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THE PUBLIC CAREER OF LEWIS HARCOURT (FIRST VISCOUNT) 1905 - 1916

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ABBREVIATIONS

Official Documents and Private Papers

ASP - Asquith Papers

BPD - British Parliamentary Debates, Commons

BRP - Bryce Papers

BUP - Burns Papers

CAB - Cabinet Papers

CO - Colonial Office Documents

FIP - Fisher Papers

HAP - Harcourt Papers

MAP - McKenna Papers

PDP - Ponsonby Papers

SMP - Smuts Papers

SPP - Spender Papers

VGP - Viscount Gladstone Papers

WGP - William Gladstone Papers

Journals

EHR - English Historical Review

HJ - Historical Journal

HT - History Today

JAH - Journal of African History

JBS - Journal of British Studies

JCPS - Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies

JCH - Journal of Contemporary History

JICH - Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History

JMH - Journal of Modern History

JSS - Journal of Strategic Studies

SAHJ - South African Historical Journal

SAJE - South African Journal of Economics

INTRODUCTION

THE MAN WITHOUT A DREAM

Lewis Harcourt remains one of the least examined statesmen in the last Liberal Governments in Britain, in which he was First Commissioner of Works (1905-1910) and then Colonial Secretary (1910-1915). His period of office coincided with one of the stormiest phases of British constitutional and political history. During 1911 to 1914 the controversies over the powers of the House of Lords and Home Rule for the Irish came to a head, and the very fabric of his society was threatened by striking workers and the militant suffragettes.

An obscure public figure would seem to be a contradiction in terms, but in the midst of this turmoil it was not surprising that Harcourt escaped the limelight. To date, Harcourt has reposed in something of an historical limbo, and he made a substantial personal contribution to this via deliberate self-effacement. 'Few men have appealed less to the gallery', a Liberal journalist wrote in 1908, in his perceptive character sketch of 'the man without a dream'.[1] But fame meant nothing to someone accustomed to treading the inner corridors of power.

The urbane, aristocratic Harcourt moved in the very highest social and political circles long before he began his public career. Public servants have been known to try to leave some permanent memorial of their term of office. Sir Lionel Earle, who worked with Harcourt at Works and at the Colonial Office, believed that this was what mainly motivated Sir Alfred Mond (later Lord Melchett) to establish the Imperial War Museum after he succeeded Harcourt at Works.[2] By contrast, even at the apogee of his career, it was only reluctantly that Harcourt had 'greatness thrust upon him'.

For Harcourt the key to power was influence. His letter accepting the post of Colonial Secretary encapsulated his personal philosophy:

> As you [Asquith] know I have never been hungry for 'promotion', feeling as I do that the prize

> of political life is a seat in the Cabinet and that once there the power of the member depends on individuality and character and not upon his office.[3]

There was also another reason for Harcourt's lack of interest in promotion.

During the late Victorian period political giants strode the earth. The young Harcourt was dwarfed by colossal figures like Lord Randolph Churchill, Joseph Chamberlain, William Gladstone and above all, his own father. Sir William Harcourt was why 'Lulu', as he affectionately nicknamed his son, cheerfully abandoned 'the prospect of a brilliant personal career'.[4] During the long years spent as his father's political 'business manager', as Roy Douglas pithily put it in his history of the Liberal Party, Harcourt developed a talent for intrigue and manipulation, rather than overt leadership.

Throughout his long association with the Liberal Party Harcourt eschewed the spectacular and shunned public acclaim or recognition. The public tended to remember the exploits of his ebullient father instead. In this sense, Harcourt never really grew out of his father's shadow, although he did not seek to bask in reflected glory. Several compilers of indices have confused Harcourt with his famous father: in the memoirs of the German Chancellor Prince Bülow; in Politicians and the War by Beaverbrook; and in one of the many works on Edward VII.[5]

Only in December 1905, shortly before his forty-third birthday, did Harcourt finally take an official post in a Liberal Government, as First Commissioner of Works. The unheralded newcomer was alluded to as an 'interesting experiment', and was eclipsed by the impressive array of political and administrative talent he had helped the new Prime Minister Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to assemble. Perhaps it was not, as touted, a 'Ministry of All the Talents', but sitting on the Government benches in the Commons were men who were to become household names.

Ministers like Herbert Henry Asquith, the pride of Doctor Jowett's Balliol, the charismatic David Lloyd George, and the brilliant,

restless Winston Churchill left an indelible impression on the face of twentieth century British politics. In March 1907 Harcourt was promoted to the Cabinet and joined this select company, but remained as unobtrusive as ever. A Cabinet colleague later recalled that the 'subtle, secretive' Harcourt did 'not interfere often in discussion but was fond of conversing with the Prime Minister in undertones...'[6] This was Harcourt's characteristic *modus operandum*

By their very nature, the secret and semi-secret talks and manoeuvres Harcourt relished do not tend to reach paper. This makes it difficult to assess the significance of the role he played behind the scenes while in office. On one level official documents make this study a straightforward narrative history. On another level it is a story of 'high politics', made incomplete by the unavailability of Harcourt's private papers.[7] The present consensus of historical opinion is that Harcourt was not a major political force. Some contemporaries thought otherwise.

The radical Liberal Member of Parliament Sir Charles Dilke opined that Harcourt was a better statesman than his father. A.G.Gardiner believed that Harcourt was 'one of the most subtle, most far-seeing, most unswerving influences in Edwardian politics'.[8] According to John Morley, in a conversation with Sir Almeric Fitzroy in 1912, Harcourt's influence was based on the way he moulded opinion 'by the quietest and often unobserved methods,' and he predicted that Harcourt could rise to almost any position within the Liberal Party. Morley agreed with Fitzroy that the most impressive aspect of Harcourt's talent was the 'reserve of force which it suggested under the mask of suppleness'.[9]

Morley, who served in Liberal cabinets with both father and son, had had ample opportunity to study 'Lulu' Harcourt's methods since the 1890s. An outsider Sir John Findlay, the Attorney General of New Zealand, echoed this high opinion of Harcourt's potential. It was 'generally admitted', Findlay wrote in 1911, that Harcourt was 'one of the few younger Ministers to whom the highest public position in England is possible'.[10] Against this must be set the contention that Harcourt was not popular enough to exercise effective power, despite his talents.

Harcourt's love of intrigue may have been a liability rather than an asset, in the Cabinet at least. According to a fellow minister, Charles Hobhouse, Harcourt had

> many attractive qualities: charming manners when he likes, a temper under good control, a hard worker, but no one trusts him, and everyone thinks that language is only employed by him to conceal his thought.[11]

Perhaps someone who had become a virtually 'professional eavesdropper'[12] on Cabinet proceedings did not inspire feelings of camaraderie. A revealing incident related by Asquith in his memoirs supports Hobhouse's remarks. Asquith's Cabinet was the last in British history to operate without the taking of official minutes. According to the precedent endorsed by William Gladstone in 1893, it was considered contrary to etiquette for anyone except the Prime Minister to take notes of Cabinet discussions.

Like his father, Harcourt was 'a voluminous note-taker'[13] and when it was called to Asquith's attention that 'a minister' was taking down his own notes, the Prime Minister 'felt bound with the assent of all my colleagues to make a somewhat sharp remonstrance'.[14] Whether Harcourt persisted in this *faux-pas* is unclear from Asquith's account, and Hobhouse's entry in his diary (based like other ministers' on memory) in 1911 that Harcourt was taking 'copious notes' may have preceded the official rebuke.

Harcourt did not belong to an 'inner' Cabinet: it did not exist. Although Harcourt was always on good terms with Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (generally known as C B) he was never as close to Asquith, who succeeded C B as Prime Minister in 1908. In so far as Asquith had any confidants, these were the Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, War Secretary Richard Haldane, and Lord Crewe. Asquith greatly valued Crewe's advice, believing that he had sounder judgement than any of his other colleagues.[15] Not only does Harcourt seem to have been unpopular, but he also lacked the dynamism of Lloyd George or Winston Churchill.

Harcourt was certainly not as argumentative as the 'Bounder from Wales' or the *enfant terrible* of the Government, and this was interpreted by some as a sign of weakness. A typical example was Harcourt's stance on the future of the House of Lords. He was a Radical by reputation and on this major issue *was* more radical than most of his fellow ministers. Harcourt publicly denounced the 'edicts of assassination' issued by the 'black hand of the peerage' against 'many fair measures'. This has been referred to as a 'confusion of terms'[16] but Harcourt was quite deliberately voicing both his personal anger and that of the Government.

From 1906-09, the Liberal Government was plagued by the obstructionism of the House of Lords. Cabinet debate on how to resolve the *impasse* centred on whether to 'mend' the House of Lords by reforming its composition, to make it less partisan politically, or to 'end' its veto powers. Harcourt was one of the supporters of a proposal made by C B in 1907 for a suspensory veto. Yet the Cabinet's would-be 'menders' were not easily persuaded to adopt the C B policy. In 1910, during the ongoing constitutional deadlock, the Liberal Chief Whip made the following comment:

> Lulu, who is the most irreconcilable of the Vetoists, though an extremely able man, somehow lacks the virility and persistence to force his views through the conflicting opinions of others.

This does not contradict Morley's contention that Harcourt used more subtle methods to influence Cabinet opinion. The fact remains that a vetoist policy *was* eventually adopted.[17] Pending the discovery of evidence to the contrary, however, Harcourt's influence on the formulation of major policy was, if not minimal, definitely limited. Nonetheless, although he was not a major member of the Cabinet, neither was he regarded as a minor one. Even Sir Henry Wilson, the most hostile of witnesses, testified to this indirectly. Wilson was the Director of Military Operations on the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID).

After he was appointed as the Director of Military Operations, Wilson steadily entangled Britain deeper in the web of European alliances, via informal liaison with French military planners. At a crucial CID meeting held on 23 August 1911, the question of Anglo-French cooperation in the event of war on the Continent was discussed at length. Harcourt and other potentially embarrassing anti-war Radicals were conspicuously absent. However the 'dirty, ignorant curs' and 'wasters' as Wilson referred to them in his inimitable way, found out about the meeting after the almost inevitable leak.

Reassured by Haldane that he would be spared from the fury of the Radicals, Wilson diarized that:

> Asquith, Haldane , Lloyd George, Grey and Winston were on our side, agreeing with my lecture of August 23 while Morley, Crewe, Harcourt, McKenna [First Lord of the Admiralty] *and some of the small fry were mad that they were not present.*[18]

The question of military cooperation with France, formal or not, was only one of the issues which divided a Cabinet in which Radicals and Liberal Imperialists were uneasy bedfellows.

The Radical lobby in the Cabinet was itself divided, and lacked an *esprit de corps*. As Professor A.J.Morris has stated in his study of the anti-war Radicals, Harcourt's

> undoubted appetite for intrigue, in itself was not sufficient to qualify him for leadership of a group whose only certainty was their uncertainty of purpose.[19]

The Radical lobby was comprised of a mixture of 'new' and 'old' Radicals, with Harcourt belonging to the latter category. Moreover, there were ministers who were not prepared to commit themselves to the anti-

war elements in the Cabinet.

For a while it seemed that the Franco-German squabble over Morocco in 1911 might develop into a war, which could involve Britain.[20] Writing to Harcourt after the secret CID meeting, Walter Runciman, the President of the Board of Education,complained that Lloyd George and Churchill had unexpectedly become the 'really warlike' element in the Government, and had

> not only developed these new tendencies with rapidity but are characteristically given to *rushes*. The stability or balance of opinion of the Cabinet cannot now be relied on by us.

By 'us', Runciman meant the anti-war ministers, although it has recently been argued that they were not quite as helpless as he suggested.[21] Harcourt did not have the weight of Lloyd George and Churchill in the councils of the Liberal Party, but from 1911 to 1914 he waged a personal campaign to try to 'stabilize' British foreign policy. His attempt to improve Anglo-German diplomatic relations was based on negotiations over the future disposition of Portuguese colonies in Africa. However the talks held by the two colonial offices were effectively only a sideshow.

They contributed to the pre-war thaw in Anglo-German relations after 1911, but Harcourt and Dr Wilhelm Solf, his counterpart in the German Colonial Office, viewed the results with remarkably rose-tinted spectacles. The moment of truth came in 1913, over the failure to agree on the terms of publication of the revised secret Anglo-German treaty of 1898. Harcourt belatedly realized that Sir Edward Grey had simply used his brainchild as a diplomatic expedient. Ultimately, the sincerity of the peace factions in England and Germany was not enough to achieve a *rapprochement* and put a stop to the escalating naval race.

Runciman's letter to Harcourt was not only a complaint about the apparent impotence of the anti-war lobby to influence policy. The

desire for 'stability' and 'balance' it expressed also revealed the essentially conservative leanings of both writer and recipient of the letter. Harcourt's Cabinet colleagues, like Lloyd George, knew that 'Lulu' was not really an *advanced* Radical. Extra-parliamentary observors, particularly journalists, also perceived this. In a flippant note a writer from The Athenaeum, a prestigious literary journal, asked Harcourt for an interview which promised to be an interesting encounter; between an 'anarchist-communist' and someone 'generally considered to be a Whig of the most reactionary type'.

Harcourt certainly had 'Whiggish' tendencies. Defining radicalism in its conventional sense of 'root and branch' reform, it is clear that Harcourt must be assigned to the 'old' Radical faction on the basis of his responses to the burning issues of the day. Before the rise of Lloyd George, the parliamentary Radicals looked to Henry Labouchère for leadership, although Harcourt dismissed him as a rather 'rococo old Whig'. Yet his own personal brand of radicalism went only slightly further than that of Labouchère whose natural role, like that of Sir William, was to oppose rather than propose.[22]

The time-worn catchwords 'Peace, retrenchment and reform' formed the essence of Harcourt's Liberalism. For both he and Sir William before him, Liberalism was the 'instrument of sober, considered progress, along familiar lines'.[23] Both detested the 'faddism' which bedevilled Liberal politics for so long,[24] but in the end neither of them managed to develop a systematic personal approach to social reform. The 'old' Liberalism lacked a panoramic view of society. Harcourt was not an ideologue, or an exponent of the New Liberalism. His correspondence reveals no really progressive thinking about social issues.

In his examination of the ideology informing the movement for social reform, Michael Freeden has described how the New Liberalism gained ground in the Liberal Party. The new concepts which were gaining wider acceptance embodied an enhanced awareness of an 'organic' interdependent society. The State was to move beyond the *laissez-faire* of the Victorian era, and adopt a greater responsibility for the 'condition of the people' issue.[25] Harcourt, however, was a doer rather than a thinker. To quote Gardiner once more: 'other men will prophesy; he will perform. Other men will create the atmosphere of change...'[26]

Neither father nor son held ideas on State intervention advanced enough to make them 'socialists'. It is unlikely that they spent much time mulling over the thorny problem of the relationship between the individual and the State. Sir William once blithely declared 'We are all socialists now', but this was simply confusing an agreement on ends with the means.[27] Only in the sphere of Church/State relations did Harcourt unreservedly uphold the supremacy of the State. Like his father, Harcourt was an Erastian but otherwise he was not really interested in 'faddist' issues like Welsh Disestablishment and the place of religion in education. This was why he declined the Board of Education and a place in the Cabinet in January 1907.

