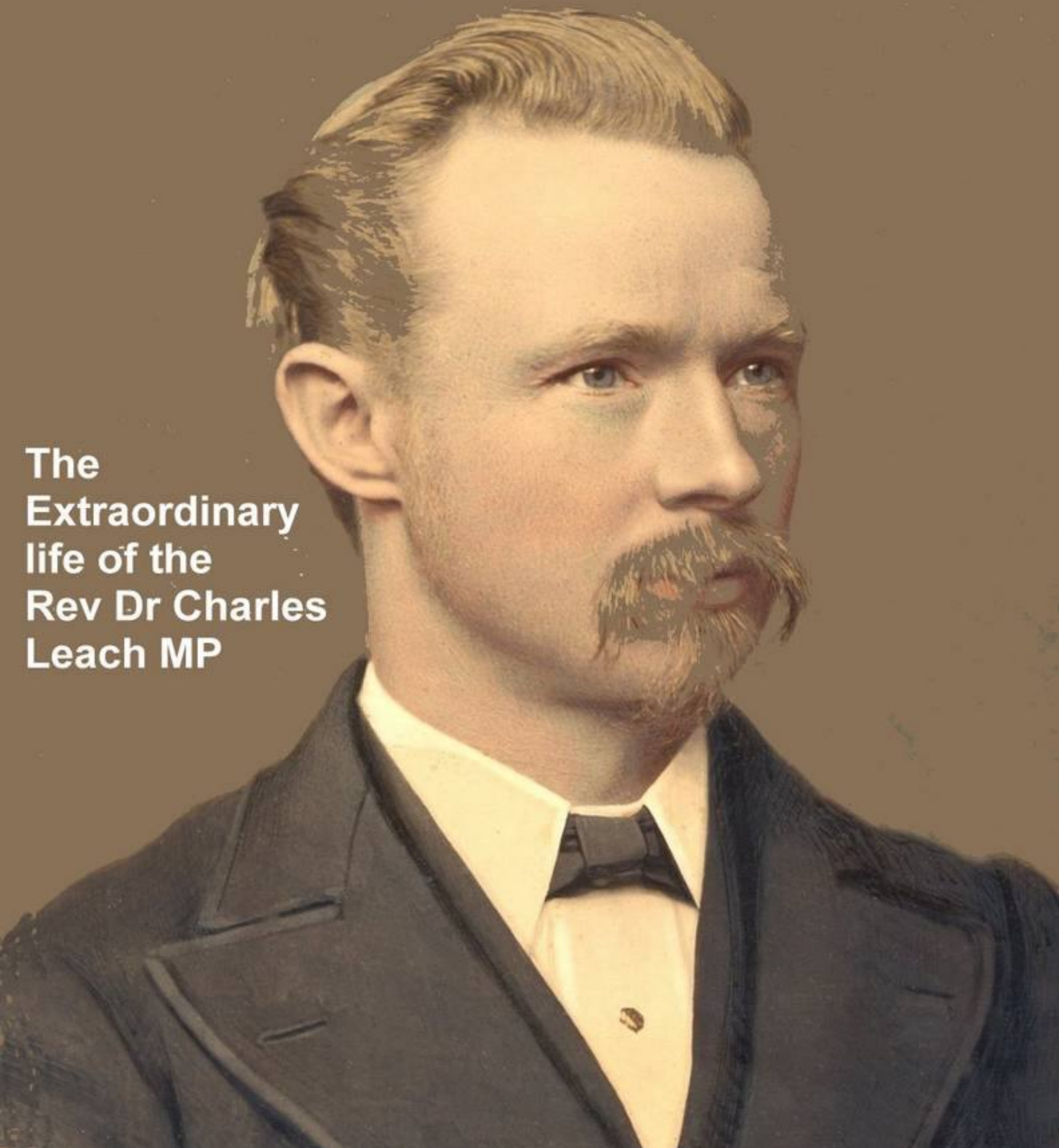
Worsted to Westminster

J B Williams



The Extraordinary life of the Rev Dr Charles Leach MP

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Cartoon of Charles Leach from the Birmingham magazine The Owl in 1879 when he had just started at Highbury Chapel

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Introduction

In the dark dying days of November 1957 I boarded the Cornish Rivera, the daily express train from Penzance to Paddington. As a special treat I was allowed to skip school to attend my grandmother's ninetieth birthday party at their house in Bushey. The image I have is of a sparse old lady with rimless glasses sitting bolt upright in her wingback chair; a little vague as to exactly who all these guests were, but happy that they were there. She began to reminisce; not about more recent matters, which at her age were a blur, but long ago when she was a little girl. Here her memories were still bright and clear. As just a teenager, I took little notice and remember nothing of what she said, only that she talked about when she was seven. I regret now that I wasn't more attentive, because my grandmother was Elizabeth, Charles Leach's eldest daughter. There I was within touching distance of this tale, and, sadly, I recall nothing.

I had always known the outline of Charles Leach's story; of how he had risen from working in a Halifax woollen mill to be a Member of Parliament. As part of my inheritance there was an ornate photograph album with the inscription 'To Ada from Charlie'. I knew the significance of that. The contents were assorted pictures of people with annotations in several handwritings. There were also more loose photos and some scraps of paper with names and dates, and a couple of inscribed books. That was all. On one occasion I had tried to work out the family tree from the information, but it was incomplete.

There the matter rested, until one day, while I was away, my wife spotted an article in the paper; 'Bedlam on the Benches' by David McKie. A Member of Parliament had waved a certificate of discharge from a mental institution to demonstrate that he was sane. How many others could prove it, he had asked. This had led the author to discuss the one MP who had been removed from the Commons for being of unsound mind under the Lunacy (Vacating of Seats) Act 1886; one Dr Charles Leach. It was a matter of a few minutes work, looking at the information we had, to be convinced that it was the same man. That was something I had never been told. It would have been a great disgrace and kept as quiet as possible. Probably even my mother hadn't known.

This added a whole new dimension to the story, and I decided to undertake some research, just to try to fill in some of the gaps. With someone who has left no papers, and there is no cache of letters or other documents, it didn't seem likely that there would be much surviving; certainly not sufficient information to undertake a biography. How wrong I was. The more I dug; the more leads I found and, eventually, even some letters turned up. As a minister of religion he was a man in the public eye, and constantly had his name in the newspapers.

Gradually the whole extraordinary story began to unfold. The route he took that led him from rural Yorkshire, and a slum in Halifax, to be a prominent and well paid preacher. The Sunday afternoon lectures which were capable of attracting 4000 people to Birmingham Town Hall. His political involvement; flirting with Keir Hardie's new Independent Labour Party; and the knack of being where the action was. From opposing Joseph Chamberlain when he split the Liberal party, to being a Member in

the great reforming pre First World War government. From defeating the maverick socialist Victor Grayson in Colne valley, to the sad end in an asylum.

The trail led me all over the country, Halifax, Sheffield, Birmingham, London, Manchester, Peterborough, and I have to thank the many librarians and archivists who gave me great help, and generous amounts of their time. During this exercise, one name kept appearing, and eventually I wrote seeking help. The reply was a long and helpful letter, which was the start of a stream of correspondence between us. Professor Clyde Binfield truly is an expert in the field of the history of the Congregational Church and my thanks are due to him for all his help and encouragement.

Had I listened properly some half century ago, maybe the story would have been easier to tell. Instead I have had to painstakingly reconstruct it from the surviving documents. Inevitably there are loose ends and false trails. I have tried to check everything from more than one source, and even then judgements have to be made as to the most likely explanation. Some things we will never know as the records have long vanished, but I have put together the story as best I can.

J. B. Williams 2009

1

Illingworth

When Elizabeth Clayton found she was expecting a child in the late summer of 1846, it was only a matter of a mile's walk to go and tell her lover Harry Leach at Grey Stones. From Illingworth, Strait Lane curved down over the escarpment to the wham which gently sloped before suddenly dropping to the Hebble Brook at the bottom. The road, however, stayed under the steep bank below Ovenden Moor becoming Crag Lane and running almost level. As she walked along the road she passed little groups of houses dotted about, which was characteristic of the Ovenden area where only part of the population lived in the few small villages. Though this was rural, the poor soil, fit only for sheep, meant that the people needed some other occupation and so had been involved in the processing of wool to textiles since time immemorial.

Harry, or Henry as he had been christened, lived with his father Samuel and five bothers and sisters in one of these gaggles of houses. Samuel was a cloth miller, like his father before him, and his son Thomas was to follow him into the trade.[1] They processed the woven cloth to improve its bulk and finish, probably at the mill just below them in the valley. Often this was known as 'fulling', though in Halifax they just called it cloth milling. The girls were all in the mills as spinners, though Martha was a cotton weaver. Unusually for West Yorkshire it wasn't only worsted that was processed in the area. The family had originally come from Ripponden another village about the same distance the other side of Halifax, and as each child was born they returned there to have it baptised in the church.[2] Harry's mother had died a few years before, and Samuel had remarried and had two more daughters, and then later a son known as Young. Presumably he was really called Samuel after his father.

Elizabeth needn't have worried because Harry agreed to marry her. His family was probably glad at last to get him out of the house and make a bit more room for everyone else. Quite soon the Banns were called in Halifax Parish Church though it was a little further away, some two miles to the south. Perhaps it hadn't seemed appropriate to use the Illingworth Church of St Mary the Virgin. On the 17th of October, the Saturday, the knot was tied and they both signed the register with their marks; like all their families neither of them could write their own name.[3] At this time, in the area, around half the men and three quarters of the women were illiterate by this measure. She was just twenty and though he said he was 23, he was really already 25.[4] Like writing, counting was a shaky skill for ordinary people long before compulsory schooling.

The question now was how they were going to live. Probably at first they went to live with her family. Her father, James, had been a weaver, but had died some years before, and her mother, Jane, got by as a woolcomber[5], which was also Harry's occupation, and that of large numbers in the neighbourhood. The Calder valley and its tributary the Hebble processed not wool, but worsted or 'stuff'. The long fibred wool of the sheep on the hills round about could be made into much finer fabrics than that from the shorter 'staple' wool from elsewhere that Halifax folk said was only good for shawls or blankets.

In 1779 the magnificent Italianate Piece Hall had been built in the town. It had 300 lockup rooms set around a spacious central quadrangle where the local handloom weavers could bring their 'pieces' of cloth for sale. It covered 10,000 square yards and was a statement of the scale of the local textile trade. Now it was in sharp decline, as

mechanisation had crept over the Pennines from the cotton industry in Lancashire and been adapted to the spinning of worsted. The multi-storey mills, which had sprung up in the town, spun virtually all the fibre. Weaving was going the same way, as the steam driven factories installed their power looms.

Only four years before, thousands of workers and Chartists had streamed down into the valley intent on destroying the machinery that they felt was ruining their livelihood. Because their method of rendering the mills immobile was to remove the drain plugs from the boilers that produced the steam, the troubles had been known as the Plug Plot Riots. Stubborn defence of the mills and the arrival of Hussars, Lancers and light infantry quelled the mobs, but not before some had been killed on both sides and the Riot Act had been read. The trouble died away, but the march of mechanisation wasn't halted. It had been the presence of the new railways, such as the Manchester to Leeds line down in the Calder valley, which had allowed the soldiers to arrive so quickly. It was probably just as well that James Clayton wasn't still trying to earn his living as a hand weaver.

1846 wasn't really a good year to get married as there was a severe depression in the trade. That, coupled with the decline of the old manual methods of processing worsted, threw a lot of men out of work. Halifax, fearing a repeat of the riots and wanting to help the unemployed and their families, decided to use the money collected to construct a new reservoir. This would kill two birds with one stone by giving the men work, but at the same time improving the town's water supply. Unfortunately the cloth workers, particularly weavers, employed at 2d per hour, were not very efficient at digging, but the work eventually got done.

The one process where no satisfactory mechanisation was available was in the preparation of the wool. The long staple of worsted was more difficult to handle as the carding machine used for the shorter staple was unsatisfactory for the longer fibres. Hence it had to be combed out by hand to bring the strands parallel to each other. This was where the thousands of woolcombers came in to keep the spinning and weaving mills supplied. It was a miserable, badly paid, job undertaken either singly or in small groups. The technique was to pull the wool through heated combs held on a post in the room. In the centre would be a fire pot where spare combs were heated ready to be swapped as those in use cooled. The smoke from the stove was supposed to be taken away by a chimney if coal was used, which was bad enough, but if the fuel was charcoal the combustion products went directly into the room. At the time they didn't understand the chemistry, but knew that it gave them headaches. It was a job that could be quickly learnt and so only some 8s a week could be earned despite putting in long hours. A good wage for a man could be as high as 17s a week, and the women working in the mills, could often match the woolcomber's earnings.

On the first of March their son was born in Illingworth and they called him Charles, a somewhat unusual name at the time where most used biblical ones, or the traditional William or Edward. Henry was common enough, but his grandfather had been called Charles as well as one of his uncles, so maybe that was where they got the idea. In 1847 it wasn't compulsory to register births, despite the system coming into use a decade before, so, typically, Harry didn't bother. Charles may well have been baptised, but with gaps in some of the church registers around that time, there is no way of knowing.

The ever present threat of mechanisation taking away his livelihood must have made Harry look around for something else to do. He probably didn't fancy going into the mills and in any case most of the general employment was for women and children. The much smaller numbers of men were overlookers and other trusted positions. There

was little chance of him obtaining that sort of job, particularly as his political opinions had, at one point, landed him in prison. He probably also didn't fancy mining coal, used for heating and the voracious appetite of the boilers for the steam engines. The solution came from a surprising direction. To the north of Ovenden, in another quirk of the peculiar geology of the area, there were good pottery clays, which had been worked since Roman times, and these were still being exploited. He took up a job as a 'hawker of pots'. It had the advantage that he was largely his own boss and was outside; not stuck in a hot little room with a smoky stove, and also not in a mill. He must have liked it because he did it for the rest of his life.

It seemed sensible to move into Halifax, where he would be closer to his market and they took a small terraced house in Ratten Row[6] a mean little street barely wider than a man's outstretched arms just at the back of the Parish Church, in the lower part of the town. The rent was probably about £5 per year, but to help with the cost they took a lodger, John Hardy, who was still trying to make a living as a woolcomber. The houses were small stone dwellings already more than half a century old. The local freestone is a pleasant yellow colour when first cut, but turns black when subjected to coal smoke for long periods. With all the tall chimneys of the mills filling up the valley there was plenty of opportunity for that.

Ratten Row from a drawing by HR Oddy, probably during the 1890s. On the left is the King of Prussia Inn. The Leach's house was a few doors beyond it. Halifax Parish Church is in the background.

Ratten Row ran up what for Halifax was a gentle slope from King Street to the church yard of the Parish church of St John. On the corner at the lower end was the King of Prussia Inn; while at the top was the seventeenth century Old Hall building, part of which was used as the Church Tavern. It wasn't difficult to see what people did when they had finished their long hours in the mills. With the crowded houses it was natural to spend as much time as possible elsewhere.

The whole area was a mass of small courts and yards. In Ratten Row, in just fourteen small houses, there were 61 people and two of those were so tiny they only contained one person, so it was relatively spacious in theirs with just the three of them

and a lodger.[7] The street was full of mill workers, laundresses, hawkers like Harry, and even a rag and bone man. Some of the people were from Ireland, at the time a clear sign that the area was near the bottom of the social scale. Only the dark damp cellar dwellings, in other parts of the town, were below them.

Coming from the country they were used to mud, which was just as well because the state of the town was dreadful. Most of the roads were still unpaved, and many houses were built with a boot scraper in the wall beside the front door. Halifax received its Municipal Charter in 1848 and a visitor the next year thought it probably the dirtiest town in England and 'has been until very lately, unprovided with any funds to carry on a better sanitary campaign. Few towns in England are better situated for being effectively drained. Mainly placed on the side of a steepish hill, with a rapid stream running at the bottom, Halifax ought to be a miracle of cleanliness, instead of, as it is, a marvel of dirt.'[8] Given that there was mostly no running water, or adequate drainage or rubbish collection, the state of small back streets like Ratten Row can be imagined. It wasn't until 1851 that the town was stirred to do something about its problems and commissioned a Sanitary Survey preparatory to obtaining funds for improvement.

Charles was lucky in that he had survived the most dangerous part of his life, the first year. The cholera epidemic that swept the country in 1849 barely touched Halifax tucked away in the Pennines in West Yorkshire, and there were only six deaths. The next year, the Superintendent Registrar reported that in the adjacent streets to Ratten Row or the courts nearby, 5 children of up to five years old had died of scarlatina. Over 40 percent of all deaths in the town were children under that age. Dr Alexander reported about the sickly districts 'and to the east the thickly-inhabited, and low-lying quarters around the parish church, the Old bank, Southowram bank, King street, Berry lane, and Pineberry hill, in all of which epidemics are wont to prevail and linger.'[9] Ratten Row, by the Parish Church, was in the middle of this area. It certainly wasn't a healthy place to live, but somehow Charles survived.

No doubt his mother would have taken him out to Illingworth to visit her family. The couple of mile walk would have been nothing for people in those days. Maria the eldest, and a year Elizabeth's senior, had moved away, but John and young Margaret were still at home. Charles was closest to this aunt. As the youngest of the family she was only eleven years older than him, and so just a teenager when he was a small child. She would have liked playing with her sister's baby and infant.

While Charles thrived, that was more than could be said for his mother. In the same year that the Sanitary Report was published, 1851, she began to show signs of illness. Gradually she became weaker and weaker as the Tuberculosis Bacillus destroyed her lungs. In Victorian times the disease was known as consumption because the effect was as though the victim was slowly being eaten up from inside. It was a terrible experience for a small child watching her decline and not understanding what was happening. In the nineteenth century TB was rife and in Halifax, at this time, around 10 percent of deaths were due to Phthisis, as the doctors called the disease. On the 29th May 1852 she finally died[10]; she was only 25, and Charles was just five, a very young age to lose his mother.

Living just round the corner in Churchyard, part of the same warren, was Mary Rothwell, a single woman in her late thirties.[11] She lived with William Swift, the blacksmith, his wife and three children together with three other lodgers; a typical example of the overcrowding in the small houses. She had been born in Salford, to Margaret and, the wonderfully named cloth dyer, Gamaliel Rothwell. Somehow she had taken up a peripatetic life and had ended up in Halifax, and earned a living of sorts as a Clothes Peg Hawker.

Perhaps Harry already knew her either from the proximity or the similar trade, but they soon got together. They were married a year later on 27th June 1853 just up the lane in the Parish Church.[12] On the certificate she claimed that her father was a Silk Dyer, which probably sounded better, but she still signed with a mark; she couldn't write her name either. Now at the age of 40, eight years senior to Harry, it was quite a change to suddenly become step-mother to six year old Charles.

Charles' Aunt Margaret, probably rather more robust than her sister, his mother

Two years later there was further excitement when Aunt Margaret married the labourer Henry Bairstow, on Friday 14th Dec 1855, again in the Halifax Parish Church,[13] though they both came from Ovenden. Henry's father, John Bairstow, was still trying to make a living as a comber. Margaret claimed to be 21 but was probably still 19 or 20. With her father long dead it was probably easier that way. Once again they signed with their marks; the standard of education was still very low. Charles, who missed his mother a great deal, would have wanted to be there as she was the one relation to whom he felt close.

It was a lonely life for the young Charles; he was an only child. This was very rare in Victorian times, where large families were the norm. His mother's illness may have been of longer standing, perhaps explaining the lack of any other children, or maybe something happened at his birth that precluded any more. His stepmother brought no half siblings, and by this time she was too old to begin. Thus he grew up as the only child in the house. This would shape him, and set him apart from his contemporaries.

2

Salem

Life became easier after 1848, following the repeal of the Corn Laws. Longstanding import duties on grain, designed to help protect domestic agriculture, were removed without the dire effects that had been predicted. The import of wheat went up, and its price down; feeding through to cheaper bread. The 1850s were the great period of expansion in the worsted trade, and Halifax grew as more, and bigger, mills filled the valley. Despite the growth in population there was a shortage of labour giving plenty of opportunities for men, women and children. Things were picking up; even in Ratten Row.

In 1855, when Charles was eight, he took the opportunity to go into the mill,[1] and into the spinning of worsted. This seems very young, but at the time it was quite normal for children of that age to be employed. Half the workers in Bowling Dyke mill were children between eight and thirteen.[2] Fortunately the worsted trade used fixed frame spinning machines and not 'mules' with their lethal moving carriages. Even then the spinning 'shed' was a frightening place with its low ceiling hung about with shafts and pulleys, whose belts reached down to each machine. The gangways were narrow, barely wide enough for two people to pass. When the whistle blew, and the shafts started to revolve, the noise was deafening; the whole mill started to vibrate. The smallest children were used to clean around the machines, as they could get into spaces that adults couldn't. The machinery was supposed to be stopped, but the rule was widely ignored because it would cause a loss of output. Natural fear would have kept him away from the lethal moving belts.

As they got older the youngsters would move on to 'piecing' where the task was to repair, instantly, any breaks of the thread winding on to one of the many bobbins on the machine. Gradually they would move up the hierarchy until they became spinners themselves. When they started they earned around 1s 6d per week, rising to perhaps 4s when they were twelve or thirteen.[3] With Harry's uncertain earnings, even the small amount that Charles would bring in would be a boost to the family's income. Charles would have been proud to be able to contribute, if only in a small way. Being the only child, he had no older brothers or sisters to do this, and so it would have been accepted that he should go to work.

In an age when the laws of the land passed in far away London had little effect on the lives of ordinary people, this was one exception. It is commonly known that in Victorian times there was concern to stop children being sent up chimneys, but in reality the major problem was their employment in the cotton mills of Lancashire, and woollen ones of West Yorkshire. The abolition of slavery in 1833 brought pressure to address this 'slavery' of children and the result was the Factory Act of the same year. This excluded all children of eight or below from employment in the textile mills (except silk ones) and those between nine and thirteen had to have two hours schooling per day. In 1844 another Factory Act, as part of a compromise to get it passed, reduced the age of employment to eight while ensuring they had three hours schooling until they were thirteen. This was coupled with a maximum of six and a half or seven hours in the mill. It was known as the 'half time' system!

This meant that, ironically, young Charles Leach was going to get some sort of teaching, years before the 1870 Education Act and the subsequent making of primary schooling compulsory. If the parents wanted the income from the employment then the

child had to attend. It is unlikely that Harry would have paid the two pence a week for Charles to go to school otherwise. It would have been years later that Charles would have appreciated the effect of national legislation on his life, and it would have contributed to his interest in politics.

Schools in those days were very strict places with a whole set of rules for the children. Some printed these and gave them to every child with instructions that they should be posted up in a prominent place in the home. With the standard of education of most of the population the parents probably couldn't read them. Punctuality and cleanliness were most important, as was the avoidance of quarrelling and contention, and speaking the truth. This wasn't child friendly education. They were sat in rows and repeated parrot fashion what the teacher said. Any misdemeanours were severely punished. The teaching was often very poor as one of the main considerations was to save money. Even with the payments, the finances of most schools were very precarious, and the extensive use of pupil teachers, where more senior students helped with the younger ones, was an attempt to address this. It did nothing for the standards, and was often criticised. Despite the system, rather than because of it, Charles learnt to read and write. In this he was the first one in his family to do so. He even mastered basic arithmetic. By the standards of the time, when still more than a third of pupils didn't learn to write,[4] this was a good education for ordinary folk.

In the previous century John Wesley had, though not originally intending to, led large numbers of 'Methodists' to leave the Church of England. In the beginning the 'method' was the strict way he and his circle set about their religion, but later it became the manner in which the church was organised with 'circuits' of chapels. These were then grouped into 'districts' with the final control being vested in an annual conference. Unfortunately the system was rather rigid and the people who succeed Wesley after his death in 1791 were considered dictatorial. Over the next half century this led to a whole succession of splits as the Methodist Church fragmented into an array of sects, though the original 'Wesleyans' remained the largest group.

Amongst the first to go, in 1797, was Alexander Kilham, who was expelled from the Conference, and took his Sheffield congregation with him. William Thom joined him, and became president of their Methodist New Connexion, while Kilham became the secretary. To the north of Ovenden, out on the moor at Brockholes, was Mount Zion chapel where Wesley had preached only the year before his death. Here the New Connexion was so strong that they evicted the Wesleyans who had to leave, and subsequently build another chapel for themselves.

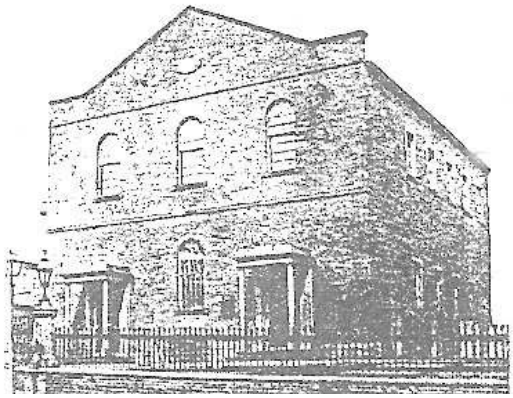
A New Connexion group also started in Halifax, meeting in Ann Street, but by 1798 were strong and confident enough to buy two acres of land in North Parade (then called Needless), a little out of the town, and build their Salem chapel the following year. They soon outgrew this simple meeting place, and in 1815 they added some land and built a new one with a minister's house attached. It was a plain four square building with twin flat-topped pillared porches, with 'an interior that was as stiff and uncomfortable as chapels were intended to be in those days'.[5]

In many of the industrial towns the influential people tended to be old dissent Nonconformists and be members of a particular chapel, usually a Unitarian one, though some were Quakers. Halifax was the exception in that it was the New Connexion Methodists that attracted them and in particular Salem Chapel. With few exceptions, the chapel had always been led by middle class men, and many were to become prominent figures in municipal politics. Dr Daniel Ainley, in his *History of Salem Chapel*, wrote 'it was widely assumed that what was decided in municipal corridors and the council chamber during the week had already been mooted in the

Methodist New Connexion chapel vestibule on the previous Sunday.'[6] There were so many people in public life that the chapel became known as the 'Mare's Nest'.[7]

Among the many influential supporters was Edward Akroyd, who lived in North Parade, and whose family had belonged to the sect for many years, having been members at Mount Zion. The Akroyds had started in Ovenden, putting out work to the hand spinners and weavers in the area, but by this time had the huge Bowling Dyke Mill in the valley by the North Bridge, only a short distance from the Chapel. Edward, that curious Victorian mixture of entrepreneur and philanthropist, did what he could to soften the blow as the hand industry was overtaken by the mills. Later, he was to transfer to the Church of England, and they became the beneficiaries of his generosity.

Charles Leach was sent to the Sunday school just round the corner from Ratten Row, on Cripplegate.[8] This was his first piece of good fortune because it was associated with Salem chapel, and what followed from that shaped his life. Attending must have caused some strains in the family as he was expected to turn up in reasonable clothes – Sunday best. There were, however, two great advantages. The Sunday school societies produced large quantities of tracts and other printed material giving the attenders plenty of things to read. In Salem these would have been supplemented by those printed by PK Holden, a member of the chapel and Sunday school teacher, with titles like *The Youth's Instructor* and *The Dying Cottager*.[9] Probably more important was that 'Sunday-schools act also as powerful agents for binding different classes together. Men in the middle ranks of life very commonly act as teachers; and acquaintanceships formed in the school-room not unfrequently lead to life-long business connections.'[10] Men such as the Ramsdens, father and son, who ran the Halifax Courier, and were instrumental in setting up the Yorkshire Penny bank, worked as Sunday school teachers. Attending Salem, with its many influential people, was particularly advantageous.



Salem Chapel as it was in Charles Leach's time

Many years later, in one of his lectures, he was to talk about playing truant from Sunday school and, on a bright sunny day in the early summer, climbing Beacon Hill to get its views over the town. This was spectacular with a forest of tall chimneys from all the mills along the valley bottom. He claimed not to have been absent very often, but at this stage his heart was not in his religion, though he was slowly being absorbed into the life of the Chapel. He was, though, a bit of a tearaway, and on one occasion kicked a teacher, but was saved from eviction by another, James Riley, who perhaps recognised some potential in the young man.

It was also claimed that he was trained at Salem School.[11] Whether that was a day school or referred to the Sunday school isn't clear. Certainly it wasn't the only day school, there were some twenty in Halifax, and it wasn't the closest to his home. It was

a good climb up the hill from Ratten Row, but so was most of the town. When it was necessary to go from school to work or vice versa each half day, then that proximity to the mill was probably more important. With financial assistance from the Akroyds and Crossleys, a new schoolroom was added at Salem in 1857,[12] and with these influential connections, it probably meant that he was sent to the particular school by the mill owner. Maybe the connection meant that he was in Akroyd's mill at Bowling Dyke.

The mills didn't have many career prospects for young men, and so when they reached 13 or 14 most of the boys left and went into other employment. Charles spent four days in a coal mine, and that was quite enough for him, giving him a respect for miners that was to last his life.[13] Then he was apprenticed to a clog and shoemaker. It seems like a considerable step up, and almost certainly it was someone from the chapel who saw a promising lad. A likely candidate was James Riley who was a clog and pattern maker; maybe the Sunday school teacher. Another possibility was Samuel Midgeley, a shoemaker, and later to be Mayor of Halifax who was the first to hold a civic service in a Nonconformist chapel, which was at Salem

Yorkshire clogs, unlike the Dutch ones which are all wood, had a leather upper on the wooden sole. They were the standard footwear for ordinary people, particularly working in the mills, where they were very practical. The apprentices started by learning clogmaking, and how to cut the wooden soles. Allied to this were pattens, also wooden soled, but with a leather strap to slip over other shoes. Underneath they usually had a large iron ring to space the soles off the ground to keep the wearer out of the mud[14]; very necessary at the time in Halifax. Having mastered these, the trainees continued with the leather working, and then they often qualified in shoemaking.

As part of his training, Charles would accompany the men out into the forests where they would cut blocks of alder or birch for the soles. These were dexterously shaped on a low clog cutter's bench with an iron swivel at one end into which hooked the long bladed knife. In many places this was a separate trade, but in Halifax the clogmakers still cut their own blocks. Back in the workshop the sole cutter trimmed the blocks to an approximate, 'stock' shape with the stock knife, and then used a 'hollower', before finishing off with the gouge-like 'gripper' to form the recess into which the uppers were fastened.[15] All this he had to learn, even before starting on the handling of the leather.

Throughout the 1850s the town had seen enormous growth, but by the 1860s some of the wealth generated was at last being used for the improvement of the town. Many of the streets had been paved and now the council had decided that in keeping with its status it should have an impressive Town Hall. Sir Charles Barry, who had designed the Houses of Parliament, was commissioned, and the Italianate building was finished in 1863 by his son. The Prince and Princess of Wales were invited to perform the opening ceremony, but on 4 August only the Prince came as the Princess was unwell. He was conducted around the town through large cheering crowds,[16] but was kept well away from the likes of Ratten Row.

The American Civil War, which began in 1861, had interrupted the supply of raw cotton, because the Union was blockading the Confederacy. Lancashire depended almost entirely for its vast textile industry on American raw cotton, and the war caused enormous distress as supplies ran out, and the mills ground to a halt. A large fund, with Lord Derby as a prominent contributor, was set up to try to prevent famine. In Halifax, with all its other industries, despite the stationary cotton mills, the problems could be shrugged off. The supply of raw cotton, though, was something that Charles Leach was very concerned about later in his life.

Though he no longer went to school he remained with the chapel, attending classes in the evening and on Sunday. While this helped with furthering his education it would have increased his knowledge of the Bible and the ways of the chapel. Here they were known as Brother or Sister, and he was Brother C Leach, the surname not being uncommon in the area. Mixing with the members of the congregation gave him many good role models, and it was said that once attending a meeting in the Halifax Oddfellows hall, while still quite young, he responded to an appeal for some good cause by contributing all he possessed – fifteen pence in coppers – and went home to sleep on his bed of straw.[17]

The chapel provided an anchor in his life and was valuable in offsetting the influence of his family, where many things were lacking, some material, but also spiritual, and certainly ambition. With the pubs at each end of Ratten Row, it is likely that his father spent a considerable time in one or the other. Charles certainly did, and as a result of drunkenness never had any money.[18] He was later to see the light and to become a very strong supporter of temperance, particularly concerned about the poverty which it brought.

Charles Leach as a young man

The Methodist New Connexion was thriving so well in Halifax, that in 1856 the district was split into two 'circuits.' Salem was head of the Halifax North circuit of six chapels, with two ministers, Rev B Turnock and Rev E Wright, appointed to it by Conference. Rev Turnock had special responsibility for Salem, but generally they both were needed to preach anywhere within the circuit. The other services were taken by a list of local preachers. The whole thing was controlled by the quarterly circuit meeting which produced a Preacher's Plan defining who would preach where and when. These men were just ordinary lay people from the various chapels in the circuit who had the ability and felt the calling to conduct services.

In September 1865 he had done well enough for the Salem leaders to recommend to the Quarterly meeting that Brother Charles Leach's name should be put on the plan as a local preacher.[19] This was a huge step for him, and showed the way he had worked his way up within the church. A few days later the quarterly meeting of the Halifax North circuit took that recommendation and received him as a local preacher on trial.[20] He was eighteen, very young to take this on.

Unfortunately this came at an awkward time, and coincided with a number of things in his private life that, no doubt, distracted him. First, in August, just before his recommendation had been made, his step-mother, Mary, had died of bronchitis[21] at the age of 56. It was a measure of the unhealthy atmosphere in the low-lying Ratten Row that chest complaints were common. The next day, when he went to register the death, Harry Leach, or more formally Henry, found that the registrar was of the same name, though he was no close relation, and in any case the social distance between a pot hawker and a registrar would have been great.

Perhaps Harry already had his eye on her, because on the day before Christmas he was married again to another Mary.[22] She was a widow called Mary Wilcox who had been living just across the valley in Southowram Bank with her daughter, son, and little granddaughter together with a lodger. Mary was the daughter of Samuel Broomhall a butcher in Liverpool, and she too had somehow drifted to Halifax, probably looking for work after her first husband died. She worked as a shoemaker, and perhaps she and Charles knew each other, maybe working in the same place. Whatever the connection, it would seem that the family probably joined them in a crowded Ratten Row. Charles must have realised that it was time to leave.

It is hardly surprising that his first attempt at local preaching wasn't very successful. At his age, and with these and other distractions around him, it was almost to be expected that at the next circuit quarterly meeting he requested to be left off the preaching plan.

Another of those distractions was that Charles had met a young lady, and where else should he take her courting but up on to his old favourite Beacon Hill. Her name was Mary Jane Fox and she lived again just across the valley, quite close to Mary Wilcox, in Pinebury Hill. She was just two weeks older than him, and had originally been born in Halifax, in Foundry Road, even closer to the mills than Ratten Row.[23] Her father, also called Charles, was originally from Dewsbury, though her mother, Sophia, was a local girl. She had an elder sister Elizabeth Ann, also born in Halifax, but the family had moved about West Yorkshire, looking for work.

Mary Jane Fox around the time of her marriage to Charles Leach. Probably the dress was loaned by the photographer

Her father had started out as a general labourer, but had managed to get employment, some years before in Batley, as a blanket weaver. This wasn't a great job as the weaving sheds were full of women and children and the pay of the men was depressed as a result. He would get between 11s and 17s a week; the latter if he was very lucky. The family had returned to Halifax but could only afford poor accommodation in Pinebury Hill. This was not a healthy place either. The water supply was not adequate, and a few years before there had been 5 privies for 156 people, and the drains, in any case, discharged the sewage on to the road.[24]

Charles Leach was, however, progressing well and completed his apprenticeship; becoming a fully qualified clog and patten maker. To the south of the main part of the town, New Road ran down to South Parade. Despite its name it was at least a century old, though the buildings along it were quite recent. Charles took number nine to set up in business. It had a tiny shop on the ground floor with accommodation above.

New Road as it is today. No 9 is the central shop of the three on the left.

He was now ready, and on the 12th January 1867 he and Mary Jane were married, just around the corner in South Parade chapel. They were both still only 19 years old. At this time most people were married in the Parish Church, as his father had been, but this wasn't appropriate for a Methodist. However, few Nonconformist chapels had a license, but one that did was South Parade, though it was a Wesleyan Methodist. Even then the Registrar had to be present as well as James Alexander Macdonald, the pastor.[25] Charles signed the register, but Mary Jane could only add her mark; she could not write her name. Charles' friend Henry Stembridge acted as Best Man and signed the register as a witness.

Among the wedding presents was a gothic mantlepiece clock with a picture of Trafalgar Square engraved on a glass panel on the front. This was curious as the timepiece had been manufactured in America, suggesting a thriving trade for it to turn up in the depths of the West Riding of Yorkshire.

With his life back on an even keel, in April Salem chapel put his name forward again as a local preacher. The circuit weren't quite so keen and recorded that 'Brother Chas Leach be permitted to take an appointment occasionally under Mr Longbottom's superintendence.'[26] All had not been well at his first attempt, but that is hardly surprising. This time they seemed satisfied and in July received him as a local preacher on trial, and in October passed him to his second quarter. This was quite a

commitment for a young man just setting out in his own business with a new, and pregnant wife.

C Henry Stembridge and Charles Leach.
Henry was his best man at the wedding

At the end of November their first child was duly born,[27] and they named her Elizabeth after Charles' mother, and Mary Jane's sister. Unlike his parents, they had done everything in the right order. Charles was busy with his shop, so just before Christmas Mary Jane went to Henry Leach, the registrar. It is unlikely that he would have acknowledged the coincidence of surnames to the young wife of a clogmaker, particularly one that could only sign with a cross. They couldn't really leave it any longer because they were on the move.

3

Bethesda

Down the Hebble valley from Halifax the road gentry meandered for a couple of miles before reaching Salterhebble where the brook met the River Calder. A further mile downstream, and across the bridge, lay Elland. It had originally been a very simple town centred around a cross with the parish church nearby. Roads ran out along the major compass points, Northgate, curving round to the bridge, Westgate, Church Street which rapidly became Eastgate, and, of course, Southgate. The 'gate' in the names, being derived from a Saxon word for a way, had nothing to do with portals or gates blocking them.

On the turn of the year from 1867 to 1868, Charles, Mary Jane, and baby Elizabeth took just this route to number 58 Southgate, a small shop right on the street with more substantial living quarters behind, reached by a small lane alongside. Into this they fitted together with Jane Pennington, an elderly tailoress, and a young couple Zachariah Drake, a draper, and his wife Agnes.[1] Despite this there was more room, both for the shop and for living, than there had been in New Road.

Under the Choices sign is the shop at 58 Southgate, Elland, as it is today. The building has been modified slightly at some point, but is essentially the same

Southgate slowly wandered up the slight incline and then fell away to the Council offices and the prison at the southern end. Though not very wide, it had become the commercial centre and was mostly lined with small shops. Unlike in Halifax, Charles Leach now had his in the centre of the town. Though the population of Elland was much smaller, there were few boot, shoe and clog makers and far less in proportion.[2] With reduced competition, and even that was to fall further during his time there, it was a better place to build a business.

Like most of the towns and villages in the area, Elland had lived by the manufacture of textiles by hand. That the trade, in the whole area, was all but dead was shown by the closure of the Piece Hall in Halifax during 1868, and its conversion to a fruit and vegetable market. Taking over from the cottage industry, there were now three mills in

Elland and the population had showed some growth, but the steadier development had not produced the same level of strains on the housing as in Halifax. With less smoking chimneys and a broader valley, the air was purer, and it was altogether a more pleasant place to live.

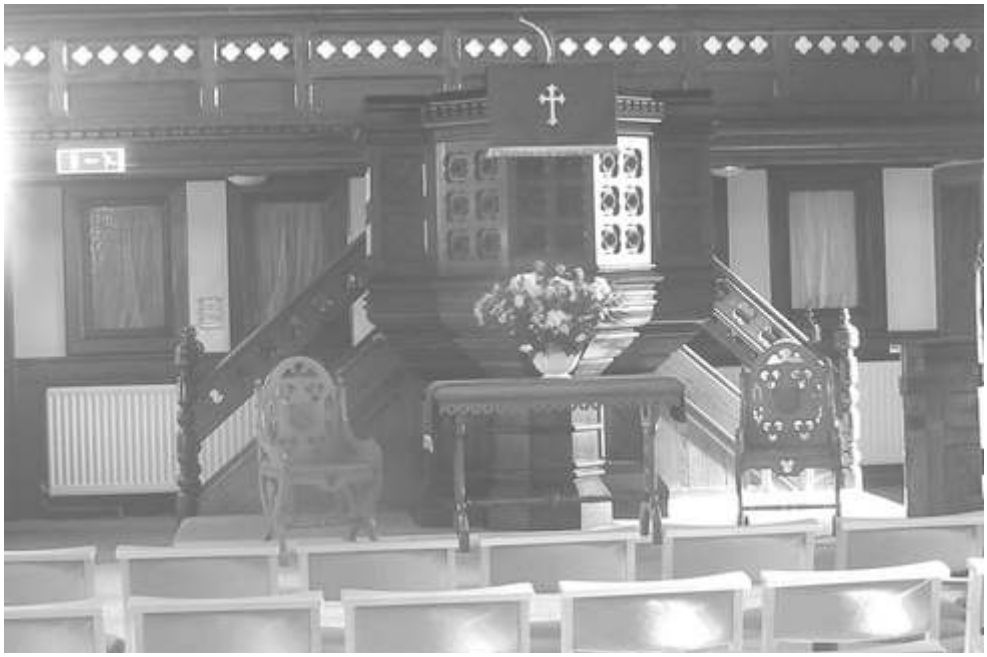
There needed to be advantages to justify uprooting Mary Jane when she had had barely time to recover from the birth, and to have to move with a baby a month or so old. She must have known what to expect when she married him, as here was a man, who, despite his almost beardless unprepossessing appearance, had boundless energy and the ambition to progress.

A few yards from the shop along Southgate was Victoria Road which led up the hill, and there at the top opposite Jepson Lane was the Methodist New Connexion's Bethesda chapel, known locally as 'Top O' th' Lane'.[3] When Charles Leach left Salem, he had been recommended to the Halifax South Circuit to continue his time as a local preacher 'on trial'.[4] Bethesda was the natural place to go, and though they found him a strange youth often having what he called 'angel visits' from his departed mother',[5] they made him welcome.

Bethesda Chapel, Elland as it was before the rebuilding in 1880

The chapel also derived from a group of people who had followed Alexander Kilham into the Methodist New Connexion after John Wesley's death. Though they went through some difficult times, by 1824 they had something like six times their original number of members. A trust of 26 artisans purchased the land where Victoria Road met Jepson lane, and built a barn like chapel, in just four months. Later two houses were added, one on each side, for the minister and the caretaker. Though the chapel could hold 250 people, this wasn't sufficient, and in 1863 it was enlarged by extending the front toward the road with a much more imposing façade and entrance.[6] When it reopened they rewarded themselves with a public meeting 'when upwards of 450 persons sat down to a most excellent tea and plentiful repast provided by a few of the friends.'[7] Inside it had an impressive carved wooden pulpit which raised the preacher well above the heads of the congregation.[8]

The society was not finished, and in 1866 they added a school building alongside the chapel, with a hall and two classrooms to the rear, costing over £1000. This meant that the 300 to 400 scholars no longer had to share the chapel with the congregation. It was into this thriving society that Charles Leach arrived in early 1868 and almost immediately began working for them, and making his contribution.



The old pulpit in Bethesda, saved from the previous Chapel, as it is today. Charles Leach must have preached from it.

Now he had grasped the essentials of conducting services, and before long he was a fully qualified local preacher. He progressed so well within Bethesda, that within 18 months he was being put forward with D Crowther and Joseph Littlewood as the chapel's three delegates to the circuit's Quarterly Meeting,[9] and he was usually one for the next few years. Beginning at just twenty-two this was quite an honour.

After only a year, Mary Jane was expecting again, and in August a son was born. They decided to call him Herbert, but with the experience of already having a child, they knew that all was not well. Within five days he had died of 'convulsions'. This may have been a severe case of epilepsy, or perhaps some other undiagnosed brain problem, not understood by the doctor. His parents were at his side as his brief life ebbed away.[10] However common infant death was in Victorian times, it must have been traumatic for the young couple.

They took the tiny coffin up the hill to Bethesda and buried him in the little walled graveyard behind the chapel. Maybe it was some sense of their own mortality that caused them to buy a double grave plot near the back corner of the graveyard, which would also provide a destination for them, when their time came. Charles threw himself back into his work, but it must have been more difficult for Mary Jane, even with 21 month old Elizabeth to occupy her.

With all the building work that had occurred within the last few years the chapel owed a good deal of money. The chapel committee was keen to reduce this and in September called a meeting of all the members, leaders and congregation 'in order to obtain the sympathy of the friends in our efforts to reduce the debt.'[11] The minister and four others, including Charles Leach were asked to prepare a few remarks. It passed off well and was 'attended by a very nice company who met in a pleasant and friendly spirit.'[12] It must have helped take their minds of their recent bereavement.

For him it was less difficult with a thriving business to run, and a good deal of his spare time occupied with chapel affairs, leaders', and quarterly meetings. Despite being so young, he was not afraid to put his views forward; his proposal to give up the unsatisfactory afternoon services was accepted. At Christmas the chapel decided to

have a prayer meeting on Christmas day and a watch night service on New Year's Eve. This was a heavy load for the minister David Heath, and Charles Leach was in a group of four requested to assist in conducting them.

He was probably glad to be kept busy, and in January he was on another committee to make arrangements for special services starting in the middle of the month. The chapel were happy to be able to tap his youthful energy for their cause.

A few months into 1870, it was apparent that Mary Jane had conceived again. In November another son was born, and they called him Harry after Charles' father, resisting the common temptation to recycle the name of the departed baby. They watched carefully for the signs of trouble, but five days came and went and Harry seemed to be perfectly healthy. No doubt they breathed a sigh of relief when that milestone was passed.

Mary Jane with Elizabeth and baby Harry
around 1871

Back at the chapel he was developing a taste for being on committees. The first was one to make arrangements for special services and for organising the society's tea meetings to raise funds for paying the remainder of the debt. On yet another he was the representative of the Sunday school, and involved in setting up a teacher's tea to be held on Shrove Tuesday followed by short addresses and suitable readings. Profits were, of course, were to be given to the society for reducing the debt.

The school, in its building alongside the chapel, was thriving with its classes for adults and children both in Bible studies and literacy. The growth in numbers was such that it was decided that two further classes were needed. It was a big step when Brother Leach, with James Roberts as his assistant, was appointed to take charge of one of them.[13]

Though he was so active with the chapel he wasn't neglecting his business and by April of 1871 he was employing six people besides himself. At just 24 he had a

workforce of three men, one woman and two boys.[14] This was a far cry from the one man band he had been when he had first set up some four or five years before. Mary Jane was not involved; she had more than enough on her hands with 3 year old Elizabeth and five month old baby Harry.

