of expediency" came to an end, and as they saw "the evident sincerity and truthful earnestness of the parties engaged in the work",

> ..... that the days of time-serving and truckling on the one hand, and of bluster and violence on the other, are over - that the principles adopted at the conference are broad enough to comprehend the virtuous portion of both classes of reformers - and that the union they have laboured to prevent, but which men in earnest to effect have succeeded in bringing about, will leave them the mere raveling of worn and political sections; or weave them, spite of their wishes, into the common tissue. This accounts for their wrath. ..... [2]

The Nonconformist had to rebuff the Mercury's contention that the suffrage was not a natural right, but an "artificial

1. N., 13 April 1842 pp. 232-3, 20 April 1842 p. 256, 18 May 1842 pp. 334-5.
2. ibid., 12 January 1842 pp. 17-18, 9 March 1842 p. 152, 20 April 1842 p. 257.

contrivance", created by society to secure good government; had to counter Edward Baines jnr.'s statistical demonstration that a House of Commons elected on complete suffrage principles would be controlled by the landlords, and would vote for the maintenance of the corn laws. After the conference, the Mercury noted that the causes of Chartism and complete suffrage were amalgamated, going "upon all fours', or rather upon all sixes, - for Complete Suffrage embraces the whole 'Six Points' ..... without a shadow of variance". "Extravagance of folly", was the phrase used to describe the conference's recommendation that complete suffragists should not vote for Members, seeking re-election, who had opposed Crawford's motion - this would perpetuate a Tory majority. The principles of the Union, concluded the Mercury, resurrecting all the middle class revolutionary bogies, "are those of the most pure and perfect Democracy the world ever saw," utterly incompatible with the existence of monarchy or aristocracy.

> ..... Nay more, these principles would not only lead, in England, as they did fifty years since in France, to the destruction of the Monarchy and the Aristocracy, but they would be pushed to the distribution of the great properties, which would be found to be the great practical disturbers of political equity.

Dismal forebodings greeted the debate on Crawford's motion. In combination, equal electoral districts and complete suffrage would take from "the towns the superior share which the Constitution gives them in the representation," transferring it to agricultural and semi-agricultural areas dominated by the landlords. Conversely, in time of crisis, whipped up by Chartist demagogues, a mass electorate might return a working man's parliament.

There can be no safety in giving the suffrage

> out of the hands of the educated classes into the hands of the uneducated, and swamping the present constituencies by introducing three times their number of operatives.....

Readers were warned in September that Sturge's "high moral character is no guarantee whatever of the soundness of his opinions".[1]

Despite Sturge's patent appeal to the religious world, the Patriot was equally unsympathetic to the new movement. This was not surprising, for during the thirties that journal had advocated a mere reform of the registration machinery created by the 1832 Act coupled with the introduction of the secret ballot.[2] Organic reform played no part in these schemes, and the Chartist movement was hailed as an "enormous evil", as "an error closely connected with irreligious feeling", with which "Evanglical Protestantism must grapple". Demands for these reforms were "a very indirect and roundabout way of obtaining reforms which the well-directed force of public opinion will in due time achieve without them". A symptom of the deeper ills of society, they would die if the grievances of the poor were redressed. The age needed not a new reform party, but a "philanthropic party", which, together with the purification of the existing constituency and electoral proceedings, would seek to alleviate the pressures on the working classes by repealing the corn laws, amending the poor laws, abolishing church rate, purging the magistracy, and curbing the "dangerous powers of the new State police". Once Tory exploitation of the registration, and corruption of the venal electors ceased,

1. ibid., 2 March 1842 pp. 136-7, 9 March 1842 pp. 152-3, 16 March 1842 pp. 168-9. L.M., 19, 26 February, 3 March, 16, 30 April, 29 September 1842.
2. P., 31 August 1837 p. 556, 2 November 1837 p. 700, 23 November 1837 pp. 748-9, 4 December 1837 p. 772, 29 October 1838 p. 700, 25 March 1839 p. 186, 1 April 1839 p. 204, 27 August 1840 p. 596.

such a party would develop naturally, without any recourse to suffrage extension.[1] Like the Mercury, the Patriot feared that universal suffrage would take all electoral power "out of the hands of the more intelligent and independent classes", leaving them overwhelmed by the easily led masses, or by a servile tenantry. This, the working class would find, was not in their interest, and Tory incitement and complicity in a movement that would destroy middle class influence, paving the way "for a restoration of feudal and sacerdotal ascendancy", was suspected.[2]

Replying to Miall, Conder asserted that universal suffrage was "based upon fallacious notions of political freedom and personal right". The vote was not a natural, but a "political right", to be exercised for the good of the community, society being the judge of whom it might safely and advantageously be entrusted to. Willing to support any scheme of suffrage extension which would "give us the chance of honest and intelligent constituencies", the Patriot, perceiving no plan which would commend itself "to the good sense of all classes of sincere Reformers", felt it best to work for the improvement of the existing electoral machinery. By May 1842, however, Conder was describing suffrage extension as the only effective counter to the spread of election bribery, the Patriot declaring at the end of June, "an extension of the Suffrage must take place". In the early autumn, it had become "a matter of duty and political necessity" to settle that dissatisfaction with the constitu-

1. ibid., 9 August 1838 p. 516, 27 September 1838 p. 628, 27 August 1840 p. 596, 15 November 1841 p. 764, 4 May 1842 p. 288,
2. ibid., 8 October 1838 p. 652, 26 November 1838 p. 764, 3 December 1838 p. 780, 7 March 1839 p. 148, 19 August 1839 p. 548, 14 November 1839 p. 748, 21 November 1839 p. 764.

tion which fed both Chartism and complete suffragism. The organ of the evangelical Dissenters was not prepared, however, to advance beyond a moderate extension, proposing a general franchise rate, payable at registration, together with educational, residential and moral qualifications. Thomas Blackburn's blueprint for a uniform £10 householder franchise in borough and country, and a simplified registration procedure, won favourable comments. Unlikely to satisfy the complete suffragists, it was "complete enough for every practical purpose," would not undermine "the preponderating influence of the middle classes", would not "be fatal to the influence of the best and most religious portion of the community".[1]

The Patriot regarded repeal of the corn laws as a more pressing issue, and, since it would have to be extorted from the sitting House, or from its successor, elected by the same constituency, victory here would open the door to constitutional reform. Miall's opposite viewpoint was not subscribed to, and complete suffragists were warned that, by teaching the "suffering Operatives, that Universal Suffrage would be a grand panacea for all their wrongs and woes", they were provoking them to physical violence. They would not adopt Quaker principles because the new leader professed them.[2]

Following its scale to Price, the Eclectic became increasingly more radical. In August 1837 a contributor outlining the necessity for remedying the defects of the

1. ibid., 4 November 1841 p. 740, 22 November 1841 p. 780, 13 January 1842 p. 28, 25 April 1842 p. 260, 12 May 1842 p. 316, 23 June 1842 p. 428, 1 September 1842 p. 588, 5 September 1842 p. 596, 3 October 1842 p. 661. Blackburn, T.: Thoughts on the Electoral System, (Liverpool, 1841).
2. P. 28 February 1842 p. 132, 18 April 1842 pp. 244-5.

Reform Act proposed a four point plan - extension of the suffrage, shorter parliaments, introduction of the ballot, and reform of the Lords. Denying the charges of political ignorance and susceptibility to influence made against the working class, the Eclectic's programme had crystallised into two demands by the end of 1839. Household suffrage and the ballot would enable "the best portion of our operatives to have a voice in the legislature".[1]

To the gratification of the provisional committee an article entitled "Chartism" appeared in the April, 1842, number of the periodical, designed to strip the Charter of "those fallacies which have hitherto made it a bugbear to a large and respectable section of society". All points, except annual parliaments, were endorsed, whilst the Nonconformist articles on reconciliation were commended to readers as "one of the most purely philosophical dissertations which has ever come before us on the subject", deserving and demanding, "the attentive perusal of every man who is interested ..... in the momentous questions which at this solemn crisis are appealing to the universal intellect and heart of the empire". Common objections to suffrage extension were dealt with, the Eclectic placing itself in the complete suffrage camp. In the January edition for 1843 Miall himself contributed an article on the "Rise and progress of the Complete Suffrage Movement".[2]

Nevertheless the Eclectic did not sustain Miall's criticisms of the Anti-Corn Law League's policies, deprecating the Nonconformist's "inopportune censure" because,

1. E.R., 4s., vol. II, 1837, pp. 212-3; vol. III, 1838, pp. 212-3; vol. VI, 1839, p. 602.
2. ibid., 4s., vol. XI, 1842, pp. 429-451; vol. XIII, 1843, pp. 90-116. Richard, H.: Memoirs of Joseph Sturge, p. 304.

> ..... The repeal of the Corn Law would be an immediate benefit, and on that account claims the precedence; ..... though the enlargement of the suffrage would secure the repeal of the food taxes, the successes would be more remote, and the terrific elements of hunger and despair may throw the battle into unexpected forms of disorder in which the master grievance might be forgotten. .....

To transform the League into a "political club", as the Nonconformist advocated, would be a mistake, for its power depended on "its strictly commercial and humane character". This lost, some members would retire, the sympathy of the religious would be sacrificed, and the middle classes, opposed to suffrage extension, would become apathetic or even avowedly hostile.[1]

During the summer and autumn of 1842 the Complete Suffrage Union seemed to make steady progress. Its council met weekly in Birmingham, the country was divided into ten areas for administrative purposes, and unpaid lecturers were appointed, Henry Vincent beginning his peregrinations on behalf of the cause. More local associations sprang up, and, in the autumn, Sturge toured the North of England and Southern Scotland, culminating in a great banquet in honour of Crawford at Edinburgh. Sturge, Vincent and George Thompson all unsuccessfully contested elections as complete suffragists at Nottingham, Ipswich and Southampton respectively. The movement's leader achieved most, winning 1801 votes in a notoriously corrupt borough, without using any improper influence. Local associations sent exhortory addresses to the Nottingham electors, the executive committee urged them to stick to principle, and O'Connor was amongst the Chartist leaders who descended on the borough to assist in his campaign. The Nonconformist had high hopes of victory, enthusiastically

1. E.R., 4s., vol. XII, 1842, pp.225-6.

outlining the responsibilities and duties of the electors in its columns.

> ..... to Nottingham is assigned the honour and responsibility of rising up in virtuous indignation on behalf of oppressed and degraded Britain, and administering to the oligarchy which now tramples upon our rights and liberties, the first stern and decisive rebuke..... a bleeding and expiring state solemnly impose upon the electors..... the dread command, 'Falter not in the course which you have set out; resolve nobly to achieve what you have so worthily begun; spare no exertion; shrink from no sacrifice; your country's honour is bound up with your success.

Miall's defence of the alliance with O'Connor did not satisfy some, for whom it was a sufficient explanation of Sturge's defeat. The Patriot could not regret this, when he had appeared as "the adopted leader of the Chartists and the protege of O'CONNOR".[1]

Miall's contribution to the Union's summer campaign was a long series of articles, running from the end of April to the end of July, addressed "to the good sense, the impartial judgement, the patriotism, and the religious principle of the middle classes of the empire". These dealt with the need for organic reform, examined and dismissed other reform schemes, and attempted to remove the prejudices which prevented many of the middle classes from supporting the complete suffrage movement.[2] The disturbances in the industrial areas in August did not surprise the Nonconformist, which had warned the complacent that they slumbered "upon volcanic ground". Anticipating universal destruction and pillage, it prophesied,

> ..... Want will presently start up in

1. Richard, H.: op. cit., pp. 305-311. N., 4 May 1842 p. 287, 11 May 1842 pp. 311, 312, 313-4, 25 May 1842 pp. 357-8, 360, 361,8 June 1842 pp. 401, 402-3, 405, 27 July 1842 p. 507, 3 August 1842 p. 528, 10 August 1842 pp. 544, 545, 547-9. P. 8 August 1842 p. 532.
2. N., 27 April 1842 pp. 272-3, then weekly until 20 July 1842 pp. 496-7.

> ungovernable rage, and will sap asunder with giant strength the conventional bonds of social order. Alas! for the middle classes, when once the frenzy of despair shall have taken possession of the millions..... 1

This was in June, when bold action by the middle classes might still avert the cataclysm. This newspaper described the events of early August as "Insurrection", and, dismissing allegations of Chartist or League complicity, argued that the troubles were spontaneous, originating in the miseries and broodings of the people, and symptomatic of their alienation from the middle classes. Once again, the choice lay before this group - support the aristocracy, giving them the weapons to resist working class demands which would surely be turned against themselves, or, do justice to the people, thus assuring security for property, and the termination of all monopolies.[2]

In response to the crisis an extraordinary meeting of the executive committee of the Union adopted separate Addresses to the Queen, to the middle classes, and to the working class, and recommended the summoning of a September conference to finalise the bill Crawford was to introduce in the Commons in 1843. Complete suffragists were also advised to vote according to their principles in municipal elections, putting forward their own candidates. At the local polls in November 1842, this policy had some success, sixteen complete suffragists being returned in Birmingham, eight in Derby, five in Nottingham, and eight in Leeds.

This speedy reaction gratified the Nonconformist, which produced its own plans for future action. Regarding it as "utterly impracticable" to extract organic reform from the

1. ibid., 22 June 1842 pp. 432-3.
2. ibid., 17 August 1842 pp. 560-1, 24 August 1842 pp. 576-7, 31 August 1842 pp. 592-3.

sitting House, it called for a movement to win over electors in key constituencies, asserting that "the great battle with the oligarchy must be fought in the poll-booths at a general election". As a result of a long series of statistical calculations Miall demonstrated that the key to the nation's destiny was held by 80,000 electors in 137 smaller boroughs. Their names and addresses had to be obtained so that they could be plied with tracts and arguments. He did not view this as a hopeless task and, telling complete suffragists how to initiate such an agitation, counselled them to avoid all extremism which would only tend to harden the prejudices of men they had to conciliate. Rather, they had to "embody and employ" the discontent created by Government's repressive measures and the income tax.[1]

The Union's exclusive electoral policy did not meet the approval of the Patriot, which denounced the new "Test Act" of the Charter, accusing its leaders of intolerance and arrogance, and protested against the proscription of all reformers who were unable to adopt the complete suffrage principle. Such dogmatism merely prevented the discovery of an expedient and practical programme around which all could rally, and from which all might benefit.[2] Miall, however, could not compromise his principles. Alliance with household suffragists was incompatible with the complete suffrage principle, for the return of a House pledged to the former, would mean the return of one opposed to the latter. Their principles would be consigned "to oblivion for another generation". Electoral pacts with Whiggery to keep out Tory

1. ibid., 31 August 1842 p. 592, 7 September 1842 pp. 624-5, 21 September 1842 pp. 641, 643, 5 October 1842 p. 673.
2. P., 26 September 1842 p. 644, 29 September 1842 pp. 652-3, 6 Ocober 1842 p. 668.

candidates were impossible; enough had been sacrificed for their political advancement already, and, as the smaller body, the Whigs ought to give way.

> ..... They hold that property, we that persons, should be represented. In order to a coalition the one principle or the other must be given up - for there is no middle ground upon which we can meet. What, then, is our obvious policy? to throw away our vantage ground at the request of a party? or to hoist our flag, bearing upon it the motto, "No compromise! No surrender"?.

There was no place for expediency and compromise in the Nonconformist's world, political of religious.[1]

Initially critical of the holding of a conference as early as September, the Nonconformist viewed its postponement to December as "most judicious". This assembly would act as a safety valve to pacify the people, not, as the Leeds Mercury alleged, exacerbating an already unstable situation. Confident that the movement "contains within it the promise of ultimate success", its organ envisaged the eyes of all "sound-hearted reformers" turning to the conference with a new hope, predicting an attendance "calculated to secure the confidence of the intelligent and the patriotic of all classes.....".[2] Such optimism was misplaced, and unrealistic, as events soon demonstrated.

The executive council had advised that the conference delegates, equally representative of the working and middle classes, should be chosen at joint meetings. This policy was forcibly altered in mid-November when a Chartist dominated public meeting in Birmingham rejected all but two candidates on the official list, including O'Connor amongst their

1. N., 14 September 1842 p. 625, 28 September 1842 pp. 656-7, 5 October 1842 pp. 672-3, 12 October 1842 pp. 688-9.
2. ibid., 24 August 1842 p. 576, 14 September 1842 pp. 624-5, 5 October 1842 p. 674.

elected delegates. Other examples of Chartist intransigence soon followed elsewhere, and the council reluctantly authorised the selections of representatives by separate class meetings in places where united action seemed impossible.

These events shocked Miall, who sorrowfully anticipated that a small but determined minority could disrupt the conference. If O'Connor did triumph, working class readers were reminded, the unenfranchised would lose most, the principles of the Charter being dragged into deeper disrepute. Their receipt of political rights would be delayed, middle class prejudices confirmed, and the people left to the leadership of selfish demagogues. They could only expect to obtain these rights with the aid of the electorate; seeking to unite both parties, the Complete Suffrage Union had set the question in a frame of christian and philanthropic principles, securing a hearing for truth in quarters from whence it had previously been repelled. Miall promised that the Union would never abandon working class interests, but, whilst having "no serious misgivings as to the result", prepared for all eventualities by informing critics of the movement that its present crisis cast no reflection on the principles it had adopted. If the conference was broken up, the complete suffragists had only to retire "upon their own principles and organisation", and calmly await "the moment when the mists of delusion shall be cleared up, the designs of selfish ambition ..... be exposed to every eye, and the brief madness of party shall have spent its whole force". As the week of the convention approached, The Nonconformist became increasingly more confident that the Chartist victories in the country were insufficient to disrupt its work. Each class had a great opportunity to demonstrate its sincerity,

and to further the essential task of conciliating middle class electors.[1]

All hope of an immediate consolidation of the alliance between working and middle class reformers was dashed at the ensuing meeting. It opened inauspiciously with a desultory discussion of the rights of irregularly elected delegates to sit, then, at the evening session of 27 December, Thomas Beggs, from Nottingham, moved, "That the bill to be presented by the Council of the National Complete Suffrage Union be taken as the basis of discussion". Lovett at once pointed out that he had modified his April resolutions on the understanding that the Charter would be examined at any future gathering, threatening to move its adoption as a basis for discussion as an amendment, if the council were not disposed to allow this. This he did the next day, and after a long and acrimonious debate Beggs' resolution was defeated by 99 votes with 87 abstentions. Sturge resigned the chair, and on the 29th a minority conference of about 90 met at Moore's Temperance Hotel, proclaiming themselves to be the true inheritors of the original mandate. Miall had supported the official motion, viewing the debate as one to decide party supremacy, not truth. Sturge argued that the Charter could never form the basis for a united movement since it was anathema to the middle classes.[2]

Only regretting that "Mr. STURGE, Mr. MORGAN, the Rev. Mr. SPENCER, and other philanthropists, should have been so far misled as to lead on such a movement", the Leeds Mercury welcomed its collapse,

1. ibid., 23 November 1842 pp. 784-5, 30 November 1842 pp. 800-1, 7 December 1842 pp. 816-7, 14 December 1842 pp. 832-3, 21 December 1842 pp. 848-9.
2. ibid., 31 December 1842 pp. 873-80, 4 January 1843 pp. 3-6. Richard, H.: op. cit., pp. 317-8.

> ..... because its object was to promote the immediate adoption of measures altogether unsuited to the present state of morals, intelligence, and political virtue in England..... 1

An affronted Sturge was forced to reply to the Patriot's strictures on his political career in the Nonconformist, and that journal's invective at the expense of its dissenting rival reached new heights. Conder stigmatised Sturge's activities as "one great mistake". Blunderingly, he had assumed that the complete suffrage movement could be carried in the country as the anti-slavery agitation had been; arrogantly, he had demanded the end of all discussion, and an unquestioning acceptance of "the STURGE Purge", including the Chartist six points. He had achieved nothing, his action merely impeding the efforts of the Anti-Corn Law League, correspondents who wrote in defence of Sturge being reminded that corn law repeal took precedence over suffrage extension.[2]

Though the disasters of December had destroyed the raison d'étre of the National Complete Suffrage Union it did not collapse immediately. Crawford moved its bill in the Commons during 1843; Vincent and others continued to lecture on its behalf; whilst the council met weekly issuing appropriate addresses at political crises. In 1844 it backed Crawford's scheme to refuse the Government supplies until grievances were redressed, Sturge and others touring the country to raise support for the plan. It failed, a London conference coinciding with the opening of Parliament was broken up by Chartists, and, later in the year, Sturge was overwhelmingly defeated in a Birmingham by-election. These events seem to have discouraged the dwindling number of

1. L.M., 31 December 1842, 7 January 1843.
2. N., 22 February 1843 p. 123, 1 March 1843 p. 136. P., 5 January 1843 p. 12, 9 February 1843 p. 93, 20 February 1843 p. 117, 27 February 1843 p. 133.

activists, reports of council meetings appearing more and more infrequently in the Nonconformist, finally ceasing early in 1845. In London the Metropolitan Complete Suffrage Association tried to keep the spark alive in a small way.

Defeat the conference may have been, but the Nonconformist dressed it up as a triumph. An attempt to impose "'an Act of Uniformity'" on the movement had been overcome, and, in the process, nothing had been lost save an embarrassing alliance. Resistance was justified for the Charter did not recommend itself to universal adoption. Holding fast to principle, the complete suffragists had succeeded in preventing "the imposition of a creed which had gathered around it the elements of disorder, bigotry, and violence, sufficient to tarnish the reputation, and to conceal the intrinsic merits of the most righteous cause". Claiming to have opposed negotiations with the Chartist leaders from the beginning, the Nonconformist welcomed the termination of "a premature attempt at union",

> ..... throwing off, we trust for ever, a vast mass of worthlessness, of narrowminded bigotry, of selfishness and vanity, of unblushing profligacy, and avowed infidelity..... We have now bright hopes of the steady progress of the good cause. Truth has, at last, worked itself clear of the dregs of faction; and the complete suffrage movement, henceforth unburdened by agitators, will step forward with more elasticity, with fresher and clearer spirits, and with more cheerful moral energy than at any former period.

The true work of the complete suffragists, the conversion of middle class electors, would have been hindered by union with the Chartists. Miall had already referred to their duty to organise the constituencies, now he suggested that a wise and sincere constituency agitation would be the best way to reach class unity. Local associations were urged to purge themselves of undesirable elements, using support for the

minority conference as a test. A constructive movement in preparation for the next general election might then be begun - canvassing for the bill, revision of the register, the publication and distribution of tracts. The sooner this was done, the sooner would the masses "throw their weight into the scale, and without any formality of reconciliation, the two classes will become one".[1]

As the year passed by, this confidence increased. The continuing theme was that of electoral readiness, and Miall, who had never expected progress through Parliament, was not disconcerted by the smallness of the minority on Crawford's motion. Vincent's narrow defeat at Tavistock, and Gisbourne's return in Nottingham, where the complete suffragists were well organised, provided more ammunition for his argument. After the latter sucess, he advised that every vacancy be contested, the debacle at Salisbury, where the organic reformers were "caught napping" merely reinforcing the contention that long term planning was essential. As the summer wore on, with Government apparently on the verge of collapse, and Whig principles no longer able to bring liberal electors out, the Nonconformist urged complete suffragists to take advantage of the political deadlock, of the growing disillusionment of all liberals with their leaders, by forming electoral clubs to direct a concentrated pressure on the constituencies. Many would be influenced by the recent attack "made by ..... educational bill on both civil and religious liberty".[2]

By the autumn the Nonconformist was becoming increasingly

1. N., 4 January 1843 pp. 8-9, 11 January 1843 pp. 24-5, 18 January 1843 pp. 40-1.
2. ibid., 1 March 1843 pp. 136-7, 15 March 1843 p. 169; 22 March 1843 pp. 184-5, 12 April 1843 p. 223, 17 May 1843 pp. 360-1, 31 May 1843 pp. 392-3, 12 July 1843 p. 488, 19 July 1843 p. 505, 18 October 1843 p. 713.

critical of the council of the Complete Suffrage Union, charging it with wasting the "seed-time" of the parliamentary recess. Its statement that "a great undertaking, like that upon which complete suffragists have entered, requires above all things else unity of purpose, a systematic and well-defined plan of action, and a thorough combination of parties in carrying it out", contained a veiled implication of weak leadership, and Sturge felt constrained to reply. He explained that, after long deliberation, the council had decided make its major effort in support of Crawford's plan.[1] The great amount of energy expended was not justified by the return.

Dubious of the scheme's value at first, the Nonconformist was full of enthusiasm for it by the beginning of December. Its implementation was justified by the completely unrepresentative nature of the Commons, sixteenth and seventeenth century precedents vouching for its constitutionality. If the Irish, Leaguers, and complete suffragists adopted it wholeheartedly, ignoring all modern conventions, "the aristocracy, considering what they already have upon their hands, would ere many months be reduced to capitulation". Here was "the lever for the overthrow of oligarchical despotism", "a bridle for rampant aristocracy". The key to parliamentary success lay in the union of all dissident groups, and those in the country who had grievances to redress were urged to rise in protest, "to express their peaceful determination to use the power which they possess to bring the present system of class government to an end". They should memorialise representatives, acting on their own initiative in boroughs not visited by the

1. ibid., 30 August 1843 p. 600, 15 November 1843 p. 776, 22 November 1843 p. 787.

complete suffrage deputations.[1]

Miall had already suggested that the various anti-aristocratic movements should coalesce at constituency level. There were three of these, he pointed out at the end of April, 1843, working for organic, commercial, and ecclesiastical reform, and the scope for co-operation between them, without compromise of principles, was immense. A plan for united electoral action was devised, designed to end the power of controlling Whig oligarchies in the boroughs, and to secure the return of candidates whom all parties might support. Defeats were inevitable, but seats lost to Whiggery were no loss to liberalism, and it would be gain if a new sense of principle were injected into political affairs.[2] At a parliamentary level, Crawford's proposal "not only admits of, but invites, the frank co-operation of all classes aggrieved by ..... misrepresentation", clearly indicating where "all may unite without merging their respective individuality".

> ..... Never before have we seen so distinctly the practicability of bringing every form of discontent to bear upon one common centre - of combining without compromise the efforts of all parties seeking reform, whether commercial, ecclesiastical, or organic.

Unfortunately the parliamentary free-traders only voted with Crawford on his initial amendment to the Address, whilst there was a patent lack of interest in the country, hence, left with minimal aid, he abandoned the experiment at the beginning of March. If this was failure, argued the Nonconformist, it had at least made men aware of the defects of the system, and of the unrepresentative membership of the House

1. ibid., 4 October 1843 pp. 680-1, 29 November 1843 pp. 808-9, 6 December 1843 p. 824, 13 December 1843 pp. 840-1, 20 December 1843 p. 857, 14 February 1844 p. 101.
2. ibid., 26 April 1843 pp. 264-5, 3 May 1843 p. 297, 17 May 1843 p. 361.

of Commons.[1]

As Miall became absorbed in the anti-state-church movement, as the Complete Suffrage Union plainly declined, the Nonconformist's articles for complete suffragists or on their principles, became increasingly infrequent. They were urged to maintain their principles at elections, despite the calamitous result of Sturge's intervention in Birmingham, when the liberal vote had been split, the Tory being returned at the head of the poll. In the spring of 1845 the council's new plan of action was favourably reviewed, but here, the newspaper's four year association with the complete suffrage movement ended.[2]

Miall did retain some interest in the question, being a vice-President of the Metropolitan Complete Suffrage Association, and appearing on the platforms of Vincent's National Alliance for Securing the Real Representation of the People in Parliament.[3] In the revolutionary atmosphere of 1848 he even returned, briefly, to his old dream of a reconciliation between the middle and working classes, on the basis of complete suffrage. All the old arguments directed at the middle classes were refurbished and paraded anew.[4]

On what was the new movement to be based? Chartist violence did not detract from the truth of the principles upon which that document rested, but since it contained unnecessary and divisive detail, since it had a bad name and would not appeal to the middle classes, it would be unwise to

1. ibid., 6 March 1844 pp. 148-9, 13 March 1844 pp. 164-5.
2. ibid., 24 July 1844 pp. 552-3, 21 August 1844 p. 596, 26 February 1845 pp. 132-3.
3. ibid., 4 December 1844 p. 832, 8 January 1845 p. 20, 14 October 1846 p. 692, 31 March 1847 p. 210, 15 September 1847 pp. 664-6, 12 January 1848 pp. 20-1.
4. ibid., 8 March 1848 pp. 154-5, 15 March 1848 pp. 174-5, 22 March 1848 pp. 194-5, 5 April 1848 pp. 234-5.

adopt it as the standard. Miall was, however, willing to support a campaign for the Charter provided the majority desired it, though the history of the Complete Suffrage Union gave no guarantee that this would win the co-operation of the masses. Universal suffrage, uncomplicated by other matters, ought to be the objective of the reform movement; household suffrage was a totally unsatisfactory expedient.[1]

In the provinces there were signs of a readiness amongst the middle class reformers for reconciliation with the masses. Bradford electors issued an address to non-electors; there was talk of a new reform association arising out of the ashes of the League; in several towns, electors and non-electors met together. Meanwhile William Lovett had been canvassing radical reformers, including Miall, on the feasibility of union on the basis of the Charter. Miall had misgivings, but attended the meeting on 3 May which formally inaugerated the People's League, where he led a group that successfully altered the proposed basis of the new organisation from the Charter to universal suffrage, although Lovett only compromised with a promise that that document would be discussed at a future conference. Inevitably, the League's inaugeral public meeting three weeks later was broken up by Chartists led by Ernest Jones, Miall's electoral colleague at Halifax the previous year. Lovett records that the League's failure to rouse the country, and its increasing financial difficulties, resulted in the secession of many council members in September, including Price, Miall, and Charles Gilpin, the Quaker, who moved the universal suffrage motion at the May

1. ibid., 19 April 1848 pp. 274-5, 26 April 1848 pp. 294-5, 3 May 1848 pp. 314-5, 24 May 1848 pp. 374-5.

meeting.[1]

"The People's League, wisely and vigorously supported, may be a great conservator of order. But nothing would be more beneficial for the security of property and life, than a people's party in parliament, wisely, harmoniously, and strenuously advocating large and effectual reforms". Thus diagnosed the Eclectic.[2] Miall had urged the parliamentary radicals to take leadership of the reform movement, when Chartist violence seemed likely to erupt in March. Their timely action might avert this. Soon reports that the liberal Members had resolved to come to a more cordial understanding, and to co-operate on the reform question, were being welcomed in his editorial columns. He advised them to publish "the maximum of reform upon which the Radical party can consent to act together in Parliament", as soon as was possible, to take advantage of the collapse of the Chartist leadership after the Kennington Common fiasco, which had left "the honest portion of the working classes peculiarly open to wise and moderate counsels". His fears that parliamentary co-operation might lead to the compromise of principle were justified when Hume's motion, limiting itself to household suffrage, appeared. It indicated a complete absence of all the qualities of generalship needed "to grapple with the passing crisis, and, with a master's hand, turn it to account". The Eclectic re-echoed these criticisms. Hume did not deserve popular support, for he had not gone far enough to woo the workers, and had made no appeal to middle class conscience. This inept display, together with the massive anti-reform vote, con-

1. ibid., 12 April 1848 p. 256, 19 April 1848 pp. 280-1, 10 May 1848 pp. 335, 336-7, 31 May 1848 pp. 387-9. Life and Struggles of William Lovett, vol II, (London, 1920), pp. 343-358.
2. E.R.,4s., vol. XXIV, 1848, p. 117.

vinced Miall of the wisdom of older views - "Earnest Reformers must now adjourn the subject of real representation from St. Stephen's to the platform - from Parliament to the press - from a confederacy within doors, to a peaceful, but active organization without".[1]

The reaction of the Patriot suggests that the complete suffrage movement made little impact on the religious world. Most Congregationalists would have applauded Blackburn's declaration to the annual meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1846, that,

> ..... The people have been addressed by Rationalism, by Deism, by Atheism, by Chartism, and by all the other isms that come from hell.[2]

The Rev. Jonathon Glyde, of Bradford, who stigmatised the Chartists as "the radical subverters of our constitution" defended these allegations in an open letter.[3] There is evidence, however, that the more radical Dissenters, mainly Baptists, but including some Congregationalists, were attracted by Sturge's combination of political reform, christian morality, and benevolent humanitarianism. Cobden had forseen this in 1841, writing to the Birmingham philanthropist,

> You would carry with you the philanthropists and the religious world, or at least neutralize their opposition, and without their aid no moral victory can be achieved in this age and country.[4]

Sturge's appeal was certainly directed at this section of society; a letter from Miall emphasises this, and gives some

1. N., 29 March 1848 pp. 214-5, 19 April 1848 pp. 275-6, 17 May 1848 pp. 354-5, 21 June 1848 pp. 454-5, 28 June 1848 pp. 474-5, 12 July 1848 pp. 514-5. E.R., 4s., vol. XXIV, 1848, pp. 102-124.
2. N., 13 May 1846 p. 325.
3. Conder, G.W.: Memoir and Remains of the Late Rev. Jonathon Glyde....., pp. 84-9.
4. Richard, H.: Memoirs of Joseph Sturge, p. 299.

hint of the religious feeling which inspired both men.

> ..... The movement in which we are engaged is too mighty a one to be undertaken in any other spirit than that of deference to the Divine Will, and dependence on Divine Strength. Politically regarded, merely, it is full of danger. We are raising a power which we may be unable to control if chafed by aristocratic opposition. But faith in Him who "stills the noise of the waves and the tumults of the people" will, I doubt not, bring us through without violent collision. The more necessity is there to get our case well founded in the religious portion of the public, before party men and politicians take part in it. 1

As early as October 1841, the Nonconformist had drawn the attention of ministers of religion to their moral obligation "to point out, in all circles of their influence, the duty, the religious duty of all men, to exert themselves in promoting the political emancipation of the people". Servants of the gospel of peace, they had to teach the working class "to wrestle for their rights by peaceable means". In 1848 the political quietists were reminded that Christ had actively criticised the corrupt institutions of his own day. Surely, the lesson was,

> .... that wherever we find erroneous systems we cannot by any possibility be too earnest in our endeavours to uproot them, and whenever we are satisfied that we have the truth on our side the more enthusiastic we are in its advancement the better. 2

The Bible taught that all men were equal, and many ministers tended to sustain their political opinions by reference to God's word. William Leask, of Chapmanslade in Wiltshire, replied to a questioner who asked him whether he had become a Chartist,

> ..... I have been taught by the Bible, which .. ....teaches the best politics, to do unto others as I wish others to do unto me; ... as I see no reason, either in sound morals or christianity,

1. ibid., pp. 333-4.
2. N., 6 October 1841 pp. 440-1, 19 April 1848 p. 275.

> why the honest man who labours from dawn to darkness to support his family should be excluded from a voice in the election of that assembly by whom society is taxed, I should have reason to be ashamed of the limited extent of my christian principles if I refused to co-operate with those who are labouring to secure him that right. 1

Benjamin Parsons, who lectured on complete suffrage principles, as well as on corn law repeal, took his bibical studies even further. During 1847 and 1848 he produced a series of cheap political tracts addressed to "the Fustian Jackets and Smock Frocks", counselling them to use moral means only in their struggle for political elevation. Through copious scriptural allusion he proved that the six points of the Charter were all sanctioned by God and christianity, that

> ..... it is a sacred duty that you owe to yourselves, to posterity, to your country, to the world, and to pure religion, to become politicians and agitate until this great principle of truth and equity shall become the law of the land.

Other pamphlets dealt with "The Radicalism of Moses", and demonstrated that "radicalism" was "an essential doctrine of Christianity". All were pervaded by a virulent anti-aristocratic tone, and assumed that the working class, if given their political rights, would be the country's saviours.[2]

Nearly 200 ministers of all denominations signed either the memorial or declaration in 1842, reported the provisional committee, but direct ministerial participation in the movement was confined to the less prominent, nine English ministers attending the April conference. Two, Thomas Spencer and Dr. Wade, were Churchmen; two were

1. ibid., 19 October 1842 p. 702. Leask was a Scot and Home Missionary Society agent at Chapmanslade. He edited several religious newspapers in later life.
2. ibid., 17 August 1842 p. 565, 21 September 1842 p. 636, 1 March 1843 p. 138. Parsons, B.: Tracts for the Fustian Jackets and Smock Frocks, (Nos. 1-17, 1847-8). Hood, E.P.: The Earnest Minister....., pp. 271-281.

Unitarians, Noah Jones from Derby and Henry Solly; the rest were Baptists - John Jenkinson from Kettering, James Mursell, and Thomas Swan, James Allsop, Thomas Morgan, all from Birmingham. Some of these were present in December, when they were joined by William Robinson, another Baptist from Kettering, and William Leask. In September, 1841, the former had written to the Nonconformist advocating a union of middle and working classes on an economic reform programme, with Sturge as leader of the new organisation. Thomas Thomas, of Pontypool Baptist College, had proposed the formation of an Anti-Monopoly Association a month later. The following March the students of the Bristol Baptist College sent Sturge a letter of support. At the Southampton anti-corn-law conference, William Malden, Congregationalist minister at Chichester, raised the suffrage question, but few ministers of this denomination were active in the Union.[1] There are several examples of meetings addressed by the Union's lecturers being chaired by Congregationalist ministers, which suggests some sympathy for the movement's aspirations, but Leask seems to have been the only one to become deeply involved. By the end of 1842 he had undertaken the superintendence of the district centred on Frome, being in regular contact with the council until the summer of 1843, recording his own activities, (the promotion of local associations, lectures, and the writing of a series of articles for the Wiltshire Independent), and offering hopeful and optimistic advice on effective electoral

1. Report of the Proceedings of the Conference.....; N.,22 September 1841 p. 403 (Robinson's letter), 20 October 1841 p. 467 (Thomas's letter), 10 February 1842 p. 98 (Malden), 30 March 1842 p. 199 (Baptist students' letter).

policies.[1]

No eminent Congregationalist layman engaged in the Union's work, though John Childs did attend the inaugeral conference, informing George Wilson of his own personal disillusionment with League policy. There was some controversy in the column of the Leeds Mercury over that journal's condemnation of the complete suffrage movement, the critic being Henry Forbes, a prominent Bradford Congregationalist, who had chaired the meeting which had chosen the town's delegates to the April conference. A special session of the Bradford United Reform Club expressed its sympathy with Forbes, and its disapproval of articles, "condemnatory of the reform party". Titus Salt took the chair, whilst James Acworth, president of the Horton Baptist College, Walter Scott, of the Airedale Independent College, and other ministers of both denominations spoke in support of the various resolutions.[2]

Miall was sincere in his political opinions, and did not abandon them when the Union collapsed, but he was, first and foremost, an anti-state-churchman, seeking, through the agency of organisations open to him, means of hastening the downfall of the Established Church. This outlook helps to explain his misgivings concerning the Anti-Corn-Law League. Recognising that the repeal of the laws by which aristocracy maintained high rents and incomes would be a stunning blow

1. For Leask, see N., 14 September 1842 p. 620, 23 November 1842 p. 781, 30 November 1842 p. 797, 7 December 1842 p. 811, 28 December 1842 p. 860, 31 December 1842 p. 877, 4 January 1843 p. 3, 18 January 1843 p. 36, 1 February 1843 p. 67, 8 February 1843 p. 89, 22 February 1843 p. 122, 29 March 1843 p. 195, 5 April 1843 p. 218, 19 April 1843 p. 247, 3 May 1843 p. 294, 10 May 1843 p. 330, 19 July 1843 p. 501.
2. L.M., 9, 16, 23, 30 April 1842. N., 11 May 1842 p. 328, 7 December 1842 p. 811.

to their power, that "the prestige of a triumph", revealing a pathway "to summits long deemed inaccessible", would accelerate other reforms,[1] Miall never felt that the League had the political strength to breach their interlocking ranks. The complete suffrage movement, a union of reformers from middle and working classes, was, he believed, more likely to master a rampant class enemy. Immeasureable advantages would accrue to Christianity following its success.

> ..... It will tend to break down the spirit of caste, than which nothing is more inimical to the triumphs of revealed truth..... It will put an end to the monopolies, which ..... have..... from time immemorial, obstructed the free march of the religion of Jesus. It will sweep out of the way a system of ecclesiastical sanctity and priestly meditation, the worldly emoluments and the legal power of whose official agents and abettors have always stood opposed to the spread of genuine piety. It ..... will throw the Church of Christ on its own resources, and compel it to fling off that immense mass of hypocrisy which now cleaves to it, which conceals its real character, paralyses its tenderest sympathies, and well nigh deprives it of influence for good.....[2]

In 1847, replying to those old complete suffragists who deplored his failure to recommend Dissenters to seek organic reform pledges from election candidates, as well as those for separation, he admitted that he had supported the movement as the most likely avenue to disestablishment. The stirring of the Dissenters in 1843, the events of 1845 and 1847 all seemed to indicate that the church issue was destined by providence to be the battlefield for the final conflict with aristocracy. Miall had attempted to channel the aroused anti-state-church feeling of Dissenters into a constructive and efficient agitation, giving the new

1. N., 26 November 1845 pp. 804-5, 11 February 1846 pp. 84-5.
2. E.R. 4s, vol. XIII, 1843, p. 114. Article attributed to Miall.

movement priority over the failing one for organic reform. Personally, he claimed, he preferred the fuller pledge, but it was unwise to make demands that would divide Dissent on the eve of a critical general election. In any case, he argued, a successful attack on the Church establishment would hasten the political capitulation of aristocracy, just as a victory for complete suffrage would have shattered the former.[1]

The principles of Miall the Nonconformist, took precedence over those of Miall the radical politician. Until 1843 the complete suffrage movement appeared to offer the best means to his prime objective; by 1844 this was no longer so. Despite his own optimism, it was doomed to failure once Cobden and the League ignored it, once O'Connor expressed his hostility, and because middle class fear of Chartist violence and demands had conditioned them against suffrage extension. And yet there are many similarities between Miall the political agitator, and Miall the champion of Dissent. He continually attacks the establishment, political or religious, ceaselessly searching for its weak spots; continually, he snipes at the lesser establishments of his own parties, the aristocracy of Dissent, and those liberal politicians who compromise with the system. Ever vigilant, ever active, he faces the world, supremely confident of the righteousness of his opinions, and of the erroneousness of his opponents.

1. N., 22 June 1847 p. 405.

CHAPTER 7.

EDWARD MIALL AND THE ANTI-STATE-CHURCH ASSOCIATION, 1841-1844.

After its emphatic condemnation of the gradualist policies of the dissenting leaders, the Nonconformist commenced a searching review of the disadvantages, failures and iniquities of the State Church.[1] It seemed designed to counteract everything that Christianity stood for, giving precedence to worldly, rather than spiritual, values. Physical force was repudiated by the Gospel, but the Church of England adopted it to achieve its ends. It wallowed in lordship and pomp, there being no place within its walls for true christian simplicity. Where Christianity combined the pious "for the purpose of promoting its influence", the Church mingled all men together, "pell-mell, for no other object that can be discerned than with a view to their being taxed by one order of the clergy". Christianity respected all mens' consciences, whilst the State Church only recognised the "fictitious" one of the State.

Characterised by this acquisitive spirit, grossly misrepresenting the truths of Scripture, the Church of England was thoroughly inefficient at the job it professed to do. Founded to present religious truth to the people, it inevitably inculcated an unthinking and mechanical obedience rather than a deep and lasting faith. State control resulted in rule by a civil legislature, ignorant of religious matters, and indifferent to the spiritual needs of the nation. The promulgation of creeds as assured verities discouraged free

1. This long series of articles ran from 7 July 1841 until 23 March 1842, and was later published as The Nonconformist Sketch-book; a series of views, classified in four groups, of a State-Church and its attendant evils, (London, 1842).

inquiry. Incomes for the clergy was the chief end, not the teaching of the people, and this emphasis on the ministry created priestism, "the first-born child of worldliness and hypocrisy". The natural fruits of an established religion were,

> ..... Hollow formality, confident reliance upon empty and frivolous rites, and an exaggerated notion of the prerogatives of the priesthood - all tending the same way, namely to secure the church in the possession of her revenues.

These arguments were not new, but Miall hoped to widen the basis of the disestablishment movement, absorbing all reformers into its ranks, political radicals, free traders, and pacifists, as well as Nonconformists. His favourite lecture during the early years of the Anti-State-Church Association was entitled, "Religious Establishments incompatible with the Rights of Citizenship". These rights, he claimed, were circumscribed by the existence of an established church. Obstacles to the free expression of opinion were erected, like the municipal officeholder's oath, and the pecuniary disadvantages inflicted on Dissenters, whilst all genuine reforms were obstructed if they seemed to threaten ecclesiastical interests.[1] The issue was national, not merely sectarian,in its implications, concerning the civil, social, and spiritual welfare of the entire country.

The clergy of the Established Church, Miall alleged, were a "political curse", possessing a vested interest in the maintenance of privilege and the status quo. This was a natural consequence of the relationship between the Church and the aristocracy; it was their tool, an efficient

1. Religious Establishments incompatible with the Rights of Citizenship, (London, 2nd. edition, 1846). This pamphlet was published by the Anti-State-Church Association.

political instrument devised, not for religious purposes, but "for the perpetuation of their exclusive power, their class privileges, their multiform monopolies". Religious good was purely incidental; it was unnecessary to the system, and inconsistent with it.

> ..... It desecrates religion - it obstructs popular freedom - it perplexes every question of civil government - it is confirmed rheumatism to the State, contracting its tendons, crippling its limbs, enfeebling its institutions, and threatening, at no distant period, a painful death.....

The Church sanctioned and encouraged militarism. Always hostile to popular education, once forced into unwonted activity, the Church sought to stunt the national mind and to prevent all independent thought. Mixed with politics, religion merely embittered existing conflicts, whilst the animosities of Church and Dissent were exacerbated by the favoured position of the Establishment. All commercial and political monopolies were supported by a Church that could read its own doom in their collapse. Fettered by the coronation oath, the Crown was prevented from doing much good, and, in the courts, the partiality of magistrates was indicative of a sinister influence exercised by the Established Church over the processes of the law. Liberal politicians, intent on attacking the feudal institutions in the State, were cautioned against attempting to prop up a feudal church by grafting "twigs of it upon rising democracy". The "natural antagonism between the principles of democracy and the principle of religious establishments", would make this a disastrous combination. Co-existence was impossible, but if unwilling to "lift up a hand against the establishment, at all events it is not within their legitimate vocation to aid and abet it". The indictment was damning. How, he concluded, "can any man pretending to patriotism lend the sanction of

his name and influence to the perpetuation of this evil?".

Separation, Miall explained, was a simple process. Firstly, all national funds reserved for religious purposes had to be resumed by the State, and re-directed to other areas of need. This was possible because religious property was national property, having been treated as such since the Reformation - what the State had given in trust to the Church of England could be withdrawn once that trust had been abused. Nevertheless, vested rights would have to be compensated, the rights of present incumbents respected, and the holders of advowsons given their market value. None of the Church's private endowments would be touched. "Satisfy all just claims which individuals, or even the sect as such, have upon these temporalities", he wrote, "and let the surplus be devoted, in such a way as parliament may deem most fitting, to the legitimate objects of civil government." Secondly, all privileges attached to conformity, and, conversely, the disabilities imposed on the dissenter, had to be abolished. Finally, all statutes empowering the magistrate to wield authority in religious matters had to be repealed.[1]

Despite his fierce broadside against the political leaders of Dissent in 1841, Miall did not reveal his own proposals for organising Dissenters against the Established Church until the following spring. This scheme, refurbished in 1843, was to provide the basis of the Anti-State-Church Association.

Defended by "wretched arguments", the Church was blessed by "hoary antiquity" and mellowed by nostalgia. "Sanctified by age", it was not "to be put down in a day". Equally, the

1. N., 23 June 1841 p. 193. This was to become the programme of the Anti-State-Church Association in 1843.

Church was deeply entrenched in society, having influenced its tone and feeling; it would not be overthrown by "petty and unplanned enterprises". Indisciplined, disorganised, and half-hearted, the Dissenters had achieved nothing substantial in the past. Totally new machinery was needed if they were to succeed. Another difficulty facing active anti-state-churchmen was the deplorable ignorance of their principles displayed by the majority of Dissenters. Ministerial evasiveness had produced uneducated congregations, but, "before the national church is overthrown, unless, indeed, it be overthrown by political violence, these men must be fully instructed". A strong church would never be felled by religious freedom societies; every minister and every church, "recognising nonconformist principles must be at work in the way of religious duty; and, identifying the destruction of state religion with the progress of Christ's kingdom, must fearlessly denounce the system as an offence to heaven".[1]

The first, indispensable task was to teach Dissenters, at present "unworthy of their principles", to acknowledge them and the responsibilities they imposed. Only when they ceased to act from motives of sectarian convenience, adopting "the higher, firmer, more unassailable ground of duty and conscience", would "they make any serious impression upon the greatest of modern evils". No consistent Dissenter could tacitly sanction a system which, subverting the "great ends of the gospel", destroyed all faith, and contradicted the peaceful tendencies of Christianity. Secondly, they had to learn that an "aggressive warfare" was wiser than a defensive stance. Self-defensive societies were useful, but they were not the instruments to sever the union of Church and State, and

1. ibid., 20 April 1842 p. 249.

Dissenters had greater ends to serve than the defence of their own interests.

> ..... They are entrusted with sacred principles which they are bound to promulgate - and, however wise it may be, however agreeable, to assert their right and vindicate their power to hold such principles without thereby subjecting themselves to worldly loss, all is not done when that is done. They are under obligation to seek more than their own freedom from persecution. Their real mission is to enfranchise Christian truth, not merely to shield themselves from wrong. Dissent, rather than Dissenters, is their proper aim. They should war for principles, not men.

Consequently, from every pastor, from every church, "there should emanate constantly streams of light serving to reveal the enormity, the falsehood, and the impiety of the compulsory system". London based societies and committees could not do this by proxy. As an additional recommendation, Miall suggested that the best form of defence against the encroachments of an increasely aggressive Establishment lay in attack.[1]

The ineffective, spasmodic, and unilateral agitations of the previous decade were summed up as "one amount of petty enterprises, in no wise connected by any comprehensive scheme, often inconsistent one with another, and always unworthy of the magnitude of the question at stake". Centralised authority was naturally distrusted by independent congregations, and outside meddling resented, but the mission before them called for an earnestness and unanimity which they had hitherto singularly failed to achieve. Miall's solution was the formation, not of another central despotism, "but of a parliament - a parliament chosen by the free suffrages of the parties concerned". Only, he believed, through such a "solemn and general stir", could the indifference and disorganisation from which Dissent had so long suffered, be shaken off. The

1. ibid., 27 April 1842 p. 265, 4 May 1842 p. 281.

representative nature of this conference would gain it a deferential hearing from sensitive congregations; its meeting would strengthen the resolve of the activists, would allow foolish misapprehensions to be refuted, and would enable ministers to debate matters on which they had been silent for too long.[1]

The convention would mark the commencement of the real work. Miall envisaged the submission and adoption of a general plan, the animation of the workers, the selection of the best means, and, as its most important consequence, "the systematic training of chapel-goers in the principles of dissent". This was the essential preliminary to any successful campaign, and the united exertions of a conference might have a greater effect in disturbing the inertia of Nonconformity, than any individual could aspire to.

> ..... Let the matter be unshrinkingly discussed by a general conference; let the duty of dissenters - pastors, masters, parents, and teachers, be set forth in a resolution; let an outline of some general plan be sketched, and circulated through our churches - backed with the sanction and recommendation of the united body; and in the course of a year or two, silence on this great question would be the exception, not the rule; and the charge of singularity would attach not to those who taught, but to those who refrained from teaching, the principles of scriptural nonconformity. 2

Additionally, the conference might issue a solemn declaration, deliberately designed to enlighten politicians on the tendency of dissenting principles; it could authoritatively settle the dispute over the applicability of passive resistance to the church rates struggle; and it could effectively condemn the increasing trend towards ecclesiasticism and priestism within the dissenting body.[3]

1. ibid., 11 May 1842 p. 305, 18 May 1842 p. 329.
2. ibid., 25 May 1842 p. 353.
3. ibid., 1 June 1842 p. 377, 8 June 1842 p. 393, 15 June 1842 p. 409.

Whilst Miall endeavoured to persuade his fellow-Dissenters of the merits of a vigorous anti-state-church movement, the London committees were manoeuvring for another assault on church rates. At the end of January, 1842, the Religious Freedom Society informed its constituents that Easthope intended to re-introduce his motion of the previous session, and its committee convened a preparatory meeting on 7 February, attended by delegates from the other metropolitan committees, from several provincial religious freedom associations, and by sympathetic Members of Parliament. The Patriot urged Dissenters to support Easthope, reminding them that, since the election, they could no longer be accused of embarrassing a friendly government.[1]

The motion was debated on 16 June. Mark Philips seconded it, Russell and O'Connell spoke in its favour. Sharman Crawford, though voting with the minority, criticised Dissenters for stopping "far short of true principle", and not demanding the total and immediate separation of Church and State, warning that, "if they did not proceed upon that great principle, they were not deserving of the remission of church-rates".[2]

Conder deemed it wise to reply to this, though he would never "have recommended the Dissenters to place much confidence" in their critic. Defending the gradual policy, he pointed out that church rates were objected to as a direct payment in support of the Established Church, and that it was a more pressing and immediate grievance than the existence of the Establishment, causing considerable

1. P., 24 January 1842 p. 53, 10 February 1842 p. 92, 16 June 1842 p. 412.
2. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 63, 1627.

suffering. This fully entitled Dissenters to seek their abolition, "postponing for the present, and till a more favourable opportunity shall present itself, the attempt to achieve more comprehensive reforms". The country was not ready for separation, and, Conder continued, Crawford was well aware that, "if he himself should introduce such a Bill, he would have the greatest possible difficulty to find a seconder". The article concluded with a veiled thrust against Miall and his followers, many of whom were involved with Crawford in the complete suffrage movement.

> The fact is, that Mr. SHARMAN CRAWFORD is the representative, not so much of Rochdale, as of a scattered band of young, zealous, ardent, but inexperienced, not to say ill-informed Voluntaries, who, not doubting the soundness of their own principles, seem to imagine that they have but to ring them in increasing iteration in the ears of Parliament, in order to carry everything before them. Speak to them of prudence, caution, policy; and in vain you write yourself Dissenter. It is to be hoped, these gentlemen will grow wise as they grow grey; but they will find out their mistake, whether they profit by the discovery or not. 1

In its turn, the Nonconformist refuted these charges, and defended Crawford, regretting that remarks which it should have welcomed had been sneered at by a dissenting journal.

> ..... The whole question of separation could not have been held by that paper at a greater discount, if it had been a representative of the countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, instead of Independents, Baptists, and others.....

Loathing "the habit of whining, whimpering, and shuffling, whether before parliament or elsewhere, such as dissenters have been guilty of, under the guidance of the Patriot", Miall agreed with Crawford; Dissenters should be honest in their approaches to the Legislature.

1. P., 20 June 1842 p. 420.

> ..... If church rates be only a grievance - a thing with which a man would much rather not be troubled - a tax, which it is exceedingly disagreeable to pay - a badge of inferiority - why then, let us seek their extinction on these grounds, and not go up to the legislature with any sing-song pretence of conscientious objections to the impost. Church rates, except as involving the principle of an establishment, are no such grievous hardship ..... But if our opposition to the exaction be founded upon our dissent - if we regard ecclesiastical taxation as involving a false principle which it becomes us to destroy - if possible, then, let us base our proceedings upon that belief, and show that we contend, not for peace, but for truth. 1

Even Miall, however, doubted the wisdom of an immediate submission of the separation question to the attention of Parliament. Dissenters still needed organisation and education, whilst it was foolish to place dissenting principles before the Commons, until competent advocates were available. In any case, there could be no impartial discussion until the House, purged of aristocratic nominees, was truly representative of the people. Disestablishment would follow the granting of complete suffrage, and Miall advised his readers to further a movement to which he was already deeply committed.

> ..... The wisest thing which earnest dissenters, in our opinion, can do, is to encourage by all means in their power the cause of complete suffrage. Whenever that shall triumph they will be strong. Until that shall be carried, their power will be contemptible. True dissent and democracy must run in couples. 2

As the session drew to its close, Miall's arguments seemed amply vindicated. The Dean Forest Ecclesiastical Districts Bill went through the Commons, despite wrecking amendments from Hume and Easthope, with, as the Nonconformist hastened to inform its readers, Russell voting in the majority. Here was clear evidence that the puny efforts of the Religious Freedom Society did not frighten the Church.