The emphasis of the New Liberals fell on improving the quality of social life. Advocates of 'national efficiency' like the Tariff Reformers wanted instead to enhance efficiency and competitiveness *vis-à-vis* foreign trade rivals, and within the existing institutional framework.[28] Nonetheless, Germanic 'efficiency', especially the smooth operation of the State insurance schemes, greatly impressed Liberal social reformers. In December 1908 Churchill urged Asquith to thrust 'a big slice of Bismarckianism over the whole underside of our industrial system'.[29] The attitude Harcourt adopted to 'national efficiency' was ambivalent.

Like Haldane, another Cabinet pro-German, he rather admired the efficient aspects of German government. But although he was regarded as an 'ardent Germanophile', this referred to his wish for better relations with Germany. He did not want to see Britain become a carbon copy of Germany, with its tariff-regulated industries and State-regimented society. Growing worker militancy could not but make Harcourt aware, like other Liberals, that Labour wanted a 'new deal'. But this was not why he supported the National Insurance Scheme introduced by Lloyd George in 1911.

It was a *contributory* scheme, and hence did not impose an undue financial burden on the State. As discussed below, finance and political impact were the two major criteria by which Harcourt formed an opinion of the New Liberals' 'social' legislation. Evidently he deemed the *extent* of State intervention needed to set up a comprehensive insurance scheme acceptable. In other areas of would-be State intervention

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he was less willing to compromise. Liberals, Radical or not, were virtually by definition opposed to State encroachment on individual liberties just as much as they opposed the extension of 'socialism'.

On the issue of conscription, for example, Harcourt stubbornly continued to defend a position which the great majority of his parliamentary colleagues eventually abandoned. He went on record as violently opposed to conscription in 1913. As late as August 1915 his attitude had not changed, although Britain was locked in a life-and-death struggle in the first of this century's 'total' wars. This seemed to exemplify the inflexibility of the 'old' Radicalism at a time of national emergency, although there were those who wondered whether the war effort *did* benefit greatly from conscription.[30]

A common abhorrence of socialism united Liberals 'old' and 'new'. In one of his speeches Winston Churchill neatly summed up what Liberals understood by socialism:

> Socialism wants to pull down wealth. Liberalism seeks to raise up poverty ... Socialism assails the maximum pre-eminence of the individual. Liberalism seeks to build up the minimum standard of the masses. Socialism attacks capital. Liberalism attacks monopoly.[31]

This still left considerable room to differ over *how* the 'masses' were to be helped.

While the pioneering efforts of Winston Churchill and Lloyd George laid down the foundations of the modern British Welfare State, Harcourt coupled undoubted devotion to the Gladstonian goals of peace and retrenchment with support of reforms that hardly broke new ground. Via his Plural Voting Bill of 1906 Harcourt proposed a reform which promised electoral benefits to the Liberals, and which upheld the principle of 'one man, one vote' endorsed by his late father and widely accepted by the party. The Small Holdings and Allotments Bill

Harcourt devised in 1907 could boast an equally respectable pedigree.

Extension of small holdings had formed a staple of the Radical 'programme' since 1885, when Joseph Chamberlain had included this measure in his agenda of 'unauthorized' reforms. Advocating land reforms as a solution to rural unemployment also conformed faithfully to Cobdenite orthodoxy.[32] The 1907 Bill tried to woo the rural voter, as did Lloyd George's proposal to reduce the rent of agricultural workers in 1913. Both these approaches had only limited success due to rural apathy and inertia, especially that of local authorities. Lloyd George tried to tackle the urban land issue by reform of local taxation, but he ran into a barrier of vested interests.

As a result, his 1914 Budget, designed to promote site value rating, met with surprisingly heavy resistance from within the Liberal Party.[33] His urban land tax proposals simply represented the other (more controversial) half of his two-pronged attempt to resolve the rural and urban land questions. It was easier for Harcourt's rural land proposals, grounded as they were in a 'traditional' context of Liberal land reform schemes, to gain acceptance as party policy. They were not innovative. Lloyd George did not see Harcourt as a 'fellow' reformer; in fact, he regarded him as a hypocritical 'mock' Radical.

'I'm fighting on the side your father fought', Lloyd George railed at Harcourt in 1909, 'and you're a traitor to it'.[34] This quarrel was over the Chancellor's 'People's Budget' for 1909/10, which highlighted their diametrically opposed fiscal views. It is also conceivable that their vastly different backgrounds introduced a dimension of class antagonism into this personal conflict. There was more than a physical distance separating the valleys of Wales and the stately ancestral homes of Nuneham and Stanton Harcourt. By contrast with Harcourt's distinguished lineage, Lloyd George came from a rural artisanal background. When his father died, the boy was raised by the village cobbler.

Harcourt had a rather pampered youth, whereas everything Lloyd George achieved was through his own efforts, coupling intelligence with a political acumen which was to take him to the premiership. Harcourt was one of the so-called Radical Plutocrats. This made him 'fair game' not only for critics on the Left of his party, but from the

Conservative Right. Harcourt was a regular target in the pages of rabidly anti-Liberal publications like the National Review. He was definitely wealthy - he was married to Mary Ethel Burns, the granddaughter of the American tycoon John Pierpont Morgan (Jnr). But it seems that personal wealth was not the only excuse for scurrilous attacks. It was simply enough to be a Liberal minister.

In 1912, for example, the denunciation of the 'Cobden Millionaires' did not only focus on Harcourt. First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill was accused of using the *Enchantress*, the Admiralty yacht, as his private property on which to hold parties. Even Lloyd George featured, sunning himself on the Riviera with his new 'rich friends'. Harcourt was depicted shooting grouse on the grounds at Nuneham, his Oxfordshire estate. All of them were lumped together as ministerial hypocrites who extolled the virtues of poverty before driving off for weekends of ease and luxury.[35]

Such politically motivated tirades sometimes correspond with reality. Harcourt was very fond of grouse shooting, and had the means to indulge his hobby. It was true that he lacked commitment to fundamental social reforms, but an attack on his favourite hobby (a not uncommon one among the land owning class of the period) was hardly 'proof' of it. There was apparently an equally selective element in Lloyd George's perception of Harcourt as a 'mock' Radical living off the fat of the land. They did not see a great deal of one another, apart from official business, and Lloyd George did not like what little he *did* see.

It was perhaps a measure of Lloyd George's dislike that he saw fit to recall, among other uncomplimentary references, that Harcourt ordered 'special food' at the Ministerial table, which 'no one else' ever did.[36] Harcourt was no ascetic, 'a man of leisure and of taste ... very pleased with the world and entirely at home in it', as A.G.Gardiner remarked in 1908. But there might have been another equally valid reason for Harcourt's reliance on 'special food': his perpetually delicate health, instead of culinary snobbery.

During his leisure hours Harcourt formed very much a part of the *haute société* of Edwardian England. He blended in with the most exalted company 'to the manner born'. Harcourt often held receptions

and, unlike Bonar Law, Arthur Balfour's successor as leader of the Opposition, did not regard them as an onerous chore. But then his dedicated wife, Mary, did most of the organizing. Harcourt was not unique in making use of social functions to keep up with the trends of political opinion, via his wide range of contacts, but his use of them in this way was probably more systematic than most.

Socializing, after all, formed an integral part of Edwardian domestic politics. This was less clear to the uninitiated, like the rather reclusive Earl of Elgin, the Colonial Secretary from 1905 to 1908. Elgin found Mary 'pleasant and conversible' but doubted that he would ever have much in common with the unexpectedly 'smart' couple.[37] Effective or not, Harcourt's techniques of indirect influence were probably employed as much - if not more - *outside* the Cabinet. 'At homes' were held at his London residence at 14 Berkeley Square long before Harcourt took office. Later, Nuneham often hosted foreign diplomats and statesmen, Cabinet colleagues, including Asquith, and even royalty.[38]

Although ideological and, possibly, social differences estranged Harcourt and Lloyd George, both had in common an impish sense of humour, and a willingness to poke irreverent fun at anyone and anything. Nor did even Lloyd George address his Monarch in the way Harcourt did. It was no surprise that Harcourt fervently championed the great Gladstonian cause of Home Rule for the Irish; but it *was* surprising how vehemently he urged George V to support Home Rule in 1913.

What formed an unbridgeable gulf between Harcourt and Lloyd George was their differences over fiscal policy. As Michael Freeden notes, this was the one area where Liberal politicians did not lag far behind the theorists.[39] 'The most uninstructed', Harcourt told his audience during a speech delivered at Cardiff in April 1909, could see that 'there were possibilities for the furtherance of great reforms through the instrumentality of finance'.[40]

Harcourt had, after all, helped Sir William to prepare the redistributive 'Death Duties' Budget in 1894, which had, as Lloyd George admitted even while reproaching him in 1909, paved the way for the 'People's Budget'. Yet what he admitted in theory he was

not quite as willing to put into practice. Harcourt's numerous suggestions and criticisms of the Budget, in Cabinet, reflected his reservations about a 'non-financial' Chancellor of the Exchequer whom he thought used figures 'like adjectives'.

Harcourt also feared the political consequences of the Budget. He believed that Lloyd George alienated many members of the middle class by his speeches during the 'Budget election', and thought at the time that the Budget itself would lead to the triumph of Tariff Reform, the fiscal alternative offered by the Unionist Opposition.[41] In so far as the Budget, like its ill-fated successor in 1914, did not only affect the wealthy, Harcourt's fears were not unjustified.

As demonstrated in the recent study of the 'People's Budget', Lloyd George was as concerned in 1909 with allaying middle class fears as with retaining the working class voters who had moved to the Liberal camp *en masse* in the 'landslide' victory of 1906. But an examination of the psephological patterns of the general elections of 1910 reveals that the middle class was far from being reassured.[42]

There was also a more fundamental reason why Harcourt objected to the broadening of taxation. In an appreciation of the financial policy of William Gladstone, Sir George Murray, the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury during 1907 to 1911 wrote:

> His whole financial theory was coloured by his detestation of the waste with which he had learnt to identify Government expenditure. He was persuaded that it generated a spirit which encouraged further extravagances.[43]

Those words applied equally well to Harcourt: it was in his attitude to State expenditure that he was at his most Gladstonian. He was as concerned about *how* the State was to bear the burden of expensive 'social' legislation as with achieving reductions in Army and Navy Estimates, although increased revenue via taxation was essential to finance the New Liberalism.

The steady increase of State expenditure had been a fact of life since the turn of the century, as even a cursory glance at the relevant British budgets will show, and the 'economists' could not turn the clock back.[44] But this did not mean that they had to like the new monetary profligacy. Harcourt made this abundantly clear in his woeful letter to the former Treasury official Sir Robert Chalmers in 1914.

Wistfully longing for the eviction of 'this beastly government', Harcourt warned Chalmers that he was in for an unpleasant surprise:

> I think that the British Budget, which is due to be unfolded today, will give you a shock. I cannot imagine what Mr Gladstone or my father would have thought or said of such spendthrifts as we are.[45]

The 'cave' formed against the 1914 Budget by wealthy Liberal MPs was based more on opposition to the enormous growth of Government expenditure and the taxation necessary to provide for this increase than to site value rating. Harcourt shared the misgivings of Richard Holt, the Liverpool shipowner who organised the 'cave', about national expenditure outstripping national wealth and income, but did not oppose the taxation of land values.[46]

Lloyd George was disgusted with the 'rich men' who opposed his Budget. He was, however, moving too far too fast for the sizeable 'business' lobby which comprised over a third of all liberal MPs, and which may well have acted as a constraint on the party's freedom of action.[47] How far finance was to be used as an instrument of social reform was clearly a major bone of contention within the Liberal Party prior to 1914.

The electoral losses to the Right between 1910-14 suggest that disaffected moderates thought the party was already moving too swiftly towards 'socialism'.[48] The desire for economy shared by men like Harcourt and Holt represented only one strand of conservative thought within the pre-war Liberal Party. Backbench hostility and alternative Cabinet views on reform saw Lloyd George's measures rejected,

which was an undeniable check for the New Liberalism. What this check implied for the future of the party remains an open question.[49]

Harcourt was even more conservative on the issue of women's suffrage, displaying an attitude far from being 'liberal' in the sense of 'open-minded' or 'unprejudiced'. This reactionary outlook was inherited from his father, from whom he acquired the mannerisms and in this instance the outlook of a bygone era. As A.G. Gardiner remarked, 'his speeches on the woman suffrage question would have done very well, no doubt, in his own Eighteenth Century, but ring a little unpleasantly in ours'.[50]

By contrast with his limited success in the Cabinet, Harcourt was more successful in marshalling backbench opinion in the Commons against the suffragettes, his *bêtes-noires*. As they discovered, an insidious attack from the flank is more difficult to parry than a direct assault, although the details of his machinations remain 'shrouded in obscurity'. The suffragettes' belief that Harcourt was the main Cabinet obstacle standing between them and the vote manifested itself in the attempt to burn down Nuneham in 1912.[51]

Harcourt did not oppose wider manhood suffrage as such: he opposed the creation of a large, specifically *female* electorate, and was not alone in doing so. He formed part of a powerful anti-suffrage minority led by Asquith himself, and there was agreement among Cabinet suffragists and anti-suffragists alike that the risks of being overwhelmed by a politically hostile female vote were not to be lightly courted.[52]

History does not abound with examples of dominant parties rushing to gamble their supremacy by introducing unpredictable factors into the electoral equation. Little positive was achieved in the way of extending the vote to women prior to the passing of the Representation of the People Act of 1918, long after the last Liberal Government had floundered in the quicksands of war-time coalition.

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cal political considerations largely determined the extent of his commitment to reform.[53] He was not an atypical representative of a pragmatic Edwardian political *élite* which placed a premium on electoral success. In this sense, all that separated Harcourt from his 'new' Liberal *confrères* was his reluctance to experiment beyond what might prove to be electorally safe. Differing views of what was 'safe' or not lay at the heart of his dispute with the arch-radical Lloyd George.

It is conjectural what course Harcourt's career would have taken had he entered office in his youth, but it must be stressed that he was not his 'father's son' in a slavish, negative sense. When one considers that Harcourt spent eleven years in office (1905-16) as against the seventeen(1881-98) spent in service of Sir William, it would be easy to overestimate paternal influence, which was certainly considerable, and conclude that he had naturally abandoned all thoughts of 'promotion' long before 1905.

Perhaps as the Earl of Crewe wrote of Harcourt:

> It is not good for anybody to live entirely in political *coulisse*, with no responsibility or public duty to keep him straight.[54]

Nonetheless, Harcourt embraced anonymity for the sake of his beloved father, and because he enjoyed a background *rôle* which admirably suited his character. Although cast in many respects in his father's political mould, he retained his individuality. As well described by Gardiner in his definitive biography of Sir William, the slim iron-willed Harcourt differed as much in character from his father as in physique.

During his frequent Cabinet battles Sir William often took on himself the task of championing Gladstonian 'economy' and combating the 'Jingoism' infiltrating the party. Gardiner may have had this in mind when he wrote of his son:

> If his possibilities are not realised it will

> be because in his secret heart he distrusts the eager movement of the times and conceives his function to be that of a check upon its enthusiasm rather than an inspiration.[55]

Harcourt took up the cudgels for the same causes. Probably he *did* consciously think of himself as a 'check' on his colleagues' impetuosity, as his father did. Even if he did not, the end result was the same. Sir William relished his Cabinet victories, often using military metaphors to describe them. His son did not derive satisfaction from a sense of 'battle' but from the point of view of the expert problem solver who sees the scattered pieces of a puzzle fit smoothly into place.