Charles' father and third wife Mary had, in the meanwhile, moved out of Halifax and back to Ovenden, into Strait Lane close to Illingworth, and where Charles' mother had grown up. With the collapse of the hand weaving, the population of Ovenden had stabilised then started to fall, as Halifax sucked the people in. The result was that while housing was a very considerable problem in the town, out here there was much more space. Harry could have a bigger house for the same or lower rent. He needed it because he and his wife seemed to have collected all the waifs and strays among the children of their families. There was Mary's ten year old granddaughter Margaret Ellen, the daughter of her daughter Sarah Ann and her husband George Ingham; and her butcher brother Edward's two youngest children, 14 year old Edward and ten year old Jane. In addition there was Harry's 19 year old half brother Sam.[15]

Harry was still pedalling his pots, while Mary was using her shoemaking skills to produce slippers. All the 'children' were, of course, sent out to work as worsted spinners. Together they would have had quite a reasonable income to support the household.

It is doubtful that Charles would have seen them very often as they were now on opposite sides of Halifax and some five miles from each other. On Sundays he would be travelling about to preach, but now he was attached to the Halifax South circuit covering Elland, Brighouse, Soyland, Boulderclough, and Lightazles, with its principal church as Hanover, which was in King Cross in the west of Halifax. Visiting these either on foot or by train would not take him anywhere near Ovenden, and he had little other time to spare.

One of the occasions when this might have been possible was around the annual fair which, in Elland, was the first Monday after the 12th August. The nearest Sunday was known as 'Thump Sunday' and many of the churches would get together to have an outdoor service. The tradition was then to visit one's friends and family and eat spiced or plum cake and cheese.[16]

Things had been getting a little lax in the chapel and by in the middle of 1871, they started to try to tighten things up. Some stewards and class leaders were chastised for not keeping proper up to date records, and it was found that some people had not been baptised. However, the major concern was the proper reception of leaders. After a lot of discussion in the leaders' meeting 'it was ultimately resolved that Brothers D Crowther and C Leach be requested at our next Leader's Meeting to answer the questions prescribed by our rules.'[17] In an age of secessions and splits it was important that members and particularly leaders agreed publicly with the rules of the particular sect. They were conscious of the split in Halifax, not so many years before in 1841, when Joseph Barker had led a group, particularly from Mount Zion, out of the Methodist New Connexion.

At the next meeting there was a good deal of objection to Brother Leach's examination and in the end he 'declined to answer the questions on the grounds of such an examination being out of order as it was not done at the proper time required by the rules.'[18] Brother Crowther hadn't even turned up, and the matter was adjourned to the next meeting. Obviously, when things had cooled a little, they both thought about it more carefully, and at the next meeting it was reported that 'both Brother Crowther and Brother Leach had answered the questions in a satisfactory manner.'[19] The incident seemed a bit of a storm in a teacup, but it showed that even at this young

age he could become rather headstrong, and only later did reason and common sense take over.

By October 1871 his class had 17 members and another 31 'on trial'. Like everything to do with the church they had to prove themselves for a while before being fully accepted. During the following winter, the number on trial dropped to 20 while one of the members moved away. After that he seemed to get the hang of this, and the numbers increased steadily over the summer until by October he had 30 members with 11 more on trial.[20] This was a thoroughly creditable effort for a young man with his first class.

This time Charles and Mary Jane hadn't been in such a hurry as they had following the death of Herbert. It was around 18 months before Mary Jane realised that she was going to have another child. In October of 1872 a second daughter was born at home in Southgate and they called her Ada.[21] This wasn't a family name on either side. It was relatively unusual and would stand out amongst the sea of Elizabeths and Marys of the time. Despite Herbert not surviving, Mary Jane had her hands full with three children under five, though Elizabeth would reach that milestone a month later.

For some time Charles Leach had had ideas of giving up the shoemaking business, and going into the ministry. However, it is not something you just decide to do; you must have a calling. For many who experience a religious conversion, it is a life changing event. For Charles Leach, in Bethesda, it was just that. The deep interest he had in the ways of the chapel was transformed into a certainty as to how he must spend his life. Later he was to describe the event: 'It was in the old chapel where I first saw the face of Jesus Christ, and where I resolved to try and follow him.'[22]

However, it was one thing to have the call, but quite another to put it into practice. His first concern was with his poor education. He was soon pointed toward books he should study, and work he should do, to bring it up to the standard required for a minister or entry to theological college. They only problem was finding the time, with the shop and all the chapel duties. The solution was to start at four in the morning which gave him four hours before he opened his shop at 8 o'clock. It was a gruelling regime, but he never minded work, and his boundless energy and enthusiasm carried him through.

Rev William Townsend, the senior minister in the Halifax South circuit had been watching the progress of the young man, and encouraging him to read widely. Townsend, originally from Newcastle, was only 12 years his senior and he too had started out in business, before being trained by James Stacey for the ministry of the Methodist New Connexion. They thus had quite a bit in common and he understood the difficulties of making the transition. In April 1873 he chaired a meeting of the Elland leaders and local preachers to discuss what to do, and 'it was unanimously resolved to recommend Brother Charles Leach to the Conference as a suitable person to be received into the itinerant ministry amongst us.'[23] Townsend followed this by chairing a meeting of the society at Bethesda on Easter Sunday when it was discussed by the whole church and was nearly unanimously passed here as well. In a large meeting there is always one who objects to anything, or maybe Charles Leach had upset someone.

The Methodist New Connexion, like the other Methodist denominations, controlled all major matters at its annual Conference which was held in a different place each year. Representatives went from each circuit and district and then formed various committees to make the decisions which were then debated and voted on in the main Conference. One of the points of dispute between Kilham and the Wesleyans had been

about who was able to attend Conference, the New Connexion insisting that lay people, as well as ministers, should be members.

One of the major tasks of the Conference was to decide where all the ministers should serve for the following year. Since John Wesley's time the idea had always been for 'itinerant' ministers. In his day they had literally gone from place to place, on horseback, preaching. Now the ministers would be sent somewhere by Conference and remain for a year or two before moving on, though more senior ministers like Townsend could stay for five years. Even then they were just posted to a circuit, and though they might have special responsibility for a particular chapel they were required to preach within the whole circuit. Thus they were still known as 'itinerant' ministers.

Charles Leach was still concerned about his level of education, and a month later he made an application to be received into the New Connexion's college. Perhaps he was encouraged by Townsend, as his old tutor, James Stacey, was now the principal of the college. A special covenant meeting was held at Hanover, the main chapel of the circuit, and they recommended Brother Leach to the Conference for admission to the college. A few days later the matter went to the district level where he satisfactorily answered all their questions, and they agreed to put the matter to Conference.[24]

In early June Charles Leach went to Hull to the Conference where he had to go in front of the College Committee, to be examined. In addition to a test to prove that he had an adequate level of education, which must have been difficult for him, he had to answer a set of questions:

a) 'Have you at present a clear persuasion of the Divine favour?
b) Do you retain the conviction that you are Divinely called to the work of the Christian Ministry?
c) Are your views still in harmony with our Doctrinal Summary?
d) Do you understand and approve the principles of our church constitution and government?
e) For what reasons are you a Dissenter from the Church of England as a State Church?
f) State the grounds of your preference for our Denomination Polity as compared with Episcopacy, Congregationalism, and Wesleyan Methodism?'[25]

They were rightly concerned that candidates really had a calling, but even more wanted to ensure that they agreed with the rules of their denomination and weren't going to cause trouble later. Despite these being new requirements and not being able to prepare, Charles Leach 'passed a very creditable and satisfactory examination before the College Committee.'[26]

The problem was how could a young man, with no resources, a wife, and three young children, afford to go to college? They must have thought that he was worth supporting as Conference found a neat solution. He was appointed at once to the Sheffield North Circuit as a 'Minister on Probation', so that he could also attend classes at Ranmoor Theological College on the other side of the city.[27] Being a minister in the circuit was a paid position which would give him an income to support his family, but the arrangement would also allow him to study. At the time some ministers went directly into service as probationers, while others spent some time in the College before commencing the probation. He was unusual in that he did both; at the same time. A solution had been found; he sold up his shoemaking business, and was on his way.

4

Attercliffe

It was only some twenty-five miles from Elland, through Huddersfield, and over the moor, to Sheffield, but it was a world away. It was the difference between wool and steel. Sheffield's reputation was for cutlery, but in reality they made anything and everything from the metal. The range included small items such as knives, forks, and files, but ran all the way up to railway lines and large forgings. If anything, it was even dirtier than the worsted towns, and certainly more so than Elland.

The population of Sheffield had mushroomed in the early part of the nineteenth century as the steel industry boomed, but in the 1860s the growth had mostly been away from the centre and the population of Attercliffe had more than doubled in the decade, fuelled by the mills' appetite for labour. Now in 1873 the boom came to a sudden end as foreign competition started to bite, and in very few works were the men making full time.[1] While this didn't appear an opportune moment to enter the city, Charles Leach was personally buffered from the effects by his fixed stipend, the salary dictated by Conference.

Though attached to the North Circuit, he was given special responsibility for Attercliffe Chapel in the east of the city. There was no problem in finding somewhere to live as the Methodists provided houses for their ministers, and theirs was a couple of minutes walk away at number five Victoria Street.[2] It was just a short road off the high street populated by forgemen, ironfounders, steel melters, file makers and wire drawers; the typical workers of the steel mills. He described it as 'in the midst of the smokiest district as my church was amongst the toiling masses at that part of the town called Attercliffe.'[3]

Attercliffe's growth had brought great strains on the housing which had struggled to keep pace, and the average household had now reached five. With Charles, Mary Jane and the three children they conformed exactly to that. Like their neighbours they were packed into a small terraced house. A measure of the standard was that the rateable value of the whole district only averaged £10 per house,[4] one of the lowest in Sheffield.

Attercliffe High Street, as it was then, climbed gently up away from the centre of the city and the slowly descended again. The chapel was at the top of the hill, just off the main road, in the fork formed by Shortridge Street and Chippingham Place, peering through the gap in the High Street to all the steel mills below. Alfred Gatty described the scene: 'Down in the valley, where the railway shoots its straight line beside the meandering Don, there stands, as it were, Dante's city of Dis: masses of buildings, from the tops of which issue fire, and smoke, and steam, which cloud the scene, however bright the sunshine. But in that once lovely valley, is concentrated the great source of Sheffield's prosperity.'[5]

In 1836 the Methodist New Connexion had built a chapel on the opposite side of the High Street, at the end of Chapel Street. It was only 45 feet wide and could seat a maximum of 188.[6] By 1869 they had felt the need to replace it with something more spacious and imposing in Shortridge Street, to accommodate more than twice the number. Though constructed of polychrome brick it had stone gothic features in the windows and in the main entrance which was approached up a wide flight of steps. Above the door was a large arched window with a circular rose within it. Alongside, a

tower with a broached spire soared up past the steep roof, making an impressive statement.

Attercliffe Chapel Methodist New Connexion Chapel
– later known as St Paul's

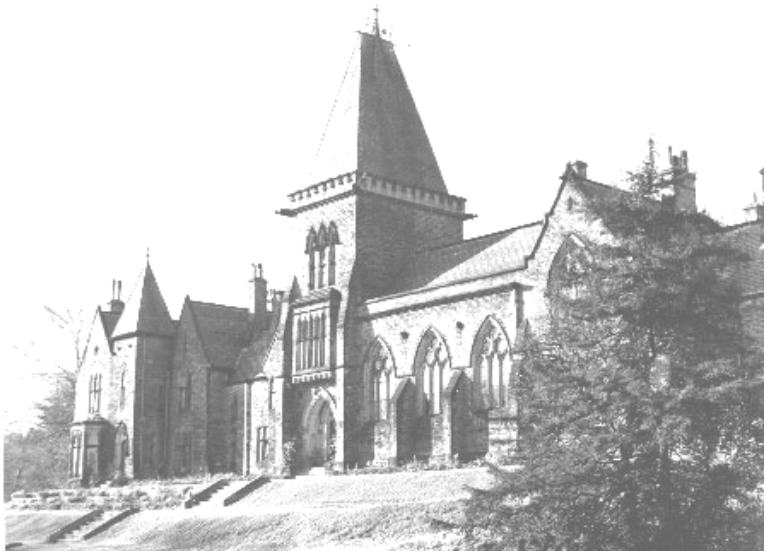
No doubt, when Charles Leach first saw it, in the summer of 1873, it would have been with that mixture of pride, euphoria, and fear that infects someone embarking on a new enterprise. Up to now he had just been a helper, and the ultimate responsibility had been with the minister, Rev David Heath, Rev Benjamin Turnock, or whoever the incumbent was. Now he was in charge; a sudden transition from shoemaker to pastor. Though he was ultimately responsible to the circuit superintendent Rev John Graham, most of the time, he would be the one the chapel members would look to for leadership. He would also be called upon, in the plan, to preach at any of the other five chapels in the circuit, though they had the help of two retired, supernumerary, ministers, George Bradshaw and Charles Mann, together with 15 local preachers.[7]

As if that wasn't enough, he had to travel some five miles across to the west of the city, to take classes at Ranmoor College. This was a different world, with the college nestling among the villas of leafy Fullwood. It was approached up a wide staged staircase leading directly to the entrance in the tower, which was the lobby for the central chapel. At one end were the teaching rooms with the accommodation for up to 16 students above, and at the other, a house for the principal Rev James Stacey DD. With its array of gothic windows, it was designed to impress; and succeeded.

James Stacey had been training ministers, like William Townsend, since before the college had been established, and then had been its principal ever since. His background shared some similarities with Charles Leach's, though he was Sheffield born and bred. He had had some elementary schooling but it had ended at nine when he became an errand boy, before becoming a cutler. His local preaching had started even earlier at 16, and by 19 he was studying under Thomas Allin, one of the outstanding names of the early New Connexion.[8] During that time Stacey and his

fellow students were befriended by Mark and Thomas, the sons of Thomas Firth a melter at one of the steel works, and a great supporter of the New Connexion, which was to lead to a life long association.

After being a minister in a number of different chapels Stacey had been the superintendent of Halifax from 1853 to 1856, when it was still one circuit. It is probable that Charles Leach, though only a boy, would have remembered him from that time. Ill health forced Stacey's retirement from preaching, but he began teaching students, after a couple of years returning to Sheffield. Though his health was always suspect he was able to continue training young men for the ministry. His Doctor of Divinity, awarded in the year the college opened, gave the correct impression for his position, but it was an honorary one, reluctantly accepted, from the Wesleyan University of Ohio.[9] It was fashionable in the latter part of the nineteenth century for American Universities to grant Doctorates to visiting English preachers.



Ranmoor Methodist New Connexion Theological training college

The Methodist New Connexion's system for training ministers was supposed to be two years at the college, followed by four years as preachers on trial. In reality there was a lot of leeway in the system, and it depended on the candidate's previous standard. As the college had only been open for nine years, learning on the job as a preacher on trial was the main element, and this could not be avoided. The college part was somewhat optional.

Of the seven men who started as preachers on trial at the same time as Charles Leach in 1873, only Samuel Steele and John Mellor had completed two years at college, while Thomas Stonely had attended for one. Andrew Myers, Francis Robinson, Thomas Willets and William Gillis[10] never went to the college, leaving Charles Leach as the odd one out in that he attended classes while also being a preacher on trial; and he had asked to attend, rather than being required to. At the same time there were only four students starting at Ranmoor, and three entering their second year.

The direct route was not a soft option as the trainee ministers, in addition to their preaching, were expected to study specific books and be examined on them each year. There was James Stacey's work on the Christian Sacraments, and Bishop Joseph Butler's 1736 *The analogy of religion, natural and revealed, to the constitution and course of nature*, which seems a curious choice for a Nonconformist denomination.

Not a lover of theology, Charles Leach would not have enjoyed that, but John Broadus', then new, *A treatise on the preparation and delivery of sermons* would have been much more to his liking, though not studied until the third year. Also included were Richard Chenevix Trench's *On the Study of Words*, and *Past and Present*, to help improve their command of English. The mainstay were books of the New Testament, and what may have tipped Charles Leach into wanting to go to college, each year one was to be studied in the Greek.[11] In addition there were six or seven other books they were supposed to read, and the superintendent was supposed to check that they had done so.

1873/4 Charles Leach is top right.
The eight men are probably his year
of preachers on trial

The Theological Committee at Conference was responsible for setting this regime, but far from being a closed club of ministers it included lay people like Arthur Ramsden, of the Halifax Courier, who Charles Leach would no doubt have remembered as a class leader from his days at Salem. The New Connexion practiced what they preached about lay members being at Conference; one of the matters which had lead to Alexander Kilham's secession from the Wesleyans.

The other points of contention stemmed from the Methodists' roots in the Established Church and the Wesley's' reluctance to let go of the connection. They revolved around the rights to worship at their own times, not necessarily those of the Anglicans; the right to have a say in the reception and expulsion of members; and the right to regard their own preachers as fully qualified. This last was now very relevant to the process into which Charles Leach was entering.

The New Connection was very strong in Sheffield, which stemmed from Kilham's work building up the new sect in its first year of existence. In the three quarters of a century since, they had expanded to three circuits in the town. With 155 around the country,[12] they had become the most urban of the Methodist denominations. Naturally it had attracted some influential supporters in the city, particularly the Firth family, who had been with them for many years.

In 1842 Mark and Thomas Firth had left Sanderson Brothers & Co to set up on their own. Soon their father, who had been head melter at Sanderson's, joined them and the company became Thomas Firth and Sons. The deaths, of the father in 1850, and the son Thomas in1858, had left the company in the hands of Mark, who had grown it to

an enormous size. They had started out making files and other small items, but now had expanded to include the huge 'tubes' for 16 inch naval and land guns.

Thomas Firth, the younger, had been concerned about the training of ministers and had set up a fund for this. After an extended holiday on the continent with Stacey, in the year of his death,1858, he had made a bequest of £5000 towards building a college for the New Connexion. The condition was that this should be undertaken within five years, and it was implicit in the offer that the principal should be James Stacey. The church was having difficulty raising the rest of what they needed, but a further contribution of £1000 by his brother Mark, in 1860[13], was sufficient to get things moving, and in the nick of time the building of Ranmoor College started in 1862 though it wasn't completed until April 1864.

Charles Leach had thus much to be thankful for in the generosity of the Firths. They were canny with their gifts, usually requiring the recipients to raise further money and complete the project within a fixed time scale, as with Ranmoor College.

When the new chapel in Attercliffe had been built, as usual it was not possible to raise all the required funds and so 'in faith' they covered the rest with debt. The amount outstanding on the chapel was £1950 and as Charles Leach put it; 'this burden pressed heavily upon the society, numbering then about seventy members, not one of whom had the good fortune to own a mansion. They had, however, a resolute determination to pay off a considerable portion of their debt.'[14]

Mark Firth had made an offer of £100 if the society could raise a further £400. These numbers do not seem large by today's standards, but consumer price inflation has been around 70 times[15] in the intervening period, meaning that the society was faced with raising some £28,000 in today's terms. This is only a rough measure, and when looked at this way, basic items seem expensive to us, while building costs appear low.

When Charles Leach arrived they had already raised £163 16s 7½d, by holding a bazaar and obtaining subscriptions. Now they were keen to obtain the balance of £237 to secure Mr Firth's gift. Charles Leach, despite the difficulties of the trade slump, set to work with his usual enthusiasm. 'The friends were again canvassed for subscriptions, and again they cheerfully gave, conscious no doubt that the Lord loveth cheerful givers.'[16] He touched everyone he could think of, The Pitsmoor Coal Company, John Banner the local draper, and even his old friend Henry Stembridge was parted from a pound.

Mark Firth was the sort of man who summoned young trainee preachers, but this time it was good news. He had obtained a subscription of £50 for them, which helped enormously, and inspired them with new hope. Firth obviously felt no conflict between his avowed support for the New Connexion and his involvement in making guns. Charles Leach, though of pacifist inclination, didn't appear to have any problem in accepting money from such a source.

However, it was the bazaar on which their hopes were pinned, despite finding that the date they had chosen clashed with a similar event at Talbot Street. Come the day, Charles Leach was on the platform with the Superintendent Rev John Graham and Rev David Heath, from his days at Elland but now attached to Sheffield West circuit. The event was opened by Councillor Alfred Allott, an accountant and ardent Nonconformist supporter, who gave an excellent speech and then made a contribution of £20 which, he hoped, would enable them to reach their target. Charles Leach reported that 'there were the usual attractions, such as weighing-machines, exhibitions, museums, etc. Perhaps the most remarkable thing of the kind was the exhibition of a cat with eight legs, which excited considerable curiosity.'[17] In the event the bazaar raised £73 10s 11d which, together with all the subscriptions, allowed them to reach

the £400 required, with £5 and a halfpenny to spare. They could thus claim the £100 from Mark Firth and pay off £500 from the debt. This was Charles Leach's first real experience of leading a fundraising effort, and it was to stand him in good stead later.

In 1867 Disraeli had succeeded in passing the Second Reform Act to extend the parliamentary franchise, having stolen the Liberals' clothes, as they had tried to pass a similar Bill two years before. This enfranchised male urban householders like Charles Leach, but the secrecy brought by the subsequent 1872 Ballot Act made it safe for those in a public position to vote as they pleased. When Gladstone precipitated a general Election in January 1874, the situation became interesting in Sheffield.

There were two seats for the city. Standing for them there was no Tory, but four candidates who came generally within the description of Liberals in the disorganised state of the party in Sheffield. AJ Mundella, the sitting member, had displaced the next candidate JA Roebuck in 1868; so there was not much love lost between them. Next came two Radicals, Joseph Chamberlain, the mayor of Birmingham, and Councillor Alfred Allott, who had only allowed his name to be put forward as part of an attempt to stop Chamberlain standing, and then tried to withdraw at the last moment. It was a chaotic election, with riots and windows smashed. Chamberlain, as the outsider, seemed to attract a good deal of abuse, having dead cats hurled at him, and was even hit by a red herring.[18]

Charles Leach would probably have been in some difficulty as to how to vote, tempted by the heavyweight candidates, but feeling some loyalty to someone who had supported him, and his may have been the one in Allott's humiliating 621 votes. It is unlikely that he would have supported Roebuck with his appeal to Tories, and his slogan 'stand by your National Religion and your National Beverage'.[19] This would have alienated a Methodist on both counts. He needed to be careful, as the church was not keen on its clergy being involved in politics.

In the event Roebuck got his revenge by topping the poll and Mundella was comfortably elected, beating Chamberlain by 1800 votes.[20] The last retreated to Birmingham to lick his wounds. The election had been an introduction for Charles Leach into Liberal politics, and it had also brought Mundella and particularly Chamberlain to his notice, who was going to feature later in his life.

Outside politics, another influence was the Rev Robert Stainton, the Independent or Congregational minister, who had arrived in Sheffield in 1865 and had built up the very successful Garden Street Chapel. As well as preaching there, he held Sunday afternoon services each week at either the Theatre Royal or Albert hall in Sheffield.[21] These impressed Charles Leach, both as a way of reaching out and bringing Christianity to people who normally never set foot inside a church, and as a way of raising the preacher's profile in the city at large. This brought greater numbers to hear him in his normal environment of the chapel.

Charles Leach had two years in Attercliffe which was to provide the groundwork for his career. The studies at Ranmoor, at last, gave a solid base to his education, and the experience of working in, and running, a chapel was just what he needed to set him up for his life's work. Trying to do both of these at the same time, normally leads to one or the other suffering; but his energy was such that this didn't occur. Since his first shaky attempt at local preaching a decade before, he had come a long way and now was thoroughly competent in the pulpit. Despite that, in his Testimonial after his first year, two of the 34 members of the circuit quarterly meeting were neutral rather than answering 'Yes' when asked if his preaching had been acceptable.[22] After the second year even this blip had been ironed out, and he received unanimous votes on all eleven questions.

His superiors in the New Connexion were also very pleased with him, and at the Conference in June of 1875, they felt confident enough to send him to the Ladywood Mission in Birmingham.[23] The church, as well as the normal circuits, ran missions to grow their support, mostly in the large cities where their presence was not as great as in the towns. It would be quite a challenge to be responsible for two chapels on his own, without a more senior minister to look after him. His contemporaries, meanwhile, were still being sent as the second or third minister in the larger circuits, where the superintendent could keep an eye on them.

5

Ladywood

'Ladywood is a large and populous district within the boundary of the borough of Birmingham. Every year it is rapidly growing in importance and respectability. Though the general trade of the town shares the dullness of which the country complains, building operations are pushed on here as rapidly as if people were starving in the streets for want of dwellings. Most of the houses rising are of the kind usually occupied by respectable members of the working and middle classes.'[1] This was how Charles Leach saw the area when he arrived, and though it was in the west of Birmingham, it wasn't the pleasant part where well to do people lived. That was reserved for Edgbaston a little further out and to the south.

The Leach's, Charles, Mary Jane and the three children, went to live in the tied house at 80 St Vincent Street, a three storey terrace, right on the street, typical of the area, with their decorative keystones over the windows and doors, and fancy brickwork just below the eaves. Though much of the area was quite new, St Vincent Street was some thirty years old.

Smart it wasn't, but it was an improvement over Victoria Road in Attercliffe. If the Sheffield suburb had suffered from high growth, it was nothing compared to Ladywood whose population had increased five times over the previous 30 years. Fortunately the industry was lighter and generated a good deal less smoke. Birmingham was known as the city of a thousand trades, many of them making small items from brass, but the industries stretched all the way from pins and needles through jewellery, to guns; not the heavy ones made in Sheffield, but personal weapons.

Ladywood Chapel

The chapel was a street away on Icknield Street West and was virtually new, having been completed little more than a year before in May 1874. It was the usual brick with stone mock gothic windows and doors, with curious hooded round windows on the schoolrooms to each side of the main chapel. It was a step up, because it had two towers, but lacked the impressive staircase as the door was virtually at the level of the road. Inside it was part galleried, but was rather plain. The choir were on a platform and in the centre little more than a dais formed the pulpit for the preacher. It could comfortably seat 600 people.[2]

Charles Leach knew that he had his work cut out, because in addition he was responsible for Heath Street chapel a mile and a half away, and to help him he had just five local preachers, and there were only 109 members of the chapels. The Sunday Schools looked more hopeful with 500 scholars and 53 teachers[3], but generally the picture was depressing. Richard Badger, one of the local preachers, was later to describe the situation. 'We verily thought that our light, which was but a flickering one, would be put out altogether. In fact it seemed that spiritually a hard frost had taken hold of us.'[4] It didn't appear that the pastorate of Joseph Hughes, Charles Leach's immediate predecessor, had been very successful; he was removed after only one year. Charles Leach's task was to change all this.

Though it didn't seem so at the time, it was his next great piece of luck to have been sent to Birmingham at this moment. Being a Free Church minister, - everyone called him Reverend despite his not being ordained - meant that he was automatically a member of a select club. As a Methodist, with their attitude to politics, he was somewhat on the fringes, but he was connected, nevertheless, to the Nonconformist and Liberal elite that ran Birmingham.

All the industrial towns and cities had been growing at an enormous rate in the first half of the Victorian period, and Birmingham was no exception. This, as he had already encountered, produced great strains on the infrastructure which was not up to the task now being asked of it. Thoroughfares, water supplies, drainage; none of these kept pace with the population. Halifax and Sheffield had started to tackle their problems, but the situation had been very bad in Birmingham as the council had been in the hands of what has been called the 'shopocracy'; a group of mostly small shopkeepers who, as the ratepayers, were only interested in paying as little as possible. They were following the 'laissez faire' attitudes of the time where minimal government was thought to be the true path. So bad was the situation that they were known as the 'Old Woodman Council' after the public house where they met, being too miserly to have a council chamber.

Something had to be done, but the impetus came from a surprising direction. George Dawson had come in 1844 as the Baptist minister at the Mount Zion Chapel in Graham Street, but his independent views had soon led to a rift and he had left to form the Church of the Saviour where he could pursue his own line and anyone could join without having to accept a particular creed. It was he who first developed the concept of the 'Civic Gospel'[5], and preached it on every available occasion from the pulpit and the platform.

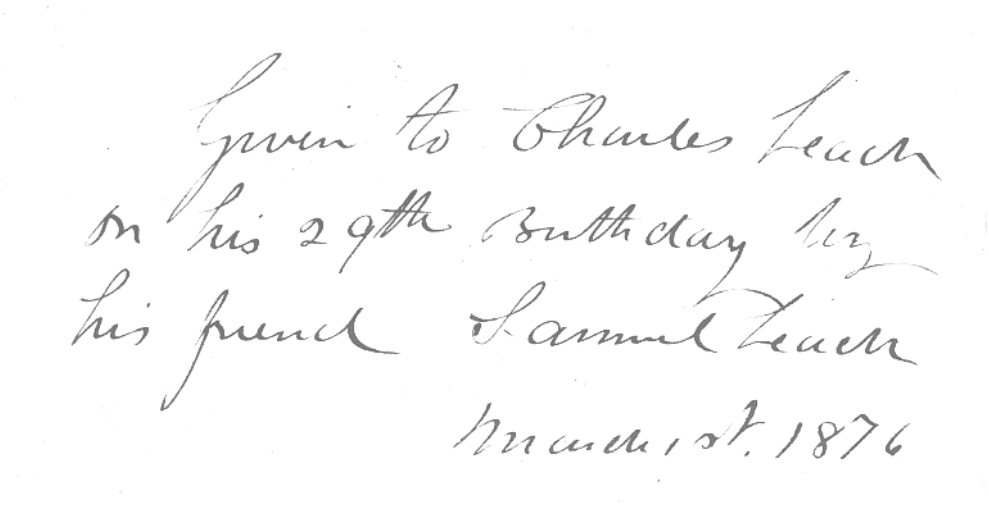
The 'Gospel' was that all good men should be prepared to do their civic duty and that able people should stand for the council so that they could work for the benefit of all. Dawson preached that 'they can redress in so many ways the inequalities of human conditions. The gracious words of Jesus Christ, 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my bretheren, even the least, ye did it unto Me' will be addressed not only to those who with their own hands fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and cared for

the sick, but to those who supported a municipal policy which lessened the miseries of the wretched and added brightness to the life of the desolate.'[6]

The message was taken up by other preachers, particularly the Congregationalist Dr RW Dale of Carr's Lane Chapel, and HW Crosskey, the Unitarian minister of the Church of the Messiah. Virtually all the the coming men of the town worshiped in one of these three chapels, or were Quakers. Probably the most important of these was Joseph Chamberlain, who had originally come from London to join the family screwmaking firm of Nettlefold and Chamberlain. He had been very successful as their Sales Director, but in 1869, influenced by the 'Gospel', he was elected to the council representing St Paul's Ward. Fortunately many others around him, like his brother Richard Chamberlain, William White, William Cook, Jesse Collings, George Cadbury and his cousin Richard Cadbury Barrow, had taken up the call. Most were members of the Arts Club, which was Liberal in all but name, and where the industrialists, parsons, and literary people mixed.

In 1873, after a clean sweep for the Liberals in the local elections, Joseph Chamberlain became Mayor. In the next three years they were to push through an extraordinary series of measures, bringing the water and gas supplies into municipal ownership and starting on 'improvements'. One of the secrets of their success was their businesslike methods and the use of the profits from the gas undertaking to fund other schemes. Though Chamberlain left to become a Member of Parliament in 1876, the impetus carried on for many years.

Charles Leach, though affected by this, had more pressing concerns at his chapel to occupy his time. The first thing was to meet and get to know his congregation, and though not particularly numerous, they were a dedicated band. Among them he found a namesake, but called Samuel Leach like his grandfather and youngest uncle. When he discovered that Samuel was a boot and shoemaker, his own trade only a couple of years before, they became firm friends. So much so that on his 29th birthday the following March, Samuel presented him with a nicely bound copy of Shakespeare's Works.



Inscription on flyleaf of book of Shakespeare's Works.

His major concern was how to boost the congregation. There were two strands to this; to improve the spiritual and financial viability of the chapel, but of greater importance to spread the Christian message to more souls. In an area where most

people were not middle class, the traditional mainstay of the chapels, it was vital to appeal to the working class. To him this was also a way of breaking down the barriers of the hidebound Victorian society.

The question was; how was this to be done? His mind wandered back to the Sunday afternoon services conducted by Rev Robert Stainton in Sheffield. The key feature had been that they were held away from the chapel, and so didn't intimidate those who normally never set foot inside one. A search of the area yielded no suitable building, and it was with reluctance that he was forced to consider the one location he could get permission to use, his own chapel. Still looking for a way to differentiate this from the normal services, he decided to call it a lecture and have it on a particular topic. He could throw in a hymn for good measure, but this was the genesis of the half hour Sunday afternoon lecture.

He was fortunate that one of the chapel leaders was William Proverbs, who ran a printing business a couple of roads away in Ledsam Street - with a name like that he had to have some religious involvement. They printed some publicity and Charles Leach just hoped that someone would turn up. He chose for his subject 'Two Hours in the Borough Gaol'; hardly a catchy title by today's standards, but an attraction in a world with little popular entertainment, and certainly none that would be free on a Sunday afternoon. One to two hundred people turned up which was quite enough to justify the effort.[7] He started a little nervously by saying: 'When a man appears before the public as a Lecturer or Teacher, his audience has the right to expect that he has mastered his subject, or at any rate understands it well. If this be thought too strong an expression, we will weaken it a little by saying that he should know more about the subject than his hearers can be supposed to know.'[8]

The following week the subject was 'Two hours in the Madhouse'; a prescient title considering what was to happen later. This produced a considerably larger attendance; he was getting into his stride. By the third week the chapel was filling up and there was no doubt that he had hit on the right way to bring people in. The effect on the congregation for the normal chapel services was also positive, the numbers started to climb, particularly for the evening service. The series finished the following March, and 'at the last lecture the chapel was quite full in every part, the audience numbering upwards of 1000.'[9] The 'quite full' being a lovely understatement for 1000 people packed into a chapel that could comfortably seat 600.

The structure of each talk often revolved around a story which could then be used to amplify the moral points he wanted to make. Achilles Taylor, one of his church leaders wrote: 'The object of these lectures was to help the working men physically, morally, and spiritually; and the lectures have been so far successful that many, both by letter and orally, have confessed that through the agency of these lectures they have made a turning point in their lives, and as one of the hearers himself said, 'Mr Leach has knocked all the rough corners off me, and now I am a better man."[10]

On the 20th March 1876, after the first winter's lectures they held a meeting of thanks to the minister. Councillor Barrow, a Quaker who had taken over the retail side of the Cadbury business from his uncles, was in the chair. Charles Leach was beginning to make friends with the important people in the area when the local Liberal councillor would come and support such an event. 'There were upwards of 400 people sat down to tea, consuming above one hundredweight of cake, besides other eatable commodities.'[11] They presented him with a purse containing £20, a sizable sum when his salary was probably around £120 per annum, and many working men would be happy with £1 a week. Charles Leach saw this, not as payment, but as a 'token of love,

of esteem and appreciation', and was clearly quite touched. He went on, however, to give a typical address on the subject of 'Drink, Dirt and the Devil'.[12]

Many of the lectures were written up and printed, of course, by WG Proverbs. After a while these were collected together and published as small books, the first appearing at the end of 1875, as *Sunday Afternoon Half Hour Lectures to Working Men*[13], for the princely sum of 3d. The title makes very clear his target audience, but in practice around one third were women. Later he was to alter it to *Working People* to reflect this.

In the autumn he recommenced the lectures, starting with *Odds and Ends*. In it he told the story of his eldest daughter saying, 'Well this is a funny dinner, nothing but odds and ends.'[14] Elizabeth was now nine, and it seems perceptive. Maybe the family were struggling to live on his stipend. His income seemed quite reasonable compared with that achieved by most working people, but as a minister he was expected to keep up appearances, and that cost money. He was to record later that his stipend at this time was not sufficient to feed his family.[15] Nevertheless he pressed on with his task.

For his last lecture in March he reviewed the situation, and outlined why he thought his approach was being successful in filling his chapel, while others failed. He stated his view: 'I cannot help thinking that many politicians and preachers too, adopt the wrong one. 'Why don't people go to church?' is a question often asked. I would answer it by saying that it is largely because the Church does not go to the people. Besides that I fear that many of my brethren who take the pulpit, have got into the habit of talking to us as if we, like them, were learned professors of the liberal arts, and had got so much knowledge that we can tell how many ounces the colour called sky-blue weighs, and how many inches a sound will measure. They forget that many, if not most, of those who hear them are poor ordinary mortals, and have not wisdom enough to see that two and two make five, or five and seven thirteen.'[16] Perhaps success was going to his head when a 30 year old preacher, not yet ordained, reckoned that he knew the answers; even if he was right. He was turning his poor education into an asset rather than a liability, because he spoke the language of ordinary people.

The results of all the work were showing in the normal chapel attendances. The average congregation for the evening services had jumped from 180 to 500, while the number of signed up members had risen from 88 to 135. One of the main ways that the chapels raised their funds was by 'letting' sittings in the pews. A charge of 1/6, 2/- or 2/6, depending on the position, was made each quarter for the use of a particular pew. With an increase of 100 in the number of sittings let, the chapel funds were considerably healthier.[17]

Rev Henry Crosskey came originally from Lewes in Sussex, but had arrived in Birmingham in 1869 to take up and rejuvenate the ministry of the Church of the Messiah. He was a Unitarian, and they denied the Holy Trinity, but believed in the three principles of freedom, reason and tolerance. The freedom was from constraining sets of rules set down by church elders; the reason was the ability to think about their faith and not simply accept what was handed down to them; and the tolerance was the acceptance of other people's varying beliefs about many matters.

Though George Dawson did not call himself a Unitarian, his philosophy was very similar, and sufficiently so for them to claim him as one of their own. After his death in 1876, Crosskey was one of those who took up the torch of the civic gospel. The Unitarian rationalist approach, with its belief in not only in being good, but also doing good, fitted easily with it. Thus he was able to further influence many of those such as the Chamberlains, Kenricks and Martineaus who came to his chapel, to take up the banner.

Rev Crosskey, however, had an unusual hobby, which he had shared with George Dawson, in that he was very interested in geology, and had already written a number of learned papers on the subject. Both were fellows of the Geological Society, giving them the right to use FGS after their names. In the circle in which Charles Leach moved, geology was quite fashionable, and he put his name forward to be a Fellow of the society. Besides Henry Crosskey, his application was supported by, Rev George Middleton, a Primitive Methodist minister, the Principal of Bourne College just up the road from where he was living, together with Frederick Derry a manufacturer of electroplated cutlery from a little further away in Upper Hockley Street. The application was sent off to London, and it was now a matter of waiting to see if it would be accepted.

6

Ordination

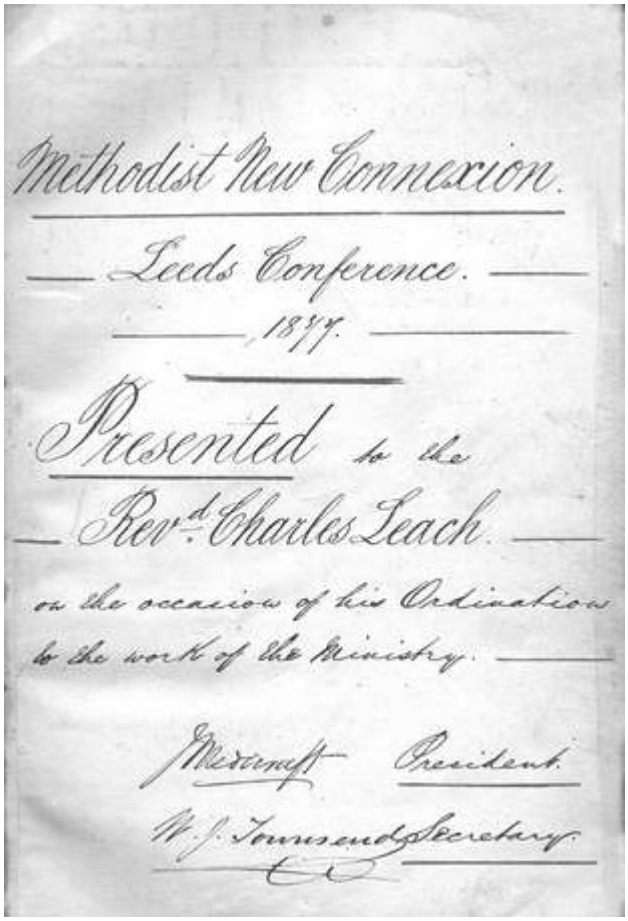
As the spring of 1877 turned to summer, everything seemed to be going well for the Leaches, until six year old Harry got a chest infection. Doctor Morris was called, but without antibiotics there was nothing much he could do, except to advise putting him to bed and keep him warm. Steadily, as May progressed, Harry became worse. Finally, on the 3rd June, he died; the cause being recorded as Pleuro-pneumonia.[1] Probably this meant an infection that had attacked both the lungs and the outer lining, not the cattle disease for which the name is usually reserved. In that year there had been a serious outbreak of the notifiable sickness in livestock, but it doesn't normally affect humans, and in the town they were well away from any cows.

This was a traumatic time for the family. Infant deaths were very common in the Victoria era, and it was taken for granted that some would not survive; but this was their second. Usually the first year was the most dangerous, and after age five they were through the worst time. The Leaches had just discovered that even after that, it is never completely safe. It was a lesson that they were to learn over and over again.

Mary Jane was, however, expecting again. After having four children in six years she had not had another for five; a curious gap. Charles Leach had additional pressures as he was at the end of his four year's probationary period and was due to take his final examinations in a few days. They decided to take Harry back to Elland and bury him, in the same grave as his brother, in that back corner of the little Bethesda graveyard. As committed Christians they had to accept that this was God's will, and try to take comfort from that.

From Elland it was not far to Leeds where the Methodist New Connexion's Conference began on the 11th June. Though his mind was probably elsewhere, he still managed to pass his final examinations, and on the 16th was 'received into Full Connexion'[2]. At last he ceased to be a 'preacher on trial'. Later in the day he, and the other seven other contemporary probationers, were all ordained. One of the senior ministers, the Rev Henry Piggin, gave them an Ordination Charge, preaching to them, and laying out their responsibilities as ministers.[3] Charles Leach was then presented with a preacher's Bible with copious notes and references. Particularly touching were the two signatures on the dedication inside the front cover. The President of the Conference that year, was Rev John Medicraft who had been at Halifax when he was young, and the Secretary, Rev William Townsend, was the very man who had done so much at Bethesda to help put his name forward for the ministry.[4] It must have been a poignant moment for both of them to see him become a fully fledged minister.

Returning home, there was a further piece of news. They had quite forgotten about his application to the Geological Society, but found that on the 6th June he had been elected to be a Fellow.[5] He could now really call himself Reverend Charles Leach FGS. Whatever the real depth of his interest in geology, and he never presented any papers, it had the great advantage of letters after his name which would help disguise his shaky education. It had been quite a fortnight, and at thirty he had arrived in the world; but at what a cost.


Methodist New Connexion.

Leeds Conference.

1877.

Presented to the

Revd. Charles Leach.

on the occasion of his Ordination

to the work of the Ministry.

President.

Secretary.

Flyleaf of Bible presented to Charles Leach on his Ordination 1877

In September there was a happier event when their third daughter was born, and she appeared to be quite healthy. They called her Dora[6]; a name again well differentiated from the traditional family ones. In a month they moved; not an easy thing to do when the house was provided by the chapel. Probably they had wanted to leave St Vincent St after Harry's death, and it had taken a few months to organise. Their new home was at 234 Icknield Street West almost opposite the chapel; rather more convenient, though a similar terraced building.

Charles Leach was soon back at work, and was now reaching out beyond his own chapel. On 21st October he was preaching in aid of a mission to the deaf and dumb, together with Rev Canon Wilkinson.[7] He was never particularly concerned about religious denominations, and would cooperate with anyone who was working for the same good cause.

By the end of the month it was time to begin the Sunday afternoon half hour lectures again, starting with the rather unoriginal subject of *Here we are Again*. These had become fixed events, and could be counted on to be throughout the winter months at 3.30 pm in Ladywood Chapel. They were now settling into a pattern of a homely story followed by the moral messages. This series was all around the theme of the parable of the Prodigal Son, examining the different aspects of the story in succeeding lectures. A good example was given on 25th November under the title of *Forsaken*:

'A gentleman, who thought himself very highly educated, came to cross a ferry. The boat was pulled by a poor ignorant man. The gentleman, opening the conversation with the

boatman, asked him if he had ever studied classics! 'No,' said the man, ' don't know anything about them.' 'Then,' answered the gentleman in astonishment, 'you have wasted part of your life. Do you know mathematics?' 'Who's he? Mathew Matticks! – Mathew Matticks! Does he live down here? – is he a boatman? Is he a fisherman? I never heard tell of him!' The gentleman, pitying the poor man, said quite three-parts of his life were entirely wasted. But presently there came a mishap – the boat was upset, and both men were in the water. The poor ignorant fisherman could swim, and when he had righted himself a little he turned round and looked at the gentleman, who was struggling in the water and shouted to him, 'can you swim?' 'N-n-no! No!' cried he, 'Well, then,' said the boatman, 'the *whole* of *your* life is gone,' and pushing off for the shore he forsook the struggling gentleman.

The man about whom we are to speak this afternoon is forsaken too. He is not in water, but is in want. He has spent all, famine has come, he is hungry and hard up. When he left his home, and went out for the far-off land with his property turned into cash, he had friends in abundance – many would gather around him like bees, ready to suck the honey, but, like bees, to forsake him when the honey was gone. They praised him, said all manner of grand things about him, tried to make him believe respecting himself what he knew was not true. Flatterers are never wanting to those who have power in the world or in the pocket. When Betsy Shiftless comes to you and begins to say all sorts of nice things, just you look out – very likely her husband has been applying to a Loan Society for five pounds, and wants your husband to be bond. If people come too thick in their praise and flattery, be careful how you deal with them. Remember the old proverbs – 'A honey tongue, a heart of gall;' 'Too much courtesy, too much craft;' 'The cat is friendly, but scratches.' Beware of two faced men. If you go to town and look at some waterproof coats, you will find they are reversible; one side for wet days, the other for dry. I fear too many men are reversible beings. Trust such men as far as you can see them and no farther, or you may be deceived. They are perfect weathercocks…'[8]

The subject taken from the Prodigal Son was thus gradually bent around to be relevant to the lives of the people to whom he was talking.