1. N., 6 July 1842 pp. 457-8.
2. ibid., 13 July 1842 p. 473.

This journal expected that Peel's promise of cabinet consideration of church extension proposals during the recess, would arouse the most acquiescent Dissenters from their slumbers. They were urged to take the offensive, to agitate the state church question to the fullest extent, to implement the conference scheme, and to make the people's cause their own, if they wished to preserve the remnants of religious liberty. The Patriot remained "unaccountably silent", and it was reluctantly conceded that, "present appearances ..... augur somewhat unfavourably for the practical realisation of our wishes". Disillusioned by this stolid apathy, Miall abandoned his exertions to create a strong anti-state-church movement, contenting himself with a sorrowful parting shot and warning:

> ..... we earnestly conjure them to reflect whether indifference to the cause of nonconformity can be made to square with loyalty to their Master; and whether the tacit sanction of, and connivance at, a spirited delusion, and a pernicious falsehood - a delusion and a falsehood productive of the bitterest and most deadly fruits, will be likely in the calmness of retrospection, to afford them that just support which every good man must aim to deserve. 1

Despairing of Dissent, Miall increasingly devoted his journalistic and political energies to the complete suffrage movement. By the end of 1842, as Dissent apparently faded into political insignificance, the new agitation was receiving his undivided attention. And yet, within two years, the Complete Suffrage Union was limping along from expedient to expedient, the vision of class reconciliation broken, whilst Dissent, having been roused into a unanimous political convulsion, was proving more amenable to Miall's suggestions.

1. ibid., 13 July 1842 pp. 473-4, 20 July 1842 p. 505, 3 August 1842 p. 521, 10 August 1842 p. 537, 17 August 1842 p. 553.

His harangues were not the catalyst that set the denominations aflame, but the miscalculations of Sir James Graham and the Conservative cabinet did. At the beginning of March, 1843, the Home Secretary, after considerable humanitarian and ecclesiastical pressure, unveiled his Bill for the limitation of juvenile hours of work in factories, and the provision of schools in the manufacturing districts. His proposals impassioned and united the dissenting world as never before. The objections raised, the debate on state education which ensued, and the course to which Congregationalism was committed by its outcome, will be reviewed elsewhere. Here, the mechanics of opposition, and the endeavours of the militants to turn the crisis to advantage, will be examined.

Immediately after the Bill's publication, the Patriot exhorted Dissenters to organise themselves against "the greatest encroachment upon Religious Liberty that has been attempted since the days of Lord SIDMOUTH".[1] An early manifestation of this new spirit was the formation of a co-ordinating Central Committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Andrew Reed. Nationally, the movement seemed spontaneous. Reed's biographers, however, recorded that he personally toured sixteen counties on behalf of the Committee. "That which appeared to our friends afterwards to be spontaneous, was not so to us; but it was held to be one of the most important steps in the whole transaction, Sir James himself admitting that we had outflanked him." This Committee, consisting of members of all denominations, sat daily for ten weeks; reluctant representatives were lobbied by their dissenting constituents; public meetings were held; petitions

1. P., 13 March 1843 p. 164.

flooded into the Commons from every corner of the country, from great public meetings, from congregations, from Sunday school teachers, from parents, and from the committees of the various denominational boards and societies. It was claimed that 24,000 were presented, against either the original Bill, or the amended version.[1] Harried by a continuous turmoil, surprised by the Wesleyan support given to it, Graham eventually retreated. As one rejoicing commentator put it,

> ..... The old spirit of the puritans has returned to their children, and men in high places are in consequence standing aghast, astonished at what they witness, reluctant to forego their nefarious purpose, yet none daring to persist in the scheme. 2

Much to Miall's disappointment the early resolutions and petitions were confined to outlining the specific objections to Graham's Bill, rather than the enunciation of principle. He accused the agitation's leaders of,

> ..... leading their followers beside the mark - leading them in the bye-paths of soft-turf to avoid the strait and flinty road of principle. The main question involved is blinked.....

The Nonconformist made no secret of its hostility to state education, alleging that the connection of Church and State lay at the root of the new scheme. Unfortunately, critics were too readily conceding "the propriety of government interference in the religious instruction of the young, so long as that interference involves no preference of the religious views of others to their own". There was a great danger that the crisis would pass over "unimproved".[3]

Both the Bill, and a recent adverse decision in the

1. Reed, A. &. C.: Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Andrew Reed ....., pp. 204-7. Manning, B.L.: The Protestant Dissenting Deputies, pp. 342-4. Cowherd, R.G.: The Politics of English Dissent, pp. 125-8.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XIII, 1843, p. 698.
3. N., 29 March 1843 p. 200, 5 April 1843 p. 216.

Braintree case, were indicative of the resurgant clericalism Dissent had to combat; both were a retribution for dissenting apathy. Yet, all Miall's previous estimates of the state of Dissent seemed belied by the power being forged in the heat of the anger created by Graham's attack on their liberties. "Here," he wrote, "are materials out of which faithful and competent minds might forge the weapon to level priestism itself to the very dust." Earnestly, the Nonconformist urged Dissenters,

> ..... as honest, earnest men, catching the spirit of their forefathers of the sixteenth century, (to) enter into "solemn league and covenant" to put down, in this land, the mother of this legislative monster - "black prelacy" - or perhaps we may rather say, a political church.....

If they valued their freedom, Miall affirmed, it was essential for Nonconformists to attempt the permanent dissolution of the alliance of Church and State. The issues at stake were far more extensive than many of them seemed to realise.

> ..... whether, the population of Great Britain, hemmed in on all sides by a religious establishment, shall become the material in the hands of a despotic, bigoted, and grasping priesthood, to be fashioned as a tool wherewith for the aristocracy to work out, at pleasure, its own selfish and ambitious designs. It is not religious liberty alone which is at stake. The triumph of the state church would be equally destructive of all civil freedom. Popular institutions, as all experience has proved, cannot long co-exist with a religious establishment. Whilst the union between the church and the state continues to be maintained, the land will be dotted in every quarter with garrisons hostile to every species of national purpose. 1

Anxious to divert this energy into anti-state-church channels, Miall viewed the Central Committee with suspicion. It was another of those self-elected and irresponsible bodies pilloried by the provincial militants in the thirties.

1. ibid., 29 March 1843 p. 193, 12 April 1843 p. 233, 19 April 1843 pp. 248-9.

He had no confidence in it, hoping, however, that "it will use none of its influence to prevent the agitation from consolidating into an organised movement for higher ends than the defeat of this measure".[1]

At Bradford, at the beginning of April, a meeting of Sunday school teachers carried an amendment,

> That this meeting, deeming all objections based upon expediency as defective, resolve that no government has a right to interfere in religious matters.

The principals of the town's two dissenting theological colleges spoke in its favour, although two Congregationalist ministers, Jonathon Glyde and J.G.Miall, opposed it, the latter conceding the principle, but regarding the motion as ill-timed.[2] William McKerrow, in Manchester, declaimed on the necessity of separating Church from State at the meetings he attended, and,on 5 May,declared that he would no longer co-operate with any group whose aims fell short of this.[3] William Malden, of Chichester, described separation as the only security for Dissenters, advising them to join the complete suffrage movement as a means to that end. In Frome, William Leask spoke in similar terms, and counselled the Birmingham committee to take advantage of the sudden upsurge in dissenting feeling, many, he reported, being converted to a cause so recently ignored and derided.[4] Even in London, the Metropolitan Collegiate Association passed a series of

1. ibid., 19 April 1843 p. 248.
2. ibid., 12 April 1843 pp. 226, 233.
3. ibid., 17 May 1843 pp. 354-5. McKerrow, J.H.: Memoirs of William McKerrow ....., pp. 126-36.
4. For Leask, see N., 29 March 1843 p. 195, 5 April 1843 p. 218, 12 April 1843 p. 226, 17 May 1843 p. 354; for Malden, see ibid., 24 May 1843 p. 370. A meeting of Brentford Sunday school teachers, reported in N., 10 May 1843 p. 322, included demands for separation and complete suffrage in their petition.

resolutions which the Nonconformist greeted enthusiastically, whilst a meeting in Stoke Newington, where Miall lived, eagerly adopted his policy.[1]

As the turbulence was prolonged, it became increasingly more satisfactory to the Nonconformist. Moderate resolutions were often an inadequate reflection of the tone and temper of meetings which eagerly cheered hostile references to state churches, Puseyite clergy, and government despotism. Manchester, on the 27th April, when "every allusion to the necessity of striking at the root of the bill was received with reiterated cheers", was no isolated example.[2] To one reviewer this demonstrated that the opinions of the people were far in advance of those of their leaders. He noticed that,

> ..... The sentiments most warmly responded to, most cordially cheered, have been those which involved a denial of the right of government to intrude on the province of education, and which charged the present obnoxious measure directly home upon the unchristian connexion subsisting between the church and the state.....

Moderate opinions had found no response, often, personal respect for the speaker preventing open disapproval.[3]

There was some criticism of this playing with abstract principles, "A Warning Voice" in the Patriot denouncing Miall's attitude as one that could only divide the disparate elements banded together in opposition to the education clauses. Conder agreed, pragmatically recommending that the prayer of petitions should be restricted to matters on which there was unity of opinion.[4]

When Graham eventually gave way, Dissenters began to discuss the next step. The Nonconformist had long determined

1. N., 12 April 1843 pp. 225-6, 233.
2. ibid., 26 April 1843 p. 264, 3 May 1843 p. 291.
3. E.R., 4s., vol. XIII, 1843, p. 699.
4. P., 20 April 1843 pp. 259, 260.

what it should be, asking, in April, whether

> ..... Those hosts which,under curious colours, are mustering in hot haste, and combining their forces against the proposed educational measure of the government - are they to be disbanded upon the decision of the first skirmish, when they might be converted into a phalanx of "Ironsides" to wage a warfare with political ecclesiasticism, until not a vestige of it remains to plague the people's peace? .....

A month later Miall affirmed that the majority of the Dissenters were prepared to turn the defensive agitation into a permanent aggressive one. At the beginning of June, anticipating the Home Secretary's retreat, he warned that, since the Church was determined to crush Dissent, this could only be a deferment, a breathing space, and advised the summoning of a general convention of Nonconformists as the best means of establishing an enduring and effective organisation of forces.[1] Graham had withdrawn with "ammunition and baggage", and the only way to counter an enemy,who had retired in good order, was to attack. To Miall, the desirability of an offensive strategy was obvious. Constantly acting on the defensive, Dissent had won some victories, but had made no real progress. Events in Scotland, where the Disruption had just taken place, had seriously undermined the Scottish establishment; the Irish Church was insecure; Wales was almost completely Nonconformist; and, in England, Graham had "awakened dissenters to a consciousness of their danger, and infused into them a spirit of determination to which they had long been strangers". This was the time to "quit our entrenchments - the word must be given to advance to the attack". An immediate appeal to Parliament was clearly unrealistic. The first task was to educate Dissenters in their principles, and

1. N., 19 April 1843 pp. 248-9, 10 May 1843 p. 328, 7 June 1843 p. 408.

to enlighten public opinion. All this might be commenced by a delegate conference, meeting in some central provincial town.[1]

The Eclectic agreed,that "self-preservation and religious duty" dictated firm action by Dissenters to end the predominance of the "state sect".[2] Meanwhile, the Patriot recommended a similar, if less decided course. Graham had enunciated principles that made peace between the Establishment and Dissent impossible. In this situation, it was the first "dictate of prudence ..... not to disband" the force that had defeated him.

> ..... Having no party in the State now to look to, we must - there is no help for it - be a party in ourselves, or create one worthy of the cause - Religious Liberty - for the sake of which it is noble to agitate, to contend, and, if need be, to suffer.

In union lay strength; divided, Dissent would fall an easy prey to the "insatiable voracity" of the Church. Hence, the formation of "a solemn league for the aggressive as well as the defensive assertion and vindication of those principles, in the firm persuasion, that He who has made us conquerors in an isolated encounter, will not fail us in the firm, united, and religious determination to plant the standard of complete religious freedom upon the fortress of its enemies", was proposed. The Wesleyan attitude was crucial, if the united front was to be maintained, but even were they to relapse into their apparent alliance with the Church, Dissenters should attempt to launch and lead a popular movement "for the avowed purpose of abolishing the Church Monopoly - the vilest of all the vile monopolies by which England is ground

1. ibid., 21 June 1843 pp. 440-1.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XIII, 1843, p. 713.

down and oppressed".[1] But, whilst the Nonconformist offered constructive schemes, and set about their implementation, Conder took the matter no further.

All depended on the decision taken in the capital, but the metropolitan leaders were clearly reluctant to make a definite move, despite Miall's discovery of another motive for immediate action in Russell's suggested co-establishment of Catholicism and Protestantism in Ireland.[2] In May, he had told Dissenters to "mistrust all societies", believing that only a representative assembly "will effectually destroy what we take leave to designate the clique-oracy of dissent".[3] The appearance of a letter from Dr. John Campbell, writing under the pseudonym of "the Author of Jethro", in the Patriot, seemed to justify this warning. Miall contemptuously dismissed his proposals as "the bit-by-bit policy". The London minister implied that separation was impracticable, and, cautioning Dissenters against commencing an agitation for extreme objects, advised the creation of a greater unified structure within Congregationalism, the establishment of a daily newspaper, the multiplication of Sunday-schools and day schools, the reconstruction of the Sunday-school Union on nonconformist principles, and the conversion of the Religious Freedom Society into "an instrument of the most potent efficiency in defending dissenters, and shaking the anti-christian foundations of the Church of England". The Nonconformist's comment was reminiscent of the tone of the Leicestershire Mercury in the mid-thirties.

> The channels he has worked out as the most appropriate in which for nonconforming zeal to run,

1. P., 19 June 1843 pp. 444-5, 22 June 1843 p. 452.
2. N., 19 July 1843 p. 497.
3. ibid., 17 May 1843 p. 360.

> so undisguisedly converge upon Bolt-court, that comparatively few dissenters, we should imagine, are likely to overlook the circumstance. The advice given has too strong a smell of the shop to be mistaken.....

Campbell's aim, the editor hazarded, was"to damp down" the Dissenters' "rising courage, to dissuade them from lofty enterprise, and to set them upon a series of petty manoeuvres, which, even should they succeed, will leave them much where they were before".[1]

Nevertheless, Miall still felt impelled to make an appeal to the metropolitan nonconformist divines, reminding them of their great influence, and the responsibilities this entailed. Graham's Bill, and the increase of Puseyism within the Church of England proved that inaction had benefitted neither Dissent nor truth, whilst, through firm commitment to principles, their Scottish counterparts had paved the way for the Disruption.[2] A few weeks later he reported a rumour, that, unwilling to disturb the recently triumphant alliance, the leaders of that movement, who should have been the natural leaders of a more advanced agitation, were planning a defensive strategy for the parliamentary recess, in preparation for another contest on education in 1844. Miall scorned this fencing before shadows.[3] Prospects seemed brighter, however, on 16 August, when the Nonconformist announced that steps would be taken to maintain the spirit of recent months by provincial ministers, "undeterred by the ominous silence preserved at headquarters". The opinions of readers on the conference scheme were requested. Miall enthused lyrically over their response.

1. ibid., 28 June 1843 p. 449. P., 22 June 1843 p. 454.
2. N., 12 July 1843 p. 481.
3. ibid., 2 August 1843 p. 529.

> We may now bid a final adieu to the system of petty warfare. The exclusively defensive policy has had its trial, and has failed. A universal feeling of distrust prevails in reference to the small-boned expedients of those who emphatically style themselves 'practical men'. Various signs, which cannot be misapprehended, betoken the breaking up of the long winter of apathy and inaction. The 'thick-ribbed ice' cracks on every hand. The snow melts, and already the distinct outlines of the landscape which it overspreads, begin to develope themselves. Down from the surrounding heights, innumerable rills of feeling gush and flow towards a common centre. The very air is balmy, and breathes hope of sunnier days. The god of light mounts higher in the heavens - and all things which have life within them are peeping forth to do him homage.

More than ever convinced, "that there exists in this country a rich and extensive unworked mine of anti-state-church opinion, which needs but courage, skill, and industry, to render eminently productive.....", he again began the task of exploding "the pretext for quiescence".[1]

At the end of September, the Address of seventy-six Midland ministers to "the Dissenting Ministers and Churches in London and its vicinity", was published. Leicester men, including Mursell, were behind this new departure. Satisfied by recent events, that, "the great cause of religious freedom will not be left without further assaults, and that there is neither safety nor honour to the nonconformists of these realms in leaving in its present position the question of religious establishments", the signatories asked their London brethren,

> ..... as many as approve of our design, to convene, with as little delay as possible, a conference of dissenting ministers and others from all parts of the country, for the purpose of seriously deliberating upon and adopting measures for promoting, by all Christian and constitutional means, the dissolution of the union between the Church and the State.

1. ibid., 16 August 1843 p. 561, 23 August 1843 p. 577, 30 August 1843 p. 593, 13 September 1843 p. 625.

Copies were forwarded to the secretaries of all the dissenting bodies in the metropolis.[1]

Miall welcomed the determination to act implicit in the Address. To refute charges that it was the product of men, ambitious to establish their own authority, and "supremacy of influence", he pointed out that the leadership had been offered to others, though if they refused the signatories would be bound to take the practical steps necessary to achieve the desired result.[2]

Those London moderates who were planning to capitalise on the feelings aroused during the spring, were disconcerted by the Midland Address. Andrew Reed was visiting provincial centres sounding opinion, hoping to found a Free Church Society, "to seek to uphold the great principle, that the civil government has not, and cannot have, any right whatsoever, to know or to interfere with the religious opinions, professions, or worship of the people; and that to raise such an unjust claim, has been to dishonour God". The Society, operating through local associations, would supervise the diffusion of information, maintain a careful oversight of parliamentary proceedings, and provide a known centre for communication. Here was a virtual revival of the Religious Freedom Society, the proposed body being more defensive than aggressive. Reed's associate in this was Dr. F.A.Cox, Baptist minister at Hackney, and a meeting was held in the Congregational Library to test opinion. Afterwards, Reed wrote,

I found that certain earnest friends at

1. ibid., 4 October 1843 p. 674. The Address was sent to both Nonconformist and Patriot by Mursell. Patterson. A.T.: Radical Leicester, p. 257. Miall,A: Life of Edward Miall, p. 92.
2. N., 4 October 1843 p. 673.

> Leicester, had taken an advanced step, as if in despair of London. They had promised to wait for five or six weeks, to give us time to test public opinion; but, instead of pausing, a claim was set up for precedence, and the whole thing was committed. I resolved most reluctantly, to stand aside.....1

Reed criticised privately, others stated their objections publicly, several letters appearing in the Patriot opposed to the convention scheme. "A Lay Dissenter" deplored a project that could only breed disunion, and, with other correspondents, suggested that it was the duty of ministers of religion to war with Satan, not their fellow Christians, damaging the spiritual life of the churches, and alienating churchmen. Dissenters, it was argued, should concentrate on the education of the public mind, this contributing more to the achievement of separation than any convention, however well attended. J.D.C. pointed to the failure of previous attempts to agitate Nonconformity on the establishment question, asserting that apathy was still general, and a representative assembly, therefore, premature; to demonstrate their sincerity, the signatories to the Address could do no worse than to form auxiliaries of the Evangelical Voluntary Church Association in their towns and villages. An even more expedientist viewpoint came from "A Looker On", who advised Dissenters to protect their own liberties before attacking the Church.[2]

A more public protest was made by the committee of the Bedfordshire Union. They too sent an Address to the London ministers, this time explaining the inexpediency of the

1. Reed A. &. C.: Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Andrew Reed....., pp. 215-7. N., 22 November 1843 pp. 785-6, for a report of a preliminary meeting at Liverpool attended by Reed, and chaired by Thomas Raffles.
2. P., 9 October 1843 p. 703. "A Lay Dissenter", 16 October 1843 p. 715, "A Dissenter", 27 November 1843 p.815, "A Looker On", 7 December 1843 p. 339, "J.D.C.", 14 December 1843 p.855, "A Northamptonshire Minister".

proposals that had emanated from Leicester. Mursell wrote to the Nonconformist denying that this representation of the views of Bedfordshire Dissenters was accurate, and that journal alleged that the Address had been drawn up under the influence of Dr. John Leifchild, the London Congregationalist minister, then in the country preaching missionary sermons.[1]

Amongst the nonconformist press the Eclectic firmly supported the convention scheme. "Content with the enjoyment of personal freedom of conscience", Dissenters had ignored the evils of state religion for too long, allowing"the prerogatives of Christ to remain under usurpation, and his system of spiritual agency to be controlled by those who understand it not". Selfish and temporal ends had motivated all their societies save the Evangelical Voluntary Church Association. There was an obligation on Dissent to grapple with this "devastating evil" far more aggressively than heretofore. A convention seemed a"rational" starting point.

> .....If it be important for the body of nonconformists to enter upon so large and difficult an undertaking as the dissolution of the alliance between church and state involves, it seems natural to commence proceedings in solemn council, and to constitute by the free suffrage of the dissenting community a centre of influence to which all may look up with respect, and whose practical suggestions all would be disposed to entertain, if not to adopt.....2

The Patriot, however, disputed both premise and conclusion. A convention, Conder feared, "would be far more likely to effect a separation of Dissenters than a separation of Church and State", revealing weakness and disunion to their opponents. Religious ends, he continued, could only be

1. ibid., 12 October 1843 p. 711. N., 18 October 1843 p. 705, 25 October 1843 pp. 723-4.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XIV, 1843, pp. 567-91.

achieved by religious means, and he recommended an extension of the operations of the denominational societies to improve knowledge of the Gospel. Both Baptist and Congregational Unions, and all dissenting churches, were "an Anti-State-Church association of the best kind - not a political one, but a religious society formed in 'a spirit of allegiance to the Head of the Church', and bearing testimony against 'a State-sanctioned, State-supported nominalism'".[1]

When the Metropolitan Anti-State-Church Association sent its address for insertion in the Patriot, Conder rejected it, castigating this "ill-considered proposal to add one more to the already numerous Associations for similar objects, without the shadow of a reason, except the 'fiery energy' which inspires a few ambitious young spirits burning for distinction - the 'Young England' of metropolitan Nonconformity."[2] The Association sprang out of the East London Religious Liberty Society, whose secretary, John Carvell Williams, was destined to become the first full-time secretary of the Anti-State-Church Association. In the provinces, the Norfolk and Norwich Religious Liberty Society, and the attempt to form an anti-state-church society in Bristol were symptomatic of the new spirit in Dissent.[3]

As the weeks slipped by, and no reply was made to the Midland Address, dissatisfaction became more and more vocal. "Testis" reported an increasing annoyance in the provincial churches with metropolitan indifference, especially amongst rural ministers, who suspected that the Londoner, "finding himself in no inconvenience from a state church, feels but

1. P., 6 November 1843 p. 764.
2. ibid., 2 November 1843 pp. 756-7.
3. N., 18 October 1843 p. 706, 1 December 1843 p. 738, 13 December 1843 p. 833.

little for those of whose pittance every tithe she exacts is a large proportion....." Another attributed their inactivity to "the dinner-table influence" of wealthy churchmen, whilst J.F.Bontems claimed that the Address would have met with a different response had it been sent to individual churches, rather than to ministerial committees. Several correspondents of the Nonconformist regretted the passivity of the laity, which pre-disposed them to wait for a ministerial lead, and there were warnings that the Londoners intended to smother the demand for a convention, and to strengthen their own influence by the formation of local anti-state-church associations, dependent on a central committee, Reed's peregrinations lending substance to this charge.[1]

The attitude of the Patriot persuaded Miall that the provincial ministers would have to move without support from London. Ready to follow the metropolis, he hastened to point out that the Midlands' ministers would not consider co-operation with any association centred on London, "based upon any principle whatever, and much less, such a milk and water one as that carried at the Liverpool meeting". The demands of deference had been met; the provincials had sufficient justification for taking the first step, and the Londoners had no right to suppress their initiative.[2]

Some Londoners were willing to countenance the forward movement, and on 7th December Miall, together with Drs. Cox and Price, met a number of ministers and laymen in the Leicester Town Hall Library. Cox took the chair, emphasising the importance of ensuring the cordial co-operation of all

1. P., 19 October 1843 p. 727. N., 22 November 1843 pp. 787-8. 29 November 1843 p. 803, 2 December 1843 p. 829.
2. N., 8 November 1843 p. 753, 22 November 1843 p. 792, 29 November 1843 p. 801, 6 December 1843 p. 817.

friends of the voluntary principle. After long discussion, a resolution was carried confirming the expediency of summoning a convention as "a suitable method of commencing a serious movement against" the establishment principle. In the evening Cox agreed to act as provisional secretary, and a list of 120 potential members of a provisional committee was drawn up; this committee was to nominate a central executive committee to make the necessary arrangements, Cox, Miall, and Price forming a sub-committee to effect this plan. Six days later Leifchild presided over a meeting of metropolitan ministers, at which Price and Cox explained what had occurred at Leicester. The decisions taken there were approved, and Cox and Reed were authorised to call a more general meeting. On 26 December in the Congregational Library, this endorsed the findings of the previous gatherings, and appointed a sub-committee, (the Revs. J.Carlile and C.Stovel, and J.M.Hare), to co-operate with that commissioned at Leicester.[1]

Miall's reaction was fervent. His "Ecclesiastical Affairs" leader in the last issue of 1843 was entitled, "The Rubicon passed", and his first of 1844, "'To your tents, O Israel!'" Dissenters were exhorted to participate in a movement designed for nobler ends than the mere extension of their civil liberties:- the freeing of the "religion of Christ secularised".

> ..... an end identified with, not their present comfort merely, but the future and eternal well-being, of man - affecting the highest interests, not of a sect, but of the Church - not of a party, but of mankind. Our civil liberties may be lawfully contended for - but the rights and responsibilities which spiritual relationships devolve upon us none can blamelessly lay aside.2

1. ibid., 27 December 1843 pp. 865-6, 880. Patterson, A.T.; Radical Leicester, p. 257.
2. N., 27 December 1843 p. 865, 3 January 1844 p. 1, 31 January 1844 p. 61 - "The Summons of Truth".

The Eclectic was no less enthusiastic. Other organs of dissent expressed their support, including the Christian Examiner, previously critical of the convention scheme. The Inquirer hoped that Unitarians would co-operate, and the Patriot stated its "deliberate opinion in favour of the present plan", it being"the part of prudence" to commence an active movement with a Conference representative of all opponents of the establishment principle, especially as recent events made future ecclesiastical conflict likely. Moreover, it would ease the fears of the ultra-conservatives, and moderate the tempers of the more forward.

> .....We cannot think that any rash or violent course can possibly originate in such a Conference; but it may prevent indiscreet displays or untoward divisions. There is a Young Englandism afloat, that mingles itself as an element in all sorts of movements, - a species of political electricity, which, according as it can be collected and conducted, may become an agent of good or of mischief.....

Clearly, there was a feeling in London, that if the conference were summoned under their aegis, then its tone and decisions might be controlled.[1]

Some organs remained silent, or were openly hostile."Nil Desperandum", lamenting the quiescence of the Congregational and Evangelical Magazines, wondered whether, "a certain influential board has enjoined such a mode of proceeding as that complained of?" Campbell, despite the vigorous anti-state-churchism of the fledgling Christian Witness, avowed himself "a reluctant convert, but a real one", on the very last day of

1. E.R., 4s., vol. XV, 1844, pp. 354-65. P., 1 January 1844 pp. 4-5, 8 January 1844 p. 20. The Christian Examiner (edited by the Rev. John Carlile, January 1841 - June 1848) is quoted in P., 18 January 1844 p. 43, the Inquirer, in ibid., 8 January 1844 p. 22, the Baptist Magazine and the Voluntary, in ibid., 1 February 1844 p. 78. The Nonconformist printed many favourable articles and comments from the provincial radical press.

the Conference.[1]

John Blackburn, editor of the Congregational Magazine, asserted that "thousands" disapproved of the scheme, despite their conviction of the injurious nature of a religious establishment. Conversely, the Eclectic, although regretting the absence from the provisional committee list of many men "whose public sanction of so noble an enterprise were, unquestionably, to be coveted," decided that it afforded "sufficient evidence, that the general body of Dissenters in this empire, are prepared to countenance a serious aggressive movement, having for its object the separation of the church from the state". Miall spoke in similar terms.[2]

Certainly, few of those dubbed the "aristocracy of Dissent" were members of either provisional or executive committees. On the latter, militants of the thirties - John Childs, Miall, and Mursell - rubbed shoulders with the men they had condemned, like Conder. Academic dissent was represented by John Pye Smith from Homerton, Dr. Jenkyn, President of Coward College, and Dr. Payne from the Western Academy. Other Congregationalists on the committee were John Burnet, Richard Alliot, and John Carlile, all ministers, and Apsley Pellatt, a layman. The Baptists were represented by Doctors Cox and Price, the Revs. W. Brock (Norwich), J.E.Giles (Leeds), C.Stovel, and J.M.Hare, a sub-editor on the Patriot. From Scotland, there were Dr. John Brown, and Dr. Heugh, both prominent in northern voluntary agitations, and Dr. Ralph Wardlaw, the Congregationalist. Finally there was one dissident Methodist, the Rev. Robert Eckett, and one Churchman, Sharman Crawford,

1. N., 13 March 1844 p. 159, 6 May 1844 p. 311.
2. C.M., 1844, pp. 392-3. E.R., 4s., vol. XV, 1844, pp. 350-1. N., 24 January 1844 p. 45.

the radical Member for Rochdale. These were prominent men, but the provisional committee, including some widely known names, also contained many lesser ones, and many whose fame lay in the future.[1]

Miall was particularly gratified by the support the scheme received in the theological colleges. A letter appeared in the columns of the Nonconformist from the students of Horton Baptist College in December, and in March, 1844, the Metropolitan Collegiate Association passed a series of favourable resolutions, whereupon the committees of the Congregationalist Highbury and Homerton Colleges forced their students to withdraw from that body. At the Lancashire Independent College, John Guiness Rogers suggests that Vaughan's more conservative views were not shared by the bulk of the students under his care.[2]

All approving organs of the dissenting press, did their best to assure the hesitant that the immediate object was not a direct attack on the Church of England, and in this they were assisted by the Address of the executive committee. This explained that the first task would be the education and organisation of Dissent, that,

> The object of the Conference will, therefore, be to act upon the conscience and the heart of the dissenting community, and to devise a means adapted to bring them up to the level of their responsibility; in order that, at as early a period as possible, they may make their peaceful, but united and determined, exertions tell upon the legislature.....3

Despite this, objections still continued to be raised; and had to be answered. These were the principal ones. The

1. N., 24 January 1844 p. 60, 7 February 1844 p. 92 for the committee lists.
2. ibid., 13 December 1843 p. 833, 3 April 1844 p. 208. Rogers, J.G.: An Autobiography, pp. 69-70.
3. N., 28 February 1844 p. 125.

wrong men were taking the lead at a time when such action was inopportune. How could a new move succeed where the church rates agitation had failed? Powerless and disunited, Dissent could not hasten the inevitable downfall of the Church of England, a Church riven by internal discord.[1] Blackburn, in the Congregational Magazine, deplored the adoption of political means to achieve a religious end, alleging that this was the necessary consequence of an all-embracing movement. Hence, he condemned a conference, which, whilst ostensibly avowing a religious objective, was to contain "Christians, Socinians, and men of no religion". This inconsistent alliance would only enfeeble the power of truth. Ministers and churches, he added, had other tasks to perform. Few of the former were "qualified for successful political action, and ..... all may be more usefully employed", whilst the latter would lose their christian character if they became political associations.

> In conclusion, we cannot but regard the constitution of the Anti-State-Church Conference as liable to the same objections as the State Church itself. Its design is to employ worldly influence for the advancement of Christian objects; and to use Christian churches for the promotion of political objects. We think that Christian societies should be used only for Christian ends, and that these will only be attained when sought by Christian means.

The critic remained unrepentent, despite the mild reproaches of Conference speakers.[2]

The absence of the "respectable dissenters" did not disappoint Miall. He regarded this as a guarantee that the supporters of the plan were earnest men, and he directed his

1. P., 28 March 1844 p. 204, 1 April 1844 pp. 213-4, 215, 4 April 1844 p. 220.
2. C.M., 1844, pp. 392-4, 472-4. Dr. Jenkyn, who raised the matter at the Conference, regretted that so few of his London brethren had attended. N., 6 May 1844 p. 311.

appeals at "every sincere nonconformist".[1]

Congregations, meeting on their own, were allowed to send two delegates, meeting together, they could select four. Public meetings and colleges could also choose two representatives. The first delegation, consisting of Miall and Crawford, was commissioned at a London Tavern meeting convened by the Metropolitan Anti-State-Church Association.[2] The columns of the Nonconformist were soon filled with reports of similar meetings, and weekly lists of delegates were printed. Nevertheless, in mid-April, Conder was bemoaning "a manifest scarcity of large English towns".[3] In the final outcome the attendance from these centres was disappointing. The only Manchester congregations to send delegations appear to have been the Lloyd Street Presbyterians and the York Street Baptists. Only the Baptists stirred in Leeds, and the Congregationalists were quiescent in Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield. In Birmingham a public meeting selected four delegates, Joseph Sturge, Rev. T.H.Morgan (Baptist), Councillor Barlow (Wesleyan Methodist), and J.H.Wilson (Independent), all active members of the Complete Suffrage Union's council. John Angell James took no part in these proceedings, and was opposed to the Conference.[4] Overall, Baptist churches sent the greatest number of representatives. As for the Congregationalists, their organ commented,

> ..... In respect to the number of Congregationalists who support the conference, and who dissent from it, this is a numerical question very easily solved. Not withstanding the novel

1. N., 27 March 1844 p. 189, 10 April 1844 p. 221.
2. ibid., 13 March 1844 p. 172, 27 March 1844 pp. 189-90.
3. P., 18 April 1844 p. 253.
4. N., 17 April 1844 p. 243. Dale, R.W.: Life and Letters of John Angell James, p. 422.

> device of gaining representatives from fractions of congregations, only about one-tenth of our congregations in London, and about one-twentieth of our congregations in the country, had any connexion with this conference. We know not how, when this was evident, it could be said, that, in giving "earnest co-operation to the Anti-State-Church Conference", there was nothing more than "the maintaining and promulgating of the general principles of the whole body of Protestant Dissenters".1

Of the London committees, only the Deputies, after considerable debate and some division, approved of the Conference.[2] The Baptist Union was the only English denominational organisation to send delegates, and this, too, followed great discussion. A resolution affirming the principle of separation was carried unanimously, and one proposing the selection of representatives by 50 votes to 22. Cox and Hare were mover and seconder.[3]

In this situation, Miall felt impelled to explain why so many of the delegates were unknown men, from obscure places.

> ..... it is from our country churches, from places little known, and districts quite remote from the public gaze, that the main host of representatives troop forth - and, in general, they are men who, coming into close contact with the workings of the state-church system, and driven to see the most baneful of its practical results, have silently nutured against it a zeal which has long struggled to express itself, and which, at the trumpet call of the Executive Committee, started up into a determination, strong enough to set at nought all opposing influence, and to disregard all the forms of conventional and courteous deference to the opinions of others which in lesser matters had been so habitually and not unwillingly rendered.4

Ultimately, about 700 delegates attended. The proceedings opened auspiciously, with blessings from Ralph Wardlaw and John Pye Smith. Papers were read by the former,

1. C.M., 1844, p. 473.
2. Manning, B.L.: The Protestant Dissenting Deputies, p. 392.
3. P., 25 April 1844 p. 269.
4. N., 1 May 1844 p. 285.

by Miall, by "A Lawyer", and by Mursell. Men active in the old Voluntary Church Association mingled with provincial militants. Jenkyn and Smith were the two most notable Congregationalist speakers. Resolutions were passed condemnatory of the state church principle, and recommending Dissenters "to commence such wise, united, and well-directed efforts as may issue in the separation of the church from the state". A scheme of organisation was adopted.[1]

Eclectic, Nonconformist, and to a lesser extent, Patriot, were elated by this successful outcome. The moderation of the speakers, their unanimity, the earnest atmosphere, were matters to mull over, and pointers to a bright future.

> ..... The temper of the meeting was most admirable..... On no occasion have we seen anything to be compared with it. The men were at once earnest and discreet; decided in their views, yet thoughtful and sagacious in the measures they originated; solicitous to accelerate the progress of the cause, yet concerned to avoid whatever was premature or doubtful; fully cognizant of their rights as citizens, yet determined in the first place to address themselves exclusively to the hearts and consciences of their own people; independent yet united; free in the utterance, yet heartily concerned to rally round a common standard. We have attended many popular assemblies; but we never witnessed one in which ..... there was so much decorum, and singleness of purpose..... 2

The fundamental principle of the British Anti-State-Church Association was, that,

> ..... in matters of religion man is responsible to God alone; that all legislation by secular governments in the affairs of religion is an encroachment upon the rights of men, and an invasion of the prerogatives of God; and that the application

1. ibid., 6 May 1844 pp. 301-12. Proceedings of the First Anti-State-Church Conference held in 1844, (London, undated). Miall, A.: Life of Edward Miall, pp. 93-6.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XV, 1844, pp. 724-41. P., 6 May 1844 p. 301. N., 8 May 1844 p. 317, 15 May 1344 p. 349, 22 May 1844 p. 381, 29 May 1844 p. 397, 5 June 1844 p. 413. Miall's articles conclude with outlines of what the individual could do to strengthen the cause in his own locality.

> by law of the resources of the state to the maintenance of any form or forms of religious worship and instruction, is contrary to reason, hostile to human liberty, and directly opposed to the word of God.

Its object was "the liberation of religion from all governmental or legislative interference", employing only lawful and peaceful means to that end. Information was to be disseminated through lectures and the commissioning of original essays and pamphlets. Local associations were to be encouraged. At elections it was hoped, wherever possible, to return "men of known integrity and ability, conversant with the principles of this society, and ready to avail themselves of all suitable occasions for exciting discussion thereupon, and ready to promote its object". The Association promised to assist such Members at all times, and especially when the council deemed it advisable to raise the state church question in Parliament. The society piously anticipated the issue's removal from the party arena, and planned to take immediate measures to secure the repeal of all obnoxious laws and the enactment of others providing the widest interpretation of the principles of religious liberty possible.

The Association's constitution was deliberately designed to avoid ossification and cliqueism - the twin butts of attack since the mid-thirties. To effect this, the executive committee of 50 was responsible to a council of 500, which it was to meet annually, to report the year's activities, and to receive new instructions. Every third year, a conference of delegates chosen by all who adhered to the society's fundamental principle, was to be convened. This popular element was supreme, for it could remodel, restrain or abolish the official authority as it saw fit. In 1844

the council was selected by the Conference, and the executive committee by the council. Miall recognised the dangers inherent in this structure, but felt that the risk was worth taking.[1]

Whilst the challenge of the educational clauses of the Factory Bill had created a spirit the militants had been able to exploit, Whig attitudes contributed to the increasing disenchantment of Dissent with their old political allies. This coolness was accentuated by the passage of the Dissenters' Chapels Bill in 1844.

Writing towards the end of that year, a reviewer in the Eclectic suggested that the Tory return to power in 1841 had benefitted Dissent by removing the encumbrance of the Whig alliance, which, during the thirties, had hindered and embarrassed all its political activities. Some had never valued the alliance in its hey-day, and Miall continued to use every opportunity to demonstrate just how little influence Dissenters actually exercised in Whig circles. Even the Patriot, in March 1842, contained what was almost the obituary of the old alliance, claiming something more than was strictly true of its outlook in the previous decade.

> ..... do not rely upon Lord JOHN RUSSELL and the Whigs for doing us justice ..... We may add that, since 1834, we have placed but little reliance upon Whig Ministers. Not that we have suspected them to be false to their principles, or otherwise than friendly to the cause of Religious Liberty; but a Church and State system enters so essentially into an aristocratic creed, that even such men as Earl FITZWILLIAM and Lord JOHN RUSSELL are betrayed by this class prejudice into all sorts of practical inconsistencies..... 2

This divergence became more apparent in 1843. At the

1. N., 8 May 1844 pp. 349-50, 10 February 1847 p. 77.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XVI, 1844, pp. 343-5. N., 13 July 1842 p. 474, 20 July 1842 p. 489. P., 7 March 1842 p. 148.

beginning of April, Russell tabled a series of resolutions on the education question. Miall feared that the Patriot would return to its "first love", adopting the proposals because they were Russell's, and that the majority of Dissenters would follow suit.[1] That journal, however, dismissed the compromise as totally inadequate, then, in July, proceeded to denounce all state educationists, and to warn Dissenters against Whig policies.

> ..... Under the Whigs, we were fast driving on towards an administrative despotism; and their Privy Council Education scheme was a part and parcel of that vicious system of centralization which threatens to swallow up, first our municipal institutions, and then our social liberties.

As for Russell, though "the last and best of the old Whigs", he was too much "a State Churchman, and aristocratic Whig", to deserve the full confidence of the Nonconformists. Possessing an "aristocratic misapprehension" of the principles of religious liberty, he tended to think "they may bend to State expediency, Church ascendancy, and edicts of Council".[2]

The passage of the Dissenters' Chapels Bill reinforced this conclusion. This was an attempt to settle and anticipate litigation, especially in Ireland, over dissenting property and trusts which had passed into Unitarian hands. In its final form, the Act simply declared that, where there was no trust deed determining doctrine, usage, or polity, occupation for twenty-five years should be taken as conclusive evidence of right of possession. An amendment, moved by Lord Cottenham in the Lords, ensured that in pending cases defendants should have benefit of the Act. This clause, opponents alleged, was designed to save Eustace

1. N., 12 April 1843 pp. 233-4.
2. P., 17 April 1843 p. 244, 3 July 1843 p. 476, 10 July 1843 p. 492.

Street Chapel in Dublin, final judgement in this case having been deferred until after the passage of the Act.[1]

Again the Patriot found itself rousing Dissenters against "a disgusting job", an attack on the orthodox, and a measure contrary to equity and all relevant judicial decisions, which threatened all trust property.

> ..... under pretext of guarding against persecution, it seeks to tie up the hands of orthodox Dissenters in a manner invidious and unjust; ..... it is a deceptive measure, its very title being fallacious, its object partial and sectarian, and its principles at variance with equity and the spirit of English jurisprudence. Much as we detest the spirit of litigation, a law to "restrain litigation" we cannot but regard as a strange anomaly and an unjust restriction upon civil rights. How inexpedient soever it may be to go to law, it being better in many cases to suffer wrong, we are not called upon to submit to have the right of appeal to law taken from us. To this Bill, therefore, the orthodox Dissenters are bound, we think, to offer the most determined opposition.....

On a more prosaic level, the Congregational Magazine stigmatised it as "a bill to endow heresy at the expense of orthodox founders".[2]

A Congregationalist lawyer wrote a pamphlet denouncing its iniquities, and the Deputies organised an agitation embracing Churchmen, Dissenters, and Wesleyans, which culminated in an Exeter Hall meeting addressed by the Revs. John Burnet, J.H.Hinton, Robert Ainslie, John Blackburn, Jabez Bunting, Edward Bickersteth and A.S.Thelwell, and by the Moderators of the various Irish Presbyterian Synods. A scandalised J.W.Massie publicly rebuked Dr. John Leifchild for submitting a congregational petition against the Bill to the Bishop of London, for presentation in the House of

1. ibid., 16 May 1844 p. 340, 20 May 1844 pp. 348-9.
2. ibid., 4 April 1844 p. 220, 8 April 1844 p. 228, 22 April 1844 p. 260, 25 April 1844 pp. 268-9, 29 April 1844 p. 276, 16 May 1844 p. 340. C.M., 1844, p. 476.

Lords. Examples of evangelical unity were not confined to the metropolis.[1]

There were some interesting exceptions to this general outcry. John Pye Smith attended a meeting of the Congregational Board, determined to prevent any "remonstrance or petition", convinced that opposition "would not be right". His journalist relations in the North, Robert Leader and Edward Baines jnr., took a similar line. Conder found the latter's assertion that the Bill was "a right and wise measure", inexplicable. Both Leader and Baines condemned endowments as a deadening influence on religious life, seeing no harm in settling a thorny problem on the equitable principle of occupation for a stated number of years. Any other solution involved endless costly legal proceedings.[2]

Miall, too, praised the measure's justice, avowing his own hostility to the endowment of religious beliefs. Furthermore, the Nonconformist, deeply committed to the Anti-State-Church Conference, deplored any movement that might widen the divisions within Dissent. Significantly, Miall was one of the eight Deputies whose requisition convened a special meeting of that body at the height of the fight, to re-consider the position, and his name, together with that of Dr. Price, appears amongst those Deputies who

1. Evans, J.C.: Letter to the Right Honourable Lord Lyndhurst ..... on the proposed Alteration of the Law of Charitable Trusts, contained in the Dissenters' Chapels Bill, now before the House of Lords, (London, 1844). Manning, B.L.: op. cit., pp. 87-93. P., 20 May 1844 p. 348 (Manchester meeting), 30 May 1844 pp. 377, 383 (Exeter Hall meeting), 10 June 1844 p. 484 (Liverpool meeting). Massie's letter is in ibid., 9 May 1844 p. 319.
2. Medway, J.: Memoirs of the Life and Writings of John Pye Smith ....., p. 473. P., 29 April 1844 p. 277. L.N., 13, 27 April, 25 May, 1 June 1844. Baines, E., jnr.: The Life of Edward Baines ....., p. 319. Leader, R.E.: Chapters in the Political History of Sheffield, 1832-1849, (Sheffield, 1884), p. 55.

signed a series of resolutions repudiating the official policy. The Patriot, alleging that the majority of the signatories were Unitarians, regretted the appearance of Trinitarians amongst them, and anti-state-churchmen were urged to oppose a measure, described as a virtual State endowment of Unitarianism.[1]

But the victory of 1843 was not to be repeated, the Bill having an easy passage through both Houses, a further illustration, commented the Patriot, of the widening gulf between the Whigs and their traditional allies. Peel's success was attributed to Whig and Liberal support; the Bill itself was "essentially a Whig measure", the penalty for dissenting opposition to Whig education proposals, and to "the precious Liberal scheme" for the endowment of Roman Catholicism in Ireland. Unitarians had generally supported these plans; this was their reward. The Dissenters' Chapels Bill, Conder concluded, was "little short of a declaration of war on the part of the Liberals against the orthodox Dissenters". Liberal Members were warned that, though Unitarians might be prominent on constituency committees, it was the orthodox who possessed the voting strength.[2]

Equally, the events of 1844 re-illustrated the weakness of Dissent in Parliament. In the previous year, Conder had reminded Dissenters of how little they owed to Members in forcing Graham to withdraw the educational clauses. Only Hawes, Hindley and Ewart deserved "our cordial thanks", and Hindley was rebuked for his mild criticism of the Home

1. N., 20 March 1844 p. 180, 15 May 1844 p. 396, 12 June 1844 p. 429. Manning, B.L.: op. cit., p. 91. P., 20 May 1844 p. 348, 30 May 1844 p. 380.
2. P., 6 June 1844 p. 396, 10 June 1844 p. 404, 13 June 1844 p. 412, 24 June 1844 p. 436.

Secretary's duplicity in retaining educational provisions in the Bill's final form. "Wanted, a Member to represent the Dissenters", was the title of this article, and it commended John Bright to the dissenting electors of Durham, as one who would "openly and efficiently represent the views and feelings of Dissenters".[1]

By 1844 the Patriot could allege that "nearly all our Liberals would seem to be anti-Evangelical", that, "in the eyes of Whig Churchmen, Voluntaryism is the worst heresy". Two consecutive sessions had proved that, not only were Dissenters "religiously unrepresented, but that they can rely, for their security, upon no section in the House, no party in the State". The remedy lay in their own hands.[2]

During the 1843 agitation Miall had advocated electoral co-operation between free traders, complete suffragists, and Nonconformists in the constituencies, to undermine the dominance of the local Whig oligarchies.[3] Conder did not go this far, but he suggested that if Dissenters used their resources wisely they might add 50,000 electors to the register, and return to Parliament at the next general election, "not less than a dozen representatives fully conversant with their views, interests, and principles". Here was a more obviously sectarian policy than that recommended by the radical Nonconformist, although the Patriot did not discountenance alliance with all "honest Reformers" "in the prosecution of a patriotic warfare against class interests and monopolies".[4]

1. ibid., 19 June 1843 p. 445, 17 July 1843 p. 508, 20 July 1843 p. 516.
2. ibid., 10 June 1844 p. 404, 13 June 1844 p. 412.
3. N., 26 April 1843 pp. 264-5.
4. P., 24 June 1844 p. 436. Dissenters, he added, should reject all Unitarian leadership at constituency level.

1843 and 1844 were preludes to the more dramatic events of 1845 and 1847. Dissent had successfully asserted its national strength in defeating Sir James Graham, and the London leaders were becoming increasingly disillusioned with the Whig alliance that had been the cornerstone of their political activities for so many years. The reverse in 1844 was galling, but the demonstrations against the Factory Bill had made the leaders of Dissent, both moderate and militant, conscious of the power they had at their command. With this consciousness, the militants felt a greater confidence in their own future. In the British Anti-State-Church Association they believed they had the means of permanently rousing that power into life, thus achieving their twin aims - the disestablishment of the Established Church, and the overthrow of the traditional leaders of Nonconformity.

CHAPTER 8.

MILITANCY MADE RESPECTABLE,

1845-1847.

Despite the success of the Convention, it proved no easy task to generate nonconformist support for the Association it had sired. It was mid-June before the list of the executive committee was advertised in the press, and almost immediately two of its most distinguished members, Joseph Sturge and Sharman Crawford, withdrew through pressure of other commitments. Nevertheless, there remained the names of many men prominent in the agitations of the preceding fifteen years, including William Baines, Rev. John Burnet, Dr. John Campbell, John Childs, Josiah Conder, Dr. Cox, Miall, Mursell, Dr. Price, Rev. C.Stovel, and Dr. Wardlaw. A committee of fifty was too unwieldy for everyday purposes, and, the Association was managed by a nucleus of London residents. The society's first officers were those who had been responsible for the preparations of the spring, Price being appointed treasurer, and Cox, Miall, and Hare joint-secretaries.[1]

Other difficulties were soon encountered. At first no bank would accept the Association's account, an incident paralleled in the early fifties by the decision of "the principal proprietor of the book-stalls on the Railways" not to handle its publications, and the refusal of the Commissioners for the Great Exhibition to insert its advertisement in their catalogue. This prejudice extended to Dissent, too, for the society found it impossible to hire one schoolroom or

1. N., 5 June 1844 p. 428, 12 June 1844 p. 430, 26 June 1844 p. 542. Miall, A.: Life of Edward Miall, p. 96. An examination of the Minutes of the executive committee, which survive from 1850, and are deposited in the Greater London Record Office, confirms these conclusions about its method of working.

chapel in the Westminster area during the winter 1844-5, in which to give a series of lectures. Another early problem was created by doubts as to the legality of local corresponding auxiliaries. After experiments with a system of local registrars, it was decided to give the executive committee a national authority, and local committees responsibility for activities in their own districts, all funds raised being paid into the London treasury. This lack of local autonomy was to cause difficulties in the future.[1]

The East London Religious Liberty Society, and the Metropolitan Anti-State-Church Association dissolved to enable their members to join the British Anti-State-Church Association, but the "respectable" Dissenters continued to stand aloof.[2] Dr.Pye Smith was requested to withdraw from the Association by the Homerton College committee - he refused.[3] Writing in 1846, one commentator marvelled at the longevity of the misconceptions of 1844, and told of damaging rumours being "industriously whispered in several circles", causing, "with some few honourable exceptions, the more prominent members of the dissenting body throughout England, whether ministers or others, to look upon it with disfavour, and systematically decline to take part in its proceedings". Declining to meet the Association's deputations, they tried to discourage others, frequently forbidding the announcement of its lectures in their chapels.[4]

1. N., 17 July 1844 p. 509, 27 November 1844 p. 820, Miall, A.: op. cit., pp. 96-8. Minute Book (of the committee) of the British Anti-State-Church Association, vol. 2, (Greater London Record Office, reference A/LIB/1), pp. 152, 210.
2. N., 21 August 1844 p. 590, 27 November 1844 pp. 813-4. Reed, C.E.B.: Memoir of Sir Charles Reed, (London, 1883) p. 60.
3. Hedway, J.: Memoirs of the Life and Writings of John Pye Smith ....., pp. 471-2.
4. E.R., 4s., vol. XIX, 1846, pp. 220-246.

That there was some truth in those charges is demonstrated by the experiences of Miall and Price in Lancashire at the beginning of 1847. Archibald Prentice, the editor of the radical Manchester Times, surveyed the Manchester meeting addressed by the deputation, noticing that "not all the broad-cloth of Dissent" was present, that "There were men of respectability - of timidity - who did not wish to compromise themselves too soon to a cause". At Liverpool the ministry was conspicuous by its absence, though,

> Circulars had been specially forwarded to the Dissenting ministers and were put into the hands of many who were zealous a few years ago in directing the public mind to the great and manifold evils, both secular and spiritual, which result from the union of Church and State.

Knowledge of the "modern tendencies" of these ministers and "opulent Dissenters", of their "present avowed repugnance to a frank and open declaration of the grounds of their Dissent from the Establishment", led to a confident anticipation of this hostile attitude. This same phenomenon occured at Bolton, where the local Independent ministers, and "the wealthier portions of their congregations ..... opposed in toto to the reception of the deputation, ... resolved ..... to use all the influence that wealth and station could demand - for the purpose of making the meeting a failure".[1]

A more important manifestation of this reluctance to follow the militants, was Robert Vaughan's announcement of a scheme to launch a new dissenting quarterly. Price, editor of the Eclectic, sensing a threat to his own position, alleged that this venture was designed to, "counteract the tendency out of which the conference grew, and to be a medium of communication with the public mind, for those who are

1. N., 27 January 1847 pp. 45-7, 3 February 1847 pp. 61,67.

thoroughly hostile to its spirit and constitution".[1] Vaughan was partially motivated by the recent change in the Eclectic's tone, remarking, when he forwarded a prospectus to John Blackburn,

> ..... The only difficulty seems to be about the 'Eclectic'. But the 'Eclectic' has thrown itself into the hands of an extreme section of our body, and has no right to complain if the majority whom it now represents resolve on having a representative of their own 2

In the course of an acrimonious public correspondence, Vaughan explained that his chief criticism of the Eclectic was its recent advocacy of Chartist principles. It had "ceased to represent the political principles of the British nonconformists", had ceased to be the journal "sustained by the names of Gregory and Montgomery, of Hall and Foster". Secondly, he deplored its identification with the Anti-State-Church Conference, which Price accused him of describing as "the most calamitous event for nonconformity which had happened for three hundred years". Though sympathising with its objects,

> ..... with all deference to the good and able men included in it, I cannot forbear to look on that as a grave mistake; and my belief is, that, in such a state of society and of religious parties, as we have to deal with in this country, were the policy embodied in that Conference to be generally acted upon by our churches, the good which would result from that course to the cause of evangelical Nonconformity, would be nothing as compared with the evil .....

But the Conference was not "the immediate cause" of his proposals - "At the most, the influence of that Association has been, in this respect only, as that of one ingredient of causation among many".[3]

1. E.R., 4s., vol. XVI, 1844, footnote, pp. 351-2.
2. Waddington, J.: Congregational History, 1800-1850, p. 575.
3. N., 30 October 1844 pp. 149-50. The series of letters from the Patriot was reprinted here.

Blackburn was informed that, "Two-thirds of the guarantee fund has been obtained from Lancashire".[1] "Vindex", a Manchester man, reported that the final decision was made in Halley's vestry, and scathingly condemning the town's leading Congregationalists, he asserted that it was fast becoming, "in connexion with Liverpool and Leeds, the hotbed of respectable(?) and aristocratic dissenterism". Since incorporation, and the opening of the Lancashire Independent College, of which Vaughan was President,

> ..... a species of dissenting dandyism has sprung up; and some of our principal men, instead of taking the lead of public opinion on those mighty and vital questions which require the united energies and influence of the whole dissenting body, are perpetually hovering about the purlieus of our town hall, playing at magistrates, mayor, aldermen, and common councilmen, or are engaged with a small coterie of divines in dragging the wheels of dissent, &c., so as to prevent our onward movement ..... [2]

George Hadfield did attempt to force the abandonment of the project. Opposed to Vaughan's views, but more concerned for the College's future if the conservatism of the British Quarterly Review became associated with it, and convinced that the principal could not adequately fill both his chairs at once, he endeavoured to arouse the committee against the scheme. His resolution, suggesting the incompatibility of the editorship with the principalship, was heavily defeated, and he immediately resigned from the treasurership. The students, equally averse to their president's sentiments, supported him, critical of the efforts being made to suppress his free expression of them.[3]

1. Waddington, J.: op. et loc. cit.
2. N., 30 October 1844 p. 751.
3. Waddington J.: op. cit., pp. 756-8. Hadfield, G.: The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield, M.P., pp. 145-8. He also disapproved of Vaughan's lectures at the Manchester Atheneaum, "on the glories of heathendom in the days of Greek & Roman pride and splendour". Rogers, J.G.: An Autobiography, p. 70.