Focus on detail and calm analysis usually characterised Harcourt's approach to various questions, whether they were Cabinet issues of national importance or administrative routine. At the Office of Works, where he remained until November 1910, Harcourt was unable to utilise all his talents. Commenting that it was like 'Hackenschmidt wheeling a perambulator', Gardiner rightly added 'he wheels it astonishingly well and seems to enjoy the task'.[56]

Two years after Gardiner published his character sketch 'Hackenschmidt' relinquished the 'perambulator' to flex his muscles fully for the first time. At the Colonial Office Harcourt maintained the same unobtrusive hard-working course he had steered at Works. Four and a half years spent grappling with innumerable colonial problems modified his 'Little Englandism' and produced a statesman justly described by historian Paul Kennedy as a pragmatic imperialist.

'The splendid war-time response of the colonies', Reverend Nelson wrote to Harcourt in November 1914, 'is to many of us a fine tribute to your work in the Colonial Office'.[57] Harcourt's many tasks left him little time for parliamentary drudgery, although Asquith did not take him (and others) to task for this, and even less to consider further 'promotion' he did not seek, valuing as he did[58]

the intricacies of the campaign more than
the visionary gleam, the actual more than
the potential, present facts more than
future fancies.

CHAPTER ONE

HIS FATHER'S SON

'I do not wish to take or do anything which would cut me off from my work with you.'

-Lewis Harcourt to his father, September 1893.

Few sons can have devoted their efforts, to the self-effacing extent of Lewis Harcourt, to the furthering of their fathers' political careers. Sir William was equally devoted to his offspring, and the origins of their close bond can be traced back to the tragic circumstances surrounding the birth of Reginald on 31 January 1863.[1] Whereas Jennie Churchill shrugged off a fall and a rough carriage ride to give premature birth to Winston, Harcourt's future colleague, Thérèse Harcourt (née Lister) was less fortunate.

She did not survive what should have been an uneventful confinement. This was a double blow for Sir William, who had lost his first son Julian the year before. As his biographer put it, his 'shattered affections' centred on his remaining son with 'an intensity that continued unbroken to the end of his life and became a legend of the social and political world'.[2] A doting father, attached to the Bar at the Commons at the time of his son's birth, saw to it that 'Lulu' lacked nothing during his formative years.

One can only speculate what course Harcourt's life would have taken had Sir William died when he was young, instead of his mother. By his very existence Sir William may unintentionally have stifled his son's ambitions. Paternal influence was clearly a significant factor in determining the late start of Harcourt's public career. His single-minded service of his father was also a voluntary decision, which reflected filial affection, but as a result, Harcourt was a late starter politically. Paternal neglect had the opposite effect on one of

Harcourt's contemporaries.

Along with Herbert Gladstone and Winston Churchill, Harcourt was one of three sons of famous statesmen who took office in the Liberal ministry formed in December 1905. Each reached office via very different routes, and Harcourt in fact achieved Cabinet rank well before the younger Churchill, whose ambition knew no bounds. Lord Randolph's neglect of his eldest son was unusual, even by late Victorian and Edwardian standards, but this only seems to have spurred Winston on to greater efforts to prove himself worthy of the family name.[3]

After meeting Winston, the Liberal Radical MP Sir Charles Dilke modified a note made long before in 1880 that Rosebery, then one of the rising stars of the party, 'was the most ambitious man I had ever met'.[4] At the age of thirteen Harcourt was already writing that his aim was to 'please and help' Sir William. By contrast, in a letter to his mother in 1899, the twenty-four year old Churchill stated that 'I have nothing else t ambition to cling to'.[5] All accounts indicate that there was little communication between father and son: Winston apparently did not even know if Lord Randolph had attended Eton, or Harrow to which he was sent in 1888.

Unlike Lord Randolph, who presented an aloof and formal front to family and parliamentary colleagues alike, Sir William took a keen interest in his son's school career, which began at a private school in Eastbourne, Sussex, in 1873. He even helped 'Lulu' to prepare for exams. In 1875 Sir William was wondering if his delicate son was ready for the playing fields of Eton. His mind was made up for him by Lady Ripon, who so often also influenced him on political matters.[6] Until Sir William remarried she was virtually a surrogate mother for the young boy, whose holidays were regularly spent in her household. So Eton it was, and for a while Sir William led the life of an unattached bachelor once more.[7]

Not for long however. Writing from Eton to Lady Ripon (later Marquess of Ripon) in November 1876 Harcourt expressed his surprise, though not his disapproval, that his father was to remarry. He acted as bestman at the small private ceremony held on 2 December, and accompanied Sir William and Elizabeth Cabot Ives on their Paris honey-

moon.[8] On his return Sir William resumed his activities as a Liberal politician, which he combined with a professorship of international law at Cambridge, a post he held from 1869 to 1887. But soon any thoughts of 'Lulu' furthering his studies there as well had to be dropped.

Sir William's son was never robust, and was plagued by various ailments throughout his life. A constant refrain of correspondents in his official papers is 'I am sorry to hear you have been ill' and 'I am glad to hear you are recovering' and similar variations on the same theme. Due to ill-health Harcourt's stay at Eton was cut short, but he always maintained a nostalgic attachment to this historic college. The most tangible evidence of this was his ever-growing collection of Eton-related literature, or 'Etoniana'.[9]

After leaving Eton Harcourt took up the offer made by Mr Justice Hawkins to accompany him on circuit, and related his first-hand glimpse of the law at work in letters to his father, who he addressed as 'My Dearest H.S.'[10] With this interlude behind him, Harcourt began his long political apprenticeship as companion and private secretary to Sir William in 1881. He soon began to keep a record of events in a voluminous private journal, containing daily and even hourly entries, which subsequent scrutiny by historians has shown to be accurate and well-informed in most respects.

II

Father and son worked as a team at the Home Office from 1881-85 and at the Treasury in 1886. The inseparable pair were to feature regularly in the work of lobby writers and caricaturists, even before Harcourt took up his secretarial tasks for his 'dearest H.S.' They appeared in a 'Spy' cartoon in 1880, and eventually Lulu even appeared in Punch, the illustrated weekly.[11]

Despite their closeness the Harcourts' temperaments were as diametrically opposed as their physiques. They were both tall, but the resemblance ended there. The Falstaffian Sir William was

> violent and impatient, his voice loud and his laughter unrestrained as a child's. He was quick to anger, but was quick to forget it and to make fun of his own impatience. His enjoyment of life was unflagging, and his manners and habits were the free, unconsidered expression of his enormous vitality.

By contrast, the slender unobtrusive Lulu

> ... moved slowly. His voice was never raised in anger, and no circumstances ever disarmed his invulnerable restraint and politeness. Whatever his emotions might be, they were kept under the discipline of an iron will ... he pursued his path silently and remorselessly. That path had one constant goal, the interest of the father who was the dominating passion of his life.[12]

Harcourt was to witness the ebb and flow of the Liberal

Party's fortunes during this six-year period packed with dramatic political developments. Returned to office in December 1885, the Liberal Government was irrevocably split over the issue of Home Rule for the Irish. Accompanying the political turmoil, and to some extent its corollary, were the fundamental changes made in the electoral system in 1885, via extension of the franchise and redistribution of seats. After that, there were no further major electoral reforms until 1918..

The reforms of 1884-85 created the electoral framework within which British politics were conducted during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. It was in response to demands from the reformists of his party that Prime Minister William Gladstone devised the ambitious bill which he introduced to the Commons in February 1884. The new Franchise Bill was intended to give the vote to rural householders, giving them the same rights as their urban counterparts enfranchised seventeen years earlier. The new bill passed Third Reading in the Commons, but now the House of Lords objected to the legislation.

As in the case of Harcourt's Plural Voting Bill of 1906, the Lords' argument was that redistribution of seats should precede any franchise reform. However, after several talks, Gladstone and Lord Salisbury, the leader of the Conservative Opposition, reached agreement. The Franchise Bill reached the Statute book at the end of the year, and was followed by a Redistribution Bill in 1885. Constituencies with a population of 15-50 000 returning a single member were now the rule rather than the exception in the counties and cities. This creation of a mass electorate and the proliferation of single-member constituencies had very important political ramifications.

Political parties now had to become *flexible* organizationally, to create - or adapt - local organizational structures to cater for the large numbers of new electors. The Liberal Party did possess a 'grass-roots' network capable of such expansion: the National Liberal Federation (NLF), founded in 1877. The energy shown by local branches of the NLF in canvassing voters, distributing Liberal literature and organising meetings did much to account for the continued vitality of Liberalism as a political force during the late 1880s. As described below, Harcourt gave the NLF valuable assistance during these years of growth.

During this stage of his political development Harcourt began to move beyond the 'Whiggishness' which his father clung to. He was always to retain an element of Whig caution in his radicalism, but did not subscribe to the 'faith of all sensible Englishmen', as Sir William wrote in 1874, when he proudly admitted he was a 'Whig'.[13] Such a political entity was, by the late nineteenth century synonymous with 'moderate Liberal', whatever a 'Whig' stood for earlier.[14] Sir William's son showed a greater willingness to associate himself with late nineteenth century radicalism, although 'Lulu' in turn found it difficult to adjust to the politics of the new century.

Even in 1874 the adherents of the Whig 'faith' were few in number. By then, only a quarter of the MPs in the Commons consisted of the landowning, mainly Anglican élite which had dominated the Liberal Party from its inception. Only fifteen percent of this category of MPs were Liberals. The real source of the Whigs' strength was their representation in the hierarchy of the Liberal Party, not on the back benches or the Liberal peerage.[15] Sir William himself was not a landowner but a lawyer. Members of the legal profession formed a sizeable part of the Liberal front and back bench.

As leader of the Liberal Opposition in the Commons from 1875-1880, the Marquis of Hartington had exemplified the Whig lack of interest in evolving positive policies. The Whig brand of Liberalism has been succinctly described as 'much more the product of tradition, loyalty and history rather than any very specific programme or set of principles'.[16] Hartington saw the Whigs' function as a 'correcting link' between the 'advanced' section of the party and those classes within it which 'possessing property, power and influence, are naturally averse to change'.[17] But change overtook the Whigs.

The extension of the franchise, coupled with the redistribution of seats, ushered in a new era of 'popular' politics at the same time that it accelerated the demise of the Whigs. From 1885 onwards Whiggism resembled, as historian Peter Rowland wittily put it in a different context, a chicken which continues to twitch after its decapitation. It was over Home Rule for the Irish that Hartington and most of the remaining Whigs seceded from the Liberal Party in 1886, but they were in any case not adapted to a political arena in which

'social' politics were to come to the fore.

When landowning, 'Whiggish' elements of the Liberal Party like Elgin , Lord Carrington and Sir Edward Grey took office in 1905, their political base had virtually ceased to exist. Yet, if what differentiated Whigs from Radicals was their approach to social reform, the Liberals in fact achieved little positive in this sphere in the twenty years following the Third Reform Act. Much was expected of the second Ministry formed by Gladstone, when he took over the reins of leadership from Hartington in April 1880. In the event, Radical hopes were dashed.

Gladstone's masterly use of 'issue' politics was what had put the Liberals in power in 1880, and led Hartington to cede the leadership of the Liberals. But during the period 1880-85 the 'tremendous outlook' for reform foreseen by a jubilant Gladstone when he took office proved illusory. The issue which had led to the defeat of the Conservatives was Disraeli's foreign policy. Now the issue which stopped the Liberals from implementing domestic reforms was the controversy over Home Rule for the Irish. Vociferous Irish Nationalist MPs stepped up the obstructionist tactics they had begun in 1877.

Led by Charles Parnell,[18] the Nationalists or Parnellites diverted parliamentary attention to the volatile situation in their country. Since 1800 Ireland had been joined to Britain by the Act of Union, and an impoverished population clinging to national pride longed for freedom. The very same electoral reforms introduced by Gladstone were also to contribute to the lack of progress made by the Liberals in other areas of reform. The enfranchisement of so many rural householders tripled the size of the Irish electorate of 220 000.

Of the two million new electors in an electorate of five million created by the Reform Act, almost 740 000 were now Irish. The reforms did not affect the Irish representation at Westminister. Ireland remained over-represented in the Commons. Parnell realized that the large Irish lobby was in a position to apply strong political leverage. By the end of 1884 he was already making it clear that the major party which committed itself to Home Rule could count on gaining the Irish vote. This spelt trouble for the unity of the Liberal Party.

As early as December 1881 Joseph Chamberlain had conceded in a letter to John Morley that the Irish had 'great practical wrongs and grievances and one sentimental one, the Union'.[19] Chamberlain, a newcomer to the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade, was the main spokesman for those Liberals who were not prepared to dissolve the union between the two countries. In a prophetic letter to Sir William, after Liberal differences over Home Rule had come out into the open, Chamberlain wrote:

> I do not expect any compromise or concession. I imagine we shall fight the matter out to the bitter end, and break up the Liberal Party in the process.[20]

From January 1885 onwards the Liberal Cabinet became the scene of increasingly acrimonious dispute, over the poor handling of foreign affairs,[21] and over Ireland. Chamberlain was interested in reform in Ireland from the *Imperial* point of view. As he saw it, a reformed Ireland would strengthen the bonds of Empire by improving the relations of the mother country with the colonies. When Chamberlain proposed his scheme for local self-government in Ireland in April, he was clearly not thinking of granting separate nationhood to Ireland, as demanded by the Irish Nationalists.

Like its proposed Scottish and Welsh equivalents, the Irish national council envisaged was an attempt to reconstruct local government. Gladstone approved this Irish scheme, but was unable to get the majority of the Cabinet to agree to it.[22] To demonstrate their new belligerence the Parnellites voted with the Conservative Opposition on a Budget amendment on 8 June, and the Liberal Government resigned five days later. As was to be the case in 1895, this adverse vote came as a welcome pretext to shed the burdens of office. Pending the compilation of a revised electoral register, Salisbury formed a caretaker government which was actually in a minority.

The ousted Liberals were in a state of internal disarray because, although he remained party leader, Gladstone was under mounting pressure to endorse new departures in what Chamberlain and his supporters called 'constructive' radicalism. Apart from the Education controversy,[23] the demands for reform of the licensing laws, and the withdrawal of State subsidies for the Established Church in Wales, the main concern of the Radicals was with land reform. Desire to 'free' the land was a quintessential objective of nineteenth century Radicalism and there was a very real need for land reform.

During his days as an active reformer,[24] the Radical stalwart John Bright had proposed the creation (or recreation) of a yeomanry. However, during the agricultural depression of the 1870s the Chamberlainites had spurned the romanticism of a 'back to the land' movement, and concentrated on attacks on primogeniture and persistent anachronisms like settlement and entail.[25] The point of liberating land was to make it a commodity which one could openly buy and sell like any other. Radical calls for Free Land and Free Labour were designed to appeal to the enlarged electorate.

In The Radical Programme, a compilation of articles published in 1885, Chamberlain and his close associate, the agrarian lobbyist Jesse Collings, stressed the link between rural depopulation and urban problems time and again. Given the power of the landowning class in 1885, still considerable socially if less so politically, making more land available was easier said than done. However, from 1883 onwards, Collings moved towards Bright's original plan, and intended to make it a reality via the extension of small holdings.

According to Collings, the creation of a new peasantry would solve urban problems of low wages, pauperism, unemployment and housing shortages.[26] The slogan 'three acres and a cow' summed up the appeal to the 'country' vote, the rural electors newly enfranchised by the Reform Act of 1884. To create more small holders, local authorities would have to be empowered to appropriate land to be rented to farm labourers, subject to the payment of fair compensation. This was the type of land reform Harcourt was to champion in his Smallholdings and Allotments Bill of 1907.