In the next lecture on the subject of *Hard Labour* he picked up again one of his themes; breaking down the barriers between classes:

'I am aware that labour is very often misunderstood. I am afraid that some of those who are in reality working men, have very vague notions of labour. There are men who toil hard and long who are supposed not to labour at all. The man who strips to the shirt and stands before the tilt hammer – the forge – the furnace, etc, is called a worker; but the man who has the misfortune to wear that horrible thing, a black coat! is supposed never to do any work! The man who yields a sledge-hammer is looked to as a man of hard labour; but he who wields nothing heavier than a pen is called a gentleman, and not acknowledged as a labourer. But the truth is, the latter is often the harder worker of the two, and finds himself alas! too frequently wearied from head to foot.'[9]

Charles Leach and William Proverbs had come up with another scheme; to produce 'a weekly magazine for every home and workshop' called *The Factory Girl*.[10] It aimed for the moral improvement of its readers, and if it raised the numbers in the chapel and the profile of those involved, that was a bonus. Even selling at one penny there might still have been some financial profit for them. In August 1877 the first issue appeared with Charles Leach as the editor and Proverbs the printer. It was a mixture of serial stories, talks from the pulpit, and moral homilies. Among its contributors was CH Spurgeon, the famous Baptist preacher, and Charles Leach sometimes included his Sunday afternoon lectures. It was to continue for some years, circulating in Birmingham and the cotton and woollen districts, changing its name to *Factory Herald* in 1879, and reaching some 8,000 to 10,000 per week.[11]

Charles Leach around the time of his ordination in 1877

In the late 1870s, Birmingham was a good place to be for those interested in Radical politics. This was a sharp departure from the traditional patrician interests of the aristocratic Whigs and Tories who had dominated governments for so long. With the advent of the 1868 reform act, and the increased franchise, there was a groundswell of interest in all types of reform. The Radicals were part of the Liberal Party, and strange bedfellows they made with the traditional Whigs. They had set up a National Liberal Federation based on the 'caucus' system, where individuals became members of their ward branch and elected a ward committee to organise recruitment and canvassing. They in turn elected members of the constituency body, the Central Liberal Association, which annually chose delegates to the National Federation. However, the municipal bodies could become quite large, usually some hundreds and in Birmingham reaching two thousand by 1885, so in practice things were controlled by a smaller executive.

In Birmingham this more or less democratic structure had swept away the cliques and committees, influenced by local magnates. It was thus a complete break with the old ways of the patricians who thought that it was their right to rule, and the beginning of the sense that everyone could have a say in how they were governed. In practice the caucus system put power into the hands of those like Joseph Chamberlain who could persuade and inspire the mass of the members. That coupled with efficient organisation in the hands of the capable secretary Francis Schnadhorst, made a winning combination. Because of the type of people this attracted, the philosophy and morality of the Radicals was driven by the Nonconformists, and this sucked Charles Leach into contact with his local Rotton Park Liberal Party.

It is not quite clear why he should have chosen the Rotton Park ward rather than the Ladywood one. The dividing line ran down the middle of Icknield Street West. The

chapel, and his home before 1877 in St Vincent Street, were in the Ladywood ward, while the later Icknield Street West address was on the other side of the road and hence in Rotton Park Ward. Perhaps it was the presence of particular councillors, initially RC Barrow, one of his supporters, and a little later of Richard Tangye and George Cadbury, all men with a keen interest in improving the lot of the people of Birmingham.

When war broke out between Turkey and Russia in April 1877, following revolts in the decaying Turkish Empire, Disraeli and his Tory government were all for joining in, concerned that the Russians would reach Constantinople and threaten Britain's lifeline to India. This produced mass protests, and in Birmingham one of the main activists was Arthur O'Neill the minister of the Baptist Newhall Street Chapel. He was a man with a radical past having been a player in the Chartist Movement in the 1840s, and a promoter of Christian pacifism. On 15th December he called a meeting in the Provident Rooms, Ann Street, to lecture on the subject of *England and the War*. The theme was the folly of war, and that England should remain neutral. Charles Leach wouldn't have needed any convincing, he was there to join in the protest against war and the Jingoism - the newly invented word - that was gripping the country.[12]

He was also building a reputation as a platform speaker. This was particularly for any organisation that seemed to be generally furthering the Christian work that he thought so important. One such body had been set up in 1870, and in Birmingham was run by its secretary Thomas Hope Aston, who was a brush maker by trade. The Birmingham Christian Evidence and Protestant Laymen's Association aimed to help answer many of the questions about Christian faith using the new discoveries in science, and also to further the Protestant cause in an ecumenical way. On 29th December 1877 Charles Leach attended the annual tea meeting and together with the chairman SP Boot gave a talk on the diffusion of true Protestantism.[13] This, though some way from his primary task in Ladywood, was all part of the widening circle of interests.

In 1878 the previous autumn's Sunday afternoon lectures were brought together and published under the title of *Homeward Bound*.[14] They had become so successful that too many people were being turned away from the overcrowded chapel, and it was essential to find a larger venue. Charles Leach swallowed hard and hired the Town Hall, the mock classical temple to the side of Victoria Square; capable of seating 3,600 people. The last lectures of the series were held there, and still the numbers grew. The meeting, after the end of the series, was now attended by more than Councillor Barrow, as Alderman Jesse Collings, a close associate of Joseph Chamberlain, also came, as did Samuel Timmins, the well known local historian and Shakespearian scholar, who was particularly pleased that Charles Leach had given special attention to the working classes.

In August he felt confident enough, and had saved a little money, to enable the family to go for a short break in Blackpool. At the age of 31, this was his first holiday. He obviously enjoyed it, and maybe this was the genesis of his later taste for travel. While there he claimed to have seen several wonderful things, but it was particularly a fortune telling affair which attracted his attention. Ever the preacher, he was to tell the story in one of his lectures in the autumn:

'I stood for some time, and saw the concern at work, but did not venture a penny as I know *my* fortune. But at length a very nice young lady, about sixty-five, had a go, and came to me with her paper. It said that she would be married, have a large family, be well to do, and happy; but afterwards she would have some trouble, and, ultimately, live with one of her sons.

'Well,' she said, 'that is a lie. I am sixty-five years of age, and have had two husbands, but I never had any children; and I am too far gone, I hope, to have a large family now.' I thought she was about right, and that the statements of the birds were false – as are most of the statements of those who pretend to forecast the future; at best they can be but mere guesses. And there are hundreds of foolish women and silly men who resort to fortune-tellers that they may learn things that only time can teach.'[15]

It was a bold assertion that he knew his fortune, as his life was to contain many events which would have surprised him had he known them then. For the time being everything was running smoothly and steady progress was being made in the chapel, and he was even able to support functions at other Connexional chapels such as Smethwick.[16] The lecturing was very successful, and was making him a well known figure in the town. He should have known that it was too good to last.

In early June 1879 the Methodist New Connexion met in Huddersfield for its annual Conference, to make all the decisions for the year, including where the ministers were to be sent. By Saturday the 14th they had dealt with most of the business, but a long discussion ensued on the wisdom to appointing ministers to home mission stations for indefinite periods. In normal circuits most ministers were moved after two years, but Charles Leach, for example, had already been at Ladywood for four. The consequence of their deliberations was that he was to be moved. The decision was that he should be sent to London, to the Second or North Circuit, based in Islington.[17]

7

Highbury

Less than a mile from Ladywood Chapel, as Newhall Street dipped down into a less salubrious area, was Graham Street where two different denominations almost faced each other. On the North side, Mount Zion, the Baptist, had been for a short time the pulpit of George Dawson. He was followed by Charles Vince, another charismatic preacher; but by 1879 they were both gone. A little further along, opposite the junction with Vittoria Street was Highbury Chapel, an unusual name, the reason for which was now lost in the mists of time. It had been opened in 1844 as an Independent or Congregational Chapel, capable of seating 1,000 – 1,300. Built of red brick with stone dressings, it had a front with a pedimented gable, round headed windows and a classical doorway[1]; a style, with its nod towards the Greeks and Romans, often known at the time as 'Modern Brumic'.[2]

Highbury Chapel in its latest incarnation as a Sikh Temple.
The original red brick has been covered over

In December 1861 William Fleetwood Callaway had been ordained the minister, and had ably drawn people from all over the town to hear him preach. By the late 1870s pastor and congregation were becoming dissatisfied with the chapel, and felt that the 'sombre murkiness of a Carr's Lane and a Graham Street were not conducive to the position of 'light and leading' which all properly conducted chapels should assume and the trim broughams of wealthy deacondom waxed out of keeping with the unattractive vulgarity or garish squalor of the back street – so to the suburbs the Highbury Congregation went (or were supposed to go)'.[3] This, in plainer language, meant that as the people were moving out of the town centre; the chapels should too, particularly as the area now had many factories making small metal parts. They had built a new, 'Lombardic' style, chapel on Soho Hill for the considerable sum of £17,000[4], which was completed in July 1979, and they left Graham Street empty.

Dr RW Dale at Carr's Lane chapel was staying put. He didn't agree with this process, known as the 'drift to the suburbs' and thought that the chapels should stay where they were and serve the changing population. In practice this meant attracting more

'working people' which was exactly what Charles Leach had been striving to achieve over the last four years.

Amongst Dr Dale's congregation, and a close friend, was Richard Tangye[5], the salesman and public face of the Tangye Brothers engineering firm who had launched themselves by launching Brunel's Great Eastern. The ship, because of its great size, had had to be pushed sideways, and it had taken over twenty of the Tanyge's large hydraulic jacks to eventually move the Leviathan into the water. That, together with the raising of 'Cleopatra's Needle' on the Embankment, had brought considerable success and fortune to the Tangyes.

Though he was not a Quaker, Richard Tangye had been educated and taught in one of their schools; leaving him with a great sense of public service. In 1878 he had been elected a Town councillor for the Rotton Park Ward, Charles Leach's stamping ground, and it was there that the two men had got to know each other. Their radical Liberalism, and concern to better the lot of working people, brought them together.

Richard Tangye obtained Highbury Chapel, on behalf of a committee, with the view to reopening it as rapidly as possible.[6] No doubt WG Proverbs and other leading members of the Ladywood congregation were part of this committee, and so the natural person to have for the pastor was Charles Leach, and they offered him the position. This was quite a decision, to leave the denomination which had nurtured him, brought him forward, trained and ordained him. He had been with them for some twenty years, eight as a local preacher, and six as a pastor. This was not something to be lightly thrown away, but they had posted him to London, to start again. The Methodists were not too keen on ministers attaining strong local followings; they wanted them to work for the good of the whole church. On the other hand, if he took the offered opportunity, though it would be a new beginning, it would be with people he already knew. Also, as an Independent, he would be free of the dictates of the Conference which could capriciously send him anywhere they chose.

He bit the bullet, and agreed to take the offered position. Whether he ever actually went to London is unclear, though a contemporary report talked of a movement 'initiated to bring him back to Birmingham.'[7] However, on 25th August he was still there attending a meeting of the committee and friends of Rotton Park Liberal Association.[8] This was presided over by Councillor RC Barrow and amongst those present were Councillors Richard Tangye, George Cadbury, of the chocolate firm, and Joseph Powell Williams, a local magistrate, leading Liberal in the town, and associate of Joseph Chamberlain. The purpose of the meeting was to hear an address by Richard Tangye and discuss the fact that his health was not so good and that he was about to leave for Australia for about three months. Charles Leach was now associating with many of the important people of the town.

By October a church of 127 members had been set up in Highbury chapel and he had been elected the pastor.[9] On the12th he preached there for the first time, and the success of the operation 'was indicated by the crowds who were unable to gain admission to the building.'[10] Over a hundred seat holders from Ladywood chapel had suddenly ceased in the summer/autumn of 1879,[11] and we can assume that most followed him to the new church. There were even some, such as Samuel Usher, from the original Highbury congregation who stayed to join the new one.

The Owl, a new independent weekly claiming 'wit and wisdom', but rarely achieving either, printed a large cartoon with the caption 'The Reverend Charles Leach, a Leach that is certain to draw,'[12] They were also impressed with the impact that he had made: 'Six years ago, in Dawson, Vince, and Dale, Birmingham possessed three preachers of exceptional genius and eloquence. Alas we should say possessed; two out of the three

are gone; they have their successors, but their places have not been filled. We welcome, therefore, to our town a man who will help to fill the void that their departure has occasioned. Charles Leach, we believe, will do something to fill the place of Charles Vince.'[13] These were big shoes for him to try to fit, particularly as he lacked one feature common to all these prominent ministers; the full beard. As someone who could not grow one, only managing a sparse moustache, this was a considerable disadvantage in the gravitas stakes as it made him seem younger than his 32 years.

The house, in which the family had been living, was tied to the incumbent minister of Ladywood chapel, so they took the opportunity to move somewhere more pleasant. Following Monument Road – Icknield Street West had been renamed – south past Ladywood Road towards Edgbaston it became tree lined and the houses larger. Just off this was Noel Road, a short street of substantial dwellings with leafy rear gardens. They took up residence in number 21, and before long were employing a nineteen year old, Mary Smith, as General Domestic Servant.[14] This was quite a step up for the Leaches who hailed from the back streets of Halifax.

The Methodists paid their ministers a more or less fixed stipend, dictated by Conference, and he would have received around £140 per annum at Ladywood, but an Independent chapel, if successful, could pay the minister what they chose. The better life style pointed to a considerable improvement in his salary. Later the family moved to 397 Monument Road, one of a small patch of larger houses next to the Wesleyan Methodist chapel and considerably closer to Graham Street and the children's schools.[15]

He was also now free to become involved publicly in politics. That was, of course, as long as what he was saying on the platform didn't run counter to the views of those who controlled the chapel. He ran foul of this problem many years later. Now, as those backing the new chapel came from the same radical Liberal and Nonconformist backgrounds that he represented, he was unlikely to have any difficulties. The Radical's programme was religious equality, temperance, land reform and non-sectarian education; exactly his concerns.

He had hardly settled into the new pastorate when it was time for choosing candidates for the local elections, and he was on the platform supporting the candidacy for re-election of William White.[16] White was a Quaker, and a great friend of Richard Tangye. Years before the two men had worked together running The Friend's Adult Sunday School, one of the earliest attempts to help the working classes in Birmingham attain some education. White was, later, to help Tangye when he came to set up in business on his own. He was a man with a strong social conscience and when he first became a councillor, for a very poor area of the town, he visited every street and courtyard and gave a report to the council on the dreadful conditions in many of them. As a result he was in the van of the movement to 'improve' the town, and very much a man after Charles Leach's own heart. Such was the Liberal's strength and organisation, that once someone was selected as a candidate, they were fairly certain to be elected, and White had no difficulties retaining his seat.

A few months later, in March 1880, a general election was called and Charles Leach went into overdrive, speaking at innumerable meetings in support of the three Liberal candidates.[17] It was clear that he was being effective when a Tory, Robert Bridcut, referring to the memorial which was being erected in honour of Joseph Chamberlain, said that 'next they would be erecting a monument to that political ruffian the Rev Charles Leach, and also to Rev Arthur Mursell'.[18] Graham Street was obviously

becoming quite a hotbed as Mursell was the minister of Mount Zion Baptist chapel almost across the road.

The town was a single constituency with three seats, but electors could only vote for two candidates. The party organisation, under Francis Schnadhorst, advised for whom they should be cast. By judicious juggling of the names in each of the 16 wards they could try to end up with approximately the same number for each candidate and, hopefully, get them all elected. In Rotton Park ward the two chosen were PH Muntz and John Bright. On polling day Charles Leach was among the 315 Liberal Party workers who turned up at 6 o'clock to work in just that ward.[19] By half past ten, such was the activity, that they had some 70 vehicles busy ferrying people to and from the polling stations. Richard Tangye, who was returning from Australia, travelled night and day to be able to reach Birmingham in time to vote.

At twelve o'clock the Conservatives announced that though Mr Muntz was at the head of the poll, their two candidates came next, with Chamberlain trailing badly. With a secret ballot they couldn't know the numbers, and clearly there was something the matter with their canvass returns, because they were soundly beaten. The three Liberals, PH Muntz, John Bright, and Joseph Chamberlain, were easily returned, though Chamberlain had the lowest vote of the three. The Tory's, Major Burnaby and the Hon ACG Calthorpe, were some 5000 votes behind.

Once the dust had settled from the election Charles Leach was speaking at the National Liberal Conference at Southampton[20], and publicly supporting Richard Tangye's attempt to get an Art Gallery for the town. With a strong jewellery industry, he was pointing out that: 'Many of the artisans work daily among precious stones and metals, which it is their business to cut and carve and twist into such shapes as make them things of beauty. Every hour a man spends in such work he must become a better man.'[21] His endeavours to improve people stretched into many seemingly unlikely areas, but he had a clear view of the relevance of everything to his overall goals. Almost at the same time he was writing a sketch of Richard Tangye's life and publishing it in the *Factory Herald,* showing his great admiration for him.

Despite the literary outlets, his real skill was with the voice. Even those who had gone to criticize were won over by the clear and straightforward nature of his delivery, and a typical report ran: 'In Mr Leach there is no affectation of learning; his style and utterances are simplicity crystallized. His gifts seem specially adapted to win, and to mould, and to lead the masses. The people formed the great bulk of the congregation which crowded the chapel to its utmost capacity, on the Sabbath evening of our visit.'[22]

Charles Leach's other activities certainly hadn't led to him neglecting his chapel. The same report commented that the 'Sunday evening congregation, on the average numbers about 2,000. All the seats are let, and the church is self supporting. There is a good organ, and an excellent choir under the leadership of Mr Proverbs junr. The Chapel has been recently renovated and transformed into a beautiful place of worship, the whole of the cost having been paid. There is a flourishing Sunday school, 500 scholars, with a large and efficient staff of teachers. Collections are rarely made, as they are not needed, the working expenses being fully met by the contributions of the Church and congregation, including seat rents. The membership is over 300, and the church grows week by week.'[23] This was an extraordinary achievement when they had started from nothing.

Birmingham Town Hall – little changed outside since Charles Leach was filling it with his Sunday Afternoon Lectures

At the end of October, it was time to fill the Town Hall again with the Sunday Afternoon Lectures, beginning with the topic *Old Friends*. A visiting American, Dr Lyman Abott, described attending one on *Ruined Homes*:

'We were late in getting there. The name of Dr Dale admitted us to the platform entrance; but it did not seem at first that any name could get us through the blocked passageway which led to the platform. But when my guide told the men and women who filled the doorway that here was a gentleman from America, they squeezed themselves into still closer compass to let me pass, and pulled from before and pushed from behind I found myself at last seated on the balustrade on the platform at the speaker's side. And what a sight! Galleries, floor, platform, doorways, aisles, even the vacant space under the platform, full of interested human faces. There were certainly not less than four thousand men and women gathered here; men who earned their bread by the sweat of their brow - day labourers, street workers, artisans of all trades... The speaker was no orator, and made no attempt at oratorical effect. If he had he would have lost his hold upon his hearers. But he knew their lives, he realised the temptations which beset them and the sorrows that encircled them; he spoke as one that was of them and yet above them, neither condescendingly nor patronisingly; he applied the counsels of Christ to their lives, and when he predicted the ruin that was brought to their homes by drink, by idleness, by temper, by shiftless and thriftless habits, by the brutal husband and the slatternly wife, they testified the truth of his teaching by their laughter, their tears, and their applause; and on more than one homely face I saw the resolution of a better life written.'[24]

This then was the secret of his success; the people came because they thought he was talking to them about their lives. The disadvantage of his background had been turned to an advantage.

However, there was trouble brewing. A Committee for Sunday Evening Meetings had been set up also to have lectures in the Town Hall, and though this appeared to be a copy of Charles Leach's, they used a series of lecturers such as S. Timmins, Rev Crosskey, Rev Arthur Mursell and so on.[25] The Mayor, Richard Chamberlain, brother of Joseph, who was responsible for deciding who could hire the hall, was under pressure from many people to use the hall on Sundays. He decided that all continuous Sunday services should stop. The Committee complained bitterly, and only just politely. Charles Leach had a booking for the whole series and when he agreed to stop in early January, Richard Chamberlain wrote explaining his position and mentioning

that 'my friend the Rev Charles Leach'[26] was also affected and had gracefully accepted his decision.

In the New Year he was faced with finding another venue and for a time used Curzon Hall. Though this was not far away, and the main hall could hold 3000 people, it was nearly square having originally been built for dog shows, and so not as large or convenient at the Town Hall.

His fame as a speaker was spreading and on Whit Monday 1881 he was at the Annual Meeting of the Sunday School Union in Kidderminster.[27] This was a very large meeting where they assembled 2500 junior and Adult scholars from all Nonconformist denominations, and for the services had to be split into three, one of which Charles Leach took. This was another indication of his ecumenical approach, and his lack of interest in, and concern for, the various theological divisions that separated the churches. If they were all working to achieve the same ends, that was good enough for him.

Another aspect of this was encouraging his chapel to look outwards and early in the New Year Highbury gathered up 200 people over 60. Perhaps he was conscious that his father had reached that age. They served them a good tea and after an address they were sent away with '¼ lb of tea, 1lb sugar, 1lb rice, a packet of sweets, a useful article from the Christmas tree, and a New Year's card.'[28] A few days later they had another gathering, this time of 200 street waifs, of both sexes, who made a precarious living by selling newspapers and matches. They were given a substantial meal of soup and plum pudding before being sent away with some good advice from the minister, together with an orange and a small book.

It was time to change the basis of the chapel, as the building was still owned by the trustees of the church that had migrated to Soho Hill. Now the chapel was bought by Joseph Powell Williams and Francis Schnadhorst,[29] probably with money from Richard Tangye. The three men were leading Liberals; Powell Williams was the Hon Sec, and Schnadhorst the secretary, of the Birmingham Association. All of them, together with Charles Leach, had been at a testimonial meeting to Joseph Fairfax, in only the previous October in Rotton Park.[30] This was one of those congratulatory meetings so popular at the time, and may well have been where the scheme was hatched. It is of note that these people were also Congregationalists and had been members of Carr's Lane Chapel, rather pointing to Dr Dale's involvement behind the scenes. Later there was some suggestion that Schnadhorst attended Charles Leach's chapel.[31]

The price was rather low; £4000, with £2000 deposit paid immediately, and the rest to be finalised on 1st January 1885. Whether the Soho Hill trustees were in a position to be generous to the incoming church, or a hard bargain was driven, is unclear. A new set of twelve trustees was set up with Powell Williams and Schnadhorst at the head of the list. Among them was WG Proverbs, who had come from Ladywood with Charles Leach, Samuel Usher, who had been a trustee of the original church, and Joseph Fairfax, whose testimonial it had been as Hon sec of the Rotton Park Liberal Association. The others were all tradesmen, from a silversmith to a milliner. What the teetotal minister thought of having John Conchar, a wine and spirit merchant, is not recorded.

Charles Leach's gratitude to Richard Tangye was clearly shown when he dedicated his next book of lectures, *Old Friends*,[32] to him. This printed most of the lectures from the autumn of 1881 and it was published by RD Dickenson of Farringdon Street London, right by the London Congregational Union's Memorial Hall. The printer isn't named so we are unsure if WG Proverbs was still involved.

The Leach Family in about 1882. Charles and Mary Jane are seated with Elizabeth standing behind them. Dora is centre and Ada right. The baby is Mabel.

At home, after another gap of five years, the Leach's fourth daughter was born, on the 20th July.[33] Because of the loss of the boys, the girls were now strung out with more or less five years between each of them. They called the new baby Mabel, a somewhat different type of name from the others. It may have been coincidence, but Richard Tangye had a teenage daughter of the same name.

8

Crusades

Charles Leach was Victorian in his expectation that the wife's role was in the home, and the man's was to work outside it. There is no evidence that Mary Jane had any other ambition or was unhappy with this position. Though she was involved to some degree in the chapel, with a tribe of small children at home she rarely appeared in public with him. In all other aspects concerning women he had, what for then, were advanced and egalitarian ideas. He was to describe his attitude to possessions in the marriage: 'When we had been married some while, my wife, in order to have a clear understanding of little matters concerning our home life, said to me one day, 'What is thine is mine, and what is mine is my own.' I looked, listened, and laughed. It made little impression on me. I noticed that it pleased her, and it didn't harm me, and so the saying passed. That was my wife's notion of our domestic socialism. It was not at all a bad position for a young married woman to take.'[1]

It was a very misogynistic society, and the degree was shown by the Contagious Diseases Act. This had originally been passed in 1864, with a number of amendments during the following five years. It was either a striking example of a piece of legislation where the unintended consequences had not been thought through, or it was a manifestation of the legislator's – all male – attitude to women in general; or both. Even the name was a euphemism for Venereal Disease.

The Act was an attempt to control its spread, amongst the soldiers and sailors in the garrison towns, by having a system of regulated prostitution. The service men, it was assumed, needed prostitutes. The girls were required to be inspected to stop cross infection, and regarded as 'fallen', so no indignity was too awful for them. Any woman, found within a certain radius of the garrison areas, could be arrested by the police and was assumed to be a common prostitute. She had then to undergo an intrusive medical examination, and if she refused she would be imprisoned.

Inevitably many mistakes were made and respectable women, with no connection with prostitution, were rounded up and subjected to this procedure. Campaigns began to get the Act repealed. One of the leading lights in these was Josephine Butler who wrote, 'By this law, a crime has been created in order that it may be severely punished, but observe, that it has been ruled to be a crime in women, which is not a crime in men.'[2]

Josephine Butler had become involved after a family tragedy. Her six year old daughter, Eva, in her haste to reach to her parents, had toppled from the banisters. A short sudden cry had been followed by silence as she landed, lifeless, on the stone floor of the hall. Josephine Butler's health never really recovered from the experience, and to deal with her grief she threw herself into charity work and particularly matters relating to women. In 1869 she had become involved with campaigns to repeal the CDA, going around the country speaking against the Act, and condemning the double standard implicit in it.

Among the multiplicity of organisations that sprang up was the Midland Counties Electoral Union for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act relating to Women, and many men were also members, often ministers of religion. As early as 1876 Charles Leach was a Birmingham delegate to their annual meeting in Leicester. It was controversial that matters of a sexual nature were to be discussed in public, particularly in front of women, but as PA Taylor said 'it seems to me that any law

which it is decent for parliament to pass, must be proper for Englishmen to meet and discuss.'[3] This was after rejoicing at the number of ladies present! Their view was that this was not merely a matter of the control of disease, but a moral one, and that men should be able to control their urges. The biased nature of the Act was also seen as 'an abomination'.

In 1881 the struggle was still continuing, and on 14th February their annual meeting was in Birmingham. Among the speakers were Josephine Butler, Sir Harcourt Johnstone, and Rev Charles Leach FGS.[4] Johnstone had been struggling in parliament to get the Act repealed, but had received little support. His attempts had been talked out, showing the general attitude in the House. Two years later there was some success when the regulation system was suspended, but it wasn't until 1886 that the Act was finally repealed.

Josephine Butler

At the same time Josephine Butler became involved in another related campaign when she discovered the amount of child prostitution, particularly in London. In desperation to do something about it, she turned to WT Stead the loose canon editor of the Pall Mall Gazette. He was always interested in a good story, and this one had all the elements. He published a sensational article entitled *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*. He, of course, had to go as far as actually purchasing a child, but later it was found to be all a put up job, and earned him three months in prison.

Simultaneously there was a crusade around the country for the cause of 'purity and justice'. The government was panicked into introducing the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which raised the age of consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen. The crusaders were not satisfied, and in early August they were still holding meetings in many towns, such as the one in Birmingham where the main motion was 'That this meeting, while rejoicing that a Bill for the better protection of young girls has been introduced into Parliament, considers that the efficacy of the measure will be grievously impaired unless the age at which seduction is made criminal is fixed at eighteen at the least, instead of sixteen as now proposed, and unless provision is made for receiving evidence from children too young to be sworn.'[5] The problem was that children could not swear the oath and so were not allowed to give evidence, making it very difficult to bring prosecutions.

Charles Leach seconded the motion saying 'it was high time that in God's name and humanity's name somebody had the courage to speak plainly on the subject. Who were those men against whom girls must be protected? He wished the Pall Mall Gazette would give their names. The man who would outrage an innocent child of thirteen deserved to have his name handed down to posterity with the curses of all good men resting on him. Where were those men? If rumour were correct some of them occupied the high places of the land. They had heard of judges on the bench, they had heard of men in the Government; but whatever they were he hoped the men of the country would do their utmost to discountenance their crimes, and to make it almost impossible for them to carry on their vile practices.'[6] Many of his remarks were accompanied by loud cheers. With a thirteen year old daughter himself, this was a subject close to home. Despite all these efforts, the age was set at sixteen in the Act, where it remains today.

An even greater concern was drunkenness, and Charles Leach was a lifelong campaigner against what he, and many of his generation, saw as its dire effects. He was to make his position clear in one of his earliest Sunday afternoon lectures, delivered in the autumn of 1875. The talk was called *Houses with their fronts off* and his inspiration had been seeing a building with its facade removed to enable it to be extended forward. He used this as a peg on which to hang investigations into people's lives, and in particular those destroyed by alcohol. 'What necessity is there in the United Kingdom for 186,096 persons holding licenses to sell intoxicating drink? Allow a house 30 feet frontage to every licensed person, and you have, when they are all put together, a street of public houses more than 1057 miles long! It means a seller of drink to every 35 families in the United Kingdom! What necessity was there to spend more than £140,000,000 on intoxicating drink in the 1873? That means that the average of £20 for every family or £4 7s 2d for every person in the United Kingdom. What necessity is there to kill 66,000 persons every year, in the United Kingdom, as drink does? To rob our Sunday Schools, our Churches, our homes? To starve children, ill-use wives, fill asylums, prisons, graves, and send thousands of souls to hell? Oh God! help me – help these working men – help all Thy people to drive from our midst this insatiable monster, which ever devours yet never tires, but annually robs us of thousands of our sons and fathers!'[7] He didn't leave much doubt for where he stood on the subject.

The 1870s were when the consumption of alcohol reached an all time peak, with the average annual consumption per person of 1.3 gallons of spirits, 34 gallons of beer, and over half a gallon of wine.[8] This is an average for every man, woman and child, teetotaller, moderate drinker all the way through to the complete drunkard. Naturally a movement sprang up to try to counter the drunkenness and its harmful effects. As early as 1835 a British Association for the Promotion of Temperance had been formed. Quite soon they were advocating teetotalism and the members were 'Taking the Pledge' to abstain from all alcoholic drink; hence bringing confusion to the name temperance, which had originally meant moderation.

The temperance movement was never a single organisation and had many different strands. The Band of Hope, set up in 1847, aimed to save children from the perils of drink, whereas the United Kingdom Alliance of 1852, sought to outlaw the whole alcohol trade. They were encouraged by the passing of a prohibition law in the state of Maine in the USA, though they were never successful in the UK. A different approach was taken by many of the Quakers who were advocating alternative drinks. It was to supply cocoa for drinking that had brought the Cadbury brothers into the chocolate business, while their cousin Richard Barrow was a big supplier of tea.

It was, however, the churches that saw the matter as a moral problem and hence one that they should throw their weight behind. Though the Methodists were strong supporters of temperance, it wasn't until he ceased being one that Charles Leach became a supporter of bodies outside the church, such as the Band of Hope. By 1881 he felt that he should act more directly, and set up the Crusaders Gospel Temperance Mission at Highbury chapel, but what was needed was a larger scale operation, and that was to come from a surprising direction.

In October 1844, Dick Booth was born in New York State in the USA. Like Charles Leach he went young into a woollen mill, and it was only the coming of the Civil War that enabled him to escape. He fought on the Union side and when it was all over he took to drink and lost everything. One day a friend gave him a roll of banknotes so he could begin again. This was his turning point, as he realised that he must change. He became a practicing Christian and soon felt a 'call' to the temperance platform; delivering his first temperance address in 1870.

However, in 1877 Francis Murphy, another temperance worker, adopted the Blue Ribbon, suggested by a friend, and it speedily became the badge of total abstinence. Thus the two weapons in the fight against drink had been established; the 'Pledge' and the Blue Ribbon, and Richard Booth took them up enthusiastically.

He felt his calling was to spread the message to Europe and arrived in England in August 1880, and after a difficult start began to run temperance missions in different parts of the country. As he did so he started to pick up supporters, in Newcastle it was Councillor WD Stephens, and by April in Leeds, Alderman Tatham, and then as the President of the committee no less than Charles Leach's old friend Rev WJ Townsend. By now he had some opposition as well, with the brewers creating a Red Ribbon movement to try to counteract him, but he wasn't distracted from his task.

The campaign continued into 1882, reaching Birmingham on the 16th May. There the committee had the Rev James Eagles, Rector of St Bartholomew's in Masshouse Lane, as President and Councillors William White and RC Barrow, now an Alderman, as vice presidents. Charles Leach made his contribution by editing a daily paper, The Gospel Temperance Herald and Blue Ribbon Gazette, for the 24 days while the crusade was in the town. It was, of course, printed by WG Proverbs.

The crusade had a number of strands. Each day there was a large meeting in the Curzon Hall led by RT Booth himself, with many smaller meetings around the city. The idea was to try to convert people to temperance and get them to sign the Pledge and wear the Blue Ribbon. At the same time, the Blue Ribbon Army would make house to house visits around the city attempting to make more converts, distributing literature such as the:

'Reasons for Signing the Pledge.
1 As a check to the desire for intoxicating liquors.
2 As a protection against the temptation from friends.
3 As an answer to opposition from enemies.
4 As a preservative to the drunkard.
5 As a bond of union between members of the society.
6 As a public testimony against drunkenness.
7 As an encouragement to the inebriate.
8 As an example to all.'[9]

'Pledge stations' were also set up in shops. Mr Terrill of Monument Road took nearly 1000 pledges at his music store, bringing the comment: 'If the signers keep their pledges they will soon have music in their hearts and homes.'[10] Evidence from

previous missions suggested that most kept their promise. Rev WJ Townsend, writing from Stockport, said that they were visiting all those who had signed during RT Booth's mission there and were finding that 98% 'have stood true to their sacred promise to abstain.'[11]

Charles Leach in Birmingham

Charles Leach held a meeting in Highbury chapel supporting the mission and they managed to give out 376 Blue Ribbons and sign up 167 to new pledges. Obviously a good deal of his audience was already convinced and presumably some 200 had already signed. It was still impressive for an evening's work. During the whole campaign in Birmingham, the movement distributed 66,297 Blue Ribbons and signed up 50,184 people as new pledges in 24 days of intensive campaigning. This was in a town with a population of 400,000.

The finale was a great meeting to give a farewell to RT Booth in a Curzon Hall packed to capacity. There were 75 people on the platform supporting the speaker, including 21 ministers of religion from all denominations, together with a couple of Trustees from Highbury chapel, and numerous wives and children. Amongst them was Miss E Leach; Elizabeth, Charles Leach's 14 year old daughter[12]; a proud moment for her.

A week later, Charles Leach presided over a Grand Blue Ribbon Reunion meeting and concert in the Curzon Hall. This was the precursor to further work for the movement as he had promised Booth that he would lead some further missions in different parts of the country. This led to ones in Raleigh Hall, Brixton Rise, in September, and in Penge, south London, in October, where he and William Noble, the founder of the Blue Ribbon Movement in England, ran a mission for a week. After that he couldn't spare any more time for the campaigns, though he remained involved in the movement in Birmingham. He continued speaking at Gospel Temperance events, and attending meetings such as that to recognise the contribution to the movement made by Councillor White during his year as the Mayor.

The success of all this effort is difficult to judge. The consumption of alcohol did tend to fall in the 1880s and onwards, but it was still a very considerable problem, but it was only the coming of the World War and the dangers of drunken people handling explosives that caused the government to legislate. Undoubtedly the crusading did

save some people and families from a worse fate, but alcohol was probably not so large a factor in poverty as Charles Leach and the other campaigners thought.

There was an interesting offshoot from the Blue Ribbon Movement. William H Greening, a Birmingham accountant and a strong supporter of the temperance movement, moved to set up an insurance company. The theory was that temperance people made a better risk, particularly for life assurance and so could be offered more attractive premiums. In the summer of 1883 the Blue Ribbon Life, Accident, and Mutual Insurance Company Ltd was established in Birmingham. The other directors were leading lights in the Blue Ribbon campaigns, William White, and William Hart, councillors from Birmingham, WD Stephens from Newcastle, Henry Lankester from Leicester, George Tatham from Leeds, Walter Priestman from Bradford, and Rev Charles Leach from Birmingham. They had the support of a further 60 people involved with the movement such as Rev WJ Townsend, and half a dozen Mayors of various towns.[13] So strong was the support that they had to allot the 100,000 shares they issued, and raised £25,000 of capital with no difficulty.

The company was successful and the concept on which it had been based seemed to work out in practice. In the early stages there was a need to go and hold public meetings in various towns to publicise the offering. This was where Charles Leach could make himself useful, and earn some of the director's fees he was soon receiving. Within a short time the company was also profitable and paying dividends to its shareholders.[14] By a piece of serendipity, Charles Leach had found himself involved in a business enterprise, in addition to all his other interests.

9

Politics

Following the 1880 election Charles Leach started to rise within the ranks of the Liberal party, and in early February 1881 he was elected to the Executive of the Rotton Park Ward Association. He was keeping useful company as Alderman Richard Barrow was the chairman, Councillor George Cadbury, vice chairman, and Councillor Richard Tangye the treasurer. The Hon Secretary was Joseph Fairfax, a supporter of Highbury Chapel, who a year later would become one of the Trustees. Being on the committee also gave Charles Leach a place on the central Birmingham Association, the 'Eight Hundred'.[1]

By October of the following year, he moved up another rung when he was elected to the executive of the Birmingham Liberal Association.[2] The '800' was rather an unwieldy body; Rotton Park elected 35 delegates for example, where it only had three on the executive. Sometimes there were officers as well, so with 16 wards this gave an executive of around 60, which though large was more manageable than the '800', which, in theory, made the decisions. In practice it was the executive, and its inner 'Management Committee', where the power really lay.

As someone whose trade was public speaking, Charles Leach was useful to the party, particularly when introducing candidates for local elections in his own and other wards.[3] In quieter times there were always issues of the day that required public meetings and he was regularly to be found on a platform supporting policies and causes he believed in. They usually came under the headings of peace, fairness, and support for the poor and the working man.

An example of the first, was speaking in the Town Hall with Rev Arthur O'Neill and Rev Henry Crosskey urging a peaceful a solution to the 'Transvaal Difficulty'.[4] The Boers had risen and won a victory at Majuba Hill. The question for the British government was whether to grant them their independence or try to maintain the annexation. Perhaps meetings such as this persuaded them to let the Afrikaners have their way. It was hoped that time would bring them back willingly into the fold.

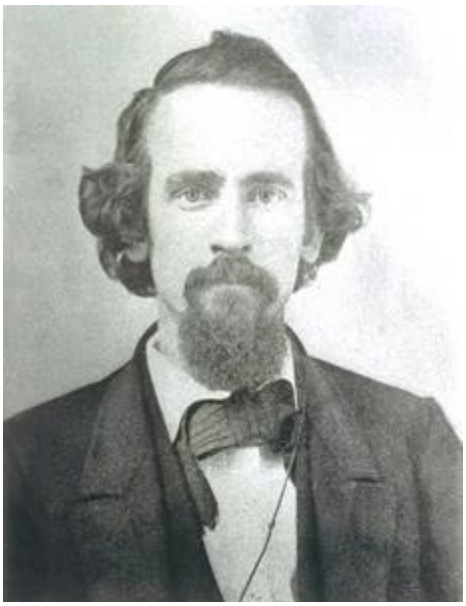
Fairness, or maybe common sense, caused him to move a motion at the annual meeting of the Birmingham Liberal Association advocating a declaration of allegiance as an alternative to the oath when entering parliament.[5] Unlike most of the Radicals, who were Nonconformists, Charles Bradlaugh was an atheist. In 1880 he had been elected as one of the two Liberal MPs for Northampton. As he didn't believe in God, he refused to take the oath when he arrived at the House of Commons. Instead of merely having him affirm, the speaker and the Commons wasted an enormous amount of time on this. On each occasion that the House rejected him, he was re-elected by the good people of Northampton. Eventually the government saw sense, and introduced a short Bill to deal with the problem; just as Charles Leach had been advocating.

His interest in the welfare of others extended to sailors, which perhaps would not be expected from such a landlubber, and he spoke publicly supporting the Merchant Shipping Bill[6] introduced into Parliament by Joseph Chamberlain. Of course, there were odd jobs for the party, and he was also very active in the celebrations to mark 25 years of service by the MP John Bright held in June 1883, as the chairman of the entertainments committee, organising a demonstration, a procession, and a fete in Aston.[7]

Fair deals for Irish tenants, was a matter of natural justice to Charles Leach. He had little sympathy for the absentee landlords, and felt that they had brought their difficulties on themselves. In April 1881, described as a leading light of the Birmingham Liberal Federation,[8] he was lecturing in Cardiff on 'Land Law Reform'. The Land League was leading agitation for the 'three Fs' – fair rent, fixity of tenure, and free sale, and Gladstone's Liberal Government had come to power pledged to address the problem. He was a strong supporter of the Bill they introduced, and was rather concerned that it would be defeated in the Lords.

A few days later he was again speaking on this subject back in Birmingham Town Hall, with amongst others Rev Henry Crosskey and Jesse Collings.[9] Collings was now the MP for Ipswich, a close friend of Joseph Chamberlain, and a supporter of Land Reform. He had piloted an Act through Parliament to provide allotments and enable the landless to have some to work, setting up the Allotments Extension Association. Charles Leach served on its executive committee, and he began to see land as the key to reform.

Henry George was an American journalist, originally from Pennsylvania. He had become very interested in how, as progress advanced, land increased in value, but that those who work it must pay more for the privilege. Being struck by the paradox that the poor in developed New York were worse off than in undeveloped California, he wrote a book *Progress and Poverty* exploring these ideas. It was published in 1879 and was enormously successful, selling over 3 million copies, which was a phenomenal number for the time.



Henry George

The central idea was that if you looked at a fast developing town and then again ten years later, interest would not be higher, nor would wages, only rent, the value of land, would be enormously increased. If you wanted to be rich for doing nothing, you should buy land in such places. This led him to the idea of a Land Value Tax which would be set high enough so that all other taxes would not be needed. It was not a large step to considering that private profit should not be made from restricting access to natural resources like land and minerals. This led to him considering that land should be in public ownership and that the state should regulate all natural monopolies. Though he wasn't against state ownership of all land, he felt that taxing

its value heavily would have the desired effect, and that no compensation should be paid to landowners for any effects of this. The problem was that many of his detractors started talking about 'confiscation' of land which was not really what he was advocating.

He considered that Britain, and in particular Ireland and Scotland were ripe for his ideas. In 1881 he went to Ireland, and ended up being arrested for his trouble and by the time he reached England he was becoming famous, or maybe infamous. In 1882 he had another go, but, as before, he was handicapped to some extent in putting his ideas forward by the organisations, such as the Land League and the Social Democratic Federation, which sponsored him. They had their own agendas which weren't always the same as his. In addition he was not always too careful to define exactly what he did mean and was soon associated with 'the abolition on private property in land.'[10] From there it was only a short step to nationalising all land and confiscating it. The situation became very confused with many groups competing to represent what they claimed he said.

By the time he came to England again in January 1884, his book had sold something like 100,000 copies in the country.[11] This time his sponsors were the Land Reform Union, and though the majority of his speeches were in Scotland, he gave 23 in England, reaching Birmingham on 19th March where he gave an address in the Town Hall. On the platform with him were a number of local people including Charles Leach. He began by saying that 'he was not a confiscator. He believed in the right of property; but wanted to call to their minds a clear distinction as to what was property. When a man took a fish from the sea it was rightfully his; but by what right could any man claim the ocean as his property.'[12] His message became more complex from there and it was little wonder that people could read what they wanted into it.

Later in his speech, he tried to make his position clearer by saying that 'he had never proposed to tax land; what he proposed was to tax the value of land, which was a very different thing.'[13] The Radical Liberals, with their hostility to landed wealth, were very interested in land reform and so were quite willing to listen to his ideas, but among his followers were those who wanted to go much further. At the end of George's speech, Charles Leach rose to give a vote of thanks, 'and cause some disturbance by declaring that he would not admit, poor man as until late years he had been, that it was right to rob the rich in the interests of the poor. In their efforts to do right, let them not begin by doing wrong.'[14] Another person present, who was not convinced, wrote: 'The intolerance of the extremists…was illustrated by the attempt to howl down the Rev Charles Leach when he spoke against confiscation.'[15]

Of the local Liberals with anything like prominence, he was the only one present. It was not what Henry George was saying, but how he was being interpreted that led most to steer clear of him. Nevertheless, his ideas were interesting to Charles Leach as someone who went along with the Radicals' tenet that natural monopolies should be in public hands. This was the basis on which the gas and water supplies had been bought for the town. Of all natural monopolies, land was the most obvious and the idea that people grew rich for doing nothing except collecting the rents was objectionable. It was only a short step for him to arrive at the conclusion that land should be nationalised, as he did a little later.

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Another area that greatly interested him was education. When the Liberal government had put through WE Forster's Education Act in 1870 it had been something of a compromise. It had aspired to nationwide primary education, but in reality it only set up School Boards to fill in the gaps in the existing system. Most schools at the time were owned by the churches and the vast majority were Anglican. Generally the Church of England wanted to keep its existing ones, while the Nonconformists handed over theirs to the Boards. This was to cause thirty years of friction, over the teaching of religion in the supposedly non-sectarian Board Schools, and whether government money could be used to pay for poor children in the voluntary (in practice meaning Church) schools.

One of the curious aspects to the School Boards was that the Act had defined that they were separate from the local councils, and their members were elected separately by direct ballot. Whether by accident or design, the electorate was of householders, without the usual limitations. Thus a woman, with her own establishment, could not only vote but could also serve on the Board, and many did, including, in Birmingham, Miss Sturge, and Caroline Kenrick, Joseph Chamberlain's sister in law. This was nearly a half century before women were to receive Parliamentary franchise. Also ministers of religion, normally barred from local councils, were permitted.

The result of the religious controversy was that the school boards were packed with parsons and their supporters. In Birmingham these were divided into the sectarians and the non-sectarians, with the odd Roman Catholic thrown in for good measure. In June 1884 Councillor Wallis resigned from the School Board and Charles Leach was elected to fill his place, and then there were seven Reverends on a board of fifteen.[16] Amongst the members were Rev Henry Crosskey, an old friend, and W. H Greening the MD of Blue Ribbon Insurance.

The non-sectarians (Nonconformists), led by George Dixon and in control with eight seats, favoured a universal state education system and the sweeping away of the voluntary schools. During Charles Leach's time they were to pass a number of resolutions on this and petitioned the Board of Education for powers to give free schooling; a policy he supported publicly.[17] While there was, no doubt, a genuine desire to produce universal high quality education, some of it was part of the Nonconformists seeking parity in religion; a long treasured goal.

The non-sectarians managed to stop all religious education in the Board Schools and so the Birmingham Religious Education society was set up to provide that teaching separately. The moving spirit was Dr Dale, but Charles Leach was a keen supporter, addressing their annual meeting.[18] They encouraged the Anglicans and Catholics to do likewise. For a while the system worked, though the problems of finding enough voluntary teachers eventually led to the religious education being reintroduced into the Board schools, but only as Bible reading without comment.