Price stumped the country arguing his case before meetings of Eclectic subscribers in several towns. The press divided predictably. Campbell, in the first flush of his own editorship, derisively compared the influence of "Six-shilling Quarterlies" belonging "to the reign which gloried in castled waggons, drawn by twelve horses, and moving at the dignified pace of twelve miles a day", to the "Cheap Periodicals", of "the age of the Railway". The Nonconformist defended the Eclectic, confidently averring,

> ..... that the British Quarterly Review has been established, less for the promotion of literature, less as an opponent to the political doctrines of the Eclectic Review, than on account of the Anti-State-Church Conference, and the serious inroad which that movement threatens to make on the influence of the aristocracy of dissent.[1]

Conversely, the Congregational Magazine welcomed the new periodical, affirming that, "justice to a very large and increasing class of nonconformist ministers and gentlemen requires that the world should know that the extreme opinions ..... advocated in certain articles", in the Eclectic, "are the sentiments only of a small section, and not of the dissenting body at large".[2] By the middle of the year, however, the British Quarterly had disarmed many of its critics by the quality of its articles, and the soundness of its political and ecclesiastical views.[3]

Despite this discouraging atmosphere of hostility and indifference, the Anti-State-Church Association prospered. By 1847 the pattern of a sustained autumn/winter campaign of lecture and deputation tours had been set. In the first three years of the society's life, 120 lectures were delivered,

1. N., 16 October 1844 p. 717, 30 October 1844 p. 750, 22 January 1845 pp. 45-6. C.W., 1844, pp. vii-viii, (Introduction to the bound volume).
2. C.H., 1845, pp. 139-40.
3. C.W., 1845, pp. 343-5. P., 3 February 1845 p. 76.

and deputations attended 80 meetings. A lecturer, John Kingsley, was appointed in March 1846, and a full time secretary, John Carvell Williams, in 1847. There were 198 registrars. 158,000 copies of the Association's pamphlets had been circulated. Thus, the Association was fulfilling its primary functions - the diffusion of information, and the education of nonconformist opinion. Financially, it was adequately served. An attempt to raise a £3,000 fund launched at the Council meeting of 1845 broke down, but the Nonconformist could boast of a financial stability unachieved by any similar dissenting society, expenditure never exceeding income.[1]

The events of 1847 augured well for the Association. Important men, who had previously stood aloof, became connected with it, one of the most valuable of these accessions being that of Edward Baines jnr., and the Leeds Independent ministers.[2] Both metropolitan journals anticipated that the first triennial conference would be "one of the most imposing assemblies of Dissenters ever yet convened, and that it will more adequately and fully represent the whole body than did the Conference of 1844 ....." "One thing is now quite clear", commented the Patriot, after its dispersal, "namely, that the British Anti-State-Church Association is fairly entitled to be considered as an accredited interpreter of the

1. N., 7 May 1845 pp. 304-7, 2 May 1849 p. 337. Minutes of the Second Annual Meeting of the Council of the British-Anti-State-Church Association ....., (London, undated, but 1846); Proceedings of the First Triennial Conference, held in Crosby Hall ....., (London, 1847). Income was as follows:- 1844-5, £1002/2/11; 1845-6, £966/19/8; 1846-7, £1429/7/0; 1847-8, £1546/11/2; 1848-9, £1776/12/3.
2. Hamilton, R.W.: Posthumous Works of the late Rev. John Ely ....., (London, 1848), p. civ. C.W., 1847, p. 275. J.G. Miall states that the Maynooth Endowment Bill had a similar effect, Congregationalism in Yorkshire, (London, 1868), p. 206.

views and feelings of the Voluntaries of Great Britain".[1]

Nationally, too, the way appeared to be opening for a sustained and successful offensive against the Established Church, Miall and his colleagues continually reiterating that state endowment of religion was the issue of the age, providential signs indicating an imminent solution.[2] In 1844 a reviewer had suggested that the leaders of Dissent might learn much from the methods of the Anti-Corn-Law League.[3] Two years later the League's task was completed. It was as if the stage was being cleared for the Voluntaries to replace it in the fore-front of middle class agitation. Miall had foreseen repeal at the end of 1845, warning his readers of the opportunity before them, once "Free Trade is reported as 'gone to be married' to the legislature". Dissenters would be culpable "if the next great question of the day be not the question of state churches". They had to act whilst the "active men" cast about for a new cause to adopt. These sentiments were recapitulated as the League prepared for dissolution, Miall being convinced that, "the church question must needs follow hard in the wake of the abolition of the corn laws".[4]

In August, the executive committee issued a circular inviting former League subscribers to enrol as members of the Anti-State-Church Association. As part of this policy, Price and Miall made their short tour of Lancashire. They left, satisfied that the county's Dissenters were "ripe for the movement", that, "the same energy which distinguished the

1. N., 28 April 1847 p. 276. P., 26 April 1847 p. 269, 7 May 1847 p. 312.
2. Proceedings of the First Triennial Conference ....., pp. 12-3.
3. E.R., 4s., vol. XV, 1844, pp. 222-3.
4. N., 24 December 1845 p. 860, 1 July 1846 p. 445. Also Minutes of the Second Annual Meeting of the Council ....., p. 7.

conduct of the League, by the people of the great manufacturing towns in the north, will very speedily be thrown into the present agitation for effecting a separation of the Church from the State".[1] Unfortunately, the Leaguers scattered into a variety of movements, none of which ever acquired the influence of the parent body, whilst those who sympathised with the aims of the Anti-State-Church Association were never entirely, or successfully, incorporated in it.

At the beginning of the 1845 session Peel announced his intention of increasing the grant to Maynooth College, and, by proceeding by bill, of releasing it from the uncertainties of a vote as part of the miscellaneous estimates. This step was to divide the Conservative party, it also divided Dissent, for although all evangelical Nonconformists opposed Peel's policy, they gave different weight to their two major grounds of opposition. The resultant split reflected the attitudes adopted towards the Anti-State-Church Conference in the previous year. Politically, the agitation was another milestone along the increasingly divergent paths taken by Whigs and Dissenters.

The dissenting press was united in its condemnation of any endowment of Roman Catholicism. Earlier criticism had emphasised this aspect of a payment made to a "Popish theological seminary of the worst character, a hotbed of sedition and bigotry".[2] Journals as far apart as the Nonconformist and the Congregational Magazine joined in a denunciation of its errors, the latter appealing to "all evangelical congregations, whether Episcopalians, Presby-

1. N., 7 October 1846 p. 669, 3 February 1847 p. 68.
2. P., 17 August 1836 p. 308, 13 February 1837 p. 100.

terians, Wesleyans, Baptists, or Independents, throughout the empire", to "protest against such an act of national apostacy". In Leeds, Edward Baines vehemently urged "British Protestants",

> ..... if they look upon it as a solemn duty to uphold religious truth and to oppose religious error, - if they regard the Reformed religion as a precious and inestimable trust, handed down from their forefathers, and constituting the richest blessing that Heaven has bestowed upon this land, - if they consider the simple New Testament Gospel a glorious gift, worth living to support and dying to defend .....

to raise "their loud and indignant protest" against the endowment of "Popery". Robert Leader won the praise of H.G.Ward, M.P. for Sheffield, for his more restrained attitude in the Sheffield Independent.

> ..... It is most gratifying to see the Independent drawing the proper line, & helping to keep Yorkshire right, which Baines, & the Leeds Mercury are corrupting..... 1

Both the Nonconformist and the Patriot denied all sympathy with the "no Popery" cry. Nevertheless, Conder, remembering the difficulties experienced by Protestant missionaries in Tahiti, and Papal intrigues throughout the world, felt it singularly foolish to aid Catholicism at a time when, "to see England humbled is the first wish of every Papist". Miall dissociated himself from,"the Liberalism which can coolly consent to clothe with new power a system ..... directly subversive of the highest prerogative of human intellect and conscience".[2]

This one objection was shared with all evangelical Protestants, but the Nonconformists had their own special

1. C.M., 1845, p. 244. L.M., 1, 22 March 1845. Leader Papers, Sheffield Central Library, L.C. 186, H.G.Ward to R.Leader, undated, but April 1845.
2. P., 24 April 1845 p. 260. N., 19 March 1845 pp. 180-1.

reason for opposing Peel's policy - their hostility to the endowment of religion, in any form, by the State. Whilst the Leeds Mercury and the Congregational Magazine emphasised opposition to the endowment of Roman Catholicism as such, the Patriot, the Nonconformist, and the Eclectic stressed the need to vindicate and defend the voluntary principle. This was tempered by a conviction that the proposal formed part of a plan to preserve the Irish Protestant establishment, being a preliminary to concurrent endowment, an outcome desired by Whig as well as Conservative.

Miall described the Bill as the "title page of a new volume of legislation". Compelled to modify the structure of establishment by the crisis through which that system was passing, statesmen realised that its survival in Ireland depended on the removal of its exclusive and intolerant facade. They decided that "the establishment is to be saved by enlarging it", for to reduce its property or power would expose the Church of England to "irresistable assault".

> ..... The Irish Church is the very key to the position occupied by the English one, the main outwork of its defence. If successfully stormed, no human craft or power can save the citadel. Well! its exclusiveness creates the danger by which it is now environed. There is no help for it but prompt concession, and, therefore, to rescue it from impending ruin, and to give it a fresh lease of existence, the Roman Catholic priesthood are to be bribed into inaction.1

The adoption of this policy, however, rebounded on its perpetrators. No longer could the Irish Church be defended as an upholder of religious truth, for it was now apparent that livings and tithes were more important than apostolic purity. Thoughtfully, the Patriot pointed out, that, in debate, many of the "fortresses of State-churchism have been

1. N., 26 March 1845 p. 196. P., 7 April 1845 pp. 220-1. E.R., 4s., vol. XVII, 1845, p. 616.

abandoned and left undefended", whilst Miall was satisfied that, "..... At length we see the establishment principle shifted to its true basis - that of political expediency".[1]

Neither would the measure solve the Irish problem. A constructive policy of land reform, legal reform, industrial development, and education was required, not one which, whilst it might improve the priesthood, would not assist the poverty-stricken Irish peasantry. The Nonconformist, amazed at the reckless support given to a scheme designed to extend ecclesiasticism, a perpetual obstacle to political and social progress, by radical Members of Parliament, asserted that the real object was not to help the people, but to emasculate them, by bribing their political leaders, the priests, into quiescence. No source of discontent would be removed, and the majority would lose "much of that political importance, which has, in times past, been strong enough to wrest from the state a redress of some of their grievances".[2]

Voluntaryism, it was argued, provided the only key to the Irish question. Disestablishment, not endowment, would be a real concession to the Irish sense of grievance. Blackburn, warning evangelical Churchmen of the danger of Catholic endowment, counselled them to opt for disendowment in Ireland to forestall this calamity. The Patriot asserted that, "the Voluntary Principle comprehends the only solution, not of the Irish difficulty alone, but of every political problem which the infusion of the ecclesiastical element has perplexed and entangled". An article in the Eclectic made

1. E.R., 4s., vol. XVII, 1845, p. 491. P., 19 June 1845 p. 428. N., 9 April 1845 pp. 228-9.
2. B.Q.R., no. 2, May 1845, pp. 582-620. N., 5 February 1845 p. 77, 26 March 1845 p. 196, 2 April 1845 p. 212, 9 April 1845 pp. 228-9.

the same point. The Irish establishment was

> ..... the bane of Ireland, the outward and visible token of her misrule and degradation ..... an anomaly which no reasoning can justify, and for which no necessity exists. Ireland will never be pacified, - she ought not to be so, while this corporation is upheld. Its historical associations madden her sons, whilst its altars and worship are connected in their minds with imprisonment, proscription, and murder of their fathers. Our love of protestantism, therefore, combines with our sense of justice in demanding the overthrow of this system.....

Other essential reforms would rapidly follow the disappearance of the "ulcer which produces the inflammation over the whole system".[1]

There may have been underlying agreement on these negative aspects of opposition to the Maynooth Endowment Bill, but there was dispute on the positive form which resistance should take. An early attempt to guide Dissenters into a particular line of action was taken by the Anti-State-Church Association, its executive committee "emphatically" protesting against the endowment, "as an uncalled for and impolitic extension of a principle which they repudiate as inimical to the civil and religious interests of the Empire". There was no mention of theological error, merely commiseration with the Irish Catholics, and condemnation of the Protestant establishment. On 1st April the first of a series of public meetings, organised by the committee, was held in the metropolis, where opposition, purely on the principles of the Association and of Dissent, was voiced. Other London committees took a similar line, the Deputies recording their sympathy with the Irish people, and a protest at the principle on which the measure was based. As explicit was

1. C.H., 1845, p. 259. P., 21 April 1845 p. 252. E.R., 4s., vol. XVII, 1845, p. 616. N., 2 April 1845 p. 212, 9 April 1845 pp. 228-9.

the Congregational Board,

> That this Board founds its opposition to this proposal on a principle of broad and impartial hostility to all grants whatever of public money in aid of religious institutions, as essentially unjust to the community, and injurious to true religion.1

But the Protestant strand was there. The resolutions of the Ministers of the Three Denominations contained the obligatory recital of voluntary principles, but this was accompanied by a long catalogue of reasons why Catholicism, in particular, should not be endowed. Indignant at the proposed extension of the establishment principle, the committee of the Congregational Union could still recommend the co-operation of all Protestants, against "a system insatiably grasping at dominion and aggrandisement", deeming "supineness and divisions" as a "guilty and fatal treachery to the dearest interests of the church of Christ, and of the whole race of man".[2] More Dissenters than the Nonconformist cared to admit, must have applauded the challenge of the Central Anti-Maynooth Committee - ".... We are fighting anew the battle of the Reformation....."[3]

How far could the Dissenter join with the Churchman in agitating the protestant ground of opposition, without compromising his principles? This was the crucial issue around which debate crystallised. There was a tradition of co-operation amongst evangelicals of all denominations, and in 1843, following initiatives by John Angell James and John Leifchild, a united service had been held in Craven Chapel, and a great meeting in Exeter Hall. Peel's scheme provided

1. N., 2 April 1845 pp. 210-1, 220, 16 April 1845 p. 252.
2. C.M., 1845, pp. 314, 397-9.
3. Thelwell, A.S.: Proceedings of the Anti-Maynooth Conference of 1845 ....., (London, 1845), pp. lxxi-lxxiii, circular of the committee summoning the Conference.

additional reasons for consolidating this union.

Towards the end of February a private gathering of members of the various evanglical denominations was held in Exeter Hall, and a provisional committee was formed to prepare for a public meeting on 18th March. Out of this latter sprang the Central Anti-Maynooth Committee, with Sir Culling Eardley Smith as its chairman, and prominent evangelical Churchmen, Independents, and Wesleyan Methodists amongst its members. John Blackburn and Dr. Reed seem to have been the most active Congregationalist committee-men, but the denomination was also represented by Conder, John Remington Mills, J.C.Evans, Dr. Morison, and D.W.Wire, amongst others. There were no Particular Baptist representatives, their London Board declining to participate, although Jabez Burns, a General Baptist, was a member. A week after its inaugeration the Committee resolved that,

> ..... in cordial attachment to the principles of the Protestant Reformation, and a stedfast abhorrence of Popery, there is a solid ground for union and co-operation in opposing the proposed measure, and they deem it of supreme importance, under present circumstances, to bear with one another in regard to minor differences, while they cordially unite in one great object.

This was a vain hope, for many Dissenters could not regard their voluntaryism as a "minor difference". On 19 April, the Bill received its second reading in the Commons, and the Committee issued a circular summoning Protestants to attend a London conference, and urging them "to unite together with a generous and honourable respect for one another's opinions, political and ecclesiastical, and by one great and holy confederation to defeat this iniquitous measure, and so to uphold the honour of our country and the pure religion of

our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ".[1]

Blackburn claimed that support for the Central Anti-Maynooth Committee did not inhibit its adherents from advancing their special ground of opposition at meetings of Dissenters. Nevertheless, he felt that"a cordial attachment to the great principles of the Protestant Reformation, and a stedfast abhorrence of Popery, as a system opposed to Christ and his Gospel, will furnish a broad and sufficient ground of co-operation among all Protestants in opposition to the measure proposed". Together with Baines, he reasoned that only a union of all Protestants, acting on a common principle, could frustrate the Government, and that, to this end, "we may forbear, for a season, to avow extreme opinions". The issue at stake was not establishment, but the protestant faith.[2] Very many prominent provincial and metropolitan ministers and laymen saw no incompatibility in moving against the Bill on the dual fronts of protestantism and voluntaryism. Which they put first would be a moot point.

Baines' advocacy of the Conference by no means represented dissenting opinion in Yorkshire. Richard Winter Hamilton was quoted by the Patriot to substantiate its claim, that, there were moderate Dissenters who, "could not have taken part in the Conference ..... without doing the greatest violence to their own feeling of what is right and

1. ibid., passim. Blackburn, J.: The Three Conferences held by the Opponents of the Maynooth College Endowment Bill, in London and Dublin, during the Months of May and June, 1845. Containing a Vindication of the Author from the Aspersions of the Dissenting Press, (London, 1845), pp. 1-3, 11 (footnote). Reed, A. & C.: Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Andrew Reed ....., pp. 222-3, "..... I went, not only that Orange leaven might be avoided on the one hand, but that religious liberty might be respected on the other ....." There were 19 Congregationalists on the Committee.
2. Blackburn, J.: op. cit., p. 3. C.M., 1845, pp. 318, 320, 397. L.M., 26 April 1845.

consistent". Sheffield's Independent described the Conference "as far more calamitous than the passage of the measure", adding that the cost to Dissent in loss of consistency, was not worth the possible good it might achieve.[1]

Willing to co-operate in any "grand evangelistic League against the stealthy encroachments of the Man of Sin ..... to join heartily in any general movement in opposition to the contemplated Ministerial measure .....", the Patriot had to remind Dissenters on 17 March, that,

> ..... It is not our abhorrence of Popery, but of Peelery, - of political jesuitism, rather than of Maynooth theology, - our objection to compulsory taxation for the support of the Irish priesthood, not the idolatrous and superstitious character of their creed and teaching, - that prompts, and should, in a great degree, determine and shape the present movement.....

They were advised to confine their petitions to the "single but broad and invulnerable principle; that all interference of the secular power in matters of religion, is altogether unjust and uniformly injurious....." Churchmen were acting on an"imperfect ground" of opposition - trammelled by their own establishment, they could only move under the "no Popery" banner, and their logical conclusion was persecution. Under obligation to make their own views clear, to avoid all misrepresentation, Dissenters had to act on their distinctive principle, which, by promising full religious equality to all sects, was also the most defensible position. Hence, at the first meeting of the Anti-Maynooth Committee, of which he was a member, Conder proposed that the movement would be more effective if Churchmen and Dissenters acted separately, thus avoiding any compromise of principle on either side, and, in June, resigned because of the increasingly

1. P., 5 May 1845 p. 292. Sheffield Independent, 3 May 1845.

"protestant" nature of its activities, especially as reflected in the phraseology of the recommended Memorial to the Queen, drafted by Blackburn. As the Conference delegates assembled at the end of April, the Patriot defended those Protestant Dissenters who believed that a suppression of their convictions "would be a dereliction of religious duty".[1]

Meanwhile, the Nonconformist, adopting the advice of a correspondent, S.K.W., advocated that each dissenting petition should conclude with a plea for the separation of Church and State.

> ..... We are wrestling a throw with the state-church principle, and either it will master us, or we must master it. Let there be no howling against popery as such. The doctrines and discipline of the Roman Catholic church, objectionable as they are, ought not to form the basis of our opposition to the grant. Let every complaint tell directly upon the impolicy and unscriptural character of state endowments of religion. The House of Commons is teaching the people of England a lesson. Let the people of England teach the House of Commons another - let the truth be reiterated in their ears, that so far from consenting to two establishments, it will not be our fault if we retain one.

The ultimate objective of Dissenters was not to defeat the Maynooth Bill, but to bring about disestablishment. The agitation was another providential opportunity for advancing that cause. Questions were being asked, "legions of arguments in favour of an established church" had been swept away - this was the time to instruct the people and Parliament through public meetings, memorials, and the press. "'No state-church' must be your device - and you must make it meet the eyes and ears of men whithersoever they turn". Miall

1. P., 10 March 1845 p. 156, 17 March 1845 pp. 172-3, 20 March 1845 p. 180, 24 April 1845 pp. 260-1, 28 April 1845 p. 268, 5 May 1845 p. 292, 12 June 1845 p. 413.

estimated that, with the ground "prepared to their hand", voluntaries might do more in three months "to enlighten, to convince, to persuade ..... than they could under other circumstances in twenty years".

> ..... The real agitation now afoot is not anti-Maynooth, but anti-state-church. The good to be anticipated from it is not the rejection of a bill, but the promotion of sound knowledge..... 1

Inevitably, the Nonconformist was vehemently opposed to the union movement. Dr. George Payne's "admirable letter", in reply to Sir Culling Eardley Smith's suggestion that the "abstract question" of establishments might be "wisely" postponed "to a more convenient opportunity", received full coverage.[2] With the Anti-Maynooth Conference meeting in London, Miall explained why Dissenters could not compromise their principles and participate in an alliance based on the "no Popery" ground. To do so would be to bedevil any future onslaught on the establishment with inconsistencies. The defeat of the Bill was of less importance, and "far less to be desired by dissenters, than is the placing of the main strength of public opposition to it, even if unsuccessful, upon the basis of just and enlightened principles". It was presumptuous to do otherwise, for, to act with the Protestants was to recognise the magistrate's claim to adjudicate between truth and error. In any case, the evil of endowment was "diminished" if error, not truth, "is duped into the meretricious arms of the state". Undisguised scorn and contempt was reserved for the Nonconformist members of the Anti-Maynooth Conference.

1. N., 9 April 1845 pp. 224, 228, 23 April 1845 p. 253.
2. ibid., 23 April 1845 p. 253. Payne's letter originally appeared in the Patriot, 17 April 1845 p. 243. He was later to engage in acrimonious controversy with Blackburn on the same topic:- P., 15 May 1845 p. 331, 19 May 1845 p. 341, 26 May 1845 p. 366.

> Wonderful is the passion in some minds for what they are pleased to regard as the practical advantages of union - altogether incredible the quantity of dirt they will eat, if only allowed, as a reward of their self-denial, to walk arm-in-arm with respectability. No sacrifice is too costly - no humiliation too low for them. Oh! the Christian forbearance which they deem it incumbent upon them to exercise towards those whose eyesight is too weak and whose knees tremble - the patience with which they will listen, by the hour together, to the outpourings of a bigotry they would blush to be taxed with - the generosity with which they will consent to bury their principles "a hundred fathoms deep" - the zeal they will display in aiding anybody, by any means, courteous or discourteous, in stopping the unlicensed tongue which may presume to give expression to the truth it does not, and cannot suppress! Verily this is emphatically the age of cant, if there was one; and of all the drivelling and contemptible cant which froths upon the surface of the world, that which is evermore urging up the virtues of union, is about the worst.1

Similarly, the Eclectic, feeling that Nonconformists, as the only truly impartial and disinterested parties, had a decisive role in any movement against the augmentation of the Maynooth Grant, deplored combination with the "no Popery" section. Opinions on both sides were too diverse to permit any union without compromise. "A separate course of action" was preferred, for anything less was "a virtual surrender of our anti-state-church principles", involving "our whole procedure in distrust and misconception".[2]

Unperturbed by these criticisms, the Committee prepared for its Conference. Deputations were sent to towns which had been quiescent. One of these was Leicester. The agent touring the Midlands was the Rev. W.Tyler, a London Congregationalist minister. On 22nd April he met the local Dissenters in Harvey Lane Chapel. There was an "animated discussion" on the propriety of co-operation with the central committee, those

1. N., 30 April 1845 p. 269, 7 May 1845 p. 301.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XVII, 1845, pp. 492, 506, 621-6, 734.

present dividing equally. Mursell was amongst those who felt that this was consistent with the voluntary position, others argued that "it would be better to have a separate Conference of Dissenters". Nevertheless, a committee was formed, determined to resist the measure "on the voluntary principle alone".[1]

As they arrived in London, voluntary delegates to the Conference were invited to meet at the Guildhall Coffee House. Behind this manoeuvre Blackburn suspected the machinations of the executive committee of the Anti-State-Church Association, and Miall, Price, and other activists were amongst the two hundred who attended this unofficial gathering. The desirability of holding a separate Dissenters' conference was inconclusively debated, but a deputation was sent to ascertain from the Anti-Maynooth Committee whether there would be any restrictions on freedom of speech in the Conference sessions. In reply the Committee gave this assurance.

> ..... while forøbearance in respect of the difference between the parties comprised in the conference will be necessary throughout all its discussions, and while argument either for or against church establishments in these dominions is deemed highly inexpedient by the Committee, they have not intended, and do not purpose, such restriction as that intended by the deputation.

As the delegates gathered for the opening session on 30th April, the Dissenters met separately, joining the others after hearing the report of the deputation, and finding it satisfactory. At first all went smoothly, then, at the beginning of the second session, there was some altercation concerning the Baptist representation on the Committee. Next, Mursell rose to give an account of the movement against the

1. P., 28 April 1845 p. 271. Blackburn, J.: op. cit., pp. 7-8.

Bill in Leicester, and the Conference collapsed into disorder as he insisted on explaining the primary ground of his opposition. Stovel and the Rev. S.Green, another Baptist, complained of this limitation on free expression of opinion, and demanded a fair hearing for those whose objection to the increased endowment rested on the voluntary principle. These three ministers, with about fifteen others, withdrew from the hall, later issuing a declaration giving the refusal of free speech as their reason, and protesting against "the exclusively 'No Popery' character of the Conference".

On its last day, 2nd May, a meeting was held at Salter's Hall Chapel, attended by "a large and influential" section of the dissenting delegates. All speakers concurred in the importance of making the dissenting ground of opposition better known, and a resolution to this effect was passed, declaring the expediency of convening

> ..... a conference of the friends of religious freedom, to adopt measures to carry on a united and consistent opposition to the bill now before parliament ..... and to all other state endowments of any system of religious instruction and worship.1

Thus was born the Dissenters' Anti-Maynooth Conference, which opened on 20th May in Crosby Hall. It may well, as Blackburn claimed, have been engineered by the ultras of the Anti-State-Church Assocation, for Mursell's outburst was obviously premeditated, and looks suspiciously like the action of an agent provocateur. The Association's first annual report congratulated the council on "the sound and enlightened grounds upon which a considerable proportion of the nonconforming body have based their opposition" to the Bill, attributing this, in part, "to the wide influence

1. Blackburn, J.: op. cit., pp. 8-18. P., 1 May 1845 p. 285, 5 May 1845 p. 291. N., 7 May 1845 pp. 301-4.

which the proceedings of the Anti-State-Church Conference exerted upon the minds of dissenters, and to the knowledge of their principles diffused by means of the lectures and publications of this Association". The provisional committee of thirty-five included sixteen members of the society's executive committee, including its four officers, but the Patriot happily proclaimed that the adhesion of fifteen others was a guarantee, to those concerned for the united movement, that nothing would be done against it.[1]

The Nonconformist enthused over this new turn of events, urging Dissenters to send delegations, for even if the conference had no effect on the ultimate fate of the Bill, they were under obligation to extricate Parliament, the Irish Catholics, and the country from their misconceptions of the dissenting position.[2]

Between six and seven hundred delegates attended, proof that "the love of truth has not yet faded out of the heart of society". The harmony between friends and critics of the Anti-State-Church Association promised a bright future.

> ..... We rejoice beyond measure, that we are now surrounded by the general body of earnest Dissenters - that events have at length driven them up to our mark - and that we may fairly anticipate, for the great question which lies nearest to our heart, a treatment from those who profess to appreciate its worth, worthy of its supreme importance.3

It was alleged that the Conference's promoters intended "to turn the proposed question of the Maynooth Endowment Bill into an occasion to assail all establishments rather than'merely to secure the defeat' of the endowment of Popery".

1. N., 7 May 1845 p. 305, 21 May 1845 p. 369. P., 12 May 1845 p. 317. Blackburn, J.: op. cit., p. 19.
2. N., 7 May 1845 p. 308, 14 May 1845 p. 333.
3. ibid., 21 May 1845 p. 372, 28 May 1845 p. 381.

The columns of the Nonconformist provided much justification for this charge, as did the content of the speeches and resolutions at the Crosby Hall meetings. There was no reference to Protestantism, and the "Address to the Roman Catholics of Ireland" dealt almost exclusively with the unjust existence of a minority, endowed Protestant church in that country, sympathising with the Irish sense of grievance. Various resolutions linked the proposed enlargment of the Grant to the continued existence of established churches in the several parts of the United Kingdom. "The duty of Protestant Dissenters, chiefly to aim at the repudiation of the assumed right by the state to interfere with the religious affairs of her Majesty's subjects in any form", was underlined. Anti-Maynooth the Conference may have been; anti-state-church it most decidedly was.[1]

Believing that, if the seceders had been "the spies of government, or hired emissaries of Rome, they could have done nothing more effectual to destroy the moral influence of the Conference on the mind of Parliament",[2] Blackburn accompanied Smith, Dr. Holloway, and Dr. Prest to Ireland, to attend the Dublin conference organised by the Irish Anti-Maynooth Committee. The feud between the extreme wings of Dissent, dormant since his denunciation of the Anti-State-Church Conference, burst into the open, for, determined to maintain the united front, both Blackburn and Smith made explanations of the dissenting position, repugnant to the

1. ibid., 21 May 1845 pp. 365-70, 28 May 1845 pp. 382-5. Blackburn, J.: op. cit., pp. 19-24.
2. Blackburn, J.: op. cit., p. 16. Thelwell, A.S.: op. cit., p. cii, wrote of the Dissenters' Conference:
"..... It may be fairly questioned whether the Jesuits themselves could have devised a more effectual method of interfering with the purposes for which the Anti-Maynooth Conference was convened."

spokesmen of the opposite viewpoint. Crosby Hall did not represent the feelings of the English Dissenters, stated the chairman of the Central Committee. His colleague went further.

> ..... The Dissenters of England are misunderstood, if it is supposed that the gentlemen who spoke at Crosby Hall expressed the opinions of the great majority of their body. There is to be found in every community a few talking men, who cannot be regarded as speaking the mind of the body; so it is with us. There are a great number of thoughtful persons among the Dissenters who do not coincide with extreme opinions, but who on Protestant grounds are most decidedly opposed to the iniquitous measure now before parliament ..... On my return ..... I will not allow it to be said in my presence without correction that the Church of Ireland is useless.....

Deploring the combination of Protestant Dissent with Orangeism, deploring the tone of these remarks, the wrath of the dissenting press descended on the heads of the two speakers, with Miall, in an article entitled "Dead Flies", being particularly severe on Blackburn. In his vindication he restated many of his 1844 allegations, warning Dissenters against "theorists" and"chartists" in their ranks.[1]

One lesson of the abortive agitation against the Maynooth Bill was "the indispensable duty" of evangelical Protestants "to arrange for a great Protestant Confederation, to embrace this country, the Continent, and the world, that, by sympathy, correspondence, and united action, they may be prepared to meet a powerful and united foe".[2]Consequently, the Central Anti-Maynooth Committee fulsomely accepted, on behalf of English Protestants, the Scottish invitation to an

1. Blackburn, J.: op. cit., pp. 24-61, 85-95. N., 11 June 1845 pp. 413, 420, 25 June 1845 p. 445. P., 9 June 1845 p. 404, 12 June 1845 p. 412, 16 June 1845 pp. 420-1. E.R., 4s., vol. XVIII, 1845,pp. 599-604.
2. Resolution of the Anti-Maynooth Conference, quoted in C.M., 1845, p. 767.

October preliminary meeting in Liverpool. Most organs of Dissent welcomed Christian union in principle, but they expressed many reservations as the Liverpool gathering assembled, and the movement to launch the Evangelical Alliance began.

Early misgivings were voiced by the Patriot, when the Anti-Maynooth Committee suggested that, out of delicacy for the feelings of evangelical Churchmen, the new organisation should ignore the Puseyism within the Church of England, a most serious threat to evangelical Protestantism, and concentrate its activities in opposition to Catholicism. The proposed constitution of the Alliance, which excluded many who were evangelical and included others who were not, was objected to. One critic doubted whether the consistent Nonconformist could unite with a Churchman, and yet remain silent on the evils he perceived within his Church - to do so was tacitly to condone them. As the Eclectic pointed out, a visible unity was perfectly possible, without the compromises necessitated by formal organisation.[1]

The anti-state-church agitation was the great difficulty. Conder's fears seemed confirmed when a letter from Smith appeared in the Patriot, appealing for a "postponement of the Establishment question, at least until a fair trial shall have been given to our efforts after union". As a gesture of good faith to evangelical Churchmen, the Anti-State-Church

1. P., 22 September 1845 pp. 644-5, but on 5 January 1846 p. 12, it gave its "cordial concurrence" to the Address issued by the Liverpool meeting. E.R., 4s., vol. XIX, 1846, pp. 487-503. Thorn, William: The Evangelical Alliance: can Churchmen and Dissenters unite in it? Or, can Evangelical Nonconformists hold Christian Fellowship with State Episcopalians?, (London, undated, but 1846). The answer was a resounding negative.

Association should cease operation for "at least" 1846.[1] In January a new storm arose over an article which appeared in the first number of the Christian's Penny Magazine, entitled, "Why I dare not conform to the Church of England". Smith publicly complained of its content and unseasonableness. Campbell, the periodical's editor, protested against any cessation of the anti-state-church agitation, suggesting, in his reply, that very few Churchmen would be attracted into a close relationship with Dissenters, even if this concession were made.[2]

Other critics took the matter up. The Eclectic found its original doubts justified. Miall's response to Smith's first letter had been decisive - "..... what can that union be worth, which demands the inversion of the rules of duty? The policy of man cannot prosper against the clear intimation of God. The union which requires this compromise cannot be effected.....". By January, the scheme was "preposterous".

> ..... It is not too much to say that the whole world groans to see God's truth emancipated from secular thraldom - ..... - and that the destiny of future ages is intimately connected with the mode in which this question shall be disposed of. But that it should be indefinitely postponed in order that some good men in our day should enjoy the luxury of shaking hands together, and meeting as Christian brethren ought always to meet, strikes us as one of the saddest displays of selfishness and littleness which can be looked upon by a reflecting mind..... 3

Nevertheless, some anti-state-churchmen did not find membership of the Alliance incompatible with their principles.

1. P., 6 October 1845 p. 676, 20 October 1845 p. 711.
2. C.P.M., 1846, pp. 12-4. C.W., 1846, pp. 81-2, 84-90, 169-71, contains the correspondence between the two men which appeared in the Patriot.
3. E.R., 4s., vol. XIX, 1846, pp. 244-5. N., 22 October 1845 p. 717, 28 January 1846 pp. 45-6, 4 February 1846 p. 61. All were to deplore the Alliance's later decision to admit slaveholding churches to full membership; see, E.R., 4s., vol. XX, 1846, pp.747-80.

Conservatives, who had always been hostile or apathetic towards the militants, were active at its foundation, but so was Dr. Cox, one the the Anti-State-Church Association's secretaries, whilst the Alliance's first historian had been a vocal member of the 1844 Conference.[1] Conder was certainly sympathetic, assuring his readers that Smith was not "to be regarded as the organ of the embryo Association", that, "everyone who connects himself with the proposed Alliance, retains the fullest liberty to express and maintain whatever peculiar principles or sentiments he may entertain".[2]

Whig support for Peel's measure did not pass unnoticed, and it was generally believed that Russell's first action on return to office would be the endowment of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. Reviewing his speech on the Bill, of the 3rd April, the Eclectic, gratefully acknowledging his past services to Dissent, added that, "we have long felt, what his lordship's speech ..... must render evident to all but his blindest partizans, that the time of our separation has come, and that Whig alliances must be renounced in deference to the higher claims of religious duty". Peel carried the third reading with the help of Liberal votes. This was a lesson, the same critic commented, which Dissenters, having "clung to the Whig alliance too long", needed to be taught. Even "the most moderate men, those who have adhered most firmly to the school of Lord John", were beginning to comprehend this "truth". The Patriot urged its readers to

1. Massie, J.W.: The Evangelical Alliance: its origins and development. Containing personal notices of its distinguished friends in Europe and America, (London, 1847).
2. P., 22 January 1846 p. 52. Even the Nonconformist received letters from readers who believed membership of the Alliance to be compatible with the maintenance of anti-state-church principles, 3 December 1845 p. 816, 4 March 1846 p. 137.

"turn out all who have betrayed them, and bend all their own efforts to the organizing of a compact, constitutional Opposition in the place of the effete and faithless Liberal party".[1]

Radicals and free traders did not escape condemnation. There were only three supporters for Crawford's disestablishment motion, whilst Dr. Bowring, a member of the Anti-State-Church Association, went into the lobbies with Peel.[2] There was surprise that Cobden had been caught in the "ministerial trap", Dr. Halley wondering whether the free traders were advancing their cause by alienating the Dissenters. George Wilson, the League's chairman, was the recipient of a letter to this effect from J.W.Massie, one of the League's most active ministerial adherents. "Writing as the organ of my denomination faithfully representing their sentiments", he explained that many "zealous friends will have to join in seeming alienation and perhaps actual hostility to its principal men from the very inconsistent and altogether uncalled for votes of last Thursday....."

> ..... I do not expect that the Free Traders will pause at my expostulation, - but they have alienated some of their sincerest friends, and continuing in their course they will offend more; and now the Anti-State Church will come in for its proper place. I am in the midst of delegates & representatives from 100 churches, unanimous in their denunciation and disappointment. I wish it had been otherwise.....

Wilson was asked to persuade "Mr. C. to reconsider his vote", Bright "to take a prominent place in opposition", and to remind Bowring and Brotherton that their seats had not

1. E.R., 4s., vol. XVII, 1845, pp. 613-4, 743-4. P., 10 April 1845 p. 228, 14 April 1845 p. 236, 8 May 1845 p. 308.
2. Crawford's motion was moved and defeated on the 5th May. 141 Members voted against, and only 2 for it. Crawford and Hindley were the tellers, T.S.Duncombe and W.Wakley the two who went into the lobby.

been rendered "more secure to the liberal interest" by their votes. Halley was able to inform the Deputies' breakfast for nonconformist delegates to the Anti-Maynooth Conference, that Brotherton had changed his vote under pressure. At the Dissenters' Conference McKerrow stated that a large section of the Manchester electorate would not vote for Mark Philips or Milner Gibson again. Mursell declared that Easthope would be "walked out" of Leicester. In London, Hawes and D'Eyncourt attended a stormy meeting of Lambeth electors, and a joint meeting of Nonconformist residents of Southwark and Lambeth condemned the votes of their respective Members. Burnet told Hawes that he would never support him again.[1]

At the height of the crisis the decisive tone of the Eclectic was apparently representative of the feelings of most Dissenters.

> ..... For ourselves, the resolution is taken - and we know that we are not alone - no matter what the claims preferred, what the services rendered, the man who has voted for this iniquitous measure, be he who he may, whig, radical, complete suffragist, free-trader, or pseudo-voluntary, he shall never have our support..... 2

Again, it was easier to expound the negative position than to formulate a viable positive policy. Blackburn was mistaken when he told the Dublin Anti-Maynooth Conference that, the "great body" of English Dissenters had decided to vote for anti-Maynooth Conservatives to defeat pro-Maynooth Whigs and Liberals. The discussions at the Deputies' breakfast, and at the Dissenters' Conference, however, revealed a very wide difference of opinion as to how far opposition to

1. P., 21 April 1845 p. 253, 28 April 1845 p. 270, 29 April 1845 p. 276, 5 May 1845 p. 291, 26 May 1845 p. 364. N., 21 May 1845 p. 368, 11 June 1845 p. 415. George Wilson Papers, Rev. J.W.Massie to G.Wilson, 9 April 1845. This is partially quoted in McCord, N.: The Anti-Corn-Law League, pp. 191-2.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XVII, 1845, p. 620.

pro-Maynooth liberals should be taken, for, whilst the ultras advocated a firm dependence on principle, others feared "an undisputed reign of toryism" if Dissenters acted too rigidly.[1]

Politically isolated, the Patriot concluded that Dissenters had to "form a party and a policy of their own". If they organised, and remained faithful to themselves and their principles, they would soon find their "distinctive existence as a party in the State is generally acknowledged, and as generally respected". In Parliament, a strong Voluntary Party, combining with free traders and reformers, could provide that independent opposition to government so manifestly lacking in the Maynooth debates. Electorally, Dissenters were advised to take a firm stand "upon those broad principles of religious freedom and religious justice, which cannot be compromised by the Legislature without endangering our national interests and the peace of these realms". This did not mean rigorous hostility to all Liberals who had supported the measure. Some could not be spared, and it would be wrong "to give the go-by to all other questions that may come into the fair scope of Parliamentary consideration". Every candidate, however, ought to recognise

> ..... the obvious principle of equity and religious freedom; that it is wrong to apply the money raised by taxation to the endowment of any church or sect; - wrong to tax either Protestants for the support of Popery, or Romanists for the maintenance of a Protestant Establishment; wrong to endow Truth; wrong to endow Error; wrong to legislate in matters of religion, whether upon the old principle of intolerance or upon the new ground of indifferentism.....

1. Blackburn, J.: op. cit., pp. 28-9. N., 7 May 1845 pp. 303-4, 21 May 1845 p. 368.

Abstention was justified if these conditions were not met. Even the moderate British Quarterly Review recommended its readers to

> REFUSE HIS VOTE TO THE MAN WHO SHALL HESITATE TO PLEDGE HIMSELF AGAINST ANY EXTENSION OF CHURCH GRANTS FOR THE PURPOSES OF RELIGION.1

Miall anticipated that parliamentary indifference to public protest against the Maynooth Bill would convince Dissenters of the urgent necessity for a reconstruction of the Commons to make it truly representative of the people. He trusted that party politics would be abandoned, and a determination to act on the anti-state-church principle at the next general election be adopted, Dissenters having "to secure for themselves a band of men, however small, qualified at once by their integrity and their ability to represent the principles of nonconformists in parliament". A nucleus of anti-endowment Members would advance the disestablishment cause, forcing less determined and committed colleagues to co-operate with them to preserve their seats. Only by acting independently, by renouncing expedient policies, by unfurling "the standard of hostility to monopoly, not of one kind only, but of every kind", could the respect of politicians be won, and the Liberal party be moulded by Dissent. "Politicians", he wrote, "will soon come up to our mark, when they are practically convinced that we will not come down to theirs".

> ..... They are far more dependent upon us, than we upon them. We, without them, should be incalculably better off than we are now - they, without us, would sink into insignificance. Their

1. P., 21 April 1845 p. 252, 12 May 1845 p. 317, 9 June 1845 pp. 404-5, 4 August 1845 p. 532, 14 August 1845 p. 556, 22 September 1845 p. 644, 27 October 1845 p. 724. B.Q.R., no. 3, August 1845, p. 127.

> whole importance is derived from our hesitation - they suck strength out of our weakness. Trooping at their heels, we shall never be above a single march ahead of toryism - and when we most need their help we shall be most certain of being betrayed. Look at the records of the existing parliament. Wherein has liberalism assisted us?

The time for aggressive action had come, lest politicians continued to believe that a dissenting agitation was nothing but noise.[1]

All organs of opinion realised that organisation was vital if Dissent was to make any impact. The British Quarterly Review pointed out that demands to candidates for an anti-endowment pledge, had to come from the united body of local evangelical nonconformist electors, all willing to abstain if necessary, or else the demonstration would be a display of weakness.[2] The Dissenters' Conference did not set up a central co-ordinating committee, and the Patriot, too, counselled constituency action, in particular, the paying of careful attention to the register to increase the number of voluntary voters.[3] Miall's advice was more visionary. He envisaged a "forlorn hope" in every constituency taking the first steps to extricate Dissent from the ranks of party, and preparing to make the anti-state-church principle the pivot of its electoral activity. Firmly wedded to principle, this numerically feeble group would possess a definiteness of purpose and a moral power, "which the whole mass of indeterminate liberalism, directly or indirectly", would

1. N., 9 April 1845 p. 229, 23 April 1845 p. 260, 7 May 1845 pp. 308-9, 21 May 1845 p. 365, 4 June 1845 p. 397, where the Charitable Trusts Bill is seen as an additional justification for a permanent aggressive movement, 2 July 1845 p. 461. Also E.R., 4s., vol. XVII, 1845 , pp. 744-9 for a similar viewpoint.
2. B.Q.R., no. 4, November 1845, pp. 549-51.
3. P., 12 June 1845 p. 412, 10 July 1845 p. 476. Co-operation with Free Trade Registration Committees, where this involved no submerging of principle, was recommended.

feel. Operating through an Anti-State-Church Electoral Club, they might hold the balance in many constituencies, and be able to negotiate with candidates from a position of strength. In this way, Dissenters could break the power of local political and electoral cliques, and make their own influence felt.[1]

What was achieved? The Deputies agreed to set up a London committee to prepare immediate measures to secure the return of satisfactory Members. An Anti-State-Church Electoral Association was formed in Bristol, and, in Tower Hamlets, the militant Dissenters, the complete suffragists, and the free traders (often the same people) created a combined electoral organisation.[2] In Hereford, however, the local Dissenters decided that, "it would be exceedingly undesirable for Dissenters to withhold their votes from any liberal candidate, who shall offer himself at the ensuing election, simply and only because he refuses to pledge himself against the policy of the government on the Maynooth grant".[3] Then, in September, Miall contested Southwark, supposedly a dissenting stronghold, and was overwhelmingly defeated by Sir William Molesworth, a pro-Maynooth radical. Despairingly, he described the "intoxicating effects of party spirit" on Dissenters.

> ..... They have in themselves all the essential elements of strength. Their mission is about the noblest that can be entrusted to man - their principles ~~are~~ sound, simple, and self-recommendatory - their numbers anything but insignificant -

1. N., 9 July 1845 p. 477, 16 July 1845 p. 493, 23 July 1845 p. 509, 30 July 1845 p. 525, 6 August 1845 pp. 541-2, including a "Model of an Electoral Club for securing a Parliamentary Representation of Anti-state-church Principles". E.R., 4s., vol. XVIII, 1845, pp. 608-9.
2. N., 9 July 1845 p. 480, 20 August 1845 p. 573, 3 September 1845 p. 611. The Bristol society had about 60 members in 1847 - ibid., 26 May 1847 p. 390.
3. ibid., 30 July 1845 p. 533. Miall described it as an "immoral display", a "voluntary self-degradation".

> their position advantageous, whether for negotiation or contest. Nothing but the drunkennesss of party spirit would have put them in the gutter. And yet there they are - and every passing politician cheers at them as worth nothing better than laughter. They cannot give up their party although they get nothing from it but kicks and insult.....[1]

Molesworth admitted that if he had been in the Commons, he would have supported the Maynooth Endowment Bill. Pilcher, the Conservative candidate, adopted the Protestant anti-Maynooth platform. Unable to back either man, a section of the dissenting electors asked Miall to stand. His address explicitly stated his anti-state-church, and complete suffrage, views, the Patriot regretting that his "principles as a Voluntary should be mixed up with political tenets with which the bulk of the Dissenters most assuredly do not sympathise". Despite regarding this as a fatal impediment to his success, the moderate journal urged the dissenting electors to support its rival's editor.[2]

Miall viewed the contest in a wider context. It was an opportunity for Dissenters to test their resolves of the spring by voting for their principles. To do otherwise would involve a catastrophic loss of character. The Southwark electors could challenge the legislative "indifferentism to creeds", which threatened to endow all alike, and to blight religion in every form. They could launch Dissent on its "divine mission", or betray it, for bold action in one important constituency would encourage Dissenters everywhere. A blow at political conventions, the contest would break the ice that was deterring others. Careless of whether the seat was won or lost, Miall suggested that Molesworth's

1. ibid., 24 September 1845 p. 653.
2. P., 18 August 1845 p. 564, 21 August 1845 p. 572, 8 September 1845 p. 613.

defeat by Pilcher would be a salutary lesson to Whigs and Liberals, whilst Dissenters would have lost nothing.[1]

Late in the field, Miall's chief protagonists were Dissenters. The executive committee of the Anti-State-Church Association requested dissenting electors to give him "their united and cordial support". A public meeting, organised by the committee, was held in the borough, with Apsley Pellatt, one of Miall's principal partisans, in the chair, and Cox, Price, Burnet, and Conder amongst the speakers. Assistance came from Lovett's National Association and from the Metropolitan Complete Suffrage Association, both recommending their members, who had votes in the constituency, to vote for Miall.

And yet he came at the bottom of the poll (Molesworth 1943 votes, Pilcher 1182 votes, Miall 352 votes). Many Dissenters voted for Molesworth, the Rev. James Aldis, a Baptist minister, suffering much obloquy in the press and at Miall's meetings, for early declaring his adherence to the baronet; Miall, he assured his assailants, stood no chance of winning the seat. Others were influenced by Molesworth's free trade professions, and by an unwillingness to split the liberal vote. Discouraged by Molesworth's early and decisive lead, many of Miall's pledged voters changed their allegiance, or abstained. Other reasons advanced for the failure included his extreme political views, his lateness in the field, and his opponents attractive aristocratic connections.[2]

Even in defeat, however, the contest had been beneficial,

1. N., 20 August 1845 p. 580, 27 August 1845 pp. 596-7, 3 September 1845 p. 612, 10 September 1845 p. 628.
2. ibid., 20 August - 17 September 1845 passim. P., 18 August 1845 - 15 September 1845 passim. E.R., 4s., vol. XVIII, 1845, pp. 482-99. Miall, A.: Life of Edward Miall, pp. 108-10.

claimed the dissenting press. The voluntary principle had been paraded before the country for a whole month, and the parties had been shown that Dissenters were in earnest.[1] Nevertheless, the result was a defeat for the militant party, and Miall realised this, for he soon abandoned his attempts to rouse up the dissenting world. Dissenters were no more ready to take an advanced position than they had been in 1841. Politically they remained liberals, and they would vote as liberals, no matter what their press counselled. Southwark demonstrates the lack of influence these organs of opinion possessed at the grass roots level. Doubtless the result would have been different in the fury of April, May, or June, but other issues had reasserted themselves by September, and many Dissenters were prepared to accept Molesworth's pledge to oppose the endowment of the Catholic clergy and all future grants for ecclesiastical purposes. Perhaps Baines was far more representative of middle class nonconformity than his metropolitan contemporaries. Stigmatising the Nonconformist policy as "extremely foolish", and likely to "be the destruction of the Liberal party in Parliament", he had repudiated an anti-Maynooth electoral test, advising Dissenters to return their own candidates when possible, or men who would declare themselves as far as Molesworth had done, and, when this was not possible, "to support the best man they can get".

> ..... Mr. MIALL ..... has strenuously advised that Electors should vote for no man, either for a seat in Parliament or in a Town Council, who is not a Complete Suffragist, and for no one who is not directly opposed to the Establishment. His own fate illustrates the folly of the recommendation. We only hope that Dissenters throughout the country will not be judged of from the conduct of the

1. N., 17 September 1845 pp. 644-5. P., 15 September 1845 p. 628.

> Ultras of Southwark, and least of all from that Ultra of Ultras who so perversely aspired to be their representative, and who thereby endangered the seat of a thorough Liberal.1

Overtaken by the corn law crisis these dissenting issues sank into insignificance. One correspondent suggested that Dissenters should waive their particular demands to prevent the return of monopolistic candidates at the general election that seemed imminent. Editorials called for a modification of dissenting terms - satisfactory promises on church rates and future state endowments "might be sufficient at the present emergency", though free trade pledges on their own ought to be inadequate. To advocate them and to disregard the claims of conscience was a sign of basic dishonesty.[2] At the end of the year Edward Baines jnr. sought a statement of Morpeth's views on further endowment in Ireland, before completely endorsing his candidature for the vacant West Riding seat.[3]

Dissenters welcomed repeal, but, with the exception of the British Quarterly Review, their press greeted the Whig return to office with pessimism. They could, commented one, whilst advising them to oppose the ministerial re-elections, expect nothing from this change, which only placed "their principles in increased danger". An Eclectic article contained the most scathing comments. The Administration was "incapacitated for anything really equitable, liberal, and patriotic". With the substitution of Russell for Melbourne, loss rather than gain, it was virtually the same as the one which, in 1841, "fell so shamefully, after six years of

1. L.M., 13, 27 September 1845. The Sheffield Independent was equally critical of Miall, 30 August 1845.
2. P., 15 December 1845 p. 836, 22 December 1845 p. 855.
3. Baines Papers, Lord Morpeth to Edward Baines jnr., 28 December 1845.

disgraceful tergiversation and mismanagement". As for Russell, he was " a narrow-minded, conceited, and stubborn politician, without skill, without views, and without any of the higher qualifications so requisite in a prime minister....." Policy decisions acceptable to Dissenters were not anticipated. The government, it was feared, would extend centralisation and state control - "a fatal perversion of the essential objects of government" - and would challenge dissenting opinion in their Irish and educational policies.[1]

Two of the ministerial re-elections were contested. Henry Vincent, the dissenting candidate at Plymouth against Lord Ebrington, was soundly beaten. Macaulay, whose scarifying remarks on "the bray of Exeter-hall", had not endeared him to the religious world, was opposed by Sir Culling Eardley Smith. The moderate metropolitan press welcomed this challenge. Smith contributed to his own defeat by restraining his voluntaryism and resorting to the "no Popery" cry, conciliating the free churchmen, but alienating the voluntaries. Miall regretted the wasted opportunity, but not the failure of a man "whose chief distinction is his intense hatred of Popery".[2]

Dissenters feared that the cabinet intended to endow the Irish Catholic Church. Disestablishment was their solution of the Irish question, but they knew this was unacceptable to aristocrats, with a vested interest in the survival of

1. B.Q.R., no. 7, August 1845, p. 260. P., 6 July 1846 p. 460. N., 1 July 1846 p. 452, 8 July 1846 p. 468. E.R., 4s., vol. XXII, 1847, pp. 1-19. This article was ready for publication in October 1846, but was withheld to ascertain how justifiable its strictures were.
2. P., 9 July 1846 p. 468, 13 July 1846 p. 476, 16 July 1846 p. 482. N., 8 July 1846 p. 468, 15 July 1846 p. 484, 22 July 1846 p. 501. In several other constituencies ministers were closely questioned by Dissenters on the hustings, or were presented with written statements of their views.

the Protestant establishment. This threat had been cited as the principal reason why Dissenters should prepare themselves for independent action at a general election. Now, the Nonconformist alleged that there was a "Whig plot" to deceive the people at that election, and then, with Peelite, Radical, and Irish support, to push the measure through early in the new parliament's life. It was a dissenting duty to agitate this question, to keep it before the public.[1]

Despite these confident prognostications, the crisis in Whig-Liberal dissenting relations was provoked by the administration's educational policy. Hook's Letter to the Lord Bishop of St. Davids, had been published in the summer of 1846, and immediately aroused a storm of controversy. With the exception of Vaughan's British Quarterly, the dissenting press firmly opposed any further state interference in popular education, and with his Letters to ..... Russell ....., Edward Baines jnr. established himself as the leading "expert" of the voluntary party. The general belief that Hook was flying a kite for Kay-Shuttleworth and the Committee of Council, seemed confirmed when the Minutes of 1846 were released. Many Dissenters protested against the proposed extension of the grants system on principle, perceiving hidden evils in the new scheme. Once more they roused themselves; once more the Government pressed on, disregarding their outcry; once more they had been betrayed by the party they had sustained.

In its early stages the agitation concentrated on securing the withdrawal of the Minutes. Yorkshire took the lead,

1. E.R., 4s., vol. XVIII, 1845, pp. 604-7; vol. XX, 1846, pp. 367-80. N., 29 July 1846 pp. 516-7, 5 August 1846 p. 541, 19 August 1846 p. 557.

with a Protestant Dissenters' meeting at Leeds on 18 February; this was followed by meetings of the various London Boards and committees, the formation of a Central Committee to co-ordinate the movement, and the appearance of the usual paraphernalia of national resistance. Over 4000 petitions against the government's proposals were presented, and in April, to coincide with Duncombe's amendment to the educational vote, for a select committee, a conference met in Crosby Hall attended by delegates representing all facets of opinion within the denominations - from Miall to Vaughan, from James to Sturge.