By then, 'Radical Joe' and Collings were in the Conservative camp, and Harcourt was able to cite their own arguments against them. Despite his general aversion to State intervention, Harcourt did not object to the extension of the powers of *local* authorities involved in his and Colling's proposals. The difference of emphasis lay in the *status* of the new small holders. Despite the pride of ownership harped on by Conservatives in their land schemes, Harcourt did not regard purchase as essential or even desirable, because it might lead to a proliferation of debt.[27]

Despite the Whiggish influence of his father, Harcourt gradually absorbed Radical ideas during the 1880s, particularly those relating to taxation. Radicals did not only view the land as something to be worked: it also represented an important source of State revenue via taxation. Tax on income could also be increased. Precisely when Harcourt was converted to the idea of graduated taxation, proportional to income, is uncertain. This was one of the reforms advocated in the Radical Programme, and 'Lulu' tried to get his father to incorporate this tax in the Budget for 1894/95.

Sir William inclined towards land taxation. In October 1885, prior to becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer for the first time, he stated that 'my disposition is rather towards a property tax than increased burdens on income'.[28] The particular direct tax he was to support was graduated death duties on estates. He subsequently endorsed the argument of Sydney Buxton in his A Handbook to the Death Duties, published in 1890, that such duties would not adversely affect national productivity, and that the revenue would make the abolition of other taxes possible.[29]

Graduated taxation on land or income in fact ran contrary to the Gladstonian notion of fiscal equity, but Chamberlain eventually managed to convince the Grand Old Man[30] that this was an acceptable principle. During his official career Harcourt was to show greater awareness (not synonymous with approval) than his father of the uses to which the new revenue from increased direct taxation could be put. As Gladstonian 'economists', both valued it as a means of avoiding the clutches of the bogey of debt, via State borrowing.

By contrast, 'Radical Joe' and his cohorts sought to use the revenue to finance more State intervention, in the interests of 'national efficiency'. Chamberlain's ideas had already been realized in concrete form in Birmingham, where slums had been cleared and shops, offices and corporate buildings had sprung up in their place. The object now was to export what has disparagingly been described as 'municipal Stalinism'[31] to the rest of the nation. Nor was the focus of attention purely domestic. The Radical Programme declared that any readjustment of local rates would be 'incomplete' without a thorough inquiry into the incidence of Imperial taxation as well.

This anticipated the crusade for the reform of domestic and Imperial fiscal policy launched by Chamberlain in 1903. However the more immediate function of The Radical Programme was to present an alternative to 'faddism' or 'issue' politics and pervasive socialist ideas. Four years after the publication of The Radical Programme Sir William made his statement that 'We are all Socialists now', but neither the Gladstonians nor the Chamberlainites were really prepared to accept the solutions advocated by the Socialists. Collings and Harcourt would have no truck with the land nationalization proposed by Alfred Wallace, where tenants would hold land owned by the State.[32]

The land reforms contemplated by the Liberal leaders in 1885 were in fact comparatively moderate. Very influential in really advanced Radical circles at that time was the 'single tax' idea of the American economist Henry George. He was to tour Britain five times, and had already made two visits, during 1881-2, and 1884. His Progress and Poverty, published in 1879, made a deep impression on would-be land reformers.[33] Henry George argued that only one tax was necessary: a land tax which siphoned off 'unearned increment'. This was the increase in the value of land arising from the increased prosperity of the community as a whole.

The taxation of 'unearned increment' was to form the theoretical basis of Lloyd George's fiscal planning in the next century, and was fiercely resisted by the property-owning class. Chamberlain saw George's proposal as a 'dramatic' and 'alarming' remedy for the sake of only 'problematic gain'.[34] The Radical challenge to his

leadership perturbed Gladstone. As Cooke and Vincent show in their study of the political events of 1885-86,[35] Gladstone committed his party to Home Rule for the Irish partly as a tactical counter to Radical pressure, in addition to his growing personal conviction that this was the only 'just' policy to adopt.

With Gladstone backing the policy of Home Rule, Harcourt was one of its fervent supporters. He deeply admired and revered the GOM of British politics, whom all factions of the Liberal Party respected, whatever they thought of his policies. In Harcourt's case, it was not a question of worship from afar: he was a member of the inner circle, socially if not politically. At one of the small, private dinners held at 10 Downing Street, the only other guest, apart from 'Lulu', was Sir Algernon West, Gladstone's former private secretary. Gladstone was the host, and Mis[illegible]n and Mrs Drew, his sister and daughter respectively, were also present.

It was not just that Harcourt was the son of one of the Government's leading statesmen: his wide range of interests made him an interesting, sought-after guest. Along with leading figures of the day, the Harcourts would also occasionally make the trip down to Hawarden, Gladstone's sumptuous country retreat. Unlike his son, Sir William was less willing to link the Liberal Party with Home Rule, but eventually grudgingly accepted it as an unpleasant political necessity. Yet, when the general election began on 22 November 1885, the Prime Minister had not yet firmly committed himself to Home Rule.

Chamberlain was still the most serious source of opposition within the Liberal Party to Home Rule. As Harcourt noted in his journal on 9 December, in the midst of the election, 'Joe' knew a Home Rule scheme was 'in the air'. Chamberlain had been on the alert since mid-October, in his correspondence with the prominent Radical MP and journalist Henry Labouchère, who informed him that 'the game of the GOM is to endeavour to unite the Party on Irish Legislation'.[36] During this critical period Herbert Gladstone was as active on behalf of his father as 'Lulu' was for Sir William in 1894.

With the connivance of Wemyss Reid, the anti-Chamberlain editor of the Leeds Mercury, Gladstone junior leaked the partially-formed

intentions of his father *apropos* Ireland to the press on 17 December, two days before polling ended. The 'Hawarden Kite', as this episode became known, had far-reaching effects. Apart from accelerating the GOM in the direction of Home Rule, it handed the political initiative back to him.[37] Any hopes Chamberlain entertained of taking over control of the direction of party policy were destroyed.

The 'kite' obliged Liberals to take sides, either for or against the preservation of the Union, but did not materially affect the outcome of the election itself. The Liberals were returned to office largely because of the rural vote, partly justifying the slogan 'three acres and a cow', although an unconvinced urban electorate tended to vote Conservative. The 'mud cabin', or Irish peasant, vote had returned eighty-six Parnellites to the Commons, placing the balance of power in the hands of their leader because of the evenly matched strength of the two major parties.[38]

More than ever the Liberals needed the Irish vote, and Home Rule was the way of obtaining it. Chamberlain had no illusions about the willingness of the majority of the party to follow the lead of the GOM on Ireland. As he ruefully admitted to Dilke, shortly after the 'kite' was flown: 'I fancy that a large number, perhaps the majority, of Liberals will support *any* scheme of Mr G's'.[39] Perhaps, as Michael Barker argues in Gladstone and Radicalism, the GOM was interested in social reform in so far as it provided a means of 'buying' electoral support for Home Rule, but this great (supposedly unifying) issue still came first in his schedule of reform priorities.

The same could not be said of Sir William, whose appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the third ministry Gladstone formed in January 1886 turned 'a highly successful lawyer who had never been quite at home in cabinet politics into a major Liberal statesman'.[40] During the tortuous political manoeuvring preceding the momentous split of the Liberal Party Chamberlain and he shared a mutual lack of enthusiasm for Home Rule, but not the same attitude to reform 'programmes'. Sir William's political philosophy always remained a simple, opportunistic one. Like 'Labby', as Labouchère was called, he found it 'a good deal easier to attack than promulgate a programme', and was quite content to 'mark time' and wait for 'something to turn up'.[41]

During his public career Harcourt emulated Sir William's selective and opportunistic approach to reform. But he did not imitate the abrasive tactics used by 'Jumbo', as Sir William's colleagues nicknamed him, due to his tendency to trample others' opinions underfoot. Sir William once remarked that he always knew when his son was becoming angry - he grew more incoherent. Whereas Harcourt senior enjoyed verbal tussles, 'Lulu' preferred persuasion and logic to *force majeure*. As Chief Whip A.C.Murray remarked in 1910, he did not try to impose his will in any arguments.

Diplomacy is an important quality for a politician, and Harcourt was nothing if not diplomatic, even before he took office. It was not a case of the pupil outstripping the teacher; if anything, Harcourt's low-key approach may have been developed partially as a response to the obviously unsuccessful *modus operandi* of his overbearing father.[42] In his quiet suave way Harcourt made many friends, and built up an intricate network of political contacts from both the Liberal and Conservative camps. As a perusal of his papers makes clear, Harcourt was also very fond of intrigue and manipulation.

He tirelessly observed political trends and events, and noted them in his all-encompassing journal. Harcourt was soon to be given the chance to utilize his talents to the advantage of the Liberal Party, but for the moment, in early 1886, he continued to devote himself exclusively to the assistance of Sir William at the Treasury. Gladstone was delighted by his new Chancellor's headlong assault on 'profligate expenditure'. Ripon, then First Lord of the Admirality, and Campbell-Bannerman, who was serving his first term in a Liberal Cabinet at the War Office,did not share 'Jumbo's determination to lop £3 000 000 off the annual service estimates.[43]

The prime bone of contention within the Cabinet was, however, the Home Rule Bill devised by Gladstone. Undeterred by Chamberlain's opposition, Gladstone presented his first Home Rule Bill to the Commons on 8 April 1886. After two weeks of fiery debate, the Bill was defeated on Second Reading by 343-313. Ninety-three Liberal MPs voted against it. Gladstone dissolved Parliament on 26 June, hoping to get public endorsement of his Irish policy. This time his appeal to the nation failed: in the ensuing election the Liberals were heavily defeated.

A total of 316 Conservative/Unionist MPs were returned, opposed by 191 Gladstonian Liberals and 85 Parnellites. The Conservatives were left with a clear majority of 118 seats, because when Chamberlain seceded from the Liberal Party, he took 78 Liberal Unionists along with him. Hartington and the Whigs were amongst those who had left the Liberal Party over Ireland. The Liberal Party had now been 'purified' of anti-Gladstonian elements. But, as Labouchère pointed out to Herbert Gladstone in August: 'Your father has created an Irish Home Rule Party, and it will fall to pieces if the principle of Home Rule be not maintained'.[44]

Labouchère in fact welcomed the split over Home Rule as a means of radicalizing the Liberal Party. He had not expected Chamberlain to act 'the part of a Conservative jackal ... leading men into a Whig cave',[45] but now the battle lines were clearly drawn. The most progressive elements in the Liberal Party tended to remain with Gladstone. In the course of his work for the Party during the post-1886 period, Harcourt was to absorb more Radical ideas. Even his father, the Whiggish 'elder statesman' left behind by Hartington and his followers, began toying with Radical ideas himself. But to implement *any* reforms, the Liberals would have to be re-elected.

III

As Labouchère pointed out to Herbert Gladstone, the Liberal Party was now inextricably linked with the policy of Home Rule for the Irish. This was by no means the only reform contemplated by Liberal politicians. The growing preoccupation of the new generation of Liberal politicians like Asquith, Haldane and Campbell-Bannerman with social reform emphasized that the Liberal Party was looking to the future. But Home Rule was the policy which had led to the Liberal defeat at the polls. And it was this very same issue which dominated Liberal politics from 1886-90.

Gladstone argued that Home Rule was the indispensable prelude to the implementation of other domestic reforms. In other words, Home Rule effectively stood as an obstacle in the way of all other reforms.[46]

They would have to wait until Home Rule had gained the electors' acceptance as national policy. This was the basic dilemma would-be Liberal social reformers faced during this period. Radicals and 'faddists' of all types accepted Gladstone's argument that Home Rule was the first priority on the agenda of reform. This insistence on Home Rule precluded any reconciliation with the Liberal Unionists.

For a while it did seem that Liberal reunion might be possible, because of the friendship between Sir William and Chamberlain. Friendship survived political and ideological differences to a greater extent than is perhaps now the case in an era of professional 'tooth and claw' politics. Disputes begun in the parliamentary debating chamber might well be settled over the dining table. Even while he was vacating the Chancellor's official residence at 11 Downing Street, Sir William made it clear to Chamberlain that he bore no grudge. After all, he had attacked Home Rule more fiercely in Cabinet than Chamberlain had outside it.[47]

It was, Sir William wrote, a time for 'decent b[illegible]l' of the dead, and there was no point in fighting over the 'corpse'. In his equally conciliatory reply, Chamberlain suggested that they meet at dinner when he came down to London, where he would introduce his son Austen to 'Lulu'. This was to be Harcourt's first meeting with Austen, who was about to set out for a twelve-month stay in Berlin.[48] Although by the time he took office Harcourt and Austen were on different sides of the political fence, they remained on fairly good terms, emulating the parliamentary comradeship shown by their seniors.

The stage was set for talks on possible reunion. As Michael Hurst has shown, Chamberlain's intransigence was eventually too big a stumbling-block to overcome,[49] but initially the Harcourts were very optimistic. Writing to his life-long friend Reginald Brett, the future Viscount Esher, Harcourt referred to the 'real desire for conciliation'.[50] He did not play a direct role in the proceedings, but Harcourt did try to stop a final breakdown of negotiations. John Morley had been one of Chamberlain's closest Radical friends, but Home Rule had estranged them.

In one of his earliest roles as peacemaker, perhaps his first, Harcourt brought Morley to Sir William's London residence at Grafton Street on New Year's day 1887. Morley and Chamberlain rather awkwardly

exchanged new year greetings, but the ice was broken. Harcourt arranged for a round table to be moved in, and the first official sesson of the reunion talks began a couple of weeks later. Morley, Harcourt noticed, was coming to rely increasingly on Sir William's 'ability and resource'; while Chamberlain's subsequent speeches against 'the Irishmen'(Parnellites) did little to help reestablish Morley's old friendship with 'Radical Joe'.[51]

By St Valentine's day, when the protagonists were gathered for dinner at the house of Sir George Trevelyan (the former Irish Secretary) Morley and Chamberlain were barely on speaking terms once again. The former seemed on the point of leaving, when Sir William's arrival saved the situation. Harcourt had obtained an enormous orchid for his father, which he pinned to his jacket to emphasize his role as 'plenipotentiary'. There was general laughter, and the dinner ended so successfully, that a resumption of formal talks still seemed likely.[52] But it was not to be. Soon afterwards, Chamberlain met Harcourt by chance, and told him he had written a letter which would make his hair 'curl'.

This letter was published by the Baptist, a Nonconformist journal on 25 February, and violently attacked Home Rule. The policy, Chamberlain argued, was an obstacle to the claims of Welsh Nonconformists, as well as those of Scots crofters and English agricultural labourers. He had burnt his bridges. As he wrote to Gladstone, 'let us remain friends even if it is out of the question that we should be allies'.[53] Sir William was tired of his, as he put it, Sisyphus-like efforts, and his exasperated letter to Chamberlain evoked the reply from Highbury that 'If this is peace, frankly I prefer war'.[54]

While the Conference wound down towards its abortive conclusion, the finality of the Liberal split was confirmed by the unsporting developments in Clubland. The 'Whig Committee', renamed as the Eighty Club in 1881, had passed a resolution of neutrality on Home Rule in 1886. But by May 1887 the Eighty Club had declared in favour of Gladstone's Irish policy. The reaction of one third of its some 240 members was to secede *en masse* to a new 'Liberal Union' Club presided over by Hartington. Brook's, not renowned as a bastion of advanced Liberalism, had already closed its doors to Harcourt and several other eligible Gladstonians since February.[55]

Whatever Harcourt thought of this snub, it was considered *de rigueur* for a gentleman to belong to a club, and there was no shortage of others to join, even before the 'black listing' was stopped. Whether or not he actually visited them often, Who's Who listed him as a member of four clubs during his period of office: Reform, Devonshire, National Liberal and Bachelors'. Yet, despite the internal squabbles, the Liberal Opposition was far from being a spent and demoralized force. The Liberal by-election successes from 1886-92 reflected the electors' confidence in the party as a still viable force in British politics.