In the meantime the Board had less contentious matters to deal with such as the seaside trip for poor children to Rhyl. The Rev Charles Leach was on hand to deliver a short address and a prayer.[19] Poverty among many of the scholars was a considerable problem, and it was found that many had inadequate clothing, and particularly a lack of boots. While the Board were aware of the problem nothing was done, as was felt to be outside their remit. By Christmas 1885, Charles Leach had become chairman of the School Board's Visiting Committee which gave him close contact with conditions in the schools, and brought the problem into sharp focus.

He decided that he should tackle this directly, and put out an appeal for clothing and shoes. 'Any sort of old clothes will do – boots, stockings, hats, caps, jackets, trousers, frocks, petticoats, capes, skirts, and girls underclothing. My wife, assisted by others will gladly sort mend, and alter garments sent, and all articles will be stamped with the word 'Lent' to prevent pawning. All clothing etc, will be distributed through the visiting officers, teachers, and others without any respect to sect or party.'[20] Mary Jane, while not prepared to be a public figure, was keen to use her domestic skills where they could be put to use to support his work. What she thought, when there was a most generous response with thousands of articles being contributed,[21] is not recorded.

Not so popular was his intervention when a Board school room was left 'swimming in beer' after being hired for a function. The Board then made it a condition of lettings that no intoxicating drinks were sold. This was not appreciated, and as Charles Leach had been one of the instigators of the ban, this brought a storm of abuse down on his head from The Owl.[22]

When the elections for the School Board came due in November 1885, a deal was done so that the number of candidates matched the number of seats available, thus avoiding the vote. Charles Leach was one of those names that still gave the non-sectarians their built in majority. Like everything else he undertook, he was a hardworking member of the board; pleased to be able to try to make a difference to the lives of the children. Even if the system was not ideal, it was still a great deal better than what had gone before.

In December 1884 he was lecturing on another matter which was to become dear to him - *Pensions and Paupers*. He was much exercised by the pensions being paid to members of the House of Lords, who he considered did not deserve them and lived on the labour of other people, 'in fact they were men who neither toiled nor spun, and despised those who did'[23], thus making clear exactly where he stood. What he was seeking was that the House of Commons should address the subject of what he called perpetual pensions, and getting away from the poor law system. It was to be another twenty years before the legislators addressed this subject.

Never shying away from controversy if he believed in what he was doing, he went to speak to striking miners at a meeting in West Bromwich. He said that he 'could confidently say that 3s 4d per day was not sufficient pay for their labour – and those that thought it was should be made to work down a pit until they altered their opinion.'[24] This was received very well by the miners but brought him a good deal of opprobrium in the newspapers and their letters columns, mostly on the grounds that he shouldn't interfere with something he didn't understand, as the miners also received other benefits making their income more like 7s per day. The Dart even went as far as to say that he was merely seeking to gain popularity which would be useful when the Liberals went to the polls.[25] When roused on an issue he would not hold back, but we can be quite sure that his motive was to try to help the working man. Whether it was always wise, is another matter.

By early 1885 trade was very depressed, due to a slump in much of the export business, and many people were unemployed. Birmingham at that time was unusual in that much of its industry was small scale, and so in difficult times both masters and men suffered together. On 15th January a large meeting of the unemployed was called. Charles Leach was cheered when he appeared and he managed to persuade them to send a deputation to petition the Mayor for help.

To ensure them a hearing he accompanied them. Thomas Martineau, the Mayor, was at a loss to know what to suggest, but Charles Leach stated that the 'men would rather

work and earn their money, than exist on charity'.[26] The question was where work could be found, and there were few answers to that, except for breaking stones; hardly suitable for men used to indoor metalworking trades. The only solid suggestion was for people to emigrate.

The Mayor did, however, set up a Special Relief Fund, but it was a year later, when it had reached over £600, that it really began distributing help to the unemployed. Charles Leach was naturally a member of the committee.[27] He was able to get the school inspectors to report on needy cases, and hence assist in targeting the help where it was most needed. This was one of the first times that a municipality had been involved in directly trying to ameliorate the effects of unemployment, rather than just leaving it to the degrading system of the poor law guardians. It engendered in Charles Leach the notion that some form of central unemployment insurance was needed. He had tried suggesting that people should put something by for times like this, but the response had been, how can we do that on 16s a week?

All this work meant that he was gaining prominence, and in March 1885 he was elected one of the Vice Presidents of the Rotton Park ward Liberal Association. In June he was attending the inaugural meeting as the '800' was expanded to the '2000'. At the same time, Richard Tangye had stepped down from the inner 'Management Committee' leaving a vacancy. Mr Drysdale was proposed but there was some opposition, on the grounds that he might be a 'communist'. Joseph Morris was put forward, but he refused to stand against Drysdale. Charles Leach was then proposed, but he refused saying 'he would not put his name against that of a working man.'[28] The matter was postponed until another meeting. Thus he narrowly missed reaching the apex of the Liberal hierarchy in the town.

The ripples from the splash caused by Henry George had not died out even in 1885 when Godwin Smith wrote an article in *The Contemporary Review* showing his distrust for democracy and concern that the Radical proletarian had a strong desire to appropriate other people's property and that somehow they thought that this confiscation was moral. In the November issue of *The Congregationalist* Charles Leach gave a robust response in his article *Democracy and Religion*.[29] Using Birmingham as an example he showed that far from not having moral principles, the people involved at all levels were 'god fearing men'. He went on to look at the influence of religion in 'helping the masses bear with patience their social inequalities under the belief that God so ordered it.' Here he said that change had come, particularly in his own thinking:

'I began life in a cottage. I was taught to believe that all the inequalities of this world – inequalities which often crush the poor man more than the tongue can tell – were part of God's good providence. By and by I awoke from this dream, and was delivered from this delusion and snare. And thousands of others, too, are waking up. They begin to see that that such a doctrine is not in God's Book. They have begun to find out that it is of man and not of God, and must come to naught. It is part of a system invented by interest, and intended to keep millions toiling that a few may live on their labour. No greater mistake was ever made than to say that this change makes the democracy want to grasp what is not its own, and that the Radical believes it is right to rob his neighbour. The artisan has not surrendered his faith in the future, but has a keener sense of justice for the present… The democracy has come to believe that all men are born free and equal. It has dawned on him after a long, long night of darkness and delusion, that the inequalities and injustice of this world are not by the ordering of Devine providence, but are the result of the injustice and rapacity of men. But it is far from the minds of toilers to be unjust and immoral in putting things right.'[30]

He was still very much in the mainstream of the Radical end of the Liberal party, but would be regarded as quite 'left wing' today. His position grew out of his religious beliefs, and there was no real dividing line in his mind between religion and politics. The appeals for clothing for poor children, and the support of the unemployed, were just the same as trying to repeal the Contagious Diseases Act or Land Law reform; they were all trying to improve the lot of the common man; or woman.

10

Liberal Split

Change was in the air again in 1885 with a new Reform Act. The General Election had to be delayed until November to enable the new voters list for the increased electorate to be drawn up. Not only that, but the large multiple member constituencies were swept away to be replaced by single seats. The balance was also altered to reflect the increased urbanisation; Birmingham, going from three to seven members. To add to the problems, the new seats didn't always coincide with the old wards, and Rotton Park for instance, was divided between the new West and Edgbaston divisions.

With one exception the Liberals ran local men as their candidates. Joseph Chamberlain opted for the West; John Bright for Central; and George Dixon, a prominent councillor, for Edgbaston. William Kenrick, one of Chamberlain's wife's relations, stood for North; and Joseph Powell Williams for South. Over in the East Alderman William Cook, originally a mechanic, but with years of service to the council on the Health Committee, and the Mayor two years before, was persuaded to stand. Charles Leach was at the meeting in Saltley Recreation rooms on 19th November to support his candidature. Cook spoke about his position regarding land reform. He looked to the proposal for allotments for the labouring classes with hope, but as an echo of Henry George's influence, he said he did not believe in confiscation of land as 'he believed in the old English principle, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'[1] He also said that free education must come sooner or later. It is not difficult to see why Charles Leach enthusiastically supported him.

Henry Broadhurst was the outsider, and he stood for the remaining seat, Bordesley. He had been one of the MPs for Stoke on Trent, but in the reorganisation had transferred to Birmingham. Originally a stonemason, he had worked on the rebuilding of the House of Commons, and then later he had entered it as a Member, rising to become a junior government minister. His route had been through the ranks of Trade Unionism, and he represented the Liberal/Labour strand of the party. Though Charles Leach had been keen to see a real 'working man' stand as a candidate, he had come to accept that this was as close as you were going to get.

Unlike William Cook's adoption meeting, which had passed off peacefully, there was a minority, presumably hired by the Tories, determined to cause trouble for Broadhurst. Charles Leach was on the platform speaking in his favour;[2] he was just the sort of person he would have no difficulty in supporting. Outside the feelings were running high and the police were needed to break up some of the fights that ensued. With several meetings on the same evening the troublemakers had ample opportunity to go from one to another. Despite the opposition, Henry Broadhurst's candidature was overwhelmingly supported.

In the vote, the following day, all the Liberal candidates in Birmingham were elected. Charles Leach became very excited at the result and was said to have climbed a lamp post, 'to harangue the crowd,'[3] when the results were known. He was in the Liberal club when Henry Broadhurst was carried shoulder high through the crush. The next day Charles Leach wrote to Henry Broadhurst's niece saying 'parsons, publicans, Parnellites, and infidels fought against him, and he has beaten them all'[4]. It was all terribly thrilling, and with the good majority in parliament, it represented the high point for the Liberals in Birmingham. The seeds of the coming trouble were already there, but in the euphoria they were being ignored.

Henry Broadhurst

The unmentioned ghost at the party had been Ireland, or more specifically Home Rule. Only the next month, through a leak to the press by his son, did it become clear that Gladstone would introduce a Bill into the Commons. The intention was to establish a parliament in Dublin dealing with most Irish matters, only retaining to the 'Imperial' parliament in Westminster specific matters such as foreign policy, tariffs, coinage and so on. This dropped like a bombshell on the Liberals, particularly as Gladstone was not prepared to listen to opposition and try to accommodate those who had concerns.

On the right of the party the 'Whigs' supported the Irish landowners, and would have none of this. At the Radical end, Joseph Chamberlain thought that it would weaken the country and the empire, and resigned from the cabinet in the following March. Chamberlain, having lost his mother, and two wives in childbirth, and consequently his religion, was without a restraining hand. That would also have been supplied, in the old days in Birmingham, by Dawson, Dale and Crosskey, but Dawson was gone, and in any case Chamberlain was mostly in London and beyond their influence. The result was catastrophic, as he had made it clear that he, and his associates, would not support the bill when it came before the house.

On the 21st April, he was invited, after considerable argument, to address the '2000' in Birmingham and explain his position. People were beginning to take sides in the matter and Francis Schnadhorst, who supported Gladstone, got himself elected President of the Birmingham Association for the coming year. The MPs were thanked for their services, but could no longer be office holders.

Chamberlain was then brought into the room by Dr Dale, and gave what was probably the most important speech of his career. He was trying to tread a very fine line in making his position clear, but attempting at the same time not to appear disloyal to Gladstone and the party. He went on at considerable length and said enough to enable most of those present to find something that they agreed with, even if they harboured some doubts. Francis Schnadhorst, who as president was in the chair, then moved a carefully worded motion: 'That this meeting thanks Mr Chamberlain for his address, declares unabated confidence in him, recognizes his honesty of purpose in the course he has taken, and places on record its judgement that in the fulfilment of his convictions he has been guided by a high sense of personal honour and of public duty.'[5] It wasn't necessary to agree with him to support the motion, and it was carried overwhelmingly.

Joseph Chamberlain

It was already 10 o'clock, when Charles Leach stood up asking, as it was becoming rather late, if it would be better to adjourn the meeting until next week. This was seconded, and an amendment entered for the adjournment to be until tomorrow. It has been suggested that this attempt at delay, to allow the impact of Chamberlain's speech to dissipate, was got up by Schnadhorst and implemented by his friends[6]. Though Charles Leach and Francis Schnadhorst were closely associated, it is not possible to say whether this was organised or merely spontaneous. Chamberlain again got to his feet and mentioned that Liberal associations around the country were expressing their opinions and forcefully asked whether Birmingham wanted to lose it position as being in the forefront of this? The meeting, not surprisingly, voted to proceed at once.

Dr Dale then put his motion which expressed confidence in Gladstone and his efforts to settle the problems of Ireland, but muddied the issue by proposing that the Bill should be amended to retain some Irish Members of Parliament on the basis that there should be no taxation without representation. He hoped that a change to the legislation would be forthcoming and that then there would be no need for anyone to choose sides between Gladstone and Chamberlain.

The motion was seconded, and then Charles Leach stood up and 'said he wished to support the resolution, or at least that part of it with which he agreed.'[7] In the heightened atmosphere, only someone as brave as him, or as foolhardy, was prepared to speak. He ploughed on despite a constant stream of interruptions and cries of 'vote, vote', hoping very soon 'that Chamberlain and Gladstone would be in the same boat.'[8] Rashly he concluded: 'By taking the vote at this late hour, without full discussion, Mr Chamberlain on the following morning would stand discredited before the country.'[9] This was a remark too far, and in doing so he had nailed his colours to the mast. From now on he would be a marked man to Chamberlain and his followers.

Another attempt was made to adjourn the debate, but again it was voted down and Dr Dale's resolution was carried by an overwhelming majority. In doing so the Birmingham caucus had fudged the issue and attempted to avoid the clash to come. Charles Leach's intervention was described by some as 'an outrage'[10] and that the minority against the resolutions was insignificant. Clearly some people had some catching up to do, as Schnadhorst and his friends had clearly seen what was coming.

A couple of weeks later, on 4th May, the national Council of the Liberal Federation met and despite attempts by some of Chamberlain's allies, it declared for Gladstone by a large majority. Now the gloves came off in the caucuses and people were forced to choose sides. Generally around the country, most of the organisations sided with Gladstone, but in Birmingham, where Chamberlain's influence was so strong, there was deadlock. The atmosphere turned poisonous as old friends and political associates found themselves on opposite sides of the argument. The strength of the Liberal/ Nonconformist alliance now became a liability as there was no getting away from the issue.

As Charles Leach had made his position very clear, this brought down a storm of abuse on his head, along the lines of 'By what authority does Mr Leach assume the right and title to sit in judgement and pronounce sentence on Mr Chamberlain?'[11] It got worse, 'But who were the leaders of the 150 whose faith in Mr Gladstone is just now so impassioned – and so convenient? Here they are: Rev Charles Leach, Rev Arthur Mursell, Alderman W Cook MP, Councillor Michael Davis, Councillor Eli Bloor, Mr George Hanson. Twisted politicians, all of them, who would have surprised their friends most if they had acted otherwise. As for Mr Leach – well, he is nothing if not pugnacious, while Mr Mursell now goes the whole hog for the Nationalists whom it was recently his delight to revile. Poor distracted Mr Cook and the two councillors don't count.'[12]

Charles Leach had even more problems. Many of his leading supporters in his chapel had been Liberals. Now they too were split down the middle, and some who disagreed with him were quite prepared to tell him so. Even those who sided with Gladstone thought that he had taken too public a position. He was now discovering that a Congregational minister was beholden to his church, and in particular, to his Deacons. As a Methodist he had been at the beck and call of the Conference, but was largely immune to the whims of his congregation.

On the 8th June the Second Reading of the Home Rule Bill was defeated when 93 Liberals voted against it. While Gladstone might not have been very politic in his handling of the objections, this was an extreme action over what many thought was a matter of detail, and not principle. While the Whigs were against it anyway, a considerable number of others were swayed by Chamberlain into opposition. The government fell and a General Election was called for July.

Charles Leach was still considering his position, but felt that he should not back down from what had become a matter of loyalty, though he did try to build bridges. It was summed up in the press: 'Mr Charles Leach need not write to the Post to prove that he is still a Chamberlainite. He once said (and it was printed) that Mr Chamberlain would stand discredited before the country next day for stifling discussion at the '2000' meeting. Down went Charles' name in Chamberlain's black book and it won't be scratched out till Master Leach brings five hundred votes to Joseph at the general election. But if the Right Honourable Turncoat stands then it may be as a joint Tory Radical candidate and he won't want Mr Leach's flock to turn up at the poll.'[13] In reality there was no way back.

The situation became very confused in that the group around Chamberlain, now known as Liberal Unionists, were still technically in the Liberal party, and in Birmingham that was split down the middle. Chamberlain's influence was still paramount and he and four of his associates had no difficulty in being reselected. Henry Broadhurst had opted for Gladstone, which led to him being rejected as the candidate, and so he went off to find a more comfortable berth. William Cook, also supporting Gladstone, did manage to be selected, but Chamberlain's influence ensured

that he lost his seat to a Tory. Thus in one bound the Liberal hegemony in Birmingham had been destroyed, though it wasn't until two years later that the Gladstonians gained control of the town's Liberal machine, forcing Chamberlain to build a new Liberal Unionist one from scratch.

In August it was decided that the list of Trustees for Highbury chapel should be revisited, but far from mass resignations, eleven new names were added. Richard While resigned, and Joseph Powell Williams did not sign the document, which was hardly surprising as he was a strong supporter of Chamberlain. Francis Schnadhorst was now at the head of the list; he and the pastor were on the same side in the dispute.

Charles Leach was no longer feeling comfortable in Birmingham and used the opportunity of his increased profile around the country to go and preach outside the town. A Congregational minister could stay in his chapel as long as he and his congregation agreed. Unlike the Methodists, where it was all arranged for you, the minister and Deacons could come to arrangements when it was time for a change. The usual method was for likely candidates to be invited to preach so that they and congregation could take a good look at each other. Of course the ministers would angle for invitations where they thought they would like to go.

It is unlikely that Charles Leach did this with Harrow Road in London as it was a new church, still meeting in the hall that had been built in a new housing development. He knew nothing about them because there was little to know, but on the 19th September he went to preach there, and was very warmly received. His pull was such that the hall was nearly full for the morning service, and filled to overflowing in the evening.[14] It was nice to feel some enthusiasm after the problems in Birmingham.

Unknown to him, the excitement had been so great that they immediately passed a resolution that they should try to get him as their pastor. On the 8th October this desire was translated into a letter of invitation. Taking this seriously he visited them again four days later. In a new church like this, where they had not had an incumbent before, there was always a considerable amount of investigation needed. He needed to be sure that the chapel could raise the £500 per annum to pay him, which he felt was the equivalent of the £450 he had been receiving in Birmingham.

He began to examine the prospect carefully, and started asking considered questions about the precise financial arrangements and present debts of the chapel. At the same time he appealed to Dr Dale to see if he knew anything about them. Dale's reply confirmed that he knew nothing, but tried to persuade him to stay in Birmingham:

'1) You have created a congregation: are you sure that it has acquired those elements of solidity and strength which would enable it to meet, without peril, the strain which would be imposed on it by your removal? When a nail is driven in, a good workman clenches it. There is something less exhilarating in disciplining and educating a congregation than in gathering it; but I am not sure that we have a right to choose the most exciting work. 2) You have a position here, and the elements of power in it you can measure; the confidence of your brethren, and of your people, and a considerable following in the town. These you lose, and to win corresponding force elsewhere will be a work of time. 3) You know that the people of Birmingham will listen to you week after week; you cannot tell, till you have tried, whether it will be the same anywhere else…But I believe that God whom we serve grants us clear guidance when our only desire is to do the work that He wants us to do, and to do it where he wants us to do it. To Him I commend you.'[15]

It was time to think carefully and to pray for guidance. After seven years the chapel should be strong enough and not need him to keep going. His position in the town was now damaged, and the comfortable world he had inhabited had been swept away by a

single stroke. It was distressing to see people he thought of as friends, cosying up to the Tories. It was noticeable that the core of those who had remained loyal to Gladstone were people like him, with roots as working men.

There was another consideration. In a few months' time he would be forty, and if he was to accept another great challenge in his life, then it was time to begin. It was all very well for Dr Dale, nearly 20 years his senior, to urge the 'safe' option, but even he seemed a little unsure in his advice; perhaps he might have taken a different view had he been younger. As it was, Dale was stepping back from politics, and trying not to take sides. For Charles Leach, at his time of life, that wasn't really an option. Yes it was more exhilarating gathering a congregation, but wasn't that what he was best able to do? Wasn't that his calling?

During the following week the discussion about his stipend was satisfactorily settled with the members of the Queen's Park chapel prepared to go the extra mile to meet his request and give a guarantee. Unfortunately it had reached the press that he was considering his position, and he was forced to state publicly that he had received an invitation, but that he had not made a decision. That seemed to fool no one. The Owl, which had been one of his sternest critics, commented in its Whispers column: 'That Mr Leach is going to follow Mr Schnadhorst to London. That Birmingham cannot afford to lose him, now that Dale is dumb and Mursell mute on behalf of true Liberalism.'[16] They were beginning to realise, that though he perhaps had overstepped the mark, his stand had been honourable, and maybe he was right after all.

The next week they were more fulsome in his praise, despite making numerous mistakes of fact:

'I very cordially hope that the seeming intention of the Rev Charles Leach to abandon his work in Birmingham in favour of a more pretentious pastorate in London may not become a reality. Though I have more than once found occasion to differ from Mr Leach, I have never entertained the slightest doubt as to his sterling integrity and unselfish zeal for the welfare of the humble poor. Sprung from the ranks himself, and coming to Birmingham an unknown and comparatively friendless man, he elevated his ministry into a veritable gospel of humanity, and when the time arrived for him to terminate his three years' connection with Birmingham…his flock very wisely determined that they could not do without him…It is one of the indirect consequences of the Home Rule struggle that he has now to decide whether he can carry on his work as successfully as before, having taken an honourable position in favour of Mr Gladstone's policy, which has brought him into disfavour with many of his former friends. Well, so be it, the leaders will go whithersoever the pleasant places are, and it is not for us to blame them. But to whom must we look for guidance now that Schnadhorst and Leach are leaving, and others are preparing to go.'[17]

The same day the Dart, the Owl's rival commented 'The Rev Charles Leach told his people that he had received a call from London, and then he left them to think over it. Some confusion resulted. Why did not they double his salary instead of passing resolutions asking him to stay?'[18] Both of these misunderstood his motivations and the nature of the church he was considering in London. Despite all the advice and comment, he had felt the call to go and on 30th October he wrote accepting the pastorate at Harrow Road. Not trusting the readability of his scrawl, he had his daughter copy out the letter in her best handwriting, before signing it.

It was a wrench for the family. Elizabeth, now nineteen was happy to go, but for the others, still at school it was more difficult. Ada had been doing particularly well and had won the class prize at Summer Hill School, but despite the disruption the idea of going to London was attractive to the whole family.

There were some loose ends to be tied up. He was in the middle of his autumn series of Sunday afternoon lectures. Despite the political problems, he was still attracting his usual large audiences in the Town Hall, which might have given him cause to ponder his decision. The final lecture on the 28th November was so crowded that hundreds of people were unable to get into the hall to hear him lecture on *Last Words*. But typically he stuck to his task and said 'that for many years he had been fighting in Birmingham against dirt in language, dirt in homes and habits, and dirt in Birmingham streets. He had been fighting debt, and warning his congregations against it, and leading people to live better and more honourable lives.'[19] It was very positive and upbeat for what could have been a very sentimental occasion.

He next had to resign from the School Board, which he was sorry to do, but it would mean that Dr Langford, who had stepped down at the last election to avoid a contest, could resume his rightful place. The chairman, in accepting his letter, said 'that he could not allow that announcement to pass without paying his tribute to the remarkable devotion and energy Mr Leach had shown in all his work as a member of that Board, and especially to the sympathy which Mr Leach had always shown towards the working classes in the town.'[20]

The feelings at his departure were mixed. He was missed immediately when it was time to organise the Christmas appeal for clothing for the poor. The Rev Gardiner undertook what he described as the heavy task with some trepidation. The chapel, despite the disapproval he had received from some members, made a fine presentation to him at the end of the month. To a piece of furniture was attached a plaque from the 'members and friends of Highbury chapel as a token of affectionate regard.'[21]

Leaving plaque from Highbury Chapel

On the other hand the Owl was still carping. 'The Rev Charles Leach's manner of leaving the town to which he owes so much, and which he has so signally benefited, was neither gracious nor gentlemanly. I am quite aware that the avowed Chamberlainism of some of the 'pillars' of his church was very offensively evident, but a strong minister would have held his ground, depending on the support of the large majority of his congregation who were in sympathy with his political views. In any case, it was Mr Leach's duty to read his opponents a lesson in courtesy. It is not generally known that when Mr Leach intimated his intention to accept the call(!) to a London chapel, a few of his old political colleagues clubbed together and organised a testimonial to him. After a good deal of circularising, it was recognised that there was no probability that the sum obtained would be large enough to justify a public presentation. The upshot was, that a cheque for £50 was privately sent to him, without

fuss or ceremony. Thus furtively concludes the Rev Charles Leach's connection with Birmingham.'[22]

A sad end to a brilliant pastorate, but it was the politics, not the preaching, that had been the problem. It was a lesson he was to carry with him; they didn't mix too well.

11

Queen's Park

Charles Leach knew that he had taken on quite a challenge, but he was ready for it. Until well into the 1870s, the whole area north of Harrow Road in west London had been peaceful pasture with grazing cows. Then in 1874 the area between Harrow Road and Kilburn Lane had been bought by the Artizans', Labourers' and General Dwellings Company. This had been formed in 1867 by William Austin, a former labourer, together with John Shaw Lowe and William Swindlehurst, to build decent dwellings for the industrial working classes.[1] They had already successfully completed Shaftsbury Park Estate in Battersea, building two-storey terraced houses with rear gardens, which was where they differed from other attempts at social housing, such as the Peabody Estates.

The designs were originally by Robert Austin, but this work was gradually taken over by a young architect named Roland Plumbe. The houses had interesting features in what was described as a minimum gothic style, which referred to the details used to soften the lines of the terraces. Some had porches, others bays, and everywhere were polychromatic details around the windows and doors. They were sufficiently interesting that, today, most of the estate is designated a conservation area.

Ilbert Street today, where Charles Shave and his family lived.
The exteriors of the houses are virtually unchanged

There were a number of classes of house and the rents varied from 7/6 to 16s per week, but with a turret or a bay there was an additional 6d. The clientele were railway workers from nearby Paddington, clerks, carpenters, plasterers, mechanics, dressmakers, and laundresses. They were the 'respectable' working classes, particularly as the company ruled that there were to be no public houses at all on the estate. This was one of the features that had attracted Charles Leach, together with the challenge of bringing just these sorts of people into the chapel.

The Artizans' company had also been keen to have churches, and as early as 1880 negotiations had begun. Congregationalists depended on their congregations for finance, and thus chapels were difficult to start, particularly in a new area such as this. For that reason the London Congregational Union had been formed, and its function

was to plant suitable churches in the rapidly growing areas. The North West District of the Union had seen a need, as there was no Congregational chapel within a mile and a half. Also alongside there was another estate, St Peter's Park, with slightly superior houses, and the two together made a population of around 50,000.

One of the curious features of the Queen's Park estate was that the vertical roads were numbered avenues and the horizontal roads were given letters, which later were altered to names beginning with that letter. The London Congregational Union had taken a lease on a piece of land on the corner of Third Avenue and Harrow Road, and asked Roland Plumbe design them a chapel with a school building and hall alongside. In 1884 they made an appeal for funds and with some in hand, and some mortgages and loans, they were able to make a start on the hall. This had seating for around 600 to 650 with school rooms underneath. It was opened at the end of June 1885.

A church was successfully established and they began looking for a pastor, with various ministers being invited to preach, or if that was not possible, members of the church going to hear them. This was not very successful. One was invited, but had already accepted another position. With most of the others they took the view that they were not sufficiently strong preachers for the requirements of a new church. In September Charles Leach's name came up, but he could not spare the time to visit them. They kept looking, but without a result.

A year later Edward J Physick, the chairman of the North West District Committee, was complaining about the lack of organisation at Harrow Road, and that it was an 'indication that it is now essential to settle a pastor over them.'[2] Mr Physick, who had been instrumental in the whole scheme, was a sculptor and monumental mason specialising in the ornamental memorial wall plaques, so popular in those times. It made a curious mixture with his work for the LCU.

Charles Leach's situation in Birmingham had changed, so this time when he was invited to preach, he accepted. It was perhaps a measure of his desire to be anywhere but in his own chapel that he would go to such a new and unknown place, where the congregation met in a hall. Once he had preached, they knew he was their man, and were very definite in that decision. As we know, it wasn't such a simple matter for him.

Seizing the opportunity, Mr Physick went round trying to get enough of the church members to guarantee the pastor's salary. He started with 15, but eventually 41 people signed the paper, a considerable number in such a new church, and a measure of their keenness to have him. The wrangle over the amount didn't seem to deter them, as they originally had reckoned on a stipend of £500, with them providing £250 and the rest coming from the LCU. Unfortunately the latter had a different idea and would only contribute a maximum of £200. In the end the agreement was that the church would find up to £450, if they were able, and the shortfall would come from the LCU, subject to their limit. As some ministers were paid considerably less than what Charles Leach was asking, Physick thought 'considerable difficulty would be prevented'[3] if the matter was not referred back to the LCU committee. The church showed their keenness by also contributing a generous £50 for his removal expenses.

Eventually all was settled, and in the first week of December the family moved and took up residence at 56 Fernhead Road, interestingly not on the Queen's park Estate, but in the adjacent St Peter's Park. It wasn't far from the chapel, but a bit smarter; three storey houses instead of two. It was somewhat of a comedown after what they had reached in Birmingham, but it would do for now. On the 5th December he took his first services, using the hall, and he was encouraged to find it full in the morning and crowded in the evening. He was not fooled by this, stating: 'I dare say many of them

were friends from other churches who just dropped in to see us, pray for us, and then come no more.'[4] Despite his caution, there were signs that his arrival had engendered some enthusiasm.

He had hardly settled in, before he was returning to Birmingham. George Nuttall, who had been the registration agent of the Birmingham Liberal Association, had died, and Charles Leach was requested to conduct his funeral service at Witton Cemetery.[5] They had known each other for many years, as they both came from Halifax, and shared Ovenden as their birthplace. Many of his old friends were at the ceremony, and it was pleasant as many of those who had become Unionist stayed away. It must have caused him a moment of doubt as to whether he had done the right thing.

Back in London there was plenty to do and new friends to make. For the following Sunday he had received an invitation to preach in the afternoon at the Union Chapel in Islington. This was a great honour as the minister there was Dr Henry Allon, one of the most influential Congregational pastors. However, with a new church his work was cut out as they had tended to drift since the opening of the Hall. The trustees and committee had done what they could, but the essential leadership had been missing, and that was his function.

The Leach family in 1888. Left to right Dora, Mary Jane, Ada, Mabel, Elizabeth and Charles

Almost immediately Charles Leach was negotiating to obtain a larger building to use as the chapel. It was too soon to consider anything permanent, but there was an interim solution, which was to erect an 'iron church'. These were temporary structures, with a metal frame, that were hired and could give an increased accommodation quickly. Before the first month was out he was canvassing support and went to see Albert Spicer, the treasurer of the LCU. There were erection costs and with such a new church it was necessary to appeal to the LCU for further help. This was forthcoming after some begging, but he and the church had to agree to a condition that the temporary building would be removed within four years. They had thus put

themselves under pressure, as this defined the timescale for completion of a permanent chapel.

By the end of March the plans had been passed by the Board of Works, the capital's controlling body for all building functions. The agreement was that the church and the LCU would share the £350 erection and fitting out costs. The contract was let for its construction, scheduled for completion in six weeks. It was just as well, as the Hall was so full on Sundays that they were turning people away. It was essential to get the larger building, which would seat 1200, as soon as possible. In the event the builder, as is their wont, was a little optimistic as in May Charles Leach was reporting[6] that they expected it to be ready in a month.

In addition to the services, the ancillary functions around the church were working well. The Sunday schools had over 600 scholars, and there were Bible classes for boys and girls. There was also a Mutual Improvement Society, a Band of Hope, a Ladies Working Party, a Temperance Society, and a Tract Society. With the church members now numbering 200, Charles Leach could look on his first six months with some satisfaction.

The two young men's classes were taken by his daughter Elizabeth, still only nineteen. She was a severe looking young woman with rimless glasses, and quite capable of dealing with a class barely younger than herself. She was strongly religious, and was a great asset to her father in the chapel, but the lack of external beauty hid a pleasant, if pious, personality.

Elizabeth Leach as a young woman. The severe looks softened as she grew older

When it came to the crunch, the costs of the temporary building had risen to £400, as the architect Roland Plumbe, representing the Queen's Park estate, had insisted that they erect a tower 'to break up the otherwise somewhat ugly appearance of the front.'[7] Some costs had been saved on the speaker's and singers raised platform as 'the carpenters who worship with us are erecting the lot as a work of love in the evening hours.'[8] Finally on 21st of July, rather later than anticipated, the 'iron church' was finished. As part of the opening speeches Charles Leach remarked that 'he was no gardener, but he felt that the proper time to re-pot a plant was when it became pot-bound. They had become pot-bound in the hall, and he hoped that very soon they would become pot-bound in the iron church, and then they would go in for the larger and more permanent building.'[9]

Charles Leach still had his business interest in the Blue Ribbon Insurance and regularly attended directors meetings of what was becoming a very successful company. A measure of his growing affluence was that he was to make two loans to the company during 1887, one for £150 and the other for £100.[10] With these paying 5% interest, they were a nice little investment. Another sign of financial progress was the move from Fernhead Road to Brondesbury Road, off the estate to the north and convenient for Queen's Park Station. It was a newly built tree-lined street, and though the house was barely larger, it was set back from the road and had a spacious rear garden. The family even had a small pet dog.

Money was to be the theme for the first half of his time at Queen's Park. Dr Dale had once said that the eleventh commandment for churches was 'thou shalt keep a balance sheet'. He knew this, but others were not always too careful. The manner in which the hall had been financed was to cause so many difficulties over the next few years. With a new church and with no others nearby to help, it was difficult to raise large amounts in donations. The nature of the population with uniform housing of artisans also brought a lack of the moneyed classes who were traditionally the major contributors. There had been an appeal in 1884, but it had not brought in very much, and the LCU were forced to fund most of the project with borrowings if they were going to continue.

Though the site was offered on a long lease, the option to buy it for £1,500 was taken up. The hall cost £4,000, and by the time the whole thing was up and running, over £6,600 had been spent.[11] Unfortunately £5,400 of this had had to be borrowed in one form or another. Exactly who was responsible for these debts was to bedevil relations for several years, and take up a great deal of Charles Leach's time. The LCU was one party, but they wanted the church to take responsibility. The North-West section of the LCU claimed they were not a separate body, though they had made most of the arrangements. The building had a set of trustees, often the same people as in the LCU or their section, but they were dependant for income on the church, which until the building was erected, didn't exist.

To begin with, the LCU had no option but to pay the interest on the £2,700 mortgage, and on two loans of £500 and £400 advanced by William Bowron. This complicated the matter further, as Bowron in particular thought that the LCU was responsible, even though he was himself a trustee of the chapel. Even the main mortgage and a second for £800 were not secured on the hall as everyone thought, because it hadn't existed when the documents were drawn up. The whole thing was a mess, and certainly without a pastor there was no way it was going to be satisfactorily resolved.

By the time they were ready to move into the iron church, Charles Leach was beginning to appreciate the horror of it. He had asked questions when he was considering taking up the position, but hadn't fully understood the extent of the difficulties. Like everyone else he had thought that the LCU would look after the debts until the church reached a level when they could manage them. The LCU had other ideas.

With the backing of Mr Physick he put forward a simple scheme to the LCU, that they should be responsible for the past, and the church for the future. This was not particularly well received, despite the secretary, Rev Andrew Mearns, having proposed it himself some time before. In August the church received a request for the interest payment on the mortgage from the LCU's solicitors and were forced to send a resolution to the LCU explaining that having met most of the costs of setting up the iron church they didn't have the money, and please would the LCU look after it for a bit longer. They were concerned that if they tried to get any more from their church it

would be a step too far and it had the danger of overstretching their congregation just as it was growing nicely.

Mr Bowron was also concerned about the interest on his loans, which added to the difficulties. Neither side wanted to back down; the church because they didn't have the money, and the LCU, probably because they had other calls on their funds, and it would set a bad precedent. In December the church sent another politely worded resolution to the LCU, making the same request, but explaining the problems in greater detail. The problem rumbled on into 1888, with Charles Leach writing again and again to the LCU, and supplying ever more detailed accounts of exactly how much money they had successfully raised and how it had been spent.

The concern was that funds also needed to be raised for the new chapel building and the whole thing could so easily get out of hand. Charles Leach had a simple view. If he could persuade the LCU to look after these loans, after all they had chosen to finance the hall this way; then he could raise the money for the new chapel building. Because of the mess, he was quite determined to find this money as gifts and not add to the debt burden. This was a considerable task, but he set about it with gusto, and he didn't want the effort diluted by the problems of the debt on the hall.

It was a pleasure then to get away from all this and return to Birmingham, where he had agreed to deliver a lecture in the Grand Theatre in aid of the poor children's boot fund on 22nd January 1888. This was a cause dear to his heart, and so he felt that he should still keep the appointment, even though it was a Sunday and he really should have been in the pulpit at Queen's park. With Alderman Cook in the chair and Richard Tangye heading the list of contributors[12], he was amongst friends, but again he was raising money, if for a different cause.

On 30th March 1888 his father, Harry Leach, died of 'paralysis', at the age of 67.[13] He had moved back into Halifax, though Brook Street was no more salubrious than his previous addresses, and he had still been a 'Pot Hawker'. The cause of death was probably a stroke of some sort, and this may point to a weakness which was passed to his son, and became of significance later. The death was sudden and Charles Leach didn't reach Halifax in time to be at his father's side. The registration, the following day, was by a neighbour. Thus was broken his last real link with Halifax.

In Queen's Park, the church was developing nicely, not only in the attendance at Sunday services, but in all the ancillaries. It was satisfying to be able to demonstrate that it was possible to build up a church in a place like this, with almost entirely working people as its clientele. In 1887 he had published a booklet entitled *How I reached the Masses*[14] describing the development of his lectures in Birmingham, and printed together with some of them. Now he was carrying on the series in London, but using the hall as his venue. By May he was giving an address to the Congregational Church Aid and Missionary Society on 'the London Artisans'.[15] He was becoming an expert on bringing the working classes into the chapels, a subject that was to be one of the keys to his career. In the meanwhile he had another great task; to raise the money for the new chapel building, while fending off the problems of the historical debt.

12

Building the New Chapel

Charles Leach began collecting donations towards building the new chapel almost as soon as he arrived, proudly announcing his first £100 promise from Edward Smith the chairman of the LCU, as early as March 1887[1]. By a year later it was apparent that it was going to cost £6,000 with another £1,000 in fitting out and architects fees. They knew it was essential to steer clear of more debt, but it was quite a challenge to raise that sort of money starting from scratch and without a supply of rich friends.

The church, having been set up by the LCU, was heavily dependant on them, and particularly on their secretary the Rev Andrew Mearns. He was a forceful character, sometimes quite ruthless in his business dealings, but there was no doubt that he a genuine interest in the development of Congregationalism in London. He had also another, surprising, side. As part of his investigations of the poorer parts of London he had collected a vast amount of information on the dreadful living conditions.

A number of people helped him in this and in the writing of a pamphlet, particularly the Rev William Preston, who had a literary background and undertook the drafting. In October 1883 this was published anonymously by the LCU under the striking title *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*. It was an immediate sensation, though far from the first publication on the subject by a long way. Helped by the publicity it received, particularly from WT Stead at the Pall Mall Gazette, it started to stir the conscience of those in power. In the furore there was speculation as to its authorship and eventually Mearns had to publicly explain the background. Undoubtedly the timing was lucky, as it chimed with the mood of the times, but it led directly to a Royal Commission, which showed that the *Bitter Cry* was not exaggerating. The eventual outcome was the Housing Act of 1885.

This was the man with whom Charles Leach needed to work, and he started with a great respect for Mearns, as someone who shared a genuine desire to improve conditions for the poor. Their early letters are cordial, but as time went on Charles Leach began to realise that a good deal of the debt problems of the church, and particularly the unclear manner in which they had been set up, could be laid at the door of the secretary of the LCU, whose job it was to ensure the everything was in order.

In addition to the running sore of who should pay the interest on the loans, in May 1888 Charles Leach discovered that the Trust Deed had not properly been set up and that it required a resolution from the LCU for the church to be properly constituted. He wrote to Andrew Means asking that this should be undertaken straight away as it left them in a vulnerable position and particularly the pastor who thus had no legal position.[2] This became another weapon in the struggles over money between the LCU and Queen's Park church. A temporary truce was called when the LCU made a grant of £200 and the church invited them to pay the interest out of it and send them the residue, though they had to ask for that again before receiving it. Mr Bowron was also having difficulty getting paid.

As a break Charles Leach was now in the financial position to take his family on holiday to Switzerland in June, staying in Vevey on Lake Geneva, and getting a taste for foreign travel. They were back in time for the scholars outing from the church and they were able to use a field close at hand where a magnificent tea was served a 6d per head. With 649 scholars and 53 teachers the Sunday schools were thriving,[3] as was

almost everything to do with the church. The fund for the new chapel building was also growing nicely.

Each year in October the Congregationalists held a meeting of the Union for the whole country, and this time it was in Nottingham. Unlike the Methodist Conferences it had no powers as those lay in the hands of the individual congregations in the churches, but it was a platform for exchanging views and trying to influence the whole movement. In 1888 papers were read on 'The work of Congregational Churches among the Working Classes in Towns' and 'Church extension in large and growing towns'.[4] These were subjects close to Charles Leach's heart and he proposed that the Congregationalists should extend the work already done among the working people by establishing missions in all large towns similar to those of the Wesleyan Methodists in London. Amongst the very independent Congregationalists this created problems and the while the suggestion was approved in principle, the practical organisation was lacking.

Alongside, in the evening, a working men's meeting was held, presided over by Charles Leach's old friend Henry Broadhurst MP, considering the church's relationship with working people. He was concerned that there was too much theology preached, and he suggested that two things should go on the curriculum of preachers – deep sea fishing and coal mining. When Charles Leach spoke he said he passed the course recommended by Mr Broadhurst as he had worked in a coal mine. Whether four days experience really qualified him, was another matter; but unlike most he had been a miner, even if for only a short time. He passed on to refer to his congregation of working people, where he was advocating more education, and comparing unfavourably the money spent on it compared with that on the army. 'Five millions…were spent to put brains into people's heads, and thirty millions to blow them out again.'[5]

Late in the year he had another book published. *Mothers of the Bible* was a departure from his usual collections of lectures and sermons, and it attempted to appeal to the fairer sex with the stories of women from the bible, simply told. This time he dedicated it 'to my dear wife, whose unassuming piety, watchful care, and faithful love, have won the confidence and affection of her children, and made my home the bright and happy spot which the following pages say homes should be.'[6] A rather curious statement, which though concentrating on motherhood, seemed to leave out his own relationship with her.

In December the problems of chapel finance broke out again. Mr Bowron had been trying to get his interest, and the position of his loans clarified. The LCU set up a sub-committee to examine the whole subject of the debt on the Harrow Road Church. They were not at all happy with the situation or their attitude, and recommended that the church should repay Mr Bowron, and also the £1,000 lent by the Chapel Building society, and until they did, they should be given no further money.

Charles Leach, never afraid of the sound of gunfire, leaped into the fray. Clearly the church didn't have this sort of money, except that which had been given or offered for the new building, which now amounted to £1,600 of cash and £1,800 of promises. He started to use the amount that they had raised as a weapon to persuade the LCU to soften their position. The basic argument was that if the church was pushed too hard it might collapse and then all would be lost both spiritually and financially. Slowly the LCU began to see the sense of this. The question was - what sort of arrangement could be made that was acceptable to both parties?

By February 1889 the outlines were appearing, but it took until July before it was clear. Trust had reached such an appalling level that the LCU refused to make the

resolution regularising the position of the church until he agreed. The basis was that the church was responsible for the £6,000 cost of the new chapel building, and if they achieved that the LCU would grant them £1,000, when it would pay all the remaining costs. Probably they thought that the church would find it difficult to raise the extra £2,600 and so they wouldn't have to pay out; they hadn't reckoned with Charles Leach's determination. In addition the church had to take on the £2,700 mortgage, and the repayment of Mr Bowron's £900, but they negotiated a £1,000 grant with which to deal with this and wouldn't need to pay the interest until the new chapel was completed. The £800 mortgage would be taken over by the chapel, but they would not be responsible for capital or interest for five years. The £1,000 loan from the Chapel Building society would be converted to a grant.

At Queen's park, they accepted it. It was a considerable improvement on the position at the beginning of the year. The LCU passed the resolution which enabled the church to be put on a proper legal basis; it looked as though peace had broken out. Almost immediately, with the LCU's approval, they accepted the tender from Treasure and Son for £6,000, for the new chapel building. The figure had been brought down to this by getting some carpenters to build the platform for £50, removing this from the cost. The building work began.

Chapel foundation stone laid by William Bowron. All the stones have been transferred to the wall of the modern chapel

As an offshoot of the LCU an 'Outcast London' charity had been set up to try to directly alleviate some of the problems. It in turn had an organisation called the Self-Help Emigration Society assisting people to go to America or various parts of the empire, particularly Canada. This was considered as a solution to some of the unemployment problems, particularly in the countryside where mechanisation was forcing people off the land. The emigrants paid part of their costs themselves. The society contributed the rest, organising the trips and the reception in the destination country. Usually agents of the society went with them.