Since its foundation in 1844 Miall had never ceased to exhort Dissenters to support the Anti-State-Church Association, warning that politicians would never take them seriously, whilst they neglected the one society that represented their principles. Before the education controversy reached its climax, they were informed that the only way to discourage Russell's endowment, church extension, and educational schemes, was a sustained attack on the Established Church, a policy which would prevent further seedings of the system in the colonies.[1] Every crisis had been seized upon to press the reluctant and the apathetic into the anti-state-church movement. The publication of the Minutes provided just such another opportunity. "Once more, Dissent is threatened with extinction by the agency of state-craft, guided to its end by ecclesiastical cunning. Once more, the State-church summons the friends of freedom, civil and religious, into the field of conflict....." So the call to arms rang out. Surely, now, as a matter of self-defence, as well as of duty,

1. N., 13 January 1847 p. 17, 20 January 1847 p. 29, 17 February 1847 p. 93.

Nonconformists would seriously contemplate an offensive strategy. Anti-state-churchism, and anti-state-educationalism were two sides of the same coin, and a firm expression of the former at the Triennial Conference of the Association would doubly reinforce the protest of the latter. Both sections of the Dissenters were invited to "shake hands over those principles which the Legislature has threatened with extinction", and to consummate the union in Crosby Hall.[1] Indeed, Dissenters did attend the Conference in greater and more influential numbers, than in 1844. Joyfully, the Nonconformist spoke of the "renewal of spring", anticipating that the country was on the threshold "of the great conflict".[2]

Of more immediate importance was the consolidation of the breach between Dissenters and the Liberal party. Staunch Whigs now began to have serious doubts. Edward Baines snr., told the county Dissenters' meeting at Leeds, that, though he "had all his life supported the Whigs;..... in this measure, they had abandoned their principles, and taken a course which called for the strongest opposition of all the friends of liberty". His Leeds Mercury informed Russell, that, "..... He is now ..... doing the most deadly injury to the Dissenters, and pandering to the unjust and arrogant pretensions of the church. He may rely on it that the Dissenters will not support an administration which does them such cruel wrong. He is destroying his own party, and will, ere long, fall between two stools".[3] The Patriot warned him

1. ibid., 3 March 1847 p. 132, 24 March 1847 p. 173, 28 April 1847 p. 269. Also see E.R., 4s., vol. XXI, 1847, pp. 528-9, (Dissenters "..... must grapple immediately and in real earnestness, with the master evil out of which so much of our vicious legislation springs....."), and L.M., 27 February 1847.
2. N., 12 May 1847 p. 341.
3. P., 22 February 1847 p. 117. L.M., 20 February 1847.

that the limits of forbearence had been reached:

> ..... he is now on the point of losing for ever that class of Dissenters who have ever been foremost to make great allowance for the difficulties of his position, and for his prejudices as a Churchman and Aristocrat, - to put the best construction on his words and his acts, - and who cannot even now dismiss from their minds the recollection of a time when they prided themselves upon their political connexion with the House of RUSSELL.1

Conder's readiness to abandon the Whigs was intensified after Duncombe's overwhelming defeat. The time had come, he wrote, not merely because of the education vote, but of parliamentary votes for a number of years, "for the Dissenters to act politically for themselves. We have always foreseen, at a distance, more or less indistinct, such a time coming. The Whigs ..... have completed the 'fulness' of this 'time' ....." They had been misrepresented, misunderstood, and ignored by the Administration, which had introduced a priestly scheme for education. As a party, the Whigs had become "shamefully toryfied", and the prime minister, a man unworthy of confidence, degenerated from the noble principles of his youth, was nothing more than "a Church-ridden Conservative" the Minutes being an "ample atonement" to the Church for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. This rupture, however, would be beneficial. "..... The Whigs have been a drag upon Dissent: Dissent has been gagged by Whiggism. If the Whigs can do without us, let them: we can do much better when we appear ourselves".[2]

Past predictions and warnings from the Nonconformist and the Eclectic seemed vindicated. If the first task of

1. P., 1 April 1847 pp. 204-5.
2. ibid., 25 March 1847 p. 188, 29 April 1847 pp. 276-7, 31 May 1847 p. 380, 17 June 1847 pp. 420-1, 21 June 1847 p. 428, 28 June 1847 pp. 444-5, 29 July 1847 p. 516.

Nonconformity was to defeat the Minutes, its second was "to cut out once and for ever our alliance with the so-called Liberals of the political world". An alliance which had produced little real good, but had cost much, in "loss of self-reliant energy, loss of character, loss of influence, loss of position". Old debts had been amply repaid; the Whigs would never assist Dissent reach its ultimate objective. "Henceforth, we can have no great purpose in common with the Whigs".[1]

This determination to obtain an adequate representation of nonconformist principles in Parliament was general. At the beginning of March the executive committee of the Anti-State-Church Association had advised Dissenters to inform their Members of, "their settled determination to withold their votes at the ensuing General Election, from all candidates, who are not prepared to resist every attempt to extend the power, patronage, and possessions of the Established Church".[2] The more militant had raised this issue at meetings summoned specifically to petition against the implementation of the Minutes. Thomas Blackburn, amidst repeated cheers, urged a county meeting of Lancashire Congregationalists, to "resolve, to a man, throughout the country, that they would never give a vote to return a man to the House of Commons who was not with them in principle; and let them make, as one of the conditions of their votes, 'no state interference with religion' ....."[3] On its third day, the London Conference recommended "to Liberal electors the adoption of well-considered means of securing the return to the House of Commons of such candidates as not merely

1. N., 31 March 1847 p. 189. E.R., 4s., vol. XXI, 1847, pp. 526-7.
2. N., 10 March 1847 p. 156.
3. ibid., 14 April 1847 p. 225. He made the same point in a letter which appeared in the Patriot, 12 April 1847 p. 231.

profess to hold sacred the claims of religious liberty, but also clearly understand what these claims imply".[1]

Dissenters, Conder wrote, "have to take the field in defence of their religious liberties, for themselves, and by themselves. Instead of fighting in the ranks of a great political party, they must now be a party, or be nothing....." As Dissenters, they need no longer be concerned with the fate of the Whig ministry. Together with his more radical contemporaries, he pointed out that on virtually all the great questions of the day there was no difference between Russell and Peel. Party distinctions were nominal, and on all religious issues both parties opposed the Dissenters.[2] Bright, the only member to argue the voluntary position in the education debate, should not have to stand alone in the next parliament. Where they were strong, Dissenters could bring forward their own candidates, and should seek adequate assurances on state education, and state endowments of religion, from all prospective candidates before committing a vote. Abstention was not disenfranchisement; it was completely justified when these conditions were not met.[3]

Gratified, if slightly surprised, by the new spirit abroad amongst the Dissenters, Miall counselled them "to do public honour to principles publicly desecrated". This was important, not the mere winning or losing of an election, or a display of strength, or revenge for treachery. No vote must be given, which "may be tortured into silent connivance at the crying evil of the times". Abstention was the better

1. N., 16 April 1847 p. 248.
2. P., 3 May 1847 p. 293, 31 May 1847 p. 380. N., 26 May 1847 p. 389.
3. P., 13 May 1847 p. 324, 17 May 1847 pp. 340-1, 10 June 1847 p. 404.

way, and support for any candidate should be dependent on an adequate appreciation of the anti-state-church principle.

> ..... Practically, it includes in it, or carries with it, all that vitally affects a nation's freedom. So long as religious instructors of any denomination are converted by Government pay into a spiritual police, such liberty as remains to us must rest upon insecure foundations. Men wrong on this point are wrong in the very basis of their political opinions - right here, they are on the way to rightness on other questions..... If ever principle was worthy of being made a touchstone of Parliamentary qualification ..... this is.....

With no real differences between the parties, the anti-state-church question seemed the only genuine electoral issue, and, in the "crisis in the history of State-ecclesiasticism", it was essential to place men in the Commons fully acquainted with the principles involved, for, Miall anticipated, "upon the next Parliament will dissolve the virtual settlement of a question fraught with graver and more serious consequences than any which has, as yet, occupied the minds of statesmen - namely, the relation which civil government should bear to the religious faith and worship of their subjects.....".[1]

As usual, the Nonconformist was more doctrinaire than the Patriot, which did not take the same dogmatic stand on the anti-state-church principle. In all this, Miall was merely re-echoing the Anti-State-Church Association. Its Triennial Conference "solemnly" commended,"to dissenting electors throughout the three kingdoms, the duty of employing the franchise entrusted to them by Divine Providence, in vindication of those ecclesiastical principles which constitute the sole basis of religious freedom and equality, and of resolutely standing aloof from all contests at the approaching general election, in which an opportunity is not afforded

1. N., 21 April 1847 pp. 260-1, 12 May 1847 pp. 348-9, 7 July 1847 pp. 492-3.

them to record their testimony, by vote, against any form of alliance between the Church and the State!! A similar resolution was passed at the public meeting, where Burnet and Miall outlined many of the arguments elaborated in the Nonconformist, placing greater emphasis on the abstention ploy:

> ..... Let us teach men, by the ejection of some sixty or eighty, or one hundred Whig members from Parliament - simply through standing aloof - that there are, at all events, some few men in the world who regard principles, that are not to be tossed about with derision and disdain in Saint Stephen's Chapel..... Give them an opportunity of studying our principles, and of studying them in the quiet of their own closets, instead of the turmoil of the senate..... [1]

The Association's implication that Dissenters could consistently vote only for anti-state-church men may have been too hard for many, but there was general agreement on the justifiability of neutrality when no positive course was available, both the Yorkshire and Lancashire Nonconformist electors advising it.[2] Nonconformist and Patriot drew from Wellingtonian experience to illustrate this new defensive strategy of Dissenters. Retreating to their "Torres Vedras", standing in their "invincible squares", they were to ignore the assaults and blandishments of politicians, resting on their principles. This was the only way to moral and political effectiveness.[3]

Electoral activity by Dissenters was not new, and the Deputies had sought Lord Robert Grosvenor's views on Roman Catholic endowment when he fought Middlesex at the beginning of 1847.[4] In some boroughs, militant anti-state-churchmen

1. ibid., 10 May 1847 pp. 327-8. Proceedings of the First Triennial Conference ....., p. 26.
2. P., 13 May 1847 p. 324, resolution of Leeds meeting of Yorkshire Dissenters. N., 2 June 1847 pp. 405-6, resolution of Lancashire Nonconformist electors meeting.
3. P., 10 June 1847 pp. 404-5. N., 7 May 1847 p. 312.
4. P., 1 February 1847 p. 68.

and radical reformers had long claimed a share in the selection of the liberal candidates. At Leicester, the resolve to turn out the old Members because of their Maynooth votes was being put into effect before the education crisis broke; this merely added to the hurdles prospective candidates had to surmount. The local committee chose Sir Joshua Walmsley as first candidate, "but we are honourably pledged to a section of the radical party here to find a second candidate" who would "advocate Separation of Church and State (Nonconformist view of it) and universal suffrage, and ..... beyond this the voluntary principle in Education in opposition to a Government scheme....." George Thompson, George Wilson, and John Brooks of Manchester, were all considered, before Richard Gardner was invited to stand. He was to be a frequent attender at metropolitan anti-state-church soirees and public meetings.[1]

Unprecedented in 1847, was the extent of the dissenting movement. A Dissenters' Parliamentary Committee sprang out of the Education Conference; its chairman was Samuel Morley. Sitting daily, its aim was to co-ordinate activity, to give information, to help in the selection of candidates, and to exhort. One of its first steps was to send out a circular letter to prominent Dissenters, to ascertain their willingness to allow their names to go onto a short-list of possible dissenting candidates. In June, it issued an "Address to the Dissenting Electors of Great Britain", encouraging them to vote "in vindication of God's truth from the assaults of State power ..... Whether you vote or stand aloof, let your conduct be a dignified and intelligible protest against

1. George Wilson Papers, William Biggs to G.Wilson, 28 February 1847. Other letters in the file for March 1847, relate to this matter.

all State interference with religion". Correspondence was opened with boroughs where Dissent appeared to be in a strong electoral position.[1] A newspaper was produced for the electoral period, edited by Charles Reed, to publish intelligence, to encourage, and to enlighten.[2] The challenge to the political parties was taken seriously, as the work done in the constituencies was to demonstrate.

The West Riding, a hotbed of opposition to the Minutes, witnessed several intense campaigns. Wakefield rejected Edward North Buxton because his views on education and endowment were unacceptable, choosing G.W.Alexander, a Quaker, as its liberal and voluntary candidate. Dissatisfied with the votes of W.R.C.Stansfield, the liberal Member, the dissenting electors of Huddersfield sought to persuade George Wilson to stand on a Nonconformist platform; within a week a requisition had received 420 signatures, but he declined the honour. John Cheetham, an Ashton-under-Lyme cotton spinner and Congregationalist, replaced him, and was narrowly defeated, with, as in so many other contests, Tory votes going to the official Liberal, to keep the separationist candidate out.[3] The Bainses sponsored the candidature of Joseph Sturge in Leeds, composing old political differences in face of a common danger. Sturge himself was never optimistic, but his reception by the local Liberals and orthodox

1. Hodder, E.: The Life of Samuel Morley (London: 1887), pp. 100-5. N., 16 June 1847 p. 437 (Address), 22 September 1847 pp. 678-9 (Report).
2. Reed, C.E.B. Memoir of Sir Charles Reed, pp. 61-2. Fourteen issues of the Nonconformist Elector appeared.
3. George Wilson Papers, series of letters from C.H.Jones and A.Willans to G.Wilson, 5 June 1847 - 14 June 1847. The Huddersfield men cannot have been rigid anti-state-educationists, for Cheetham "is rather favourable to secular education by the State, but he is a sound Nonconformist, and opposed to all religious endowments". (L.M. on Cheetham, quoted in N., 23 June 1847 pp. 461-2).

Dissenters was good. J.G.Marshall, a state-educationist, was the other liberal candidate, supported by Unitarians and Churchmen. To win the seat, his party made a compact with the Conservatives, the Leeds Mercury estimating that 1551 known Tories voted for Marshall, and only 479 accredited Liberals. All this was very much a revolt against the old leaders of Leeds Liberalism, for the majority of these remained in the Marshall camp.[1] There was a similar coalition at Halifax, where Miall opposed Sir Charles Wood, the strength of his support forcing the withdrawal of the second sitting Liberal Member, his radicalism ensuring that he would share many working class votes with Ernest Jones; but, he came third, with over 200 Tories splitting between Wood and their own candidate. This contest, the Nonconformist wrote, was an example of what others should be - here were religious men, many of whom had not previously been politically active, acting from religious motives, merging all political differences to vindicate religious principles.[2]

There was hectic activity in the metropolitan constituencies. George Thompson was brought forward in Tower Hamlets by a combination of Dissenters and political radicals. Charles Reed was one of his secretaries, Samuel Morley nominated him on the hustings. Their principal target was Fox, whom the Dissenters had introduced to the constituency in 1841. "We hope", commented one journalist, "that he will displace the incapable Whig by whom that great borough has, for the last seven years been discredited". Thompson was returned,

1. Joseph Sturge Papers, B.M., Add. Mss. 43845, f. 33, Edward Baines jnr., to J.Sturge, 22 May 1847. E.R., 4s., vol. XXII, 1847, pp. 367-9. Richard, H.: Memoirs of Joseph Sturge, pp. 339-40.
2. Miall, A.: Life of Edward Miall, pp. 125 ff. N., 14 July 1847 pp. 508-9. E.R., loc. cit., pp. 369-70.

a 1000 votes clear at the head of the poll, with Clay, Fox's former colleague, second. With no paid agents, with the drink interest hostile, this was regarded as a "splendid triumph". Of Thompson, one supporter wrote, "it was his bold and unambiguous broad principles of complete civil and religious liberty - of complete religious equality - in the separation of the Church from the State, that won the hearts of his supporters, and induced them to put forth their most strenuous exertions to sustain his own.....".[1] Benjamin Hawes, another member of the Government, was a second major target. Charles Pearson, an anti-state- churchman, topped the poll in Lambeth, whilst D'Eyncourt, the other sitting Member, who had voted against the Minutes, and pledged himself against further endowments, came second. Dissenters deliberately split their votes between the two men in the afternoon to force Hawes, second at that time, into third place.[2] The Deputies participated in the campaign, submitting a series of questions to every metropolitan candidate, to ascertain their opinions on state education, state endowment of religion, and other dissenting grievances. Of the fifteen they recommended, it was boasted, all but one were returned, and he withdrew several days before the election. Not all were anti-state-churchmen, some were merely pledged against future endowment, but six, Duncombe, Wakley, Thompson, Pearson, Charles Lushington in Westminster, and Pattison, were regarded as such.[3]

1. P., 1 July 1847 pp. 452-3, 2 August 1847 p. 524. N.E., 20 July 1847 p. 30, 3 August 1847 p. 61. E.R., loc. cit., p. 373.
2. E.R., loc. cit., pp. 372-3.
3. ibid., p. 372. N.E., 16 July 1847 p. 17 for the Deputies' advertisement of recommended candidates. Neither Lord Dudley Stuart, nor Rothschild (Marylebone and the City respectively) were included in this list, but both had complied with minimum dissenting demands before election day.

Russell, "the arch-traitor", was Member for the City of London. "Who'll bell the cat"? asked the Nonconformist.

> We are the more anxious to see summary justice done upon Lord John Russell, inasmuch as he has been more closely than any of his supporters identified with Dissenters, and has received a larger share of their sympathies. His treachery to them calls aloud for punishment, as a salutary example to politicians of his stamp. He is a quarry worth flying at: bring him down, and we shall do much to put an end to his dangerous crochets..... ... Lord John must be publicly disowned by Nonconformists. On this head it will be folly to leave room for the possibility of a mistake ..... Prick him for electoral execution! ..... Let him creep into Parliament through some nomination borough, upon the back of his elder brother.....

If the prime minister, the "head", were forced to retire, "the body and limbs will be instantaneously paralysed....."[1]

Pattison, it was generally agreed, was the only City candidate Dissenters could vote for, but it was essential to move against Russell, lest Nonconformists were misrepresented if he were defeated by "no Popery" Conservatives. Considerable pressure was put on Rothschild and Larpent, the other Liberals, to accept the minimum of dissenting demands, and both did so, the latter too late to secure his election.[2] Russell, however, was impossible. His first public meeting, rigged, claimed the nonconformist press, collapsed in uproar, with the chairman refusing Morley permission to move an amendment hostile to the Premier. The Dissenters' Parliamentary Committee issued two Addresses to dissenting City electors, explaining why they should not vote for Russell, and recommending Pattison and Rothschild. An eve of poll meeting in the London Tavern, chaired by J.R.Mills, chairman of the Deputies, added Larpent's name to these, but the first resolution bound the meeting, "to withold its support from

1. N., 2 June 1847 p. 413, 14 July 1847 pp. 508-9.
2. P., 28 June 1847 pp. 444-5. N.E., 9 July 1847 pp. 5-6. N., 14 July 1847 p. 508.

any and every candidate who is not prepared to oppose every attempt to endow one sect at the expense of others, or the extension of the principle of endowment or State support to all sects; and who is not prepared also to defend and support the religious education of the people, unfettered by State pay or State control, as the most precious guarantee of the civil and religious liberties of this country".[1]

"Unexpectedly", Russell was returned at the head of the poll, this being attributed to, "that new-born gratitude which his Bishop's Bill excited in the minds of the Tory clergy and their devoted friends.....". Nevertheless, "many Dissenters of the Morning Chronicle order", voted for all four liberal candidates "upon the past service principle". The return of Pattison and Rothschild, however, was "a fair indication, that the bulk of the dissenting electors have shown both their consistency and their numerical importance.. ....".[2]

Other members of the administration met with similar hostility. Hadfield had warned George Wilson in January, that Milner Gibson would "be pressed very closely" on the endowment question by dissenting electors. A week before the election, Bright wrote, "..... Gibson is in a mess about the Bishoprics Bill, & he will get deeper and deeper in it if he stay with this Govt.....". At a meeting of the election committee, amidst considerable applause, Hadfield asked Gibson to explain his absences from the Commons' discussions of the Manchester Bishopric Bill, and why he had voted in opposition to the sentiments of a majority of his constituents, on all ecclesiastical questions. Only two votes opposed a

1. N.E., 9 July 1847 p. 6, 23 July 1847 pp. 35, 38, 27 July 1847 pp. 41, 45.
2. Ibid., 30 July 1847 p. 52. N., 4 August 1847 p. 568. P., 2 August 1847 p. 524.

vote of confidence, but two-thirds of those present abstained.[1] At Nottingham, dissenting abstentions contributed to O'Connor's defeat of Sir John Hobhouse, whilst, in a confused situation in Edinburgh, the voluntaries took advantage of a tide running against Macaulay, and ousted him - a result which provided considerable satisfaction.[2]

Another who attributed his defeat to the Dissenters was Roebuck, whose opponent at Bath was Ashley. This allegation is difficult to sustain in its entirety. Roebuck had frequently incurred the wrath of the dissenting press, but both the Nonconformist and the Nonconformist Elector urged Bath Dissenters to vote for him. His charges against the Rev. William Jay were refuted in the latter, where a correspondent recounted that he had recommended both the old Members to his people at a vestry meeting before leaving the town; his son was active on Roebuck's side; three of his deacons split for Roebuck and Lord Duncan.[3]

Not all local nonconformist political leaders were prepared to break up the "liberal interest". In Sheffield, for instance, the votes of Ward and Parker on the education proposals gave dissatisfaction, and the former wrote to Leader regretting that their political association seemed to be terminating. As in Leeds, the local Liberals were divided, but to prevent the seats falling to Tories, a compromise was reached, and no opposition offered to the old Members.[4]

1. George Wilson Papers, G.Hadfield to G.Wilson, 2 January 1847; J.Bright to G.Wilson, 20 July 1847. N., 4 August 1847 pp. 571-2.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XXII, 1847 pp. 374-8.
3. Leader, R.E., Autobiography and Letters of the Right Honourable J.A.Roebuck, (London, 1897), pp. . N., 14 July 1847 p. 508. N.E., 13 July 1847 p. 13, 6 August 1847 pp. 78-9. P. 9 August 1847 p. 540.
4. Leader Papers, H.G.Ward to Robert Leader, 5 April 1847, 17 July 1847.

In Bradford, the Nonconformist community wished to repudiate the agreement made by the local Liberals, to run William Busfield, whose recent votes had caused discontent, together with Col. T.P.Thompson. Led by Robert Milligan, they organised a committee for Thompson alone. The Colonel was reluctant to stand without an assurance of victory, which a divided liberal party could not guarantee, although the various canvasses promised well. Eventually, however, Busfield made pledges against future religious endowments, and the two men were returned together. Once the Tories had produced two candidates, union was essential to save the seats for liberalism.[1]

Nevertheless, the dissenting ranks in the Commons were not greatly strengthened. All those who fought in Yorkshire were defeated; James Kershaw, a Congregationalist, was defeated by a Conservative Wesleyan Methodist, Joseph Heald, at Stockport, although he was returned in Cobden's vacant seat at the end of the year. D.W.Wire was bottom of the poll at Boston, Robert Hardy at Worcester, and Apsley Pellatt received a derisory vote at Bristol. Samuel Peto, the Baptist railway contractor, was returned for Norwich, but as a Whig, opposed by the local nonconformist community, because of his adhesion to Russell, and his mildness on the state-church question. Unable to obtain an acceptable statement of opinion from him, they reluctantly adopted J.H.Parry as their candidate. Peto allied himself with the Marquis of Druro.[2] A Congregationalist

1. George Wilson Papers, series of letters, T.P.Thompson to G.Wilson, 5 June 1847 - 31 July 1847.
2. There was plenty of comment on this affair in the nonconformist press. N.E., 13 July 1847 p. 15, contains a leader from the Norfolk News, edited by a militant Dissenter J.H.Tillett, dealing with Peto's inconsistencies. N., 7 July 1847 p. 485 contains his attack on Miall's view of separation. Birrell, C.M.: The Life of William Brock, D.D., (London, 1847) pp. 156-7.

James Pilkington, was, however, returned for Blackburn. Whigs resorted to coalitions to save themselves, but many dissenting electors must have found themselves in strange company on polling day. Miall, Sturge, Thompson, and Vincent, who contested Ipswich under the dissenting banner, were all complete suffragists - it would be interesting to know how many of their supporters were. Nottingham's Dissenters stood by, and allowed O'Connor to win a seat, but Sturge had won 1900 votes as a complete suffragist there in 1842. Ernest Jones fished for voluntaryist votes in Halifax. Great care was taken to dissociate the Nonconformist movement against endowment from that of the evangelical Churchmen, who were requiring pledges against Catholic endowment in Ireland, but the Whig press tended to tar them with the same brush.[1]

What, in the end, had been achieved? Estimates of the number of anti-state-churchmen returned varied from 26 to 32; of the numbers pledged against all further endowments, from 59 to 72.[2] But the Administration had not been weakened, since seats lost to the dissenting agitation, were made up by those won from Protectionists, and dissenting interests were as ignored in the next five years, as they had been in the preceding six. Miall's prediction that this Parliament would be immersed in the state-church question, proved over-optimistic, and there was no organised protest against establishment as such until after the 1852 election, when there was an influx of orthodox Dissenters into the House. The Minutes had sparked off the crisis, but having brought

1. See, for example, the "Address of the Dissenters Parliamentary Committee to the Nonconformists of London", N.E., 27 July 1847 p. 41.
2. N., 1 September 1847 pp. 634-5. N.E., 24 August 1847 pp. 158-60. The Dissenters' Parliamentary Committee claimed 62 M.P.s, opposed to all future grants for religious purposes.

off the Wesleyan Methodists, the Government knew that their opponents, in any case divided on educational issues were in a very small minority. The Nonconformist Elector might argue, that, these

> ..... stupid, impractical, and inequitable Educational Minutes must be withdrawn; and, if they should not be, we must get some of the recently elected patriots to refuse the grant of supplies.....

But in the following March, Bright advised Baines of the futility of trying to strike up any opposition to the education vote.[1]

Miall, however, expected immense long term benefits to accrue from this independent electoral movement. Freedom of action would never again be sacrificed; "Whig borough cliques" had been "routed", and forced to fraternise with their political opponents to save their authority, thus revealing the pretence behind the party system, behind professions of irreconcileable hostility. Finally, through their firmness, Dissenters had vindicated their principles, saving their own reputations:

> ..... They have fairly struggled to the other side of the Slough of Contempt, and have regained a footing on solid ground. Their day of humiliation is over. The saucy sarcasms of bantling Ministers will be heard no more. The extension of the ecclesiastical endowment principle is rendered well-nigh impossible. Throughout the next Parliament, the voice of Dissenters will count for something more serious than a deedless clamour..... [2]

The reply to the taunts of the ministerial press, that Dissenters had only engineered the defeats of their own leaders, was that these failures were victories, were demonstrations of dissenting power,

1. N.E., 24 August 1847 pp. 152-3. Baines Papers, J.Bright to E.Baines jnr., 7 March 1848.
2. N., 4 August 1847 p. 557. E.R., 4s., vol. XXII, 1847, pp. 362-6 said much the same.

> We consider the cases of the elections at Leeds and Halifax to be decided political victories for the Dissenters. The Dissenting candidates have been baffled; but, for the CAUSE, they have won. The formal electoral results were only obtained, by unworthy political huckstering. STURGE and MIALL, not only otherwise would not have been defeated, but would have been triumphantly returned.....

Such narrow defeats as these, as that of Kershaw, of Cheetham, of Alexander, with so little preparation, gave great encouragement for the future.[1]

For that future, it was essential to organise. Dissenting political weakness had been caused by the extemporary nature of their agitations, by their basic disorganisation. In recommending the formation of effective Registration Associations, the Dissenters' Parliamentary Committee were not alone. John Cassell suggested that a £50,000 fund should be raised, and placed under the control of a Board, like the Reform Club, which would assign Nonconformist candidates to seats, and finance them, whilst at the local level, Dissenters would strengthen their position through Nonconformist Registration Associations. Tillett's scheme for an Electoral League and Provident Association for promoting the Aquisition of Freeholds, was welcomed by the dissenting press. In its farewell editorial, the Nonconformist Elector must have expressed the thoughts of many:

> ..... As we have electoral power, and a fair share of social and moral influence, and have now recently, perhaps for the first time, discovered the greatness of our real strength, shall we not exact indemnity for the past, as well as security for the future? That we may prevent a renewal of all attempts at further aggression on the part of the Whigs ..... and that we may enforce redress for the past, we must create and widely extend some permanent system of political organization, and of united action for the future.
>
> Towards this object, the first obvious principle

1. N.E., 3 August 1847 p. 60. E.R., loc. cit., pp. 382-3.

> of success will be the cultivation and maintenance of more extensive union and co-operation among ourselves..... 1

Some felt that a narrow dissenting movement was not enough, arguing that Dissenters had been too one-sided in their advocacy of principle - "Has there not been an almost total disregard of man, and of the things that belong to man, as such? - all large patriotism, all warmth of heart, necessary for the carrying out of any great work, struck with paralysis by a respectable conventionalism"? Having broken from an alliance which had muzzled them, they had to form a new one, with the people. Any new organisation, or party, should embrace the rights and privileges of all, not just those of the Nonconformists. Only then would they become an irresistable force.[2]

Professor Cowherd suggests that the events of 1847 were a challenge to the Whig leadership, and concludes that, "voluntaryism was an essential part of the new liberalism. Free traders and voluntaryists were the same people and their object was one - to abolish exclusive aristocratic privileges in church and state".[3] Certainly, the administration was challenged, but, so were all those liberal and radical Members of Parliament who had voted for the Maynooth Bill, and who advocated the extension of the state's educational role. Cobden and his colleagues had been criticised in 1845; Cobden was a state-educationist, and doubtless his absence

1. N., 15 September 1847 pp. 668-9, 22 September 1847 pp. 678-9 (Report of the Dissenters' Parliamentary Committee). P., 16 August 1847 p. 556. N.E., 6 August 1847 p. 80 (Cassell's letter), 24 August 1847 pp. 152-3. E.R., loc. cit., pp. 378-81.
2. N., 4 August 1847 p. 557, 11 August 1847 pp. 588-9. E.R., loc. cit., pp. 380-2. N.E., 17 August 1847 p. 119 for letter of P.Crellin, on this subject.
3. Cowherd, R.G.: The Politics of English Dissent, p. 163. His brief account of the election leaves much to be desired. For a contrary view, see Machin, G.I.T.:"The Maynooth Grant the Dissenters, and Disestablishment, 1845-1847", English Historical Review, vol. lxxxii, pp. 84-5.

on the continent during 1847 prevented the ire of the nonconformist press from descending upon him once again. It is true that voluntaryists tended to be free traders, but free traders were not necessarily voluntaryists. Writing to Baines the following year, Cobden, whilst explaining the mutual compromises necessitated by any party alignment, remarked that, "the education question is the main cause of the split amongst the middle class liberals". In Lancashire, some Nonconformists felt that the old League machine, which still dominated liberal electoral activities in the county, was neglecting their interests, George Hadfield forwarding to George Wilson complaints at the clique's selection of Alexander Henry as the Liberal candidate for the South Lancashire seat vacated by Charles Villiers, warning of the danger of a secession.[1]

In 1845 the Eclectic had claimed, that, "Liberal principles were very different things from the 'liberal interest', and we have a shrewd suspicion that one of the best things for the former would be the annihilation of the latter, as it exists at present".[2] Denying that there was a Liberal party, since no party rested on popular principles, dissenting journalists, adopting an extreme laisser-faire view of the state's role, assigned to a new popular and constitutional opposition the task of opposing "a lavish and pernicious misapplication of the public money", of checking,

> ..... the tendency of modern legislation to imitate the worst features of the Continental despotisms, by subjecting the whole business of society, civil and sacred, - matters of personal duty, of parental obligation, and of voluntary

1. Cobden Papers, B.M., Add. Mss. 43664, ff. 205-7, R.Cobden to E.Baines jnr., 28 December 1848. George Wilson Papers, G.Hadfield to G.Wilson, 22 November 1847.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XVIII, 1845, pp. 609-11.

> benevolence, equally with those which relate to rights and wrongs, - to the machinery of Government". 1

Few radicals and free traders would have wholly subscribed to this view. Recognising the chaotic political situation created by the corn law crisis, the militants sought to exploit it to ensure that disestablishment was the core of any new liberal grouping's programme, and they believed that the election, by taking the establishment debate into the constituencies, would contribute to the eventual realisation of this.[2] For all their talk of embracing popular demands, Dissenters essentially wanted a party founded on their own terms, and this was simply unrealistic. Voluntaryism was a divisive factor in the politics of the next dozen years; it was never an essential component of the "new Liberalism", because, unlike free trade, it never became an accepted verity. Dissenting dogmatism merely intensified the political fragmentation out of which the compromise of the "new liberalism" developed.

Following the Maynooth Endowment Bill so very closely, the Minutes stimulated an unprecedented union and unanimity within Dissent. On the political front it opened the breach with the Whigs which had long been threatened, and fostered the movement to re-organise the 'liberal interest' in a dissenting mould. Convinced that they were facing a crisis of the first magnitude, that they were once more defending those truths of civil and religious liberty fought for by their ancestors in the seventeenth century, Dissenters were pushed onto the defensive. An embattled situation developed,

1. P., 20 May 1847 p. 348, 29 July 1847 p. 516.
2. N., 9 June 1847 p. 428, "The germ of a new party", 4 August 1847pp. 568-9.

which the extremists were quick to capitalise on - they seemed so right in their predictions and solutions. Prominent men joined the Anti-State-Church Association, moderates and militants coalesced on political platforms, and Edward Miall, formerly the spokesman of a minority, was hailed as,

> ..... our leader, we ought to recognise and proclaim the fact. If we cannot secure his return to Parliament this time, let us at least make it known, that he is the adopted candidate of the Dissenters, to represent them as a body in the House of Commons. 1

At last, militant Nonconformity appeared to be respectable. The future lay with the Nonconformist and the Anti-State-Church Association, the only national dissenting political society, rather than with the London committees which had dominated dissenting activities in the past.

1. N.E., 10 August 1847 p. 89.

CHAPTER 9.

THE ANTI-STATE-EDUCATION MOVEMENT, 1833-1856.

Crises over educational issues spurred on the militants in 1843 and 1847, demonstrating the close link between anti-state-churchism and the anti-state-education movement. But, whilst the Anti-State-Church Association had aggressive as well as defensive tendencies, the voluntary education programme was very much a defensive reaction to the reviving claims and menacing advances of the Church of England. State education might undermine the liberties of the English people, but if it was controlled by the members of the Established Church it would be converted into a weapon for the extermination of religious Dissent. Yet, the hard line taken from 1843 onwards was never fully representative of dissenting opinion on this question, particularly in the thirties.

Brougham's Bill (1820) had been opposed because of the authoritative position it gave to the parish clergyman in the organisation of the parish school - a recognition of the ecclesiastical assumption that the Church had sole responsibility for the education of the people.[1] Thirteen years later there was a more muted reaction to the first grant for educational purposes. Their press urged Dissenters to take advantage of the offer by supporting the British and Foreign

1. Brown, James Baldwin: An Appeal to the Legislature and the Public, more especially to the Dissenters from the Established Church, of every Denomination, on the Tendency of Mr. Brougham's Bill for the Education of the Poor, to augment the Poor's Rate; to interfere with the Rights of Conscience; and impinge on the spirit of the Toleration Acts, with some Remarks on its probable Effects in injuring Sunday Schools, (London: 1821); Dale, R.W.: History of English Congregationalism, pp. 646-9.

Schools Society. It was "essentially unjust" to divide the money equally between the "sectarian" National Society, and the truly national and undenominational British Society, but the vote was applauded as an acknowledgement of the principle that state aid for popular education had to be given "irrespectively of the narrow interests and exclusive claims of an endowed priesthood". It was,

> ..... a vote at variance ..... with the system of ecclesiastical monopoly, which would make the education of the people subordinate and subservient to the influence and power of an order..... 1

No organ denied the right of a government to make some provision for the education of its people, and the Irish protestants, agitating against the scheme introduced into that country in 1832, were admonished for implying this.[2] Arguments, to be hotly repudiated ten years later, were admitted. Plainly, wrote one reviewer, "the resources of private benevolence are confessedly inadequate to the task of bringing the schoolmaster to every man's door". Government had a duty "to promote the instruction of the people, as connected with the peace and good order of society". If government interest and aid were admissable, however, its limitations were explicitly stated. It could assist, but not displace the voluntary societies, and the Patriot was concerned that its activites should not prove incompatible with the parental responsibility for the education of his child. The major qualification was in the religious sphere. Education had to be religious; if it were added by government, then this religious instruction had to be unsectarian. Hence, when the Eclectic offered a blue-print for "national

1. C.M., 1833, pp. 599-600; P., 28 August 1833 pp. 296-7; E.R., 3s., vol. XI, 1834, pp. 14-5.
2. P., 25 April 1832 pp. 76-7.

education on just and comprehensive principles", it began,

> ..... the schools shall be open on equal terms to children of all religious denominations, and ..... no sectarian manual or church formulary be introduced.

It logically followed from this, that state aid should be impartially distributed to all sects.[1] The conditions attached to the school building grant recognised this principle.

On the other hand, the Church of England claimed the right of superintending popular education, and, as the National Society swallowed up a disproportionate share of the grant, Dissenters began to suspect that, privately, Ministers sympathised with this. There was a rising tide of protest. The standard of teaching in Church schools was alleged to be appalling, and inspection was advocated as the only remedy for this malversation of the national funds. But the chief ground of complaint was that £36,000 had been voted for "the erection of Schools for Churchmen only". "No system of Education", it was declared,

> ought to receive the support of the State of which all denominations cannot avail themselves, much less, from which religious Dissenters are designedly excluded.....

By conniving at this misapplication of the grant, Ministers were allowing it to become a new dissenting grievance, being warned that if they continued to support exclusive schools, controlled by "a bigotted and factious clergy", then Dissenters would completely withdraw from the scheme, making the abuse even more outrageous.[2]

Radicals were already advocating the prohibition of

1. ibid., 18 December 1837 p. 804, 14 June 1838 p. 388, 21 June 1838 p. 404, 7 February 1839 p. 84, 25 April 1839 pp. 260-1. E.R., Loc. cit., pp. 15-21.
2. P., 6 January 1835 p. 5, 3 August 1836 p. 293, 16 August 1838 p. 532, 24 September 1838 p. 620.

religious teaching in aided schools as the only feasible solution to this problem. The Central Society of Education wanted a Government Education Board, and, castigating the efforts of the voluntary societies, their complete supersession by a secular state system. This was as evil as the claims of the clergy.

> Both these systems appear to us to be fundamentally defective. Both dishonour the Bible. The one demanding something more than the word of GOD as the basis of religious instruction; the other, by taking up with something less. Both degrade the common charter of our salvation to a level with a human system of dogmatic theology. Both promote priestcraft. If the one violates the rights of conscience, the other sets at naught the claims of GOD..... 1

What alternative did Dissent offer? In 1832 the various denominational boards and committees had given the Government's Irish plan a warm welcome.[2] One day per week was set aside for denominational instruction, and this was allowed on other days out of school hours; the Bible could be read, provided there was no compulsion to attend; and the representative Board of Commissioners of National Education in Ireland devised a series of "Scripture Extracts", for use in the schools, acceptable to both Roman Catholic and Protestant. A similar contrivance was adopted in the Liverpool Corporation Schools. Here the leading protagonists of the comprehensive plan were both Dissenters, William Rathbone, a Unitarian, and Thomas Blackburn, a Congregationalist. It was abandoned in 1842, once the Conservatives had a majority on the council.[3] No one suggested the adoption of "scripture extracts" as part of a national plan for England, but there

1. ibid., 18 September 1839 p. 596, 30 October 1837 p. 692, 23 November 1837 p. 749.
2. C.M., 1832 pp. 315, 317-8, 325.
3. Murphy, J.: The Religious Problem in English Education - the Crucial Experiment, (Liverpool, 1959).

were those who felt that religious instruction might be given by ministers of the various denominations, at specified times in the school day, thus freeing the master to provide a secular and unsectarian education.[1]

In 1834 the Eclectic Review had proposed the appointment of a "Board of Commissioners", the establishment of six or seven government normal schools, and the building of parochial schools, maintained out of the rates, and managed by locally elected committees. Religious instruction would consist of nothing more than "a reverential and intelligent reading of the Bible for two hours every day by all the children who were able to do it with propriety".[2] Four years later, the Patriot demanded inspection of all aided schools, a "Central Board of Education" being responsible for the "superintendence of secular education", ascertaining the competency of teachers and the efficiency of schools. Supervision of religious instruction, and the appointment of masters, was to be left to the discretion of the local voluntary management committees. Memorialising Russell on the question, the committee of the British Society made similar recommendations.[3]

A Government measure was promised for 1839. Following Russell's statement in the Commons that government aided education could not be exclusive education, a conference of Dissenters and liberal evangelical Churchmen, meeting at the end of March, expressed its satisfaction with the Administration's disposition "to afford additional facilities

1. Sheffield Independent, 21 October 1837.
2. E.R., Loc. cit., pp. 19-20.
3. P., 25 June 1838 p. 412, 16 August 1838 pp. 532, 534. Binns, H.B.: A Century of Education, being the Centenary History of the British and Foreign School Society, 1808-1908, (London, 1908), pp. 128-9.

for the instruction of the people on liberal and comprehensive principles". Its proposals ressembled those of Conder and the British Society. Aid, it was hoped, would supplement and not supplant voluntary efforts; inspection was essential; and, it was suggested, responsibility for the religious teaching "might be safely and beneficially confided to the exclusive care of local committees appointed by the voluntary contributors to the School Funds.....". There should be provision for the exemption of Dissenters and others from this instruction in parishes where there was only one school, whilst denominational teaching should be forbidden in wholly maintained schools, or in factory schools. A committee was formed to watch the progress of any Government measure.[1]

Beset by claim and counter claim, by a Church demanding to control popular education, and to instruct the people in its principles, and by the dissenting cry for an equitable division of the national resources, Russell sought to steer a middle course, failing to satisfy either party. On 10th April an Order in Council was published constituting a Privy Council Education Committee. Two major proposals were made: First, that all aided schools should be inspected, and second, that a training college and model schools should be founded. These were to serve the whole community, and, accordingly, the religious instruction was to be divided into "special" and "general" categories, the latter forming part of the normal tuition of the college and schools, the former being given by the ministers of the various denominations.

Churchmen, their demands unmet, swung into the attack,

1. P., 21 March 1839 p. 180, 28 March 1839 pp. 193, 196.

towing the Wesleyan Conference, aghast at the equality given to Catholicism, in their wake. Dissenters deplored this reaction - the real threat to evangelical religion came not from Rome, but from the exclusive schemes of an increasingly Puseyite clergy.[1] Nevertheless, though praising the impartiality of the measure, they criticised its details. A Parliamentary Board would have been preferable to a Committee of Council. The principal objection was to the provisions made for religious teaching in the model and normal schools. Both the Leeds Mercury and the Patriot were exceedingly dubious of the value of the proposed "special" denominational instruction, anticipating the creation of a new army of Anglican and Roman Catholic stipendiary chaplains, whilst Nonconformist ministers, refusing state pay for religious teaching on conscientious grounds, would be unwilling to abandon other commitments to attend classes in the schools. Opposition was partially based on the principle that the State could not endow religious teaching.[2] But, there was no denial of the State's right to assist the poor parent in the education of his child, "so far as it may be practicable without interfering with the rights of conscience", and Dissenters were urged to petition Parliament to counter-balance the ecclesiastical campaign against the Committee of Council.[3]

At the beginning of June the Committee withdrew its proposals, "until greater concurrence of opinion is found

1. ibid., 23 May 1839 p. 349, 3 June 1839 pp. 372-3.
2. ibid., 27 May 1839 p. 356, 3 June 1839 p. 372. L.M., 25 May 1839, 1 June 1839. Provision was in fact only made for the appointment of one Anglican chaplain, but the measure was regarded as a model of future developments. There is a letter from Edward Baines jnr. to Kay-Shuttleworth on the matter in Smith, F.: The Life of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, (London, 1923), pp. 83-4.
3. P., 20 May 1839 p. 340. L.M., 9 June 1839.

to prevail",[1] contenting itself with an enlargement of the annual grant. Dissenting reaction was favourable; inspection was embodied in the new Minute, and, with the duties of the inspectors apparently confined to an examination of the secular aspects of aided schools, all the objectives sought since 1838 seemed achieved. Of course, Church schools would still take a disproportionate share of the money but the important principle of inspection had been adopted.[2]

There were misgivings, even before the publication of the Factory Education Bill in 1843. An "innocent concession" in 1840 (the concordat between the Committee of Council and the archbishops on the appointment of inspectors of National Schools),[3] took on a more sinister guise when the Committee prevaricated over making a similar agreement with the British Society after H.S. Tremenheere's adverse reports of conditions in aided schools connected with it. The centralising tendency of Kay-Shuttleworth's opinions were regarded with increasing apprehension, and this threat to the independence of the Society viewed with alarm. In 1839 £10,000 had been voted to the educational societies for the erection of normal schools; aid meant inspection, and a hostile report on the Society's headquarters would, it was feared, do it irreparable harm. If no accommodation could be reached on the inspection question, its committee was advised to return its share of this money. It was essential to preserve the Society as "a faithful and practical" censor

1. Order in Council of 3rd June, 1839. Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education ..... 1839-40, (London, 1840), pp. vii-viii.
2. P., 10 June 1839 p. 388. The Protestant Dissenting Deputies resolved that the Minute was "the most unexceptionable measure for national instruction, as it regards the rights of conscience, which has ever been suggested by any body of advisers of the Crown". (ibid., 20 June 1839 p. 409).
3. ibid., 16 July 1840 p. 500.

of Government activities. Agreement was eventually reached, but by then many of the Society's supporters had had their worst fears confirmed.[1]

Sir James Graham, after a long gestation period, introduced his Bill into the Commons at the beginning of March, 1843. The ground had been well prepared by Ashley in an emotional speech of 28th February, on the moral, spiritual and physical destitution of the children working in the manufacturing districts. The Home Secretary proposed further restrictions on the hours of child labour, and to establish schools in these urban areas. The Patriot and the Leeds Mercury were early sounding the tocsin to arouse the dissenting community.

The sum of the indictment against the educational clauses of the Bill, was that they were "sectarian and oppressive".[2] Sectarian in the authority they gave to the Church in the supervision of the religious education of the children in the aided schools, in the certainty that the managing boards of trustees would be dominated by Churchmen in a part of the country where Dissent was the stronger, and in the necessity for episcopal approval of any teaching appointment. Edward Baines jnr. alleged that the measure was a "Declaration of War against all the Dissenters in the kingdom", and the Patriot titled it "the British and Sunday-school extinction Bill". There was no confidence in the promise that efficient British schools would be able to give certificates of attendance to factory children, for had not the scheme been concocted by Dr. Hook, the

1. ibid., 26 January 1843 p. 60; E.R., 4s., vol. XII, 1842, pp. 481-502. Binns, H.B.: op. cit., pp. 130-3.
2. C.M., 1843, pp. 310-1, resolutions of the Congregational Board.

tractarian vicar of Leeds, and James Saunders, a factory inspector, and "a very zealous and bigotted High Churchman". School inspectors were not noted for their sympathy with the methods and principles of the British Society. The Patriot informed its readers that the sole object of the Bill was the replacement of British, and dissenting Sunday, schools, by Church schools controlled by the Puseyite clergy, where "every venomous thing in the Tracts for the Times will be assidiously used to infest with its mortiferous influence the minds of the rising generation.....". It was, wrote another critic,

> ..... a church-extension scheme which the government has propounded - a scheme as unscriptural in its tendencies, as delusive in its professions, as ominous to all which is energetic and vital in religious instruction, as it would be found conducive to the propagation of error and the ruin of the souls of men.

Conscience clauses, the Dissenters alleged, would be inoperative, yet the schools were to be rate-supported, thus compelling them to contribute to the maintenance of an education which they regarded as unscriptural, and from which they could not benefit. They would still have to sustain their own schools, which would face increasing financial difficulties, through the inability of their pupils to find employment in the factories. This rate aid was stigmatised as one of the anti-constitutional features in the Bill, the Committee of Council being empowered to levy a parochial school-rate at the behest of an irresponsible board, thus usurping the right of local communities to tax themselves. Compulsion was another objectionable element in the scheme - compulsion on manufacturers to employ only children who had attended approved schools, compulsion on them to maintain and establish factory schools in areas where there was no

suitable alternative provision, and, compulsion on the parent, not only to send his child to school, but to send him to one particular school.[1]

Miall's Nonconformist took a broader view. An assault on Dissent the measure certainly was, but it was equally an assault on Chartism and political radicalism. Alarmed by the increasing intelligence of the northern operatives, the aristocracy hoped to mould them into submission through government schools; where the Church and the army had failed, the schoolmaster was to be sent as the Government's policeman. The object was not to educate, but to rule.

> ..... The thing obviously sought for is a new and efficient instrument for managing a somewhat restive people. The curb no longer holds - the whip no longer cows, the population of these realms. The only chance remaining to the aristocracy of bestriding the people with safety is to see that they are properly broken in. This purpose is written upon their scheme in letters of light. Education is their sole remaining resource for maintaining class ascendancy - and education, in order to answer the purpose, must be in their own hands 2

No modifications were acceptable - the complete abandonment of the measure was demanded, for Government had vacated its essential position of impartiality. A central committee was formed to co-ordinate the agitation. Russell produced a series of amending resolutions, but the Bill's opponents were urged to disregard them, to concentrate on defeating the main scheme, and not to be drawn into irrele-

1. For all this, see in particular, P., from 13 March 1843; E.R., 4s., vol. XIII, pp. 583-94; Baines, E., jnr.: Letter to the Right Honourable Lord Wharncliffe, Chairman of the Committee of Council on Education, on Sir James Graham's Bill for establishing exclusive Church Schools, built and supported out of the Poor's Rates, and discouraging British Schools and Sunday Schools, (Leeds, 1843). There was a plethora of pamphlets and tracts against the education clauses of the Bill, and more of these will be found in the Bibliography.
2. N., 8 March 1843 p. 153, 15 March 1843 pp. 168-9, 22 March 1843 p. 185, 5 April 1843 p. 217.

vant debates on the merits of the various plans.[1] Graham's own concessions were rejected out of hand; they did not remedy the basic injustice of the measure.[2] In June he withdrew them.

Hinton had argued that since the Bill was based "upon a wrong principle" - the imposition of religious education on children, by law - the whole scheme was vitiated from the first. No consistent Nonconformist could acknowledge the State's right to order religious instruction in this way.[3] But, to the great disappointment of Miall, who wondered how his fellow Dissenters squared their acceptance of government grants for religious education with a repudiation of the establishment principle, there was no general movement to take up a more rational stance.[4] In the early stages of the agitation petitions still recognised the State's right to aid popular education; the Patriot suggested alternative schemes which Dissenters might find acceptable. "Against an equal system of National Education", wrote Blackburn, "it is impossible for intelligent and patriotic Nonconformists to oppose themselves, who have examined the volume published by authority, 'on the Physical and Moral Condition of the Children and Young Persons Employed in

1. ibid., 12 April 1843 pp. 233-4. Baines, E., jnr.: A New Danger to Religious Liberty, Lord Russell's Resolutions. To the Rev. Andrew Reed, D.D., Chairman of the London Central Committee for opposing the Factories Education Bill, (London &. Leeds, n.d.).
2. N., 3 May 1843 pp. 296-7. P., 3 May 1843 p. 304. Baines, E., jnr.: The Amended Bill. A Letter to the Right Honourable Sir James Graham, Bart., Secretary of State for the Home Department, (Bound in "The Factory Bill, Original and Amended", a volume in Leeds Public Reference Library).
3. Hinton, J.H.: Why Not? or Seven Objections to the Educational Clauses of the Factories Regulation Bill, (London, 1843), pp. 1-2.
4. N., 29 March 1843 pp. 200-1.

Mines and Manufactories'".[1] By May, however, the tone of the agitation was changing. The opinions voiced at meetings became more decided. The Eclectic appeared unequivocally on the voluntary side, and the Patriot concluded that Dissenters were obliged to "oppose and resist with all the determination and perseverance we can summon ..... any plan of National Education - any State interference with the Education of the people.....". National education too clearly meant Church education, and the undermining of civil and religious liberties.[2] By the summer, too, Baines, inspired by provincial and denominational loyalty, had conducted a survey of the educational and religious provision available in the manufacturing districts. This provided statistical evidence of the power of voluntaryism, and he drew the obvious conclusion, telling the Congregational Union assembled at Leeds,

> ..... that it is not the province of a government to educate the people; and that the admission of the principle that it is its province, would lead to practical consequences fatal to civil and religious liberty..... 3

Desirous of vindicating their sincerity, conscious of the need to defend their Sunday schools and evangelical religion by an expansion of their educational resources, the dissenting world turned to this new field of endeavour.[4] Whilst the Wesleyans launched an education fund, and the

1. P., 20 March 1843 pp. 180-1; C.M., 1843, pp. 311-2.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XIII, 1843, pp. 573-94, 697-715, passim. P., 3 July 1843 p. 476.
3. Baines, E., jnr.: The Social, Educational and Religious State of the Manufacturing Districts; with statistical returns of the means of education and religious instruction in the manufacturing districts of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Cheshire: in Two Letters to the Right Hon. Sir Robt. Peel, Bart. With an appendix ....., (3rd. edn., London, 1843). C.M., 1843, p. 835.
4. C.M., 1843, pp. 832-42, report of the debate at the Leeds meeting of the Union. P., 4 September 1843 p. 620, 4 December 1843 p. 828, 18 December 1843 p. 860.

Baptist Union advised its constituents to work through the British Society,[1] the Congregationalists debated the merits of an independent denominational effort. The Leeds meeting did not endorse Baines's exposition of the abstract justification of voluntaryism, merely stating that, "both the general and the religious education of the people of England must be chiefly provided by the voluntary efforts of the various denominations of Christians". It did recommend that, "each church having adequate resources, should support a day-school for boys, and another for girls", where this was impossible co-operation with other Nonconformist bodies and liberal Churchmen being sought to ensure, "that ..... in every locality where there is a Congregational church, there should be a week-day school on liberal principles". These schools, denominational in character, would provide unsectarian religious instruction, and be open to all. Congregationalists were urged to give greater support to the British Society, and a Committee of General Education was formed in connection with the Union.[2]

Working under the chairmanship of Charles Hindley, this Committee convened a Conference on General Education in London in December. Attended by prominent provincial and metropolitan Congregationalists, the meeting launched an education fund (with five donations of £1000 and nine of £500), making arrangements for its distribution between the central committee and local schemes. Advice was given on the foundation of schools, and the basic position on a denominational, but unsectarian system, was reaffirmed. Most important, however, was the decision eventually taken, after long

1. P., 25 December 1843 p. 876.
2. C.M., 1843, pp. 842-3.

debate, against the receipt of State grants, the terms of the resolution reflecting the links of the new movement with anti-state-churchism.

> That this meeting, utterly repudiating, on the strongest grounds of Scripture and conscience, the receipt of money raised by taxation and granted by Government, for sustaining the Christian religion, feels bound to apply this principle no less to the work of religious education; and considering that the education given by the Congregational churches must be religious education, advises most respectfully, but most earnestly, that no Government aid be received by them for schools established in their own connexion; and that all funds confided to the disposal of the central committee, in aid of schools, be granted only to schools sustained entirely by voluntary contributions.