Despite the battering of 1886, the Liberal Party was still, pending the rise of Labour, the major alternative for anti-Conservative voters in what was effectively a two-party electoral system. But Liberal organizers were not complacent, and there was much reorganization within the party on the local level during the final years of the decade. In the interests of greater electoral efficiency, the official Liberal Central Association, controlled by Chief Whip Arnold Morley, cooperated with the National Liberal Federation. The secretary of the NLF at this time was the tireless Francis Schnadhorst.

The NLF occupies a distinguished place in the history of the Liberal Party's long and symbiotic relationship with Nonconformity.[56] Within a few years of its creation, this Birmingham brainchild of Joseph Chamberlain was turned into a nation-wide network, with the help of associates like Dilke and Morley. NLF organization was modelled on that of the Conservative Central Office and American party caucuses, and the rapid growth of the federation was indicative of the growing power of middle-class Nonconformity. The growing influence of the NLF made the satisfaction of Nonconformist demands crucial for the Liberal Party.

Gladstone described Nonconformity as the 'backbone' of British Liberalism. Radical Nonconformity was an important source of Liberal parliamentary support in the post-1886 period. Labelled as Dissenters during the Eighteenth Century, the members of non-Anglican Protestant churches were commonly referred to as Nonconformists by the next century.[57] Nonconformists wanted reform of licensing, recognition of sectarian religious teaching in schools, and, in Wales, the withdrawal of State subsidies to the Established (Anglican) Church. Nonconformist influence in the NLF meant that the federation attached great importance to these issues.

The Liberal Party championed these Nonconformist causes despite the preoccupation with Home Rule, and the NLF remained closely linked to it. In September 1886 Schnadhorst underlined the growing power and independence of the NLF by moving its headquarters from Birmingham to London, although the final break with Chamberlain came only in April 1887. It was also in late 1886 that Schnadhorst decided to do away with the ineffectual London and Counties Liberal Union. In place of the LCLU, he created a Home Counties Division. It began to operate in July 1887.

Harcourt gained his first practical experience of party organization during his term as Honorary Secretary of this new division, which he joined soon after its inception.[58] Part of his duties included drawing up schedules for public appearances of leading Liberal politicians like John Morley who jocularly complained that 'Lulu' was a slave driver.[59] Another function was the collection of monies in the form of subscriptions, and this led to a slight *contretemps* with a future Prime Minister. The Spectator, a Unionist free trade weekly, was the first newspaper to describe Rosebery as a possible successor of William Gladstone.

Rosebery certainly seemed to have a dazzling political future in prospect. In 1889, when Harcourt wrote to Rosebery, sixteen years separated the two men. At 42, Rosebery was a seasoned politician, who had already served in Liberal Governments as Lord Privy Seal, and as Foreign Secretary. The contrast with the still relatively 'raw' newcomer to the Home Counties Division was all too evident. But all this made little difference to Harcourt, who had presumably already met him while the latter served Sir William as Under Secretary at the Home Office from 1881-83. Harcourt saw no reason why His Lordship should not pay his subscription of £50 like everybody else.

In his characteristically polite but pointed way Harcourt reproached Rosebery for his dereliction of his financial duties as Chairman of the London County Council. He reminded him that the NLF with its influence among the mercantile class, had done a great deal to secure this post for Rosebery, and that the Committee (of the Home Counties Division) felt he should pay his subscription at once, as a *sine qua non*

for its retention.[60] Rosebery was not swayed by the earnestness of his young correspondent: he professed himself unaware of any obligation to pay an annual subscription to the Home Counties Division, although he admitted that he had made an occasional *donation* as President of that society.

'I understand', he sarcastically added, 'I have long ceased to be that'. However he would consider sending a small sum in stamps as a token of his 'constant good will'.[61] Harcourt had not bargained for so summary a dismissal of his request, and wrote back expressing the 'disappointment and regret' of the Committee, 'intensified by the levity of the tone employed by Your Lordship'. There is no further reference to the affair in the Harcourt Papers, and so it can only be guessed how it ended. Rosebery was probably as good as his word, and sent the stamps! A few years later they had far more serious grounds for disagreement, but this is an interesting illustration of how seriously 'Lulu' took his work for the federation.

Despite his various secretarial tasks, Harcourt found time to accompany Sir William on his excursions to the Continent. Their usual destinations were France and Germany, where the aging Sir William was wont to consult a Wiesbaden oculist about his eyesight. He was growing more and more reliant on 'Lulu', and never grew tired of hearing others - like John Morley - sing his son's praises. The winters spent at Madeira during his youth as a cure for his lung trouble had undoubtedly done Harcourt much good, but his health remained delicate. Sir William was in no hurry to see him enter Parliament, so the Harcourts' domestic routine remained unchanged. But on the political front there was a state of turmoil due to an unexpected *causa celebre*.

The Irish Nationalist O'Shea decided to end his marriage of convenience, and filed a suit for divorce citing his chief Charles Parnell as co-respondent. A startled public found out about the long liaison between Parnell and Mrs O'Shea for the first time. Parnell tried to play down the scandal, but he was now to suffer the fate of so many other politicians whose private lives have, by some mischance, become the object of public scrutiny and censure. In November 1890 he was found guilty. Sir William was not as enthusiastic about Home Rule

as his son, and he had a low opinion of Parnell.

Sir William welcomed the scandal as a pretext for severing the Liberal Party's links with a man whom, he wrote to his wife, he had had the pleasure of never shaking hands.[62] Initially Gladstone maintained that this was a matter to be settled by the Irish themselves, and that it was not his task to pronounce moral judgements. But, as the Harcourt journal testifies, it became difficult to remain impartial because of the rising groundswell of anti-Parnell feeling in the Commons. Whatever Harcourt thought of Parnell, he clearly regarded him as a political liability for the Liberal Party.

In a note to Ripon, he commented that:

> The rage and despair of our party is beyond all words. I have fled from the lobby as I can stand it no longer ... I believe that this must destroy our chances at the Election whenever it comes.[63]

Harcourt therefore almost certainly approved of the determined efforts of John Morley and Sir William to get Gladstone to make a declaration against Parnell. Finally, the GOM did consent to the publication of a letter to Morley in which Gladstone stated that Parnell's retention of the Nationalist leadership might result in 'consequences disastrous in the highest degree' to the Irish cause.

This assured the political demise of Parnell, although he continued to fight for the Irish leadership right up to his death in October 1891. Coincidentally, but symbolically, this was the very same month that a new phase of Liberal policy was ushered in at Newcastle. The new programme unveiled here, at the annual meeting of the NLF, illustrated the Liberal leaders' awareness that new planks were needed in the party platform. Ireland was not forgotten, but in the 'catch all' so-called Omnibus Resolution 'faddist' Nonconformist proposals jostled side by side with Radical reforms dealing with land ownership and the franchise.

Among the land and tax reforms proposed in this mixed bag were repeal of the laws of primogeniture and entail, freedom of sale and transfer, 'just' taxation of land values and ground rents, and compensation to town and country tenants for 'disturbance and improvements'. Also advocated was taxation of mining royalties, and 'just' division of rates between owner and occupier. Other reforms wanted were extension of the Factory Acts, a 'free Breakfast Table', disestablishment, and enfranchisement of leaseholds.[64] The announcement of this reform programme came at an opportune moment for Harcourt himself.

By 1891, his organizational efforts for a federation with which his father had become disillusioned, placed him in a rather invidious position. Both Morley and Sir William had become tired of deferring to the wishes of the 'provincials' from the NLF. Sir William regarded the attendance of Liberal parliamentary leaders at NLF meetings as a 'bore and a mistake'. He saw no point in being an 'ornamental' figure who had to make short 'ornamental speeches' of seemingly ephemeral benefit to the Liberal Party's interests.[65]

Gladstone even allowed NLF Secretary Francis Schnadhorst to draw up lists of suitable (and unsuitable) speech topics, and Sir William frowned on such encroachments by an extra-parliamentary caucus. Interference in policy-making was anathema: when Schnadhorst moved an unauthorized resolution on Welsh Disestablishment shortly after his return from South Africa in mid-1890,[66] Sir William reacted violently. While Harcourt tried to mediate, his father and Morley bombarded the rapidly-failing Schnadhorst with recriminatory letters. Even after this summer storm blew over, Sir William remained convinced that the key to Liberal electoral success was 'definite action' in the Commons rather than provincial 'excursions and alarums'.[67]

Still heavily influenced by his father, it seems unlikely that Harcourt contributed much to Sir William's drift away from 'Whiggish' *laissez-faire* from December 1890 onwards. Sir William began to cooperate more closely with Labouchère, the acknowledged spokesman for the small but aggressive band of 'extreme' Radical MPs. But this should not be mistaken for *ideological* commitment to Radicalism. Michael Barker's study of Gladstone and Radicalism clearly indicates that Sir William was something of a political opportunist: Gardiner shows that he was

essentially a Whig. Hence his closer association with Radicalism was rather suspect. Michael Barker might be right in suggesting that the motive was simply political self-preservation.

To remain *de facto* parliamentary leader of the Liberals, in the increasingly frequent absence of Gladstone, Sir William needed to show that he knew where the Liberal Party was going. Yet despite his new concern to give the Party a progressive image, he was still not a member of the 'advanced' wing of the Party.[68] Neither he nor his son aligned themselves with the Radical advocates of 'national efficiency' represented by Richard Haldane and his circle now that the Chamberlainites had left the Liberal Party. Social reform was the universal topic at Radical watering-holes like the Eighty Club and the Reform Club.

Again, it is not greatly significant that Sir William spoke at the Eighty Club on several occasions, and was later elected as its president - since the club's original name was the Whig Committee. The Harcourts were averse to State intervention on principle: like Labouchère they feared, as the Radical leader put it, to end up as 'a child in the hands of the State'. In fact, Sir William found a kindred spirit in Labouchère precisely because the latter was in fact less radical then some of his followers. The traditional type of Radicalism Labouchère represented did not contradict, in its essentials, the political and economic ideas which informed the Harcourts' liberalism.

Opposition to State intervention was a key part of the Gladstonian creed - this tradition of British liberalism went back to John Bright, and before him, his mentor Richard Cobden. Labouchère was a fanatical 'Little Englander', and although Harcourt junior was to modify his ideas on this subject later in his own public career, Sir William always regarded isolation as a splendid idea. Like his father, Harcourt consistently opposed expansionism and 'entangling alliances', a phrase coined by the third American president Thomas Jefferson, and much in vogue at the time. Nor was Labouchère's adherence to free trade a uniquely Radical characteristic.

For most Liberals, Radical or not, the Corn Laws repealed in 1846 were a fading memory. By the last decade of the nineteenth century

it was considered natural, not radical, to uphold free trade. Although its survival was by no means a foregone conclusion,[69] in late Victorian and Edwardian England, free trade came closer to being an unquestioned dogma, rather than just a policy. Liberal Gladstonians were also united in their opposition to what Bright had called 'profligate expenditure'. The Harcourts' devotion to retrenchment precluded their approval of really radical social reforms, like old age pensions, cheap housing for the poor and restructuring of local government.

Such projects were expensive, and the watchword of Gladstonian financial policy was economy. Then and later, Harcourt saw nothing incongruous in limiting reform to a strictly Gladstonian path. When he came to serve in a Liberal Cabinet during the next century he showed that the 'radical' elements of his Liberalism were static, and firmly rooted in the past. The social reform Bright had concentrated on was land reform. As a goal, rural regeneration made good political sense,[70] not only to Bright, but to successive Liberal land reformers like Harcourt and Lloyd George. Nonetheless, the very different approaches adopted by the latter two statesmen was a testimony to the ideological rift underlying a similar objective.

Part of the reason Sir William and Labouchère co-operated smoothly was that they had no conflicting *long-term* objectives. Like Sir William, 'Labby' was in his element in a parliamentary rough-house, and specialized in destructive, as opposed to constructive, criticism. In some ways he was indeed a 'rococo old Whig', as Harcourt once described him. His alleged extremism did not extend much beyond the stock Radical demands for an end to the House of Lords, Welsh Disestablishment, land reforms and a genius for obstruction.[71] Sir William and Labouchère both believed that the Liberal Party should not concentrate on Home Rule at the expense of other reforms.

Despite their respective views on *which* other domestic reforms were important, they agreed that electoral victory could not depend solely on Home Rule. As Labouchère noted, Home Rule would have to be made a 'mere portion' of a larger Liberal programme:

> What an English elector wants is an issue in

which his interests are personally concerned.[72]

After the furore over the Parnell case, Liberal electoral prospects needed a boost. Although Gladstone senior had anticipated a comfortable Liberal majority at the next general election, the situation had changed.

The Opposition had taken a hard knock. As one David Lloyd George, a then obscure Radical Welsh MP sitting for Caernarvon Boroughs noted on 27 November 1890:

> There is absolutely no fight left in us ... The House simply rushes through business. There is practically no opposition. Labouchère's ... most pungent sayings excite no laughter.[73]

The Newcastle Programme offered the diversity of reforms Sir William and Labouchère sought. It offered something to Nonconformist and secular Radicals alike. Sir William wholeheartedly endorsed the Programme because it moved beyond the previous NLF 'faddism' he could no longer tolerate.[74]

Harcourt could not but endorse a programme which offered electoral success, but the reason for his allegiance to the NLF itself needs closer examination. He did not *identify* himself with the specifically Nonconformist demands of many federation members for reform of existing education and licensing legislation, and for disestablishment and disendowment. He was even more 'unmystical' than Sir William, who charged gleefully into the midst of religious *mêlées* for the sake of the fight *per se*. Of course, because of his uncompromising commitment to traditional Liberal values, Harcourt upheld religious equality and freedom of worship. But, with minor exceptions, he confined his attention to secular matters.

Harcourt clearly stated his indifference to religious matters later on in his career, and as a member of the Established (Anglican)

Church himself, could hardly be expected to share the zeal of Non-conformist would-be reformers. It seems that the attraction of the NLF, from Harcourt's point of view, was the work the federation could do to provide party *unity*. Labouchère (and others) saw the Liberal Party as the Home Rule Party. But behind this universal, binding policy the Party contained very differing schools of thought. Many Liberal supporters of 'national efficiency' were also Liberal Imperialists.

They were not, as yet, referred to as 'Lib Imps', (the term came into use almost a decade after the unveiling of the Newcastle Programme) but Haldane, Asquith, Grey, *et al* already had these *ideas* in common.[75] Far from being a united entity, the Liberal Party was an assemblage of cliques and interests: ethnic/religious; professionals, businessmen and landowners/industrialists; Radicals of various persuasions, including Gladstonians,and even a residue of Whigs (in the passive political sense). The NLF was a body in a position to transcend these differences, working at the *local* level to build a wider, national Liberal unity.