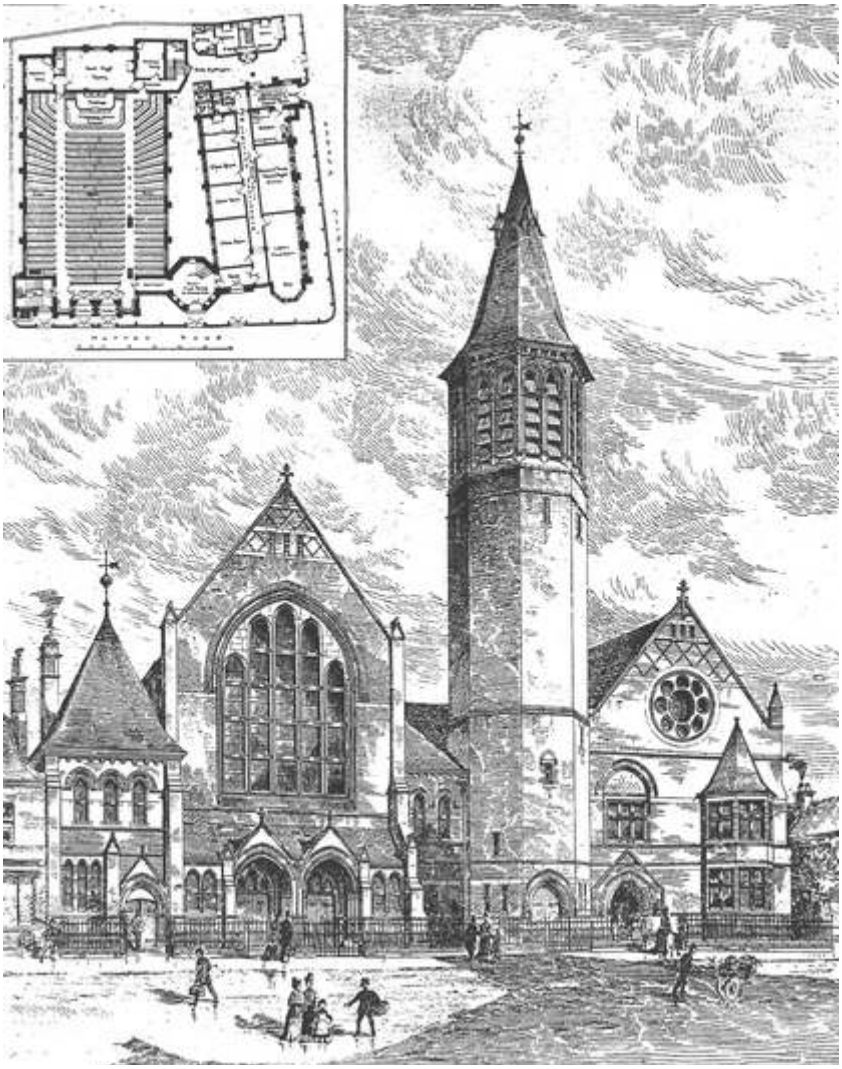
In April 1889 Charles Leach accompanied the party to Canada and the USA.[7] He used the opportunity to also go on a preaching tour, beginning in Montreal in the first Sunday in May. Later he went south of the border and visited Washington, and Ohio, where the University awarded him an honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree. This was popular at the time, and many leading English Churchmen had Doctorates, often from American universities. It was a proud moment for the new Dr Leach, and finally laid to rest his concerns about his lack of education.

On his return it was again education that was on his mind. After the passing of the Technical Instruction Act and money becoming available for this purpose, he chaired a meeting to examine support for setting up a Polytechnic for Queen's Park[8]. The School Boards had largely taken care of primary education, but anything further was sadly

neglected, and with so many artisans in the area there was a need for training. A resolution was carried unanimously in a crowded meeting and plans were put in hand to try to set up such an Institute.

However, despite the finances appearing to be under control, Mr Bowron was complaining that he was not receiving his interest, which under the agreement was the LCU's responsibility until the chapel was completed. Clearly all was not well at the LCU, and in October Rev Andrew Mearns resigned. A small committee considered this, and by a narrow majority refused to accept it. The main committee backed this with a larger majority. Mearns stayed; but still Bowron didn't get paid. By December he was getting very angry that his letters weren't being answered.

The chapel building was going up and the money was still coming in. It was going to be a race to see if they could reach the required total by the time it was ready to open. At the same time there was another construction site in the area and in January 1890 the new library at Queen's Park on Harrow Road was opened. Charles Leach was pleased to be part of the opening party and gave a brief address.[9]



Queen's Park Chapel from the building plans. On the right is the hall built before Charles Leach's time with the new chapel on the left. In practice the tower was never built to the full height

In early June, in less than a year from receiving approval, the chapel was ready. It had only taken nine months to construct and was a large red brick building 96 feet long and 54 wide, with a nave and side aisles. It had a gallery all round, and in total could seat around 1,500 people. Between the chapel and the hall was a tower which contained one of the staircases for reaching the gallery. A compromise on the cost meant that the tower was only 60 feet high instead of the designed height of 125 feet. The intention was to complete it later, but it was never carried out. The front was broken up with twin open porches, giving a welcoming appearance on to Harrow Road.

On the 5th there was a grand opening. No less than Rev Henry Allon came to preach and there was a tea meeting in the hall, followed by a public one where everyone was invited; all the people from the LCU, trustees, supporters, local MPs, and even Mr Bowron. Shortly before, the church had put out a leaflet advertising the celebrations, and the preachers for the first two Sundays, but admitting that they still needed £500 to make the chapel debt free.[10] Of course, there would be either a charge or a collection at all these events.

There was an apocryphal story that Charles Leach was so forceful in his determination to collect the money that on one occasion he refused to let the congregation go until that was achieved. Whatever the truth, the money was obtained, and in August they were submitting their accounts to the LCU showing that not only had they raised all of the £6,000, but they had received it and had paid all the bills, except for final payments to the builder and architect totalling exactly £1,000, which they were requesting from the LCU; as agreed.

Probably the LCU were surprised at the speed with which the church had moved, and that they had actually raised the money that was their side of the bargain. Whatever the reason, the £1,000 wasn't forthcoming. In October they were writing to Andrew Mearns pointing out that they had taken over the £2,700 mortgage, and they would not take this responsibility unless they received the £1,000.[11] In November Charles Leach was still trying to get the other £1,000 so that Mr Bowron could be paid. When nothing happened he complained to Edward Spicer then Chairman of the LCU, and cousin of Albert, who wrote ever more blunt letters to Andrew Mearns requesting him to sort it out.

Mearns was hiding behind the fact that the mortgage for the £800 had not been signed. This was in such a mess that it took a considerable amount of backwards and forwards, resolutions, and legal work, before the matter was finally settled in February. In the meantime tempers were getting rather short. Bowron had threatened to sue Mearns, Charles Leach had said he didn't want any more dealings with him, Spicer had demanded to keep the whole matter in his own hands, and Mearns was complaining 'I hope it will be a long time before we have anything more to do with Dr Leach'[12], whose offence was to push to get what seemed rightfully the church's, and refuse to accept documents that were not properly drafted. Finally it was all sorted out and everyone got paid, including poor William Bowron. Perhaps he should have been more careful about the terms and exactly who he was lending the money to, but it had been the church and he thought he could trust them.

Even before getting the chapel open, the Queen's Park Institute was set up using the classrooms in the hall building, and within a couple of months it had 143 pupils,[13] and was catering for children from under eight to over fifteen, charging from 10/6 to two guineas a quarter.[14] With day schools, evening classes, and Sunday schools, the building was in almost continual use. Charles Leach was, of course, the president of the Institute, with an impressive list of vice-presidents, headed by an Earl and a

Viscount, all the local MPs including Randolph Churchill, academics from the New College the Congregationalists' training establishment, representatives from the London County Council, the Queen's Park Estate management, and even Rev Andrew Mearns. He had made very sure that he had a wide ranging support for the institute which had science, mathematics, art, and carpentry classes, to name only a few. Built around this were popular lectures on scientific subjects.

Such was the draw of the whole operation that quickly the new chapel was full on Sunday evenings and quite full in the mornings. There were over twenty 'auxiliaries', ranging from Bible classes to a swimming club, with a total of 2,859 members. Importantly they also included a Medical Insurance Society, and a Help Myself Savings Bank; early attempts at social security. All these clubs took 200 officers to run and attracted around 3,000 people a week during the winter months.[15] Charles Leach was now in charge of an impressive organisation which had been built up from a standing start in a new area in an amazingly short time. He had plenty of help, but it had been his drive and leadership that had propelled it forward.

By the spring of 1891, he felt he deserved a holiday, and chose, as so many ministers did, to go to the Holy Land. Thomas Cook and Son ran these trips which were carefully arranged to bring the travellers to Jerusalem in time for Easter. He took Mary Jane and thirteen year old Dora with him. Elizabeth and Ada were left in charge of the house, looking after eight year old Mabel, and the maid Selina Perry.[16] The trip took a month, travelling overland to Italy, and then by steamer to Jaffa. As the railway had not yet been completed, they had to ride to Jerusalem on horseback. The highlight was to visit the many sites with biblical resonances, even including Jericho and Bethlehem, before returning via Cairo. This was the beginning of his love for Palestine, which he was to visit many more times.

Besides the Blue Ribbon Insurance, which changed its name in 1890 to the Abstainers and General Insurance Co Ltd, he had invested in the London and Universal Bank. In 1889 this had taken over the business that Mr Cochrane had been carrying on privately for some years. Quite quickly things went wrong and when it was put into voluntary liquidation it soon became apparent that many of their loans had become bad debts. The bank became notorious in accountancy circles as one of the earliest examples of the failure of auditing to show the problems of the organisation. Dr Leach became a member of the shareholders representative committee to confer with the liquidator.[17] At the end of the process he was lucky to escape without losing too much money.

Though he had a comfortable income, this wasn't true for all ministers. In some places, particularly in the small country churches, the pastor could be very badly paid. At the annual Congregational Union meeting he began by proposing closer working between the prosperous town churches and those in the country. In subsequent years he proposed a sustentation fund to bring the stipends of all ministers up to minimums of £150 for a married man and £100 for unmarried ones.[18] This produced heated debate in an organisation that valued the independence of its chapels. While the principle that they should help their poorer brethren was accepted, they could not agree on how it was to be administered. Each year he would bring up the subject again, but without success, until eventually after many years of trying a fund was set up and began to bring the stipends in the poorer chapels to more acceptable levels.[19]

Despite getting the chapel open, they weren't finished with raising money. After a couple of years, to let the dust settle, the church was later back politely asking the LCU for £500 if they raised £1500 by the end of 1894, to reduce the debts. Despite their large number of members, they rightly thought that the scale of these were too

much of a burden. In July 1893 the LCU offered £200 if they raised the £1,500; hardly generous, but nevertheless they were grateful. By August 1894 they had raised £1,550, which, including the grant, enabled them to reduce the debts to £3,000. It had been a monumental effort; the whole project of hall, iron church and chapel had cost around £14,000. Though they had received around £3,500 total in various grants from the LCU, the rest they had raised themselves in about six years; and most of it in less than three. In addition they had paid all the running costs and the pastor's not inconsiderable stipend. Charles Leach may have been forceful, but this sort of result is not achieved without, perhaps accidentally, stepping on a few corns.

13

The ILP Affair

It was a pleasure for Charles Leach to attend a local Liberal party meeting in April 1887 where all were agreed about the need for Home Rule for Ireland.[1] It was one of those curious hangovers from history that Queen's park, and the surrounding area, was part of Chelsea, though a long way from it, and known as Chelsea Detached. Naturally then his involvement was with the Chelsea constituency which had had a Liberal member of parliament in Sir Charles Dilke, but he had lost the seat to Charles Algernon Whitmore in the July 1886 Election.

Dilke was a wealthy man with interests in publishing, including *Notes and Queries,* and had had a promising career in politics rising to the point where he and Joseph Chamberlain were regarded as the leaders of the Radical wing of the Liberal party. This all went disastrously wrong in July 1885 when Mrs Virginia Crawford made a public accusation that he had seduced her three years earlier. In 1886 it went to court, and Dilke was ruined as far as his political career was concerned. He had retained his seat in November 1885 but only with a majority of 175, and then lost it in 1886 by almost exactly the same amount.

Despite the scandal Dilke was still accepted in Chelsea circles particularly as his second wife Emilia had married him in October 1885, knowing about the accusations, and had stood by him through everything. She was an art historian with books to her name, but she also had an interest in social reform and working conditions for women. The Women's Protective and Provident League that had been set up by Emma Patterson in 1874, was an umbrella organisation for women's trade unions, as the TUC wouldn't accept them. Lady Dilke was heavily involved, and in 1886, after Emma Patterson's death, she took over the presidency of the League.

It was thus inevitable that Charles Leach should get to know the Dilkes when they attended Liberal party functions in Chelsea,[2] and it followed that they should become supporters of his work, particularly in the Queen's Park Institute. He reciprocated this by supporting the Women's Protective and Provident League, though he wasn't always able to attend their annual meetings.[3]

By late 1888 the London School Board was holding elections and it was natural that he should stand for the Chelsea division with his experience of serving on one in Birmingham.[4] Though he was supported by the Radical Clubs[5] and the South Kensington Women's Liberal association[6], he only polled 6,053 votes whereas the winners received 9,000 or 10,000.[7] Without Francis Schnadhorst's efficient Birmingham Liberal machine behind him it was much more difficult to get elected, though he was well clear of being bottom of the poll. He kept his interest in education, however, by being a manager at a couple of local Board schools.

It was perhaps deliberately provocative of the Liberals to hold the 1890 meeting of the General Committee of the National Federation in Birmingham, now that it was the epicentre of Liberal Unionism. Despite the School Board setback Charles Leach was still committed to the party and he attended because he still held a position within it. Towards the end of the event he moved up further when he was elected one of the 25 additional members of committee for the following year. With him were Richard Tangye and GH Kenrick from Birmingham, and the Rev J Guinness Rogers a well known Congregationalist from Clapham in London.[8] This represented the high point in his involvement with the party organisation.

It was one of those quirks of the system that local government in London was by Vestries, which no longer had anything to do with the Church. Though their powers and areas were hardly less than many municipal authorities, they had the status of Parish Councils, and hence ministers of religion were not barred from serving on them. In May 1892 Charles Leach stood for the Hans Town ward of Chelsea Vestry, using the Queen's Park Institute address, and on the 11th, with 320 votes, was comfortably elected. Sir Charles Dilke, with 457, headed the poll, which only showed the small size of the electorate.[9] Even after being elected to the Finance and Kensal Town Bridge committees, he seemed to find it uninteresting, and rarely attended. In the next two and a half years, he was only present for 7 out of the possible 60 or so meetings; hardly a good record, but not the worst. Perhaps it merely showed his disenchantment with politics in London.

With the Liberal Party out of power, and an aged Gladstone still the leader, it became clear that the hoped for reforms would not happen; deepening his disillusion. The natural successor was Lord Rosebery, and he inspired even less confidence. Charles Leach's political ideas were moving in a different direction, and far from working for them at the time of the general election in August 1892, he resigned from the local party. After the vote, the Liberals, though in a minority, formed a government with support from the Irish Nationalists. Gladstone was still Prime Minister, but with his attention totally on Irish problems, drift set in.

It was only a few weeks later, in October, when the Congregational Union met for its autumn assembly, where one of the main topics for discussion was 'The Church and the Labour Problem'. The lead paper was read by Rev J Macdougall of Manchester who felt that the church should act as the peacemaker in disputes between capital and labour. The poor, and wretchedly housed, should be the concern of philanthropists and social reformers and the rich should also do God's bidding and turn their faces against luxury and vice. The next speaker, Rev CF Williams, said that the labour movement was not merely about 'shorter hours, higher wages, and better homes, but to secure for labour a juster share of the wealth it created, a fairer chance of living a full wholesome life, how to win for the workers the right to the enjoyment of the fruits of their own skill and industry.'[10] While agreeing that the church should take an interest in social affairs they disagreed as to the extent that they should interfere in specific matters.

It was at this point that Rev Dr Leach rose to make his contribution. He thought ' that the church should aim at the conversion of the labourer and his surroundings. He was quite certain they would never solve the labour problem by setting the labourer against his master or by making the poor man believe that the rich man was his natural enemy. He was opposed to the establishment of separate labour churches. He was at one of those churches on Sunday night and heard a Member of Parliament say that Christianity was dead, and that he was glad of it; that it was wrapped in its own lifeless forms, and only awaited a decent burial; that they had appealed to the Church and it had failed. He condemned this language, and contended that he who set the poor against the rich was as much the enemy of the one as the other. What the Church should do was to see that the surroundings of the poor should be decent, and see to it that the poor man who would work should have work, and whip with a cat-o-nine-tails every vagabond who would not work. They ought to rid labour of the public house which was the fruitful parent of unmentionable vices.'[11] The speech was received with cheers as he made his points, showing that within the church at the time this was popular thinking. You could not follow Christ and believe in 'class war'.

Sitting in the gallery was James Keir Hardie, the MP in question. Born in 1856 in Legbrannock in Scotland, he had worked as a baker's boy from the age of eight before

entering the pit. He worked his way up from trapper to coal hewer, but attended night school to learn to read and write. He was so successful in this that in 1879 he became correspondence secretary of the miner's association, but also a Christian, and a member of the Good Templars temperance organisation. From one miner's association he went to the next until, with the organisation of successful strikes behind him, he reached the secretaryship of the Scottish Miners Federation. After one failed attempt to reach parliament, in 1892 he won West Ham South as the United Liberal, Radical and Labour party candidate. Though his connection with the Liberal Party was very tenuous, they hadn't actually stood a candidate against him. From their backgrounds, he and Charles Leach had a good deal in common.

However, Hardie, on hearing the accusation, became quite agitated, requested, and received, permission to go to the platform and explain the statement attributed to him. 'What he had said was that Christianity of the schools is dead, and the Christianity of Christ is coming to the front. What he desired was a peaceable and gradual settlement of the labour question. He said that they would appeal to Parliament and to the Church for help, and if they turned a deaf ear, then he advised them to take the matter into their own hands. The reason that the Labour party had turned its back on the Church was because the Church had turned its back upon them. They got respectable congregations on Sundays, and preached to please respectability.'[12] There were many objections to his remarks, which were a red rag to Charles Leach, but he was persuaded to sit down again until Keir Hardie had finished. Afterwards Hardie was to admit that he didn't know what he had said as he was so agitated. When he was allowed to reply, Charles Leach said 'Mr Keir Hardie might have meant to put it as he now stated but he would stake his reputation on the fact the he had put it as he (Dr Leach) now stated.'[13] A number of other ministers piled in refuting the statements that they did not do anything for labour, but in milder tones, which allowed the two main combatants time to cool down.

The next day it was humble pie time, and Charles Leach obtained permission to make an explanatory statement on the affair. 'It seems in quoting Mr Keir Hardie's address I omitted to use three little words which I now most gladly add. Mr Keir Hardie says that his statement on Sunday afternoon was that it was Christianity *of the schools* that was dead, and not simply Christianity. The shorthand reporter verifies the use of these three words. I gladly accept the correction, and wish my quotation from his speech to read with these three words included. I will add further, that if the accidental omission of these words has caused Mr Keir Hardie any inconvenience I am sorry, as I do not wish to misquote any man. May I add that, if the Labour Church will allow me, I shall be very glad to address them on Sunday afternoon next.'[14]

The whole business was all over the papers and it was a very public apology. A commentator added 'The Rev Dr Leach, who apologised yesterday to Mr Keir Hardie at the Congregational Union, is one of the most energetic of ministers. He is at one end of the Harrow Road what Mr Clifford, the Baptist preacher, is at the other. He is a tremendous Radical in politics, and he works for politics and for religion largely in that city of workmen, the Queen's Park. He has a fine chapel, costing, I believe, some £7000, which he declined to open until every penny of the debt was paid off. He got the money. He is a preacher of great energy and power, a humorous lecturer, a social reformer – indeed, an everything reformer – and a great influence on the neighbourhood. In controversy he is an ugly man to tackle. But he seems to have lost his temper (and I do not wonder) with Mr Keir Hardie, and to have said more than he meant, or, at all events, than he could prove.'[15]

The press wanted to take sides in the matter, but many thought that they should heed Hardie's warnings about the church helping labour in their cause. It was not a charge that could be levelled at Charles Leach. Ironically it was reported a few days later: 'I am assured by a reporter who attended the meeting at the Labour Church that both Mr Hardie and Dr Leach are right, for though the former used the qualifying words, yet in repeating the sentence he omitted them.'[16] It was somewhat of a storm in a teacup, but it had brought the two men to each other's notice.

A few months later, in January 1893, a conference was held in Bradford, to consider Labour parliamentary representation, the upshot of which was that the Independent Labour Party was formed. Keir Hardie, a little reluctantly, was elected the first chairman. Up to that time, all Labour representatives had been, more or less, within the Liberal Party. This was a definite break; the view was that Labour should go it alone.

Keir Hardie in 1894

Charles Leach was watching the situation carefully; the ILP published a penny tract on their programme and policy in September, and when he came across it some months later he read it with interest. Inevitably it attacked both the Tories and the Liberal Party claiming that there was little to choose between them, as they were all from the same class. To some extent this was an inevitable consequence of non-payment of Members, who thus needed to be rich or have powerful backers to afford to spend their time in the House. What attracted him was the programme:

'By the Eight Hours Bill, we prevent the physical deterioration of the nation and provide leisure for culture and amusement.

By Municipal Employment, we provide remunerative work for every willing worker, and we establish a minimum wage for all industries.

By Free Boarding Schools, we provide education and maintenance for the children and a healthy, intelligent and stalwart race for the future.

By Pensions for the Aged, we provide a decent subsistence for the worn out worker.'[17]

It doesn't seem too revolutionary, and they thought that Municipal Employment would solve a whole raft of problems from unemployment to minimum wages, while boarding schools would take the next generation away from the conditions in towns and cities, and possibly from unsuitable parents.

The Leach Family in 1894. Left to right standing, Ada, Dora, Elizabeth. Charles and Mary Jane are seated with Mabel at the Front

Keir Hardie came to Charles Leach's notice again at the end of June 1894 when he caused a furore in the House of Commons. Sir William Harcourt had put forward a loyal motion congratulating the Duchess of York on the birth of a son four days before; the future King Edward VIII. On that same day there had been a mining disaster at the Albion Colliery, Cilfynydd, South Wales, when over 200 men were killed. Hardie was incensed when there was no recognition of this in the House. After saying that the birth of the child was unimportant and some blunt things about the Prince of Wales' philandering and ownership of vile slums, he made his point that the House should have taken the opportunity for a vote of condolence to the relatives of the victims of the disaster. It was a touchstone moment, and Charles Leach knew where his sympathies lay.

It was a big step, but by 16th August he decided he was ready, and wrote to Keir Hardie. First he invited him to come and give an address at one of his Sunday afternoon lectures at Queen's park; then he added: 'I have come at least to accept your programme as set forth in the penny tract from your pen, and am sincerely thinking of joining the Independent Labour Party if you will have me. Such influence as I possess, and it is considerable in religious circles all over England, I think I ought to use in the interests of the class from which I spring and amongst whom I toil.'[18] Hardie wrote straight back suggesting a date, and also promising him a warm welcome, but warning him that there could well be consequences when the move became public. Charles Leach replied that he thought that he knew what would happen and it was not so bad. 'It is more appalling to me to see the desperate condition in which so many of the

wealth producers find themselves than it can be to vote against either Liberal or Tory, or to abstain from voting for either. I shall know that I did one or the other to further the interest of the toilers…If my acceptance by your party – and I am prepared to follow the lead of a man who is led by his New Testament – should add strength to it I shall be glad.'[19]

Within a couple of days he was returning the signed 'Declaration of Adherence' and asking where his subscription should be sent. He added: 'The seven items of Programme on page two make up the most Christian programme I have seen in a long time. With my New Testament in my hand I can expand and defend them in any assembly in the world where civilised men assemble…'[20]

On 25th August Keir Hardie wrote a column in his *Labour Leader* about Dr Leach, clearly pleased at his conversion, and explaining the history since their little contretemps two years before. 'Bit by bit Dr Leach has been developing and has now reached the conclusion that the logical outcome of his Master's teaching is Socialism, and that the ILP offers the best and most effective means of realising it. May many who are hesitating be led to follow his example.'[21] On 9th September Keir Hardie went to Queen's Park and gave his talk, which allowed them to meet afterwards over a cup of tea and quietly get to know each other. Hardie was off to America and there would not be another opportunity.

That year the Congregational Union held its autumn meeting in Liverpool, but Charles Leach didn't cause any controversy. He did speak, as an ILP member, at a fringe meeting organised by the Christian Socialist League which seemed an obvious organisation for him, particularly as it was led by Rev John Clifford, the prominent Baptist who had his chapel not far away along Harrow Road at Westbourne Park. Despite being from different denominations, the two men had much in common, including membership of the Geological Society.

At the beginning of November he was interviewed by the British Weekly about his involvement with the ILP. He laid out the policies that he found distinctly Christian: arbitration instead of war; work for the workless; free elementary, secondary, and university education; provision for the aged poor other than the workhouse; the eight hour day; and collective ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange.[22] He claimed that most of these he had been preaching all his life, and that was undoubtedly true for the first few in the list, but it was the last that showed a change in his position. He had listened to Henry George and had concluded that land should be in common ownership as long as this could be done with proper compensation, but that collective ownership should be general, was a big step along the road to socialism. On the other hand he disapproved of the 'violent and determined opposition to the Liberal Party, even in cases where the Liberal candidate is thoroughly at one with us on social questions.'[23] Though he was associating himself with the ILP, he still had not quite let go of the Liberals, particularly as at that time the distinctions between Radical Liberals, and Labour were often quite fine.

In the normal course of events his membership of Chelsea Vestry would have continued until 1895, but the Local Government Act of 1894 had changed the system and the whole Vestry had to be re-elected in December. He put his name forward to stand again; under his new colours. There had been grumblings in the chapel about his involvement with the ILP, but this was a step too far. In early December there were two withdrawals from the poll, Sir Charles Dilke and Rev Charles Leach.[24] It was worse than that, as he was also forced to leave the party. Keir Hardie wrote: 'And so we have lost our only DD. From time to time mutterings have reached me which foreshadowed what has now happened. Dr Leach will probably realise now more fully

than he did at the time what my letter meant in asking whether he had realised all it meant to join the ILP. He thought he did and was prepared for anything. Now he finds there was something for which he was not prepared. I am glad all the same he has been with us. In future he will be more powerful as an outside ally than he ever could have been as an insider. When men have passed their fortieth year and are bound by ties and associations it is no easy matter to break from them. If all I hear is true Dr Leach's deacons after the manner of their kind were making it very uncomfortable for him and would not hear of his running on the ILP ticket.'[25]

Thus ended his membership of the ILP, which had lasted less than four months. Once again it had been his political activities that had got him into trouble with his church. This time he stuck it out, and kept his head down for a while. Maybe Hardie was right, and if he remained with the Liberals and worked for the same objectives, just as much, if not more, could be achieved. After the August general election in 1895 when all the ILP candidates failed and Kier Hardie lost his seat, this didn't seem such a bad idea, particularly as the Tories with their Unionist allies had won a clear majority. By November he was supporting Samuel Insull the Progressive candidate for Chelsea in the London County Council election; more or less back in the Liberal fold. He returned to his battles over freedom of religion and non-denominational schools, the latter threatened by a proposed Education Bill.

It has been suggested[26] that the reason he returned to the Liberals was that he realised that the ILP was determined to pursue its own line, and not be another Lib-Lab group. This doesn't seem likely. Though he didn't like their attacks on the Liberals, he was fully aware of them at the time. He was forced out of the ILP, and where was he to go? The Fabians would seem a natural home, but they were a talking shop and he wanted at least the semblance of action. In the end his point of departure was over 'setting class against class' which from his religious perspective was wrong. Kier Hardie with his Christian background believed in evolutionary methods, but others weren't so scrupulous. It pointed up the wide and fluid spectrum of ideas that constituted the labour movement in the1890s.

Charles Leach had published another book of his Sunday Afternoon Lectures in 1894, and had tackled the subject of socialism head on when he had used it as a title for one of them. He had made his own position clear by saying that to him it aimed at the destruction of poverty, and that he was keen to do something to break up the distinctions between landlords, tenants, and labourers. On the other hand he was still pursuing his traditional themes such as fighting the giants of poverty, intemperance, gambling, and irreligion. His politics were always seen from a Christian perspective.

14

Ada

In the late 1880s a slim rather good-looking young man joined Elizabeth Leach's Bible class. His name was Charles Henry Shave and he lived around the corner from the chapel in Ilbert Street, the original 'I' street of the Queen's Park Estate. Born in 1873, he was in his mid teens and six years younger than Elizabeth. Despite a certain diffidence, he was a promising young man.

Charles Shave – Christmas 1892 – the photo was probably a present to Ada

The Shaves, a few generations back, had been farm labourers in Long Melford in Suffolk, until around the beginning of the nineteenth century when John Shave had risen to a be a gamekeeper. He was able to have his second son James apprenticed as a plasterer, which was a good trade in that area where so many of the houses were covered with pargetting, the decorative plasterwork. James, though, had more ambition than to spend his life putting swirls on cottages in a rural backwater, and headed for the metropolis.

By the 1840s the west of London was growing rapidly and the fashion was to build the houses of inferior brick and then cover them over with stucco, a form of plaster. James settled in Paddington, close to many of the building sites. With his trade much in demand, he prospered and soon married his landlord's daughter, Sarah Richardson. They had five boys, the eldest of whom, George, was Charles' father.[1] George became an engineer working in the Paddington area, but took the opportunity to move to Queen's Park when it was built.

Charles' mother, Eliza, died when he was nine, but his father married again to Louisa Coppin, and so the household consisted of his father, step-mother, younger siblings, and two small half brothers[2]; quite a crush in the small terraced house. Despite his normal appearance, Charles had a secret; he had an artificial foot. Between the ages of nine and fourteen he had spent a great deal of time in St Mary's hospital having a series of operations trying to save the limb, before it was finally amputated. Whether the cause was tuberculosis, or osteomyelitis, or a neglected fracture, isn't clear. Despite the handicap, he managed very well, and most people were unaware of the problem.

After leaving school, despite the gaps in his education due to the hospital stays, he managed to get a job in an architect's office as a surveyor's assistant. Here he learnt to draw with precision, a skill which was to stand him in good stead later. In the Bible class he was also a diligent student, and it wasn't long before Elizabeth brought him to her father's notice. Charles Leach took an interest in the young man and encouraged him to consider training for the ministry. He was one of five that were marked out for this course during his time at Queen's Park. Another of them, FJ Gould, was later to become the minister at Highbury, Charles Leach's old chapel in Birmingham.[3]

Ada Leach - One of God's choice saints

Charles Shave soon had a further interest in the Leach household. He had set eyes on Elizabeth's younger sister, Ada, who was only a year older than him. She was taller and slimmer than her elder sister, and in a dark haired family, stood out as fair. Though she had a tendency to the prominent chin that ran through the female line, as she reached maturity, she was the pretty one. Despite the fashion of puff sleeves, and for pulling in the waists, it couldn't disguise how narrow chested she was. She was never particularly strong.

Fortunately, she was quite academic. During her secondary schooling at Summer Hill in Birmingham, she had won class prizes,[4] and by eighteen had taken up teaching. With the expansion following the education acts there was a considerable demand and it formed a respectable occupation for many young women. With her father's strong interest in the subject it is something he would have encouraged. Because of his weak

education he was determined to see that his children received a proper one, and the fact that they were girls didn't make any difference to him. He was a strong supporter of equal rights for women.

As Charles Shave became more involved in the life of the church he felt he had received a calling to the ministry. This was something that came on gradually, and then suddenly became a blazing certainty. In 1892, when he reached 19, it was time to put this into practice, and he obtained a scholarship from the Countess of Huntingdon's charity, which enabled him to go to the Congregational training college at Cheshunt. During the holidays he would return home to see Ada, and in the summers he worked as a reporter for a local paper to earn some money. By the Christmas of 1894 he was giving her a present of an expensive photograph album and quite soon they became engaged. They couldn't be married quickly as he needed to complete his six year course and so it would be 1898 before he would be finished. Even then he would have to find a church and become settled. She seemed quite prepared to wait.

Frontispiece of Photograph Album
Charley is Charles Shave

In May 1896 Charles Leach was a little surprised to read in the newspaper that he had been murdered in Tunis; this seemed unlikely to him. It was, of course, all a mix up and the victim was not the Dr Leach of Harrow Road, as they claimed, but a medical doctor working in North Africa for the London Evangelical Society. With the same name and an involvement with a religious organisation, that was enough for some journalists to jump to a wrong conclusion. The error was soon realised and an explanation given.[5]

For Charles Leach life was the usual round of education concerns, temperance meetings, and preaching around the country, as well as in his own chapel. He had reached a level of prominence in Congregational circles, for example giving the final address at the Union meeting in October 1895. In July 1896 he was invited to preach at Cavendish Street Chapel in Manchester. He knew perfectly well why they had invited him; they had lost their pastor a month before and were looking around for a replacement. Thinking that he had nothing to lose he took the pulpit in late September, having already asked for, and received, some information about the church. Though he was happy at Queen's Park he was prepared to consider the possibility. This wasn't so unusual; he had received a number of calls over the years; to Tolmer's Square in Paddington, and Stepney Meeting House being two that reached the press.[6] They had even thought that he had accepted the position on the second occasion, though he was still at Queen's Park.

Cavendish were impressed by him and a church meeting was called in early October and resolved, with a few dissenters, to take the matter forward and approach Dr Leach to find whether he would be interested. The response was positive; Charles Leach's reply was 'Go forward'[7]. This was enough for them, and the Deacons began negotiations, even travelling to London to speak to him. They were sufficiently encouraged for the church to pass a resolution on the 21st inviting him to be their pastor. This time it was unanimous.

He wrote back thanking them and promising to give it 'the most careful and prayerful consideration'.[8] It was now that negotiations began in earnest. They had been paying the Rev Holdsworth, the previous pastor, only £300 a year, but he was straight from college. Clearly a man of Dr Leach's calibre was not going to settle for that, though they did try. His stipend had been raised to £600 at Queen's Park and he, understandably, wanted to match that. This was not an easy matter for Cavendish as though they had been an immensely prosperous church in Free Trade Manchester, with the changing population in the area, things had gone into decline. They were suffering, like so many, from the drift to the suburbs. It is easy to see the attraction of Charles Leach to them. Here was a man who had reached prominence in the church, but with a reputation for reaching the working classes, and this was just what they needed. The problem was; could they afford him? After some careful consideration they decided they could, but it was an act of faith and would depend on his 'pulling power' to bring people in and raise money for any special items.

Less obvious was the attraction of the call to Charles Leach, though there were things in its favour. He had been at Queen's Park for ten years which was beyond the average stay of pastors. There he had built a successful church, and though there was always work to do, the great task was largely behind him. His skill was as a constructor, not a maintainer. Now approaching 50 years old, he felt that one more challenge would complete his ministerial career. It was certainly flattering to be invited to what was undoubtedly one of the premier churches of Congregationalism, and in that sense it would be the crowning of his work. The fact that they needed someone like him to reinvigorate the congregation, and attract a new one, was the sort of task to which he felt most fitted. To him it was God's calling that he should undertake such work to which he was suited, and therefore could make the greatest contribution.

With some minor matters, such as being able to continue his Sunday afternoon lectures, out of the way, it was now time for a decision. Queen's Park had got to hear of the call and passed a very flattering resolution begging him to reject it.[9] As he approached the point of decision he was realising what he would be giving up at Queen's Park, where the whole church and its auxiliaries were in a sense his creation. This didn't make it any easier. He went and talked to many leading Congregational churchmen, hoping to get an unbiased view, and opinions as to whether they thought Cavendish Street could be brought back to be a thriving church.

The ladies at Cavendish Street even wrote to his wife and daughters, extending a welcome, which helped to sway them. On 5th November he was still agonising and wrote: 'I can neither eat, sleep, nor work as I should.'[10] He had done as much as he could in consulting other people; it was now a matter of praying for guidance.

Having slept on it, or maybe remained awake, the following morning he was confident that he knew God's will. He resigned from Queen's Park, and wrote accepting the Pastorate of Cavendish Street. Despite some uncertainties, the plan was to be with them at the beginning of the New Year. Confident that with the support of the congregation and the auxiliaries they could build the church up again and with his usual energy, he began at once, asking for chapel yearbooks and maps of the area so

that he could plan a campaign. He fixed on the title for the first Sunday afternoon lecture, expecting to give it in early January.

In the meantime, it was Ada's health which was giving cause for concern. Her decline had been so gradual that for a long time no one realised quite how serious it was. A few days later, Charles Leach's worst fears were confirmed; she had tuberculosis. Thinking back to his mother's fate, he was soon on his knees praying that she would be spared. Charles Shave, no doubt joined him, but Mary Jane felt confident that if she stopped teaching and stayed within the home, had plenty of rest, good food, and tender loving care, she would recover.

Still Ada grew worse, despite all their efforts, and it was clear how she too was thinking. It was described by her father: 'When she was confined to bed, and too weak to read, almost to move, I used to go quietly into her room each forenoon to read and talk with her. One morning she led the conversation upon Heaven, a subject which was occupying her mind. Turning her head towards me, and fixing her gaze upon my face, she said: 'Father, do you think we shall know one another in Heaven?' Without I moment's hesitation I answered that I had no doubt upon the subject. 'Then', said she, 'and why do you believe it? Can you give me good reasons for your faith?'"[11]

It was difficult to answer her, but he did, because he firmly believed it. When he went to his study and tried to find suitable quotations in books that might help, he was surprised to find little of relevance. Thinking about it, he realised he had never preached on the subject in all those years. It was something he was to study carefully later.

In the meantime he was throwing himself into his work, trying to keep his mind on preparations for the new pastorate, but finding it very difficult. It was unclear whether the move would still be able to take place as planned, but everyone was still hoping that Ada would recover and everything would remain on track. As she deteriorated he could only consider one day at a time and the move had to be put on hold. He still had commitments such as the annual meeting of the Metropolitan council of Free Churches[12], but in his distracted way could make little contribution.

Towards the end of November it became clear that there was no hope for her getting better. Cavendish Street were very sympathetic and clearly prepared to wait for their new pastor until he was in a position to ascend the pulpit, but how long that would be no one knew. They tried to keep working on the arrangements but it was very difficult without being able to set dates.

The resolution of the situation was not long coming. She was not strong enough to resist the disease, and on the 19th it was all over. Charles Leach was later to write: 'In the month of December, 1896, my daughter, aged 24 years, one of God's choice saints, breathed her last in my arms, and slipped away from us to join the redeemed in the Better Land…At the end she grew very tired, and longed to go home to that land whose inhabitants with all their sufferings left down here, are at ever at peace with the Lord Himself. So, with her head resting on her father's shoulder, and without a struggle, she went away to pillow her head upon the bosom of that Saviour she loved so well, and had done her best to faithfully serve. She is waiting there for our homecoming in due time.'[13]

Despite being a minister, and trained to deal with death, it was still a shattering blow. With Ada's gradual decline, they knew it was coming, but it is never quite the same when the time arrives. For Mary Jane, based at home, the absence would be even more marked than for him with his busy schedule. His mind must also have gone back more than forty years to his mother's demise at the hands of the same disease, and almost the same age. Was there some family link that had skipped a generation?

They were sure of the repository of her soul, but there was still the question of what to do with her mortal remains. Like most Non-conformist chapels, Queen's Park had no graveyard. It was possible to find ones nearby which were not tied to the Church of England, and there was the large public cemetery at Kensal Green, but these didn't appeal. In such times the call of one's roots is strong; they would take her back to Yorkshire; to where she was born.

The arrangements for the operation were formidable. A hearse with its horses wearing black plumes would be needed to take her to Kings Cross Station, so that those living nearby could see her leave. From there it would have been many hours on the train, with one or two changes, which would have to be undertaken with all due ceremony, before they arrived at Elland. There another hearse was needed to go through the town, passing their old shop in Southgate where she had entered the world, before turning up Victoria Road. At the top of the hill they finally reached Bethesda Chapel, and could lay her to rest in the same grave as her little brothers, placed there some twenty years before.

It seemed a strange thing to do, for a Congregational minister to bury his daughter in the graveyard of a Methodist church, but it was comforting to have all the children together. It felt like a home tucked away in the neat little cemetery behind the chapel. The building itself they didn't recognise as it had been rebuilt in 1880, three years after they had laid Harry there. So as not to disturb the graves they had turned the chapel round to lie along the road, instead of away from it. The only disadvantage was that now the main entrance lay awkwardly in a yard between the chapel and the school building. Nevertheless it still seemed familiar, and it felt that they had done right by her.

It was what happened next that caught nearly everyone by surprise. Charles Shave accompanied the family to Elland; after all, she was his fiancée. It would be expected that he would be inconsolable, having watched the love of his life decline and die. With Ada interred, he was released from his promise to her, but as a potential minister, though in training, he still needed a wife. Instead of turning to the next youngest sister, Dora, now nineteen, and perhaps entering the dangerous age; he went the other way.

The story goes that he proposed 'over Ada's grave'. Whether this was literally true, or indicating that it was a disrespectfully short time after, is no longer known. Elizabeth didn't have any concerns about the impropriety, or feel that they should wait; she accepted him immediately. She was six years older than him, and now at 29 was well on the shelf. In an era when the future for girls was to stay at home, or get married, the sensible ones took an opportunity when it was offered. They knew each other well, and she had plenty of experience in the life of the chapel and so would make an ideal pastor's wife. In time he had come to appreciate her sterling qualities.

Charles Shave had known he didn't have much time, and had to be quick about his proposal. In little more than a month after the funeral the opportunity would slip from his grasp when the family moved to Manchester. It was there, some four years later, that he and Elizabeth were married by, of course, her father. In the meantime he had been ordained as the minister of Barry Chapel in South Wales. They had a long and happy enough life together, though there was always a faint shadow of a ghost lying somewhere in the background; Ada.

15

Cavendish Street

Chapel was hardly an adequate word for the massive collection of buildings that filled a whole block on the south side of Cavendish Street, off Oxford Road in South Manchester. It consisted of a large church, capable of seating 1850 people, "sometimes called the Nonconformist cathedral of the North",[1] the Ormond Hall, the schools, and assorted others. As if that wasn't enough, alongside the front of the chapel was a tower topped by a tall spire, dominating the area. The whole assemblage had cost a fabulous sum of some £25,000 to £30,000 in 1848[2] when the congregation had moved from their city centre site in Moseley Street, after finding there was no space to add the schools.

Cavendish Chapel. The schools can be seen to the right behind the church

In those days it had been a rich church with many wealthy members and prominent pastors, but the drift to the suburbs and difficulties obtaining good ministers had taken its toll. Years before, they had tried to persuade Dr Dale to come, but he had decided to remain in Birmingham. There were a number of short pastorates and the last, ending in June 1896, was Rev John W Holdsworth. He had been straight from college and it was a difficult assignment for him. After four years he resigned, a move that was quickly accepted by the deacons. It gave them the opportunity to try to find the right person to rejuvenate the church, and in Charles Leach they thought they had found just that man. Thus they were surprised, and delighted, when he accepted their call.

The Leaches moved to Manchester on Tuesday 2nd February 1897, to take up residence on the edge of the city, in York Place, a mostly circular road with large houses set in their own grounds. The house had three storeys, with two bedrooms on the top floor, more on the first floor and two entertaining rooms in addition to the usual arrangements at ground level. It was, however, quite convenient as a horse drawn tram ran along Oxford Road from York Place to Cavendish Street. It had been completely redecorated before their arrival with Charles Leach receiving almost daily reports from Mr Nairn, the secretary from the church, who was keeping an eye on progress. He had the whole family to tea on moving day, so that the removers could get things settled before they went to the house. With an £80 removal allowance from the church they could afford to have things done properly.

All the upheaval, and the task of settling in a new place, helped to take all their minds off the recent loss. They could start afresh without Ada's empty bedroom constantly reminding them. Charles Leach had work to do because on the Sunday he had to preach in the chapel morning and evening, and he was also restarting his Sunday Afternoon lectures with one appropriately titled *Move on*.

One of the things that he had been planning with the church, before his arrival, was to circulate an address to the neighbourhood. He had written a suitable letter and it had been printed up, complete with a photograph of him now wearing glasses. Volunteers from the church had then distributed them, block by block, to the whole neighbourhood. It was just the sort of thing that was needed to inspire and encourage the existing members and bring in new ones.

In the address he introduced himself and explained about his Sunday Afternoon lectures, before giving a neat description of his views:

'I am coming to live and work in Manchester in the hope that, with the earnest co-operation of the friends at Cavendish, something may be done from our centre for the mental, moral, social, and religious welfare of the people. I earnestly desire to gather together a large congregation of men and women, of all classes, who will worship side by side, and work together for the betterment of the people and the glory of God.

I am a Congregationalist, and the church over which I come to preside is a self-governing community of spiritual men and women who love Jesus Christ as Prince and Saviour, and for his sake love one another. I am in favour of civil and religious freedom, an earnest Temperance worker, a friend of the poor and the oppressed, and an ardent advocate of everything that will lessen the unfortunate distinctions which divide class from class. I long for and work to hasten the day when men will be brothers all the world over, and Christ be acknowledged as universal King.'[3]

He concluded with an invitation to everyone to join them.

This was all leading to the formal service of recognition for the new pastor, held on the 18th. Among those giving addresses was the Lord Mayor of Manchester, Alderman JF Roberts, a past member of the church, and the Rev BA Woods, the secretary of the Congregational Union, and many years before a pastor at Cavendish. He was one of the people who Charles Leach had consulted before making his decision to come.[4] Also invited was George Tennant, the secretary of Queen's Park Chapel, who spoke about Charles Leach's time there. Never missing an opportunity, a week later, a welcome tea meeting was held with tickets at 9d each; proceeds, of course, to church funds.

The family were rapidly made members of the church. Charles Leach, as the pastor, naturally had to be enrolled, but he was joined by his wife, and two of his daughters, Elizabeth and fourteen year old Mabel. Dora never became a member, either because

she didn't want to, or out of prudence. She had taken up teaching like her departed sister, and depending where she taught, there could be difficulties. Nevertheless, she had a seat with the others in the family pew. They were joined by large numbers becoming members and taking sittings in the church. The impact of a new, and dynamic, pastor was beginning to have an effect.

It is easy to think that all the minister has to do is to preach at a couple of services on Sundays, but that was the just the beginning of his tasks. There was also another service on a Wednesday evening and of course his Sunday afternoon lectures; hence four lectures or sermons to prepare each week. A year before his arrival a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon movement had been set up at Cavendish to provide good Christian entertainment for men on the day of rest. The PSA had been particularly delighted when they found Charles Leach was coming because his reputation was well known in those circles. It was a simple matter to splice his lectures into their programme, but he did insist on one change, and that was to extend the invitation to women as well as men.

To control and motivate the church he had to work through the deacons and the church meetings each held once a month and, of course, chaired by the pastor. These were just the formal business meetings, but there was a continual daily round of items needing his attention from negotiating to obtain other preachers to interviewing the flood of new applications for church membership.

Beyond these the chapel had numerous Auxiliaries, the clubs and societies. Of course they all wanted the pastor to be their President. This required him to be present at all their business meetings, but it did give him the opportunity to know what was happening and to try to inspire them. The organisations ranged from the obvious Sunday schools and bible classes, to rambling, cycling and swimming clubs. The only exceptions to his patronage were the ladies clubs where Mary Jane, with the children now largely grown up, was free to hold the position, though Elizabeth ran the Women's Meeting.