Somewhat inconsistently, the gathering then recommended that the efforts of churches be conducted, "as far as practicable", in connection with, and in support of, the British Society, which was receiving government grants. Dale argued that this sprang froma a dichotomy in the voluntaryist position - although they were opposed to the receipt of aid by churches for Congregational schools, they saw no objection to its receipt by schools not connected with a particular church, and in which undenominational instruction was given. A simpler explanation is that the Society offered the only immediate means of training teachers, old associations were hard to break, and the Conference realised that the most effective way in which co-operation with other denominations might be pursued in poor and rural areas was through its agency.[1]

Controversy was stilled for three years as the denominations worked to extend the educational provision under their immediate control. Dr. Hook then published a

1. ibid., 1844, pp. 72-83. Dale, R.W.: History of English Congregationalism, p. 662.

pamphlet advocating a wide extension of state aid for education. He estimated that there was a vast deficiency in the number of school places available, claiming that the voluntary system would never provide them. Recognising the existence of dissenting schools, he called for the co-operation of all denominations in the sphere of education, with the Government making larger grants towards school Buildings, maintenance, normal schools, and teachers' salaries. The religious difficulty, he suggested, might be solved if the State's aid was specifically dispensed for the support of the secular content of the school's work, and if denominational teaching was allowed in the schools, at set times, by the ministers of the respective sects.[1]

Hook met with some sympathetic response from Nonconformity. After all, his proposals were similar to those circulating in dissenting circles in the thirties, although there had always been suspicion of schemes for denominational instruction, at specified periods in the school day. The idea that aid might be received for secular instruction was revived in 1843 by George Payne.[2] In an article completed before the appearance of Hook's pamphlet, the British Quarterly Review had defended the right of Government to supplement and assist voluntary effort, claiming that the "religious men" were incapable of educating the whole population alone. There was a need for state-supported schools in poor districts, giving secular education only, grant aid being given to other institutions for their

1. Hook, W.F.: On the Means of rendering more Efficient the Education of the People. A Letter to the Lord Bishop of St. David's, (London, 2nd. edn., 1846.)
2. Payne, G.: The Question: 'Is it the Duty of Government to provide the Means of Education for the People?' Examined, (London, 1843), pp. 30-2.

general educational activities. An appendix gave Hook's scheme, "in its substance, our cordial approval".[1] In a further long and important article in the November number of the quarterly, Vaughan probed deeply into the statistics of educational deficiency, copiously illustrating the poor quality of the accommodation, and of the teaching given. Baines's estimates were closely scrutinised, the writer pointing out that no matter how much money the denominations raised, the bulk of it went to the richer places, whilst the poorer had to subsist on a trickle from the inadequate central funds. Moreover, he reminded his readers, responsibility for a school did not cease with its erection - it still had to be maintained. Again, he justified the right of the State to intervene, returning to the principle adopted in the previous issue - aid for secular instruction, which would be inspected, no notice being taken of the religious teaching in aided schools.[2]

Vaughan was an exception. Generally, the dissenting press, perceiving the tractarian state-churchman behind the conciliatory mask, treated Hook's scheme with suspicion, denying the necessity for any State interference, and ridiculing his solution of the religious problem.[3]

Mid-nineteenth century Nonconformists, militants and moderates alike, adopted an extreme laisser-faire doctrine of the role of the State. Arguing that it had no right to meddle in a man's soul, they assumed that it had none to

1. B.Q.R., 7, August 1846, pp. 268-72, 273-6.
2. ibid., no. 8, November 1846, pp. 444-508. Other dissenting advocates of Government intervention included Edward Swaine: Equity without Compromise, (London, 1846), and Dr. John Hoppus: The Crisis of Popular Education ....., (London, 1847).
3. P., 13 July 1846-17 August 1846; N., 22 July 1846 p. 493; E.R., 4s., vol. XX, 1846, pp. 301-6.

interfere in his other social activities. A long series of articles by Herbert Spencer appeared in the Nonconformist in 1842, on "The proper sphere of government". Dwelling at length on the nature of the original contract which had brought society into being, he alleged that it had only conferred the duties of defence, maintenance of order, and the protection of life and property, on government. It provided no justification for interference in any other activity of man.[1] These views were eventually expounded by practically every organ of the nonconformist press with which we are dealing; all would have agreed with the editor who remarked that the State was "neither a father nor a mother, but merely a constable, or a chief justice". Hence, utilitarianism was a dangerous philosophy sanctioning all manner of interference. Bureaucracy and centralisation, which all government social measures seemed to involve, were denounced as the seed of continental despotism.[2]

Opposition to State education was one aspect of this outlook, though, except in the case of the Nonconformist, the extreme dogmatism of many Dissenters on this issue succeeded rather than preceded the disillusionment with government aided education precipitated by the events of the forties. The incentives of the market place, the spontaneous springs of benevolence, and above all, the action of the providential laws, were to be preferred. Education became another responsibility of the individual threatened by a government takeover. Neglect of abuse of these duties provided no justification for its intervention to rescue ~~the~~ him from the consequences of his mistakes and follies.

1. N., 15 June 1842 and following weeks.
2. ibid., 13 September 1843 p. 633, 3 April 1844 p. 213, 13 January 1847 p. 23, 29 May 1850 p. 439, 2 April 1856 p. 209. P., 6 May 1847 p. 300, 12 July 1847 p. 476, 6 March 1848 p. 148.

The only allowable exception was in the case of workhouse children, for the State stood in loco parentis towards them. Once acknowledge, Baines feared, that the State had a legitimate interest in the mental training of the people, and the next logical step would be a State control of the pulpit and the press. Civil and religious liberty were always under pressure when government roamed out of its alloted sphere.[1]

Some substance was given to these arguments by the repeal of the corn laws, and the general adoption of free trade. Government had admitted the error of commercial regulation. All the voluntaries demanded was the application of the same principle to education.

> Now there is a great analogy between Government Protection to Industry and Government Protection to Mind. They are both attempted in great part from the same motives; they indicate the same distrust of individual exertion and prudence ..... In each case the Government undertakes to do for the people what they are better able to do for themselves. In each case, the effect of that Government protection is to impair the exertions of individuals and classes. In each case, the habit of leaning on the Government entails other unforseen evils. In each case, Protection is defended by doubts and fears which experience shows to be groundless. In one case ..... Protection has been 'the bane of Agriculture', - in the other ... . it would be the bane of Education. 2

An incisive reply was given to the parry that the quality of popular education could only be improved through Government control and inspection. Landsdowne's words were quoted back at him. He had described Government as "'the worst of cultivators, the worst of manufacturers, and the worst of traders'". Baines happily added, and "the worst of

1. Baines, E., jnr.: Letters to the Right Hon. Lord John Russell, First Lord of the Treasury, on State Education ...., (London, n.d., but 1846), pp. 7-16.
2. ibid., p. 5. E.R., 4s., vol. XXII, 1847, pp. 592-8.

educators".[1] The mismanagement by government departments during the Crimean War drove this lesson home. With six education bills before the House in 1855, the Nonconformist viewed the situation with some amazement.

> ..... And is it just now, with the experience of Balaklava before our eyes, and the causes of mismanagement and failure which are so deeply rooted in all provinces of Government action palpably demonstrated, that the people of England can be about to constitute a new Government department, and to commit to official hands the delicate and most important business of popular education? We trust not..... [2]

Conceding that, possibly, in the first flush of enthusiasm accompanying a new national plan, there would be a desire for improvement, and some progress, the voluntaries denied that this would be sustained, predicting its collapse into a period of lethargic inertia, of outward decency and inner corruption, as officials, inspectors and masters sought to make their labours as light as possible. An improved education system could best be obtained through the free competition of private schoolmasters and independent day schools. Progress and quality would be a pre-requisite of survival - there would be no apathy, no neglect of new methods and materials, and the inefficient would be displaced as parents ceased to patronise them.[3]

Divine ordinance and natural law dictated that the parent was responsible for educating his own child. The majority observed this, and the neglect of the few was no

1. Baines, E., jnr.: A Letter to the most noble the Marquis of Landsdowne, President of the Committee of Council on Education; with an Appendix containing the Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education, in December, 1846; presented to both Houses of Parliament, Feb. 5, 1847, (London, 1847), pp. 4-5.
2. N., 24 January 1855 p. 57, 25 April 1855 pp. 317-8.
3. Baines, E., jnr.: Letters to ..... Russell ....., pp. 50-62. N., 19 August 1846 pp. 564-5, 16 September 1846 p. 628.

justification for the intervention of the State. To make education an affair of national law, declared Dr. Harris in his inauguration address at the opening of Homerton College, "is virtually to dismiss the parent from an office to which God has appointed him. It is to overbear a Divine law by a human enactment". The voluntary principle enlisted the benevolent and the religious in the task of education, for society had a duty to assist the poor, and to persuade the negligent of its value to their children. If this natural mechanism had become inoperative because of high taxes which made it impossible for the working classes to pay for the education of their children, or forced them to send them to work before they had received an adequate schooling, then Government could act - by repealing the taxes and legislation responsible for this situation, and by reforming the old endowed schools to open them to all. State provided education would not reach into the slums, would not touch the lowest classes, whom it was designed to benefit. Indeed, it would only destroy the "voluntary efforts of religious and philanthropic bodies ..... the only agency that can ..... draw the poor children out of their abodes of wretchedness, and allure them to receive instruction". The operation of christian love, not the force of the state policeman, would bring the social outcasts to school.[1]

Government's role was the negative one of removing the obstacles to educational progress, rather than the positive one of initiating and financing it.

The "alarmingly insidious"[2] Minutes of 1846 proposed a

1. Baines, E., jnr.: ibid., pp. 23-4. Hamilton, R.W.: The Institutions of Popular Education. An Essay to which the Manchester Prize was adjudged, (Leeds &. London, 2nd., edn., 1846), pp. 207-9. E.R., 4s. vol. XXII, 1847, pp. 591-2. N., 2 August 1843 pp. 537-8, 17 October p. 757. P., 22 April 1852 p.260.
2. N., 10 February 1847 pp. 84-5.

very wide extension of the existing grant structure. Money was to be made available for grants to pupil teachers and stipendiary monitors, for teachers' pensions and for salary supplementation. After their apprenticeship, pupil teachers were to proceed to normal schools receiving maintenance scholarships. Civil service posts were to be open to those who failed to reach the required standard, whilst teachers who had qualified at the colleges were to get salary benefits.[1] Once more Dissent moved to do battle with the state educationists, Baines taking the lead with pen and on the platform. Through the objections to these proposals the more practical economic, political, and religious arguments against State education can be viewed.

In the first place, dissenting opponents of the Minutes claimed that the increased government aid for popular education was totally unnecessary. In 1846 Baines had replied to the statistical arguments of Hook and Vaughan, accusing both of exaggerations and of misconceptions. He always argued that the crucial figure was not the number in the age group 5 - 15 who were not at school, but the number who could reasonably be expected to be in school at any one time, given, he estimated, an average school stay of five years ("a very high average"). This, he suggested, gave a reasonable proportion, considering the size of the working class in England, of 1 in 9 of the population in school at any one time. If this view was adopted, the deficiency found by Hook and other state educationists was practically halved, and the voluntaries could allege that it was minimal compared with the provision made by the voluntary bodies since 1800. If

1. Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education, 1846, vol. 1, (London, 1847), pp. 1-12.

only the impatient "doctrinaires" could wait the slow, but natural development of voluntaryism would solve all these problems. Baines's statistical findings were the rock on which the voluntary case rested for the next fifteen years, boosted by the publication of the 1851 census returns in 1853, regarded as official confirmation of his calculations.[1]

Reciting Baines's figures, voluntaries denounced the Committee of Council's proposals as needless. If state aid was unnecessary, then it was an appalling waste of money. Baines computed that, if fully implemented, the Minutes would entail an additional burden on the tax-payer of £1, 742,500. This, in its turn, became another oft quoted weapon of the voluntaries.[2]

By 1847 they were stigmatising state education as the mark of a despotic system of government. Miall had been arguing this before 1843. The "utilitarian doctrine" of state education rested on a "false principle", the ultimate effect of which would be to create an immoveable, conservative education establishment, an arm of aristocratic government, resisting all improvement and innovation. Most dangerous of all, however, was the power it gave to a government, for to concede,

> ..... the task of moulding the habits, shaping the character, and fixing the elemental principles, political, social, moral, and religious of succeeding generations, is just to let down the drawbridge, and raise the portcullis, which at present guard the citadel of our national freedom. 3

Others took up this strain after the wider acceptance of

1. Baines, E., jnr.: Letters to ..... Russell ....., pp. 17-49; Strictures on the New Government Measure of Education, (London, 1853), pp. 4-16; Education best promoted by Perfect Freedom not by State Endowments. With an Appendix containing official returns of education in 1818, 1833, and 1851, (London, 1854), pp. 35-45.
2. ibid., A Letter to ..... Lansdowne ....., pp. 5-12.
3. N., 4 August 1841 pp. 296-7, 20 July 1842 p. 497.

voluntaryism as the sole basis of national education. Its apologists began to study those European countries which had governmental systems, comparing their economic, political, and social progress and achievement unfavourably with that of England, where education had been left to the energies of a free people. Baines suggested that the despot exploited a state system as a means of "more entirely subjugating his people", by moulding opinions and attitudes, and crushing all independent thought. Miall wrote of, that "kind of regimental education ..... which ..... can only obtain intellectual order at the expense of intellectual freedom...." But this liberty that the despot sought to crush was"far more precious" than the mere acquirement of knowledge, for liberty was "the nurse of all the virtues which dignify men and communities"; it was the foundation of British moral and industrial supremacy.[1]

The Minutes threatened this political liberty and independence. Baines calculated that 80,000 people, from the families of pupil teachers to teachers desirous of salary supplementation or a pension, would become directly or indirectly dependent on the increased grants for their subsistence or future well-being, a dangerous extension of government patronage. The Nonconformist anticipated that, anxious for ministerial approval, the whole profession would "acquiesce in all the suggestions of government", teaching nothing "inimical to 'things as they are'". It was "despotism thinly veiled".[2]

1. ibid., 24 February 1847 p. 116. Baines, E., jnr.: Letters to ..... Russell ....., pp. 76-96.
2. Baines, E., jnr.: A Letter to ..... Lansdowne ....., pp. 12-4. N., 10 February 1847 pp. 84-5, 17 February pp. 100-1.

This particular objection was applicable to all schemes of state control and assistance - all undermined the national character and the self-reliant spirit of the people, paving the way for the Prussian system of despotic government ruling over a submissive and apathetic people. Baines was not singular in the views he still held nine years later:

> ..... I believe that civil and religious freedom depend upon the self-relying action of the people; and that the more the people are taught to depend upon the Government, the feebler becomes their virtue and love of liberty. 1

Equally obnoxious was the unconstitutional manner in which the Minutes were being introduced. The Committee of Council was an irresponsible body, with no legislative authority, and yet, by its fiat, the whole basis on which English education had been conducted was to be revolutionised. Members of Parliament were reminded that this was a formidable usurpation of their prerogatives, which could easily be imitated by other government boards and committees. Such important changes ought to be embodied in a bill, thus allowing sufficient time for parliamentary consideration, whereas they would be implemented on the passage of the education vote. Dissenters, who had defended the Committee in 1839, now approvingly quoted the Lords' condemnatory resolution of that year.[2]

Doubts concerning the constitutionality of the Committee were frequently repeated in the dissenting press during the ensuing decade. In 1853, despite Russell's withdrawal of his

1. Baines, E., jnr.: National Education. Remarks on the Speech and Plan of Lord John Russell, (London, 1856), p. 4.
2. ibid., especially his Appeal to the Liberal Members of the House of Commons on the Government Measure of Education, (London, 1847), pp. 2-11. N., 14 April 1847 p. 221. P., 8 March 1847 p. 148, 15 March 1847 p. 164. E.R., 4s., vol. XXI, 1847, pp. 521-5.

Borough Education Bill, the new provision for rural areas, outlined in the Minute of 2nd April, was proceeded with. Their suspension was demanded, "until they have received, like every other legislative measure, the full sanction of the House of Commons", lest this became a precedent for the evasion of discussion on any measure. A year later the Nonconformist was describing the danger to the country if unscrupulous men gained control of this "practically irresponsible despotism". The reality of these fears could be illustrated by the optional Minute on school management, introduced by the Derby Administration, and subsequently rescinded, the effect of which would have been "to elevate sacerdotalism to supremacy in the School as well as in the State".[1]

Although the Nonconformist claimed that it opposed state education on general grounds,[2] the religious issue inevitably loomed large in 1847. Ostensibly the Minutes wore a gloss of impartiality, but critics asserted that Government was once again abandoning its neutral position, above the denominational squabbles. True, the proposals had a latitudinarian aspect - the schools of all persuasions were to be aided, with no religious test - but this was a "pretence of liberality". The Committee had adopted "a sectarian policy", secure in the knowledge that Dissenters would refuse the grants if school managers were to be bound by any regulations concerning religious teaching. The managers of non-Church schools had to certify the standard of religious knowledge attained by candidates for pupil teacherships, that they were satisfied with their annual progress in this subject, and whether pupil

1. N., 23 June 1852 p. 477, 29 June 1853 p. 518, 24 August 1853 pp. 679-80, 14 June 1854 p. 485.
2. ibid., 25 January 1854 p. 69.

teachers and stipendiary monitors "have been attentive to their religious duties", on the annual certificate of character and conduct.[1] Denying the right of the State to take any cognisance of the religious behaviour of its subjects, Dissenters, even Vaughan, could not take the money under these conditions.

"..... Amidst plausible professions, profuse avowals of impartiality", the Government sought "to accomplish the policy of an intolerant and sordid hierarchy". Not only would the bulk of grants go to Church schools, but the independent establishments of the Nonconformists would be crippled. Dazzled by the glitter of stipendiary monitorships, pupil teacherships, scholarships to the normal school, and the prospect of employment in the Excise Office, the working classes would send their children to the Church schools. Teachers would be lured away by the promise of state pensions and salary supplementation. Attending Church day-schools, the children would naturally gravitate to the Church Sunday school, thus emptying the main recruiting ground of Dissent. "I will not", declared Baines,

> see this stab inflicted on Voluntary Religion, and this unfair advantage given to the Established Church and universal endowment, without making all the opposition which the laws of my country permit. I will denounce it as an act of flagrant injustice. I will treat it as an attack on religion and freedom.

Compelled to support the inculcation of religious doctrines of which he disapproved, the Nonconformist would be contributing to the maintenance of an education system which did not benefit him. Here was church extension in a new guise - the erection of "a new School Establishment, on Church principles, and in the closest connexion with the

1. Minutes of Committee of Council ....., pp. 7-9.

Church Establishment". The grant system, the Patriot suspected, might even be abused as a cheap means of training a new order of deacons.

The Minutes, moreover, gave to the parish clergyman what the Dissenters considered an inordinate power within Church schools. Dependent on his favourable reports for their salaries and scholarships, teachers, their apprentices and assistants, would fall under an influence which might be used for invidious political or religious purposes.[1]

The apparatus of dissenting protest rolled into action. Meetings were held, resolutions passed, petitions presented, deputations saw Ministers, and a central committee was formed to co-ordinate the agitation. A conference was planned for mid-April to coincide with the debate on the education vote, when Duncombe was to move for a Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry. Crucial was the attitude of the Wesleyan Methodists. In 1843 their hostility had disconcerted Graham, contributing greatly to his defeat.[2]

Both Ministers and the voluntaries understood the importance of winning this denomination to their side. Nonconformists confidently expected their assistance.[3] Much faith was put in the reputed remark of Jabez Bunting.

> 'The measure is bad, irretrievably, incurably bad; I oppose it altogether,'

But as the United Committees of Privileges and Education delayed its decision, rumours began to circulate that secret

1. Baines's pamphlets contain the whole, or part of this indictment. Also see E.R., 4s., vol. XXI, 1847, pp. 510-20; P., 18 March 1847 pp. 172-3; N., 17 February 1847 pp. 100-1.
2. Ward, J.T. and Treble, J.H.: "Religion and Education in 1843: Reaction to the 'Factory Education Bill'", (Journal of Ecclesiastical History, vol. XX, pp. 79-100), pp. 84-5.
3. N., 3 March 1847 pp. 134-5, comments at meeting which set up the Central Committee.

negotiations with the Committee of Council were in train, and optimism was dampened, the Patriot expressing a fear that the Wesleyans "will be made parties to a political bargain as flagrantly corrupt as was ever struck between State-craft and sectarian cupidity". It soon became apparent that a "contemptible intrigue" was in progress, and eventually that a "base contract" had been made, Government succeeding "in buying off the official hostility of the Wesleyans".

Dissenters found it incomprehensible that the United Committees had been deceived by the Government. Certainly, the Committee of Council informed them that Roman Catholic schools could not qualify for aid under the new Minutes whilst the Minute of 3rd December, 1839 (making the reading of the Authorised Version a condition of the receipt of aid), was in force, but, they added, this did not preclude them from introducing a further Minute to enable these schools to share in the benefits of the system. "Foul disgrace" the agreement may have been, but the United Committees had extorted more solid concessions from the Committee on the inspection question, and the abuse to which the Wesleyan Conference and Bunting were subjected in the Patriot must have been actuated by a realisation that this, the decisive point in the campaign, had been won by their opponents. It was consoling, however, to point out that the boasted catholicity of the measure had been exploded by this explicit, if short-term, exclusion of the Roman Catholic schools from its scope.[1]

Not all Wesleyan Methodists accepted this, several attending the Crosby Hall conference on 13 April, but with the opposition reduced to a nucleus of Voluntary Dissenters,

1. P., 29 March 1847 pp. 196-7, 8 April 1847 pp. 220-1, 15 April 1847 pp. 236-7, 19 April 1847 pp. 252-3, 26 April 1847 p. 269, 3 May 1847 p. 293.

the Administration felt able to proceed with its plans, sure of a large Commons majority, and of majority support elsewhere. The thunders of the conference, the threats of the dissenting press, fell on deaf ears. Russell, however, still hoped to conciliate some of these dissenting critics.

Whilst most opponents of the Minutes had also avowed their hostility to state education, some Dissenters had stood aloof from the protest, deploring its increasingly emotional tendencies. The Rev. Jonathon Glyde told the Leeds meeting of Yorkshire Congregationalists that whilst he opposed the Minutes, "he could not go to the length of objecting to all aid on the part of the Government to schools .....(sensation)".[1] At Sheffield, the Rev. R.S. Bayley addressed a huge public meeting, moving a resolution urging Government to remove all that was objectionable in the measure,[2] whilst Vaughan, who spoke against the Minutes in London and Lancashire, never abandoned his conviction of the legitimacy of state aid for general education.[3] Others who went against the tide included Edward Swaine, who suggested that a request for modification of the Minutes might have found more acceptance with Ministers than the unreasoning clamour for outright withdrawal, and Thomas Binney, who caused some consternation at the conference by his avowal:

> ..... I can conceive that secular instruction and religious education are two very different things (cries of 'No, no'). I can conceive that the office of secular instruction may be undertaken by any well-qualified citizen; but religious education is the solemn obligation of the parent and the church ..... I do not see that it might

1. N., 24 February 1847 p. 18. Conder, G.W.: Memoir and Remains of the late Rev. Jonathon Glyde, ..., pp. 105-12 for his views on education.
2. N., 7 April 1847 p. 214.
3. ibid., 3 March 1847 pp. 133-4, 31 March 1847 p. 193, 14 April 1847 p. 225.

> not be possible to separate the two functions, and that Government might greatly assist the secular instruction of the people.....

John Cheetham, soon to be a parliamentary candidate at Huddersfield, took this view.[1]

Meanwhile, Vaughan's position was subtlely changing. He opposed the Minutes, he wrote, because no Dissenter "could be a party to them without committing himself to the principle that it pertains to the state to expend public money in aid of religious teaching .....". He disliked the agitation's increasingly political aspect, refusing to countenance the social and political objections being hurled at the measure. Hence, on April 14 a letter appeared in the Morning Chronicle, in which he suggested that the Nonconformist conscience might be appeased if the Committee agreed to take no cognisance of the religious teaching in aided schools, "except to require that ..... it shall be given at particular hours, and that the attendance of scholars at those hours shall be optional.....". The situation, further modified by the secession of the Wesleyans, leaving opposition to the Congregationalists and Baptists, was radically altered by the passage of the education vote in the Commons. True, the managers of Church of England schools could make their religious teaching compulsory on all pupils, and this was a real dissenting grievance, but, Vaughan felt that Dissenters ought to stress their conscientious difficulties, seeking to obtain some adjustment from Government which would enable them to benefit from the new grants, whilst "our own principles shall be respected in our own schools".[2]

1. ibid., 16 April 1847 pp. 246, 249. P., 5 April 1847 p. 215. For an elaboration of Binney's views see his Education, (London, 1847), pp. 61-72.
2. B.Q.R., no. 10, May 1847, pp. 540-51; no. 12, November 1847, pp. 528-34.

On 25th May he attended a meeting of Lancashire Dissenters at Manchester. Most of those present were later to be active in the National Public Schools Association or in advocating the Manchester and Salford Local Scheme. Resolutions were passed recognising the need for State assistance, and submitting that the conscientious scruples of their fellows might be circumvented if a clear distinction was drawn between general and religious instruction, aid being specifically restricted to the former.[1] Vaughan denied the charge that he was in secret communication with the cabinet, but found it difficult to evade Hadfield's allegation that the meeting, with an attendance of thirteen, was totally unrepresentative, prominent Manchester ministers declining their invitations.[2]

Whatever the effect of these movements, Russell informed the House at the end of June that the Minutes would be modified to meet the "refined" objections of the Dissenters, and on 10th July a Supplementary Minute appeared. Managers of aided schools who objected, "on religious grounds, to make a report concerning the religious state of such schools, as required by the Minutes of August and December, 1846", were exempted from this task, whilst no certificates of religious knowledge or practice were to be required for their pupil teachers and monitors.[3]

With the exception of the British Quarterly Review, the dissenting press unequivocally rejected the concession, and even Vaughan had to admit that it was invalidated if

1. N., 2 June 1847 p. 420.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XXII, 1847, pp. 488-508. B.Q.R., no. 12, November 1847, pp. 536-9.
3. Minutes of the Committee of Council ....., pp. 33-4. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 93, 920.

the inspectors were to enforce the Minute of 3rd December, 1839.[1] Generally, Dissenters thought it inconsistent to accept state aid for the secular instruction given in their schools, when the religious element permeated the whole of that instruction. One critic described the amendment as a "distinction without a difference", since it failed to remove the basic objections to the endowment of religious teaching, and did not nullify the constitutional, political, and economic arguments against the measure.[2]

Any distinction between secular and religious instruction was inadmissable. Baines had early stated the basic voluntary position.

> ..... Believing it to be of unspeakable importance to give religious instruction in our schools to the children of the poor, we are shut up by our principles from receiving money doled out by the civil power, and raised by taxes, for that purpose. Inspected, or not inspected, - controlled or uncontrolled, - we cannot receive the produce of public taxation for our religious teaching. If we do, we are false to our principles, - we cease to be Voluntaries.....

Education meant more than the mere teaching of reading and writing. Spiritual and moral training, of which religion was the essential component, were crucial. Hook and Vaughan were condemned in 1846 for advocating its exclusion, if only partially, from the day school, and this was to be one of the weightier charges brought against the Manchester secularists in the fifties.[3]

1. B.Q.R., loc. cit., pp.534-6. P., 29 November 1847 p. 799, letter of George Payne to Vaughan, 6 December 1847 p. 813 for the latter's reply. Dr. Davidson, who was present at the May 25th meeting, also repudiated the Supplementary Minute, ibid., 9 August 1847 p. 543.
2. N., 28 July 1847 p. 545. P., 21 June 1847 p. 429, 1 July 1847 p.452, 22 July 1847 p. 501.
3. Baines, E., jnr.: An Alarm to the Nation on the Unjust, Unconstitutional, and Dangerous Measure of State Education proposed by the Government, (London, 1847), p. 16; Letters to ..... Russell ....., pp. 63-75.

For the majority of Congregationalists and Baptists the events of 1847 confirmed their predilection against state interference, reinforcing the lessons of 1843. As attitudes hardened on the political and ecclesiastical issues thrown up by these controversies, so they hardened on education. Nonconformists now sought to consolidate their position, and to extend the range of their activities, both as a matter of self-defence, and in vindication of their principles. At York, in October, the Congregationalists stigmatised the Supplementary Minute as "of most mischievous tendency", denying that it offered any inducement for the slightest reduction in their opposition. In December, the denomination held an education conference at Derby. The propriety of continuing the denominational mode of operation was endorsed, schools providing scriptural, but unsectarian religious teaching. The education committee of the Union was re-organised into the Congregational Board of Education, its duties including the training of teachers, the inspection of schools, the establishment and assistance of schools in poor areas, and the general provision of educational requisites. Faith in the efficacy of the voluntary principle was reaffirmed.[1]

Meanwhile, the decision of the British Society committee to accept grant aid under the Minutes, and not to return the money already received for the erection of the Borough Road College, had caused a crisis in the ranks of its supporters. Their deeply divided opinions had been shown in

1. Peel, A.: These Hundred Years, (London, 1931), pp. 179-82. The object of the Board was, "To promote the extension of primary education imbued with evangelical truth, conducted by teachers of religious character, and sustained by the combined efforts of parents and the liberal aid of Christian benevolence". C.W., 1847, pp. 543-4; 1848, pp. 36-42.

1844 at a conference convened to consider the receipt of aid by the Society; it was then agreed to leave matters to the discretion of the committee. Three years later a special general meeting was requisitioned by the voluntaries, to decide the Society's position. John Burnet and G.W. Alexander moved a resolution demanding the employment of, "only those [voluntary] resources by which its operations were so long sustained, and the use of which its constituents can universally approve". An amendment confirming the discretionary powers of the committee was carried; many of the Society's voluntary supporters seceded after this defeat.[1] Nevertheless, with"a curious inconsistency" Congregationalists continued to sit on the committees of British schools, and to subscribe to their funds.[2]

Those seceders who were not Congregationalists, or who deprecated the denominational nature of the Board's activities, eventually coalesced to form the Voluntary Schools Association. Adopting the non-denominational basis of the British Society, they repudiated all resort to state aid. Besides propagating the voluntary creed, the Association planned to train teachers, and to make grants to needy schools. Its support came from Baptists, Quakers, and Congregationalists who, like Miall, deplored their denomination's independent action.[3]

A further consequence of this breach with the British Society was that the Congregational Board ceased to send its students to Borough Road for training. Independent establishments were set up, and in 1851 Homerton College was purchased

1. Binns, H.B.: A Century of Education ....., pp. 141-6. P., 3 June 1847 pp. 388,391.
2. Dale, R.W.: History of English Congregationalism, p. 670.
3. N., 20 December 1843 pp. 856-7, 15 March 1848 p. 167. P., 30 September 1847 pp. 660-1.

as the site of new model and normal schools.

Despite an aura of confidence following the 1847 general election, the voluntaries were in no position to challenge the education vote, even formal opposition, Bright informed Baines, being pointless.[1] Accepting this situation, the leaders of the movement concentrated on spreading their opinions throughout the country, on combating the plans of the state-educationalists, on consolidating their own position, leaving the ever-spiralling education vote as a testimony to the accuracy of Baines' predictions.

The return of several orthodox Dissenters at the 1852 general election slightly altered this picture. It was at least possible to ensure that the voluntary viewpoint was expressed in the Commons, even if a victory on a division was unlikely. The education vote offered a natural opportunity for the staging of such a debate. In 1853 it was, the Non-conformist alleged, pressed through with unexpected speed to forestall any discussion.[2] The following year Miall tabled and amendment, asking for a reduction of the vote to its 1853 level, and the appointment of a select committee to examine the working of the 1846 Minutes, so that the policy could be abandoned if proved erroneous. On a division the voluntaries would have been in a "fearful minority", but Miall withdrew when Russell intimated a willingness to appoint a select committee in the next session.[3] Thomas Barnes initiated debates with similar amendments in 1855 and 1856. Again there were no divisions, "But it is no slight advance to get Voluntaryism in education as well as in religion, fairly

1. N.E., 24 August 1847 pp. 152-3. Baines Papers, J. Bright to E. Baines jnr., 7 March 1848.
2. N., 25 May 1853 p. 418.
3. ibid., 14 June 1854 p. 485, 5 July 1854 p. 562. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 134, 965-9, 1001.

before the House in a presentable shape".[1]

Voluntary weakness in the 1847 Parliament was illustrated by the difficulties experienced by Peto, Kershaw and Pilkington when they attempted to obtain some representation for their view point on the select committee appointed in 1852.[2] A year later the Nonconformist claimed that the presence of the Nonconformist M.P.s had dissuaded Russell, unable to view the loss of from 20 to 30 votes with equanimity, from pressing his Education Bill. In 1854, the Scottish Education Bill was defeated by nine votes, exactly the number of educational voluntaries, that journal stated, who had gone into the opposition lobby. "The Liberal officials", noted Miall, "are indignant that any on their side of the House should presume to think and vote for themselves, and independently of party convenience".[3] Hadfield was in the forefront of the opposition to this Bill when it was re-introduced in the following session, and its Scottish opponents deliberately framed their wrecking amendment to enable the anti-state-education Nonconformists to vote with them.[4]

Because of the wide differences of opinion amongst M.P.s, there was never any real liklihood that an education bill would be carried. Of the leading statesmen, Russell, with a "persevering wrongheadedness",[5] persisted in his efforts to legislate, introducing bills in 1853 and 1855, and a series

1. N., 1 August 1855 p. 589, 18 June 1856 pp. 442-3. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series vol. 139, 1404-22, vol. 142, 1359-64.
2. E.R., 5s., vol. III, 1852, pp. 640-1. P., 25 March 1852 p. 196.
3. N., 27 July 1853 p. 589, 17 May 1854 pp. 415, 421. The nine appear to have been: Barnes, Crossley, Bell, Hadfield, Heyworth, Miall, Pellatt, Peto and Pilkington. Several Nonconformist MP.s were in the Government minority.
4. ibid., 27 June 1855 p. 507, 4 July 1855 p. 517.
5. ibid., 24 January 1855 p. 57.

of resolutions in 1856. The voluntary press roundly condemned these attempts.[1] In 1853 Miall tabled an amendment to the Borough Bill to allow voluntaries to subtract the sum they subscribed to schools from the education rate they were assessed for. An attack on him in the Atheneaum was regarded as proof that radical state-educationists were more interested in eliminating voluntary schools and extending the government system, than in popular education.[2]

A new principle which appeared in the bills of the fifties was that of local rating and local control. This safeguard against over-centralisation came from Manchester, and since the various bills contained adaptations of the Manchester solutions to the religious and political problems, an examination of the reasons why the voluntaries opposed these will cover many of their objections to the measures proposed by Ministers and independent Members.

Formed in 1847, the Lancashire Public Schools Association offered a local plan for the county, with district school committees levying an education rate, and providing free elementary education in the schools they managed. Bible extracts, selected by an interdenominational committee, were to be used as the basis of moral education, and to inculcate "a reverence and love towards the Divine being". No denominational teaching was to be permitted. Three years later, the Association was dissolved, and reconstituted as the National Public Schools Association, advocating the establishment by

1. ibid., 6 April 1853 p. 269, 13 April 1853 p. 290, 20 April 1853 pp. 309-10, 14 February 1855 p. 117, 25 April 1855 pp. 317-8, 12 March 1856 p. 161. Baines, E., jnr.: Strictures on the New Government Measure of Education, (London, 1853); National Education. Remarks on the Speech and Plan of Lord John Russell, (London, 1856). P., 11 April 1853 p. 228, 14 April 1853 p. 236, 18 April 1853 pp. 244-5, 21 April 1853 pp. 252-3.
2. N., 25 May 1853 p. 418, 8 June 1853 p. 449.

law, of locally supported and managed schools, giving a free secular education, religious instruction being provided outside school hours. The local opponents of this secular plan, believing in the importance of incorporating religious teaching into the general work of the school, devised the Manchester and Salford Local Scheme. This too combined local management with a local school rate, the proceeds being distributed to all existing schools in which the teaching was of a religious character, irrespective of denomination.[1]

Unitarians and members of the Lloyd Street Secession Church were prominent in the L.P.S.A. and its successor, but some Congregationalists and Baptists did support it. Dr. Samuel Davidson, the theological professor at the Lancashire Independent College, was an active committee man, whilst Vaughan endorsed its scheme "in its general outlines". Elkanah Armitage was a vice-president, who offered a subscription to a proposed model secular school. Swaine made a point by point reply to the Eclectic Review's attack on the N.P.S.A., and was a member of the deputation which visited Russell in June 1853.[2] Churchmen and Wesleyan Methodists were especially active in supporting the Local Scheme, but the Revs. Richard Fletcher, James Gwyther, and J.L.Poore were not invited to attend the Manchester conference convened by the Congregational Board because of their advocacy of it, and the Rev. A.E. Pearce told the meeting of the zeal with which leading lay members of the various churches assailed their ministers,

1. Maltby, S.E.: Manchester and the Movement for National Elementary Education, 1800-1870, (Manchester, 1918), pp. 67-94.
2. ibid., passim; L.P.S.A./N.P.S.A., Executive Committee Minute Books, (Manchester Central Reference Library). Copy Letter Book of the N.P.S.A., to E.Armitage, 8 December 1853, to E.Swaine, 2 February 1853, 21 March 1853, 30 May 1853, 1 June 1853, (also in Manchester Central Reference Library). Swaine, E.: Secular Free Schools a Nation's Policy ....., (London, 1851). The Autobiography and Diary of Samuel Davidson, ... Edited by his Daughter, (Edinburgh, 1899), pp. 29-30.

extolling the benefits which would stem from the implementation of this project.[1] Nevertheless, both the Congregational Board and the Voluntary Schools Association held successful protest meetings in the town. At the former, £2,950 was donated towards the removal of the Homerton College debt.[2]

Proceeding from "a gratuitous, unwarranted, and fallacious assumption", these state educationists underrated what had been done voluntarily, cheerfully exaggerating deficiencies in the existing structure. Ignoring statistics, because they invalidated their case, they found fault with the quality of the instruction given in the voluntary schools. Associating crime and ignorance, they disregarded the more important connexion between crime and destitution, which could only be abrogated by an improvement in the physical condition of the people. State education would never effect this change.[3]

Most baffling was the inconsistency of Cobden, and other stalwarts of the free trade movement in supporting the secularist project. Voluntaryists assured them that they were acting contrary to the principle that dictated their activities in other spheres.

> ..... He (Cobden) is a Free-trader - he deprecates all legislative meddling with conscience - he insists upon its being left to its own energies and to the unfailing laws of Providence. Now will he tell us why he deals with the mental interests of the community on precisely opposite principles to those which he contends for in relation to their material interests?

Believing that Cobden had "been led astray by sophistry or friendship", it was comforting to remark that such obvious

1. N., 24 September 1851 p. 760. Remarks of Morley and Pearce at the conference.
2. ibid., pp. 758-60, 11 February 1852 pp. 99-101.
3. ibid., 6 March 1850 pp. 190-1, 17 April 1850 p. 311, 28 May 1851 p. 417, 25 April 1855 pp. 317-8.

tergiversations further discredited already untenable opinions.[1]

Objections voiced in the forties were still valid, but the voluntaries concentrated their fire on two aspects of the Manchester schemes - free education, and their solutions to the religious problem.

Free schools would not be full schools; the essential pre-requisite was to instil in the parents an appreciation of the value of education to their offspring. Proving that there was a surplus of school room in Manchester, Baines argued that many operatives sent their children to school for a short period; the obstacle to an extended education not being an inability to pay school-pence, but the counter attraction of high wages for child labour in the factories. The onus was on the purveyors of education to persuade parents to send their children to school, and to improve the service they offered to make them prize it.[2] Equally, another critic remarked when welcoming the formation of the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry in 1852, it was wrong to ask the public to subsidise, "that lack on the part of some of the working classes which arises chiefly, if not entirely, from the gratification of a depraved appetite.....". An examination of the proportion of wages expended on drink and tobacco would clearly indicate whether the Manchester operatives, amongst the best remunerated in the country, could afford to

1. ibid., 6 March 1850 pp. 190-1, 29 January 1851 p. 86; P., 4 November 1850 p. 701. Parsons, B.: A Letter to Richard Cobden, Esq., M.P. for the West Riding of Yorkshire, on the Impolicy and Tyranny of any System of State Education, (London, 1852), pp. 3-4.
2. N., 1 October 1851 pp. 780-1. Speech at the Manchester conference of the Congregational Board. Also, ibid., 25 January 1854 pp. 69-70, 19 March 1854 p. 317.

pay for the education of their own children.[1]

The voluntaries disputed their opponents' claim that the destitute, not previously embraced within the school system, would be attracted to the free school. Only compulsion, they correctly assessed, would effect this. "The patient and self-denying spirit of Christian kindness" was best adapted to this work through the agencies it had created - ragged schools, district visiting societies, and town missions. In any case, it was unwise to provide a free education for any but the very poor. The working classes could afford to pay for it; to give it to them would be demoralising, whilst an education which cost nothing would be little valued by its recipients.[2]

Of course free schools would close down voluntary ones, as, indeed, would the distribution of any rate aid in which they did not participate. Subscribers, resenting having to pay a subscription as well as a rate, would tend to forego the former; pupils would leave the schools to benefit from the free system, or the better facilities available in aided schools. The cynical might suggest that preservation of their own schools was the real motive behind the resistance to a free education which most accepted twenty years later, after the failure of voluntaryism to meet the nation's needs had been made manifest. However, in the fifties Dissenters genuinely doubted the wisdom of transforming the educational system; in this, despite their political liberalism and radicalism, the Nonconformist anti-state-educationists were amongst the most conservative of the age, fearing political, ecclesiastical, and educational despotism, still

1. ibid., 24 March 1852 p. 217.
2. Baines at Manchester. Hinton, J.H.: A few plain Words on the two Education Bills now before the Country, (London, 1852), pp. 4-6.

fighting the battles of the seventeenth century against tyranny. In this theory of free education, they sensed the recognition of communist principles. To assert that every man had a right to education, freely provided by the State, was "to embrace the principles of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier". Once this socialist doctrine were publicly acknowledged, similar claims concerning food, clothing and employment would soon follow. It was a doctrine as opposed to the individualism of the English system, as subversive of the independent spirit of the people, as the despotic forms imposed on the continental nations.[1]

The Manchester secularists modelled their scheme on the Massachussets system of free schools. Voluntaries felt the analogy to be inapt. New England contained no large industrial centres, and there was no widespread juvenile employment; a system suitable for a rural community, introduced to meet the needs of a colonial past, was not the basis on which to build the educational provision of a complex industrial nation, already possessed of an adequate arrangement. Here, argued the state educationist, was a religious people, with free political institutions, who had national secular education. Yes, replied the voluntary, but it was a country without an established church, and whose educational system contained many defects glossed over by the secularists. The continuance of slavery in the United States was no great advertisement for the moral climate created by its secular schools.[2]

1. Robertson, C.: Objections to a System of Free Education for the People, based on General or Local Taxation. A Paper read at a Public Meeting convened by the Congregational Board of Education, held June 26, (London, n.d., but 1851), pp. 4-9. E.R., 5s., vol. I, 1851, pp. 492-3. N., 14 January 1852 p. 17.
2. Baines, E., jnr.: Letters to ..... Russell ....., pp. 97-109. E.R., 4s., vol. XXII, 1847, p. 604; 5s., vol. I, 1851, pp. 491-2. N., 6 November 1850 p. 899.

Secular education was repugnant to the religious voluntaries.

> Whether our object in training the children of the poor is to promote their welfare as individuals, or the welfare of the society of which they form the component parts, it is of unspeakably higher importance that they should grow up with sound moral and religious principles, than that they should possess the mere elements of secular knowledge.

The secularist spoke of moral teaching in the school; but how, wondered his opponents, could this be inculcated without reference to religion? The teaching of "an Atheistic morality", certainly not "an adequate or proper education for the rising population of England", would result. A legal exclusion of religion from the school was as odious, as intolerant, as making its teaching compulsory. It would drive the pious teacher, unable to separate his religious convictions from his daily life and work, out of education, leaving the plastic and impressionable minds of the young to the care of the indifferent and the infidel. Only the voluntary system, supervised by the religious and the benevolent, guaranteed the inclusion of this vital religious component.[1]

The Manchester and Salford Bill was equally abhorrent. True, religious teaching was a condition of the receipt of aid from the central fund, but this was condemned as another form of religious endowment by the magistrate, and was totally unacceptable. Moreover, the scheme contained the elements of that principle of universal endowment which Dissenters had been fighting since 1845. Precisely the same arguments justified distributing this sort of rate to places of worship and ministers, as to schools and schoolmasters. On a more immediate level, the proposal was as unjust to Dissenters as

1. E.R., 5s., vol. I, 1851, pp. 481-5. P., 20 January 1851 p. 44.

that of the seculars, taxing them to sustain doctrines they believed to be erroneous, undermining their own schools, whilst forcing them to watch the Church of England march off with the lion's share.[1]

The divisions of opinion amongst state educationists were evident in Parliament as well as in Manchester. Controversy between them and the voluntaries was bitter. Any proposal which would bring these conflicts into the arena of local politics was unwise and the voluntaries regarded this as a most expedient argument against these schemes. It was obviously impossible, Baines pointed out, for any universally acceptable scheme to be devised and implemented. Voluntaryism was not beset by such disputes. Offending against no man's conscience, it enlisted religion in the work of popular education. Maintaining inviolate the principles of English freedom, it respected the responsibilities of the parent. To jettison all this for the uncertainties of some theoretical plan concocted in Manchester or Downing Street, was the height of folly.[2]

This inability of state educationists to agree was one reason for the optimism of the voluntary press in the mid-fifties. Miall noticed a change in the tone of the Commons, too, citing the debate on Pakington's Bill in 1855 as evidence.

> ..... Last session we were but a cheerless few - now we are a respectable, loquacious, and demonstrative number. Who would have expected a really able and hearty speech on our side of the question from Lord John Manners? This phenomenon ..... we witnessed on Monday night. And we, who have heretofore been so solitary in denunciation of State education, were actually jostled (not

1. E.R., loc. cit., pp. 486-90. N., 25 February 1852 p. 137.
2. Baines, E., jnr.: Education Best Promoted by Perfect Freedom not by State Endowments ..... pp. 18-24, 28-34.

> unwillingly), out of our places by new men..... who competed with us in crowds to catch the speaker's eye..... [1]

The publication of the education returns gave more encouragement to the voluntaries. Russell used them in his speech introducing his Borough Bill - thus, exclaimed his opponents, completely destroying his own case. Vindicating Baines's calculations, and demonstrating the "comparative insignificance" of Government's contribution since 1838, they were a "splendid testimony to the power of the voluntary principle ..... to the capacity, willingness, and ability of the people to educate themselves". [2]

Yet, if there was stalemate in Parliament and on the polemical front, the anti-state-educationists faced more material problems. There was less talk of every chapel having its own school, and more of the self-sustaining school. This was a new approach, adopted to combat the charge that the voluntaries were setting up a degrading eleemosynary system, and to meet their financial difficulties. Assisting in the foundation of these schools, the benevolent would withdraw once they became self-supporting out of the school pence. The working classes, it was believed, would pay an economic fee if the education offered was of a high standard. "The Congregational Board, and kindred institutions", remarked the Nonconformist, "are the best friends of the working class; for, while they strive to raise the standard of education, they aim to make it self-supporting, and to mature that sturdy feeling of independence which forms the basis of the

1. N., 13 June 1855 p. 467.
2. ibid., 23 November 1853 p. 937. Baines, E., jnr.: Strictures on the New Government Measure of Education, pp. 4-16; Education Best Promoted by Perfect Freedom not by State Endowments ...., pp. 35-45. E.R., 5s., vol. VI, 1853, pp. 528-33.

national character".[1]

Money was the great deficiency. Vaughan had reminded the Congregationalists that schools had to be maintained as well as built, doubting whether the initial impetus which would raise a large sum quickly for the latter purpose, would last long enough to provide for the former.[2] During the fifties it became apparent that the Congregational Board could not perform all its functions adequately on its slender income. In 1851 it was decided to aim at one of £4000 a year, but even this proved too ambitious, and it was a frequent lament at anniversary meetings that the Board's income did not allow it to assist ailing schools in rural areas. At the autumnal conference of the Union in 1854 a special fund had to be launched for this purpose.[3] Churches supporting their own schools must have faced the same problem.

The Voluntary Schools Association suffered from the same complaint, and unsuccessful attempts to amalgamate with the Congregational Board were made by its committee.[4] Always conscious of its denominational character, it was not until 1856 that the Board was prepared to reach an accommodation. It was then agreed that the former should concentrate on the assistance and establishment of schools, whilst the latter dealt with teacher training.[5]

1. N., 13 July 1853 pp. 549-50, 24 May 1854 pp. 426, 427-8. This is a report of the anniversary meeting of the Congregational Board at which Miall and others deplored the adoption of the title "voluntary education". It did not precisely convey what was meant.
2. B.Q.R., no. 8, November 1846, pp. 480-6.
3. N., 2 July 1851 pp. 521-4, 25 October 1854 pp. 885-6.
4. ibid., 23 October 1850 p. 858, 7 May 1851 pp. 362-3. P., 15 May 1851 p. 312. C.W., 1851, p. 289. Rev. Henry Richard, secretary of the Voluntary Schools Association, forced a discussion of the Board's reluctance at the May meeting of the Union.
5. N., 21 Mat 1856 pp. 355-6, 4 June 1856 p. 402. Unwin, J.W.: Voluntary and Religious Education. Minutes of the Proceedings of a Conference held at the College, Homerton, December 10, 1856 ....., (London), p. 18.

This anti-state education movement, one facet of the increasing political militancy and activity of Dissent, was partially a self-defensive reaction to the Anglican revival. State assistance for popular education was acceptable as long as the State acted equitably, but as Churchmen became more demanding, Dissenters saw covert concessions to them in all the measures proposed by Ministers. Even those most sympathetic to a state system began to speak of its impossibility whilst there was an Established Church. Thrown onto their own resources, the Dissenters built up a complete theory to justify a voluntary system. Inextricably tied up with religion, the education question merged with the establishment issue, and it is significant that the boosts given to the anti-state-church movement co-incided with the great educational conflicts of the forties. Politically the movement was important as one cause of the divisions which fissured the Liberal party in the mid-nineteenth century. It was Cobden who wrote

> ..... At present the Liberal party, the soul of which is Dissent, are torn to pieces by the question, and it is not easy to heal a religious feud..... 1

Envisaging themselves as the defenders of the nation's liberties, and of the existing voluntary educational provision, Nonconformists were not going to withdraw in deference to the opinions of Richard Cobden or Lord John Russell.

These beliefs led Nonconformity into an educational cul-de-sac. Conscious that State education would kill the voluntary spirit, they overlooked its greatest weaknesses. Its manifestations varied from town to town; its successes

1. Morley, J.: The Life of Richard Cobden, (12th edn., one volume, London, 1905), Letter to G.Combe, pp. 547-9.

were greater in the city than in the country, where small and poverty-stricken rural chapels found it impossible to maintain independent and viable schools. Tending to under-estimate deficiencies and to over-estimate quality, their own propaganda created a sense of complacency which made it difficult for the education societies to raise an adequate and assured income. As early as 1847 there were complaints that Baines's optimistic figures of the previous year had seriously curtailed subscriptions to the Congregational education committee and to local schools.[1] By the sixties many were prepared to admit that the movement had been unrealistic. Money was not forthcoming for the long-term needs of the societies or of the schools, whilst individual and denominational benevolence was totally inadequate to meet the demands of an increasing population, and the need for a more widely educated one. Only the State could command the requisite resources and direct them to the areas of greatest need.

1. P. 18 February 1847 p. 108.

CHAPTER 10.

CONFUSION AND DISARRAY,

1848-1852.

Proposals for the establishment of a permanent dissenting political and electoral organisation proved abortive, even in Manchester, where the formation of a board of deputies to protect the interests of Dissenters within the new diocese was planned.[1] The men who might have provided the right national leadership were otherwise occupied, Miall with the Anti-State-Church Association, Baines and Morley deeply committed to the voluntary education movement. Indeed, with no continuing reason for combination, Dissenters soon reverted to their customary factions and groupings. Meanwhile, the Anti-State-Church Association, despite the prejudices of Churchmen and Dissenters alike, made a steady if unspectacular progress, consolidating the gains of 1847. It succeeded in remaining solvent, and, in 1852, the Nonconformist was gratified to learn that the Times had reported the annual meeting for the first time. Events within the Church of England seemed likely to produce a change in public opinion and the Association's activities had "hollowed out for the thoughts which they excited a channel to flow in.....".[2]

The controversy over the appointment of Dr. Hampden to the see of Hereford, the imprisonment of the Rev. James Shore, the Gorham case, and the secession of the Rev. Baptist Noel from the Establishment were turned to advantage by the anti-state-churchmen.

Anticipating the capitulation of the Hereford chapter to the congé d'élire, they regarded this as a demonstration of

1. N., 18 July 1847 p. 599, 25 August 1847 pp. 615-6.
2. ibid., 12 May 1852 p. 357. E.R., 5s., vol. II, 1851, p. 525.

the political character of the State Church, exposing the sham of free election to bishoprics.

> ..... The Church will be at the feet of the State, prostrate, helpless, outraged; and thousands of conscientious men, hitherto proud of the connexion between the sacred and the secular powers, will witness with shame, perhaps with indignation, an exhibition which, for the first time, will disclose to them, in all its naked deformity, the degradation to which dependence upon the State necessarily exposes every visible organization of Christianity.

The price of freedom was the severance of the link with the State, and the corollary of this, as the Nonconformist informed those clerics who were demanding the assembly of Convocation in the fifties, was the relinquishment of all the privileges and wealth of an Establishment.[1]

Both the prosecution of Shore, and the Gorham case, were instigated by the Bishop of Exeter. Together, remarked one Voluntary, they "will shake the edifice of the Establishment to its very foundations". Announcing that he had received several letters proposing Philpotts for membership of the Anti-State-Church Association, Miall agreed that he had done more "for the elucidation of our principles" than all the lecturers put together, but he assured his readers, there was no connexion between the Association and the Bishop.[2]

Shore, a clergyman who had withdrawn from the Church, and had associated with evangelical Dissenters, found considerable sympathy for his plight in their ranks. There was a move to pay his costs, the Nonconformist urging its readers to contribute as "one mode of protesting against that ecclesiastical tyranny of which Mr. Shore is a victim". For the anti-state-churchmen it neatly illustrated the real

1. N. 18 December 1847 p. 860, 22 December 1847 p. 885, 29 December 1847 p. 908, 4 August 1852 p. 597.
2. ibid., 14 March 1849 p. 197, 31 October 1849 pp. 859-60.

nature of the hierarchical character of the Church of England. Binney pointed out that, although Philpotts had acted discreditably, "the law justifies him", he was "canonically correct". Concluding its review of the affair, the Eclectic recommended the Anti-State-Church Association to its readers,

> ..... Every man must make up his mind and take his stand. Discarding all bitterness and party spleen, eschewing personalities, throwing from us whatever is mean and disingenuous, we must be prepared ..... to contend at once ..... against secular control and priestly intolerance in the conduct of the Church 1

The Gorham case was regarded as the most damaging of these incidents to the Church of England, and as likely to offer the greatest opportunities to the Association. Again the dissenting press tended to agree that Philpotts's interpretation of the Articles and the Book of Common Prayer was correct. Where did this leave the evangelical Churchmen, especially after Sir Herbert Jenner Fust had decided against Gorham in the Court of Arches? At least, wrote Miall, he had lifted the veil of self-deception under which they had laboured for so long, leaving them in a very anomalous position. If they remained ministers of a Church whose teachings they believed to be false, they might retain their emoluments and privileges but would surrender all self-respect and everything that distinguished them from their colleagues. The laity would have their faith shaken to the core. To save themselves from being swamped, the evangelical clergy had to secede. If they did, the errors of the Establishment

1. ibid., 14 March 1849 pp. 197, 199-200, 21 March 1849 pp. 219-222. E.R., 4s., vol. XXV, 1849, pp. 609-629, 769-785. Binney, T.: Conscientious Clerical Nonconformity. A Discourse. With introductory Remarks on the imputed Conduct of the Bishop of Exeter, in the Cases of the Rev. J. Shore and the Rev. G.G.Gorham, (London, 1848), pp. 4-9.

would become more glaring, the anti-state-church movement would gain a new impetus, and new allies; a compromise with their opponents, however, would be equally damaging to the Church "as a professedly religious institution", providing irrefutable arguments for the Association.[1]

To Dissenters, it was humiliating for a Church to wait for laymen and the State to define its doctrines. When the final judgement was announced by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, it was described as having "fallen like a bombshell on Churchism - crashing into the most secret retreats of the citadel, shaking the walls to the very foundation ..... The venerable fabric is tottering".[2] The internal conflict between evangelicals and tractarians had come into the open, demolishing the old belief in the unity and uniformity of a National Church, created by creeds and formularies.

> ..... Politically it may be one - spiritually it is but a juxta-postion of utter opposites....