William Gladstone's ambivalent attitude to Radicalism was masked by his nominal lip-service to the Newcastle Programme, from which even the embryonic Liberal Imperialist group could not dissociate itself, although - like Sir William - it disapproved of the NLF's claims to dictate Party policy. The new programme did nothing to alter the fact that Sir William remained the *bête noire* of a group committed to extension of State intervention in the interests of 'national efficiency'. Because of the differing perceptions of future policy within the Liberal Party, the Programme did not arouse universal enthusiasm. Essentially, the Programme was what Chamberlain derisively described as a 'political

conglomerate'. The Liberals' own leader found it hard to accept that this general attack on privilege and monopoly was a welcome alternative to the preoccupation with Home Rule.[76]

Gladstone's leadership in fact became increasingly nominal, and his rare parliamentary appearances put a heavy burden on Sir William who, as his deputy, was saddled with great responsibility without the corresponding authority. Sir William could not make crucial decisions without the approval of the 'supreme personage', as he called his chief, and the inefficient arrangement was hardly conducive to maintaining back-bench discipline. It was small wonder that Harcourt's father sought to secure his position as 'Mayor of the Palace' via what he saw as closer association with Radicalism, via Labouchère. United, outwardly at least, by the new programme, the Liberal Opposition now awaited the next general election.

As the year 1891 drew to a close, Sir William had had his hands full domestically. Shortly before Christmas his brother Edward died. Edward's only son, Aubrey, was then overseas, and this left Sir William with the task of administering the Oxfordshire estate of his late brother. Nuneham Courtenay was not the oldest Harcourt possession - the family seat was the manor at Stanton Harcourt - but it was the largest. It had been bought and George II had made Simon Harcourt Viscount Harcourt of Stanton Harcourt in 1749. Subsequently, the estate came into the possession of Edward Harcourt, the Archbishop of York and the great grandfather of 'Lulu'.[77] Aubrey was now the heir, after the death of the present Edward, and Sir William was next in line.

The estate Harcourt was to make his country retreat was plea-

santly situated on the Isis, the old Oxonian name for the upper Thames. The towers of Oxford were plainly visible from the house, which was designed by Etonian architect Stiff Leadbetter. From 1781-82 it had been virtually rebuilt, in the midst of an idyllic setting reflecting the genius of landscape designer Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, whose last commission this was.[78] But for the harassed Sir William, Nuneham was only another responsibility, and more than ever he found his son indispensable. 'I don't know what I should do without him', he wrote to a 'fellow Whig' colleague John Spencer.[79] Harcourt did not only help out at Nuneham and in London : Malwood also benefitted from his attentions.

Malwood, in Hampshire's New Forest, was where Sir William found solace way from his parliamentary woes. After his first visits to the New Forest in 1882, Sir William had decided to establish a country house there. He obtained twenty-two acres on the site of the lodge where, tradition had it, William Rufus spent the night prior to his assassination. No doubt this was an added attraction for someone with the impeccable Norman surname of Vernon, but Malwood's great beauty was its main recommendation. Sir William spent most of his leisure time at Malwood, where he would proudly show guests around his well-kept acres.[80] The keen interest Harcourt showed in gardening was acquired from his father, his mentor in this as in other spheres.

Harcourt had Malwood connected with the outside world by telephone,[81] perhaps fondly anticipating the day his father would become the leader of the Liberal Party. Up to date information is an essential commodity for any leading politician, and Sir William could now keep his finger on the pulse of politics even from the midst of the New Forest.

But in late 1891 a tired, depressed Sir William cound not even envisage electoral victory for the Liberals, let alone accession to the leadership. In a letter to former Liberal Cabinet Minister Hugh Childers he wrote:

> I rather envy you... for retiring for a time from this troubled and troublesome scene. I think that if we come into office you will rejoin us in opposition in a very short time.[82]

The new parliamentary session began on 9 February 1892, with Gladstone abroad, on doctor's orders. In his absence Sir William deputized as usual. One of the early highlights of the year, as far as the Harcourts were concerned, was the defeat of a Women's Franchise Bill by a narrow vote of 175 - 152 in April, in a division which saw much cross-party voting. Sir William temporarily gave up the comforts of Malwood for the sole purpose of voting 'against the women' after the Second Reading of the Bill. On the issue of women's suffrage Sir William was a 'frank Philistine, rejoicing in the most antiquated view in regard to the place of women in society'.[83] His brother Robert (born in 1878) became a suffragist, but Harcourt whole-heartedly shared his father's arrested views on the 'total incapacity of the [female] sex for public affairs'.

IV

The Liberals won a narrow victory in the general election of July 1892, with the help of Irish and Labour support. Queen Victoria was reluctantly obliged to send for that 'dreadful old man' William Gladstone yet again. As the Grand Old Man began to form his fourth and final Liberal Government, he was pressurized by Sir William, who tried to make it a condition of his accepting office that Lord Vernon, the head of the Harcourt family, be given an under-secreteryship. Harcourt was on good terms with the Gladstones, as noted earlier, and what he thought of his father's clumsy attempt to bargain with the Prime Minister is a matter for surmise. An indignant Gladstone categorically rejected Sir William's

demand, and his son was summoned to take the offensive letter away.

Possibly, Harcourt was not informed of the letter's contents, and the fiasco might have remained a secret shared by Sir William, Gladstone and his Welsh friend Stuart Rendel. But if he *was* in the know, Harcourt must have treasured this missive as a text-book example of how not to apply pressure. Of course Harcourt was still perfecting his ability in this field himself (Rosebery was a tough customer), but Sir William would have benefitted from lessons from his almost invariably subtle and diplomatic son. Gladstone always found 'Jumbo' perplexing, and this escapade left him more baffled than ever. 'Such a strange mixture of a man was never known', he later declared.[84] By contrast, Harcourt was something of a diplomat *manqué*.

No less discerning an authority than Rosebery himself later stated that he would not select anyone other than Harcourt for a foreign mission : 'Not scrupulous - charming manner - perfect tact'.[85] Harcourt usually remained on good terms with his correspondents, even when he failed them. An example, just after the Liberals took office was the petition he made on behalf of a Mr. Hobart, who sought to be appointed as private secretary to Campbell-Bannerman.CB had been appointed War Secretary once more, and Harcourt already had a high opinion of a man many agreed to be 'the only one apparently fitted for every office'.[86]

Writing to Harcourt on 16 August, three days before the first meeting of the new Liberal Cabinet, CB explained that he would rather stick to precedent and continue with the private secretary of his predecessor. He knew Hobart, he added, and would inform him accordingly. Hobart subseqently wrote back to Harcourt to thank him for his efforts, and mentioned CB's 'most kindly' letter.[87] Another errand Harcourt undertook, this time probably at the instigation of Sir William, was to discuss with William Gladstone the possibility of including Labouchère in the new government. In the end, nothing came of it, apparently because the Queen felt that the ownership of a newspaper was not compatible with a ministerial post.

'Labby' had edited the weekly journal Truth since 1877, and also owned it. The failure of Harcourt's mission did not come as a surprise to Labouchère, but his exclusion rankled. Superficially the

Radical leader remained on good terms with the GOM, who took responsibility for the royal decision, but Labouchère regarded Gladstone as a 'super-annuated old goose'. And there was more than a touch of bitterness in his later description of himself to Sir William as a 'leper whom the Queen would always have sitting at the gate ... scratching his sores'.[88] Nonetheless, Harcourt senior continued to run the risks of 'infection' to radicalize the image of the party and to satisfy the electors with various reforms.

Sir William urged Gladstone to support new legislation providing for local option, village councils with control of schools, registration reform and one man one vote, payment of members and Welsh disestablishment. These reforms, he argued, were 'only a fraction' of what Gladstone had pledged at Newcastle.[89] The Liberal leader in fact already had his own list of measures drawn up. The focus was on registration and franchise reform to alter an electoral system Gladstone regarded, with some justification, as loaded in favour of the Unionists.[90] The three major reforms were swift compilation of accurate registers, reduction of the length of the qualifying period for residence franchise to three months, and abolition of the plural vote.[91]

The electoral benefits Gladstone expected these reforms to yield would, as he saw it, make Home Rule possible by making the Liberal Party's parliamentary strength powerful enough to achieve it. Along with the extension of small holdings, the abolition of plural voting later formed two of Harcourt's principal reform objectives when he took public office. Then, and later, he firmly believed that these reforms would be greatly beneficial for the Liberal Party. The Harcourts clearly had very different ideas about *which* reforms were important: the faith 'Lulu' had in 'one man, one vote' was analogous to that of Sir William for the policy of allowing local option on the temperance issue. Harcourt favoured *reform* of the House of Lords, as proposed by Labouchère in 1888,[92] whereas Sir William was a 'Single Chamber' man.

It was this diversity of opinion within the Liberal Party, exemplified by the Harcourts, that the Liberal Imperialists rejected. Rosebery and his followers had quite definite ideas about what should constitute domestic policy, as well as foreign policy. As Asquith later put it, they saw the

period following the introduction of the Newcastle Programme as a chaotic one. The argument was that instead of strengthening the 'party of progress', the Liberal Party, the Programme had actually weakened it by getting it to spend its energies 'in more or less futile efforts in the simultaneous pursuit' of fruitless schemes.[93] In other words, instead of seeing the Newcastle Programme as (at least) a partial solution to the problem of 'faddism', as the Harcourts did, the advocates of 'national efficiency' saw it as an extension of NLF influence on the Liberal Party.

The group of Liberal ministers and back-benchers later to be known as Liberal Imperialists objected to what they regarded as Gladstone's continued deference to the 'faddists' of the NLF. By contrast, the classical type of Radical ideology represented by the federation rejected any systematic extension of State intervention to implement domestic reform. Whatever the extent of their personal commitment to radicalism, Gladstonian L berals agreed on the importance of the individual, and individual rights. The achievement of 'national efficiency' via State intervention was, from this view point, an unacceptably mechanistic, impersonal approach. But the Roseberians did not see any conflict between their approach and their party's fundamental principles.

What mattered to them was the *national* interest, not the means. Administrative and legislative reform, and improvement of education, living and working conditions were all ways of making an 'organic' society more efficient. There was nothing wrong with State intervention, not only to promote 'efficiency', but to act an an arbitrator between workers and employers and to combat unemployment.[94] These very different approaches to social reform within the party contained the seeds of future conflict, but there was still peaceful co-existence during the post-1886 period. During a visit to Hawarden the Harcourts stayed up to 1.30 am chatting with Rosebery; when Sir Edward Grey made his maiden speech, he was warmly congratulated by Sir William, illustrating the general agreement on the importance of the Irish question. Even an autocratic Unionist like Lord Curzon was not beyond the pale.[95]

Yet, in September 1892, barely two months after the Liberals had taken office, the ideological differences were brought out into the open over the issue of Uganda. This was not one of Britain's East African protectorates, and was administered by the British East Africa Company

(BEAC). Not only was the Company running at a heavy loss, but it was also losing control - unable to deal with growing civil unrest. The BEAC began to prepare a plan for evacuation, but Rosebery, now Foreign Secretary, had no intention of allowing the creation of a 'void' in what he regarded as an important British sphere of influence. When the Prime Mininster and Sir William belatedly found out about Rosebery's plan for direct British intervention, their fury knew no bounds.

The ensuing conflict over the retention of Uganda renewed the struggle between Imperialists and 'Little Englanders' began by Foreign Minister Palmerston and Bright in mid-century.[96] This time it was an internecine struggle, which brought the Liberal Government to the edge of destruction. In what Dame Margery Perham rightly described as unusual language for British ministerial correspondence, Sir William expressed his preference to die 'a thousand deaths' rather than agree to military occupation, and Gladstone was hardly less adamant.[97] The essence of 'Little Englander' opposition to what Rosebery called 'pegging out claims for the future' consisted of hostility to the idea of subjugating foreign peoples, and the expense of administering the newly-acquired territories.

As Radicals like Labouchère saw it, possessions obtained and held by force were not assets to the Empire, and he opposed bills for colonial loans on the grounds that a Crown Colony was a 'thoroughly rotten' colony.[98] In the end, Rosebery got his way, because of the strength of the Imperialist faction within the Party, and partly due to the press campaign which drummed up popular support for annexation: a 'temporary' occupation was grudgingly agreed to by the Cabinet. The British finally 'evacuated' Uganda in 1962. The Government survived the crisis, and Harcourt continued his work for the NLF. He found parts of his organizational work more demanding than others - like making public speeches.

By 1892 Harcourt was already a practised speaker - his first public address was made at Derby in 1884, a debut which delighted Sir William.[99] Harcourt was, by his own admission, never a great orator, but a competent one. He apparently so admired his father's speeches that he once wrote that he had been kept awake all night thinking about one of them! To this Sir William replied:

> You are like the clerk at the table who, when Pitt had the wine, he had the headache. If I am to make the speeches and you have the insomnia I shall make no more speeches.[100]

As a speaker, Harcourt certainly seems to have modelled his style on that of Sir William.

A contemporary described Harcourt's delivery when 'addressing a large general audience as slow and rather monotonous'. Similarly, Sir William's words were

> allowed to flow from him monotonously lazily, as if the speaker cared not how they came out. Mr. Harcourt... lacks what Emerson, in his essay on eloquence just published, sets down as a main requisite in an orator - animal heat; to warm himself and, as a necessary consequence, his audience.[101]

Public speaking did not come naturally to the reserved Harcourt, unlike his future colleagues Asquith and Lloyd George. Although the content of his speeches was almost always of a high standard, he had his 'on' and 'off' days like most other speakers.

The difference between him and more confident speakers was that he regarded speeches as an ordeal, and was often in a very nervous state *before* he spoke. When Harcourt finally joined the Liberal back-benchers in 1904, he generally kept out of the perpetual parliamentary verbal cut-and-thrust. Even as a Cabinet Minister, he did not approach public speaking engagements with any greater degree of confidence. On one occasion, when he was due to speak at Dewsbury, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, his wife informed the widowed Lady Harcourt that:

> Lulu is very well but of course plunged into the depth of depression which always accompanies his speech making.[102]

The speaking engagements for the NLF were probably a strain for

the frequently ill Harcourt, but he undertook them often, as testified by the wife of James Bryce, then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Marion Bryce asked Harcourt to chair a conference of delegates from women's associations which wished to support the Liberal programme. The meeting was to be held on 1 December, and someone was wanted who understood points of order and would keep the proceedings 'well in hand'. Perhaps, she concluded, Harcourt might also deliver a short speech that same afternoon on organization, and work that women's associations could devote themselves to during the winter. She felt that this was a weak point in many of the Liberal associations, and some words from Harcourt, who had had considerable experience in this type of work for the men's associations would be much appreciated.[103]

By the end of the year the weary Sir William, now sixty-five, was considering retirement from politics, while his son decided to reduce his own work-load by resigning from the executive committee of the Home Counties Division of the NLF. In gratitude for his past services he received an antique silver bowl and candlesticks at a presentation ceremony presided over by Lord Rosebery, who dwelt on

> the brilliant distinction which the recipient would have won had he not chosen the humbler and certainly the more labourious part of working in obscurity for the regeneration of the Cause.

In his reply, Harcourt was equally complimentary about Rosebery, a rare moment of public accord.[104]

Shortly afterwards, in early February 1893, Harcourt received another thank-you from the new Home Counties Division Secretary William Allard, wishing him well after 'four years of close association and undisturbed confidence and good feeling'.[105] Good feeling was hardly what, in the meantime Sir William was inspiring at the War Office and the Admiralty where Spencer was now First Lord. Weary of office or not, his blasts at 'profligate expenditure' were as fierce as ever. 'Jumbo' had been panicked by the 'miserable mouse' of a surplus bequeathed by George Goschen, his Unionist predecessor at the Exchequer. In his 'tame' budget of 1886 Sir William had used the Sinking Fund to avoid a

deficit but now he was driven to an increase of direct taxation.