Not content with the existing 18 societies he soon persuaded the church to add four more; a Gospel Temperance Union, his old hobbyhorse; a young people's society for Christian Endeavour, an American import; a Ladies Society for Useful Work, obviously Mary Jane's baby; and Provident clubs where regular contributions provided support in times of trouble or particularly medical care for those falling ill. The Provident clubs were one of his specific interests, and he had persuaded the chapel to become involved. They had a standard set of rules, to which, never missing a trick, he owned the copyright. Though there were people to run the societies, he needed to be involved in everything, to maintain the momentum and inspire everyone to greater efforts to try to build the church back up again. With ever his eye on publicity, a church magazine was started.

Elizabeth, in addition to the Women's Meeting and supporting her mother in some of the other societies, became a Sunday school teacher. They had been a little short of them, but the situation was soon remedied and by the end of their first year there were 24 for the 404 pupils.[5] Mother and daughter were soon serving together on committees of the church. It was noticeable that the involvement of women was gradually spiralling out from the traditional ladies interests to more general involvement such as representing the church on other bodies, a trend, no doubt, encouraged by Charles Leach. The bastion of the deacons had yet to be breached though.

Charles Leach had not been successful in his long fight at the Union for a sustentation fund for the poorer pastors, but it had resulted in the setting up of a Congregational Church Aid Society with much the same aim to bring all salaries to an

acceptable minimum. They had managed to reach £80 for all, and get some to £90 or £100. This was regarded as a success and only showed the enormous gap between the lowliest and the high fliers like him. It was a matter of economics; if the pastor could pull in the people there was enough to pay him well. Chapels had to be run on businesslike lines.

Charles Leach was also developing an interest in the great pictures in the city's art gallery. In the autumn he began a series of sermons based on them, starting with Holman Hunt's *Shadow of Death*.[6] It was something else to help bring the people in. In October he was attending the Congregational Union where he was prominent enough to give one of the concluding speeches on the subject of 'Faith and Freedom'.[7]

Somewhere in the middle of all this he found time to write another book. Called *Is my Bible true? Where did I get it?*, it was a departure from his usual output of collections of lectures or sermons, and was a layman's guide to the origin of the good book. He dealt with the New Testament and then the Old, trying to answer the questions of the title and other related ones as well. It was clear, simple and straightforward, and though no doubt it would be criticised by scholars, it was right for its intended readers.

As if he hadn't got enough to do, there was also the matter of the Jubilee. In 1898 the chapel was due to celebrate the golden anniversary of its presence in Cavendish Street. There had been a plan to raise a fund to do some refurbishments, in time for the event, but little had been achieved. The project was expected to cost £1500, but only £80 had been collected by the beginning of his pastorate.[8] Clearly one of his tasks was to breathe new life into this effort.

Towards the end of 1897, with the church showing new vitality with over 100 new members and 300 more sittings, and far greater attendance at the services, it was financially stronger with doubled weekly offerings. Charles Leach felt that it was time to look again at the Jubilee Fund. In his businesslike way he called together a proper committee to examine what needed to be done. It was soon discovered that there was no real basis to the original sum, but it wasn't too far out. A meeting called of all the members and seat holders quickly produced promises of £500, which was an excellent start. A general appeal was then sent out, particularly to many of the old friends of the church who had over the years moved away. Glad that something was being done for the old chapel they contributed generously and soon the fund reached £1600.

The plan was to close the chapel on 1st May and use Hulme Town Hall for six Sundays while the work was done. What was needed was quite extensive; general repair of the outside, repainting inside, cleaning all the pews and woodwork, and replacing the gas by electric light. This last was quite an innovation in 1898. They weren't finished there, because further work was required on the schools including repapering some of the classrooms. Last, but not least, they decided that the organ should be replaced. It was soon found that more money would be needed, but a decision was taken to do the work properly and trust that the extra would be forthcoming. The confidence wasn't misplaced as over £1900[9] was finally given, and a thorough job was done.

On 19th June the reopening services were held and everyone came to look with huge attendances at the services. In the evening nearly every gallery, side aisle and nook and cranny was filled with something like 1800 people. Charles Leach, fortunately used to preaching to large numbers, was not intimidated. The general opinion was that it was a great improvement and the chapel was particularly spectacular lit up at night. The only thing that hadn't been completed was the installation of the new organ, but

this didn't spoil the celebrations which went on for over a week, culminating in the inevitable tea meeting. Only then could the pastor draw breath.

There was also time for another quiet celebration in the family as Charles Shave, having finally finished his training, became ordained at Barry Congregational Church in South Wales. It was gratifying to Charles Leach that one of the young men he had encouraged had made the grade, but for Elizabeth it was more significant. Now it was only a matter of allowing some time for him to become settled and they could name the day. She had waited patiently, effectively serving an apprenticeship at Cavendish, preparing herself to be a pastor's wife. Now she could see some light at the end of the tunnel.

Another event that year which brought it closer was the passing by Parliament of the Marriage Act of 1898. This allowed Nonconformist ministers to be licensed to perform marriages in their chapels without the Registrar needing to be present. Early in the New Year the church applied for just such a licence for Rev Charles Leach. Always looking to increase the involvement of people with the church they straight away were advertising that marriage could be solemnized in the chapel. The charge was 10/- including pastor's fee, caretaker's fee, and certificate.[10] Though not large, this was yet another source of income for the pastor.

The church were extremely happy with their minister, who had largely achieved their hopes when he was appointed, including financial stability. As a result they raised his stipend to a minimum of £650 a year.[11] There were arrangements that beyond this sum further money was paid into a general fund up to £50. Once they had reached that amount, any extra was his. This could only be described as a 'payment by results' incentive. He had now risen from a worsted spinner bringing home a few shillings a week, to being in the top few percent of earners in the country.[12]

One of Charles Leach's plans for 1899 had been to take up the invitation to attend the Congregational Council being held in Boston, USA during the autumn. The church had granted him the 12 weeks leave that would be required. However, it wasn't to happen because not far into the year things started to go wrong. The constant preaching and lecturing in large halls, in those days with no possible source of amplification, produced a terrible strain on the voice. It certainly wasn't helped by the poor smoky atmosphere present in central Manchester. In March he was forced to write to his deacons saying that his voice had failed and that the medical men had said he mustn't preach again for three months.[13] One had even suggested this should be twelve months. He was very sorry about the effect of the church and even offered to resign. The deacons wouldn't hear of it, and immediately granted him the time he would have taken later in the year.

Never one to miss an opportunity, he booked himself on to a 50 day Mediterranean cruise. The ship called at Gibraltar, Tunis, Malta, Alexandria, Jaffa, and Beyrout, giving time to visit Cairo and Palestine. The boat left on 10th April, but progress was not as swift as had been expected, 'owing to alterations in the movements of the steamer on account of the plague'[14] and he only returned well into June, finally taking up the pulpit again on the 18th. The good news was that his voice had pretty well recovered, and that he felt in excellent health.

It wasn't to last and before the end of the year he was suffering again, but just remained at home. Far from just sitting there he was sending notes to the chapel trying to keep things moving. He had found a new helper to write the letters for him; Mabel. Now seventeen, she was the robust one of the family. She had the family jaw in an even more pronounced manner than her sisters, and it gave her a rather pugnacious look. She was shaping up nicely to be her father's helpmate. Fresh for 1900 she joined

her eldest sister as a teacher in the Sunday school. She was also there to assist when her mother and the wives of the deacons were organising the chapel tea meeting in January. Perhaps she felt that she should try to take over some of the roles now that Elizabeth would soon be leaving them.

The family were gearing up for the wedding that was to take place on 17th April. With her involvement in the life of the chapel it was to be expected that Elizabeth would receive some presents, but they were quite generous; a case of cutlery from the deacons and their wives, and a fully equipped sewing box from the women's meeting. The latter had an engraved plate expressing their good wishes. In the three years that the family had been in Manchester she had become very involved, and they were sorry to see her go, but it had all been good experience for her future.

With the licence to hold marriages already in his hand Charles Leach was ready, and delighted, that he was able to perform the ceremony himself. Charles Shave had his old friend Alfred Anderson by his side, while Dora acted as her sister's bridesmaid. It was these two that signed the register witnessing the marriage.[15] It had been a long wait for Elizabeth, but here she was at the age of 32, a married woman, and a minister's wife. It was a role to which she was ideally suited, both through experience and inclination. Off they went to Barry, leaving a hole in the life of the family in York Place. Now there were only two daughters left at home.

Barely had they had the send off than Charles Leach was in the thick of a new scheme to set up a Forward Movement based at the chapel. The object was to employ a deaconess and other agents to go house to house around the whole neighbourhood 'to promote the Moral and Religious welfare of the people'[16]. Sister Edith Hancock was employed at the princely sum of £52 a year. It was all part of raising the profile of the chapel in the neighbourhood and attracting as many people as possible to the Christian faith.

Come the autumn it was time for the Congregational Union, this year being held in Newcastle. A keynote speech was given by Rev Andrew Mearns on 'The problem of Congregational churches in large towns', or as one commentator put it 'an address which might equally have been delivered under the title 'Empty churches and how to fill them."[17] Who was there better to talk on the subject than the Rev Charles Leach 'who urged that the people of the neighbourhood must be made to feel that they wanted to come. All class distinctions must be removed within the chapels. Outside in daily life this was not yet all on one level, but once they entered what they were pleased to call God's house all social distinctions must be left behind. They must make the services so as the people could share in.'[18]

It might seem extraordinary now that he should need to say such things, but at the time his egalitarianism stood out in a class ridden society. Not only did he feel that what he was doing was morally right, but it also worked in bringing people into the chapel. Some of his contemporaries might not agree with him, but they had to listen as he had built a reputation for just this sort of thing; and proved that it worked.

16

Return to Politics

Charles Leach hadn't even preached his first sermon at Cavendish Street before he was attending a meeting of the local Liberal association. After the ILP affair, a few years before, he had seemed inhibited from political involvement. With the move to Manchester that restraint was removed and he threw himself into a mass of activities outside the chapel. Maybe it hadn't just been a reluctance to be too involved in politics, because now there were many other organisations as well. Was this because he needed distractions to try to forget about Ada, or was it that the move had given him a new lease of life?

Whatever the reason he was attending Liberal meetings every few weeks. It was noticeable that Mary Jane, though now heavily involved with the church, kept away from the political functions, even social ones when many of the wives attended. Perhaps she felt that as a woman it was no concern of hers. Without the vote many women thought this way, though that was beginning to change.

For him, becoming involved with all these organisations was a way of trying to better the lot of his fellow man; essentially a Christian viewpoint. Many on the left had begun by thinking that the problems of the world could be cured by converting sinful men and women, but then concluded that it was society itself that must be changed. He, however, always believed that men and women should be brought to Christ, but, at the same time, there were some things that could only be remedied by concerted action. Some of the pressure groups to which he belonged sought to alter people's opinions and behaviour and were thus an extension of his work within the church, while others were trying to change the course of government. It was natural then to be involved with a party to try to ensure that 'good' people were elected to positions where they could influence matters for the better.

He felt more comfortable back with the Liberals, partly because they had adopted much of the ILP programme, but also the spectrum of people included many with views not dissimilar to his own. It was not so much that the party was putting forward a programme that he subscribed to, but that it was against the Tories who seemed to be merely trying to help their own interest groups of landowners and the Anglican Church. This appeared to be the objective of the Government's Education Bill, which was supposed to deal with the financial problems of many of the voluntary (usually church) schools. Instead of bringing them within the School Board system, the proposal was to support them directly with government money. Most Liberals, and particularly the Nonconformists, were keen to see an education system for everyone, and especially one that was free of church influence. Charles Leach, of course, added his voice to those demonstrating against the Education Bill.[1] In the end it didn't make it to the statute book, which had more to do with the machinations of parliament than any action outside.

At the time the chairman of the Manchester Liberal Union was CP Scott MP, who was also the editor and owner of the Manchester Guardian. By appearing on platforms with him,[2] Charles Leach came to his notice, and hence of the newspaper which took a keen interest in his activities for the next few years. This was convenient for them as he usually generated something of interest, but it also raised his profile, which had useful knock-on effects in the chapel.

The concerns didn't just run to domestic politics, but also to events happening abroad. An example was the Cretan crisis. The Greeks had been foolish enough to challenge the decaying Turkish Ottoman Empire, attempting to annex Crete, and got into considerable trouble as a result. Contrary to the policy of the government, the sympathies of most Liberals were with those they felt were trying to escape from the yoke of the Ottomans, and so naturally sided with Crete and Greece. Charles Leach wrote 'This is the time for every man to speak out who loves justice and freedom. To see England – freedom-loving England – forming part of a Concert whose main object seems to be repression of the efforts of the Cretans to throw off the galling yoke of the Turk is a sorry sight indeed. I can only hope that swift justice may overtake those who have let loose the Turkish dogs of war.'[3]

In the end the Great Powers rescued Greece and a high commissioner was put in to govern Crete. Perhaps the protests had influenced the government. There was also a philanthropic aspect to this when the ladies of the church, led by Mary Jane, formed a committee to receive 'help for the Cretan and Grecian sufferers in their distress.'[4] The attitude in the chapel towards the Turks certainly wasn't improved, when a little later Mr Behesnilian came to talk to them about the violence encountered by Christian Armenians to persuade them to convert to Islam.[5]

Charles Leach around the time of the move to Manchester

Then there was the temperance, or rather total abstinence, movement. He had not been so active in these circles as earlier in his career, but now he was trying to make up for that. He spoke at the Congregational Total Abstinence Association,[6] as well as Band of Hope and Women's Christian Temperance functions. A particular target was the sale of Liquor to Children. He set up a meeting at Cavendish Street to protest at the 1,764 outlets in Manchester that sold 'intoxicating liquors' to children under thirteen.[7] This was a target that was likely to receive more general support.

After the Royal Commission on licensing reported at the end of 1899 that they considered that there were too many public houses in towns, the temperance movement thought they were beginning to get somewhere. A large meeting was called in Manchester and it seemed that there was a wide degree of support for the minority report presented by Lord Peel.[8] This suggested one liquor shop for every 750 people. Charles Leach, ever the realist, soon calculated that these would need the closure of

three quarters of the outlets in Manchester,[9] and the proposed resulting level of compensation would amount to a million pounds. While he didn't want to pour cold water on a proposal which might lead to some progress in this area, he could see that it wasn't really practical. However it might be a step on the way towards a more drastic arrangement to tackle the problems of drink.

He even found time for local politics as well. It seemed that there had been some problems with the police – scandals according to the papers. They were attacking the members of the Watch committee that they felt were responsible and considering what line to take in the forthcoming elections. A Citizens' Indignation committee was set up. Serving on it with Charles Leach was Dr Pankhurst, whose wife and daughters were to spring to prominence in the Women's Suffrage movement a few years later.

In 1898 the Americans sent the warship the USS Maine to Cuba ostensibly to protect its citizens during the growing armed uprising against the Spanish authorities. The Cubans had, for some years, been seeking independence, but now the situation was becoming critical. A tough Spanish general, Valeriano Weyler, who had been sent to gain control of the situation, started using 'reconcentration camps' to separate the population from the rebels; a sign of things to come. When the Maine mysteriously exploded and sank, killing 266 men, it was not long before the United States and Spain were at war.

There was no doubt where Charles Leach would stand on an issue like this. He was on the side of the underdog and the people of Cuba trying to obtain their freedom. He was against Great Powers of Europe attempting to hold territory which was not theirs. He was also against war, and so the situation presented some dilemmas for him. He resolved these in the resolution he proposed to the Congregational Union May meeting expressing regret 'at the outbreak of war between America and Spain, and … sympathy with the United States in their efforts to terminate Spanish injustice and cruelty in Cuba.'[10] The upshot was that Spain was beaten in many of her colonies which were largely taken over by the Americans, though they did grant the Cubans their independence in 1902.

It was the number of bodies with which Charles Leach became involved that was so surprising. They ranged from those trying to help individuals to the overtly political, seeking equality for Nonconformists. The Manchester and Salford Sailors' and Boatmen's Mission had a home where seamen could stay when ashore, but it also aimed to bring Christianity to the men. With the ship canal bringing large ships inland this now a real concern. It was an odd area to interest for him, but he had done so right back to his Birmingham days. He also arranged for the chapel to have a collection for their funds.

He was also a member of the Manchester and District Assoc for the abolition of the state regulation of vice.[11] This was a pressure group still fighting an old battle, but one that they felt had not been won. It seemed that the government was reverting to a state of affairs they thought they had overcome. As ever, the arguments revolved around the Army and venereal disease, and whether state regulated brothels were the way to control the situation. Despite sending resolutions to Members of Parliament, they didn't seem to be making much progress.

It was natural that he should be elected a vice president of the Lancashire Federation of Pleasant Sunday Afternoon societies.[12] His Sunday Afternoon lectures in Birmingham were well known and had been one of the inspirations of the movement and so they were delighted to have him involved. The PSA had spiralled outwards from the original concept and now ran classes and entertainments in a wide range of areas.

Thrift had always been one of his objectives. He felt quite sure that if people could put a little on one side this would save immense amounts of suffering in times of difficulty. He had been instrumental in setting up the Provident clubs at the chapel, but he also supported the Penny Savings Bank Assoc of Manchester and Salford.[13]

As a churchman he could be expected to be against trading on Sundays, but he and his fellow ministers could not resist passing a motion to congratulate the Salford Butcher's association who were trying to suppress Sunday trading and to pressure the Watch committee 'to use every effort to secure quiet for the citizens of Manchester on the Day of Rest.'[14]

He had always been a strong supporter of the Liberation Society, or to give it is full title, the Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control. He joined the local North Eastern counties district of the society.[15] This was an overtly political organisation of mostly Nonconformists who were seeking, amongst other things, the disestablishment of the Church of England. They thought that if this could be achieved then it would put all the churches on an equal footing. They also believed that it would free the Anglican Church to rejuvenate itself.

It was thus no surprise to find him on the Executive of the Northern Counties Education League. It had always been one of his long term objectives to have religious equality in education, and hence to have a universal system, which, of course, meant removing the Church influence. This was now not just a concern of the Anglicans, but also the Catholics who were insisting on retaining control of their schools despite them receiving public money. It seemed to the League all wrong that state money should be given where the public did not have control.

There were also problems obtaining free education. The School Board had refused to support 140 scholars at Holland Street, one of their schools, and would only do so if they went to a church school.[16] This was just the sort of issue that exercised the League. After the government's attempt to introduce an Act giving more support to the church schools, they felt that the tide was running against them and they must fight it at every turn.

The other side of this was to try to get more Liberals elected both in the Municipal elections and to the School Board. As most of them were also Nonconformists, they could usually be depended on to support these causes. As if he hadn't enough to do, he returned to speaking for Liberal candidates on public platforms. All through the autumn of 1898 he was busy with supporting one or another, with the local elections looming. The following year he was supporting FW Maxwell in St George's Ward for the City Council. This he was particularly pleased to do as Maxwell supported the ILP programme of 1893 which had now been adopted by the Liberal Union.[17]

In 1900 it was time for him to have another attempt himself to be elected to a School Board. He joined a group called the United Education candidates. They were supporters of teaching non-denominational religion in the Board schools, and trying to run as good a system as possible. It was felt that some of the Board members had tended to favour the Church schools and hence not try to obtain the highest standards in the Board ones. Most of his colleagues were elected, including two women, one of whom was Emmeline Pankhurst, the suffragette. However, he was not, coming next to bottom of the poll. It was a disappointment, but it was not as though he didn't already have enough to do.

Of course, in the background, he was still involved as a director in the Abstainers and General Insurance Company. Though the lecturing work that he had undertaken for it in the early years had largely died away as it became more established and prosperous, he still needed to attend the directors' and the annual general meeting,[18] It

was gratifying to find that the thesis, on which the company had been formed, that abstainers were a better risk, was actually found in reality. It provided a useful boost for the abstainers at a time when the tide seemed to be running against them.

For some time trouble had been brewing in South Africa, but what had brought it to a head was the discovery of large deposits of gold. These were in the Transvaal, one of the Boer, farmer's, republics. There was an influx of people, mostly British, to work the mines, bringing strains in and around Johannesburg. The Boers, fearing loss of control, would not enfranchise these 'Uitlanders'. This was the ostensible reason for the British Government's involvement, but driven by Joseph Chamberlain who was Colonial Secretary, they were keen to bring the mineral wealth within the orbit of the British Empire.

By September 1899 both sides were giving ultimatums and war seemed inevitable. Charles Leach was among the first to publicly protest at meetings during the month. He had no difficulties this time. He was against war, against Britain trying to take over things which weren't theirs, and against Chamberlain, who had never been forgiven for splitting the party in 1885. Once the fighting started it was clear that he was in a minority in opposition, but that did not deter him or the other pacifists.

In January, a retired Methodist minister and novelist, Silas Hocking, called a meeting of friends of peace in Exeter hall in the Strand in London. Around 350 people were present with others being turned away. They passed three resolutions; the first condemned the war 'as a scandal to Christendom and a disgrace to civilisation which it was the duty of all Christians to endeavour to stop.'[19] The second was highly critical of Joseph Chamberlain who they felt brought about the war. The third was to set up a committee to try to implement the other resolutions 'by means of the Press, the pulpit, and the platform, and by appealing to constituencies at by-elections.'[20] The committee of over thirty, including two women, contained some interesting names. Together with Rev Dr Leach, were ten other men of the cloth including Revs, Dr Clifford and Sylvester Horne, friends from his London days. The press was represented by WT Stead of the Pall Mall Gazette, and HW Massingham who had been the editor of the Daily Chronicle but had resigned over his opposition to the war and had joined CP Scott's Manchester Guardian. Also notable was the Member of Parliament David Lloyd George. Though it was pacifism that united them, they were also all people with a radical view of politics.

Though the war went badly at first with the Boers taking advantage of their ability to rapidly deploy, and the lack of organisation of the British forces, in the end numbers were going to tell. As 1899 became 1900 the tide started to turn and the Boers were defeated a number to times and the sieges of the towns were being lifted one by one. On the 18th May Mafeking was finally relieved, turning Baden Powell into a hero, and causing great celebrations at home.

This was a bad moment for an opposition party to be fighting a by-election. John Campbell, Marquis of Lorne had had to give up his South Manchester seat when he succeeded on the death of his father, the Duke of Argyll. The Liberal candidate was Liefchild Stratten Lief-Jones, for simplicity commonly known as Lief Jones. Charles Leach had no problems signing the papers supporting the candidacy,[21] and speaking for someone who had been involved in attempts to prevent the war. Manchester was not good territory for the Liberals at the best of times, but now Lief Jones was easily beaten by William Peel, the Liberal Unionist allied to the Tory Government, who was a grandson of Sir Robert Peel.

By September British forces under Field Marshall Lord Roberts had captured the capitals of the two Boer republics, Bloemfontein and Pretoria, and declared the war

over. The Government realised that this was a good time to hold a general election, before the euphoria died down. The result was the 'Khaki' election where the government, as would be expected, won by a substantial margin. In South Manchester Lief Jones didn't stand again and the candidate, leading local Liberal Edwyn Holt was defeated, but by a smaller margin this time. However, the war was not over, the Boers turned to guerrilla tactics and things became very nasty. It had been a false dawn.

17

Dora

1901 was more than numerically the beginning of a new century, particularly when the old Queen died on 22nd January. With the accession of Edward VII change was in the air. Though he had a poor reputation as the Prince of Wales, it soon became clear that he took Kingship seriously, and the political classes breathed a sigh of relief. The Boer war, in its guerrilla phase, showed little sign of resolution, though the horrors of the 'concentration' camps had yet to come to light.

In Barry, Elizabeth had not been happy. Perhaps it was the place, or just that she wanted to be closer to her mother when she had her first child at the age of thirty-three. To accommodate her, Charles Shave managed to find another position as pastor of Providence Place chapel in Cleckheaton, Yorkshire, starting in the winter of 1901. She was returning quite close to where she had been born, and not too far from her parents, across the Pennines in Manchester. It was in Cleckheaton on 6th March that her first child, a son, arrived. They called him Eric because they liked the name, Charles after his father, and Leach to include his mother's maiden name. Thus embedded within his series of names was that of his grandfather.

Charles and Elizabeth Shave with baby Eric

It was a proud moment for the Leaches who had begun to think that, despite having six children, grandchildren were going to be denied to them. Charles Leach had no time to dwell on it as he was off on another trip to Egypt and the Holy Land. He had developed a fascination for the area and it was also a way of having a proper rest. As he became older he was finding the pastorate, and all the other interests, quite a strain, particularly on his voice. Mary Jane had not liked to go with him not knowing the precise timing of the intended arrival.

Though Charles Shave had now been at Providence Place for a couple of months, he had not had his service of recognition. It hadn't been appropriate earlier with the impending birth, and then when you had a prominent preacher as a father-in-law you wanted him to come and speak. It was nearly the end of April before Charles Leach returned and so the service didn't take place until 9th May. As well as Elizabeth's father he had the principal of his old college; so it was quite a celebration, despite the delay.

After the birth, Mary Jane went on holiday, taking the two remaining daughters with her. They chose to board with Richard and Mary Jones in a small village called Llanddulas along the North Wales coast not far from Colwyn Bay.[1] It was a good place to have a curative break with fresh sea air, not so much for her own health, but that of Dora. The Easter holiday provided just the opportunity to get her away from her teaching duties, which might restore her. With the past history, Mary Jane was concerned about her.

Dora had been a delightful child, always rather small for her age, but otherwise robust enough. As she grew up, she became rather ordinary, and had taken to school teaching just like Ada. She had not wanted to sit at home hoping that some man would carry her off. Not as pious as her sisters, the teaching gave her the excuse to avoid being involved in the life of the chapel, though she would attend the Sunday services, as the dutiful daughter of the pastor.

However, Dora's health was causing the family concern. Dr Charles Holmes had his practice in Oxford Road, and worked at the dispensary almost next to the chapel. In addition he was the retained panel doctor for the church's Medical Provident club. All in all, he was the man to consult. They knew the signs and so it was no real surprise when he confirmed their fears. She too had tuberculosis, phthisis as the doctors called it. It is not surprising that, like her sister, close proximity to children had brought her into contact. The death rate from the disease, though falling, was still well over one death per thousand of the population.[2] In addition many people were carriers, though they themselves didn't succumb.

Of more interest was the prognosis. One of the most important factors was the family history. While the doctors now realised that TB was not inherited, it was still considered that what was passed on was the degree of tissue resistance to attack by the germs. As one wrote: 'Indeed, where the family history points to the presence of an acute and rapidly fatal type of phthisis in more than one member, there is more than usual likelihood of a seriously impaired resistance; in too many cases which have come under my own observation the disease in these circumstances has shown a tendency to be acute and run a rapid course.'[3] With Ada and her grandmother both dying of the disease, it didn't look good.

While Ada had conformed to the phthisical type with her narrow chest and slender bones, Dora was less obviously of this mould. This gave some hope that she might be more resistant. The worst age was as an adolescent between the ages of 15 and 21. She was now beyond that range, so maybe this gave her more chances of survival. A great consideration was that the disease was made worse by poor air quality and dusty environments. It was becoming apparent, that despite living on the edge of it, the atmosphere in Manchester was having a bad effect on all of them.

Dora Leach

The standard treatment for TB was for the patient to go to a sanatorium which would be sited in an area thought to have healthy air and to spend as much time out of doors as possible. Manchester's Hospital for Consumption was in Bowden in Cheshire to the south west of the city, and one possibility was for her to go there, but Mary Jane wanted to keep her at home so that she could look after her. The compromise was for the whole family to move out of the city to Altrincham, only a mile from the sanatorium. They went to Ellesmere Road, on the edge of the small town, virtually a country lane with only a couple of houses in it. They settled in Kingswood Lodge, where Dora could get the benefit of the fresh air and spend as much time as possible in the open. This they thought would give her the best chance possible. She could be fed a good diet and milk, carefully sterilised, just as the doctor ordered.

For Charles Leach it didn't seem too inconvenient. The station wasn't far, and he could take a train into the city where the Oxford Road station was a manageable distance from the chapel. There was also the benefit that he was spending more of his time in a place that was claimed to be in a very healthy situation.[4] Though it was less convenient for him, it was well worth it to keep the family together and do the best they could for Dora, and give her a chance of recovering.

He was trying to keep up his usual hectic round of meetings, but by November the strain was beginning to tell. He wrote to the deacons of the chapel on 26th November pointing out that he had now been with them five years and that he had said, when he arrived, that he hoped to be able to retire after that time. While he hadn't accomplished all that he had set out to do, he had been there longer than the average of the five ministers before him. He thus offered his resignation if they thought that was in the best interests of the church.[5] The deacons didn't take this seriously, and immediately resolved 'That in the unanimous opinion of this vestry the time has not come for his severance with Cavendish.'[6] There was nothing to do, but to carry on.

In addition to the church work, it was the usual round; the setting up of a Provident Clothing club at the chapel, a meeting of the Liberation society, which was concerned about the impending Education Bill, another of the Free church council two days later, and then the arrangement for an upcoming temperance mission. Despite the difficulties of keeping his mind on his work as Dora slowly declined at home, the annual meeting of the chapel in January was regarded as the best held for many years.[7]

The church secretary, Mr Wharton, stated that the church and its auxiliaries bring to the premises each week about 3000 people, and that around 250 offices are held by various workers. Charles Leach had much to be proud of, but it was difficult to enter into the spirit of it.

It had become apparent that, despite putting up a greater fight than Ada, Dora was steadily losing ground. In the early hours of Tuesday 18th February 1902, she finally gave up the struggle after nearly a year. She was 24; just like her sister before her. Dr Holmes came out to Altrincham and signed the paperwork; it was somewhat of a failure for him as well. The news soon spread to the chapel and an impromptu deacons meeting agreed to send a 'message of loving sympathy to her sorrowing parents'.[8] They cancelled their normal meeting for February and decided to send a wreath to the funeral.

There was no question as to where she should be buried, and this time it was a rather shorter and simpler journey across the Pennines to Elland. On the Saturday it was once again time to climb the hill to Bethesda and place her with her brothers and sister in the family grave in the back corner of the little graveyard behind the chapel. It was time to have a large slab of a gravestone recording the names of all four of them under the text: 'He giveth his beloved sleep'. Was it premonition or merely prudence that led them to leave plenty of space under the names so that more could be added?

Once again it was time to try any pick up normal life, but with each succeeding death it got harder. He could go back to the routine of the chapel, but for Mary Jane she was now left at home with only one daughter, Mabel, to comfort her. In a little over five years they had lost two adult daughters to consumption, and though Elizabeth was very much alive, in the aftermath, her absence was keenly felt.

Charles Leach soon returned to something that passed for normality. On 23rd March he was preaching in the chapel in the morning and was pleased to mention that the new King, Edward VII, was planning to feed half a million of the poor in London in the week after his coronation. While accepting that this was a good thing, he was curious to know why it was only for the poor of London, the richest city in the world. He also wanted to know how 'he expected to find 500,000 people poor enough to qualify for his charity dinner. If he got to know how many of them were the victims of vicious economic conditions he hoped that he would tell Parliament to turn its serious attention to the question of the condition of the people of England. And if he discovered how many of them are poor as the result of liquor, he imagined he would tell the House of Commons and the House of Lords to pass the Home Secretary's Temperance Reform Bill now before Parliament, adding to it the entire closing of all liquor places on Sundays.'[9]

As ever his concern was for his fellow man, particularly those who through no fault of their own, were suffering from the economic conditions. He was unusual in this. So many people who have climbed up out of poverty themselves think that others can do likewise, and all that they need to do is to work hard. He always understood the realities of life; he wanted society to evolve so that wealth was more equitably spread, and everyone could lead a decent life. Now this is not seen as unusual, but then it was a Radical view. However, he was probably wrong about the extent of the poverty due to drink. There was a problem, but the statistics now suggest that it was not quite as great as the temperance movement believed.

It was not long before they decided that Altrincham was too inconvenient, and it probably reminded them too much of the recent loss. They returned to Manchester, but not back to York Place. A little closer to the chapel, on the other side of Oxford Road was Cecil Street which ran both ways from Denmark Street. The north side was in

Greenheys and there number 65 was amongst a group of the houses which, unlike the rest, had long back gardens running right to Acombe Street, from where was a view out over the park. It was neither as large nor smart as York Place, but then there were only the three of them plus a maid, unlike the five who had moved to Manchester.

One of the ways he came to terms with the bereavement was to write another book. The title, *Shall we know our friends in Heaven?* showed the way his mind was working. The question harped back to the one raised by Ada before she died, and though it was reasonable to mention those circumstances, it is curious that there is no reference to the recent loss at all. It must have been a considerable consolation to completely believe in the existence of Heaven and be quite sure that was where his children had gone. They had travelled beyond suffering and to a better place. One therefore had to feel glad for them, and that reduced the feeling of loss.

This slim book examines pieces of scripture, showing that memory still exists in Heaven. There are numerous examples where historical figures are recognised, and so it is only as small step to be confident that we would recognise our friends. He wrote it as much to comfort himself as for others. As the publisher said, on one of the many reprints, it had been of very great help to many thousands of readers. Charles Leach concluded by saying: 'My own faith in recognition in Heaven is greatly strengthened when I find that vast multitudes of other people hold the same Scriptural truth. I hope that what I have said in this little book has helped to confirm and strengthen your faith also. If so I shall be glad.'[10]

Mary Jane had shut herself away to look after Dora and he was keen to get her out into the world again. While he would ask other pastors to help him in his church he was quite prepared to return the favour, and in April he was attending the bazaar at the nearby Ancoats Congregational church where they were trying to raise £300 for urgently needed repairs.[11] Unusually, he took his wife with him. Though she did not attend many of these sorts of events, it helped to ease her return into society, and soon she was back serving on committees representing the church.

At last at the beginning of June there was news for everyone to rejoice. He was pleased to be able to read the official telegram declaring that the Boer war was finally at an end.[12] It had been a running sore with many people disagreeing about the origin and conduct of the fighting, but now they could all be happy together that was over. He then had his large congregation sing the Doxology, 'Praise be to God from whom all blessings flow'. To him it was a considerable relief, but his thoughts turned to people who were mourning those whose bodies rested in nameless graves on the veld.

Soon there was more good news. His visits to the Middle East had borne fruit and he received an invitation for Thomas Cook and Son, the travel company, to accompany a party to Egypt and Palestine and deliver lectures at several points of interest on the journey.[13] They were to leave on 17 March and not return until 23 April. The timing was carefully arranged so that they could be in Jerusalem for Easter.

Amongst those in the party, were a number of ministers, including none other than his son-in-law Charles Shave, who kept a diary of the tour in the form of letters sent back to the Cleckheaton Guardian.[14] They travelled through France to Marseilles to meet the boat. This stopped in Naples before heading for Greece, where they continued to Athens by train to see the Acropolis. Here they found that their biblical ancient Greek was not much use to order tea in the modern country.

They journeyed on to Constantinople, and to impressions of the 'unspeakable Turk'. On the way Charles Shave was asked, by one of the younger men, if he could point out the Bosphorus. This he did but was corrected by the man pointing to Dr Leach and saying 'here is the boss for us'. Being a peaceable minister he didn't administer the

punishment the joker deserved. After a stop in Beyrout, they arrived in the Holy Land. Some of the party went to visit various Biblical sites, but this required travelling on horseback and camping. Dr Leach left it to his son-in-law to accompany them.

The party reassembled in Jerusalem for Easter and then continued to Egypt before returning home. Despite the problems along the way, Charles Leach had developed a taste for this sort of thing. Charles Shave was also bowled over by the experience and this brought a desire to return. It was certainly a good way to take a break from the cares of the pastorate, and despite the difficulties at times, it was relatively restful.

18

Passive resistance

In 1901 came one of those contentious legal rulings which, in the Edwardian period, caused great upheavals because they changed the law as it was commonly understood. The Cockerton Judgement declared that instruction in science and fine art could not be described as 'elementary education' which was the only legitimate area of activity on which School Boards were allowed to spend public money. Unless the law was changed, the secondary schooling, into which all over the country they had been quietly but steadily expanding, would have to be abandoned.

This was the excuse for which Arthur Balfour, the nephew of Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, had been waiting. After the failure of the Education Bill in 1897 there was still the funding crisis in the Anglican schools, and the government was seeking a solution. The principle of the new Bill was to do away with all the thousands of School Boards and put education in the hands of the much smaller number of local authorities. They would be empowered to fund secondary education as well as primary.

The further difficulty was that there was no government money available as the Boer war was soaking up what was available, so there was no alternative to raising the additional money from the local rates. The quandary was whether they should force the local authorities to support the denomination schools, so that they didn't disappear due to lack of funds. This was bound to cause trouble and the Bill as first submitted to Parliament had a clause allowing the local authorities to opt out. While seeming clever in the House this would have been an administrative nightmare, and in any case it was removed during the Bill's passage.

Joseph Chamberlain, who had been absent at the critical moment due to a cab accident, was appalled. He knew that his Liberal Unionist supporters, mainly Nonconformists, would see the Bill for what it was, partisan in favour of the Anglicans. They would view it as paying for sectarian education as part of their local council rates. There was nothing he could do, as he was largely responsible for the war which had absorbed the available government money. He felt that it was going to destroy Liberal Unionism.

In July 1902 Lord Salisbury suddenly resigned and Balfour became Prime Minister, but he was even more reluctant to listen to Chamberlain's pleas for concessions to the Nonconformists. He was convinced that reform was essential, and most agreed with that, but it was the manner of it that caused the problems. With his Victorian patrician attitudes he saw no reason why the government should not blatantly legislate in favour of its supporters, in this case the Anglicans. The idea that the Church schools should be merged into a unified non-denominational state education system was something he couldn't accept, particularly after strong representations by the bishops.

The Nonconformists were furious and started protesting even before the Act was passed. At the end of September a large meeting in Manchester was organised by the local Free Church Federation, and of course, Charles Leach was present. The Chairman, Rev Dr McLaren made their position clear that though there were good aspects, 'we oppose this bill because it gives public money and does not secure public control – we oppose this bill because it endows the teaching of sectarian creeds; we oppose this bill because it re-establishes religious tests.'[1]

A meeting at Cavendish Street to consider the situation passed the resolution: 'That this Church and Congregation protests against the Education Bill now before the House of Commons on the ground that it is an outrage on the conscience of freechurchmen, by requiring them to support schools maintained for sectarian and clerical purposes from which Nonconformist teachers may be excluded. Further this church and congregation pledges itself that in the event of the Bill becoming law every effort will be made to render it unworkable.'[2] A copy was to be sent to Rt. Hon Arthur Balfour, and it probably wasn't the only one he received. He couldn't say he hadn't been warned, but he wasn't taking any notice.

Finally in December the Bill became the Education act of 1902. It established two sorts of school, Provided, and Non-Provided. The former were the previous Board schools, while the latter were the voluntary - mostly those owned by the Church. At face value it appeared innocuous, and many Churchmen could not understand what the fuss was about. The devil was in the detail, and particularly the way managers were appointed for Non-Provided schools. Usually this left control, and specifically that of religious instruction, in the hands of the Church. While in theory assistant teachers could be appointed without reference to their creed, heads were subject to the trust deeds of the school which normally defined their religious denomination. The reference in the Act to the bishop being the arbiter in the case of disputes was a giveaway as to its biased nature.

Undoubtedly, the most contentious point was the use of money from the local rates to support these Non-Provided Schools. Though the other issues were of concern to many, and significant numbers thought that the opportunity to create an efficient national education system had been squandered, it was the rates issue that really stuck in Nonconformist throats. There was this sense that the government, and Balfour in particular, had either just let the bishops have their way, or were unconcerned with the effect of the Act. They seemed unaware that with the coming of the twentieth century the world had changed, and what had been acceptable in Victorian times was no longer so. The Nonconformists were going to fight the Act all the way, and Passive resistance Leagues sprang up all over the country.

The leading light in the National Committee was Dr John Clifford, and old associate of Charles Leach's, who was the Baptist minister of Westbourne park chapel just along the Harrow Road from Queen's Park. There were similarities in their backgrounds as Clifford too had had little education and worked as a boy in a lace factory, but had educated himself rising to a bookkeeper by sixteen. He had gone to the Baptist College and become a minister, eventually becoming one of the leaders of that church. He too was a strong social reformer and they were involved in many of the same causes from temperance to opposition to war, and support of the Liberal party.

In January of 1903 Dr Clifford and Prime Minister Balfour were trading blows in the press. In Manchester a large meeting was held in the Central Hall to form a Manchester and District Passive Resistance League for Securing Justice in the Management of the People's Schools. The chosen tactic was to refuse to pay the proportion of the local rate that they judged was used for private and sectarian schools. A committee was formed and the Rev Dr Leach was elected president.[3]

For a while the activity was mostly in huge demonstrations, speeches and letters to the papers. There was no way the government could now say that it was merely the concern of the few. However, while the opposition to the Act was large, not everyone agreed about the tactics, and it was only the 'hard liners' that went for the passive resistance. Some thought that the correct way was, as Balfour said, to change it in Parliament, but he knew perfectly well that this would be very difficult. Even should

the Liberals have a majority in the House of Commons, it was unlikely to be able to get amending legislation through the House of Lords, with its inbuilt Tory majority, as leading Liberal Sir William Harcourt pointed out. The argument was degenerating into one about the tyranny of majorities over minorities, though whether this referred to Nonconformists, or only their position in Parliament, is not clear.

Then came the first cases of people refusing to pay a proportion of their rates. The authorities responded by sending police to seize some goods from the offenders. These were then taken to auctions and sold to pay the debt. The passive resisters would turn up in force and buy back the property of their colleagues, and there the matter would rest. However many of the sales were disrupted and sympathetic auctioneers, when they understood what was happening, refused to conduct further ones. It was more a matter of making life difficult for the authorities, than outright civil disobedience.

Charles Leach was interviewed by the Manchester Guardian to find his views on the subject. He mentioned that the reporter was sat in an easy chair 'that was going to be taken and sold for the rate which I refuse to pay.'[4] He therefore considered that what he was doing was not illegal and he wouldn't he disenfranchised for the act. Asked what he wanted, he desired the removal of the religious tests from teachers, which, having had daughters in the profession, was something close to his heart. While he regretted the damage that the Act had done to relations between the Free Churches and the Anglicans, his longer term view was that the Act must be repealed. As a result, he felt that Freechurchmen should be standing for local and Parliamentary elections. While he was still barred from the former as a Minister of Religion, maybe it set his mind thinking about the latter.

He stated his more general views as: 'My hope lies with the great mass of the English people. I trust we may soon see the people demanding a) that before the law all men shall be equal, b) that no man shall suffer any civil disability because of his religious belief or no religious belief, c) that no man shall be made to pay for the support of schools in which children are taught to despise the religion of their fathers, and d) that every church in the land shall be supported and governed by those who went to that church.'[5] These were twentieth century, not nineteenth century attitudes, though the last has only partially been achieved when the Welsh Church was disestablished.

A little later he made his position even clearer. 'The ultimate aim of Nonconformists must be to secure an Act of Parliament providing for a truly national system of education, embracing all grades, and giving opportunity to the poorest as well as the richest to climb to the highest positions.'[6] Here lay the basis of some of the mutual incomprehension between many Nonconformists and some Churchmen. The later saw nothing wrong with Anglican teaching in the schools, and many of them had little understanding of the educational desires of the great mass of people.

Charles Leach issued a challenge in the local paper to Churchmen and Roman Catholics to attend meetings to explain the issues surround the subject. As he had expected there were no takers for this. One of the matters he was trying to quash was the idea among some Anglicans that somehow the Board Schools had provided Nonconformist Education. This seemed to him to be confusion between non-denominational and Nonconformist teaching. Clearly many of those opposed to the passive resisters didn't understand the difference.

In August, the sales of goods of passive resisters commenced in the Manchester area. The pattern was that the supporters would turn up in numbers and sing hymns and even have a prayer before the auction could begin. Dr Leach was usually one of those present. After a while he was roaming all over Lancashire in support of local groups.

In September the first seven summonses were issued in Manchester and inevitably, with his head well above the parapet, he was one of them.[7] Three more were also ministers; together with Edwyn Holt, formerly chairman of the city's Watch Committee; a solicitor, Mr Darbishire, Hon Sec of the Passive Resistance League; and Miss Hadfield, the sister of a city magistrate. Despite some legal argument they had no real defence and so an order for the distraint of goods was made against them all.

Charles Leach having finally produced a splendid moustache, but still not much of a beard

Charles Leach placed a notice in his front garden saying: 'The bailiff is going to take my goods because I will not pay rates for the teaching of Popery and Anglicanism.'[8] However, when the police came to call he was more amenable, and it wasn't the easy chair that was offered, but a piece of silver plate, which was much easier to handle. This could then simply be bought back and the whole process completed. It seems rather a charade, but for people in public positions such as ministers this was necessary to stay just on the right side of the law, even if they had the support of the churches. This was not as simple as the system adopted by a Quaker shopkeeper in an earlier age who, when an article was distrained, immediately offered to buy it back for the sum owing.

On the other hand there were those who took their opposition to its logical conclusion and refused to co-operate at all with the authorities. The courts had no option but to send them to prison. Though the numbers were not large the impact of the threat of a lady being sentenced raised the profile of the protest still further. She was quite prepared for jail, but in the event someone paid her rate and she was spared.

The movement was still spreading and by mid December some 7,000 summonses had been issued and 300 sales had taken place. Two months later the number was over 10,000 and positions were becoming entrenched. By April they had reached 20,000, with 23 men having been sent to prison. At the end of the following month it had reached 45,500 with 1,600 sales, and 108 imprisonments. This was in England, but in

Wales a movement led by Lloyd George had rendered the Act almost unworkable, and the Prime Minister was reported to be considering a Bill to deal with the situation.

The League was still calling for amendments to the Act, but it wasn't long before Charles Leach, ever the realist, was saying that they mustn't compromise. 'Let the question be settled at the ballot box.'[9] He had realised that Balfour was never going to modify the Act to their satisfaction and so it was necessary to wait for a change of government. Unfortunately he had not heeded Sir William Harcourt's warning about the House of Lords.

It was inevitable that the Bishop of Manchester should join the fray. Edmund Arbuthnott Knox, only recently appointed to the See, had arrived via academia at Oxford having held numerous posts including proctor at Merton College where he had earned the nickname 'Hard Knox' for his firm belief in discipline. From a long line of Anglicans, he had held a number of livings including Aston in Birmingham in the 1890s. He and Charles Leach, though both involved with their churches, lived in different worlds and there was never any chance of them understanding each other.

Charles Leach, referring at a meeting to a speech by Knox, said that 'the Bishop used expressions that made very light of the position of the passive resisters. It might be pleasant for men on the other side to allude to them in such a strain, but did they suppose it was pleasant for men like those on the platform to have to go to the police court, to have their goods seized, and to find themselves ridiculed by those who did not understand them?'[10] Much later the two men were to have a public argument in the pages of the Manchester Guardian, characterised mostly by the Bishop's complete failure to understand the passive resister's problems with the Act.