The acquiescence of the evangelical clergy was inexplicable; the tractarians were more consistent, but they were not expected to secede if this meant the renunciation of wealth and privilege. Both parties were tied to each other, and to the State, by a "golden chain"; this incident had demonstrated its strength. The claim that the Established Church was free to manage its own internal affairs was proved to be a fiction, whilst the case had again revealed that the alliance of Church and State "was founded and is maintained on political grounds, and not with a primary, scarcely a secondary view

1. N., 1 August 1849 p. 597, 8 August 1849 p. 617, 15 August 1849 p. 637, 26 December 1849 p. 1026.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XXVII, 1850, pp. 488-90.

to religion".[1]

Noel's secession, and the publication of his Essay on the Union of Church and State was not expected to bear immediate fruits, but it would cause anti-state-church principles to be read and considered in circles the Association could not reach.[2] Nevertheless, at its annual meeting in 1849 (addressed by two Churchmen, the Rev. Thomas Spencer, and the Rev. Mr. Stoddart), it was resolved that recent events in the Church, "especially the secession of ..... Noel and the Rev. John Dodson, expressly on the principles embodied in this Association", gave reason to hope that, "the period is approaching when Churchmen will be constrained to unite with Dissenters in demanding the separation of the Church from the State".[3]

These events provided endless themes for the Association's lecturers and deputations. They made much of Horsmann's revelations of internal graft, of the "well-meaning but futile efforts" of the evangelicals to make the Establishment's resources available to meet the needs of the spiritually destitute, to adapt its "cumbrous machinery" to modern needs, and of the growing sacerdotalism within the Church. All gave "unexpected and incalculable weight" to their arguments, forcing attention on"the great controversy in quarters heretofore impervious to truth".[4] At the third Triennial Conference an "Address to Churchmen on recent Events in Connexion with the Ecclesiastical Movements of the Church of England" was read, and later published. Cases and controver-

1. ibid., pp. 112-5, 626-46. N., 13 March 1850 p. 201, 17 July 1850 p. 569.
2. N., 27 December 1848 p. 985, 7 February 1849 p. 97.
3. ibid., 9 May 1849 pp. 359-63. Spencer's proposals for a Church Reformation were shouted down by the meeting.
4. ibid., 2 May 1849 p. 337.

sies were outlined, their implications and consequences considered, and the impossibility of any reform of the present structure asserted. The Church, the Address concluded, had to be placed on an entirely new basis, "..... acting upon its own resources, and thus opening up for it a career as much marked by piety, disinterested zeal, and usefulness, as its past career has been by injustice, incongruity, and inefficiency".[1]

Until 1851 there was no real change in the society's methods. Miall described himself as a "strolling agitator"[2] and the Conference was informed that since 1847 between 500 and 600 meetings of various kinds had been held under its auspices, "being nearly three times the number previously held". "Nearly all" the English counties had been toured, "the first class towns" visited at least once a year, whilst, "The largest public buildings in the kingdom - not excepting even the Free-trade Hall, Manchester, and the Town-hall, Birmingham, have been the scene of these gatherings".[3]

A new departure in 1849 was the decision to launch a petitioning movement. No speedy capitulation by the legislature was anticipated, but petitions would, it was hoped, have an educative effect on Members, familiarising them with the phraseology of the movement, removing their misconceptions, and preparing them for the time when they would be dealing with the matter. Anti-state-church Members might be encouraged to voice their opinions, incidental discussions would follow, which, through press reports would instruct popular opinion.[4]

1. ibid., 3 May 1850 pp. 342-3, 346, 349, 19 June 1850 pp. 489-90.
2. Miall, A.: Life of Edward Miall, p. 146.
3. Extracts from the Report in E.R., 4s., vol. XXVIII, 1850 pp. 106-8.
4. ibid., 4s., vol. XXVI, 1849, pp. 18-9. N., 2 May 1849 pp. 337.

Meanwhile, the Association was taking up a role as the parliamentary pressure group of Dissent. In this political guise it replaced the Religious Freedom Society, and began to supersede the Deputies. In 1849, for instance, a circular was sent to liberal Members on the ecclesiastical provisions of the South Australian Colonies Bill, and it was re-issued the following year. The objection was that the measure would commit the colonists to support religious bodies in perpetuum; a complete cessation of all grants was the preferred course, but the Association would accept an amendment leaving continuance to the discretion of the colonists. Lushington moved an amendment to this effect in 1850.[1] The executive committee took a prominent part in organising the opposition to the Metropolitan Interments Bill, taking particular exception to the clergy compensation clauses.[2]

The Association's major political success was engineering the withdrawal of the regium donum. This grant to poor dissenting ministers had first been made in 1723 as a royal gift, eventually going onto the miscellaneous estimates as a parliamentary grant. Protests had been made in the eighteenth century, when it was regarded as a political bribe designed to silence agitation against the Test and Corporation Acts, but in the eighteen thirties and forties, as Dissenters moved against the Establishment, they became increasingly conscious of this particular blot on their own escutcheon. They were given no chance to forget, for their

1. N., 13 June 1849 pp. 457-8, 27 June 1849 p. 498, 20 February 1850 p. 150, 27 February 1850 p. 162. Minute Book (of the Committee) of the British Anti-State-Church Association, vol. 2, pp. 24, 27.
2. N., 8 May 1850 pp. 369-70, 22 May 1850 pp. 409, 413-4, 29 May 1850 pp. 430-1, 5 June 1850 p. 458. Minute Book ....., vol. 2, pp. 69,72, 77, 80, 82ff., 85.

opponents happily reminded them of the apparent inconsistency.[1] At the end of 1833 the United Committee, the Committee of the Ministers of the Three Denominations, and the Deputies all condemned the receipt of the money as contrary to dissenting principles. Four years later the Congregational Magazine contained a forceful article which compelled a reply from John Pye Smith and the other trustees. In the same year, the Congregational Board encountered a major stumbling block in Spring Rice's refusal to consider abolition whilst there were ministers willing to take the money, and prominent Dissenters to distribute it.[2]

1845 witnessed the renewal of the campaign to end the grant. Several of the anti-Maynooth petitions had contained references to the regium donum, and the Dissenters Anti-Maynooth Conference emphatically called on the distributors, "to decline the further reception of a vote which involves the proceedings of Dissenters in suspicion, impairs the moral force of their opposition to the state-church system, and furnishes to the opponents of the voluntary principle their most plausible and effective weapon". The Congregational Union petitioned Parliament to withhold the grant.[3] The futility of this was shown when Hindley divided the House on 13 June - only three Members went into the lobby with him, thirteen fewer than accompanied him in 1838.[4] But the Nonconformist had not anticipated an easy success, explaining that there were too many vested interests committed to its

1. P., 20 February 1837 p. 116, for a reply to the Times, which had taunted Dissenters with the inconsistency of demanding the abolition of Church Rates, whilst retaining the regium donum.
2. C.M., 1834, pp. 126-7; 1837, pp. 141-65, 237-41, 331-2, 468. Manning, B.L.: The Protestant Dissenting Deputies, p. 388.
3. N., 28 May 1845 p. 396. C.M., 1845, pp. 469-70.
4. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 81, 528-30; C.M., 1838, pp. 524-6.

continuance, whilst government would not willingly yield a pittance that was a "moral blight" on Dissent. Miall then turned his fire on the distributors, who "stamp it with a kind of moral respectability", appealing to them, and to Pye Smith in particular, to defer to the opinions of "the respective sections of the church to which they belong".

> ..... Some deference is due, surely, to the unanimous opinion of those with whom we act, in matters touching their reputation; and we must profess our astonishment, as well as our unfeigned regret, that Dr. Pye Smith, knowing as he does the light in which his brethren view the Regium Donum, has not long since declined to participate in its distribution. 1

Dr. Cox resigned his distributorship to the Baptist recipients because of its incompatibility with his co-secretaryship of the Anti-State-Church Association. Now the secretaries wrote an Address to the distributors and recipients, urging them, as the Government's justification for continuing the grant, to refuse to handle it. In any case, their action made Nonconformist anti-endowment professions seems insincere. Pye Smith made a detailed reply, explaining his refusal to comply. The Association commissioned an elaborate rejoinder.[2] He never withdrew, despite continuing press appeals and attacks.

Having failed to dissuade the distributors, the Association turned to parliamentary action. In 1848 Charles Lushington moved that the grant be struck of the miscellaneous estimates, and was supported by Col. Thompson, W.J.Fox, Kershaw, George Thompson, Bright, Hume, Muntz, James Wyld, and Crawford. The motion was defeated, Kershaw being rebuked by Miall for seeming to acquiesce in Russell's view that the

1. N., 18 June 1845 pp. 429, 436.
2. ibid., 9 July 1845 p. 480, "Address from the Secretaries of the Anti-State-Church Association to the Distributors and Recipients", 30 July 1845 pp. 526-7, for Pye Smith's reply. Regium Donum. Reply of the Committee of the British Anti-State-Church Association to Dr. Pye Smith, (London, 1845).

Government could only withdraw the grant if Dissenters guaranteed to provide an equivalent.[1] In 1849 Lushington withdrew his motion because he had not been supported by petitions, but Wyld forced a division, being defeated by 52 to 33.[2] The following year the minority rose to 72, evidence of enthusiastic lobbying by Dissenters and the Association; the Government implied that the grant would continue as long as distributors and recipients could be found.[3] Then, in 1851, the "reproach" was "wiped away", the Chancellor of the Exchequer informing Lushington that although the money would be granted for the ensuing year, he had no intention of renewing it in 1852. By sheer persistence, the Association "had succeeded where older and more 'practical' organizations altogether failed".[4]

This political aspect of the Association's work was welcomed. Too often, the Eclectic alleged, Dissenters had kept their principles in the background when serving on united committees, or in deputations to Ministers, Nonconformity being "exposed to grievous misrepresentation". This mistake would not be repeated by the Anti-State-Church Association. "Whatever may be the prospect of success, right principles will be rigidly adhered to, and boldly advocated."[5]

Nevertheless, despite its achievements and feverish activity, the Association still found it impossible to attract a mass following. The occasional Member of Parliament now

1. N., 30 August 1848 p. 645. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 101, 439-58.
2. N., 6 June 1849 p. 437. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 105, 1110-6.
3. N., 24 July 1850 p. 589. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 113, 128-33.
4. N., 23 July 1850 p. 577. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 118, 970-1.
5. E.R., 4s., vol. XXVIII, 1850, p. 109.

appeared on its platforms,[1] but this sign of growing influence made little impact on the bulk of Dissenters. As the Eclectic commented, although the Association had a steady and rising income, its size (£1791 for 1850-1, excluding the publications fund) was indicative of the extent to which wealthy Dissenters still stood aloof, though it was still larger than that obtained by any similar society in the past.[2] The Association held meetings in Lancashire in February, 1848, and the Patriot was pained to report that at neither Liverpool nor Manchester, where the audiences were "both numerous and respectable"

> ..... do we notice the presence of the leaders of that section of Dissenters who have, from the first, stood aloof from the ..... Association..... 3

The British Quarterly was still expressing those criticisms of the militants that Vaughan had voiced in the thirties, and Campbell, in his assault on the Association, spoke very truly when he pointed out that, although it was easy to fill large halls when the speaker was a Miall, a Price, a Burnet, and easy to arouse an unthinking, emotional response, this was not the same as a definite commitment to the Association.[4]

The extent of this problem is suggested by the repeated appeals of both the Nonconformist and the Eclectic. In 1849, the wary were warned that the tide of progress would leave them behind unless they took the opportunity, offered by the Triennial Conference, to declare themselves. This same plea was still being made at the end of 1851. The latter felt it necessary to reason with those "sound and able voluntaries," who, impugning the society's constitution because of its

1. George Thompson, Colonel Thompson, Lawrence Heyworth, Richard Gardner.
2. E.R., 5s., vol. II, 1851, p. 525.
3. P., 17 February 1848 p. 109.
4. B.Q.R., no. 23, August 1850, pp. 252-3. B.B., 17 April 1850 pp. 259-60.

comprehensive character, and lack of evangelical basis, accused it of arrogance and intolerance towards non-members.[1]

Prejudice and indifference were reinforced by other factors. Miall had to answer ~~to~~ those who argued that the conflict within the Church between evangelicals and tractarians would destroy the Establishment, without the interference of Dissenters. The tractarian concept of separation was totally removed from that of the Nonconformists. They aimed to free

> ..... sacerdotalism from secular restraints - to arm the clergy with unlimited power to exercise their spiritual sway - to weed out evangelicals - to define faith with more precision - and to keep and use, in their own right, and according to their own regulations, the whole of that immense amount of national property, at present devoted to the maintenance of the Anglican Establishment.....

No Dissenter could view this with equanimity; neutrality was dangerous if it allowed the tractarians to ensure an acceptance of separation in their sense. Desirous of resuming church property for the use of the people, anti-state-churchmen had a duty to prevent its appropriation by a clerical party.[2]

A more serious threat to the Association was the attack launched by Campbell. He was influential, his paper and magazines having very wide readerships. It sprang from a campaign he was conducting against Price's transference of the editorship of the Eclectic to William Linwood, who had trained for the Congregational ministry, become a Unitarian

1. N., 2 May 1849 p. 337, 6 February 1850 p. 101, 10 September 1851 p. 717. E.R., 4s., vol. XXVIII, 1850, pp. 101-2. "..... It is by no means gratifying to see men who have been in the van of Dissenting movements gradually consigning themselves to public oblivion .....". ibid., 5s., vol. II, 1851, pp. 515-20.
2. N., 3 April 1850 p. 261.

minister at Mansfield, and had been associated with W.J. Fox at Finsbury.[1] Linwood had links with Miall through the complete suffrage movement, and Campbell switched his fire to the editor of the Nonconformist after the publication of the latter's The British Churches in relation to the British People. Concerned by the alienation of the working classes from religion, Miall analysed the reasons for this, proposing many radical remedies. He cast doubts on the value of a professional ministry, questioned the attitudes of middle class church and chapel-goers, suggested that chapels might be used for more secular purposes during the week, and demanded the abolition of formality and worldly distinctions in religious worship.[2] The book was critically noticed by the British Quarterly which suggested that if the churches had been more sympathetic to the Anti-State-Church Association, they would not have suffered so severely from its strictures. Price reviewed it favourably in the Eclectic.[3] Campbell, enjoying his role as the defender of orthodoxy against Linwood and Price, now proceeded to declaim against a "SCHOOL OF ANARCHY" being formed within the British churches. Miall and Price were "very largely the soul that animates the body of the Anti-State-Church Organization", and from this derived their capacity for mischief, their position giving them influence over the minds of Dissenters, particularly the young, and virtually giving "the stamp of the Association" to their opinions. Price, by now again editor

1. B.B., 2 February 1850 - 3 April 1850. Waddington. J.: Congregational History, 1850-1880, (London, 1880), pp. 9-11.
2. Miall, E.: The British Churches in Relation to the British People, (London, 1849). Most of Miall's views had been outlined in a series of articles which had appeared in the Nonconformist at the beginning of 1849.
3. B.Q.R., no. 23, August 1850, pp. 217-262. E.R., 4s., vol. XXVII, 1850, pp. 78-94.

of the Eclectic, ought to be denied the confidence of the Nonconformists until he abjured the principles expounded by Miall, whilst the Association should be ostracised "till the perversion of its influence to purposes of anarchy shall have ceased, and the recurrence of such an evil be rendered ever after impossible".[1]

Campbell, who had been a member of the executive committee, now announced his resignation from the society, and, reviewing six years work, designated it a failure, asserting that the triennial conference ought to seriously consider its disbandment. It had little support amongst Nonconformists; its efforts were puny, its successes negligible; no Churchman had been converted by it; whilst there had been a decay in piety in the life of the churches, which the Association, if not responsible, had done nothing to prevent. The state-church question remained much as it was in 1844. Revival was now needed, not a disestablishment movement. Then he proceeded to condemn the constitution of the Association - the exclusion of prayer from its meetings, the union of the "devout and ungodly" in what should pre-eminently be a religious work. No society based on these principles deserved the confidence of the Nonconformist community.

> ..... The constitution of the Anti-State-Church Association is spiritually, religiously, and entirely wrong, and such as can never obtain the approval of the British Nonconformist Churches, or the blessing of God. It cannot long stand; it does not deserve to stand; and the sooner it comes to an end the better. If, - which we wholly dispute, - organization should be proved to be necessary to the case in hand, it must be an organization of those that love Him whose glory is sought by a separation of Church and State..... 2

1. B.B., 3 April 1850 pp. 227-8. Miall, A.: Life of Edward Miall, pp. 155-7.
2. B.B., 3 April 1850 p. 234, 17 April 1850 pp. 259-60 (reprinted in C.W., 1850, pp. 215-223), 24 April 1850 p. 275.

These arguments, reminiscent of those voiced in 1844, probably reflect the general prejudices against the Association. Nevertheless, he exposed himself as "Bluster, Brag, and Co.", to sarcastic and mocking attacks, both from Miall and Price, whilst his remarks about the Association contributed to the final severence of the connexion between the Congregational Union and the magazines edited by him.[1] It was a measure of the Association's strength that it could afford to laugh at its antagonist, and, that despite all, Mursell could report from his experiences on a recent northern tour,

> ..... I believe ..... that there is a deep, strong, and increasing conviction in the dissenting mind - indeed in the public mind - ..... in our favour ..... Gentlemen who had never before come forward, now, from sheer conviction of the soundness of our principles, and the honesty of our intentions, come quietly and manfully to take their station beside us.2

One of the Association's difficulties lay in the North. Successful public meetings were held in Manchester, but, because of the control the executive committee exercised over its local committees, no permanent organisation grew up. Steps were taken to rectify this in 1851 when the committee agreed to relax its rules to allow the Manchester committee to retain a third of its income for expenditure on its own projects.[3] This was unsuccessful, for in 1853 Kingsley was sent to assess the situation. He found "a feeling of despondency ..... prevalent among our friends", past failures having alienated some, and discouraged all. However, he now felt that the Mancunians had sufficiently recruited their energies after the anti-corn law battle, and that "the

1. N., 10 April 1850 p. 281, 29 May 1850 p. 429. E.R., 4s., vol. XXVIII, 1850, pp. 112-121. Peel, A.: These Hundred Years, pp. 217-9.
2. N. 3 May 1850 p. 341.
3. Minute Book ....., vol. 2, pp. 185, 192.

Society was now quite free from the odium incurred thro' local representatives of a questionable or even disreputable character". There were still doubts of the "practical wisdom of the Executive Committee", and a dissatisfaction with the status accorded to local committees, "which had almost shaped itself into a desire to originate a movement entirely independent of our control". Consultations with leading ministers and laymen led him to conclude that there was a readiness for aggressive movement, provided precautions were taken against "another ignominious failure". Proposing that he should be appointed as local secretary for the North, based on Manchester, he outlined his plans for "an Anti-State-Church school" in the town, and for the organisation of the whole of the society's operations in Lancashire and Yorkshire.

> ..... Being myself fully impressed with the necessity & duty of preserving a conciliatory course of action, I would avail myself in that position of every opportunity of establishing amicable relations with those parties who have hitherto regarded our proceedings with suspicion or dislike. From this course I believe it is still practicable to secure a large augmentation of our strength..... 1

Adopting his suggestions, the committee sent Miall and William Edwards, the Association's treasurer, to Manchester, where they dined with local Dissenters at the home of James Watts. In the summer, at a dinner provided by Elkanah Armitage, they decided to form a local committee.[2] Kingsley was able to give a full report of his initial operations to the Triennial Conference, but the experiment was terminated in 1854. When Kingsley was offered the secretaryship of the Achilles Insurance Company in Manchester, the executive committee dubiously gave him permission to undertake this

1. ibid., pp. 470-3.
2. ibid., pp. 478, 482, 484, 521.

new post along with his existing commitments, but in July they decided to end the arrangement, dissatisfied with its results. Manchester's independent status was to remain, but the committee "forthwith" took over the responsibility for organisation and the collection of funds in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Kingsley resigned, despite an offer to retain his services, though at a reduced salary.[1] The Manchester local committee did not long survive these changes, and in November 1855 the executive committee recorded the receipt of the balance of its accounts. A "considerable proportion" of its supporters, it was reported, would continue to subscribe to the parent body.[2]

An incident which must have intensified doubts of the London committee's capabilities was the failure of its ambitious publishing venture. The Association had never neglected the press. Pamphlets, broadsheets, and placards had been produced on various aspects of the establishment question, but in 1850 a sub-committee recommended that this department "be carried on on a larger & bolder mode than has yet been attempted". Thus was born "The Library for the Times"; a series

> adapted for the School, the Cottage, the Drawing-room, and the Study, which, in addition to their intrinsic merits, shall be pervaded by the spirit of that principle to the realisation of which the labours of the Association are directed. 3

Both the Nonconformist and the Eclectic welcomed this approach to the young, and to the adult, through the medium of good

1. N., 9 November 1853 pp. 901-2. Minute Book of the Executive Committee of the Society for the Liberation of Religion from State - patronage and Control, (Greater London Record Office, reference A/LIB/72), pp. 40, 52, 92, 105-6, 112.
2. ibid., pp. 199, 204.
3. Minute Book ....., vol. 2, p. 102; press advertisement inserted under 20 March, 1851.

literature, freed from the prejudices of Establishment, though the latter warned of the difficulties the Association would face from boycotting booksellers.[1]

The project did not start on a sound financial footing. A publications fund was launched at the end of 1850, from £1500 to £2000 being the target. By the following May under £600 had been subscribed; the sum had grown to £1250 by October.[2] Miall extolled the merits of the first volumes to his readers, but even before the end of the year some of the difficulties foreseen by the Eclectic were appearing, and, because the first editions were issued when the fund was only at £1300, far too much capital became tied up with the stock.[3] The situation was re-assessed in the autumn of 1852. A sub-committee reported that even if six volumes were produced annually (the original scheme had been for twelve), a larger fund than £2000 was essential, but only £1486 had been received. Publication of the series was suspended, notice was given to Cyrus Edmonds, the editor; the warehousemen were dismissed; and steps were taken to dispose of the stock. It was calculated that £1500 was needed to meet all outstanding liabilities. There was a new appeal to the society's supporters, and the usual winter programme was curtailed whilst the committee-men and officers canvassed for donations.[4] The mess was not finally cleared up until after the re-organisation at the end of 1853.

Papal Aggression posed another problem for the executive

1. N., 8 January 1851 pp. 21-2. E.R., 5s., vol. II, 1851, pp. 528-9.
2. N., 13 November 1850 p. 910, Report of Secretary at annual autumnal metropolitan meeting of the Association; 14 May 1851 p. 380, Treasurer's report at Council Meeting; 29 October 1851 p. 858, Secretary's report at the metropolitan meeting.
3. ibid., 5 November 1851 p. 877, 12 November 1851 p. 897.
4. Minute Book ....., vol. 2, pp. 391-9, 402-5, 408, 414, 417.

committee, the Association suffering, not for what it did but for what was said by its most prominent supporters on its platforms, and especially for what appeared in the columns of the Nonconformist, which, it was assumed, reflected the opinions of the committee, and the policy it had endorsed.[1] In fact, the committee adopted a neutral stance. "The establishment of a Hierarchy in England by the Pope" was the subject of "extended conversation" in November, but, the Council was informed, they decided that the constitution of the society precluded any involvement.[2]

Most Dissenters regarded the Papal Bull and the appointment of Wiseman and the bishops, as a challenge to Britain's protestantism, and to her political institutions. "We lay down", said Binney, "last Sunday night, and dreamt, as usual, that we were Protestants, living in a Protestant country; we awoke on Monday morning and found ourselves the inhabitants of 'Catholic England!'.....".[3] The shock of this stirred old prejudices and fears. Campbell gloried in the hostility of the people to the cardinal, only lamenting "that the fire of this animosity burns less brightly than it did aforetime". Conder asked whether, "this intolerant assumption of territorial jurisdiction within this realm by a foreign priest, is to be tamely submitted to", warning of the political, moral, and religious dangers which would accompany an influx of Jesuits into the country.[4]

Miall took a calmer view. Doubtless the Pope had been

1. E.R., 5s., vol. II, 1851, pp. 521-3.
2. Minute Book ....., vol. 2, p. 140. N., 14 May 1851 p. 379.
3. Binney, T.: "A Change in the Priesthood necessitates a Change in the Law". The Dissenters and the Papacy, (London, 1850), p. 6.
4. B.B., 30 October 1850 p. 737. P., 21 October 1850 p. 668, 12 December 1850 p. 788, 19 December 1850 p. 804.

imprudent, but all the signs within the Established Church had offered him encouragement. Dissenters were warned not to be diverted from the anti-establishment agitation by the 'No Popery' cry, a red herring which many Churchmen would tempt them to follow. It was a clash between two rival hierarchies, both making erroneous assumptions, and Dissenters could not consistently ally with either. Rather, leaving them to fight it out, they ought to exploit the opportunity to press anti-state-church principles, for these, undermining all prelatical assumptions, were the true safeguard of Protestantism. The destruction of the Establishment would remove the great inducement to the aggression - the hope that the Roman would replace the Anglican establishment. No right of the Queen had been violated, and talk of upholding the royal supremacy was recognition, by Dissenters, of that Establishment system they repudiated. Papal pretensions were harmless, for there was no means of enforcing them, and, by appointing bishops, the Pope was doing no more than he had already done in Ireland and the colonies, where the Government had recognised them. He was shocked and grieved "that Dissenters, Dissenting ministers, and Dissenting newspapers, should deem it necessary to swell the note of alarm, and call upon Government to interpose.....". The Eclectic agreed, and Charles Gilpin was cheered, when, at the Anti-State-Church Association soiree, he urged,

> ..... Dissenters of England to be sure that with the struggles of rival hierarchies for place and pelf, and power, they have nothing to do. Let the ecclesiastical potsherds of the earth strive with the ecclesiastical potsherds of the earth..... 1

1. N., 23 October 1850 p. 858, 30 October 1850 p. 878, 6 November 1850 pp. 889, 898, 13 November 1850 pp. 909-13, 918-9, 20 November 1850 pp. 929-30, 4 December 1850 p. 969. E.R., 4s., vol. XXVIII, 1850, pp. 739-63.

To the Patriot, advocating a union of the differing parties within Dissent, to make "an effective protest against the doctrinal teaching of the Church of Rome", this was incomprehensible. The proper relationship between church and state was irrelevant in this crisis.

> ..... We are called upon by the POPE OF ROME to choose this day whom we will serve. The option lies between Popery and Protestantism; and, in such an alternative, neutrality is treason.

Those who ignored the political dangers, who only perceived a struggle between rival hierarchies, "must be blind to the great European conflict of which we have witnessed but the beginning". Rome was a "political foe, - insidious, unscrupulous, potent, with vast resources and extensive secular alliances, the enemy of our laws, of our constitutional polity.....". Dissenters "as citizens, patriots, Englishmen", should disregard "such men, who are unconsciously leagued with the greatest enemies to your dearest interests." There was an obvious reference to Miall in the following,

> ..... had the POPE another red hat to dispose of, some soi-disant Protestant Dissenter might be found a rather promising candidate. At all events, our humble judgement is, that more tact and sincerity would be shown by endeavouring to promote union among ourselves, than is evinced by studiously intermingling honied compliments to Rome with bitter and unbrotherly sneers at those Nonconformists who deem it necessary to guard against the arts of Romanism..... 1

Not all militant anti-state-churchmen found Miall's attitude satisfactory. Mursell wrote to the Nonconformist vindicating his own view that Dissenters should demand governmental intervention to protect the civil supremacy of the Queen, violated by the bull. Others rejoiced that he, with other active members of the Association, was not one of the

1. P., 18 November 1850 p. 732, 21 November 1850 p. 740 28 November 1850 p. 756.

"Nonconformist-Papal party". It was a duty of the legislature, ran the address of the Leicester Dissenters, "to take heed that no ukases, bulls, or authoritative proclamations issuing from any foreign potentate, under whatever pretext or disguise, take effect in these British realms". Swaine and Henry Bidgood, executive committee-men, attended a parish meeting in St. James's, Westminster, whilst at Bristol several "out-and-out Anti-State-Churchmen" demonstrated that,

> ..... they think for themselves, and will not sacrifice great principles, involving the fate of nations, to mere abstractions, and that they will leave the wilder men of the day to run themselves, if they please, out of breath in gazing at the cerulean sky. [1]

Patriot and Banner both hoped that Dissenters, sharing a common Protestantism with Churchmen, would forget their other differences, "to unite with all classes of our fellow-countrymen to resist the aggression". Care was taken, however, to assure Catholics that Nonconformists would not countenance an assault on their religious liberties, and to remind Episcopalians that they could not defend their connexion with the State.[2]

Most Dissenters were happy to appear on the platform with Churchmen, although at Leicester, Southampton, and Leeds, they met separately as Protestant Dissenters. Some anti-state-churchmen moved disestablishment amendments at these combined protest meetings, Miall being thrown off the platform by two clergymen at Islington when attempting this.[3]

1. ibid., 28 November 1850 p. 756, 2 December 1850 p. 764. N., 27 November 1850 p. 960, for Mursell's letter; 4 December 1850 pp. 971-2, Leicester Protestant Dissenters' meeting; 11 December 1850 p. 989, Miall's reply. There was a heavy correspondence on this question in the columns of the Nonconformist until the end of the year. J.Guiness Rogers records a similar division in the activist camp at Newcastle - Autobiography, pp. 94-5. B.B., 27 November 1850 p. 795.
2. B.B., 6 November 1850 pp. 747-8; P., 11 November 1850 p. 716.
3. N., 13 November 1850 pp. 914-5, Skeats, H.S. and Miall, C.S.: History of the Free Churches of England, footnote, p. 520.

Views of Russell's letter to the Bishop of Durham depended on the original position adopted. It was either "manly", and would "occupy a chief place among the many noble things His Lordship has uttered", or was "the determined dive into apostacy of a man who has yet the impudence to recall at this moment his early reputation", the "final act of recreancy in the once boasted champion of religious liberty".[1]

Opponents of the agitation spoke of religious liberty and tolerance; their critics of "the true limits of religious liberty". There were cases, they argued, in which toleration had to be limited. Whilst there should be complete toleration for every individual conscience, when a religious group threatened the common rights of society, the magistrate could legitimately intervene to circumscribe its liberties. Catholicism, a "politico-religion", which denounced liberty of conscience, claimed to absolve the guilty from their crimes, excommunicated sovereigns freeing subjects from their allegiance, relaxed the obligation of oaths with heretics, justified dissimulation and fraud for the good of the church, "can surely have no just claim to an unlimited toleration".[2]

The Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, "pitiful" after the resolution of Russell's letter, after such national determination, was, however totally inadequate. It did not interfere with "the operations of those mischievous men and women with whom the land begins to swarm, and who live only to deceive, delude, and bewilder the people", and left the "root and bane of all the mischief", endowment of Romanism in Ireland and

1. P., 11 November 1850 p. 716. B.B., 13 November 1850 p. 763. N., 13 November 1850 p. 918.
2. B.Q.R., no. 25, February 1851, pp. 257-61.

the colonies untouched. Together with legislation against tractarianism, and a termination of recent governmental flirtations with the Vatican, a reversal of the endowment policy was regarded as an essential component of any measure. Included in the four point plan of the Banner, were protection of the individual from the importuning of priests, the extension of the provisions of the Mortmain Acts to personal property, the transference of the possessions of those who entered the religious life to the next of kin or the crown, and the legal inspection of monasteries and nunneries. The Patriot actually viewed with equanimity the possible substitution of "the present linsey-woolsey Cabinet" by ministers more willing to vindicate the honour of the crown, and the independence of the nation. Unimproved during its slow Parliamentary progress, the Act remained a "symbol" and an instalment of what had to be done.[1]

Miall's position seemed thoroughly vindicated by the measure's "unspeakable littleness." Seeking a "dead letter bill" that would satisfy the Protestants without alienating its Catholic supporters, Ministers had proposed a measure, derisory when compared with the efforts made to obtain it. A prohibition of titles would not halt the "insidious progress of Popery"; as amended in July, the Bill became too punitive for the Ministry to enforce it, whilst neither Protestantism nor religious liberty were strengthened by its passage. A

1. B.B., 19 February 1851 p. 120, 12 March 1851 p. 176, 19 March 1851 p. 192, 26 March 1851 pp. 203-9. P., 10 February 1851 p. 92, 17 February 1851 p. 108, 10 March 1851 p. 156, 27 March 1851 p. 196, 7 July 1851 p. 436. By February the Eclectic Review had argued itself round to the need for legislation to prevent the reception of the Bull and the new titles, and for the withdrawal of all money grants from Roman Catholic personnel or institutions, but it, too, found the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill thoroughly inadequate, 5s., vol. I 1851, pp. 247-52, 379-84, 506-10, 632-5.

"fatherless bill", it had taught some instructive lessons,

> ..... that what is born of a foolish panic, is not likely to grow into a wise and beneficial power - that inconsistency is the parent of inconsistency - and that to lean upon a legislative staff for spiritual ends, is to lean upon that which is sure to fail us in the hour of trial, and is likely to pierce us, both in reputation and in power.

Only the bishops would benefit from an Act, which guaranteed a monopoly of titles and hierarchy, whilst Dissenters, erroneously fraternising with ecclesiastics, had been unable to challenge popery in "its secret haunts" - the Church of England, and the Universities. The sham of government intervention having been unveiled, they could now turn to their true mission and,

> ..... let loose the true spirit of Protestantism, by abolishing that which corrupts it, by removing that which impedes it, by breaking down that which confines it.....

As it was, a session had been wasted, and reform postponed for another twelve months. Mockingly, Miall put his feelings about the Bill and its progenitor in a neat epigram.

> Feel no surprise, whatever your displeasure,
> At Russell's petty anti-Papal plan
> They may well call it Lord John Russell's measure,
> 'Tis just the <u>measure</u> of the little man! 1

A fear that the animosity stirred up during the winter would spoil the Council meeting of the Association proved groundless. There was no discord, the several references to the bull and deprecations of government intervention, at the public meeting, eliciting a "hearty and general" response.[2] Another crisis had been averted, but Miall's reaction to the

1. N., 12 February 1851 pp. 117, 126, 19 February 1851 p. 137, 12 March 1851 p. 197, 19 March 1851 p. 217, 20 March 1851 pp. 246-7, 2 April 1851 p. 257, 30 April 1851 p. 346, 9 July 1851 pp. 546-7. The Deputies presented a petition demanding a more stringent measure. Significantly its opponents were connected with the Anti-State-Church Association, <u>ibid.</u>, 2 April 1851 pp. 258-9. Manning, B.L.: <u>The Protestant Dissenting Deputies</u>, pp. 206-9.
2. N., 14 May 1851 pp. 377, 378-84, <u>passim</u>.

Aggression and to the activities of the majority of the Dissenters, confirmed many in their antipathy to the Association.

The agitation spawned a new organisation, and revived an old cry, the Protestant Association, and disendowment of Maynooth College. Both Patriot and Banner welcomed a new society to guard religious freedom at home and abroad. The movement was "timely and seemly, ... identification with it will be alike an act of piety and of patriotism....." "We believe", remarked the other,

> that there is an imperative necessity for an alliance of all classes of Protestants at the present crisis, for the purpose of bringing the religious feeling of the country to bear more influentially and decisively upon the national policy, and, so far as consists with pacific relations, upon that of foreign Governments. Our disregard of the interests of Protestantism abroad, has been ..... a national sin, and has led to our punishment..... 1

Disendowment of Maynooth was one of its aims. In March Campbell had denounced state aid to a college where, "..... there are 500 men being prepared for the dismal work of perverting the human understanding, misguiding the nation, and destroying the souls of men...". There was an imperative need, he wrote then, for a "universal movement among the Protestants of England for the withdrawment not only of this grant to Maynooth, but the immediate cessation of all grants whatever throughout the Colonies". It was equally important to re-protestantise the Commons, purging it of "hollow and half-hearted Protestants, the dupes or tools of the sham liberalism which is but the disguise of infidelity", if policies were to be reversed, national charater retained, and moral influence preserved. Mobilising the protestant feeling

1. B.B., 13 August 1851 p. 545. P., 11 August 1851 p. 524-5, 21 August 1851 p. 540.

of the community, the Association might ensure the return of "bona fide Protestant Representatives", men whose protestantism would be "their strongest motive for undertaking the burdensome responsibilities of a Member of the House of Commons".[1]

Here, was another fruitful source of dissension within the Liberal party. Cobden recognised this, writing that if,

> ..... Baines be representative of the opinion of the influential Liberals of the Riding, we are as wide as the poles asunder upon the vital questions of the age. I will sit for no place where the constituency will not back me in an active opposition to all invasions of the principle of religious equality.....

Intending to resign his seat at the next election, he doubted whether he would find a constituency willing to return him, "seeing how the majority of dissenting politicians have violated the rights of conscience by supporting the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill.....".[2]

The split in Liberal ranks over the endowment issue had been illustrated in 1848. Dissenters assumed that the Whigs intended to endow the whole Roman Catholic priesthood in Ireland.[3] A vacancy was created in the West Riding by Morpeth's succession to the family earldom, but Charles Fitzwilliam, Whig candidate and son of the Whig earl, was unwilling to give a satisfactory pledge on the Irish endowment question. The Leeds Mercury was bitter.

> It is ..... for the men of the West Riding to decide, whether they will send a Member to vote for creating another huge Establishment in Ireland, - whether they will make themselves parties to the

1. B.B., 19 March 1851 p. 192, 13 August 1851 p. 545.
2. Morley, J.: The Life of Richard Cobden, p. 560, Letter to Bright.
3. N., 2 August 1848 - 29 November 1848, for an intermittent series of articles on the ecclesiastical, political, and economic aspects of endowment, and reasons for opposing it.

> permanent endowment of five thousand Roman Catholic priests..... and whether they will thus sanction the greatest practical advance towards the endowment of all religions and of everybody of religious teachers by the State. [1]

This proved to be the issue on which the Liberal nomination rested. Roebuck was brought forward by another group and received an enthusiastic reception in Leeds, but, he alleged, under pressure from Baines ("..... My opinions on education and want of sympathy with the Anti-Catholic outcry, were the cause of the emnity and opposition of Baines ....."), the delegate meeting at Normanton decided to offer it to Sir Culling Eardley.[2] This was regarded as a wise decision by the dissenting press, even the Nonconformist being ready to forget past quarrels, whilst regretting that Roebuck's "one political heresy" made him inadmissible as a candidate at that particular juncture.[3] The Wesleyan ministers in Leeds considered some action in support of Eardley, William Barton feeling "that it would be more than foolish to petition a House of Commons not to endow Popery & to elect members who will do the thing".[4]

He was defeated by Denmison, Tory candidate, because, suggested Miall, of his failure to adopt the anti-state-church principle as the basis of his opposition to Irish endowment, his timidity and sectarianism having exposed him to a crossfire from friend and foe alike. Many Whigs defected to vote for Denmison, but Liberals abstained, or voted reluctantly for Eardley. Henry Dunn, the Sheffield liberal leader,

1. L.M., quoted in P., 13 November 1848 p. 724.
2. Leader, R.E.: Autobiography and Letters of the Rt. Hon. J.A. Roebuck, pp. 206-10.
3. B.B., 29 November 1848 p. 804. P., 23 November 1848 p. 748. N., 29 November 1848 pp. 914-5.
4. Jabez Bunting Papers, William Barton to Jabez Bunting, 24, 28 November, 6 December 1848. I am indebted to Professor Ward for this reference.

a Churchman, with a Congregationalist background, told Robert Leader that,

> I cannot support Sir C. Eardley; what reputation has he, except as a bigot, which should lead the Riding to accept him? I cannot forget his Maynooth Committee, and I feel that the safty of Religious Liberty will be best secured by his rejection.....".

Cobden declined to participate in the campaign, though he voted for Eardley, seeing "the proceedings of the last election (not with the aristocracy but the liberal party) ..... without feelings of personal reluctance as a notice to quit". In Manchester, he reported, "Our League friends" were "very lukewarm about the West Riding Election", many refusing to vote, "quite out of humour with the religious intolerance of the Eardley party". Bright, who read Eardley's election address on the hustings, wrote of "some want of cordiality with you [Baines] on the part of some who have heretofore gone with us, but it is almost entirely among the Unitarians, who seem to think that an earnest & religious man is necessarily politically hostile to all whose sentiments do not agree with his.....". He was able to add, however, that "you will get nine out of every ten liberals in this neighbourhood....." (He was writing from Rochdale).[1]

In 1848, as in 1845, the Nonconformist had advised Dissenters to eschew all union with Churchmen in their opposition to the endowment proposals, and to act on the voluntary principle. A sectarian opposition was "incompatible with a clear and unmistakeable exhibition of our principles as Dissenters", whilst a separate campaign would enable them to

1. N., 20 December 1848 p. 965. Leader Papers, Henry Dunn to Robert Leader, 29 November 1848. B.M. Add. Mss., 43664, ff. 201-7, R. Cobden to E.Baines, 13, 21, 28 December 1848. Baines Papers, J.Bright to E.Baines, 6 December 1848. Morley, J.: op. cit., p. 495.

exploit "the Ministerial proposal as a powerful lever put into their hands for the subversion of state ecclesiastical establishments as such.....".[1] Having condemned the spirit of the anti-papal movement in 1850 the Nonconformist, though wishing the Protestant Association well, could not support it, and deplored the narrowness of its opposition to the Maynooth endowment. Every assistance would, however, be given to the movement for the repeal of the Endowment Act, "an outpost of a bad system - ..... a key to the false position of a formidable enemy", thrown out to protect the foundations of the Irish Church. The blow which toppled the grant would "virtually decide the greatest question of our age - the relation in which the civil ruler must henceforth stand to the religion of his subjects". "Unconsciously, but very effectually", the Association was "doing our work", but it was inexplicable that Dissenters appearing on its platforms could abridge their principles, by attacking one endowment, when, logically they should condemn all, protestant or catholic.[2] The Eclectic, too, advised Dissenters not to join the Association, the points of difference between Churchmen and Dissenters being such "as preclude an advantageous, or even consistent union for the objects here stated ..... we cannot combine for defence of 'the principles of religious liberty', with those whom we regard as systematically opposed to them, both in theory and spirit.....". Each side ought to act "contemporaneously rather than conjointly", against the college endowment, Dissenters, opposed to all endowments, working through the Anti-State-Church Association.[3]

1. N., 20 September 1848 p. 714, 25 October 1848 p. 805, 1 November 1848 p. 835.
2. ibid., 3 December 1851 pp. 966-7, 4 February 1852 p. 77, 19 May 1852 p. 377, 9 June 1852 p. 437
3. E.R., 5s., vol. I, 1851, p. 510; vol. III, 1852, pp. 125-6, 515-6, 535-6.

Others agreed with this assessment, and though an Eardley, a Cox, a Campbell, or a Binney, supported the Association,[1] they were ready to disrupt its meetings, converting them into anti-state-church gatherings. This happened at Derby, Norwich (where ministers defended the alliance), and Southampton, whilst the Congregational Union, objecting to the anti-Maynooth resolution prepared by its committee (describing the grant as "an insult to the Protestant feeling of this country"), replaced it by a more general condemnation. At a general meeting of the Deputies, the committee proposed a petition against endowments, and "especially" against that to Maynooth. Opposition to this word came from William Edwards, Ebenezer Clarke, J.F. Bontems, all committee-men of the Anti-State-Church Association, and Samuel Morley. Despite Conder's defence the offending phrase was withdrawn.[2]

These issues merged into the 1852 election campaign, complicated by the revival of the free trade question. Few tears were shed over the defunct Russell Administration, "the most incurably inert, the most incapable, the most hand-to-mouth, makeshift ministry of modern times", whose leader had "sneaked out of office to avoid being driven from it".[3]

Yet their replacement by the Protectionists under Lord Derby could not be viewed with equanimity. Free trade was threatened, whilst their ecclesiastical policies were designed to place the people more fully under clerical control. Finding plentiful evidence of the Ministry's identification with the "priest party", there were no grounds, political, ecclesias-

1. N., 3 December 1851 pp. 957-9 at the Association's first general meeting.
2. ibid., 28 January 1852 pp. 59-60, 11 February 1852 pp. 102-3, 106, 17 March 1852 pp. 198-9, 21 April 1852 pp. 297-8, 19 May 1852 p. 377.
3. ibid., 25 February 1852 p. 146. P. 23 February 1852 p. 124. E.R., 5s., vol. III, 1852, pp. 386-9.

tical, or commercial, on which the country could afford to give it a trial. Miall, therefore, recommended a short and decisive assault, with liberals uniting on a radical reform platform, which would help keep the Whigs out of office. Believing that organic reform should not be postponed, he deplored the resurrected League's retreat behind free trade defences, and, while promising co-operation, declined to suspend his other activities.[1]

The imminent election presented Protestant Dissenters with something of a dilemma. How far should their principles and objectives be subordinated to the free trade cause? During the previous year, following the opposition of the Manchester School M.P.s to the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, and consequent on the "socialistic and bureaucratic tendencies" contained in their education schemes, consistent Protestant Dissenters had been told that it was impossible for them to "give their political support to members of this party".[2] Did the new conditions of 1852 invalidate this counsel?

Conder equally deprecated the dictation of any one pledge to candidates, and the League's exclusive policy. Popular education and Maynooth endowment were issues which could not be ignored, and on both of these the political Liberals either opposed or were contemptuous of the dissenting position. Principally indebted to the northern Dissenters for their seats, the Liberals persisted in treating them as "political nobodies", associating with Catholics and Unitarians, but never with Baptists and Congregationalists, who were,

1. N., 3 March 1852 pp. 157, 166-7, 10 March 1852 pp. 186-7, 17 March 1852 pp. 206-7, 23 June 1852 p. 477.
2. P., 21 April 1851 pp. 252-3.

> ..... to be black-balled at clubs or at elections to places of trust and influence, - to be counter-worked in municipalities and Parliamentary boroughs - to be ignored by the 'Liberal' press, - and to be, in the meantime, made all convenient use of for party purposes, by keeping up the hypocritical cry of Religious Liberty.....

Bright was an "honourable exception" to this general rule, but the "intolerance of liberalism" had done more than anything else to divide and break up the party. Accusations of bigotry and sectarianism, levelled at those Dissenters who were reviving the Maynooth question, were another example of this phenomenom. As citizens, Dissenters could not be indifferent to the political colour of the government,

> ..... but they would deceive themselves, if they considered it as of material consequence, in respect to matters which concern their religious interests, whether the Government be administered by Whigs, Tories, or Radicals. Sir ROBERT INGLIS and Mr. COBDEN, Lord JOHN MANNERS and Sir WILLIAM MOLESWORTH, Mr. DISRAELI and Mr. ROEBUCK, Oxford and Manchester, - we count upon as much favour or tolerance from the one, as from the other; that is to say, just so much, and no more, as we can, as conscientious Protestants and Voluntaries, extort from the policy of ecclesiastical opponents or political antagonists. 1

"B.L." advised them to defer other issues until free trade was saved, recommending that free traders should be supported in straight fights with monopolists, even when they opposed other dissenting opinions. "Hampden" objected to the implication that Dissenters ought to vote for Fox and other state educationists, because they were free traders, and for Locke King and his coadjutors who had tried to force railway companies to run Sunday trains by law. Blinded by the danger of a return to protection, "B.L." had ignored the threat to dissenting interests and protestantism inherent in a Peelite/Radical/Whig coalition. "Our liberties, civil and

1. ibid., 4 March 1852 p. 148, 8 March 1852 p. 156, 11 March 1852 p. 164, 3 June 1852 p. 360.

religious, are in more peril from Sir James Graham, and Lord Aberdeen, and Mr. Cobden, than from Lord Derby and his 'tail' of squires", he remarked. Whilst free trade principles were an essential qualification for a candidate, "a certain amount of soundness on the vital question of endowments", meaning a condemnation of the Maynooth Endowment Act, and a willingness to vote for repeal, might be expected. The free trader, he concluded,

> ..... who is not an anti-Maynooth man, and an anti-Maynooth man, who is not a Free-trader are equally dangerous persons in Parliament, and .... no friend of civil and religious liberty ought to vote for either. 1

Noting the "urgent necessity that our representatives should be truly religious men, for who else can understand religious questions?" the Patriot counselled its readers to co-operate with free traders and reformers, taking care not to be bullied or cajoled into an abandonment of "their higher principles and more sacred interests". In constituencies where they formed an important section of the electorate, they should insist that the candidate give a due recognition to their claims and interests, and no Member should be returned ignorant of dissenting principles. Although free trade was the first question, others "of far greater and wider importance, - questions of European interest, will remain to tax the wisdom or illustrate the folly of our legislators and rulers, long after that has been universally recognised as a fait accompli".[2]

Unrepentent of its support for the Protestant Association, this journal was not ashamed to admit that it opposed

1. ibid., 11 March 1852 p. 166, 22 March 1852 p. 191, 29 March 1852 p. 207.
2. ibid., 4 March 1852 p. 148, 8 March 1852 p. 156, 11 March 1852 p. 164.

the Maynooth grant on grounds other than the general anti-endowment principle. Those Dissenters who, "by merging their Protestantism in their Dissent" were refusing to join their fellow-protestants, "at once dishonour their religion and weaken their testimony against the mistaken policy of Establishments". Endowment of catholicism was a "dangerous policy", and, at the end of June, declaring that "Protectionism is dead", the Patriot stated,

> ..... Free-traders as we are, therefore, we do not hesitate to prefer a hearty, honest, intelligent farmer, like Mr. BALL ..... to any Free-trader, Whig, Radical, or Peelite, who would support the training of an army of Popish janissaries at the public expense, or pander to an infidel Liberalism in league with England's worst enemies.....

Protestant electors had to act, for "the priest party" were everywhere exerting themselves to increase their parliamentary representation, either by recourse to intimidation in favour of Catholic candidates, or by means "of Liberal tools or dupes in opposing a religious Protestant.....".[1]

Campbell was far more explicit, recommending that wherever "practicable", the discontinuance of the grant ought to be made a condition of support. In an earlier article he had been even more decided.

> ..... Let Members be given distinctly to understand, that the day of deliberation on the subject of Maynooth and Papal endowments generally is gone by - that the question is settled in the minds of Protestant Englishmen! The question is vital, and involves whatever is dear to the British people. For Electors to trifle with the subject were treason against the highest interests of the empire! Let there be no mistake! Religious men of every sect and party ought to place as number one on their list of great questions, Protestantism!.... [2]

1. ibid., 1 April 1852 pp. 212-3, 12 April 1852 p. 236, 20 May 1852 p. 328, 24 June 1852 p. 408. Edward Ball, a Congregationalist, was a Protectionist candidate for Cambridgeshire.
2. B.B., 10 March 1852 p. 160, 24 March 1852 p. 192, 28 April 1852 p. 272, 7 July 1852 pp. 449-50.

For the Nonconformist Maynooth was a minor issue, and Dissenters were warned that a combination of free trade and anti-Maynooth cries would assist the Tories. Those, it explained, who raised the "no Popery" cry claimed that they were acting in defence of Protestantism, whereas it had really been revived to safeguard "Anglican clerism". Immediate repeal of the Maynooth Endowment Act was neither in the interest of Ireland, nor of Protestantism in that country. Unless the Protestant Churches were simultaneously disendowed, such a step would merely intensify religious bitterness, and complicate the Irish question further.[1] Their different outlook was reflected in the reaction of the Patriot and the Nonconformist to the replies of Bright and Milner Gibson to the Manchester auxiliary of the Protestant Association, the latter condemning the former's criticisms of the town's Members, and praising their bold confrontation "of this hideous spectre.[2]

Both the Nonconformist and its correspondents regarded the election as an opportunity for pressing anti-state-church principles on candidates and public alike. In 1850, anticipating an early end to the political stalemate, Miall had urged his readers to ensure that dissenting interests were not subordinated to others in the next "national" movement.[3] This advice was still valid in the new crisis, for though free trade was the pre-dominant issue, it would be settled long before the end of the new Parliament. Much might be done without harming its prospects. Renewed Whig Tory hostility could be exploited. Whereas they had allied with their political opponents in 1847 to defeat radical candidates, Whigs

1. N., 24 March 1852 p. 227, 21 April 1852 p. 297, 2 June 1852 p. 417.
2. ibid., 24 March 1852 p. 227, 2 June 1852 p. 417. P., 22 March 1852 pp. 188-9.
3. N., 16 January 1850 p. 45.

would now have to co-operate with these same Radicals to frustrate the Protectionists, this making them more amenable to the views of Nonconformists, and even willing to share the representation of two member constituencies. Pledges against further grants for religious purposes and against church rates should be the minimum demanded. If possible, two anti-state-churchmen ought to be returned. Reviewing election movements in early April, the Nonconformist estimated that the next Parliament would contain from 25-30 anti-state-churchmen. Nonconformists residing in constituencies where no candidate was prepared to support or recognise their opinions, need not hold them in abeyance. Elections, when men were ready to think about, and discuss political and politico-ecclesiastical questions, presented "a golden opportunity for telling truths which may be neglected, or but hastily glanced at, another day....".[1]

Liberal critics, accusing constituencies of bigotry when they sought a dissenting candidate, forced Miall to defend this programme. An assault on the Establishment was a dictate of prudence at a time when the clergy were busily extending their presumptions. The freeing of religion from State control would release the Commons from a source of tedious debate and strife; "the springs of mind" would be eased as free trade had eased those of industry, and the effects of bigotry would be neutralised. Despite the scorn of liberalism, this was a national, not a sectarian issue.

1. ibid., 10 March 1852 pp. 177-8, Letter from "A Nonconformist Elector", 17 March 1852 p. 197, 7 April 1852 pp. 257-8, 6 May 1852 pp. 337-8, 23 June 1852 pp. 477-8. E.R., 5s., vol. IV, 1852, pp. 124-6, advised that free trade should be given precedence, but that, this secured, Dissenters should take their principles to the polling booth, pledging candidates "not to details, but to principles", where this could be done "without injury to the special question of the day".

It was inevitable that Englishmen would turn to reform "the last surviving and most fearful legacy of a former age", with its obvious "mass of anomalies, inconsistencies, contradictions ..... an unbroken chain of practical absurdities". Nothing "will be able to stave off this momentous question".[1]

There was no central electoral organisation. Dissenters were too divided on questions of policy to make this feasible, and no threat to their immediate interests forced unity on them. The Anti-State-Church Association did, however, attempt to take a general advisory role. A sub-committee had examined electoral policy at the beginning of the year, and, whilst not considering it "advisable to recommend the friends of the Association to pledge themselves to support only ..... anti-state-church candidates, think it both practicable & desirable to take advantage of such an event for directing public attention to the object at which the Association aims". They did not advise interference in individual contests, though where a candidate held anti-state-church principles, "the Committee should be prepared to afford all the assistance which it may be able & may with propriety give".[2]

In June, an election sub-committee was appointed. It did no more than print circulars, placards and broadsheets, the Minutes of the executive committee recording no other work, though advice was doubtless sought and given. The unstable financial state of the Association at this time precluded an ambitious policy, and the sub-committee was warned to keep its expenditure down. The Association's advice to its members in the 'Circular', and to Nonconformist electors in its 'Address', was similar to that of the Nonconformist - act on

1. N., 6 May 1852 pp. 337-8, 26 May 1852 p. 397.
2. Minute Book ..... 2, pp. 324-5.

anti-state-church principles at all times, eliciting candidates' opinions on politico-ecclesiastical questions and extracting pledges for votes on specific measures where there was a refusal to give a general one on separation. Sardonically, the committee suggested that opponents of the Maynooth Grant, especially those who did not object to grants to other sects, should be "pressed for reasons why Roman Catholics should be taxed to support Protestantism, if Protestants ought not to be taxed to support Romanism; and why the Irish Church Establishment should not be abolished if the Maynooth grant is withdrawn". The essential thing, however, was to bring the issue before candidates and the public.[1]

Without a very close examination of individual contests it would be impossible to assess how far this conflicting advice was followed. Certainly, in Manchester, the negative replies of Bright and Milner Gibson to the Protestant Association questionnaire do not seem to have greatly reduced their dissenting support, though the latter undoubtedly lost votes.[2] There were many, who, like Hadfield, considered that in the crisis of free trade, "Reform & everything else must be laid aside". The unity of Liberals in Leeds and the West Riding, despite the ominous signs of previous years, reflected this attitude.[3] James Cook Evans, contesting Stafford, was rebuked by the Nonconformist for his anti-Maynooth, rather than anti-state-church campaign, whilst Alderman Challis, in

1. ibid., pp. 375-6, 378, 380, 383. Copy of the "Circular" is inserted in the Minutes. N., 6 May 1852 pp. 348-50, council meeting, passim; 7 July 1852 pp. 517-8, "Electoral Address of the Executive Committee".
2. B.B., 2 June 1852 pp. 361-2. P., 12 July 1852 p. 448. George Wilson Papers, J.Bright to G.Wilson, 12, 18, 20 May 1852.
3. G.Wilson Papers, G.Hadfield to G. Wilson, 24 February 1852.

Finsbury, was expected to obtain a large Church vote because of his known position on Protestant questions, though he was able to satisfy the anti-state-church electors of his suitability to represent them. William Willans, a Congregationalist, who fought Huddersfield, did not stress disestablishment in his address, trusting in the progress of intelligence and "the desire which both clergy and laity are beginning to evince for more freedom of action in ecclesiastical matters". On the other side, there was Miall making no secret of his opinions in Rochdale, and Hadfield in the same vein at Sheffield, whilst Crossley told the Halifax voters that he opposed Maynooth's grant for the same reasons that he opposed all state endowments.[1]

The Sheffield contest once again demonstrated that antipathy between Roebuck and the Dissenters. There is no foundation for his charge that Hadfield was pushed into the constituency by the League to oust him from Parliament. From the correspondence of Hadfield and Leader, it is apparent that his candidature was supported by Dissenters hostile to the sitting Member. The Patriot viewed matters in this light,

> ..... we are utterly at a loss to understand, how any Evangelical Dissenter, or any friend to Voluntary Education, can consent to be misrepresented by Mr. ROEBUCK, who has rewarded the support given to him as a Liberal by Evangelical Dissenters with contumely and insult.....