Because of his reluctance to add to the 'burthen' of income tax, Sir William focused his attention on property. Goschen himself had paved the way for an increase of death duties via his related estate duty on estates worth over £10 000 per annum, introduced in his third Budget in 1889.[106] It is unclear when Harcourt became interested in the equalization of death duties - graduation according to estate value. The NLF endorsed this reform from 1888 onwards, but as noted earlier, Harcourt did not automatically follow its cue although he worked for the federation. An increase of death duties was a welcome alternative to borrowing to meet the national debt and ever-increasing State expenditure, but it was not Harcourt who persuaded Sir William to take this path.[107]

Harcourt, Sir William and Alfred Milner spent long hours at Malwood and at 11 Downing Street discussing the intricacies of a 'Death Duties' Budget. Milner's interest in Imperial problems did not preclude his approval, in principle, of an increase of succession duties.[108] Moreover, he owed his position as Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue at Somerset House to Sir William, and found him a most likeable chief. Given this good working relationship, steady progress was made with what was to be a milestone in the history of British fiscal reform. Preoccupied as he was by these fiscal deliberations, Harcourt also kept an eye on the progress through the parliamentary grind made by the very mixed assortment of Government bills.

Apart from the second Home Rule Bill, there were measures relating to temperance reform, general 'labour' bills, including the provision of conciliation boards to settle disputes, Welsh Disestablishment, and registration reform. About the latter bill, which Allard kept Harcou informed about, the Home Counties Division Secretary complained that the 'sorry nominees' of the local authorities should not be entrusted with future voting lists: '[it] is such a defeat that I think I should smile if the Bill were lost'.[109] Allard had his wish granted in September 1893, the month Gladstone's cherished Home Rule Bill finally passed Third Reading in the Commons, nearly seven months after it had first been introduced.

Unfortunately for the Liberals, Unionist obstruction in both

Houses saw almost all their other reform measures accompany the Registration Bill into oblivion.[110] Consigned to the tender mercies of the House of Lords, the Home Rule Bill itself was given short shrift via a massive 419-41 vote of rejection. These proceedings generally met with approval or apathy. Cheering crowds greeted the peers as they emerged from Westminster after rejecting the Home Rule Bill. From the Home Counties Allard reported that the performance of the Lords 'excites no interest. No one applauds; none resent it: lethargy reigns'.[111]

Throughout the period 1892-95 this was the problem the Liberal Government faced: due to the indifference of most of the public about Irish and Nonconformist demands, the House of Lords could use its veto powers selectively, in the knowledge that the Government was unlikely to win an election fought over 'minority' interests. While the Government's legislation was meeting with disaster, Sir William was urging his son to accept the vacant post of Woods and Forests. This entailed looking after the remaining tracts of royal forest and woodland in a non-ministerial department which was the forerunner of the present Crown Estates Office, and had been detached from the Office of Works since 1851.[112]

Harcourt refused, explaining that:

> 1st. I do not wish to take or do anything that would cut me off from my work with you, in which I think I am some real use at times.
> 2nd. It would be denounced as a 'job' (which it would be), and would damage you and the Govt.
> 3rd. It would cut me off altogether from political life, which I am fond of. So don't let us think any more of it.
> Bless you.[113]

Not long after turning down this offer, Harcourt found that 'political life' was hotting up, and he found himself involved in the Cabinet row over the naval estimates for 1894/5. Whatever his ambivalence towards 'radical' social reforms, Gladstone was not prepared to compromise on the issues of peace and retrenchment. The Admiralty wanted

an increase of £3 000 000 on the estimates for 1893/94, and Sir William sought a compromise increase of £1 500 000. The Chancellor had to fight on two fronts: getting the Admiralty to modify its figures, and then trying to persuade Gladstone to accept even these reductions.[114] An entry in Harcourt's journal early in January 1894 refers to the 'acute' crisis in Downing Street, with Gladstone determined to resign 'nominally on the ground of failing faculties, but really on the navy'.

Despite his respect for the GOM, Harcourt wondered whether or not it was time for the Prime Minister to retire, but Sir William's view was that this would'finish' the Liberal Party for a generation. After an inconclusive Cabinet meeting held on 9 January, Gladstone indicated he would resign after his return from a holiday at Biarritz.Convinced that this would mean the 'end of all things', Sir William hastily brought his diplomatic son into the field. Harcourt was despatched to Lord Acton, the historian and admirer of the GOM, who was to accompany the Gladstones on their holiday. Harcourt primed Lord Acton with arguments Sir William thought might carry weight with the Prime Minister, and perhaps, dissuade him from resigning.

Nonetheless, after returning from the French resort, Lord Acton reported that the GOM was still in a 'fierce' mood, and unwilling to change his mind despite his family's urging that he remain at his post. Herbert Gladstone, an anxious witness of this crisis, was reassured by Harcourt that there was a 'very genuine desire' on all sides to reach an agreement. He explained that he had had a long talk with Spencer after which the First Lord examined the estimates again to see what further cuts could be made. But, Harcourt reminded the GOM's son, Spencer had already agreed to cuts of over £1 000 000, and would not concede more than another £200 000 or £250 000 at the outside. Rosebery would not agree to substantial additional reductions 'even if it were possible which it is not'.[115]

Sir William was unaware that his son was in fact pleased by the adamance of the Foreign Secretary: it meant that the 'economists' had lost, but this also ensured the retirement of the GOM. Harcourt's letter to Herbert Gladstone was not as ingenuous as it seemed: well before it was written, he had expressed his conviction to Reginald Brett that the 'old man' would not be returning to the Commons. Harcourt made it quite

clear to his host, the future Lord Esher, that the successor of the GOM would be Sir William:

> Loulou [said] he has worked for ten years at wire-pulling, and now he must reap the fruit. So the struggle has commenced between Loulou and Rosebery for the premiership.[116]

It came as no surprise to Brett that 'Lulu' was the driving-force behind Sir William's bid for the premiership. He had suspected that this would be the case as early as December 1892, noting that the three factors favouring Sir William were his seniority in the Party, that he was in the Commons, and his son, who was 'not a quantity that can be neglected. He has so many friends'. During a subsequent luncheon with Rosebery, in which Brett discussed the succession issue on a 'speculative' basis, the Foreign Secretary expressed an 'immensely high' opinion of Harcourt, whom he thought accounted for 'two-thirds' of Sir William's popularity.[117] But in fact the odds were heavily stacked against 'Lulu'.

To make his father Prime Minister, Harcourt needed more than just support from his wide circle of acquaintances and friends: he needed *influential* backing. Rosebery was, in Queen Victoria's eyes, a preferable alternative to Sir William. Stansky's account of the struggle makes extensive use of Lulu's journal, and shows that Sir William was too unpopular in the Cabinet. Harcourt realized this after he vainly offered the influential John Morley 'all the kingdoms of the world', as Rosebery wryly put it when he later found out about the negotiations. Harcourt sought Morley's support because a powerful group of back-benchers including Haldane, Grey, Buxton, Birrell and Ellis (made Chief Whip in March 1894) were under his influence.

Moreover, some years earlier, Morley had promised Harcourt that he would support Sir William as Gladstone's successor. To his dismay, Harcourt now found that the Irish Secretary was not prepared to stick to the terms of the 'Malwood compact'. Even the dangling of delectable carrots like the Foreign Office and the Exchequer did not help. Morley cited the 'untoward events' of the past eighteen months as the reason for his inability to work under Sir William and 'possibly not even with him',

in answer to Harcourt's reproaches for his *volte face*. Harcourt told Morley that

> I had given up the best years of my life and other things beside in the hope of making WVH Prime Minister and I should not give in without a fight ... I meant WVH to be first or out of it altogether.[118]

Morley resented his exclusion from the informal meetings held at Sir William's Brook Street residence some months earlier, thinking that the succession had been discussed by the other Cabinet Ministers invited to the 'conferences'. Although the talks were probably confined to formulation of Party policy, Morley took his exclusion as a personal snub. He also disagreed with Sir William over specific issues, like the size of the Irish contribution to the Imperial Exchequer in terms of the Home Bill Rule, and over women's suffrage, which Morley supported. From Harcourt's point of view, Morley was being 'a silly sensitive bundle of nerves', but although Morley was more susceptible than most of his colleagues he was not alone in opposing Sir William's claim.

It was not only Morley who recalled 'little incidents' and the 'strenuous discussions'(as Sir William refered to them) virtually indistinguishable from a torrent of abuse, whether written or verbal. Rosebery realized this:

> Asquith, Acland and Spencer were equally firm (along with Morley) to me as to the impossibility of Harcourt being Prime Minister. For some reason or another he had offended them all, and made them shrink from the idea of his being placed in authority over them.[119]

Not all of 'Jumbo's' colleagues realized, as Milner did, that under the bristling façade was to be found a genial, almost childlike personality.

In the end, it made no difference that, as Morley wrote, Harcourt was 'the most confidential emissary that Sir William Harcourt could

possibly have chosen - in many ways cleverer, neater, more astute, diplomatic and far more resolute...'[120] Nor did it matter that Sir William did have some sympathizers among the back benchers. They were not consulted. Sir William himself argued that it was better people should ask why one was *not* in a certain place rather than why one was. He was prepared to serve under Rosebery rather than jeopardize the Government's tenure of office because of his personal interests. Harcourt tried to persuade his father otherwise, but to no avail:

> I tried to argue against this view feebly for a time, but knowing that it is the right and only possible one. It will be a splendid sacrifice if it has to be made, and it will be easier for him then it will be for me. He has hardly any ambition; I have a double dose for him.[121]

So, from 23 February onwards, Harcourt acknowledged in his journal that the struggle for the premiership was lost. Apart from Sir William's reluctance to leave the Exchequer and the general Cabinet antipathy, the bulk of public opinion and the press swung behind Rosebery. The pro-Rosebery Liberal publications included the Daily Chronicle, the Daily News and the Westminster Gazette. Only after the issue was decided did the latter daily concede that Sir William had deserved fairer treatment.[122] On 1 March Gladstone (who had returned from Biarritz on 10 February) held his last Cabinet. Later in the afternoon he made his last speech in the Commons - a vigorous attack on the House of Lords.

That same evening the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, informed Rosebery that the Queen intended to summon him when Gladstone resigned. In fact the GOM intended to recommend Spencer, but during his last audience on 3 March the Queen did not mention the succession issue.[123] To her great satisfaction Rosebery accepted a post which became a nightmarish burden he prayed to be rid of. Lord Kimberley replaced him at the Foreign Office, instead of a disgruntled Morley, much to the delight of Harcourt, who never really forgave him for not supporting his father. Outwardly at least Sir William seemed his usual bluff self, although Lady Harcourt displayed less *sang-froid*.[124]

As one of Harcourt's future colleagues put it, although Sir William deferred to the new order, he 'and still more his son, made no pretence that the service was cheerful'.[125] Even before the succession struggle, the new Prime Minister had not been on very good terms with the Harcourts. A typical example was the remarks the latter made about the uniform Rosebery wore at the opening of the Imperial Institute in 1893. Rosebery wrote that he would pass over Harcourt's 'flippant remarks' about the uniform he had worn not to mention the 'baseness' of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.[126] What particularly angered Rosebery now was Harcourt's efforts to deprive him of the premiership.

Consequently, he rejected Harcourt's peace overture on 2 March, and repeatedly stated later that he would object less to restoring friendly relations with Sir William 'were it not for Lulu'. According to one of Rosebery's biographers, the 'cold ruthlessness' with which Harcourt had sought to undermine the Foreign Secretary's claim to the succession was to 'poison' the Liberal Party for the next ten years.[127] Certainly Rosebery and Harcourt were never really on good terms thereafter, but the 'poison' existed *prior* to the retirement of the GOM. As Peter Stansky has shown, it was in the void left by the departure of Gladstone that the clash of policies and personalities came out into the open.

Without the restraining influence of Gladstone, this clash was allowed to supersede wider party interests. Until the succession of the little-heralded Campbell-Bannerman in 1899, the Liberal Party drifted like a rudderless ship. Rosebery, Sir William and Morley had been guided by Gladstone for so long that they could not provide effective leadership on their own. The deterioration of Liberal electoral prospects under the leadership of Rosebery was to an important extent a corollary of the lack of harmony in the Cabinet, and the failure to agree on domestic policies. In effect, 'faddism' was revived as each leader championed his pet reform at the expense of others.

Rosebery was to attempt, unsuccessfully, to revive the plan of the GOM for an anti-House of Lords campaign. Morley remained committed to Home Rule for the Irish. And perhaps the clearest example of the way Liberal leaders were out of touch with elements of their supporters was

Sir William's tenacious faith in licensing reform. The Local Veto Bill of 1893 proposed to give local authorities the power to abolish licenses. Another Local Option Bill Sir William also backed, in 1895, intended to allow local authorities to decrease the number of licenses in their areas. But there were Liberal liquor traders as well as Conservative, although numerically the latter predominated. Also, Nonconformist advocates of temperance reform did *not* constitute a majority of the Liberal rank-and-file.

The United Kingdom Alliance was the most important Nonconformist lobby supporting Sir William's efforts, but local veto or option had less support in England than in Scotland and Wales. Neither Harcourt nor his father seemed to realize this. Like other observers, they were well aware of the seriousness of drunkenness as a social problem,[128] but seem to have underestimated the extent of the support for an alternative means of reform. This entailed the regulation of licensing by municipalities, as at Gothenburg. Backed by Joseph Chamberlain as early as the 1870s, the 'Gothenburg' system had gained many adherents at the turn of the century. This divergence of policy hampered the effectiveness of the temperance movement.[129]

At least one correspondent informed Harcourt of the unpopularity of the Government's local veto policy. This was the Liberal Imperialist Scots MP Munro-Ferguson, who represented Leith, the port of Edinburgh. The future Viscount Novar noted that since Leith was the centre of the liquor interest in Scotland he was having 'a devil of a time'. In a further letter he reported that on the basis of public and private talks, he believed that nine out of ten of his constituents favoured control by municipal boards.[130] The warning went unnoticed. Perhaps, coming as it did from someone who was then Rosebery's private secretary, Harcourt even interpreted it as a criticism of his father's pet policy.

As it turned out, the 1895 election showed that it was not only at Leith that local veto or option failed to strike a responsive chord. But during the weeks following the end of the succession struggle, the possibility of an electoral cataclysm was the last thing on the Harcourts' minds. Aided by Treasury officials, the Harcourts were hard at work on the annual Budget. Harcourt threw himself into the work with as much zeal as he had shown previously, by learning shorthand and typing

to act as Sir William's secretary. Now he 'drudged seventeen hours a day over his father's budget ... he grubbed among blue books and dusty documents'.[131]

The core of the working force was comprised of Harcourt, Sir William and his official secretary Sir Rees Davies. This hectic period must have been slow torture for the non-smoking members of the trio: Sir William's consumption of large cigars was even greater than usual. His suffering colleagues tried to substitute a smaller cheaper brand, but the attempt did not go undetected! On 16 April 1894 Sir William introduced his famous 'Death Duties' Budget in the Cabinet, and ten days later his son was still busy reassuring the GOM about its provisions.[132] Gladstone was much perturbed by what he considered 'by far the most Radical measure of my lifetime'.