It might seem now that Charles Leach had gone somewhat over the top, but he certainly wasn't alone. It is difficult today for us to understand the passions that the subject aroused. The Nonconformists were still fighting battles for equality that had been going on for centuries against an entrenched church that was state sponsored. This was the basis for them wanting to disestablish the church; so that they might have a more level playing field. There was also no doubt that Balfour, in the Act, had made no attempt to be fair and reasonable. He seemed unaware that now it was the twentieth century and more egalitarian attitudes prevailed.

In that it did not achieve changes in the Act, the movement seems a failure, but it was just the sort of issue that the Nonconformists and Liberals needed to galvanise them and bring them out of the doldrums that they had been in really since the split in 1885. Once they started to be active again they realised that there was a lot that needed to be done, and that the Tories, particularly under the insouciant Balfour, had no idea of this. When a year or two later the election did come, the result was not in doubt, and the passive resisters had made a considerable contribution to that situation.

19

Overstretch

Though Charles Leach believed in what they were doing in the Passive Resistance League, he could not have anticipated quite how much time it was going to involve. In addition to the periodic meetings the committee felt duty bound to turn up at the courts and sales to support all their members. Now that the legal process had really got going it was creating quite a burden on top of all his other activities. In January of 1904, after a year in the post, he resigned. He claimed that he felt that the position of president should be a layman, but he was also trying to reduce his workload. Unfortunately Edwyn Holt would only agree to take the position if he became chairman of the executive committee. In theory it was a less onerous post, but in practice it made little difference.

In that same month the chapel celebrated the pastor's seventh anniversary. Though they were quite happy with him, things had settled into a steady existence. The big increases in the numbers had ceased, the church roll had only crept up from 350 to 371 between the beginning of 1901 and the end of 1903.[1] It wasn't that they weren't attracting fresh people but that the losses now nearly matched the gains. He was still putting in all the effort, and the pastorate in a large church was an onerous one, but achieving little except standing still. He wasn't a man to be happy with that for very long.

Outside the church and the passive resistance there was still the usual hectic round of meetings and speeches. He was attending the Christian Endeavourers Conference[2], and the general assembly of the Manchester Auxiliary of the London Missionary Society[3]. The Liberation Society was much taken up with the Education Act and though they agreed with the passive resisters about it, they weren't necessarily happy with the methods and he was careful to keep that out of his speech.[4] Even Mary Jane was back serving on Women's and other committees.

At the end of February there was another issue that had come to prominence; though this time he could merely denounce it from the pulpit. The mine owners in South Africa had a plan to import large numbers of Chinese workers to run the gold mines instead of providing jobs for surplus workers from England as they had promised. 'Instead of this the authorities have allowed unscrupulous owners of gold mines, who are unwilling to pay fair wages to white men, to carry a proposal to take Chinese labourers from their homes with a degrading bondage because these yellow men can be had cheap. It makes one's flesh creep to think of the physical, the moral, the horrible degradation to which these Chinamen are to be taken.'[5] While this might seem rather forthright, it was mild compared with some of his contemporaries like Rev E Aldon French who spoke of slavery being reintroduced into the Empire.[6]

On top of all this, on 1st March he became 57 years old and that made up his mind. He knew that he would be put under pressure to withdraw so he decided to use the most public way possible. He wrote, had printed, and circulated an address:

'To the Deacons, Members and Seat-holders of Cavendish Chapel.

Dear Friends,

I herewith most respectfully give you notice that it is my intention to resign the Pastorate of Cavendish Chapel about the end of September next.

It will interest you to know that I do not propose to take this course because I have any complaint to make or dissatisfaction to express. We have had seven years of unbroken peace and continuous prosperity, and Cavendish now ranks among the strong Free Churches of Manchester.

I intend to resign so that I may get a year's freedom from the cares and claims of the Pastorate, to enable me to preach and lecture in some of the large centres of population.

From October to March I hope to visit many places for preaching purposes in connection with Free Church Councils and other bodies. About the middle or end of March, at the request of Messrs. Thomas Cook and Son, I intend to accompany a select party of ladies and gentlemen on a trip to the Mediterranean, Palestine, and Egypt, and deliver short Biblical and Historical Lectures on the Holy Land.

In May, if the way opens, I should like to go on a preaching tour to Canada and the United States.

By the end of the year's vacation, or before, I hope it may be plain to me whether, and where, I am to settle in the Pastorate again.

And now, my dear friends, though I am still to be with you as your Pastor for six months longer, I take this opportunity of thanking you most heartily for all your kindness to me and mine, and for all the co-operation and help you have given to me in the great and important work we have been able to do at Cavendish Chapel. I shall be glad to meet you at Cavendish as often as it may be convenient during the time I am to be with you.

I most earnestly pray that the few months we are to be together may be a time of spiritual up lifting, and trust I may have the joy of leading many of you and your sons and daughters into the fellowship and joy of Church membership before I cease my work among you.

May Heaven's richest blessing rest upon you all,

Your affectionate Pastor,

Charles Leach'[7]

In publishing this wish list on 25th March, he could see light at the end of the tunnel, even though he still had another six months to serve. He now had to deal with the fall out, which wasn't long in coming. The deacons were not pleased and felt he should have spoken to them first. They immediately sent him a letter. He replied the following day saying that having decided on 'a year's freedom from the many anxieties of the Pastorate'[8], he could not see any other way of achieving it, and did not want to cause the deacons any unnecessary discussions. He knew the form perfectly well, but by doing it this way it made it much more difficult for anyone to put pressure on him in private, and try to make him change his mind.

The deacons appeared to have little inkling of what had motivated his decision, and still had a mistaken idea that he might be persuaded to stay. On 13th April they were noting that if Dr Leach could see his way to withdraw the circular publicly that would be the best policy, and in that case he would have their loyal support. A few days later they wrote to him again asking him not to resign. He replied that he did not see his way to accede to their request.

However, he had changed his mind about the preaching tour in the large cities, saying 'I must do work which will not take me so much away from home, should the opening for such work come to me.'[9] There were two reasons behind this; first he needed a rest; too much rushing about the country had been part of his problem, and at his age he needed to slow down. The second was that Mary Jane's health was causing him concern. After the problems with the children he was hypersensitive to even slight illnesses in case they were the precursors of something worse.

After his letter to them, the deacons were starting to realise the position. Despite the various suggestions and advice they had given him, he still seemed determined to go. On the 28th April they wrote to him rather sadly after 'prayerful and anxious

consideration' accepting that there was no more they could do, and suggesting that the matter was put to a meeting of the whole church. He felt that this had gone on long enough. There had just been a slight chance that there might have been some sort of compromise that would have given him a rest while allowing him to stay. He now realised that this was not possible, and wrote back straight away that 'I herewith most respectfully resign the office of Pastor of the church at Cavendish chapel.'[10] He was now keen to get some clarity into the situation.

At the Church meeting on 4th May, the negotiations that had taken place between the Pastor and the deacons were explained in detail. A considerable amount of discussion took place before putting the motion that Dr Leach should be requested to earnestly reconsider. This was voted down by 78 votes to 64, because the majority felt that after the deacon's negotiations it would be useless to reopen the subject. They then put another motion: 'That this meeting most reluctantly accepts the resignation of Rev Dr Leach as Pastor of Cavendish Chapel and in doing so desires to express its hearty and sincere appreciation of his untiring efforts for the welfare of Cavendish which has been so abundantly blessed during the tenure of his Pastorate and prays that the Divine Spirit may guide, sustain and bless both him and his family for many years to come.'[11]

At least now the position was clear, and as a maximum, by the end of September he would be gone. His financial position was strong and so he was not under any particular pressure to decide what to do next. His concern was with Mary Jane, and they concluded that some sea air would do her good. It certainly wouldn't do any harm to get out of the Manchester smog, and so they took a house at Norbreck right on the coast just north of Blackpool. It wasn't very convenient as it was some distance from the station, but that wasn't the first consideration. A train could be taken to Preston, and then down to Manchester, and it would take an hour or two to reach the chapel, but it would only be for a few months.

His resignation quickly reached the press and Christian World stated that he 'will at once undertake a Pastorate if one opens.'[12] Whether he had actually said this, or it was supposition on their part, the result was that he received an invitation from Harecourt Chapel in Canonbury, Islington. He was prepared to look at it if he could meet his objectives of cutting his work load. Moving to another city would mean that he could resign from most of his outside commitments and concentrate on the Pastorate. They quickly realised he was prepared to consider it, and so at the end of May they sent him a unanimous invitation and were quite prepared to wait until October, to enable him to have a rest.

Until he was clearer about Mary Jane's health he was not going to make any decision, but promised them one by the end of June. In the meantime he was commuting from Norbreck but still keeping up his usual round of chapel duties, committees and lectures. The passive resistance was still rumbling on, and though he had been trying to reduce his involvement this hadn't been very successful. Cavendish had agreed to release him at the end of August as he was owed some holiday, so he didn't need to keep going for much longer.

Just then there was another issue to protest about, due to the antics of the Tory government. There had been a growing consensus in many towns that there were too many public houses, and the local authorities had increasingly been refusing to renew licenses. There was supposed to be some compensation for the landlords in this case, but it was not always being paid, due to legal uncertainties. The brewers, who owned many of the pubs, had called on the government to do something about the situation. As the licensed trade were strong Conservative supporters, the government felt they had a debt to them and so decided to legislate. The Bill they first introduced in April

provided for safeguards, including a compensation fund on a local basis. A levy on all licensed premises would provide the funds, but it effectively it established rights and curtailed the scope of the licensing authorities.

The temperance movement saw it as an attempt to support the suppliers of the demon drink and were soon protesting. In Manchester Charles Leach was present on the platform in May at a crowded meeting in the Free Trade Hall.[13] There was a strong representation of opposition MPs and churchmen of all denominations including Anglicans. In June when the Bill had passed most of its stages in the House of Commons, and looked as though it would become law, a great demonstration was held in Heaton Park in Manchester. It attracted about 10,000 people and there were four platforms each with a number of different speakers, and, of course, he was one of them.[14] Balfour took no notice, and the Bill became the Act. It was another turn of the screw ratcheting up the determination of the opposition to ensure the removal of this government.

In Norbreck Mary Jane was improving and it looked as though the immediate worry was over. Charles Leach had realised that he needed to be more at home, and therefore the preaching tours were definitely dropped. Careful consideration had suggested that Harecourt could produce a less hectic life. The move was definitely not for money as 'he had left himself entirely in their hands.'[15] In fact he settled for a reduction, only receiving £500. A move to London, in addition to the opportunity to slide out of a lot of the commitments outside the chapel, was attractive as it would bring him closer to the centre of things; he was beginning to think beyond the churches. The decision was therefore made that he would accept the Pastorate at Harecourt, just before his deadline of the end of June. The start was scheduled for the beginning of October, allowing him to take September as a break.

It was time to start disentangling and Miss Leach – Mabel was now the only unmarried daughter – resigned as a Sunday school teacher. Her mother also needed to extract herself from the Women's organisations in which she had become involved. For him, too, things were winding down and though as late as April he had been still trying to get new members for the church, now with the drive missing, things were slowing.

In August when the deacons came to look at the finances, they found that for the first time in his pastorate, they were short by £100 of the amount of money that they needed to pay him his full stipend. The income each Sunday had dropped to below £10 and they were forced to write to him seeking a meeting hoping that he 'may possibly be able to make some suggestions'.[16] Without the constant effort that he usually put in, not all of the plates could be kept spinning.

On 28th August he preached at Cavendish for the last time, and a large congregation assembled to hear his farewell sermon. He didn't dwell too much on his time at the chapel, but 'expressed his pleasure leaving Cavendish Church stronger than he found it – in fact, one of the strongest Free Churches in Manchester.'[17] On the following Wednesday a large number of members of the congregation gathered in the schoolroom alongside the chapel to say goodbye. There were presentations on behalf of the church and the Christian Endeavour Society, and a number of speeches. Then, after seven and a half years he was finished, with a clear month to have a rest.

It was typical that he should spend his free Sundays visiting the various churches in the vicinity.[18] While some conducted very good, but austere, services he was happier at chapels where the local working people were present it large numbers. It was something of a busman's holiday, because he was looking at how the various ministers approached attracting a wide social class into their services. This was a subject dear to

his heart, but after all his own experience, it showed that he still didn't feel that he knew all the answers.

Of course he wasn't really finished with Manchester; there was still the Passive resistance. He had gone to pay his rate of £3 11s 6d, and had offered a cheque, which was for the full amount less 1s 3d. That would have been the end of the matter, but he wanted to make the condition 'that the amount for education should not be accepted from anyone tendering it on his behalf.'[19] The overseer had refused his offer under these circumstances, and the matter had gone to court. He had been summonsed for non-payment of the rates, about which he was not happy.

In the court he tried to argue that he had not refused to pay the rate, only part of it, while the overseer, Mr Tatton, explained why he had not accepted it. The stipendiary magistrate, Mr Brierley, was not very impressed, or with Charles Leach's claiming that under the Act of Uniformity Nonconformist ministers were relieved of certain obligations. The magistrate found against him, and he had no option other than to settle. He thanked him for his patience and the overseer for putting it into court as a matter of convenience, as he needed the matter resolved before he left for London. However, as a parting shot, he warned Mr Brierley that he would soon have many more passive resisters before him.

He still had to resign from the Passive Resistance League. Fortunately his membership was of the local organisation and so with the move they could hardly refuse to accept. At the meeting later in September they thanked him for 'his devotion to the interests of the League…and [that he had] proved himself an earnest and effective advocate of passive resistance both on the platform and in the press.'[20] While he still strongly believed in its work, it was a great burden lifted from his shoulders.

A few days later on 1st of October he left for London. Though he already knew where they were going to live, it wasn't ready, and he went to a temporary address. The plan was for Mary Jane and Mabel to stay in Manchester until the end of October when they and the furniture would go to London. Mabel, now of age and a robust and capable young woman, could look after her mother.

He was able to do one last favour for the chapel. They had made a call to the Rev James Cregan, to be their Pastor, but he had proved reluctant. Charles Leach advised them that he had been made another, probably less attractive, offer, so if they wanted him they would need to press their case hard, and quickly. They took his advice, and Cregan, who had made his name in Northern Ireland, became the next minister at Cavendish.

20

Harecourt

Harecourt Chapel stood on the north side of St Paul's Road, in the Canonbury part of Islington, North London. It was an unusual building, built of stone in a gothic style, but with an octagonal central plan and three short arms on the main axes. The entrance lay between two of these on the corner of St Paul's Road and Alma Road. It had been built in 1855 after the congregation had migrated from Aldersgate in the City, as that area had depopulated. There its history had stretched back to 1648.

By 1904 it was suffering again as its flock were dispersing to the suburbs. The chapel could hold some 1,300 people and so the congregations of 1903 at around 200 would have seemed rather sparse. It was time to call on the services of someone like Charles Leach to try to arrest the decay. He, of course, felt he knew what to do and 'he did not see why they should not be able to attract to Harecourt a considerable number of the intelligent, thoughtful young fellows who crowded the district, and he would be glad if some of the toilers living about the chapel might find at Harecourt a spiritual home.'[1]

Harecourt Chapel, Canonbury, before it burnt down

After his month's rest, and lifting the burden of all his other commitments, he was ready to get straight down to work with something like his old vigour. It was quite straightforward now, as he had done it all before. He wrote an address and had it printed and circulated in the area ready for his first services on the 2nd of October. It was his usual message, after introducing himself he went on:

'I am coming to North London in the hope that, with the earnest co-operation of the friends at Harecourt, something may be done from our centre for the mental, moral, social and religious welfare of the people. I earnestly desire to minister to a congregation composed of men and women of all classes, who will worship side by side and work together for the betterment of the people and the Glory of God. I am a Freechurchman, and the church over which I come to preside is a self governing community of men and women who love Jesus Christ as Prince and Saviour, and for His sake strive to be useful to others. I am in favour of civil and religious freedom, and am an earnest temperance worker. I shall be prepared to co-operate with all parties in movements which promote the general welfare of the people…'[2]

It was essentially the same message as before, but a little more subdued. He wished to break down the barriers between classes, which would also bring in as many as possible of the workers who were moving into the area. One tool he had found useful over the years was his Sunday afternoon lectures and he soon started them again. While he still wanted to work beyond just the chapel, he was now cautious of becoming so involved in all the causes he had been in Manchester. He needed to be more selective and concentrate on those that he felt would have most effect.

One of the attractions of Harecourt was that it was possible to find a suitable house nearby, within walking distance. On the other side of St Paul's Road, Canonbury Park South curved away. It was a quiet leafy street of substantial three-storey pairs of semi-detached houses, most of which had been built in the 1840s and 1850s. However, a gap had been left in the middle of the north side and it was only in the 1880s that a detached house was built on this plot. As the street numbering had not allowed for it, it was known by name, as Springfield, though later it was designated 17a. This was the house the Charles Leach had taken, and it seemed far too big for just three of them with probably the odd servant. When they had come to London some eighteen years before, there had been four daughters in tow; now there was just Mabel. Hopefully here the environment would be less unhealthy than it had been in Manchester.

Springfield, 17a Canonbury Park South – the Leach's house

A month after his arrival his service of recognition was held and amongst the visitors was the secretary of the London Congregational Union, Rev Andrew Mearns, who

with the benefit of time and distance could be more charitable, describing him 'as a hardworking pastor who had never had a failure'.[3] That was not something that could be said of all ministers. Now with his family around him, he could really get down to work, and within three months the congregation had grown considerably. On the first Sunday of 1905, he received 30 new members into the church.[4] He hadn't lost his touch.

Things were still going well in March when he went on 'holiday'. In reality he was accompanying another party to the Mediterranean, Palestine and Egypt on behalf of Thomas Cook and Son. While he was away it was quite easy to get prominent ministers to mind his pulpit. They included Revs Silas Hocking, the anti-war campaigner, Dr Guinness Rogers, a leading Congregationalist, H Elvet Lewis and Lawson Foster, previous Pastors at Harecourt, and of course his son-in-law CH Shave.[5]

He hadn't entirely escaped the passive resistance movement, and he wouldn't want to, but it was now at a more reasonable level. Even before he went on holiday he was back in Manchester attending a special 'National Passive Resistance Day' meeting following those of the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches. Here he was with his old friends from the Manchester League, but also Revs Dr Clifford and Sylvester Horne.[6] The movement had grown to 637 leagues, and couldn't be ignored, though the government was trying hard. In October it was time for another big meeting in the Albert Hall with the prominent members of the League, such as Charles Leach, on the platform. This gathering was under the auspices of the Liberal Party; the subject, always a political one, was becoming more so, and less of a Freechurch matter.

Things were looking up in the summer with another happy event in the family when Elizabeth, after a four year gap, produced another child. This time it was a girl and they named her Mary, and Leach after her mother's maiden name. Though they were now a long way away, still in Cleckheaton, it was something to celebrate and again was a small recompense for their own past losses. Fortunately the state of medicine had improved and the death rate for infants had dropped markedly. The child was healthy and strong despite the mother's age, which for that time was quite old at 37.

At the end of his first year at Harecourt his impact was shown by the message from the church 'placing on record the Church's gratitude to God for the manifestations of his presence during the year, which had resulted in considerable additions to the Church membership, the enlargement of the congregation, an increase in finances and considerable quickening of the activities of the auxiliaries.'[7] Though not mentioning him by name it was clear who had been the tool of God's will.

In politics, the situation was looking more hopeful for the Liberals. For some while the government, which had been in power for a very long time, had been showing signs of running out of steam. Its biggest problem revolved around 'Tariff Reform', a break from the free trade ethos of the nineteenth century, which was still espoused by the Liberals. Joseph Chamberlain, to strengthen the Empire, was strongly advocating a plan for preferential tariffs for its members, which inevitably meant raising them for imports from elsewhere. Many Unionists, such as the Prime Minister, were not so keen and only recommended the use of tariffs as a reaction to those imposed by our trading rivals.

At first sight Chamberlain's plan seemed quite clever, but in practical politics it contained a fatal flaw which he appeared to be unable to see. Inevitably the prices of basic foods would need to rise as they became subject to tariffs for the first time. The electorate was not in the mood to accept this trade off of higher food prices in

exchange for strengthening the empire. The strain of his advocacy of the scheme was threatening to split the Conservative and Unionist Party, though Balfour just managed to hold them together. Chamberlain's antics, however, caused a considerable amount of schadenfreude in ranks of the Liberals.

It was now that the damage caused by the actions of the government, such as the Education Act, became fatal. In December of 1905 the Balfour government gave up the struggle and resigned. Campbell Bannerman, who had become Liberal leader, formed a government and called a general election for January. The result was a landslide for the Liberals, who won 401 seats, and a catastrophe for the Unionists, who could only achieve 156. In addition, the persistence of Keir Hardie and the Labour Representation Committee finally paid off with them winning 30 seats and renaming themselves the Labour Party. This was in addition to the 24 Lib-Labs still within the ranks of the Liberals.

In general the new government party was made up of radicals and reformers. It looked forward into the twentieth century and not backward to the nineteenth as the Tories had done. To the likes of Charles Leach there was now hope that some of the wrongs of the past, such as the Education Act, could be put right, but also that much needed social reforms, in pensions, health insurance, and unemployment protection could be introduced.

The incoming administration had stated that addressing the education issue was one of its priorities. The boot was now on the other foot, and it was churchmen who were setting up 'Church Schools Emergency Leagues' in their defence. By early February the Bishop of Manchester was speaking at just such a meeting in the city. He was dismissive of the claims of the Nonconformists and out to score points when he stated: 'When Dr Leach, secretary, I think of the Passive Resistance League, with a Board School at his doors, sent his children to St Mark's School, Birmingham; the rector of St Mark's had no power to refuse admittance to those children.'[8]

This immediately came to Charles Leach's notice and he felt it called for a robust reply. He ignored the small point that he had not been the secretary of the League, but went to the core of the matter:

'The good Bishop refers to the fact that I took my two little girls, one an infant, to a Church School in Birmingham. I suppose he quotes me with the intention of discrediting me in some way. I am sorry that the Bishop omitted to state what he knows to be true:-

1) That it is twenty-five years since I took those little girls to the Church school.

2) That I forbade the teaching of the catechism and the Prayerbook to my child in the girls' school.

3) That there was not then, as there is now, an Act of Parliament which excludes Free Church men and Free Church women (whom the Bishop scorns as 'Dissenters') from headteacherships in publicly supported schools; and makes me pay rates for teaching Popery and Anglicanism in publicly supported schools.'[9]

The Bishop was rather more conciliatory in his reply and denied he had set out to discredit him or that he knew any of his points. He also claimed not to have used the word 'Dissenters'. It was also clear that he did not understand what the passive resisters were complaining about. He concluded that he was interested to know why Dr Leach had 'preferred a Church school to publicly supported secular schools?'[10]

Back came a reply 'I respectfully inform his Lordship that it was solely because St Mark's School was 'at my door,' whilst the nearest Board school was further away than we cared to send an infant.'[11] Now this is curious because the Board school was only slightly further away than St Mark's from either of their addresses in Birmingham

around that time. Certainly it was a good walk from Noel Road to either. Maybe there had been more to it. He continued: 'Later they both went to Board schools, and later still to high schools, and one of them at the age of twenty-three was appointed head mistress in a higher elementary board school.'

The two girls would have been Ada and Dora, as Elizabeth was older and Mabel not yet born. As both of the middle girls became teachers it has not been possible to ascertain which of them became the head teacher. Ada had been ill longer and so might not have been well enough at twenty-three, while Dora's death certificate only stated Schoolmistress. What he didn't say was that now they were both inhabitants of Elland Bethesda graveyard.

The argument rumbled on in the letters pages of the Manchester Guardian. The Bishop wanted to know why his conscience had allowed him to send his children to a Church school then but it didn't allow him to pay rates for one. He also wanted his opponent to quote the clause in the Act which denied headteacherships to Free Church men and women.

In the end Charles Leach quoted the clauses from the Act and explained how these, in practice, led to the result he claimed. The problems lay, more subtly, at a secondary level in that in the church schools the Church still had de facto control through a majority on the board of managers, and the trust deeds defined the religious allegiance of the head. The Bishop's reply made it clear that he still didn't understand why the paying of rates to support this was the critical matter. It seems a fine point now to cause such a fuss.

The government had meanwhile carried out their promise to introduce an Education Bill, but by June that, too, was causing complaints. A conference was held at Caxton Hall in London which welcomed the Bill but wanted clause four withdrawn. This involved a degree of parental choice in the teaching of religion in the school their children attended, and was an attempt to strike a balance between the concerns of the Nonconformists and those of the Catholic schools. Charles Leach was, of course, there seconding the motion against clause four. In practice it proved impossible to find a way of framing a bill that would satisfy a wide range of requirements. It had a rough ride in the House of Commons, and was then dropped after the Lords so modified it as to remove its original intent. This was a great disappointment to the passive resisters, who had thought that the problem was about to be solved.

On 1st March 1907 Charles Leach was 60 years old. He had already remained in the pulpit rather longer than he had hoped, but now he was looking beyond the church. He was not the sort of man to sit quietly in retirement and so was looking at what to do. His mind was turning towards two things; business and politics. He was still a director of the Abstainers Insurance Company, and had risen to be Vice-chairman.[12] In December he joined the London Chamber of Commerce, paying his two guineas subscription fee.[13] Whether he was involved in any other business activities is not recorded. He was not placed in any industry category and so there is no indication as to what his interests were. Maybe he had joined because Sir Albert Spicer, who he had known as the treasurer of the London Congregational Union, was the president, or was just thinking ahead in case he became involved in other commercial activities. Possibly he felt a bit vulnerable without belonging to some organisation that would give him credibility. Despite his success, he had never quite lost the feeling of inferiority that his background and poor education had given him.

It was politics to which his mind was really turning. At the Congregational Union meeting in Blackpool in the autumn he was quite prepared to be controversial. A resolution had been put forward urging arbitration in a dispute between railwaymen

and their employers. He proposed that it should be modified to express 'the opinion that the strike was threatened owing to the refusal of the railway directors to recognise the men's union. It was too late in the day for a body of men to refuse to meet another body of men or their representatives.'[14] The amendment was passed despite the objections of the proposer of the original motion. Clearly he, and many other Congregationalists, were on the side of the working man and by implication his representation by trade unions.

In January 1908 an article by him appeared examining the subject of old age pensions. It had long been something that interested him, and particularly at his stage of life, but this was examining the proposals for a government scheme where he would not be eligible. He considered the numbers who would receive it, the cost, and how it was to be afforded. This soon showed that the more generous schemes were unaffordable, and that some compromise was necessary. There would be a cut off for all those whose income was greater than 10s per week, and the proposed pension was 5s; hardly generous. He had thought that probably it would be paid to all those above 65. The problem really lay in how to fund it, and he suggested that some savings could be made in the Army and Navy after the treaties with Russia and Japan, and by economies in the Poor Law and elsewhere. 'All the rest might be obtained by placing upon land the burdens it ought to bear, but does not now bear, and from graduated income tax. One thing seems certain to all serious minded people, and that is that the money will have to be raised. The nation has made up its mind that old age pensions shall be secured, and it is for statesmen to tell us how it is to be done.'[15] He had most of it right, only the pension when it was introduced was from age 70, to cut the numbers and make the amount affordable.

A few days later he announced his resignation from the pastorate at Harecourt. He claimed that it was so that he could devote himself to special preaching and lecturing, but within a few days his name was being mentioned as a probable Liberal candidate for the Barrow constituency. Though he was talking about 'more freedom from the responsibilities of the Pastorate than he had been able to secure,'[16] he certainly wasn't going to sit around.

He preached his last sermon at Harecourt on 23rd February 1908 and on the following Wednesday there was a large farewell meeting. He and his wife were presented with, appropriately, 'a pair of richly upholstered easy chairs, a pair of beautifully framed engravings, and a piece of plate.'[17] A measure of his achievement at the chapel, in little more than three years, was that a third of the people now on the books had had no involvement with the church before his time. To really round this off, the next day he returned to Queen's Park to give an address at the coming of age celebrations of the church, meeting his old friend George Tennant who had been the secretary for 20 years.[18]

It must have been strange to walk out, after all these years, knowing that he would not be a pastor again. However he had a job to do. Freed of his connection with the church, Thomas Cook and Son could publicise his name as conducting a party to the Holy Land and Egypt. Leaving on 25th March, they were going to cruise around the Mediterranean before visiting the places of religious interest in Palestine, and then to crown it would see the Pyramids and the Sphinx. There were two versions of the tour, 30 days at 46 Guineas, or 37 days at 54 guineas.[19] To him it was a much a holiday as work; and he would be paid for it. It was a wonderful way to start his retirement.

21

Prospective Parliamentary Candidate

Only those who didn't know Charles Leach well would have expected him to really retire. A restless temperament like his was going to look for some other outlet, even beyond the writing that he undertook. His mind had already turned towards seeking a seat in Parliament, but it wasn't to be Barrow, but Colne Valley that showed a keen interest. In the middle of April, while he was still on his trip to Palestine and Egypt, his name was being mentioned as the front runner.[1] After considering others, the Liberal council invited him to address a series of meetings as soon as he returned at the end of the month.

Colne Valley runs south west from Huddersfield in Yorkshire, thrusting deep into the Pennines; steep industrial valleys fringing into moorland. Like Calderdale, its prosperity had rested on the woollen industry as fast flowing rivers had provided water and power for the mills. The smoke from the chimneys and the underlying millstone grit gave the area its characteristic black appearance. The lower valley was almost continuously built up with Golcar, Linthwaite, Slaithwaite, and Marsden virtually running into each other. Further to the south, Meltham and Holmfirth were also in the constituency, but Huddersfield was not. Thus, though it was largely rural, containing no large town, it was also industrial.

Charles Leach had had several opportunities for seats but as he said 'I am a Yorkshireman and Yorkshire always had an attraction for me'.[2] Elland was only a few miles away, though it wasn't quite in the constituency, so this was close to his old stamping ground. The valley was strongly Nonconformist, and the co-operative movement had a number of shops. It appeared to be a good fit, and him an ideal candidate with his position on the radical wing of the Liberals.

On 4th May he began with a meeting in Slaithwaite and started to lay out his political position. He supported the government on Free Trade, education, licensing of public houses, and the land question. He commented that he owned a bit of land – three feet by seven feet – in a chapel yard at Elland.[3] While this was passed off as a joke it must have brought a pang to think of the children lying there. He continued: 'Land lay at the root of every other political question…Private ownership of land should be speedily doomed, and he hoped to live to see the day when people would have the possession of land, and work on it for the benefit of the people. They must get as far as possible back to the land, and in the Small Holdings Act they had got a start, and hoped to get more.' These seem like radical views today, but at the time they were received with applause, as quite acceptable.

He was also in favour of one man one vote, women's suffrage, and the Miners' Eight Hours Bill. 'The short experience of four days' work in a pit was enough to convince him that eight hours was enough to work underground…[He] declared himself an evolutionary, not a revolutionary, Socialist, going for those things which he deemed to be practicable and likely to be carried out in the next generation. He took his Socialism from his Master who said 'Do unto others as ye would that they should do to you".[4] The use of the word socialist, though it might have represented his views, was to cause much trouble later, particularly as many people didn't quite understand what it meant in detail.

He worked his way around the constituency reaching Marsden a couple of weeks later. Here he laid out his views succinctly, and claiming that he had always voted Liberal. While technically correct this was airbrushing out his short period with the ILP. 'That great historical party… stands for the rights of the people as against the privileges of the of the Peers; the protection of Labour against the claims of the Lords; hope for the man in the cottage as well as the man in the castle; a better home for the docker as well as for the duke; fair wages for the man in the mill as well as reasonable profits for the master; the destruction of the sweater and the encouragement of the honest employer; comfort for the aged instead of the cold charity of the parish; freedom of trade and no tax on food or material; the power of the British people over the power of the brewer; and the supremacy of the House of Commons over the House of Lords.'[5]

He summed this up saying he stood for justice alike for all classes and for privilege and monopoly for none. He might have called himself a socialist but there was no hint of 'dictatorship of the proletariat' here. His position stemmed directly from his religious beliefs. Many have tried to equate socialism with the teachings of the Bible, but his interpretation was that you cannot reconcile class war with Christianity. He sought to destroy poverty while often others sought to destroy wealth. There was clear water between him and many others on the left and it stemmed from just this point. His was an inclusive view of the world, even if sometimes he did struggle to accept certain groups, like landowners and brewers.

The Colne Valley Liberal Council were quite happy with him though. On the last day of May they unanimously approved him as their prospective candidate for the division, at a meeting of 470 members. In his speech of acceptance he made it quite clear that he did not think that it would be easy to recapture the seat, and it would take a considerable amount of work. However, he was prepared to put in the effort, and if they wished to win they would need to support him. It was just like his approach when arriving at a new church and trying to ginger them up. One of his secrets had always been his ability to motivate people. Here the goal was different, but the method was the same.

Victor Grayson

The sitting Member of Parliament for the Colne Valley Division was Victor Grayson a militant and independent socialist. He was described as 'the 'Clarionette' with red tie, flannel shirt, and bicycle, who has been moved to continuous anger…Such men see

the world transfigured by a great crusade. They are convinced that by demonstration and violence today, or (at latest) tomorrow, the people will rise in the millions…and inaugurate the gold age of the Socialistic millennium.'[6]

A native of Liverpool, he had served an engineering apprenticeship, before commencing training as a Unitarian minister. A talent for oratory led him from the Sunday school to the outdoor platform. Turning to socialist politics he joined the ILP in Manchester, and became a popular speaker for them. Following the election in 1906 he withdrew from his course, and was soon often found speaking to the many ILP groups in Colne Valley.

The Member for the constituency then was the Liberal Sir James Kitson who had held the seat since 1892. When, in July 1907, he was elevated to Baron Airedale of Gledhow the seat suddenly became vacant and a by-election was called. This was Grayson's chance. The Colne Valley Labour League, a network of ILP branches, which had been working hard in the valley, adopted him as their candidate. The Labour Party, newly formed in Parliament, refused to endorse him. Partly this was a technicality to do with the lack of trade unionists in the Colne Valley league, but as well there appeared be doubts about the man himself. Also, as this was a seat where the Liberals would be expected to win, under their secret pact, Labour would not run against them.

Grayson fought a spectacular campaign; his oratory producing a stir in the valley. He positioned himself as a revolutionary socialist, taking the line that the workers should break the rules of the rich and take their destiny in their own hands. The excitement he caused led a high proportion of the electorate to go to the polls. In a three cornered fight he won by 189 votes, and became an independent socialist Member of Parliament. The Labour party tried to negotiate his inclusion in the party, but he refused, not wanting to submit to its decisions and discipline.

At first the people of Colne Valley had been pleased to have an MP that spoke up for them, and particularly the unemployed, but it soon became apparent that he was a loose cannon. Stories of high living and heavy drinking began to filter back, but it was the actions later in the year that caused him problems. He tried to get the House to adjourn to discuss the unemployed. There are ways of doing this sort of thing, but he had no patience with the procedures and working within the system. He raised himself to a prominent position and notoriety, but also removal from the chamber.

He hadn't endeared himself to the Labour party by shouting 'you are traitors to your class'[7] at them as he left. After causing more trouble the following day, he was suspended and left saying that it was 'a house of murderers.' Though he was eventually allowed back he rarely attended. For someone who had been voted the most popular MP in Yorkshire, he was now beginning to divide even his supporters. The oratory and radical approach, and the prominence that this had brought, were slipping away because he didn't have the patience to work within the system.

Grayson's victory had been a profound shock to the local Liberals as they had held the seat since 1885 and thought that they had a strong candidate in Philip Bright, the son of John Bright, the well known MP in Birmingham. The result had galvanised them into reorganising themselves and gaining a determination to regain the seat at the earliest opportunity.

Charles Leach knew what he was up against, and that it wasn't going to be easy, but with only two years of the possible seven expired for the parliament, it was likely to be some while before an election was to be expected, despite the problems of getting legislation through the House of Lords which might precipitate a crisis at any time. Hopefully, there was time for the party to use extensive propaganda and raise his

profile in the constituency. With his background he felt sure that he could inspire them and weld the party workers into an effective team.

It is clear why the local party chose him. Being a Yorkshireman is always a plus within the county. There was a suspicion that Grayson's Nonconformist and religious background made him a candidate with a strong moral position; Charles Leach also had these advantages. He was on the Radical wing of the Liberals and could even speak about being a socialist, but he was within the mainstream of the party. He was a strong public speaker, which was essential to compete with Grayson's oratory. Altogether, if they put in the groundwork he stood a fighting chance.

Charles Leach was still preaching on an occasional basis, and attending meetings of causes he believed in such as having shops closed on a Sunday, but his main effort was directed to working in the constituency. At last there was a government that was trying to implement many of the policies he had been advocating for years. He was going to work hard as he wanted to be part of it.

While the attempts to repeal the 1902 Education Act had been unsuccessful – two more bills in 1907 and 1908 had not even made it out of the Commons – the government had been busy attempting to tackle the problems of the age. It had introduced legislation allowing local authorities to provide free school meals and brought in school medical inspections. These were things he had been advocating since his time on the Birmingham School Board twenty years before.

More important were the attempts to tackle poverty. The cost of poor relief had been rising, partly because the stigma attached to it was no longer so much of a deterrent, and it was difficult to maintain the harshness on which the system had depended to limit numbers. Even the previous administration had realised that something must be done and had set up a Royal Commission to examine the system. Long after the government had fallen it produced two reports, a majority and a minority one. Though they both recommended changes they were of little help to the legislators.

The government had decided to approach the problem from the other end and tackle the individual causes of poverty. The first move was to introduce an old age pension scheme. This was exactly along the lines that Charles Leach had foreseen, but by limiting the age to 70 they were able to produce a universal system for which they could raise the money from the Exchequer. More was to come when Campbell Bannerman's resignation brought fresh men to the important posts. Asquith, the Congregationalist and Yorkshireman, became Prime Minister, leaving the treasury open to the rising star of David Lloyd George. Winston Churchill, who had swapped sides over tariff reform, became the President of the Board of Trade.

Churchill's Trade Boards Act tackled the next layer, attacking low pay, setting up Boards to define minimum wages in sweated trades such as tailoring, lace-making and box-making. He also addressed unemployment by setting up labour exchanges to advertise vacancies. This was a necessary prerequisite to the plan for unemployment insurance to be introduced later. It was the government's ambition to introduce a health scheme which would complete their ring of social security measures and hence remove the major causes of poverty.

It was an ambitious plan, but how was it to be financed? There were two prongs to this. The first was to make the schemes insurance based so that the employee and employer bore the bulk of the cost. The pension scheme had taken most of the available funds, and there was also the need to find money for new battleships for the impending arms race with Germany. Lloyd George bit the bullet and introduced a budget in April 1909 against 'poverty and squalidness' to deal with the sick, infirm, unemployed, widows and orphans.

The method was to raise taxes. The increases in death duties and income tax for those earning over £2000 a year were bad enough, but it was the land taxes that were a step too far for the landowning Tories. They decided to oppose the budget by any means possible. After all, as Lloyd George pointed out, 80% of the members of the House of Lords owned more than 2000 acres. A clash was inevitable, and the battle between the Commons and the Lords, which had been brewing since the government came to power, came to a head.

Despite a tradition that the Lords did not reject finance bills from the Commons, in November they voted down the Budget. The scene was now set for a major constitutional crisis. The government could not accept the Lords having a right of veto over their policies and so called a general election for January 1910 to decide 'who governs Britain'. To Charles Leach this was not unexpected. He had been warning for a year, after they rejected other smaller bills: 'The people would fight the House of Lords to the last. Many battles have been fought between privilege and people, and they had always ended in favour of the people, as this one would. The country must get ready for the conflict.'[8]

Immediately the battle started in the constituency. Not only was he fighting the once very popular, incumbent Member, but he also had a Tory opponent in the shape of Captain Boyd Carpenter, the son of the Bishop of Ripon. Boyd Carpenter, educated at Oxford, was a Boer War veteran and currently the Mayor of Harrogate and a representative of the town on the West Riding County Council. He was clearly a strong candidate and there was a great probability that Charles Leach would be crushed between the two.

Undaunted, in early December, he began a hectic round of meetings. It wasn't that he had been inactive; he had held over 80 since coming to the constituency the year before. Now he was accompanied, not by Mary Jane, but by 27 year old Mabel. She gave a speech in his support: 'As long as I have known him – I have never known him undertake any duty which he did not faithfully perform as far as his health and strength allowed him. And if you send him to Parliament, you will never regret your choice of a member who will always watch your interests and will always try to get the people to put forward things that are right and put down things that are wrong.'[9]

Mabel Leach

After numerous enthusiastic meetings, on the 29th December he was formally adopted as the Liberal's candidate, and the battle really began. Grayson was easy to attack as he had come out against the budget, and quoting his own speeches was sufficient to demonstrate his contempt for Parliamentary procedure. What was the use of electing a man who didn't want to be in the House? 'On the other hand was Captain Boyd Carpenter, the conservative candidate, who was very glib of tongue, but stood for everything that was reactionary.'[10]

By early January, and after numerous rousing Liberal meetings, the local paper was describing Charles Leach as increasingly popular. By the middle of the month he was reported as having been 'scoring heavily at the expense of his opponents during the week… [and had] come out of the ordeal with flying colours.'[11] Charles Leach was making progress. He could appeal directly to the workers that he was one of them: 'I stand by the people…as one of the people. I worked in a mill at the age of eight like you people, and I know what it is to be poor and to have to struggle. I should be unworthy of my name and of my poor old father if I was to forget the class to which I belong.'[12] Trying not to leave anything to chance there was a large advertisement – Vote straight for Leach. Clearly the local paper had come over to his side which helped to squash the silly rumour that someone had put round that he didn't intend to go to the poll.

A telling moment in the campaign was when Grayson's supporters had set out to discomfort him. 'Dr Leach had stated that the poor, or the unemployed – whom Mr Grayson had claimed to champion – should never starve as long as he had a crust to spare. Mr Grayson had fastened on to the remark, and, at his instigation, his supporters asked Dr Leach where he got his crusts from! Dr Leach was indignant. Suiting the action to the words he dramatically replied, 'These hands, this brain. I have never eaten the bread of idleness!' The effect was electric. He was cheered to the echo and the questioner subsided.'[13] This was used again and again during the campaign and it backfired badly on the Grayson camp.

Grayson was still taking extreme lines, such as stating that the members of the House of Commons were unimprovable and they were as low as any human can get. He was against the budget and called the 5s of the pension a 'pot egg' trying to run down what had become rather popular. He had also been reading one of Charles Leach's books, or more correctly his piece in *The Cross and the Dice Box* on Parsons and Politics, trying to find things with which to discredit him. Charles Leach hit back: 'Twenty years ago when Mr Grayson was in knickerbockers in the hands of his nurses, and before the Independent Labour Party was born, Charles Leach was advocating feeding the hungry children, doing something for the homeless, working men, and protesting against old people being sent to the Bastille.'[14] He was dying to get to parliament and help in the attack on poverty and trying to destroy the workhouses.

Boyd Carpenter was also easy to counter as he was a supporter of what they called Tariff Reform, protectionism by another name, which was likely to introduce duties on basic foodstuffs and hence raise the price of bread and other mainstays of people's diets. In a constituency that had elected a socialist it wasn't difficult to paint him as a reactionary who was against all the social security legislation that the government was trying to introduce. The 'people versus the House of Lords' message was also playing well and left a Tory in a difficult position.

Thursday the 20th of January was an ideal spring-like polling day. Because of Grayson's notoriety the result was being watched with interest beyond the constituency. Most felt that the advantage was with the sitting Member, but the Times commented: 'It seems to me to be likely that Mr Grayson will be defeated, and Mr

Leach, the weak candidate with the Liberal tradition of the constituency behind him, or Captain Boyd Carpenter, the strong candidate with a relatively weak party behind him, will be elected in his place.'[15] They didn't seem to realise the work that Charles Leach had put in or his ability to motivate.

The counting took place the following morning with the result being announced in Slaithwaite Town Hall at about one o'clock. The result was a huge surprise. Grayson had only polled 3,149 votes, a big drop from his by-election result. Boyd Carpenter, with 3,750 votes, had beaten him comfortably, but with 4,741 votes Charles Leach had won with a satisfactory majority of 991. The Liberals were ecstatic to regain the seat, and Charles Leach was 'chaired' round to the Liberal Club where he spoke to the crowd in the street from the small iron balcony over the front door. 'They had fought a good fight and won a great victory. They had driven off the food taxers and had settled the man who was elected in 1907 and who had failed to discharge his Parliamentary duties. Without wishing to speak an unkind word of either of the candidates he would say that the gallant Captain would now have time to attend to his mayoral duties at Harrogate,… and Mr Grayson could go on reading his book and complete his education.'[16]

The January 1910 election. Charles Leach is bareheaded on the balcony of the Liberal Club speaking to the crowd. Mabel is to his left.

Once the euphoria had died down he went on a round of celebratory meetings in the constituency. Here, however, he was keen to heal any wounds that might have been caused during the campaign. 'Having won the victory, he hoped they would all settle down and forget everything that might have angered them during the proceedings of those they called their political opponents; they should remember that the Socialists and Conservatives were their neighbours and citizens…He promised that he would do the best he could to prove as worthy a member as he had been a diligent and hard working candidate.'[17] Now he had to do the job.

The Liberal party in the country was, though, rather pleased with him. Grayson, apart from being a nuisance in Parliament, had been a worry in that he represented a revolutionary brand of Labour politics. There was a danger that he would be the start of a movement that would threaten the Liberals working class support, and even the system. Charles Leach had shown that a radical version of Liberalism was still attractive to the voters.

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Member of Parliament

It was with pride that Charles Leach entered the gothic splendour of the Palace of Westminster clutching his certificate from the returning officer; not bad for the lad from Ratten Row. Unlike now, the elections were not held on a single day, and it was into February by the time all the results were known. The enormous majority of 1906 had melted away leaving the Liberals only two seats ahead of the Unionists, but the 40 Labour members and 82 Irish were also Ministerialists – supporters of the ministry of Asquith – so he could in practice command a comfortable majority.

While the Liberals were very happy to welcome the man that had rid the House of Victor Grayson, there were others who were not displeased. Amongst those was Keir Hardie, his old friend from the early ILP days, who could not help being amused at the swap of Charles Leach for Victor Grayson. Grayson had been an embarrassment to the Labour members and many were not sorry to see the last of him, but here was a man, though nominally a Liberal, who he knew shared many of his views and would not cause trouble and so probably would be more of a useful ally.

In the middle of the month the formalities began with members taking the oath, but then on the 21st it was time for Edward VII to present the King's Speech. It was a strange experience for Charles Leach, with his attitude towards the House of Lords and many of its members, to enter the lion's den. It was a magnificent sight with the peers in their robes and the King, who liked pomp, on his throne at the end of the chamber flanked by his Queen. It was a 'pinch yourself' moment particularly in view of the content of the speech which referred to 'measures to define the relations between the Houses of Parliament'. It was all politeness and ceremony, but it could barely disguise the battles to come.