Miall saw the candidature of Hadfield and Toulmin Smith (it was originally to be a joint venture) as a challenge to Whiggism by a juncture of Dissent and Radicalism. The latter withdrew, and Hadfield wavered, but in mid-April he received a requisition signed by 1200 electors. By mid-May, Roebuck

1. N., 14 April 1852 p. 289, 28 April 1852 p. 329, 2 June 1852 p. 429, 16 June 1852 p. 468. P., 17 June 1852 p. 392, 5 July 1852 pp. 432-3. Miall, A.: Life of Edward Miall, pp. 171-3.

had explained himself to the local Dissenters, and it was the Whig Parker who lost his seat.[1]

In Tower Hamlets, there was complete disarray in the dissenting ranks. Many prominent Dissenters who had been active on George Thompson's committee in 1847, including Samuel Morley and Charles Reed, were annoyed by his long absence in the United States and neglect of parliamentary business when in England. They adopted Sir William Clay. Thompson campaigned with A.S.Ayrton, with whom he had made, so his opponents, alleged, a disreputable agreement for the payment of their joint expenses. Both were anti-state-churchmen. Clay declined to take a separation pledge, vindicating himself in a long Letter, in which he deplored the intrusion of an abstract question into the election contest. Vituperation and abuse swept the constituency as old allies accused each other of treachery, and remarks made at both the Council and public meeting of the Anti-State-Church Association caused Morley to submit his resignation from the society. To Miall, the choice was simple - no Dissenter could vote for a man who claimed that he did not understand what separation meant. Conversely, the Patriot took the side of Morley and the rebels, writing of Clay's "able and enlightened letter", and extolling his suitability to be the Dissenters' candidate, despite his refusal to give the pledge.[2] Events in this constituency neatly illustrate the general disorganisation into which Dissent had sunk.

1. Leader Papers, G.Hadfield to R.Leader, 24, 25 March 1852; R.Leader to G.Hadfield, 26 March 1852; J.A.Roebuck to W.Fisher, 1 April 1852. George Wilson Papers, J.Bright to G.Wilson, 1 April 1852. The Personal Narrative of George Hadfield, M.P., pp. 169-75. N., 24 March 1852 p. 226, 7 April 1852 p. 268, 19 August 1852 p. 388, 30 June 1852 p. 508. P., 5 April 1852 p. 220, 8 April 1852 p. 228.
2. N., 21 April 1852 pp. 309-10, 6 May 1852 pp. 339-40, 12 May 1852 pp. 357-8.P., 19 April 1852 p. 252, 29 April 1852 p. 276. Minute Book ..... vol. 2, pp. 368, 374.

From a dissenting point of view the overall results of the election were eminently satisfactory. More Protestant Dissenters were returned to Parliament than on any previous occasion. There were twelve Congregationalists - Edward Ball (Cambridgeshire), Thomas Barnes (Bolton), Thomas Challis (Finsbury), Thomas Chambers (Hertford), John Cheetham (South Lancashire), Francis Crossley (Halifax), George Hadfield (Sheffield), James Kershaw (Stockport), Edward Miall (Rochdale), Robert Milligan (Bradford), Aspley Pellatt (Southwark), and James Pilkington (Blackburn). Sir George Goodman and S.M.Peto, Leeds and Norwich respectively, represented the Baptists. There were at least nine Unitarians, two United Prebyterians, four Free Churchmen, two Friends (Bright and James Bell, M.P. for Guilford), Hindley still sat for Ashton, Brotherton for Salford, "though we know not with what body to class him", and J.P.Westhead, a Wesleyan Methodist, successfully contested Knaresborough. If the Roman Catholic membership was approximately fifty, the Nonconformist proceeded to estimate that one seventh of the new House would be unconnected with the Church of England. Almost without exception they represented large constituencies, an encouraging sign "of the tendency of public opinion on ecclesiastical questions".[1]

Here, the Nonconformist enthused, was the parliamentary nucleus for a movement "which aims at the complete liberation of religion from state interference", whilst there was "gratifying evidence of the growing disposition of liberal politicians to range themselves under the same banner".[2]

1. N., 4 August 1852 pp. 597-8, 11 August 1852 pp. 617-8. E.R., 5s., vol. IV, 1852, pp. 381-2, where there is a revised version of the Nonconformist list. B.B., 4 August 1852 p. 521, viewed the election results as a victory for Protestantism.
2. N., 14 July 1852 p. 537, 4 August 1852 p. 597.

There were, of course, some exceptions to this generalisation. Ball was a Conservative who had "always avoided everything offensive and unkind towards the Church of England, and recognizes the necessity of maintaining it", informing his constituents after his return, that, although he opposed Church rates, he would vote to uphold the Irish Church, "agreeing as he did in the necessity of a State religion". Peto was the patron of three livings, who, whilst "opposed to any fresh endowment of any religious denomination", and ready to work for "the repeal of every impost which presses on the consciences of Dissenters", would not "support the separation of the Church of England from the State".[1]

These were minor blemishes, and the anti-state-church journal prophesied a glowing future. After the successful completion of the new House's first task, the passage of a Reform Bill, the separation question "will assume a very different position, and will be characterised by none claiming credit for common sense as merely abstract and impractical. Government, the Legislature, and the Press, will begin to treat it as a serious business.....".[2]

1. ibid., 14 April 1852 pp. 288-9, 28 July 1852 p. 583, 8 September 1852 pp. 697-8.
2. ibid., 14 July 1852 p. 537, 4 August 1852 p. 598.

CHAPTER 11.

A PRESSURE GROUP IN ACTION,

1852-1856.

Enthusiasm was understandable. Evangelical Dissent was visibly represented in the Commons as never before. And yet, when the initial exhilaration had passed away, there were serious matters to discuss - what, as Dissenters, were these new Members to do?

Conder anticipated the reinforcement they would bring to the Protestant cause in the Commons. As advocates of voluntaryism, they could resist the claims of any church to State allowances, as well as "that new-fangled liberalism which would extend the power of the Crown by quartering religious teachers of all sects and creeds on the Public Purse". They would be able to ensure that government observed the just limits of legislation, that it did not relieve the people of their duties, and that the burden of taxation was reduced. They could press for the abolition of church rates, whilst, as anti-state-educationists, their presence guaranteed that the House would keep an open mind on the various schemes submitted to it, and on the workings of the Minutes of Council. His concluding remarks, however, referred less to separation, and more to Protestantism, reflecting much that had appeared in the Patriot during the election campaign.

> ..... We have always committed a practical mistake, when we have placed in abeyance that Evangelical Protestantism which, equally with our Dissent, is the bond of our strength and union .... We are no more at liberty to merge our Protestantism in our political Nonconformity, than to forget our Nonconformity in our Protestantism,

or our citizenship in our Dissent..... 1

What of separation?. From the first the anti-state-church press urged caution on the new M.P.s. Their first task was to learn the ways of the House, and then, for a time,

> ..... it will be well to do little more than expose the miserable sophisms which pass current in the House; to bring to light the actual working of the existing system; to distinguish between the monetary and the religious part of the Church question; to enunciate clearly the distinctive principles of voluntaryism; and to show our statesmen how the discussions of Parliament will be disencumbered by religion being separated from state politics and left to the support and direction of those who cherish its spirit.

Since religious matters were frequently discussed in the legislature, plenty of scope for this would occur. They were the "pioneers of truth", clearing the way for their successors. A premature commitment to a substantive motion would be an error, the House being unprepared for it. Liberal and conservative critics were assured that the distant nature of their objective would not preclude the adoption of "a sober and businesslike spirit", that courtesy would be observed - the anti-state-churchmen were not "boisterous, burly, hoarse-throated, and illbehaving men.....".[2]

The dissenting Members accepted this role. At the end of February, 1853, the Milton Club held a dinner to celebrate the return of the evangelical dissenting Members. Fifteen M.P.s attended, Samuel Morley presided, and all sections of opinion were represented, the speakers including Miall, Peto, Conder, Vaughan, Cox, Campbell, Baines, and Kershaw. The Eclectic's apprehension that an undue prominence would be

1. Conder, J.: The Political Position of Protestant Dissenters in 1853. Eight letters addressed to Evangelical Nonconformist Members of the House of Commons, (London, 1853), pp. 5, 44-70. These first appeared in the Patriot.
2. E.R., 5s., vol. IV, 1852, pp. 255-6, 382-4. N., 18 August 1852 p. 637.

given to the dissenting principles of the Members, an aggressive policy being encouraged, was groundless. True, the toast was to "your representatives in Parliament", and Morley spoke of "our members", but Cheetham, Peto, and Miall each reminded the company that they had been returned, not as Dissenters, but as representatives of their fellow-citizens of all shades of opinion, and that they could not isolate themselves into a dissenting clique. Cheetham was confident that none of his colleagues would unnecessarily force questions peculiar to Nonconformists onto the House, but that they would take every opportunity of explaining their principles, and of enlightening it. Peto spoke of the "undesirableness of an aggressive policy". Parliamentary and public opinion could be best nurtured by a defensive approach, vigilantly scrutinising legislation, opposing every extension of the state-church system, and by "frequent inculcations" of sound views on ecclesiastical questions. A substantive motion might seriously damage the movement, as might "the bringing forward of any points which are especially interesting to us at the present moment.....". Miall was in close accord with all this; they must "proceed cautiously and wisely", acting with discretion, not breaking parliamentary propriety or boring Members, but exploiting the endless stream of ecclesiastical topics to make their point. But, he warned, "if we do invariably put them (dissenting principles) aside, I believe we shall deservedly draw down upon us the contempt of all the world .....".[1]

In the autumn there had been talk of the need for some organisation to secure joint action.

1. N., 23 February 1853 pp. 151-4. E.R., 5s., vol. V, 1853, pp. 375-6.

> ..... We do not wish to see the dissenters of the House assuming the form and adopting the tactics of a party, but we do wish to see them so united in counsel and action, as that their forces may be readily combined on important occasions.... 1

The Nonconformist resumed this theme in the new year. Divisions amongst the Nonconformist Members threatened to nullify the advantage of their presence in the House, making them weak and contemptible in the eyes of Ministers, who would happily push through measures undermining their educational institutions and principles, ignore their grievances, or make them more burdensome. Despite agreement on broad principles, dissension remained, a consequence of "memory or of personal sensitiveness". Politicians had forgotten their "petty, personal, and party distinctions" in joining the Aberdeen coalition, an "impressive lesson" for the Dissenters, amongst whom there was a greater propensity to fragmentation than ever. Differences should be sacrificed, coalition, on "broad intelligible grounds", would enable them to command the "respectful attention" of the House, and, "probably, prevent the mischiefs they have so much reason to dread".

> The leaders of opinion among Dissenters are, we are convinced, fully able, if willing, to convert the present weakness into massive strength. Whenever they can make up their minds to abandon all merely personal and minor differences, and organise themselves for the disenthralment of religion from State trammels, and for its rescue from state corruptions, they will take a position which will insure attentive consideration of their opinions and wishes. Oh! for an Aberdeen to conduct the negotiations!.....

A very rudimentary organisation, sufficient to acquaint them with each other's views on questions touching religious liberty, to allow consultation and mutual encouragement, was required.

1. E.R., 5s., vol. IV, 1852, pp. 383-4.

This sentiment gave the dinner an additional value, and the Nonconformist regretted that it had not been made more comprehensive. An informal meeting, in an informal atmosphere, would remove mutual misconceptions and misunderstandings, preparing the ground for "that friendly co-operation which is essential to their comfort and success".[1]

Such organisation did not materialise during the 1853 session, but on February 8th, 1854, a meeting of Members agreed on the desireability of establishing a Parliamentary Committee for "the advancement of religious liberty with especial reference to the rights of Protestant Dissenters". All members of the Committee were anti-state-churchmen, though not all were Dissenters. They were Thomas Barnes, Francis Crossley, George Hadfield, Lawrence Heyworth, James Kershaw, Edward Miall, Robert Milligan, Apsley Pellatt, Samuel Peto, James Bell, Richard Gardner, and James Heywood, whilst Dr. Foster, Hull Terrell and E.W.Field represented the Liberation Society, the Deputies, and the Unitarians respectively.[2] In the autumn the parliamentary sub-committee of the Liberation Society took a further step, recommending that, since, "the objects of the Voluntary party in Parliament would be greatly promoted by their acting under some recognised leader.. ..... a communication should be opened with Mr. Bright M.P., with a view to his accepting that post".[3]

Miall did not expect any concessions to the voluntaries from the Aberdeen Coalition during the 1853 session. From

1. N., 5 January 1853 pp. 1-2, 2 February 1853 p. 89.
2. ibid., 15 February 1854 p. 129. Minute Book of the Executive Committee of the 'Society for the Liberation of Religion from State-patronage and Control', p. 48.
3. Minute Book of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 111-2. Bright was invited to chair the annual meeting in 1853. He declined, but his letter expressing sympathy with the objects of the Association was read. N., 11 May 1853 pp. 370-2.

education, birth and inclination Ministers were more likely to strengthen Establishment than to weaken it, but though they might agree on a policy of extended universal endowments, he had no fears that this would be adopted - it was too unpopular in the country. A satisfactory settlement of the Canadian clergy reserves dispute, some modification of church rates, a remodelling of the ecclesiastical courts, and a measure of university reform were, however, anticipated.[1] Three of these figured prominently in the politics of the ensuing four years, but the Dissenters constantly found themselves opposed by Ministers, unwilling to adopt their solutions. Consequently, there was a growing disenchantment with the sincerity of the Coalition and its Palmerstonian successor, and a tendency to embarrass Governments into making concessions. The clergy reserves question dogged Ministers during 1853.

Both the Nonconformist and the Anti-State-Church Association had taken a keen interest in the position of the colonial Establishments. When, in 1851, it became apparent that the Whigs had advised the Queen of the need to submit to the wishes of the Canadian legislature, and to place the disposal of the clergy reserves under their control, there was a general exultation. This was the "gap in the hedge"; disestablishment would progress from colony to colony, to Ireland, to Scotland, and to England. "The outposts of State-churchism will be carried one after another. The suckers will be stabbed up", each success facilitating the next step. The Nonconformist gave a resounding welcome to Molesworth's promise to introduce a bill in 1852, even anticipating the

1. N., 29 December 1852 p. 1017.

defeat of the Tory Government by it.[1]

The Coalition's own measure was carried by a large majority on its second reading. William Scholefield's Irish disendowment motion had obtained 68 votes in the same week. "..... The tide of events", it was optimistically exclaimed, "is in our favour. Let us take it at the flood, and rely upon the good providence of God to bring our venture safely into the haven of success". In committee, Russell moved amendments providing an imperial guarantee of clerical incomes if the local legislature secularised the clergy reserves. This was denounced as a "scandalous violation" of ministerial good faith, demonstrating the strength of ecclesiastical influence in the cabinet, for whereas anti-state-churchmen hoped for the overthrow of establishment in Canada, the amended bill would preserve it. Miall and Bright forced a division on the changes, alleging that they would only delay a final settlement, the former taunting that, "although the noble Lord's original conceptions might be fair honest and good, he was never able to carry them into effect when they related to church affairs. Some mysterious influence was always sure to intervene". Circularised by the executive committee of the Anti-State-Church Association, its allies mustered 108 votes in the minority, Tories supporting the Government. By voting with the Tories against the third reading the voluntaries might have been able to defeat the Bill, but the legal opinion that the clauses of the 1840 Act, which the amendment would have left unrepealed, would be nugatory, precluded this drastic step.[2]

1. ibid., 26 February 1851 p. 157, 8 December 1852 p. 957.
2. ibid., 9 March 1853 p. 189, 23 March 1853 pp. 229, 238-9, 13 April 1853 pp. 298-9. E.R., 5s., vol. V, 1853, pp. 507-9. Minute Book ....., vol. 2, pp. 476-7, 478. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 125, 486-506.

Both church-rates and the Maynooth endowment were discussed during the session. Overall, the Nonconformist felt that things had gone satisfactorily. The presence of the Nonconformist Members had tapped the latent liberalism of the House, and in the debates on the ecclesiastical items in the miscellaneous estimates, it was gratifying that Nonconformists were not the only, nor the chief speakers.[1] There had been no obstructive motions, no boring speeches, but anti-state-church principles had been enunciated at every favourable opportunity.[2]

There had been more positive successes. Russell had withdrawn his Borough Education Bill, realising that if he pressed it, the anti-state-education Nonconformists would be forced into an opposition which could bring the Administration down. Other pieces of legislative mischief were prevented. Ministers abandoned the Edinburgh and Canongate Annuity Tax Abolition Bill, because of the "vigilance and activity of the few out-and-out Voluntaries". Despite its acceptance by Edinburgh Dissenters, this compromise settlement of the long dispute over a local tax for the maintenance of ministers of the Church of Scotland, violated the voluntary principle too much for the rigid Englishmen. The Anti-State-Church Association circularised M.P.s, and many were persuaded to attend the debate who would otherwise have stayed away. Seconded by Hadfield, and supported by Miall, J.B.Smith moved the postponement of the second reading for six months, and despite

1. Miall told the executive committee that during the course of the discussion, "..... opinions & declarations had been elicited ..... indicative of the progress which the views held by this Association are making in the House of Commons". The committee had initiated the discussion, and circularised Liberal M.P.s beforehand. Minute Book ....., vol. 2, pp. 487, 489.
2. N., 25 May 1853 p. 409, 24 August 1853 p. 669.

the opposition of Ministers, won their point.[1]

Finally, there was the Burials Bill. This had passed through the Lords, and was Molesworth's responsibility in the Commons. Dissenters objected to the placing of "every arrangement relating to the opening of new Cemeteries under the despotic and irresponsible control of the Bishops". Local boards had to obtain episcopal permission before opening a cemetery, a portion of which had to be consecrated, although the grounds were to be provided at the cost of the ratepayers. Bishops were to supervise by-laws, as far as they affected funerals of Churchmen, and to negotiate compensation for clergy deprived of fees. Whilst it was obligatory to build a chapel for the exclusive use of Churchmen, the erection of one for other denominations was optional. Here was a Bill originating in the Lords, demonstrating that "the mitre is too powerful in this country for common-sense and proper feeling". The executive committee of the Anti-State-Church Association protested,

> ..... against the design evidenced by this bill of making the proposed cemeteries appendages to the Church Establishment, and sources of emolument and influence to its clergy and bishops, as well as against perpetuating the exclusiveness and sectarianism which characterise the present system of sepulture in parochial grave-yards. 2

M.P.s were circularised, and a deputation from the committee, supported by dissenting Members, visited Molesworth. Concurring with their sentiments, he stated that he would not take the Bill beyond a second reading since Palmerston, then Home Secretary, intended to introduce a general measure.

1. ibid., 27 July 1853 p. 589. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 129, 446-470; Minute Book ..., vol. 2, p. 521.
2. N., 22 June 1853 p. 489, 6 July 1853 pp. 529-30, 538, 27 July 1853 p. 589, 3 August 1853 p. 619. Minute Book ...., vol. 2, pp. 521ff., 525, 527, 535, 538.

Free from much that was objectionable in its predecessor, the Government scheme still maintained the distinction between consecrated and unconsecrated ground. Miall's amendment that both portions, and the chapel, should be open to the free and indiscriminate use of all was defeated, but an acceptable compromise was proposed, giving to both parties "an expensive, but substantial, equality" - the erection of an unconsecrated chapel wherever there was a consecrated one, and the compulsory provision of unconsecrated ground.[1]

Meanwhile, steps were being taken to create a more unified dissenting organisation outside Parliament to give the voluntary M.P.s greater support. This need provided the theme of Miall's speech at the annual autumnal soiree of the Anti-State-Church Association which was attended by three M.P.s (Pellatt in the chair, Miall and Crossley). His remarks in the Nonconformist hinted at a lack of the "popular enthusiasm" displayed at similar gatherings in the past, although the electoral successes were no excuse for a relaxation of effort. Greater activity and organisation was essential if the presence of the Nonconformist Members in the House was to be effective. At this crossroads, despite apparent drift and collapse, the Association's committee was busily preparing to take a new direction. Now that the parliamentary foothold had been secured it had to give a greater political slant to its activities, had to improve its financial position, and to perfect local and central machinery. An appeal from John Carvell Williams followed, urging voluntaries to increase their subscriptions to the Association, to obtain a wider circulation for its publications, especially the "Library for the Times", and to organise themselves into local

1. Minute Book ...., vol. 2, pp. 527, 535, 538.

committees in communication with the executive committee.[1]

Unfortunately many Dissenters still felt antipathetic to the Association. On the day after the celebratory dinner a group of 60-70 prominent Dissenters, including Peto, Kershaw, Cheetham, Pellatt, Miall, Cox, Campbell, Vaughan, Dr. Reed, Henry Bateman, Swaine, Conder and William Edwards, met privately at Radley's Hotel, and discussed the propriety of launching a new organisation to further the objects in which Dissenters were interested. Forbearence and conciliation dominated as the basis and course of the Anti-State-Church Association, and the obstacles in the way of a new society were fully reviewed. A committee was appointed to confer with the Association and the Deputies to ascertain whether a united plan might be devised.[2]

On March 23rd, this committee, consisting of Cox, Dr. Foster, and Bateman, met the executive committee. Delegated to discover whether this closer union might be achieved through a union of the Association and the Deputies, or by the foundation of a completely new society, they informed the executive committee that their constituents favoured the adoption of an evangelical basis for the new movement. Struck by the nebulosity of the precise object of the original meeting, the executive committee assured the deputation that, though desirous of promoting a closer union amongst Dissenters, and willing to consider any proposals for modifying the constitution, machinery, or operations of the Association, they could not consent "to narrow its present basis, or to deviate from its avowed object, viz the creation of a public sentiment in favour of the Separation of the Church from the

1. N., 1 December 1852 pp. 937-40, 8 December 1852 p. 958.
Minute Book ...., vol. 2, p. 417.
2. N., 23 February 1853 pp. 154-5.

State".[1]

Significantly, a week after this meeting the Nonconformist informed its readers that whilst changes in method and organisation were being examined by the committee, it would be the "height of folly" to relax the Association's educational activities, or to abandon its ultimate aim in favour of minor and more immediate objectives. Re-invigoration and re-organisation were required, as was a link between the Association and the M.P.s, but there was no need to change its fundamental position.[2] More money was essential - in April Edwards lent £550 to meet the debts of the publishing department, whilst the income on the general account from May 1852 - May 1853 was only £1278/15/5, with a mere £925/13/10 from donations and subscriptions, a decline of over £500 from the peak years of 1849-51. Admittedly £655/3s. had been donated to the publications fund but these financial difficulties, and the evidence of declining confidence they provided, must have made the executive committee more amenable to change. To allow time for thought and discussion the triennial conference was postponed to the autumn.[3] It is possible that the results of the 1852 election, and the consequent boost to dissenting morale and political activity, saved the Association from collapse.

Unfortunately, the Minutes merely record that the proposed constitutional and name changes were debated, so it is impossible to ascertain the arguments used to justify them.[4]

1. Minute Book ....., vol. 2, pp. 475-6, 480.
2. N., 30 March 1853 p. 249.
3. Minute Book ....., vol. 2, pp. 464, 474, 478, 488, 511-2.
4. ibid., there was discussion on the proposed name change, the new scheme of organisation, and the revised constitution on 7 October, 19 October, 26 October, but conference arrangements had occupied the committee's attention from August.

All we have are the columns of the Nonconformist, and these, designed for general consumption, do not contain the more expedient reasons. On 27th July the Council met to make the preliminary arrangements for the triennial conference, and a "strong desire" was expressed

> ..... that efforts should be made to secure the attendance of influential gentlemen who have not hitherto connected themselves with the movement, there being a readiness to introduce such modifications in the society's plans as may remove objections without departing from its object, or depriving it of its unsectarian character..... 1

With the conference promising to be the most momentous in the Association's history, Nonconformist readers were urged to select their delegates and attend, despite the difficulties of the season, despite the secession of prominent men in recent years, offended by its articles, or because of their altered views on the means to the desired end. At least they did not have to commence a new movement, the tide of opinion favoured the Association's principles, and an election under a new reform bill would make the Association national. They were "three parts up the hill Difficulty"; once the summit was reached, "our course will be far easier than it hitherto has been from the first.....". The Association's efficiency had to be improved to capitalise on this drift in opinion. In this new situation the attitudes of 1844 had to be replaced by magnanimity and forbearence. A well attended conference would effect the necessary changes, but there could be no deferment of the Association's object, no relaxation of its principles, although all modifications of form,

> ..... which may have the effect of obviating prejudice, closing up breaches, removing misapprehensions, conciliating respect, increasing internal strength, easing external operations, or

1. N., 3 August 1853 p. 609.

> bringing moral strength to bear upon the Legislature of the country, will ..... be readily adopted.....

Three critical issues had to be decided. Firstly, had the divisions caused by Papal Aggression within the ranks of the Association's supporters healed? Secondly, could Dissenters forget their petty disagreements and coalesce on the principles of the Association, the Nonconformist predicting that ".....a wise and forbearing course of conduct in regard to these minor differences of view and feeling, will be followed by a rapid expansion of the power and numbers of the Association....". Thirdly, could the Association stimulate and exploit the changing opinions in Parliament and country?. Its machinery needed modification to bring the "susceptibility of Parliament" and the "enlightened liberality of the people" together. Properly effected this would lay the foundation of a triumphant future. The only alternative to this reorganisation was decline in influence and usefulness.[1]

Additional encouragement was given by a circular signed by many leading Dissenters, several of whom were previously unconnected with the Association. Reiterating many of the Nonconformist's arguments, they concluded that, without restricting the catholic basis of the Association, or putting its ultimate end in abeyance,

> ..... such modifications of the machinery and modes of action may be defined, as will obviate the objections, and secure the co-operation, of large and important sections of the community, already one with it in principle, ... [2]

Such was the general air of conciliation, that Miall

1. ibid., 28 September 1853 p. 769, 5 October 1853 p. 789, 26 October 1853 p. 857.
2. ibid., 5 October 1853 p. 790, 12 October 1853 pp. 809-10 (270 signatures by this time), 19 October 1853 pp. 829-30. The executive committee also sent out deputations to explain the object of the conference to the Association's followers as they selected their delegates.

opened the columns of the Nonconformist to its readers to discuss a proposal that its name should be changed, to make it less offensive to its opponents and to Churchmen, and to enable it to shake of the sectarian label which prevented it from becoming the journal of the radical working men. Correspondence, pro and con, continued for seven weeks, the editor then giving a negative decision.[1]

About 400 delegates attended the conference. Miall, Pellatt, and Bell were the only M.P.s present, although Hadfield, Crossley, and William Biggs (the Leicester Unitarian and Member for Newport, I.o.W.) sent their apologies. Nevertheless, the Nonconformist's reporter felt that the presence of Morley and Baines "held out hopes that many gentlemen of position and wealth who have hitherto refrained from active co-operation, will give the society their future support". After the secretary had read the report, Edwards presented a financial statement, and Kingsley described his activities in Lancashire and Yorkshire. The conference then began its real business.

"Society for the Separation of Church and State" was the officially proposed new title. Miall explained that the committee, desirous of adapting the society to the exigencies of the time, were ready to make changes to meet the objections of those who had stood aloof, though holding the same principles. The old name was a non-essential, and, since it excited prejudice the committee were willing to abandon it; it was, moreover, a negative title, and something more positive was desirable. A change would, it was hoped, relieve Churchmen of their misconception that the society was directly hostile to their Church. The Revs. Henry Toller and J.E.Giles

1. ibid., 7 September 1853 p. 718 - 2 November 1853 p. 877.

moved the retention of the old name, claiming that it was explicit, that the Association would recruit support as the climate of opinion changed, and that alteration would cause confusion. Evidence was presented by Kingsley that the old name had discouraged many influential men, for, in Manchester, an intimation that a change was being considered had had a good effect, whilst John Blackburn, the critic of 1844, stated that though his views had altered, though the improved gentlemanly and christian tone of the Nonconformist indicated the new temper of the leading members of the Association, he could not become a member whilst its name implied an aggressive stance towards the Church of England. Baines, feeling that the proposed title was not comprehensive enough, that more was involved than the Church of England, that the image of striking off a fetter in the interests of religion was required, proposed "The Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Connexion". The issue was hotly debated, but in the evening session Miall intimated that if Baines' amendment - "Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control" - were carried, the committee would accept the decision of the meeting. There was a large majority in its favour.[1]

The basis of the society was made wider than before, since Dr. Foster moved the excision of the second clause of the Constitution which would have given a religious definition of its principles. This amendment was carried, and the Nonconformist enthused over the conference's "wise liberality."

> ..... It has declared any statement or definition of its principles as unnecessary and restrictive - unnecessary, because the title of the society, and the specification of its object, sufficiently describe its work - restrictive,

1. ibid., 9 November 1853 pp. 897-904.

> because it is impossible to clothe an abstract principle in terms which will not exclude many who nevertheless concur in the political end to be sought. The effect of this will be that men of different creeds will not be invited to act together professing a common religious motive. They will combine to accomplish an end in which they concur, without asking or offering the reasons which prompt them to desire it. They will subscribe to no doctrine. They will neither avow nor imply mutual religious sympathies. They will be no more responsible for each other's faith, than they would be in signing a petition to the Houses of Parliament. They associate for the simple purpose of effecting ..... a certain change in the laws affecting the relation of the State to religious bodies - and every individual is left to the free guidance of whatever motive may have most influence over him..... 1

On the second day Miall read a long paper on "the prospects and duties of the Society in relation to the House of Commons and its Constituent Bodies". He spoke of the gradually changing temper of the House on religious liberty questions, though warning that it was still too early to move a substantive motion. He explained the policy that had been adopted by the voluntary M.P.s, and the immediate results of their "tuitional efforts", describing the variety of ecclesiastical parties in the Commons. The Society needed to establish a link between it and the anti-state-church Members, and to cultivate its influence in the constituencies to increase their number. The formation of two standing committees was proposed, made up of a majority of men not members of the executive committee. They would meet when necessary, sitting on the executive when matters concerning their department were dealt with. A parliamentary committee would look after business in the two Houses, receive all Parliamentary Papers, and examine all bills, its decisions carrying the full sanction of the Society. Providing information for M.P.s, it would ensure attendance at debates and

1. ibid., pp. 897, 904.

divisions, and, "generally charging themselves with the task of aiding to bring about in the House a well-defined, well-matured, and pre-concerted course of action on ecclesiastical topics", the committee would impress on the proceedings of the voluntary party "that continuity, persistency, and unity of design, which they have hitherto wanted, and which it is impossible, or at all events, extremely difficult, to bring about by direct organisation". A Reform Bill was expected, and the electoral committee's task was to prepare for the election that would follow it, capitalising on the extension of the franchise to return more anti-state-churchmen to Parliament. Extended operations necessitated a consequent increase in expenditure and income - Miall suggested that the latter should be £5000 a year. Approving of the scheme, the conference authorised the executive to appoint chairmen to the sub-committees.[1]

Predictably, the Patriot welcomed the change of name; it clarified the objects of the Society, and was a natural conciliatory step. On the other hand, the Eclectic seconded Toller's objections, doubting whether this minor alteration would have the desired effect, similar societies with less obnoxious names having been ostracised in the past. Modification was designed to "remove all reasonable grounds of objection which have hitherto separated men who ..... aim at the same great result", and the Nonconformist hoped that the moderation of the conference would be responded to.[2]

The Society's circle of support did widen. An improved income was the first priority, and friends were asked to

1. ibid., pp. 904-9.
2. P., 7 November 1853 pp. 732-3. E.R., 5s., vol. VI, 1853, pp. 770-1. N., 9 November 1853 p. 897.

increase their subscription from the customary guinea to £100, £50, £20, £10, or £5; a spontaneous response, without waiting for a formal application, would be a vote of confidence in the executive committee and the Society.[1] Meanwhile, the committee was planning a canvass of the metropolis, hoping to raise £1000 before turning to the provinces. Morley's co-operation was solicited, and he suggested that "gentlemen who would be likely to head a subscription list" might be invited to a dinner party, John Remington Mills and Joshua Wilson being asked to unite in the invitation. This fell through, Mills declining to subscribe until a provincial appeal had been opened. Consequently, on 1st February a private soiree, chaired by Morley, was held at the London Tavern. Attended by about 50 people, nearly £500 was promised, the Nonconformist being particularly struck by the high scale of the contributions, and by the presence of several new adherents; clearly the recent changes "have told, and are telling, effectively on the minds of many whose co-operation until now it has sought in vain to enlist.....". Seven M.P.s were present (Kershaw, Bright, Barnes, Crossley, Bell, Pellatt, and Miall), and letters of support were read from five others (Sir James Anderson, Scholefield, Biggs, Heyworth, and Hadfield). At a public soiree held in March to raise more subscriptions and to petition on the Universities question, another £800 was promised, mostly in three year subscriptions. Heyworth chaired the meeting, and Peto, Pilkington, Milligan and Murrough were amongst the M.P.s present, or who wrote letters. Blackburn attended.[2]

1. N., 16 November 1853 p. 917.
2. ibid., 8 February 1854 pp. 109-10, 15 March 1854 pp. 217-9. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 8, 14, 26-7, 39. Mills gave £50 for three years in August, p. 101.

By the end of the month, the canvass was moving out into the provinces, and here the change in methods became apparent. There were far fewer of those excitable public meetings, and more privately convened gatherings, at which the deputation explained the alterations effected by the conference, and what was being done, particularly in the political sphere. It was much more respectable, and designed to appeal to the susceptibilities of the wealthier Dissenters who had stood aloof for so long. Together with the name change it had its effect. There were "a considerable number of new faces" on the platform at the public meeting in May, and H.O.Wills of Bristol was not alone when he told a private meeting there, that "while he had felt unable to connect himself with the society in former times, he was now ready to avow that he felt that they were under great obligations to the society under its new name.....".[1]

Income never reached £5000, but there was a substantial improvement, from £1789/16/11d. in May 1854, to £3,126/4/6d. a year later, (£2,550/0/1d. in subscriptions), and to £3,208/1/8d. in 1856. It was a considerable achievement to have raised the income to this level, and to have maintained it in the war years. At the triennial conference in 1856, Edwards asked for another £1000 per annum.[2]

Although Dr. C.J.Foster (Professor of Jurisprudence and Roman Law at University College, 1849-58) was appointed chairman of the parliamentary sub-committee at the end of January, immediately beginning his work at a salary of £300 a year, the selection of his committee was delayed whilst

1. ibid., 10 May 1854 p. 389, 21 November 1855 p. 838.
2. ibid., 10 May 1854 p. 388, 9 May 1855 p. 360, 8 May 1856 pp. 310, 313.

negotiations took place with the Deputies, through Morley, to ascertain the possibility of "a union or co-operation between that body & the Parliamentary Sub-committee". The Deputies' committee lingered over their reply, eventually declining any amalgamation, since, "it was not clear that they could obtain any advantage from the proposed union, tho' they were prepared for joint action in particular cases, where a temporary organization, uniting all dissenting bodies, might at certain times be desirable". They thought that the Society could render service at elections by supplying candidates, and that free communication between the two bodies might at all times be beneficial, "the Deputies as representing the Metropolis & the Society the Provinces".[1] This rather condescending response arrived long after the sub-committee had commenced its task, though the challenge may have stimulated the Deputies to greater exertions, the Eclectic remarking on their renewed vigour.[2]

An additional boost received by the Liberation Society before the opening of the 1854 session, was the publiciation of The Report of the Census of Religious Provision and Worship, made in 1851. Giving "tardy but full justice" to the dissenting denominations, it exploded the myth that the Established Church was co-extensive with the people.

> ..... a religious Establishment which does but half the spiritual work of the nation, and that the lesser half, is an anomaly which no sophistry can defend once the facts of the case are thoroughly known.

Other facts, all condemnatory of the state church system, could be deduced from the Report. It proved the voluntary system to be the best means of satisfying the religious

1. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 39, 47, 87. Manning, B.L.: The Protestant Dissenting Deputies, pp. 393-4.
2. E.R., 5s., vol. VII, 1854, p. 378.

wants of the people, since the non-endowed sects had outstripped the Established Church in meeting them, at a lower cost, and with greater efficiency. The evidence from Wales effectively disproved the claim that only an establishment could make adequate provision for religious needs in rural areas.[1]

This was an opportunity not to be neglected. A sub-committee recommended that a small volume be produced, "with a view to making it (the Report) as conduicive as possible to the advancement of the Society's views". It also proposed the circulation of the general results of the Census "in a popular form" through a four page tract, which could be stitched into selected monthly periodicals. The information provided was so valuable, the implications so obvious, that they felt it wise to abandon any idea of making a profit by its sale, "the utmost efforts which the Society's resources will justify being put forth to make so important a document subservient to its purpose". By mid-February, Thomas Plint of Leeds had agreed to prepare the book at a fee of £30, and it was decided to print 50,000 copies of the tract to be circulated to subscribers, to the press, and stitched in magazines at a cost of £54/3s.[2]

An electoral sub-committee was not set up until the spring of 1855, but already the Liberation Society was carving a new role for itself as the main national organiser of dissenting opinion, and although its primary object was kept in view, it began to lead movements against other

1. N., 4 January 1854 pp. 1-2, 18 January 1854 p. 49, 1 February 1854 p. 89.
2. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 32, 43-4, 46. The Ecclesiastical Census of 1851, and its Results. Occasional Paper, No. 1. of the Society for the Liberation of Religion ....., (1854). Voluntaryism in England and Wales; or the Census of 1851, (London, 1854).

grievances - the University tests and church rates - as well as examining the ecclesiastical aspects of legislation. The Society came to adopt many of the methods of the old Religious Freedom Society, welcoming enquiries on church rate and burial board questions, and issuing handbooks of advice on both subjects.[1] Campaigns in Parliament, campaigns in the country, were all guided from the offices in Ludgate Hill with considerable skill. The single-mindedness of the forties and early fifties had been sloughed off, and a new catholicity, a new confidence, acquired.

At the end of its first year, the Society could point to one resounding success - the ending of tests at Oxford for the Bachelor's degree. As early as 1852, following the publication of the Report of the Oxford University Commission, Miall had described University reform as "the most promising, practical, Dissenting question", which, if resolved, would shake the establishment system. Were the Universities freely open to the Dissenters, "the Separation of Church and State becomes only a question of time ....."

> ..... If episcopacy ceases to have exclusive right to the use of the enormous endowments for educational purposes, and is despoiled of its usurped but now distinctive privileges in the distribution of learned honours, and the keeping of the chief entrances to the professions, then it will lose its right arm of worldly power; the prestige now attaching to it will be gone; its social glory will have departed.....

University reform, then, was "emphatically an Anti-State-Church question", offering one of the most assailable and indefensible points of the Establishment for attack. It

1. Wills, A.: A Treatise on the Powers and Duties of Parish Vestries in Ecclesiastical Matters: being a Vestryman's Guide, (1855). Practical Directions to the Opponents of Church-rates, (1855). Burial Grounds and Burial Boards: or, the New Acts regulating Interments, as they affect Dissenters, with Practical Hints for their Guidance, (1855).

ought to be "agitated throughout the Dissenting communities, as a question belonging peculiarly to them, and on which they may and ought at once to take action".[1]

Eighteen months later, asserting that every opportunity of extending religious liberty had to be used, the Nonconformist was still arguing with those Dissenters who regarded an agitation for the removal of the tests as inexpedient. There was no analogy between demanding University reform by the State, and opposing national education aided by it. It was true that once the Universities were open to all, Dissent might lose more by the defection of young men to the Establishment, than it would gain academically, but this was a selfish argument. In 1850 Dissenters had been urged to agitate the question as a "Protestant duty", relieving the country of "the chief seat of Romanizing teachings". A few secessions were a small price to pay if the "great ecclesiastical marshes" of Oxford and Cambridge, continually emitting "a miasma of the most deleterious kind to the nation at large", were to be drained "of their stagnant waters". Ecclesiastical exclusiveness would be humiliated, "the prestige of bigotry" destroyed, and public opinion liberalised.[2]

A Government bill to reform Oxford University was anticipated, and at its second meeting, on 28th February, the parliamentary sub-committee of the Liberation Society recommended to the executive the immediate commencement of an agitation, "having for its object the admission of

1. N., 22 September 1852 p. 737. A series of articles based on the Report followed.
2. ibid., 18 December 1850 p. 1019, 8 March 1854 p. 197. E.R., 5s., vol. V, 1853, pp. 451-2 for a similar view.

dissenters to the Universities, with full enjoyment of advantages attached to them". A series of resolutions, adopted as the basis for action, should be published, forms of petition circulated, pressure put on the press to ensure that the issue was fairly discussed, and the Society's tract, The Public Right to the Universities, distributed. Within a week the sub-committee was making arrangements for the advertisement of the resolutions.[1]

Apparently the Parliamentary Committee of M.P.s did not expect a successful outcome to the campaign, although it was generally agreed that it would be wrong to allow the occasion to pass without some statement of the dissenting position. One member of the Committee was reported as saying of the abolition of tests,

> It will be done, it will be done sometime or other, there is no doubt of that; but you and I shall not live to see it.

On 3rd March a deputation of M.P.s visited Russell with a memorial, signed by about a hundred of their colleagues, on the admission of Dissenters to the Universities. Some dissenting organs got the impression from his reply, that although the cabinet would not propose the ending of tests at Oxford, they would not oppose an amendment moved by an independent Member. The Nonconformist, and Miall was a member of the deputation, reported Russell's concurrence with the dissenting viewpoint, and his intimation that the Government's Bill would contain no concession to it, but not the suggestion that Government would accept an amendment. The voluntary M.P.s and their allies, it reported, intended to

1. Minutes of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee of the Liberation Society, (volume in Greater London Record Office, reference A/LIB/13), 28 February, 7 March 1854.

support the second reading, attempting to get an amendment inserted in committee, and, if this failed to vote for or against the third reading according to their own discretion.[1]

The bill contained no reference to the test issue. Indignantly, Miall, Blackett, and Heywood raised the question in the House - how could Russell talk of making the University more available to all when five million Dissenters were still to be excluded?[2] Heywood's first motion was for a select committee of inquiry. This was lost by 172-90, the Nonconformist pouring scorn on those Dissenters and Liberals who had scurried into the lobbies with the majority to prevent a ministerial defeat. As Hadfield pointedly asked the House,

> What was this bill to him, or to those who, for 150 years and more, had been excluded from the Universities?

One third of the population could not be ignored to meet cabinet convenience, or to satisfy episcopal intolerance. Heywood's firmness, however, had good effect, Miall noticing a more accommodating ministerial tone, and, with the liberal side of the House likely to support Heywood's next amendments, chances of success were bright. This was partially attributable to the determination of Dissenters not to allow themselves "to be coolly set at naught with impunity", and partially, "to the readiness with which the call of the Liberation of Religion Society to petition has been responded to by the country.....".[3]

Another commentator assured his readers that the

1. E.R., 5s., vol. IX, 1855, p. 112. N., 8 March 1854, p. 197. Ward, W.R.: Victorian Oxford, (London, 1965), p. 197-8.
2. N., 15 March 1854 p. 217, 22 March 1854 pp. 246-7. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, 131, 911-4, 933-5.
3. N., 3 May 1854 pp. 374-5. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, vol. 132, 959-60.

successful outcome of the campaign was "due entirely to the courage of the Liberation Society, in resolving to conduct (it) ..... on its own responsibility, on the principle of going in to win .....", and, in particular, "to the untiring diligence of the Chairman of the parliamentary committee". Before the end of March 4000 circulars, containing forms of petition and the Members' memorial to Russell, had been sent to nearly every Baptist, Independent, and Unitarian minister in England and Wales. Communication was opened with the Baptist and Congregational Unions, and letters sent to leading Liberals throughout the country who were likely to organise petitions, to write to their representatives, or to influence the local press. There was no locality "in which a batch of Dissenters were not informed of and induced to use some precise mode of attack which they had specially in their power". Dissenting journals felt that the impact of all this on the liberal M.P.s was decisive.[1] Heywood worked closely with Foster and the parliamentary sub-committee, asking them to organise a London public meeting in support of his amendments. This meeting, planned for 21st June, was not held because of complications in the parliamentary time-table.[2]

In committee, his amendment for the abolition of tests at matriculation was carried by 91 votes, whilst that for open admission to all degrees was lost by 9 votes. The cabinet then agreed to accept an amendment on the third reading, allowing admission to the Bachelor's degree without tests. This success, in the same week as the narrow defeat of Clay's

1. E.R., 5s., vol. VIII, 1854, p. 245; vol. IX, 1855, pp. 112-3. N., 28 June 1854 p. 525.
2. Minutes of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee ....., 8 June 1854. G.Wilson Papers, J.Heywood to G.Wilson, 2 June 1854.

Church-Rate Abolition Bill, was greeted enthusiastically by the Nonconformist as indicative of the new power of Dissent, and of what might be done if organisation was maintained.

> ..... We are no longer an inert, inorganic mass which every politician could desire to use, and could afford to despise. Our principles have become a power. Our will passes for something better than 'sound and fury, signifying nothing!. We may be unequal yet to seize the helm of legislation - but even now, that helm visibly answers to our pressure. Something has been done - but only just enough to prove what might be done, if our resolution were equal to our opportunity, and our combination were general, frank, sincere, and hearty.

In Parliament, Dissenters had sat silent as other Members advocated their cause, again demonstrating that, "..... the prevailing sentiment of the House is far more nearly in accordance with the doctrine of religious equality, even as we understand it, than has been generally supposed .....". As for the cabinet, not only had they over-estimated Lordly prejudices (their House granted the bill an easy passage), but had "made a mistake in ignoring the dissenters altogether in the Oxford bill", a mistake which had rebounded against them, forcing retreat, humiliation, and loss of prestige.[1]

Cambridge University reform came under the purview of the parliamentary sub-committee and their Commons allies in 1855 and 1856. Like all Whig reform schemes, the 1855 bill was "a compromise which combines a minimum of real improvement, with a maximum of delusive pretence .....". Expecting something in advance of the Oxford bill, Dissenters were offered no more, although the Nonconformist argued that the principle recognised then, that all tests before degrees which did not confer governmental rights within the University should be abolished, ought to extend to Cambridge, and

1. N., 28 June 1854 pp. 524, 535, 5 July 1854 p. 533. G.Wilson Papers, J.Heywood to G.Wilson, 1 June 1854.

its "inceptive M.A.".[1] Church rates abolition occupied the attention of the sub-committee, and little was done. The bill was later withdrawn. The 1856 edition was equally obnoxious. Admitted to the Master's degree, Dissenters were to be excluded from the privileges it conferred unless they subscribed. Heywood was to move the withdrawal of this clause, his supporters agreeing to oppose the third reading if defeated. In fact, the voluntaries won a series of victories. Clauses were inserted abolishing tests as a qualification for scholarships or exhibitions, and an amendment, allowing Nonconformist M.A.s to become members of Senate, was carried against the Government. Heywood, however, dropped an amendment opening all offices, except clerical ones, to dissenting graduates, on the Government plea that its inclusion would endanger the bill in the Lords. This was regretted, and needless, for they threw out his earlier amendment; the dissenting press demanded the revised bill's rejection by the Commons.[2]

Church rates had been a dead parliamentary issue for several years, gradually reviving as Dissenters began to enter the Commons, after 1847. The Deputies had attempted to raise the matter in 1848, but it proved difficult to find an M.P. willing or able enough to act as their spokesman. The following year, Sir J.Trelawney, acting for the Deputies, moved an anti-rate motion, and was defeated. Russell's presence amongst his opponents, volunteering "the second-hand absurdity, that church-rates should continue to be enforced as a great national homage to religion", was an ominous sign.

1. N., 2 May 1855 p. 337.
2. ibid., 18 June 1856 p. 433, 25 June 1856 pp. 462-3, 9 July 1856 p. 493. Minutes of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee ...., 4, 11 April 1856. The committee had assisted Heywood's efforts, in 1855, to obtain a committee of inquiry into ways of opening the Universities and public schools more widely to the people. (Minute Book of the Executive Committee ....., p. 152).

Trelawney failed to obtain time for his motion in 1850, but the next session, aided by the extensive propaganda of the Deputies, he did secure the appointment of a Committee of the House on church rates. The Deputies assisted him in the preparation of evidence, the Anti-State-Church Association co-operating in this work. No report was published, though Trelawney prepared an analysis of the evidence which the Deputies printed.[1]

Trelawney lost his seat at the general election, but the Deputies soon found a successor in Sir William Clay. He was forestalled by J.G.Phillimore who sought leave to introduce a bill which would have exempted Dissenters from liability to pay the rate, without abolishing it. Clay moved his abolition scheme as an amendment. The Anti-State-Church Association and the Deputies attempted to rouse the Dissenters in support. Phillimore's plan was objected to by Miall and Pellatt in the debate, and by the Nonconformist, on anti-state-church grounds. The price of escaping from the burdens of a vexatious tax, was the renunciation of a right to any part or portion of the country's ecclesiastical wealth. With all dissentients cast out of the Church, "..... the entire property which she now enjoys, by virtue of her nationality, will remain as the exclusive possession of such as have not registered themselves as Dissenters .....". Indeed, the Church could not lose, for if few registered, the majority would have no excuse for refusing payment.

> ..... The possible settlement of the State-church controversy is not so very remote as to authorize Dissenters thus to alienate from themselves all rightfull interest in Church

1. Manning B.L.: The Protestant Dissenting Deputies, pp. 190-1. N., 21 March 1849 pp. 217-8, 21 May 1851 pp. 397-8. Minute Book ....., vol. 2, p. 223.

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Both motions were defeated, Phillimore being supported by the Government and the Conservatives, Clay being defeated by a combination of Whigs, Peelites and Conservatives, although some members of the Ministry voted in the minority of 172. Russell's inconsistency in opposing Clay was reproved by Bright during the debate; it was, remarked the Eclectic, "fatal to the reputation and power of a liberal statesman". There was, however, consolation in the division amongst Ministers - public feeling was ready for a change in the law, and it would soon become an open question in cabinet.[2]

Much of the reluctance to agitate church rates stemmed from uncertainties in the law, the Braintree case plodding through the courts until 1853. In 1847, Denman, in Queen's bench, upheld the right of a minority in a vestry meeting to levy a rate. Three years latter the judges in the Exchequer Court endorsed this judgement by 4 - 3. At least, conjectured the Nonconformist, this decision would arouse the Dissenters of the great towns, who, having abolished the local rate in the distant past, had relapsed into an apathetic neutrality on the establishment question. Then, in 1853, the law Lords decided against the right of the minority to lay the rate, thus rejoiced the Nonconformist, foreseeing agitations in every parish still paying the tax, knocking "the last spark of vitality" out of it. A piece of plate was presented to Samuel Courtauld, who had sustained the battle since 1837, but the most suitable testimonial would be adoption of the

1. Manning B.L.: op. cit., pp. 191-2. N., 2 March 1853 p. 312, 27 April 1853 p. 329, 11 May 1853 p. 369. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, vol. 127, 618-24. Minute Book ....., vol. 2, p. 489.
2. E.R., 5s., vol. VI, 1853, pp. 96-100. N., 1 June 1853 pp. 430, 438-9.

"Courtauld weapon" by Dissenters, restored to their full rights in the vestry. It was a power to be used, and there was a renewed vigour in the parishes after the Lords' pronouncement, "Our Church-rate Record" becoming a regular Nonconformist feature.[1]

Together with the Census revelations, this gave Clay more ammunition when he again moved for abolition in 1854. A Government measure was anticipated, but the Parliamentary Committee of M.P.s inquired in vain as to its contents. Meanwhile, the Nonconformist Members opposed Blandford's Capitular and Episcopal Estates Bill, arguing that it appropriated to the augmentation of small livings a surplus that could be adopted as the substitute for church rates.[2] Clay's bill was for abolition, but C.W.Packe, M.P. for South Leicestershire, drafted a compromise, allowing those who registered themselves as Dissenters with a J.P. to be exempted from the rate for service expenses, remaining liable for the repair of the parish church. This "magnificant" privilege after a crawl "through the dust of self-humiliation", was totally unacceptable to the Dissenters. Carvell Williams predicted the continuance of bitter vestry struggles, and the persecution of those who registered in rural areas, urging them to petition in support of Clay, and to write to their representatives. Clay's bill had been drafted at a Parliamentary Committee meeting, both the Liberation Society and the Deputies being represented.[3]

There was a prompt response to the Liberation Society's

1. N., 17 February 1847 p. 93, 30 January 1851 p. 81, 17 August 1853 p. 649, 26 September 1855 pp. 714-5, 3 October 1855 p. 725.
2. ibid., 8 March 1854 p. 197, 5 April 1854 p. 286. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd series, vol. 133, 487.
3. N., 17 May 1854 pp. 406-7, 24 May 1854 p. 425. Minutes of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee ....., 11 May 1854.

appeal for petitions, and to the general surprise of his supporters, Clay obtained leave to bring in his bill, despite Russell's opposition. Steps were taken by the parliamentary sub-committee to obtain fair coverage for the dissenting case in the press, and to influence M.P.s. In the week of the triumph on the tests, the second reading was lost by a mere 27 votes. There was matter in both debates which augured well for the future. True, Russell and Palmerston had gone into the opposing lobby, the former's speech on the first motion being "an essentially Tory plea", but whilst Gladstone's vote was hostile, his speech was sympathetic. Only 8 members of the Government voted against the second reading with 22 abstentions; 143 Liberals were absent, and constituents were urged to ascertain why. There was sufficient encouragement to justify a vigorous assault in 1855.[1]

Reviewing policy for the new session, the parliamentary sub-committee,

> Agreed that the entire force of the Society should be directed upon the Anti-church-rate movement, assuming that Sir W.Clay's bill can either be carried this session or so advanced as to secure its principles being adopted by the legislature - that the other matters be duly laid before Parlt as occasion opportunity serve, but that they be not pressed forward pending the Ch. Rate discussion.

The executive committee was recommended to engage Alfred Wills to write the Church Rates Manual, ensuring its publication before the Easter vestries, to distribute a circular to supporters explaining what was intended, to organise a press campaign, petitions and letters to Members, "especially from

1. N., 24 May 1854 p. 435, 31 May 1854 p. 445, 446, 28 June 1854 p. 526. E.R., 5s., vol. VII, 1854, pp. 759-60; vol. VIII, pp. 116-8. Minutes of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee ....., 25 May 1854, 8 June 1854, when it was "Reported that an analysis of the division list showed that it was possible to read Sir W. Clay's bill 2nd time against both government & opposition, but that all depended upon the action of the Constituencies".

the more moderate dissenters", and to encourage vestry contests.[1]

A Society circular of the previous August, had already advocated the multiplication of vestry contests, even in places where success seemed unlikely, as a means of preparing the ground for the re-introduction of Clay's bill in 1855, promising pamphlets and a legal handbook for those engaged in the struggle. Acknowledging the unpleasantness of stirring up parochial animosity, the Nonconformist seconded this appeal, there being indications that prominent politicians would adopt an abolitionist stance if sufficient pressure were exerted.[2]

As the year opened, dissenting Members were reminded of the need to oppose Blandford's bill, and, dismissing the argument that agitation ought to be postponed for the duration of the Crimean War, the Nonconformist prepared its readers for a church-rates campaign, even before the Liberation Society had made its final decision.[3] The times were peculiarly propitious. Party confusion made the Commons more accessible to constituency pressure, and the individual Member, conscious of the proximity of a general election, more amenable to dissenting demands. Since the prospects of a majority were good, Miall anticipated that the Palmerston Administration, unable to afford the humiliation of defeat on a minor issue whilst fighting a war, would be neutral, or give active support. The war provided additional arguments for abolition - all causes of internal strife needed eliminating, whilst the removal of this drain on their

1. Minutes of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee ....., 5, 20 February 1855. The next entry is for 14 February 1856.
2. N., 2 August 1854 p. 633.
3. ibid., 3 January 1855 pp. 1-2, 17 January 1855 p. 41.

resources would induce men to contribute gladly to the increased taxation it entailed. All the signs, after the failure of the aristocratic military machine, were favourable for an attack on another bastion of privilege, the breakdown in the Crimea necessitating "some show of modesty and conciliation in ecclesiastical economy .....".