Ironically, it was Gladstone himself who had preferred Sir William to 'Radical Joe' at the Exchequer in 1886, because of the latter's views on 'ransom'.[133] It was not just that Sir William had abolished the universal 30/s Death Duty devised by Gladstone in 1881. The ex-Prime Minister regarded the graduated succession duty which replaced it as 'too violent'. Previously, taxation had been applied 'equitably', not taking differences of income into account. The novelty which upset Gladstone and angered landowners was the tax on 'real' property changing hands on the death of an estate owner. Before, only 'personal' property was liable to be taxed.

The distinction was an important one in the case of larger estates. 'Personal' property was defined as small, portable items. 'Real' property was anything larger - buildings, boats, etc. A tax of 1% was levied on estates worth £100-£500. The next bracket was between £500-£1 000, on which 2% was levied. The ceiling was 8%, on all assets in excess of £1 000 000. Hardest hit in terms of the new scales were the inheritors of the nation's largest 'real' or immoveable assets. Gladstone was not the only prominent Liberal worried by this blow to the pockets of large estate owners. Rosebery gave notice of his reservations on 4 April, two days after Sir William read out most of the draft Budget to his colleagues.

Harcourt's journal recorded that:

> Just as we were leaving the House at 6.30 a yellow box arrived from Rosebery containing an elaborate memo --- directed against the Budget generally, and the Graduated Death Duties in particular. WVH much amused at the high Tory line taken by R, and said, 'I wonder what the Daily Chronicle would think if they could see this![134]

Rosebery wondered if the Liberal Party might not alienate the influential landed class, or 'property', by breaking up large estates and make itself many enemies. A 'horizontal division' of parties might result, costing the Government its hitherto wider base of support and obliging it to draw exclusively on working-class support. Sir William cheerfully accepted this possibility in a reply which prompted Rosebery to pencil on it 'Insolence is not argument'. However, because Sir William agreed to reduce the maximum scale from 10% to 8%, Rosebery did not discuss the Budget further in Cabinet. The Harcourts interpreted his lack of protest as a sign of weakness.[135]

Harcourt and his father seem to have viewed the Budget from different points of view. Years later the former continued to refer to this truimphant introduction of the principle of graduation, and its completely successful implementation in subsequent budgets.[136] In 1894 Radicals wondered why Sir William had not introduced graduated income-tax as well, unaware that Harcourt *had* urged his father to do just this. But Milner drew up a memorandum cogently arguing against the inclusion of a surtax on incomes in excess of £5 000 per annum : there would be administrative problems, and assessment would seem 'inquisitorial'. Sir William accepted these arguments.

Lloyd George would later realize Sir William's hope that 'we shall one day find the means to carry it out'.[137] For the Chancellor, the value of the new estate duties seems to have been that they enabled him to avoid a substantial increase of income-tax. The minimal increase from 7d to 8d in the pound was the last one prior to the War Budget of 1900, which was introduced by his Unionist successor Sir Michael Hicks-Beach. Sir William relieved those earning less than £500 per annum of taxation. As he explained to the Liberal economist Francis Hirst, death-duties

would obviate the need for an increase to more than 8d in the pound.

A low income-tax during peace time allowed for a reserve in case of war, when a drastic increase was then justifiable to avoid excessive borrowing. But in peace-time, Sir William contended, taxation ought never to be 'at concert pitch'.[138] For the Radicals who welcomed the introduction of graduated taxation, it was a means of redistributing wealth. The death duties' importance as a precedent was, by contrast what alarmed the Conservatives, who wondered where the process would end now that it had begun. As the ever-cautious Arthur Balfour realized from the outset, graduation was a political hot potato : 'In my opinion ... of all possible questions the very worst for us to choose as our battle-ground'.[139]

The attack the Opposition mounted on the Budget was based on another issue: the tax on drink. Conservative landowners mobilized behind the front provided by 'the trade'. Posing as champions of the popular interest, the brewers crusaded on behalf of the 'poor-man's beer' allegedly threatened by the proposed 6d additional tax per gallon of spirits and per barrel of beer. Sir William argued that, with its great profits, the trade could afford the taxes and that the consumer would not be affected. But the issue hung in the balance as an already thin Liberal majority in the Commons was further eroded. Nine Irish Nationalists voted with the Opposition over the spirits and beer duties.

After passing Second Reading by a mere 14 votes (308-294), the Finance Bill was transfered to committee, where the back-stage squabbling began. Both friends and foes agreed that Sir William conducted his campaign with exemplary skill and remarkable (especially for him) patience. One of his ablest helpers was Milner without whose presence at Somerset House, Edward Hamilton opined, the Bill might not have been carried.[140] After it emerged from what Harcourt disparagingly described as 'the Bear-pit' the Bill passed the Third Reading by 20 votes on 17 July 1894. Only the House of Lords remained, and any serious tampering, let alone rejection, was not seriously considered by the Opposition.[141]

The Budget was the most important Liberal measure passed during Rosebery's tenure of the premiership and the highpoint of Sir William's parliamentary career. But at the time, as his son testifies, he was

simply overjoyed to be 'quit of the Bill, humming to himself 'no more cram'.[142] Sir William's need to 'cram' showed that he was still far from mastering the labyrinthine intricacies of finance. Worried landowners did not yet know it, but 'confiscatory' finance was still far in the future. A man who declared the very next year that the country had 'very nearly reached the limits of tolerable taxation'[143] was no fiscal revolutionary.

After the succession struggle and the strenuous budget preparation, Harcourt's usually keen interest in the political world was at an all-time low. Just at the time his father was savouring his greatest triumph, Harcourt was made a tempting offer to end his unofficial haunting of the *couloirs* of power. Sir Charles Linnotte was about to leave the Mint, and wanted Harcourt to replace him. After 'long and careful consideration' Harcourt declined, although he would have liked the post. It was only one of the accidents of life, he explained to Linnotte, that he had gone into politics. In fact, one of the Mint's greatest attractions was that it offered an 'early and complete severance from political life'.

Nonetheless, Harcourt added, he felt bound to remain a while longer in the profession in which he found himself although it was one 'for which I believe I am not well fitted, and in which I have certainly lost much of the interest I once felt'.[144] Although at the time Linnotte made his offer Sir William was trying to get his son to start an independent career, he failed to persuade 'Lulu' to accept the proferred post. Sir William was also most annoyed that his son's temporary disenchantment with politics also led him to turn down his first chance to enter Parliament. Harcourt was visiting the Ripons at Studley Royal, their Yorkshire estate, when NLF Secretary William Allard was advised of a vacancy in the borough of Leicester.

This was due to the resignation of its MP, Sir James Whitehead, Mr. Hyde, the burgess for Leicester, wrote to Allard asking if Harcourt would consider standing for the office. Allard then contacted Harcourt at Studley Royal but not surprisingly, the reply was negative.[145] Sir William, as his biographer notes, was upset by the obstinacy of 'Lulu' but gave way finally. Father and son decided to spend the rest of the summer holidaying in Italy, and by the time they returned to England in

October the argument had been patched up.[146] On his return Harcourt plunged into his varied secretarial tasks with renewed vigour, lightening his father's work-load.

One of his tasks, and a responsible one, was to consider applications made to the Treasury for funds. At least one head of department preferred to approach the son rather than his fierce father. Herbert Gladstone was First Commissioner of Works in the last Liberal administration of the 1890s. As Gladstone's biographer wrote, this office

> removed from the more serious anxieties of politics, offers as pleasant a variety of duties as any Minister can desire. The care of great historic palaces, the maintenance of parks, the planting of gardens, the beautifying of streets, the supervision of monuments and public buildings ...[147]

However, as Harcourt realized when he later took over Works himself, the department was what Sir William once described as the 'whipping boy' of the Treasury. There was a perennial shortage of funds for Works' many projects. On this occasion Gladstone sought approval for his scheme to improve the Government offices in Parliament Street, adjoining Whitehall. As he explained to Harcourt, he did not wish to bore Sir William with a long memorandum. His plan, a large one, was intended to settle the question of new Government accommodation for a long time to come.[148] Construction duly began, and thirteen years later Harcourt was cast in a similar role when he presided over the completion of the new, much-needed, public offices.[149]

While assisting Sir William, Harcourt assiduously continued to record the dissension among the Liberal leadership. The last few months of Rosebery's administration were unhappy ones for the party in power. At the very start of his premiership, Rosebery untactfully declared that a necessary pre-requisite for Irish Home Rule was English approval. Harcourt thought at the time that Rosebery's blunt statement that England was the 'predominent' partner of the United Kingdom was 'a very bad and foolish blunder' which would do 'immense harm'.[150] As it turned out, the real harm was caused by the Government's inability to pass legislation favour-

ing the minority interests forming part of its support-base.

Until the passing of the Parliament Act of 1911, Liberal Governments could not satisfy Irish and Nonconformist demands due to the Lords' selective use of their veto powers. Government inaction created growing anger and resentment among the Liberal back-benchers and rank-and-file. The manifestation of this was sensitivity to real or perceived slights. In late 1894 Harcourt was personally involved in this phenomenon, in a typically convoluted affair which illustrated the then sorry state of Liberal politics. In an address to his constituents at the Welsh port of Bangor, Lloyd George cited an assertion made by compatriot Sir George Osborne Morgan. This was that Sir William had used an insulting expression in connection with Wales and Welsh questions.

Harcourt lost no time in replying in what seems to have been an inauspicious start to his exiguous correspondence with the Welsh MP. He emphatically denied Morgan's assertion. In turn Lloyd George explained that he was reporting what had been told him by a colleague to whom Morgan had given this account.[151] Sir George Morgan accused Lloyd George of 'fabrication', and the latter despatched another letter to Harcourt asking why he had not reacted. The barbed reply from Harcourt explained that since Sir George Morgan had made a public denial, he had not considered it necessary to contradict the reports to which he had referred and which, as far as his father was concerned, were absolutely without foundation.[152] The implicit suggestion was that Lloyd George *was* the 'fabricator'.

Presumably Sir William had not told his son - or else 'Lulu' did not care to admit - that he had told Morgan 'I wish you and your Bill were in hell!' It was because the Welsh Disestablishment Bill's second reading had been crowded out by other business that Morgan had sought Sir William's assurance that it would be considered during the next parliamentary session. It was the slow progress of this Bill which had led to the temporary revolt of Lloyd George and other back-benchers in April, although they had to return to the fold due to the 27-4 vote of confidence in the government by Welsh members on 25 May.[153] The furore could only have strengthened Lloyd George's conviction that the Disestablishment Bill would not pass the Commons in 1895.

Events showed that Lloyd George's doubts were fully justified. On 19 February 1895 Rosebery offered to resign due to lack of

Cabinet and back-bench support. The totally unexpected move threatened to bring down the tottering government. Although during one of his talks with the Prime Minister Sir William commented that 'Without you the Government would [be] ridiculous, with you it is only impossible',[154] his son did not want Rosebery to depart. This is clear from the entries in his journal in which he remarked this would be a 'cruel time' for Sir William to take over, when the Liberal Party was 'thoroughly demoralized and disheartened and disorganized'.[155]

The reason for the generally low morale was a succession of by-election setbacks. But Harcourt also surmised, quite correctly, that Rosebery was not in earnest. The Prime Minister's ploy was intended to restore party discipline and in fortuitous conjunction with a brief Liberal electoral revival, the ploy achieved its objective. By mid-year however, Liberal by-election losses mounted steadily once again. Reginald Brett noted in his journal that Harcourt

> anticipated with intensive satisfaction a complete route at the general election. *He* is most vindictive, whereas Sir William has recovered his equanimity [since the succession contest] Loulou has cut off all friendly relations with his father's colleagues. I rather admire the intense pugnacity in one so naturally gentle.[156]

Harcourt did not have much longer to wait, as a physically and mentally exhausted Rosebery presided over the disintegration of the Liberal Government. As Harcourt's journal had predicted in February, the ministry was turned out 'quietly and unexpectedly' on a minor question. On 21 June, a quiet Sunday evening devoted to Army Estimates, the Unionists cunningly marshalled their forces. They forced a division over the sufficiency of the smokeless new, and expensive, cordite supplies for the army. The Liberal defeat - 135 votes to 125-was not irreversible. Enough Liberal MPs could have been summoned back to the lobby that same evening to ensure a more favourable 'cordite vote'.

Yet the Liberal Government resigned. For Rosebery and Sir William the victory of the Opposition provided a welcome excuse for

relinquishing the responsibility of office, in the same way that the adverse vote over Home Rule had done in 1885. On taking office the Unionists immediately called an election. A relatively small swing of votes was enough to convert a Liberal majority of 43 in the Commons into a Unionist majority of 152.[157] The confusion in the Liberal camp was exemplified by the defeat of Sir William at Derby on the very first day of polling.

In 1892 Sir William had obtained about 2 000 votes more than the next highest Unionist candidate. Now he and his fellow candidate in this double-member constituency had been decisively defeated. One of Harcourt's correspondents described the outcome at Derby as an act of 'hideous ingratitude',[158] while NLF Secretary Robert Hudson, who had succeeded Schnadhorst, found himself with 'no words to express my sorrow'.[159] By 23 July the full extent of the disastrous defeat the Liberals had suffered was clear: they had 177 seats to the 341 of the Unionists. Among the Opposition also were 82 Irish Nationalists. Many attributed the voting pattern at Derby and elsewhere to the emphasis Sir William laid on Local Option.

Whether or not the Local Veto Bill of 1895 was 'a more disasterous failure than any other',[160] the fact remained that the nation had rejected a Liberal administration plagued by internal dissension, and unable to offer its supporters tangible reforms catering for their particular interests. For those Liberals who saw the disaster as an outcome of sectionalism and programmes, the reaction took the form of greater interest in 'class' politics and a search for non-socialistic ideologies of reform.[161] For the present, however, the Liberal Party faced a bleak future bereft even of the moral inspiration of William Gladstone, who retired from the Commons.

V

In a prophetic letter to Robert Hudson written just after the electoral *débâcle* Liberal Chief Whip Tom Ellis commented that:

> The disease of the Party is deep-seated. Time alone can eradicate it, and Time will take ten

good years of its own self to do the job.[162]

Since the Liberals were in fact to spend the next ten years in Opposition, Ellis was quite correct, but he did not suggest a remedy. An undated memorandum in the Harcourt Papers did try to propose one. It was prepared by, presumably, a member of the Home Counties Division, and although it is undated it seems fairly certain that it refers to the post-election situation in 1895.

The interest of this memorandum lies in the practical guidelines it set out for dealing with the pernicious effects of 'faddism'. The Liberal defeat was attributed to the excessive diversification of 'progressive' politics. Various unions and societies were named, which 'though excellent in their way' tended to accentuate the sectional character of such politics.[163] The memorandum concluded that:

> The main object of our work in future should be to emphasize the importance of Registration Reform and to educate the working classes as to the value of the vote by assisting in the full development of the local government of this country.[164]

From this memorandum, and other correspondence in his papers, it is clear that Harcourt maintained an interest in the affairs of the NLF, despite having severed his official link with its Home Counties Division. During the succession struggle he had invited NLF Secretary Robert Hudson to stop over at Malwood on his way to a meeting at Portsmouth.[165] Harcourt was always adding to his network of political contacts, and no doubt he sought to bring an influential official like Hudson over to the side of the Harcourts. Home Counties Division Secretary William Allard was another valuable correspondent, who kept Harcourt *au fait* with political developments at the local level.[166]

In return, Allard would ask Harcourt to get his father to speak at certain public meetings on behalf of the Division. The Harcourts' accord with the NLF was not duplicated in their relations with Rosebery.

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