It was essential to act before the prestige acquired in 1854 was tarnished, and before a less satisfactory settlement was secured by some other party. Abolition, bringing peace to the disturbed parishes, would also "render insecure a number of reprehensible customs of politico-ecclesiastical administration, which are in some respects analogous to, as well as interlaced with it .....". Certainly, there were more important questions to deal with, but, in tones very different from those which had condemned the "practical men" of 1841, the Nonconformist concluded,

> ..... we can best settle this question now - and hence our earnestness in insisting on it. We do not counsel the neglect of other things - but merely their present subordination to the main duty of the day. What we urge is, a concentration of energy on this one point whilst opportunity favours ..... [1]

Reaction in the provinces was crucial; the country Dissenters had to pressurise the Commons, their own representatives, and the Church. Public meetings were unimportant, but well organised local abolition committees, in connection with the Liberation Society, were essential. A circular gave advice on petitions, on the need to write to M.P.s, and on the conduct of vestry contests. Wills's book appeared before Easter, and a new issue of bills and tracts was published. Contests would highlight the grievance, and specific

1. ibid., 31 January 1855 p. 77, 7 February 1855 p. 97, 20 March 1855 p. 217, 18 April 1855.p. 297.

reference to them in petitions was recommended.[1]

Response was good, hopes of success delusive. Clay's majority on the motion for leave to proceed with the bill was large (155-76), and encouraged dreams of abolition during the session. Palmerston assented to its introduction; ministerial support seemed assured. The Nonconformist warned against complacency, advising Dissenters to exert pressure on those Liberals who, although favouring abolition, doubted the efficacy of the voluntary principle to fill the gap it would leave. Actively pursued this could make success more certain. Clay, "a zealous ..... a most judicious leader", had made the initial breakthrough. It would be the fault of Dissenters if they failed to take advantage of the strong parliamentary position to which he had led them.[2]

The second reading, on 16th May, was also carried (217-189), an affirmation by the Commons of the principle of total and immediate abolition. The majority was, however, smaller than anticipated, whilst Palmerston had spoken and voted against the bill. Russell had supported him, but the premier had "reaped his reward in a shameful, and, we believe, unexpected defeat". Government opposition was abandoned, but the bill did not receive a third reading, Clay being thwarted by the forms of the House. To obtain a substantial abolition majority was still an undoubted achievement, ascribed to the "completer organization of Dissenters", and to the greater pressure brought to bear on representatives by constituents.

> ..... thanks to the activity of the Religious Liberation Society, Dissenters are becoming cognisant of the fact that they have, what we have always asserted they had, an enormous amount of undeveloped power, and they are only just beginning

1. ibid., 20 March 1855 pp. 217-8, 4 April 1855 pp. 257, 260.
2. ibid., 4 April 1855 p. 257-8.

to employ it..... 1

In the autumn the executive committee issued a new address, announcing that the bill would be re-introduced in 1856, but suggesting that continuous pressure on the systen was necessary to achieve the desired result. Rates should be contested everywhere, legal means being used to invalidate them as well as vestry majorities. Bad feeling would have to be accepted; agitation on the widest possible scale was the only way to "force" abolition on politicians and Churchmen.

> ..... the voice of discontent may be heard by Parliament and the Government. To defeat a Church-rate on a poll is ..... the most valuable result of an agitation, but the mere fact that rates are increasingly contested, apart from the issue, has a powerful influence.

A new work on the legal aspects was published, and advice from the Society's legal experts promised. This was to be accompanied by a limited enquiry into the types of parishes which had made or refused rates in the previous year, and, it was hoped, the holding of public meetings in large towns.[2]

Again, Dissenters were urged to communicate with their representatives, the increasing proximity of a general election giving added weight to their letters.[3] The second reading was carried, this time by a majority of 43 in a House of 403. Constituents were requested to contact the 88 absent Liberal M.P.s, and it was calculated that there would have been a majority of 70 if all those who had voted for abolition in the past had been present. Government support was given, Sir George Grey informing the House that amendments

1. ibid., 23 May 1855 p. 397, 398-9, 407, 27 June 1855 p. 507, 25 July 1855 p. 565.
2. ibid., 24 October 1855 p. 774. Liberator, 1855, pp. 41-2, 69. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 195-6, 199, 200-1.
3. N., 13 February 1856 p. 97, 27 February 1856 p. 129.

would be moved in committee.[1]

These proposed the abolition of rates in parishes which had not levied them for five years, and in those whose vestries refused a rate, and did not reverse this decision within two years. In places where rates were still levied, any person declaring that he was not a member of the Church of England was to be exempted, forfeiting voting rights in the vestry on church-rates. Dissent was presented with a dilemma - acceptance or rejection?

The parliamentary sub-committee recommended acceptance, subject to the removal of ambiguities, and without waiving the right of the Society to persist with the original bill if the amendments were lost. Clay's counsel, and "the belief that public opinion will sanction the course so advised", confirmed the decision. Consequently, the executive committee published a series of resolutions explaining that, although they preferred the unadulterated bill, the amendments, by abolishing rates in a large number of parishes, by giving others the chance of abolishing them, and by exempting Dissenters from payment where they were still levied, "are in with, though falling short of, the object aimed at by this Committee". Deeming it expedient to support the government, they reserved the right to revert to complete abolition in the future.[2]

The Nonconformist, also preferring Clay's bill unamended, hailed this as a "discreet decision". Acquiescence involved no compromise of principle, since the amendments embodied the principle of abolition, though more circuitously.

1. ibid., 12 March 1856 pp. 161-2, 168-9.
2. ibid., 26 March 1856 p. 194, 23 April 1856 p. 269, for resolutions of the Deputies in like vein. Minutes of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee ....., 19 March 1856. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 252-3.

Government amendments would give the bill a better chance in the Lords, whilst pliancy would ensure the continued unity of the Liberal abolitionist phalanx, which might otherwise be disastrously split by dissenting stubbornness, resulting in a loss of votes and defeat. If the amended bill was rejected by the Lords, the original measure could be revived with the advantage that Ministers and Whigs would be morally compelled to accept an advanced measure, and that the abolitionists could dismiss as imaginary the practical advantages of any other compromise scheme.[1]

Not all Dissenters agreed with this appraisal. Hadfield was hostile, as was the Freeman, a Baptist journal, arguing that the proposed declaration would disqualify Dissenters from interfering in the affairs of the national church. The Nonconformist denied this, asserting that it only affected his rights as a parishoner, not as a citizen. Nevertheless, the matter was debated at the Triennial Conference in May, the Rev. H.Toller moving an amendment to the official motion supporting the committee's action. Critics outlined the problems of Dissenters in rural areas, the dangers of quitting the vestry when it dealt with parochial charities, and claimed that the amended bill would only give relief to those places where Dissent was strong enough to compel it.[2]

The point was academic. Government was reluctant to press on with the bill, and Clay withdrew it on 27th June. This was mortifying, Ministers having obviously used the amendments as an excuse for supporting the second reading, to avoid being left in a minority.

..... In truth, Palmerston has out-jockeyed

1. N., 19 March 1856 p. 179, 26 March 1856 p. 193.
2. ibid., 16 April 1856 p. 249, 8 May 1856 pp. 310-1.

> us by a movement which promptitude and determination might have made available for putting him into a second-best position.

But, Dissenters had learnt to recognise ministerial insincerity, and had the perfect reason for rejecting all future compromises. In 1857, re-united, the abolitionists would press forward Clay's original bill.[1]

Disestablishment was the Liberation Society's aim and no opportunity of advancing it was lost. The Society followed the Anti-State-Church Association in its concern for the welfare of colonial voluntaries. In 1855, for instance, the voluntaries allied with the colonial reformers to delete clause 54, which reserved £50,000 for ecclesiastical purposes, from the Victoria Government Bill. Petitions sent to the Legislative Council, a totally unrepresentative and irresponsible body claimed the Nonconformist, had been ignored; 13,000 signed a memorial to the Queen requesting her to refuse the royal assent to the bill. At the same time, the Colonists asked the English voluntaries for assistance.[2]

Since the bill had to pass through the Commons, its opponents believed that they could either persuade Russell, then Colonial Secretary, to withdraw the clause or expunge it in committee. Early in March the Liberation Society was in communication with the Deputies ascertaining the feasibility of a united deputation to Russell. With no great hope of a successful outcome a group of dissenting Members, and representatives of the Liberation Society, the Deputies, and the Colonial Missionary Society met the Colonial Secretary on 7th June. Foster described sentiment in the colony,

1. ibid., 2 July 1856 p. 473. Minutes of the Executive Committee ...., p. 290.
2. N., 30 May 1855 p. 417.

J.R.Mills events in South Australia and Canada to illustrate general colonial anti-endowment feelings and Hadfield explained the deputation's unwillingness to extend the discord at home to the colonies. For the colonial reformers, Robert Lowe argued that the colony could not afford to make the grant. Russell remained unmoved. Miall and Bell sought the postponement of the second reading for six months, but withdrew on the understanding that they would be allowed to move amendments in committee. This was done, unavailingly.[1]

In 1856 the Society was asked to support memorials to the Government requesting the withholding of the royal assent from an act of the Jamaican legislature, extending the period during which the colony was to subsidise clerical stipends. The Tasmanians sought their help to defeat a similar manoeuvre.[2]

Then there was Ireland. In 1849 it was reported that Roebuck intended moving a motion on the Irish Church in the 1850 session. This Church, suggested the Nonconformist, was the best point at which to attack state ecclesiasticism in Parliament. More immediate than the colonial churches, a campaign against its obvious anomalies would generate greater enthusiasm than one against more distant objects. Ireland contained the weakest link in the establishment system, the schemes of politicians to make it more acceptable demonstrating their awareness of this and a consciousness that things could not remain as they were. Not sanctified by history, its position weakened by the political and social condition of

1. ibid., 13 June 1855 pp. 457-8, 20 June 1855 p. 487, 27 June 1855 p. 507. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 153, 174, 178. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 138, 1957-8, vol. 139, 87-90, 96-7.
2. N., 23 January 1856 p. 49. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., p. 231.

Ireland, the Irish Church was an ideal target.[1]

Amazed that the radicals had never agitated the question, for a State Church was a constant impediment to progress and reform, Miall anticipated that Roebuck's motion would remove those taboos which had precluded discussion in the past. Naturally, the Anti-State-Church Association prepared to give him all possible assistance. A sub-committee examined what might be done to arouse the country, and Miall was asked to meet Roebuck to ascertain exactly when he intended to give notice of his motion. Carvell Williams and Edwards eventually saw him, receiving the impression that, though serious in his intentions, he did not want the avowed support of the Association. Plans were abandoned, though special reference to the Irish Church was recommended in the general petitions it hoped to elicit from its supporters.[2]

There was more to Ireland than the Irish Church. The Maynooth Endowment, minister's money, and the Irish regium donum provided avenues of attack against it. They were the props under the establishment whose removal would bring the whole edifice down.

Richard Spooner's anti-Maynooth motion in 1853 provided one of the first opportunities for voluntary Members to voice their principles, William Scholefield moving an amendment, that, the attention of the House be directed to "all enactments now in force, whereby the revenue of the State is now charged in aid of any ecclesiastical or religious purposes whatsoever, with a view to the repeal of such enactments". This, remarked the Eclectic, raised the

1. N., 26 September 1849 p. 757.
2. ibid., 19 September 1849 p. 737, 3 October 1849 p. 777, 23 January 1850 p. 61, 15 March 1850 p. 202. Minute Book ...., vol. 2, pp. 5, 14, 19, 24, 27, 31-2.

question from the level of partisanship to that of principle, though the Nonconformist spoke of the utter irrelevancy of a debate in which the three protagonists had no common ground. Miall informed the House that he could not vote with Spooner, for to do so would "be constituting the State the judge between truth and error in religion". He was one of the anti-state-churchmen who abstained on the division, but Barnes, Bell, Brotherton, Crossley, Hadfield, Heywood and Milligan were in the majority, with Chambers, Cheetham, Kershaw, Pellatt and Pilkington in the anti-Maynooth minority. Scholefield's amendment was defeated by 262 - 68, with all the Dissenters who voted, except for Ball, in the minority.[1]

Within a year, Miall was taking a different view, arguing that the Irish regium donum and the Maynooth endowment ought to be the next targets of the Dissenters. The establishment used these grants to buy off its foes, placing subsidised allies between it and its assailants. Abolish them and the Irish Church would face the full brunt of the radical, dissenting, and catholic assault. Of these grants, Maynooth aroused most hostility, and was the most likely to fall; as such, it was "the key of our adversaries position". Withdrawn, the Catholics would join in the dissenting attack on the regium donum. Hence, on 3rd July, 1854, several Dissenters who had abstained in 1853, or voted against him, supported Spooner's motion - including Miall, Bright, Crossley, and Barnes, - though dissociating themselves from his arguments.[2]

Religious equality was the Dissenters' goal, Ministers being warned not to expect their assistance if Disraeli

1. E.R., 5s., vol. V, 1853, pp. 504-5. N., 2 March 1853 pp. 169, 182, 9 March 1853 p. 204. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 124, 447-51, 926-7.
2. N., 12 July 1854 p. 573, 11 April 1855 p. 277. E.R., 5s., vol. VIII, 1854, p. 248.

adopted the protestant cry as a party issue, hoping to overthrow them on the Maynooth vote. Any party attacking any endowment, would receive dissenting support, no matter what their motives, as a stage on the road to disestablishment, although the broad principles on which this action was based would be made plain to the public. It was unfortunate that Maynooth presented the most likely target, thus giving the movement something of a sectarian tinge, but,

> ..... What we would do by them, we would do by all - and we begin with them, in order that we may the more easily, and surely reach all. Religious equality is our goal - we cannot get at it by the oath of universal State endowment, nor would we if we could. We must, therefore, steadily pursue the policy of disendowment, which, besides being more to our mind, is more feasible. And, we believe, that in resolutely following out this course, in whatever company we may chance to find ourselves, we shall not only best promote our object, but confer the largest benefit on our fellow-subjects of every creed. 1

Thus, although the parliamentary sub-committee recommended the Society to exert its influence in support of Spooner in 1855, there was an annual history of opposition to the Irish regium donum and its ancilliary grants.[2]

In 1854, the Society published Bright's hostile speech, which "perfectly gibbeted the miserable grant". When Dr.Wilson of the Belfast Presbyterian College asked the parliamentary sub-committee to disavow its sentiments, it replied by public letter, written by Foster, vindicating publication.[3] The Nonconformist was unsparing in its attacks on the ethics, motives, and meanness of the Irish Presbyterians, its charges being reinforced by the evidence provided in the parliamentary returns relating to the distribution of the

1. N., 18 October 1854 p. 853, 11 April 1855 p. 277.
2. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., p. 163.
3. N., 12 July 1854 p. 582. Minutes of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee ....., 10 November 1854.

grant in 1853, obtained by Hadfield.[1] In 1855, it reported that William Williams, Hadfield, Miall, Crossley and Pellatt had a batch of amendments prepared, and that though left in small minorities, they were "gradually producing an impression that public money is wasted when devoted to such objects". There was some consolation in the belief that the fraternisation of Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Catholic in the lobby would cease once one group had lost "their share of the spoil". Hadfield continued the struggle in the following year.[2]

Minister's money was a tax of one shilling in the pound imposed during the seventeenth century for the benefit of the protestant clergy of certain catholic towns in Ireland. In 1848 a select committee had recommended abolition, with a substitute being found in the ecclesiastical commission fund. Six years later William Fagan, M.P. for Cork sought to implement this recommendation. His original motion, seconded by Hadfield, was defeated, and the next day Government obtained leave to bring in its own bill, Fagan's amendment being seconded this time by Miall. This was a compromise measure, and Dissenters who had voted with Fagan because of the analogy between minister's money and church rates found cold comfort in their opponents' arguments concerning the inviobility of Church property. Miall informed the parliamentary sub-committee, which had circularised Liberal M.P.s, that he would move the postponement of the second reading for six months. Dissenters had as great a vested interest in

1. N., 29 November 1854 p. 981, 1 August 1855 p. 581, 2 January 1856 pp. 1-2.
2. ibid., 1 August 1855 p. 589, 9 April 1856 p. 239, 23 April 1856 p. 279. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 139, 1542-4, 1549-51, vol. 141, 591-600, 1243-7. Spooner and Hadfield were tellers for the same motion in 1856, against the grants to the Belfast theological professors (Unitarian).

defeating the principle behind the measure, as the Irish had in defeating the bill itself, and the opposition lobby on the various votes "was seen to be filled with dissenters more than with Irish members, and the battle fought was not for minister's money but for church rates".[1] Doubtless as a result of this connection, Fagan was being used by the sub-committee as a means of communication with the Irish M.P.s on the church rates division - one favour deserving another.[2]

Scholefield's motion had won 68 votes; in the same session, G.H.Moore's for a select committee of inquiry into the revenues of the Irish Church, was supported by several Nonconformists.[3] It was not, however, until 1856, that the anti-state-churchmen brought their own comprehensive Irish disestablishment proposals before the House, on 27th May, Miall moving, "That this House resolve into a Committee of the whole House, to consider the temporal provision made by law for religious teaching and worship in Ireland".

At the end of November, 1855, the executive committee agreed, "that, inasmuch as the Irish Church question has thus far been alluded to in the House of Commons in connection with the ecclesiastical endowments, generally, at present existing in that part of the United Kingdom, it will be the most advantageous course now to introduce the subject formally to the House in that connection". In moving for a committee Miall would have full scope to describe the resolutions he wished to submit to it, and an opportunity of dealing

1. E.R., 5s., vol. VII, 1854, pp. 503-4, 615-6. N., 15 March 1854 pp. 217, 226-7. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 131, 615-6, 996-7. Minutes of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee ....., 20 February, 13 March 1854. Miall spoke in support of the second reading of Fagan's bill in 1856.
2. Minutes of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee ....., 8 June 1854.
3. E.R., 5s., vol. VI, 1853, pp. 130-1.

comprehensively with the Irish endowments. It was hoped to get a day early in the session, before Spooner's Maynooth Endowment Act repeal motion, "respecting which it is hoped we may receive instruction from its promoters as to their intended course". To secure a good attendance in the House, and support in the country, the parliamentary sub-committee recommended that, "about 20 or 30 leading M.P.s be communicated with, in order to ensure their special personal attention & support"; that information should be distributed to Members who might contact the Society; that articles be placed in the press; that constituencies be appealed to, the Society's deputations giving the matter prominence as a "practical question" in their addresses. All these methods would contribute, it was anticipated, to make the Irish Church's status a hustings question.[1]

The public did not learn what was afoot until February, when Nonconformist and Liberator revealed the plan. This new aggressive phase in the Society's work, by reviving the Irish Church question, would force the hereditary liberals to choose sides, and instruct the electors. Miall did not expect more than one negative division, but he would be able to place the whole ecclesiastical policy to which he was pledged before the House as a practical measure, and a practical proposition would be there for those who concurred with him to vote on. As the first substantive disendowment motion submitted to the House, it represented an immense advance, raising the question from a sectarian crochet to the level of public policy. Success or failure depended on the amount of pressure put on M.P.s by the electors, and they

1. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 210-1, 236, 237.

were urged to act promptly.[1]

Hoping to precede Spooner, the anti-state-churchman still anticipated advantages if that motion were debated and carried beforehand. His success would demonstrate the palpable justice of the nonconformist solution to the problem. Hence, when Spooner's motion for a committee to consider the Endowment Act and its repeal was carried, voluntary Members voting in the majority, the Nonconformist looked forward to a strengthening of their arguments, to the support of liberals attracted by impartial disendowment, and to the assistance of the Irish Catholics, adopting disendowment once they had lost their own grants. Their vote on Spooner's motion did involve the voluntaries in some inconsistency, for Black moved an amendment widening the committee's terms of reference to include all grants for ecclesiastical purposes. Fearing that this would swing the bulk of Tory and Whig votes against Spooner if carried, doubting whether the amendment extended to the Irish Church, and whether, if Spooner's motion was passed, modified by it, the forms of the House would allow Miall to proceed, they voted against Black.[2]

There were further delays. On 22nd. April, the day assigned to Miall, there was no House, but this was no reason for despondency. His case had been made "irresistable" by Spooner's victory and postponement would enable propaganda to be spread in Ireland and amongst Liberal Members of Parliament, whilst outside activity might be intensified.

> ..... There never was a more auspicious moment for endorsing the doctrines of Voluntaryism in association with the maxims of statesmanship.

1. N., 6 February 1856 p. 81 (including article from Liberator of February), 13 February 1856 p. 97, 9 April 1856 p. 229.
2. ibid., 23 April 1856 pp. 269, 276, 278-9.

> That which was but yesterday a theory, will tomorrow be a policy. Events are rapidly maturing an abstract opinion into a principle and motive of action. That which has been done in Canada may be done ere long in Ireland..... The question is one which gains rather than loses by accidental postponement. Come what may, it will not be dropped..... 1

Steps were taken to ensure that there could not be a count out, and on 27th May Miall rose to move for his committee. Stafford preceded him, asking for an adjournment, since the feeling the motion was likely to arouse was not in harmony with the spirit of national unity experienced at a time of peace celebration. The premier concurred with this, but condescendingly observed,

> ..... as the honourable member for Rochdale has had great difficulty in obtaining a day, it would, perhaps, be discourteous to expose him to any further disappointment.

Miall argued that disendowment was a matter of justice, as well as of sound policy, which could not be evaded if the repeal of the Maynooth Endowment Act were carried. He described the history of the Irish establishment, and its failure to accomplish anything worthwhile. Indiscriminate endowment had been adopted to save it, but the public would not accept this solution - disendowment was the only viable alternative. There was, he pointed out, a parliamentary precedent for interference in the affairs of the Irish Church, the Whigs having abolished ten sees and church cess in the thirties, and he proceeded to outline a disestablishment scheme, demonstrating that there would be no confiscation, that national property would be put to beneficial uses, and that it would not be injurious to Protestantism. Fox and Hadfield were amongst the voluntaries who supported the motion, Palmerston replying to it for the Government, display-

1. ibid., 23 April 1856 p. 269.

ing, "among other things which did him more credit, an intense ignorance of the modern aspects of the question.... ..." 93 voted in the minority, and 163 in the majority, with, it eventually transpired, 29 pairs.[1]

What had been achieved? Disendowment, at least for Ireland, had been introduced to the House for the first time in a practical form, and it had not been ridiculed or inadequately supported - indeed, the unavoidable absence of Bright, Cobden, Heyworth, Barnes and Dunlop just prevented the favourable votes reaching 100, the Nonconformist estimating that 130 members might be expected to approve of impartial disendowment in Ireland. It was a triumph, this journal noted, to have forced a debate and a division on a policy, distateful to both Whig and Tory, and for which there was no clamour in England or Ireland. The House, moreover, was ready to adjourn, the Turkish ambassador's ball being a strong counter-attraction to Miall, who had been heard "with marked and unflagging attention", the issue being discussed "with calmness and good humour".

> ..... this quiet, unimpassioned, business-like mode of dealing with so novel and so large a question, marks the immense stride which the Anti-State-Church principle has taken in Parliament during the last three or four years, and illustrates ..... the extent of its success.

It was generally agreed in the House that the voluntaries had "successfully established a serious advance of their position".[2]

This was no excuse for relaxation of effort. The vote could not be "fairly understood to express an absolute approbation of the principle of disendowment" in the sense

1. ibid., 28 May 1856 pp. 373-6, 383. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 142, 712-772.
2. N., 28 May 1856 p. 383, 4 June 1856 p. 393.

in which Miall had presented it. It merely indicated a readiness to consider this as one solution to the Irish problem. Moreover, the true strength of the opposition had not been tested. They had regarded the motion with some indifference, but a sharp resistance could be expected, now the new policy had been initiated.

> ..... It would be vain for us to underrate the vast amount of latent sentiment in favour of the National Church - an amount, perhaps, too great to be entirely overcome, so long as the electoral body is restricted within its present area, and its force neutralised by unequal distribution. It is, however, of immense consequence, that existing constituents should exert themselves to the utmost; for every act of theirs will materially contribute to the formation of sound public opinion in the minds of that large body of our countrymen who must, at no distant period, be admitted within the limits of the Constitution. 1

A partial consequence of this parliamentary move was the forging of new links by the Liberation Society with the Irish Catholics. Following the holding of "a large & influential public meeting" at Clonakilty on 15th. August in support of his disendowment motion, Miall recieved a letter from J.O'Neill Daunt expressing a desire to co-operate with the Liberation Society in conducting a systematic agitation in Ireland. After conferring with Miall and Edwards, Foster crossed to Ireland, met Daunt, returning with the impression that "the Clonakilty meeting would be followed up, & that it might be regarded as the beginning of a bona fide further movement among the Irish Catholics". Foster had taken a "Paper" with him, outlining the objects of the English voluntaries, their mode of action, and guaranteeing that the Society would take no step of a sectarian character. Co-operation, it emphasised, was only possible if the Irish went to "destruction of the Irish Establishment, as such",

1. ibid., 18 June 1856 p. 433.

and suggested that this might be best achieved if each party kept its own organisation, "the heads of each consulting previously on important steps". Maynooth was to remain an open question. The committee approved of all this, looking forward to working with the Irish movement, but recording

> ..... their determination to sanction no settlement of the question of Disendowment which does not effect the entire disendowment of all religious bodies in Ireland, including therein the secularization of the national property at present vested in the Irish Protestant Church.

Voluntaryism was the only possible basis for an alliance; there could be no endorsement of the transference of the endowments to a Roman establishment,[1]

Nonconformist⁄ Members and the Society dealt with other ecclesiastical questions during these years, though those examined in detail tended to occupy them the most. In 1854 the parliamentary sub-committee was thanked by the Stoke Newington local committee for its assistance in defeating the Stoke Newington Church Bill. Hadfield, intent on moving the postponement of the second reading of the Church Buildings Acts Amendment Bill, was advised to delay his motion, since church interests opposed the bill, and it was better if a Churchman took the lead against it.[2] Previously he had sought to amend the Church Buildings Act Continuance Bill, and, although defeated, the Church Commissioners had only been renewed for two, not ten years.[3] Nonconformist M.P.s opposed the Colonial Clergy Disabilities Bill, claiming that it would free colonial churches from state control, whilst

1. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 291, 310-3, 316. Norman, E.R.: The Catholic Church and Ireland in the Age of Rebellion (London, 1965), pp. 177ff.
2. Minutes of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee ....., 7,13 March, 5 June 1854.
3. N., 29 March 1854 p. 267. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 131, 441-3.

allowing them to retain their revenues, and establish tyrannical ecclesiastical authorities in the colonies. Hadfield and Ghambers were prominent here, and the Nonconformist attributed the bill's withdrawal to Nonconformist vigilance, which had drawn the House's attention to the measure's dangerous tendencies.[1] In the next session, the parliamentary sub-committee successfully co-operated with the opponents of the Great Northern Doncaster Church Building Bill, which would have enabled the company to erect and endow a church and school in the town. Opposition to the Torquay District Churches Bill had less happy results.[2]

Nonconformity had acquired a new parliamentary status, making its opinions and principles felt in the House. It was generally agreed that the responsibility for this lay with the parliamentary sub-committee, and particularly with Foster. Crossley told a Halifax meeting in 1854 that he

> ..... had so carried on his work as to unite a great number of members of parliament in favour of this society, and during the last session they met together weekly to discuss questions brought up by Dr.Foster in such a way as no private member could have brought them up, and laid before them so that they could go into the House of Commons with powerful effect, being prepared for what they had to do .... [3]

Writing of the "perpetual guerilla war" that had to be conducted against ecclesiastical encroachments, the Eclectic pointed out that through its analysis of bills, of parliamentary papers and other matters, the parliamentary sub-committee was able to exercise an overall generalship, directing Members when and how to vote on these ecclesiastical

1. N., 22 March 1854 pp. 237, 246-7, 5 July 1854 p. 553. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. series, vol. 131, 998-9, 1008-11.
2. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 152, 157.
3. N., 13 December 1854 p. 1022.

topics. Adopting its own "whip", the Liberation Society had created a new confidence amongst voluntary Members, pleased to find themselves together in the lobbies so frequently. Other Members, who had no particular love for their principles, joined them there because of pressure exerted by constituents, again at the instigation of the Society. Dissenters and their allies had made themselves into a party, "numbering not less ordinarily than a third of the House, and in pitched battles they have counted more". This systematic approach by the Society to parliamentary management, was, claimed this journal, something new.

> ..... On particular questions it is not uncommon ..... for parties interested to send round circulars to members on whom they think they may rely, setting forth in eloquent indignation the wrongs they suffer, and humbly asking assistance in the emergency ..... but for a party out of doors to practise the thing systematically, and in a form betraying perfect acquaintance with the usages of the House and the habits of members individually, and while perfectly respectful, not betraying any consciousness at all that they were asking a great favour, was something quite unknown to any theory of the Constitution. 1

Any who doubted the Society's worth, efficiency and energy, were advised to visit the Commons, where its influence was felt, and its usefulness could be tested. "Through a period of unparalleled public langour", noted one supporter,

> ..... the only, or nearly the only great questions of domestic policy which have been kept alive, and which are making progress, are those questions to which the Liberation Society had put its hand.

The outcome of Miall's debate was not unexpected, for nothing had been left to chance, the future of the Society depending on the outcome. A strong position had been created by the patient parliamentary tactics of the Nonconformist Members,

1. E.R., 5s., vol. IX, 1855, pp. 105-11. P., 9 May 1856 p. 232.

and the "real, earnest, cautious, but unobserved preparation" of the parliamentary sub-committee.[1]

And yet, there remained one great flaw - the continuing opposition of Governments to dissenting aspirations. When the Parliamentary Committee of M.P.s was formed in 1854, the Nonconformist anticipated that it might shape ministerial policy, "by combined and judicious pressure", gradually removing "much of the scrub and brushwood which environs the Church Establishment, and which constitutes a part, both of its reproach and defence .....". Surrender of the State Church was not expected, but several related questions existed, on which both Churchmen and Dissenters were in some degree of agreement, where concessions could be made.[2]

The omissions of the Oxford Bill, and the Government's reaction to Fagan's motion, destroyed these hopes. Nonconformist Members would have to decide "to be dangerous as well as useful", unless they desired to be treated with contempt.[3] An Eclectic article resumed this theme, outlining the ecclesiastical measures of the session, and how Ministers had consistently acted against dissenting interests. Of twenty-six divisions on ecclesiastical issues to the end of April, Government had, "in all ..... voted against the side of religious liberty", being left in a minority by their normal supporters, and saved from defeat by their political opponents. An "unbroken series" of measures had been sponsored by the Coalition in which everything opposed by Dissenters had been pushed forward, and everything they sought held back. One dissenting M.P. was reported as complaining,

1. N., 9 May 1855 p. 357, 4 June 1856 p. 393.
2. ibid., 22 February 1854 p. 149.
3. ibid., 15 March 1854 p. 217.

> The coalition government is formed upon the basis of giving the dissenters nothing; and I am glad to see it is so, for that tells us what we have to do.

Since Dissenters could hold the balance in the House, they ought to give their support to the Administration on more honourable terms.

> ..... Let them not be just the members against whom something very like a dead set is to be made by the government policy, and who do not need the 'whip' on a close division. Let them show that they are not terrified by the half-hinted threat of a dissolution, which will only increase their own numbers in the House. Let them make just the difference of supporting their principles first, and the government second, instead of urging their principles only so far as consists with the convenience of the Coalition, and they will not then commit the mistake into which some of them are falling, of supporting the government in opposition to their principles ..... we do not think they have done all that their position in the House, and as they must now begin to feel the support which has been waiting for them in the country, would, well-used, have enabled them to do .....

Cordially agreeing with this assessment, the Nonconformist regretted that some Members had fallen into the trap by voting against Heywood's amendment on the second reading of the Oxford Bill, those who had voted according to principle having shaken Government out of its complacency. Courage had to be developed - the courage to vote against Government, not when they were certain to be in a majority, but when a hostile vote might overthrow them.[1]

Much the same complaints were made against Palmerston's ministry, especially after its out-manoeuvring of Clay on the Church Rates Bill in 1856. It was a "most stinging reflection" that continued support for the Administration would merely court further rebuffs.[2] Foster raised the matter at a meeting of the parliamentary sub-committee, recalling

1. ibid., 3 May 1854 p. 365. E.R., 5s., vol. VII, 1854, pp. 611-21.
2. N., 2 July 1856 pp. 473, 483.

ministerial opposition to church rates abolition and all progressive reforms.

> ..... He thought it impossible that this state of things would long continue, & that an union now effected among a few M.P.s (from 10 to 20) for the purpose of acting together adversely to the govt on the next party vote, if avowed, would have the effect of altering the present policy of the Govt on the above questions. He was prepared to do what in him lay towards effecting this union, & would be responsible for an early success of the Ch. rate abolition bill & a general advance of their principles, if the Committee should approve of him so doing .....

The sub-committee minutes lapse for two years at this interesting point; the executive committee minutes record no decision, so it is impossible to deduce whether this policy was adopted.[1]

Nevertheless, progress had been made. After all, despite its strictures on ministerial obstructionism, and dissenting submissiveness, the Nonconformist still asserted that the anti-state-church party had greater cause to celebrate at the end of the 1854 session than any other ecclesiastical or political pressure group in the House.

> ..... no Parliamentary session of recent years has brought with it such solid advantages, and, at the same time, so few occasions of regret, to those who would substitute for the religion of State-craft the vital power of a pure and unfettered Christianity. 2

Having built up its parliamentary position, the Liberation Society turned to the constituencies. Morley, chairman of the 1847 committee, was invited to head the electoral sub-committee in March, 1855, and accepted.[3] This appointment was well-received. Intended to "vitalise and

1. Minutes of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee ....., 16 February 1857. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., p. 329. The next major party division of the session was Cobden's censure on Palmerston's Chinese policy.
2. N., 5 July 1854 p. 553, 16 August 1854 p. 673. E.R., 5s., vol. IX, 1855, pp. 113-5.
3. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 149, 157.

bring into play whatever liberal and dissenting strength each constituency may be found to possess", the committee would not trespass on local independence, although the advantages for constituencies, "in fighting the battle of sound political and ecclesiastical principles, by the establishment of what may designated 'headquarters' for information, counsel, and assistance ...." were obvious. Once the committee commenced its operations the,

> ..... Anti-State-Churchmen will have at command an engine adapted to every ecclesiastico-political purpose they can be supposed to desire.....

Early preparation was essential for the next general election, the Nonconformist fearing that Palmerston would want to upset as many Radicals and Dissenters as possible, replacing them by his own followers. The formation of the committee would "frustrate sharp practise on the part of the clique now in office".[1]

Edwards, Foster, C.S.Miall and E.S.Pryce, the Society's travelling secretary, were appointed to the committee, and by the summer they were engaged in advising Nonconformists of registration procedures, particularly for the counties. The Census had shown that Dissenters provided more accommodation for religious worship than the Church in twelve counties. A compact, well-organised body, in these constituencies, it was argued, could hold the balance, and secure respect for, if not acceptance of their demands.[2] Foster stressed this at the London Tavern meeting in December, listing 25 county constituencies in which it ought to be possible to obtain a majority of votes favourable to the dissenting interest. At the Triennial Conference in 1856, Miall suggested that, with

1. N., 14 March 1855 p. 197, 9 May 1855 p. 357.
2. ibid., 27 June 1855 pp. 478-9. Liberator, 1855, pp. 2, 7.

adequate organisation, one hundred voluntaries could be returned to Parliament at the next election, and both Pryce and Foster spoke of the need to register more county voters. At the end of June the committee issued circulars urging that a special effort be made to increase the,

> ..... number of Religious Liby. Voters in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, East Norfolk, East & West Suffolk, North Essex, East Somerset, West Gloucestershire, North Wilts & North & South Northumberland.

Lists of every Baptist, Independent, and Unitarian congregation in each registration district were drawn up; circulars, enclosing a claim form, told how to register and explained the qualifications. Local men were asked to supervise matters, the agents they employed being offered a fee of one shilling for every dissenting vote put on the register.[1]

Correspondence was heavy, great care being taken to ensure that the claims were valid. The general election fought in the following April provided some test of these activities. There were contests in 27 counties, twenty identical, or close to ones operated on by the committee - "all the gains", it was alleged, have been made in our list.[2]

By 1856 the Liberation Society had developed into a powerful pressure group, influential in Parliament and the constituencies. By widening its objectives, by accepting the logic of gradualism, its committee had arrested the decline of the Anti-State-Church Association, and had extended its

1. N., 12 December 1855 pp. 886-7. The constituencies referred to were:- Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, North Durham, North Essex, South Essex, West Gloucester, South Hants, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, North Leicestershire, Middlesex, East Norfolk, South Northamptonshire, North and South Northumberland, East Somerset, East and West Suffolk, East Surrey, East Sussex, North Warwick, the Isle of Wight, North Wiltshire. ibid., 8 May 1856 pp. 513-4. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 288-9. Liberator, 1857, p.84.
2. Liberator, loc. cit.

base in Dissent. Thomas Pewtress, vice-chairman of the Deputies, told the Triennial Conference that, though sympathising with the aims of the Association, "he could not approve of their going slap-dash for the separation of Church and State", but that now a more realistic policy had been adopted he could co-operate. Those who agreed with him must have been pleasantly surprised by Miall's defence of the executive committee's acquiescence in the Government's church rates amendments. Dissenters, he explained, had to prove that they were practical men, though this did not imply that they should forget principle.

> ..... The longer I live, the more I perceive, that there is something else in world besides fidelity to principle; and, although, without that fidelity, nothing is of much worth, yet fidelity without discretion, very infrequently fails to accomplish all that it might otherwise have done ... . [1]

It was encouraging, commented the Patriot, "that the Liberation ..... Society is pursuing practical objects by practical means, under the guidance of Parliamentary leaders and out-of-door tacticians who so well understand how to collect, direct, and handle their forces".[2] The impact of all this on Dissent was reflected in the rising subscription figures, and, as its forces were consolidated, by the need for a monthly organ of the Society - the Liberator.[3] It was all very different from the Nonconformist of 1841, with its strictures on apathetic Dissenters and "practical men". As Dissent had become more political, so the wild men of the thirties and forties had assumed the mantle of leadership, becoming more responsible, more mature. Now, they, in their

1. N., 8 May 1856 pp. 309, 311.
2. P., 9 May 1856 p. 232.
3. Minutes of the Executive Committee ....., pp. 174, 179-82, 184-5.

turn, were charged with obeisance to the mores of metropolitan Dissent and society. The difference was that, as active anti-state-churchmen, they never forgot their ultimate objective, university reform, church rates abolition, all tending towards disestablishment.[1]

Miall's motion had taken the disendowment question into the Commons, but his plans for 1857 were forestalled by the dissolution. He lost his seat in the ensuing general election, and there was no one of sufficient stature to replace him. Miall had created the Association, and through it had acquired the political power and prestige which made Roebuck include him in the quadrivium to discuss and plan the course to be followed by the advanced Liberals after that election.[2] Because he was so very clearly the Society's spokesman, the loss of his eloquence and experience in the Commons was a crippling blow to its activities. To this was added the defeats of Barnes at Bolton, of Bell at Guilford, and of Pellatt in Southwark - all executive committee members, and all trained in parliamentary methods during the 1852-7 campaigns. As the Liberator acknowledged, this would greatly disarrange the Society's plans.[3]

And yet, despite the opposition of successive Governments, the Society had shown what could be done if Dissent was organised - had proved that it could put sustained pressure

1. N., 14 May 1856 p. 335 for a letter of H.S.Skeats deploring the change in the character and tone of the Nonconformist since Miall's return to Parliament, as well as criticising the parliamentary tactics of the Liberation Society. Also, N., 21 September 1853 pp. 760-1, 28 September 1853 pp. 780-1, "..... I have my fears excited (and I am not alone here) whether you have not been tampered with by the time-serving and fashionable Dissenters of the present day ..."
2. B.M., Add. Mss., 43669, f. 107, S.Morley to R.Cobden, 13 April 1857.
3. Liberator, 1857, p. 83. Clay was also beaten in Tower Hamlets.

on Parliament, and force it to recognise its claims, something which had never been achieved before. As for Irish disestablishment, it had been expounded in the House, and with Miall's 93 votes was as practical a question as free trade had been in the thirties. By their indiscriminate opposition to Maynooth, to the regium donum and to the Irish Church, the anti-state-church M.P.s had lifted the question from the trough of sectarian rancour, providing, in impartial disendowment, a platform on which Liberals and Radicals could eventually coalesce.

CONCLUSION.

In 1839 the Patriot distinguished between three distinct political groupings within Dissent. On one extreme were the militant anti-state-churchmen, making "a great deal of noise", but possessing "little influence", resolutely declining co-operation with the regular organisations of Nonconformity, whose policies they scorned as trimming and expedient. Any government reluctant to adopt their demands was immediately denounced and opposed. The opposite extreme was occupied by men, "generally ..... of the last generation, who have been outrun by the circumstances of the times"; abstaining from all political agitations, they condemned them as inimical to religious purity. The third category, embracing "nearly all the wealth, talent, and energy of the various denominations", consisted of "practical men who discard visionary theories and impracticable plans", of prudent men, who, whilst opposed to establishment, bided their time, "availing themselves of the advantages offered by circumstances".[1]

These three sections could still be traced in the mid-fifties, but, a result of the stresses and strains of the forties, the opinions of militants and moderates had slowly merged, and a distinct dissenting political viewpoint had emerged. This combined political radicalism, educational voluntaryism, the abolition of church-rates and a general defence of the Nonconformist position, with the eventual dis-establishment of the Church of England, an event, it was agreed, which would take place at some indeterminate future date. If there had been a struggle for political power in the dissenting world, and the in-fighting of the thirties and forties suggests that there had, then the extremists, adopting

1. P., 18 February 1839 p. 108.

a modified and more practical programme, had been victorious. In 1857 Edward Miall, a leading critic of metropolitan Dissent in 1839, was the recognised leader of Nonconformity, in and out of Parliament, whilst the circulation of the Nonconformist placed it well ahead of its competitors. To achieve this, the latter had moderated its initial dogmatism, whilst the refurbished Anti-State-Church Association had revived, with some success, the issues agitated by the despised societies of the thirties. Significantly, however, the Deputies held aloof from the Liberation Society, and, except for Samuel Morley, that body's major financial contributions came from the provincial magnates of Dissent in the north, rather than from their metropolitan counterparts.[1] They resented their displacement as the natural leaders of English Dissent, and were not prepared to compromise with their rivals.

Miall's own deep sincerity of purpose, his calm conviction of the righteousness of his cause, profoundly impressed those he met, especially the young, the Nonconformist remarking on the support the Anti-State-Church Association received from the "young mind of Dissent". In his first pastorate at Newcastle, John Guiness Rogers allied with the "young men of true Liberal and Nonconformist spirit", to advance its work; in Birmingham, R.W.Dale had frequent arguments with James, with whom he was co-pastor at Carr's Lane Chapel from 1853, on the justifiability of the forward movement. Reviewing the century in his autobiography Rogers testifies to the influence Miall exerted within Dissent,

1. Balgarnie, R.: Sir Titus Salt, Baronet: His Life and its Lessons, (London, 1878), pp. 267-8 for statement that he made a gift of £5000 to the Society. General subscription lists confirm this impression.

despite the many difficulties he faced.[1]

Disestablishment was an emotive issue in the mid-nineteenth century, for both Churchman and Dissenter. There had been a strong undercurrent pressing for the agitation of this question in the early thirties, but the successes of the London committees in 1836 and 1837, when the Whigs had conceded many of their demands, and seemed ready to abolish church-rates, had effectively stilled it. Increasing frustration, and disillusion with Whig promises and official policies, stimulated the desire for a more forceful movement. With Parliament and Government oblivious of their needs, the militants sought to divert Dissent into an aggressive stance; compromise with the system had failed, the Reform Act had not given large minorities a public voice. By attacking the Established Church Dissenters would draw attention to themselves and to the institution which, above all others, emphasised their second class status in society. Piecemeal chippings at its privileges, spasmodic agitations against church-rates, the formation of occassional societies to defend dissenting interests and the Reformation against the heresies and encroachments of rampant ecclesiasticism, were inadequate. Strike at the root of the evil, place the enemy on the defensive, and sheer persistence would bring the whole edifice down, releasing Dissent, in one glorious blow, from the fears, frustrations and oppressions of two centuries. This was the burden of the message emanating from Leicester in the late thirties, and the Nonconformist of the forties is filled with the emotional outpourings it suggests. But

1. N., 27 January 1847 p. 45. Rogers, J.G.: An Autobiography, pp. 92-3. Dale, R.W.: The Life and Letters of John Angell James, p. 457.

although there was emotionalism in the movement, an emotionalism which alienated many Dissenters, it rested on a sound theoretical basis, and it was the theory which alarmed the politicians.

Yet, politically, disestablishment was a millstone around the neck of Dissent. Whigs and Liberals were prepared to consider and redress the practical grievances; most were unwilling to encompass the downfall of their own Church. Together with the education issue, which developed in the forties, leaving the Nonconformists isolated in their voluntaryism, separation was a divisive force within the ranks of liberalism. Not only did Nonconformists feel themselves to be cut off from the aristocratic Whigs, but also from the popular radical wing of the party, which, anti-voluntary in education, seemed to prefer endowment all round to universal disendowment. By the fifties nothing more was expected from the Whigs, but these differences of opinion prevented the consolidation of the popular element. It was not until educational voluntaryism had proved inadequate to meet the needs of the nation, not until the rest of the Liberal party adopted disestablishment, if only in Ireland, that the Nonconformists could compromise, and reconciliation took place. Dissenting prejudices and policies were a major obstacle to the formation of a united Liberal party before the sixties.

John Vincent discerns a cycle of reconciliation and dissidence in dissenting political attitudes in this period.[1] To some extent this is true and recognisable. During the thirties the Patriot was a Whig journal, despite the

1. Vincent, J.: The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857-1868, (London, 1966), p. 74.

recriminations it occassionally voiced, and the Leicester charge that the Londoners "are all of them Whigs - Whiggish", was not groundless.[1] Historical tradition, Russell's labours for Dissenters in 1828, and the remedial measures passed by the Whig government made this inevitable. By 1839, however, the militants were demanding the abandonment of the Whig alliance, the Nonconformist merely picking up this cry where the Leicestershire Mercury had left it. Whig attitudes to education and to the Maynooth Endowment finally turned the Patriot against them. In the late forties and the fifties, Russell and the Whigs made no real effort to regain the support they had lost, resisting the anti-church rate movement, and the agitation for the removal of tests at the universities. This is the period of "dissidence", the Eclectic counselling Dissenters in 1849, "not to hang on, as obsequious followers of any party".[2] Palmerston's apparent trickery over church rates legislation seven years later merely confirmed this alienation. Almost ruefully, the Nonconformist remarked,

> ..... The most stinging reflection is that by continuing to support the Administration we court these humiliating rebuffs. 3

As we have seen, in 1857 members of the Liberation Society were ready to precipitate the Ministry's downfall. Reconciliation with Whiggery never took place, but gradually, as the doctrinaire outlook of Nonconformists softened, especially on the education issue, they were able to find a niche in the Gladstonian Liberal Party of the sixties. During the forties and fifties, however, Dissenters were in a political cul-de-

1. Leicestershire Mercury, 25 May 1839.
2. E.R., 4s., vol. XXV, 1849, p. 653.
3. N., 2 July 1856 p. 483.

sac of their own making. Only as a unit in a larger party could they expect some redress of their grievances, as in the early thirties. Acting alone, they would never persuade any government or the House of Commons to consider their point of view. This was the political dilemma, so frequently pointed out by the Patriot in the late thirties. Unsympathetic as the Whigs seemed, they were the only people who would grant the Dissenters any of their demands. To reject them, in this situation, was like cutting the nose off to spite the face.

Disestablishment may have been a dead issue from the beginning. The Eclectic and the Nonconformist ceaselessly exhorted Dissenters to support the Anti-State-Church Association, but the response was negligible. It seems that the churches could only be aroused on more immediate matters, like the redress of the practical grievances. Only the anti-state-education uproars in 1843 and 1847 can compare with the display put up by Dissenters in 1834 when the United Committee was concentrating on their removal. The broadening of the programme of the Liberation Society in 1853 was a recognition that the movement could not survive on the anti-state-church platform alone. If the Society became the central co-ordinating committee, securing all dissenting aspirations under its umbrella, it would gain new support from those who had previously ignored it. This was the thinking of 1853, and suggests that the anti-state-church movement, per se, had failed to stir those who ought to have been its natural advocates. Significantly, too, Dissent had gained most in the thirties when its leadership had been at its most pragmatic; this lesson had to be relearnt by the militants in the fifties.

Was there anything to be led? John Vincent prompts this

question. He suggests that militant dissent suffered because whilst the leadership and the money were concentrated in Lancashire and Yorkshire, the mass support which they sought was powerless, and unorganised, in the mining and old Cromwellian counties.[1] The 1851 census gives this view some credence. There were 158 Congregational chapels in the West Riding, 170 in Lancashire, 155 in Middlesex, but also 142 in Devon, 134 in Essex, 110 in Somerset, 116 in Hampshire, 96 in Gloucestershire, and 90 in Suffolk. The Baptists presented a similar pattern, with 99 chapels in the West Riding, 100 in Lancashire, 102 in Middlesex, but 101 in Wiltshire, 91 in Suffolk, 91 in Norfolk, 102 in Gloucestershire, 107 in Kent, 112 in Devon. Hence the real voting strength of Nonconformity lay in a broad band across the country from Devon to the Wash. This was an untapped field, until the Liberation Society began its registration campaign in many of these counties. Nonconformity in the mining areas tended to be dominated by Methodism, and does not concern us here.

Agitations always had to be drummed up in these rural areas. There was never anything completely spontaneous about the dissenting movements of these years, but, in the fifties in particular, the Liberation Society seems to be creating agitation for the sake of agitation; there is little demand for an anti-church rates crusade, but the Society produces one, perhaps to justify its own existence. The Northern activists, the Midland militants of Leicester, the leaders of the Liberation Society were influential, not because of the mass following behind them in the country, but because in the borough constituencies their social status and their radicalism attracted many liberals who were not Nonconformists,

1. Vincent, J.: op. cit., p. 67.

and because, Dissent was sufficiently concentrated to be a recognisable political force there. Social factors, too, made Dissent an aggressive element in urban politics, whilst opposite tendencies enforced passivity in the counties.

Uncertain about its political affiliation in the forties, Dissent turned this way and that seeking a leader it could revere as Russell had been revered in the past, and as Gladstone was to be in the future. No saviour appeared. Cobden was a state-educationist, as were many of the leading parliamentary radicals. The obvious choice was Bright, but he refused the honour when the Liberation Society approached him in the autumn of 1854. Bright never identified himself with the militant Dissenters, claiming that, as a Quaker, he had "no particular sympathy" with Wesleyans, Congregationalists or Baptists more than Anglicans.[1] In any case, deeply embroiled in a campaign against the Crimean War, Bright had no time to lead Dissent in its parliamentary battles, and he may have been influenced by their attitudes to that enterprise. Miall's view was equivocal. He told his constituents at Rochdale that a war to save the Turkish regime at Constantinople was unjustified, but that Government had to fulfill any pledges it had made. If there was to be a conflict with Russia, then all possible resources should be used to bring it to a speedy conclusion, including the fomenting of disaffection in the subject territories of the Tsar. At the end of March, 1854, the Nonconformist stated,

> ..... the justice of this war - the moral right of Europe to punish Russia as a reckless disturber of its peace - no one can impugn.....

By the autumn the Nonconformist was veering towards a peace

1. Read, D.: Cobden and Bright. A Victorian Political Partnership, (London, 1967), pp. 168-9.

policy. Alliance with Austria guaranteed the maintenance of the status quo, and once Turkey was safe, if liberty was not to be carried into Eastern Europe, the war was not worth continuing. This drift was confirmed in the following year.

> ..... A great war for a little object, is a great crime. Entrenching ourselves in the strength of our convictions and the consciousness of our integrity, against the ignorant or wicked clamour that denounces as Anti-English all whose voice is for peace, we declare our belief that nothing is to be gained, either to Turkey or to Europe at large, by the continuance of a conflict, all whose supposed objects were abandoned from the beginning, and whose real objects are sufficiently attained. [1]

Prior to this, however, Bright's Commons speech condemning the war in November, 1854, had been labelled inappropriate.[2] The Nonconformist had always supported the objects of the Peace Society, without adopting the principles on which its activities rested in their entirety.

> ..... we do not, and cannot, believe that the use of physical force in defence of life, liberty, and property, against the aggressions of unbridled passion, is either sinful or impolitic..... [3]

Miall's attitude was moderate; many Dissenters took a more extreme view which shocked advocates of the peace principle, the Patriot even advising them to obey the royal mandate for a general fast in March 1854.[4] In the North, Edward Baines informed Cobden that, "I differ from you completely and as openly as possible on the war".[5] Most Dissenters, and their organs, had encouraged the activities of the Peace Society in the fifties; now, the majority had turned against Cobden and

1. N., 1 February 1854 pp. 102-3, 29 March 1854 p. 267, 7 June 1854 pp. 475-6, 23 August 1854 pp. 702-3, 30 May 1855 p. 427.
2. ibid., 8 November 1854 p. 930.
3. ibid., 15 November 1854 pp. 950-1.
4. Anderson, O.: "The Reactions of Church and Dissent towards the Crimean War", Journal of Ecclesiastical History, vol. XVI, pp. 209-220.
5. Cobden Papers, B.M., Add. Mss. 43664, ff. 213-8, Edward Baines to Richard Cobden, 19 January 1856.

Bright. Possibly here, in this division of opinion over the Crimean War, lies the reason for Bright's refusal to become the parliamentary champion of those who seemed to have deserted him.

In the sixties the Nonconformists provided the moral fervour within the Liberal Party; the "nonconformist conscience", for what it is worth, directed Liberal governments along certain paths, particularly towards temperance legislation. There was no real evidence of this inclination in the fifties. If we can talk about a "nonconformist conscience" in this period, then the anti-slavery agitation must be a manifestation of it. But in 1850 the Nonconformist was supporting Hutt's notion for the withdrawal of the West Africa squadron, claiming that it was both expensive and inefficient.[1] In the forties, Miall had opposed the policy of the Anti-Slavery Society and the maintenance of preferential duties for free grown colonial sugar, to discriminate against the slave produced article from Cuba and Brazil. Arguing from his view of the limited role of the state in home affairs, Miall explained that to demand governmental regulation of its subjects trade according to the morality of foreign states, was to "elevate (governments) to an eminence they were never meant to occupy". Its sole responsibility was to protect commerce, not to direct it. Equally, a government had no right to dictate how another country should order its internal affairs.[2]

It was logical, given a political philosophy which excluded the education of the people from the sphere of government activity, that the militant dissenters should

1. N., 20 March 1850 p. 230.
2. ibid., 21 June 1843 pp. 441, 442-4, 5 March 1845 pp. 148-9.

oppose the teetotalers when they began to seek state intervention to regulate the drink trade. As early as 1846, the Nonconformist, whilst admitting the enormity of the evil, doubted whether, "in the long run, it will be nearly so great as that which would result from the extinction by act of Parliament of individual freedom". Law, Miall frequently averred, could not regenerate society.

> ..... Neither popular virtue, nor popular happiness, can be permanently promoted by coercive restraints. They may drive vice for a brief moment underneath the surface - but they do nothing to eradicate it. It will burst forth afresh with increased virulence..... [1]

Miall had to defend these views from the attacks of critics amongst his followers, but they were not unrepresentative. Samuel Morley, for instance, was not converted to the need for legislative interference until 1878, although he was a total abstainer, and a lifelong worker in the temperance cause.[2]

The "nonconformist conscience", if we take the teetotal movement as its most characteristic offshoot, did not exist in the middle of the century in the form it took in its last thirty years. There were those who sought legislative solutions for the drink problem, but most, tied to a doctrinaire view of the state's role, could not accept this. Once this view modified, as it had to in the sixties as the voluntaries were converted to state education, then it was a simple matter to add moral regeneration to the state's tasks. Only then could militant teetotalism become a necessary feature of the political Dissenter, of the militant Congre-

1. ibid., 12 August 1846 p. 549, 26 August 1846 p. 581, 2 November 1853 pp. 886-7, 16 November 1853 pp. 926-7, 14 December 1853 pp. 1006-7, 8 August 1855 p. 597.
2. ibid., 17 January 1855 p. 49. Hodder, E.: The Life of Samuel Morley, pp. 418-20.

gationalist.

Dissent had begun the thirties in the tail of the Whig party; twenty years later they had helped to break up that party, leaving themselves politically isolated, and, therefore, somewhat powerless. And yet, they were stronger, better organised, and more vocal than they had ever been, no longer behaving as political amateurs. Beginning the period under the political tutelege of the Unitarians, the orthodox Dissenters had overturned this bondage, and, under the guidance of, in the main, Congregationalists, had developed their own characteristic political viewpoint. Much of this creed may have been misguided, but it was evidence of growing political maturity that it existed at all. Losses in the 1857 general election made further progress impossible, although it is doubtful whether much could have been achieved until militant Dissent re-incorporated itself within a major party. Gladstone's first ministry disestablished the Irish Church, abolished church rates, opened the Universities, and acknowledged, albeit inadequately, the Nonconformist interest in temperance reform. Contributing to the political chaos from which the Liberal Party emerged, the Nonconformists were to make an important contribution to the form it assumed.

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