Back in the Commons it was a matter of orientating himself, and finding kindred spirits. He soon discovered that amongst the intake was another Congregational minister in Rev C Sylvester Horne, who, unlike him, was still a pastor. The two men had known each other around the time of the opening of Queen's Park chapel when they had worked in close proximity, and again as both had been strong supporters of passive resistance. There were many other Congregationalists such as Sir Albert Spicer from him London Congregational Union days, and other free churchmen who were likely to be interested in similar matters.

He soon discovered the procedure for one of the key things that a back bencher was able to do – table questions to be answered by the relevant minister. On the 28th his first question came up and was for answer by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George. The temptation was to ask one of those burning questions that had worried him for years, but he was determined not to make the mistakes the Victor Grayson had done and so would carefully stay within the rules of the House. Until he fully understood them, he was going to proceed cautiously.

The question posed was a technical one on whether post office and trustee savings bank funds could be used by local authorities. Lloyd George replied, mentioning 'my honourable friend'[1] which, though standard procedure, would make the hearer feel he had arrived, though the rest of the answer merely pointed him to existing arrangements. The result was really a polite – no. Obviously this was not a random question as four other members asked much the same over the next month only to be pointed to the reply already given to the Member for Colne Valley.

Two weeks later he was getting into his stride and was asking the President of the Board of Education if 'he would urge the Education Authorities to exercise the power given to them by …the Education Act 1907, to grant maintenance bursaries to children of the poor to enable them to continue at elementary or higher elementary schools beyond the age of twelve.'[2] The Secretary, Charles Trevelyan, dodged the question saying it was up to the local authority, but he was ready to ask a supplementary on how many had taken up the bursaries. Again Trevelyan slid out of answering by saying that they didn't yet have all the information from the local authorities. Frustrating though this was, he quickly realised that other Members were not faring any better. This was all a game and he needed to fully understand the unwritten rules to achieve anything.

It was good to be able to go to the meeting of the National Free Church Council with MP after his name, to talk about Nonconformist chaplains and education questions.[3] As a speaker they would listen to him more intently particularly on political matters; probably thinking he had more influence that he really did. The reflected glory was particularly noticeable when his motion was seconded by Mrs Lloyd George, wife of the Chancellor.

The grandchildren Eric and Mary Shave with their parents - around 1910

In the February edition of Cook's Traveller's Gazette was a large piece about a private spring party to Palestine and Syria – Conducted by Dr Leach.[4] It was the usual Middle East trip, taking in Egypt as well. There were two variants of 30 or 37 days and it was due to leave on 23rd March. While he had probably contracted to do this long before the election was called, the fact that it still hadn't been withdrawn from the February edition suggests a certain lack of confidence in his prospects of being elected. Once he was, with the government's programme and his being a new member, there was no possibility of him going.

The government took a surprising length of time, until April, to get to the main issues facing them – the budget and the whole subject of vetoes by the House of Lords. To some extent the delay had been caused by the discussions with the Irish, who were keen to curtail the power of the House of Lords, knowing that their chief objective of a Home Rule Bill had no chance of being passed by them. They were less enamoured with the budget which contained increased duties on drink including Irish

whiskey, and wanted to see the action against the Lords first. The government, naturally, wanted to deal with the budget.

They came up with an ingenious solution, and once they started everything moved with great speed. On the 7th April they introduced into the House the first of three Resolutions, designed to define their attitude to the Lords and what they wished the Lords powers to be with various types of legislation. They divided them into Money Bills, and Bills other than Money Bills. The first resolution was that the House of Lords should be disabled by law from rejecting or amending a Money Bill, while the others were subject to a more complex process that after being rejected, if passed three times in successive years by the Commons, would become law whatever the Lords did. The third resolution, which they reached by the 14th, was to limit the Commons to five years between elections rather than the current seven.

Despite various attempts to amend the resolutions to dilute their intent, there was never any danger of them not passing in the House as the Liberals were set on this course, and the Labour Party and the Irish both wanted the Lords tamed for their own reasons. On the 11th while the House was in committee discussing 'Bills other than Money Bills', Charles Leach got to his feet, with some nervousness, and made his maiden speech:

'I desire to support this Resolution both by my voice and by my vote. The only hesitation I have in speaking in its favour is my lack of knowledge of the forms of this House; but if I should fall into any error, I hope the Chairman will correct me as mercifully as possible.'[5]

Despite the diffident introduction – he was still very concerned not to do a Victor Grayson and upset his fellow Members - he went on to roundly attack the attitude of the opposition in the Commons before turning to the Lords themselves.

'It seems to me it is time we should ask ourselves who are and what are the Members of the Second Chamber about which so much has been said? How did they come to be where they are? Who gave them the power they possess? They make august claims, and in dealing with this Resolution to limit their power of Veto we should consider who and what they are. Among them there are many distinguished men whom we all delight to honour. There are also among them brave men who have bled for their country, and among them, too, there are many who have bled their country. The bulk of them are made up of those who neither toil nor spin. They are there by right of birth. We are told by the Noble Lord who represents Oxford University… that a baby who is born a Duke is born a legislator. I fail to see why a baby who is born a Duke should have a greater claim to be a legislator than a baby who is born the son of a docker. In my judgement a Member of the Legislature should only occupy that position because he has secured the confidence of the people.'[6]

After that he turned on no less than the Leader of the Opposition.

'The right hon. Gentleman asked a question which I have not yet heard answered. He said he wanted to know what particular crime of the House of Lords loomed most largely in the imagination of the Government and their Friends. There is no particular crime; they have been guilty, in my judgement, of every crime in the political calendar. It is not a case of petty larceny, it is wholesale burglary; it is not one solitary act, it is a life of destruction of Liberal measures. There is no class or party that they have not injured except their own. What have they done for labour? They have rejected and mutilated Bills introduced to benefit labour. What have they done for the Irish? What have they done for the Nonconformists? What have they done for Scotland? All along they have been mutilating and destroying Liberal measures, and the time has come when their power to mutilate and destroy must be brought speedily to

an end. I support the Resolutions by word and vote, because I think for far too long a period the House of Lords have defied the people's will; for far too long they have opposed the best interests of progress; for far too long they have supported privilege and monopoly, and the time has now come to put an end to their one sided and unfair opposition to all that we conceive to be for the best interests of the people. The more speedily this is done the better.'[7]

With that he sat down, no doubt feeling better. Despite his cautious start, he had, as so often, stuck his head well over the parapet. In the heightened atmosphere it was hardly noticed. Despite the impassioned speeches, few were going to change their minds.

The majorities against the amendments, and to pass the resolutions, were always well over 100; Charles Leach, of course, always adding his vote to the support. On the last day the government rolled all these resolutions into what they called the Parliament Bill, and it was introduced to the House and passed its first reading. The advantage of this process was that they now had a Bill that was very robust and had demonstrated the House's resolve to have it even though it had only just been introduced.

The Government now turned to the budget, and drove it through with great determination. On Monday 25th it had its second reading, the next day the committee stage, and the following day the third reading. It passed all of these with comfortable majorities. On the 28th it was sent to the Lords, who, much to everybody's relief, passed it the same day without a division. Despite this climb-down the Commons was in no mood to back away from its determination to curtail the power of the Lords.

King Edward VII gave his Royal Assent to the budget, but he knew that there was still a constitutional crisis, and he was right in the middle of it. If the Commons persisted with the Parliament Bill, and there was every reason to think they would, and the Lords were to reject it, and there was every reason to think they would, then the problem became his. The Prime Minister had already been sounding him out on the possibility of creating enough new peers to ensure that the measures passed in the Lords. He was very reluctant to become involved in what could be construed a party political matter, and of doing something unconstitutional and hence bring the Crown into disrepute.

He still hadn't made up his mind what to do about the matter when in early May he started coughing and wheezing, and though he continued to give formal audiences until the 5th, that evening the doctors announced that he had bronchitis and that his condition was causing some anxiety. Just after noon the following day, still trying to keep going, he collapsed and a series of heart attacks followed. At 11.45 that evening, 6th May, he died peacefully. His son became George V, and inherited the constitutional problem.

There was no way that Asquith could go immediately to the new and inexperienced King asking him to make the very awkward decision about new peers when even his father wasn't sure what to do. Instead the Prime Minister went to the Tories proposing a Constitutional Conference to see if they could solve the problem. It was more in hope than any real conviction that a solution could be found. At first, with a common feeling that they should spare the King, some progress was made. Meanwhile, with the heat taken out of the situation, Parliament turned to other matters.

Charles Leach was also busy outside the House, still keeping his hand in preaching, even returning to Cavendish for one Sunday. He attended a meeting of the Central Sunday Closing Association, presided over by no less than the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was, of course, a member of the House of Lords, but Charles Leach would swallow that to support an organisation where he agreed with the objectives.

On 21st May at the same time as the funeral of the old King, services were held around the country. The National Council for the Evangelical Free Churches held a service in Westminster chapel, as part of the general day of mourning, and the 2,500 seats were all full. Charles Leach was present as a member of the executive of the National council, and three other members of Parliament also attended including Rev C Sylvester Horne who assisted Dr Clifford with the service.

Back in the House he was beginning to get the hang of Parliamentary questions, asking the Home secretary when the Unemployment Bill would be introduced, which flushed out the Prime Minister to admit that in the circumstances it was unlikely to be that year.[8] A further question stuck a pin into the Chancellor asking when those on Poor Law relief would be brought into the old age pension scheme. Being excluded from the scheme had left them in somewhat of a catch 22 position. Lloyd George could not provide an answer, but it would act as a reminder that there was still a problem. Charles Leach also couldn't resist the temptation to try to support the Nonconformist cause when the occasion arose to talk about Chaplains in the Navy or Prisons, or suchlike.

As if the Commons hadn't had enough excitement for one year, in the middle of June Mr Shackleton, a Labour Member, introduced a private members bill, which because it had supporters from all the parties, was known as a Conciliation Bill. The title was the Parliamentary Franchise (Women) Bill. To appeal to all sides, it was a limited measure, seeking only to enfranchise women who were householders or occupiers of premises worth £10 a year. Thus married women living with their husbands would be excluded. Surprisingly around a million women would be included made up of spinsters, widows and so on, who were 'heads of households'. With an excess of women over men in the population this was quite a large group. The introduction had the beneficial effect of calming the various groups of Suffragettes and Suffragists, at least for a while. Though many didn't like the limited measure most felt that it should be taken as a first step.

On 11th July the Bill started its second reading in the House. The first day was notable for a long and brilliant speech by the rising Tory star, FE Smith, a Liverpool lawyer who had won the Walton division against the tide in 1906. Like many, and particularly the government ministers, he was against the measure but was somewhat circumspect in how he opposed it. He introduced an amendment to try to delay the process by three months. The next day it was the turn of Winston Churchill, now the Home Secretary. In a long and rambling speech it gradually became apparent that though he claimed to be in favour of Women's franchise he was against the Bill, as it was 'undemocratic'. What concerned him, and many Liberals, was that they thought that most of those enfranchised would be upper class and hence Tory supporters. Keir Hardie tried quoting statistics from the social researcher Charles Booth to counter this, but to little effect.

It was now Charles Leach's chance to speak:

'It takes some courage on the part of one who has participated very seldom in the Debates in this House to speak in favour of the Bill after the strong deliverances of the Home Secretary. I have no intention of following the right hon. Gentleman in the arguments he used; I will simply say that of all the speeches I have heard him make in this Assembly—and they have been many—he has never made one based on a more slender foundation than that he delivered this afternoon. If hon. Members will read it carefully tomorrow, when they get the Report, they will find it can be easily attacked. I support the Bill not merely to redeem my election pledges, but as a measure of justice to women, who too long have been kept from what, I think, is their right. I regret that the Bill goes such a very small way. I am in favour of giving

votes to women on precisely the same terms as they are given to men. But this Bill does not do that. You make the woman pay rates and taxes, and extract them from her to the very last shilling. Why should you not give her the same privileges as you give to men from whom you also take rates and taxes? Men have votes on many qualifications; this little Bill gives votes only in two directions—to the householder and to the ten-pounder.

What grounds are there for the rejection of this Bill; woman has proved her fitness by the way she acted on boards of guardians and on school boards and in many other directions. I believe there are some men in this House who are opposed to this Bill because they fear women—they absolutely fear what may happen if the vote is granted to them; they oppose it, in fact, on grounds of prejudice… The hon. and learned Member for the Walton Division made a speech yesterday, and I venture to express my opinion that no speech ever made in connection with this subject has been so capable. But even behind that speech, if you look carefully into it, you will find prejudice and fear of women... Several Liberal Members are going to oppose this Bill because it does not go so far as they wish. I do not understand for the life of me a hungry man refusing a breakfast which I may be willing to give him because I do not also undertake to entertain him at luncheon and dinner, and to serve him with the finest champagnes. I cannot understand why any man should object to this Bill if he is in favour of democratic principles simply because it does not go far enough.

I am a hearty supporter of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I was delighted to hear the speech he made in introducing his Budget last week... I heartily approved of its main features. I am, however, altogether opposed to the action of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in certain directions. I deeply regret that old age pensioners are to receive their pensions partly from the local authorities, and that invalidity and working insurance are to be delayed another year. But I should be very foolish indeed if I refused to vote for the Budget because it does not go the length I should like. Bearing this in mind, I hope Liberal Members who are talking of opposing this Bill will reconsider their position. Every argument used against this Bill, so far, was used against the measures to give votes to men in boroughs and in counties. There has been nothing new advanced, and, indeed, I am surprised that they should have been brought up again. Is there any hon. Member of this House who can say that he has been influenced by any of the arguments used to vote against this Bill? We trust women in local affairs, on school committees, on health committees, on housing committees, and even on borough councils, but we seem afraid to trust them with the Parliamentary vote. I believe if they are given the vote it will raise the tone of public life, it will lessen the bitterness which obtains at elections, and it will hasten those social and humane measures for which we have too long been waiting.'[9]

Whether any of the speeches had affected any of the members is difficult to say. The matter was going to be decided largely on prejudice. It was not long before the voting began, and the situation became very confused. First it was necessary to deal with defeating the delaying amendment. The division showed clearly who was on which side of the argument. All the supporters, including Charles Leach were in the 'Aye' lobby, while those opposed included the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, and even the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Curiously supporting the measure was Balfour, the leader of the opposition. There was an easy majority of 299 to 190 in favour of dealing with the matter now.

It was with the main second vote where the problems arose. The question put by Mr Lehman, an opposer of the Bill, was 'That the Bill be referred to a committee of the whole house.' At first sight this appeared to be in favour of the Bill passing its second reading, but it was a poisoned chalice, because by having a committee of the whole House, rather than a small one, there was no chance of there being parliamentary time for it to go through its further stages. It was a way of burying the Bill. The result was a clear majority of 320 to 175, hence it could be claimed that it passed its second reading.

The large majority showed that many were not clear whether they were voting for the measure or to bury it. While Balfour was amongst the 'Ayes' so were the Prime Minister and his cabinet colleagues who had voted to delay it. They knew what was going to happen next. So did Shackleton, the proposer of the Bill, together with most of his supporters, and they voted against it. Charles Leach was in the 'No' lobby with them. Many of those voting for it were those opposed to the measure, hence the confusion.

It was not a surprise, when a little later Asquith announced that there would be 'no further facilities' to carry the Bill forward. He had always been against it, and having virtual control of the Parliamentary timetable, he knew he could just lose it in the mass of business. Sending it to a committee of the whole House had just played into his hands; and so died the first real attempt to enfranchise women. There was a majority in favour in the chamber, but Asquith's opposition was the deciding factor.

23

The Second Election

The Constitutional Conference rumbled on over the summer of 1910. The high hopes with which it had started soon dissipated as they approached the nub of the matter. Despite innovative ideas, such as Lloyd George suggesting a coalition government, the leaders of the Liberals and Unionists had reached stalemate by November. The Liberals were still determined to curtail the powers of the House of Lords and so there was no option but to have a further election. To prevent another deadlocked result Asquith went to King George V and he was persuaded, with reluctance, into a secret compact to create sufficient peers should the need arise.

With this assurance Asquith called the election for December to be held between the 3rd and the 19th. Charles Leach was on his way to Colne Valley again, after a much shorter period than he had expected. While he didn't really want another one so soon, the confidence that Asquith exuded made all the Liberal candidates sure that should they obtain another majority then he had something up his sleeve that would enable the Parliament Bill to be passed.

By the beginning of December Charles Leach was holding meetings and explaining his position. Though the main issue at the election was the veto of the House of Lords, there were other matters he was proud to say that he had supported, such as the great budget, the maintenance of free trade, the Conciliation Bill, and the expansion of the old age pension scheme. Turning to the future he laid out the things he would support: 'One man one vote – reform of the registration laws; reform of education; religious equality; votes for women; all elections on one day – and that should be a holiday; public houses should be closed during polling; popular control of the liquor traffic; local self-government for Ireland…an insurance scheme for the unemployed, helping the sick and afflicted; for better treatment for widows and orphans – and improving the lot of the toiling masses.'[1]

By the following Monday he was holding three rousing meetings in one day and hammering home the key issue of the peers versus the people. As Victor Grayson had decided not to stand again, he had only Captain Boyd Carpenter to fight, and so could target his appeals more easily. Tariff Reform was attacked by showing that wheat prices were over £2 a quarter in Berlin, Paris and Genoa, but only £1 11s 0d in Liverpool.[2] The difference he claimed being due to the lack of tariffs.

Voting took place on Saturday the 10th in pouring rain, or a 'depression climatic condition'[3] as it was described. It wasn't practical to hold the count the same day, so it began at nine o'clock the following morning. The result was very uncertain, as no one could be sure of the effect of Grayson not standing. It could be expected that those with socialist views might turn to him, but some of the working class might return to the tradition of voting Tory. How would the peers versus people issue play in Colne Valley? Would the electors feel that he had done a good job as the MP; he had certainly done it conscientiously, but would they recognise that?

Accompanied by Mabel he was present to watch the count, a little more nervously this time as losing a seat was a greater disaster than failing to win one. He could breathe a sigh of relief when the result was declared. He had had added 400 votes to poll 5,147, but the Captain had increased his by 1,100 to 4,847.[4] It was closer than he would have liked, but he still had a majority of 300 and could safely return to

Westminster. The supporters were jubilant, and took him round to the Liberal club where he again gave a speech from the balcony.

There was an addendum played out in the Coroner's court the next week. Eighty-eight year old John Shaw had been very keen to vote for Charles Leach. The Liberals had sent a car for him which had taken him to the polling station. After placing his cross he was driven home again, and satisfied he sat down again in his favourite chair. It was some time later when it was noticed that he had died; but his vote still counted.

The national result was also little different. A handful of seats changed hands leaving the Liberals and Unionists at a dead heat on 272 seats each. The gains had gone to Labour, now at 42, and the Irish at 84. With those parties still largely supporting Asquith there was no question of him being unable to continue in power. If anything the majority likely to be in favour of the Parliament Bill was slightly increased. The scene was now set for the showdown.

Parliament didn't reassemble until early February with the King's speech on the 6th. Charles Leach wasn't a new boy any more. It was like the second term at school; you feel confident because you know your way around. He was quick off the mark tabling questions and his first ones came up two days later. They were an odd mixture; the government's attitude to the opium trade with China, the form of an enquiry into the mine disaster in Pretoria, and whether a political pension can be stopped. On the following Monday he had three more, again on widely differing topics: could the Public Authorities be made to provide Sanitaria for poor people unable to afford them; and could Local Authorities be pressed to implement the measures in the Small Holdings Act to make land available for those who required it? It also looked as though he was having trouble with his post as he wanted to know how much extra duty there had been in the East Central District office. Obviously he was aware of a staffing problem and this was a way of ensuring that something was done about it. He was getting much better at these questions, successfully raising topics that needed attention, and the ministers finding it much more difficult to fob him off.

He also had had a stroke of luck with his name coming up in the ballot for Private Member's Bills. He knew exactly what he wanted to introduce as he had already drafted it even before the election. It all stemmed from another of those landmark legal rulings, in the Edwardian era, that appeared perverse though were probably legally correct. The Osborne judgement overturned what had been considered normal practice for many years, and would have continued to do so had it not gone to court.

Walter V Osborne was the head porter at Clapton Station in North London, though he lived in Walthamstow and was the secretary of the Walthamstow branch of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. Being a Liberal, and generally a 'difficult' man, he objected to being made to pay part of his dues to the Union to support the Labour party. He appealed for funds and launched a case in the High Court which came to trial in July 1908. He lost, but after raising fresh money took the case to the Court of Appeal. In November it was heard in front of the Master of the Rolls, Sir HH Cozens-Hardy, the father-in-law of Rev Sylvester Horne. He and the other judges found that supporting Parliamentary candidates was beyond the definition of a Trade Union and so illegal. Osborne had won.

The Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party were very unhappy about this and had no option but to appeal to the House of Lords. This caused a certain amount of mirth, not least to Osborne himself, of the socialists having to put their affairs in the hands of the peers. It wasn't until late November 1909 that the Lords reached their judgement and supported the Appeal Court. With the budget crisis in full swing and an imminent election there was not time to consider the issue, but during 1910 it became

apparent that the only solution was to seek legislation. The Labour Party was now in a relatively strong position to ask this of the Liberals, but Asquith, though sympathetic, was in no hurry.

Charles Leach had taken an interest in this subject and was keen to solve it. While he was a Liberal he still had a regard for the Labour Party and particularly his old friend Keir Hardie. Though the government had promised to look at the matter, he wanted to move things along. During the hustings for the December election he mentioned that he had prepared a Bill on the Osborne Judgement, and submitted it to the Prime Minister. He added 'his Bill would enable a man to earmark his subscription for helping the sick and those out of work, and was more radical than the Government's proposal.'[5]

On 16 February he was able to introduce his Trade Union Bill, to legalise political action by Trade Unions. He was supported by Stephen Collins, the MP for the Kennington Division of Lambeth, a Congregationalist and Abstainer like himself; and another of the January intake, Harold Glanville, the Member for Southwark Bermondsey Division. It has been commented that they were all Liberal members for working-class constituencies.[6] This may or may not be relevant, but it is notable that two were Nonconformists, and all three on the radical wing of the party. The dividing line between the Liberals and Labour was very thin.

The Bill itself was quite simple. One clause negated the Osborne Judgement making it lawful for Trade Unions to use their funds to support Members of Parliament and their election expenses. The second followed his previous comments and allowed dissenters from the political levy to require that their contribution be used for sick or unemployment benefits.[7] The Labour Party was not happy with this and a couple of weeks later got the opportunity to introduce their own Trade Union Law Amendment (No 2) Bill.[8] This was simpler still and merely satisfied itself in negating the Osborne Judgement. There was no provision at all for the views of dissenters from the political levy.

The difference between the two Bills pointed up the difference between the Labour party and the radical Liberals. There was little to choose between the policies advocated as they all agreed about social legislation, support for the poor and disadvantaged, and hankered after degrees of nationalisation. There was a complete overlap with some Liberals having more extreme views than some of the Labour members. The difference came in that Labour felt that the minority should submit to the will of the majority. It was a narrow view concerned only with the working class and contending that Labour was their party and thus should be supported by Trade Unions, and all members receiving their funds should be subject to the rules of the Party.

The Liberals like Charles Leach had a wider view. It was natural justice that the Unions should be allowed to fund candidates for Parliament. What also fell into that category was that individual members should be allowed to have their own views and support who they liked. It was quite wrong that they should be forced to contribute to a party with which they disagreed, just because they were a member of a Union for their trade. As he had said many times, he wanted everyone to be included and benefit from improvements. The support was for the poor and the needy, not because they were from the working class, but because they were fellow human beings. This stemmed directly from his Christianity and was the point at which Jesus' teaching and many of the left wing parted company.

This was all a sideshow from the real business of this Parliament – the battle with the House of Lords. The Parliament Bill was reintroduced, unchanged, into the

Commons on the 21st February and passed a division comfortably on the following day, Charles Leach, of course, adding his vote to those in favour. Such was the hurry that the Second Reading started only five days later. On the 28th it was his turn to contribute to the debate. It was approaching 8 o'clock when he rose; the tetchiness of the atmosphere could be seen in his opening remarks: 'I will not attempt to follow the hon. Member opposite in attributing improper motives to those who differ from me. If I think that hon. Members who sit on that side are sometimes mistaken, I believe they are quite sincere, and I wish that those who sit on that side would give the same credit to those who sit on this.'[9]

Contributing to the tension was the preamble to the Bill which announced the Government's intention 'to substitute for the House of Lords as it present exists, a Second Chamber constituted on popular, instead of a heredity basis.' Though the Bill was just about the Veto of the House of Lords on Bills passed up from the Commons, there was this underlying threat that once these changes were made there was nothing to stop the government using the new powers to force through a complete restructuring, or other constitutional measures such as Home Rule for Ireland. In addition the Unionists would lose their cosy ability to rule when they were in power, and depend on the Lords to restrain legislation they didn't like, when they weren't.

One of their lines of the Tory attack in the debate was that the Bill would completely negate the power of the Lords. Charles Leach continued:

'The hon. and learned Member for the Walton Division (Mr. F. E. Smith), in a speech on the First Reading referred to this Bill as providing for One-Chamber Government only. The same statement has been made over and over again, and the hon. and learned Member appealed to this side of the House to answer the charge. As far as I understand the Bill—and no man has better tried to understand it than I have done; again and again during the election in December, I referred to it in my contest in the Colne Valley, it provides for a real Second Chamber. Everybody knows that we have One-Chamber Government when the party opposite are in power. The Prime Minister and the Government are anxious to provide a real revising Second Chamber. I understand the proper functions of a Second Chamber to be revision and restriction. When the House of Commons sends up measures badly conceived and imperfect, it is the business of the superior persons in that House to revise, amend, and send back the Bill with their amendments to this House; and the Bill of the Government gives ample opportunity for the exercise of that power. Three separate Sessions and two years is in my judgment far too long a period. In the exercise of their power of restriction, if the House of Lords do their duty, they will check hasty and improper legislation by whichever party it may be sent to them.'

He then attacked the House of Lords for the way it had repeatedly rejected important Liberal, but never Conservative measures. The revising powers had not prevented, for example, the 1902 Education Act.

'This Bill will prevent an irresponsible, non-elective, and violently partisan Chamber from destroying measures passed at the will and demand of the people. Speaking for myself, I say that the Bill is far too generous. I hope the Government will delete the Preamble and accept amendments declaring that two Sessions in one year is ample time in which the other House and the country can decide about any measure in dispute. I do not see why a democratic Government, backed up by the Radical party, should trouble itself too much about reforming the House of Lords. The only reform of the House of Lords as at present constituted—I hope no one will misunderstand or misrepresent me; I say as at present constituted—is to reform it out of existence. Let us have a Second Chamber composed of men who do not sit in it merely by the accident of birth, but who have done something, and are there by right of some wise

method of popular election. The House of Lords, as we know it, is violently partisan, and must remain so as long as it is constituted as at present. It cannot be otherwise. Members of that House stand for the rights of the few as against the needs of the many. By birth, breeding, and social position they are, and they must be, with some notable exceptions, entirely ignorant of and out of sympathy with the struggles of the poor and the toiling masses of the people.'

There followed a series of examples where the Lords had, as he put it 'taken the wrong side', and raising many of the old Nonconformist bugbears. He was subject to a considerable amount of heckling, but ploughed on:

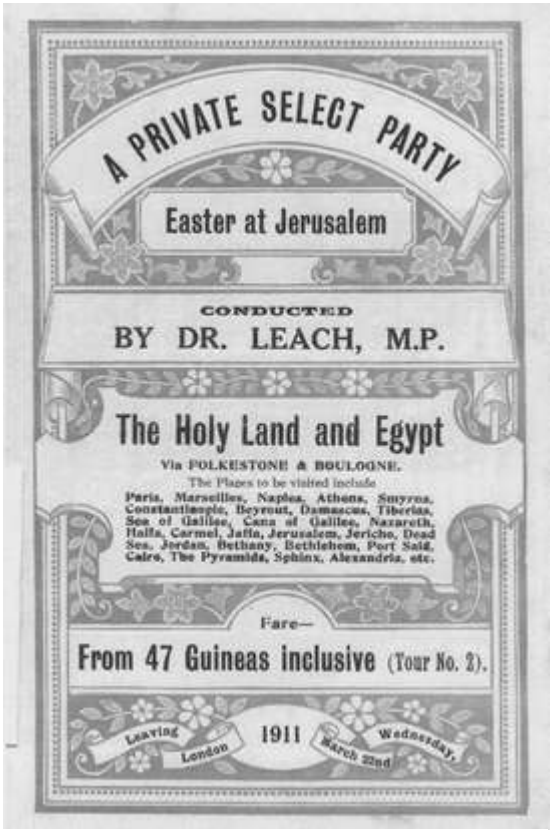
'Last of all the House of Lords laid their hands on the Budget, the most stupendous blunder and the most colossal act of folly of which I have known any party to be guilty. The Prime Minister has accurately described it as the greatest act of political suicide in modern times. The claims which they make are such as cannot be admitted on this side of the House. Let me say one word in connection with the great objection that is taken to this Bill by hon. Members opposite. Home Rule seems to be the nightmare which is haunting them from beginning to end.'

Once again he was courageous, or foolhardy, enough to meet the real challenge head on. Most had shied away from mentioning this, but not Charles Leach who went on to defend that policy as well. He ended by saying he would vote for the Bill, which went without saying. Two days later the Unionist wrecking amendment was defeated, and the Bill passed to its committee stage by comfortable majorities of well over 100. Nothing much was going to happen until that happened in late April, or early May when the Trade Union Bill was due for its second reading, so here was the chance to take a break.

24

The Holy Land

Charles Leach had intended to conduct a party to the Holy Land for Easter of 1910. As a newly elected MP he felt he should not be absent so soon after his election, and gave his maiden speech during the time he would have been away. Instead of cancelling the tour, it had merely been postponed for a year. Despite the December election Cooks were already starting to publicise 'Easter at Jerusalem' with Dr Leach MP.[1] Shortly afterwards they put out a 16 page booklet describing the trips in detail. There were two versions, thirty-seven days including Damascus, and thirty days 'for those who cannot spare the time for the longer trip'. Dr Leach was travelling with the main party which would bring them to Jerusalem for Easter. The prices were 55 guineas for the main tour, 47 for the shorter, and you could travel first class for an additional 17. Guineas were still very popular amongst traders as they hid the fact that you were paying an extra shilling for every pound, and hence it seemed cheaper.



Booklet from the 1911 party to the Holy Land

Thomas Cook was a religious man, a former Baptist preacher he worked as a cabinet maker in Market Harborough in Leicestershire. In the 1840s, as a strong supporter of the temperance movement, he had begun organising rail transport for them which gradually led him into more seaside tours in England. His breakthrough came when Sir Joseph Paxton asked him to bring workers from Yorkshire and the Midlands to visit the Great Exhibition. Later in the 1850s and 1860s he expanded across the

channel, with visits to Belgium, Germany and Switzerland making use of the new railways.

With his religious background the Holy Land held a lure for him and in 1869 he conducted his first tour there, taking in Egypt as well. While in 1871 he took his first party round the world, Palestine held a fascination for him and he spent more and more time on this while his son, John Mason Cook ran the business. By 1891, when Charles Leach first went, he was taking approaching 12,000 people a year, and had a major organisation in the country. Unfortunately he died the following year, but the family carried on the business.

Charles Leach claimed to have visited nine times. The first was in 1891 and the last in 1911. He also went in 1899, 1901, 1903, 1905 and 1908. The 1903 trip was said to be the fourth which means that, if the claim is correct, there must have been two more visits between then and 1911. As it could not have been 1910 there are not many years left, and no evidence has been found, though 1906, 1907 and 1909 are possible. Nevertheless he was very experienced in travelling there and was definitely involved in conducting parties for Cook's from 1903 onwards. Before 1908, while he was still a Pastor, they had to be a little circumspect with regard to the amount of publicity that was put out. None has been found for 1909, so it would seem likely that the two missing trips were in 1906 and 1907.

The 1911 tour left England on 22nd March from Charing Cross Station, travelling via Folkestone and Boulogne to Paris, where a quick dinner fortified the passengers for the overnight train trip to Marseilles, to catch the boat. Cook's 'cruises of the Mediterranean' made extensive use of the French mail steamers. The first port of call was Naples, where after breakfasting they went ashore and carriages were provided to visit some of the sights. Cook's were always concerned to ensure that the tourists were regularly fed, and all transport was laid on.

The next day the itinerary was extolling the day's sail along the coast of Italy and through the beautiful Straits of Messina. There is nothing new in holiday brochures. A visit to Athens and the Parthenon necessitated a train journey from the port at Piraeus, after landing by small boats. The religious tone of the tour was shown by including a visit to Mars Hill where Paul the disciple had preached as documented in chapter 17 of the Acts of the Apostles, which was so thrilling to the many ministers and churchgoers in the party that they often sang a hymn. Charles Leach's function, in addition to giving short lectures at various places, was to deal with any problems such as a lady passenger turning their ankle and needing to be taken back to the ship.

For the classical scholars amongst the party, the cruise through the Greek islands recalled Homer's stories in the Iliad and the Odyssey, before they reached Smyrna in Asia Minor – now Izmir in Turkey. Travelling up the Turkish coast brought them through spectacular scenery to Constantinople (modern Istanbul), the home of the 'Unspeakable Turk'. The Turkish Empire was not popular due to its treatment of those like Armenians that showed a reluctance to convert to Islam on account of their Christian faith. The impression of Constantinople didn't improve the view; it was of filth, stray dogs, and government inefficiency. This was somewhat counterbalanced by the splendours of the Mosque of St Sophia, the Galatia Tower and the Golden Horn.

The ship then took three days working round the coast of Turkey, before reaching Beyrout (Beirut) where after visiting the city the two parties separated. Those on the longer tour, with Dr Leach, took the spectacular train journey up through vineyards, interspersed with groves of mulberry and pine. Higher still, they climbed, over two ranges of mountains, reaching 4000 feet, before winding through the gardens and orchards surrounding Damascus. In the city, one of the oldest in the world, they began

to be among places with Biblical connections. To the north-west of the city is a hill, said to be the where Abraham rested, and where the inspiration that there is only one God came to him. More than 2,000 years later Mohamed came to the same place in honour of Abraham's memory.

In the city he was impressed by the trade from the East of silks, carpets, brass-work, silver-work and golden artefacts. He described the scene: 'We have just been for a ride through the bazaars and streets. I know of no way of reproducing the street scenes. You must imagine crowds of men and women dressed in every possible colour, and combination of colours, walking, squatting, smoking, talking, shouting, buying and selling all at once. And then you have not the half of it. It has greatly interested me. As I walk through its streets I feel that I am walking in a place older than Abraham. And as these Eastern cities do not change much, we have a real picture of ancient days.'[2] Of course, they had to visit the 'Street Called Straight' mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles and the House of Ananias where Saul had his sight restored and was converted to the apostle Paul.

The next three days were spent working their way along the Damascus to Haifa railway, with the first stop in Tiberias, which allowed time for a sail on the Sea of Galilee, alongside which Jesus had spent most of his life. Now they were really in New Testament lands, with visits to the Place of the Sermon on the Mount, and Cana of Galilee, before reaching Nazareth, the place of His upbringing. To him things seemed so little changed by the passing of centuries that 'when I first walked the narrow streets and steep lanes of Nazareth, and looked at the people on its streets and in its houses, I tried to think that they might be much the same when He saw them. And when, at the well – always a centre of interest at Nazareth – I saw quite a number of women – some at work, others filling their vessels with water – I almost imagined I could see her face among them who was His mother, and who must often have come to this well.'[3] After the thrill of this, it was literally downhill to Haifa, with nothing more exciting than Mount Carmel. A ship then took them along the coast to Jaffa, while those on the shorter tour had gone straight there from Beyrout.

From Jaffa, both parties took the same route for the rest of the time; the shorter tour being seven days ahead, and without the services of Dr Leach. From the ship they first took the train for Jerusalem. The five days spent there being the highlight of the tour. To the religious in the party, and that was most of them, here was the Holy City, the objective of their pilgrimage. There were so many wonderful things to see it was difficult to know where to start, but they didn't need to worry as Cooks had it all organised. The excitement was generated for Christians by the sense that they were walking the very places that Jesus had trod, and were mentioned in their New Testaments, which they had to hand.

At nearly every turn were places and buildings with resonances from the Bible. Perhaps not every story was absolutely true, but that didn't detract from the wonder of it all. For Charles Leach, on his ninth visit, it still held the allure even though he knew thoroughly what to expect. Mount Zion, the highest point of the city, was approached along Zion Street and through the Zion Gate. It was here that David had taken the Ark of the Covenant. Close by were the ancient foundations of Solomon's Temple known as the Wailing Wall.

From the hotel they used, near the Jaffa Gate, it was not far to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, down David Street and into Christian Street. The church was supposed to be over the site where the cross had stood, and where Joseph of Arimathea had a new tomb hewn to lay the body of Christ. Though there had been a church there for sixteen hundred years, Charles Leach knew perfectly well that there

was no real evidence that this was the site of Calvary and of the tomb. It didn't matter; it was still a very inspiring place.

By a strange juxtaposition, the two storied building where the biblical David was supposed to be buried, also contained a plain and not very clean room about fifty feet long and thirty wide where the Last Supper was said to have been held. Doubts of its authenticity or not, there was a real sense of the closeness to Jesus.

There could be greater certainty about the Mount of Olives, despite most of the trees having disappeared. In the twenty years that he had been going Charles Leach had seen the buildings increase on the hill and he feared that soon the natural beauty would be gone. Once the top was reached, either by walking up one of the pathways, or for the less energetic a long way round by carriage, there was a glorious view. It is the highest point of the hills around Jerusalem at 2,720 feet. From here they could see the whole city laid out before them, and pick out the Mosque of Omar, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Below the hill in the Vale of Kidron they entered through a low doorway into the walled Garden of Gethsemane. This was truly a place of pilgrimage, despite the crude illustrations on the Stations of the Cross. He was impressed by the eight ancient olive trees that regenerate themselves by sending up fresh shoots from the roots when the old trunk dies. Thus the trees that he was seeing might have sprung from the roots of those that were in the garden when Jesus walked there. It was that sense of being within touching distance of biblical events that had the profound effect on the travellers. It was easy for Charles Leach, as their guide, to bring it all to life.

They couldn't leave before outings to Jericho and the Dead Sea by carriage, and visiting Bethlehem. The last they found was little more than a village, with a few people making religious figures, but the Church of the Nativity, marking the place where Jesus was born, was for some the high point of the tour. Despite the dubiousness of the Good Samaritan Inn, it was another opportunity to ponder on the stories from the scriptures. Looking around, the dusty hills, with their white buildings, were so different from the brick cities in the green land of England.

It was with regret, and with their minds full of the sights and sounds that they took the train back down to Jaffa, where a ship took them to Alexandria, and then they went on by rail to Cairo. Here it was just tourism to visit the great Mosques and the Coptic Church and the bazaars, but the real objective was the Pyramids, Sphinx, and the tombs. Their tour wouldn't have been complete without seeing the famous Museum containing so many of the artefacts that had been found.

Now their faces turned homeward; returning to Alexandria, through a district 'in which the customs and habits of the natives can be observed',[4] and a four day sail returning to Marseilles. A leisurely forty-eight hours was taken for the train journey to England via Paris, bringing Charles Leach back in time to resume his parliamentary duties.

The whole Middle East held a fascination for Charles Leach. Growing up in a Yorkshire woollen town, he would not have expected ever to have ever seen these places, let alone quite as many times as he did. He was to distil this interest into his book *The Romance of the Holy Land*.[5] It was virtually complete before his last visit in the spring of 1911, but he claimed that he wanted it to be quite up to date. What he didn't say was that he was contracted to Cooks to conduct a party. Nevertheless having studied the subject and made nine visits, he was well qualified for the task. Much of it was written in the House of Commons library, where he would sometimes go to escape from boring debates.

In the twenty years that he had been visiting he had seen many changes, not least the coming of the railways which had made journeying much simpler, but some of the immediate contact with the place was lost compared to travelling on horseback. On his first visit in 1891 it had been necessary to ride from Jaffa to Jerusalem, as the railway, though under construction, was not completed until the following year. Later the visits were made easier by the opening of the Beirut to Damascus line, part of which required rack assistance on the steep gradients, and not long before the 1911 visit the Damascus to Haifa route was brought into operation.

Camping Expedition 1903. Note the TC flags on the tents. Rev CH Shave is third from right standing in dark coat

Years before it had been necessary to either ride, or where some sort of road existed, to use horse-drawn carriages. The whole party would be taken by series of them, forming a sort of caravan. Accommodation was sparse too and for some of the visits, particularly to Galilee and to Damascus from Jerusalem or vice versa, camping was involved. Highly organised by Cooks, this wasn't slumming. A dozen or so sizable round tents would be set up at the stop by the local men accompanying the party. These had conical roofs topped by the flag with the TC logo of Thomas Cook and Son, and the occasional union jack. They were large enough to stand up inside, some used for sleeping and some for the meals.

By 1903 Charles Leach was getting too old for that sort of thing and it was his son-in-law Charles Shave who went camping, while he stayed in Jerusalem. Unfortunately the rain came down and the spirits of the party were rather low, but were improved by him going out by horse from Jerusalem to meet them. He was still able to ride despite growing up in a town, and now being 56. Before the Damascus to Haifa railway, this was the way to get from one to the other. It was a memorable experience, if fairly gruelling with several days on horseback.

The book is a lyrical description of the places to visit and their biblical connections. In laying out his qualifications to write such a work he quotes some of the places he had been:

'I have ridden on horseback from Judea to Damascus; from one end of the country to the other. Since railways were built and roads made, I have been east, west, north, and south. I have several times travelled down the eastern side of Jordan, through what is now the great

corn growing district, were once the famous 'Bulls of Basham' were reared. I have several times crossed the land from Haifa to Tiberias – that is from west to east. I have entered Jerusalem on horseback, in a carriage, and by railway-train. Several times have I crossed the Lebanon Range, by carriage and train, travelling up to the snow-line, passing under the shade of lofty Hermon, on to Damascus. On the banks of the River Abana I have sipped coffee with the natives.'[6]

He described his first sight of the Holy Land which shows his fascination with the place. They had been in Egypt and were approaching Jaffa by ship in the early morning:

'I knew that soon I should feast my eyes with my first view of the land, and the dream of a lifetime be realised. When the curtain of darkness was drawn back from the chamber of the skies, and the gates of the East were unlocked to let the light filter through the mist, I saw a dim outline which I took to be the Judean Hills. Looking more like cloud than mountain, the peaks of the lofty heights became within the range of vision. Then, as the mist scattered, and the grey dawn gave place to the fuller, clearer light of the morning sun, I not only saw the long stretch of the coast-land, but the background of mountains. I knew that behind these hills those great kings, poets, and prophets of the Hebrew race, who had done so much for religion, lived and did their work. I did not, I could not, forget that He also lived and died there whom Christians call the 'Light of Life', and who is in the Te Deum called the 'King of Glory, the Everlasting Son of the Father.'"[7]

The book describes a notional journey to Jerusalem, taking in all the sights there, before venturing wider to Bethlehem and Hebron, and a diversion to Jericho, the Jordan and the Dead Sea. Then he takes us north to Jacob's Well, Samaria and Nazareth. The route now took in Tiberias, the Sea of Galilee and on to Damascus before returning to the Mediterranean at Beirut, which he always spelt Beyrout. This was more or less the opposite way round to the 1911 visit, but the precise routes had changed over the years, partly due to the transport improvements.

1911 was to be his last visit. The following year it was to be his son-in-law who took over the duty. After that things became more difficult with the Balkan wars involving Turkey and Greece. From then it was not long until the region was sucked into the First World War, with fighting in the Holy Land, and TE Lawrence and his Arabs were tearing up the Damascus railway. After the Ottoman Empire collapsed the lands were divided up and political borders introduced. The years when Charles Leach had been able to wander freely represented the golden age for pilgrims. The land was still largely unchanged giving the traveller that biblical sense, but transport links were improving to enable access. It was never to be quite the same again.

25

Parliament Act and National Insurance

Arriving back on the 28th April, Charles Leach was ready to return to the House of Commons on the following Monday, 1st May. It was going to be an exciting few months. He had expected to see his Trade Union Bill ready for its second reading, but it was difficult to find time in the crowded session. The Labour party's Bill was suffering the same way, but the government was promising their own to deal with the same subject. On 24th May, Winston Churchill, now the Home Secretary, introduced the Trade Union (No 2) Bill; the number, having to be added as Charles Leach had got in first.

The primary matter before the House, the one that was generating all the excitement, was the Parliament Bill, which was going through its committee stages as he returned, and he was in time to vote on the key sections. Such was its importance that it went to its third reading almost immediately. The Tories were fighting a rearguard action all the way. FE Smith had proposed an amendment that would have destroyed the intention of the bill, but the house was in no mood for cleaver cleaver dodges like this.

On the 15th Charles Leach rose to make his contribution to the debate. He was responding to a question from the opposition asking whether they thought that people had understood the bill at the last election. His answer was that he had discussed it at great length in Colne Valley, and if they didn't understand it that wasn't the fault of the Cabinet. He was even confident enough to take a pot shot at FE Smith: 'I marvelled that an hon. Member so keen in analysis and so learned, and having such an extensive acquaintance with logic, should have based so strong an argument as he attempted to do on premises which would not bear his conclusions.'[1] He continued to explain his position:

'I shall support this Bill because I believe it will make the progress of legislation desired by the people, as expressed in this House, somewhat easier and more rapid than of late it has been. We know that Parliament after Parliament has seen some of its greatest measures destroyed or mutilated, and if this Bill becomes law, as I believe it will, the pace will be considerably quickened, as I consider it ought to be. In the next place I support the Bill because it would secure a closer approach to equality of treatment as between the two great parties in the State than at present exists. Everyone knows who takes an interest in public affairs that measures carried by the Conservatives in the House of Commons, however bad they may be, even when the party had no mandate for them – such as the Education Act – are hurried through the Second Chamber, while Liberal measures, however good, are delayed, defeated, and sometimes destroyed. The time to put a stop to this unfair, this grossly partisan, this unequal treatment, is long overdue, and I am pleased that it is soon to come to an end.'[2]

Much of the argument had become rather repetitive, and by now was generating far more heat than light. There could be no meeting of minds on the essential point that the Liberals were determined to have some means of getting their legislation through a hostile Upper Chamber, and the Tories wanting to retain the status quo. Some difficulties arose from the preamble to the bill which mentioned a future reform of the House of Lords. The Tories were concerned as there were people who would go further than what was being suggested, and seek complete abolishment. Charles Leach wanted to make clear that while he agreed with this, it wasn't the function of the bill, and in the meantime the veto of the upper chamber had to be addressed. Despite the

fevered atmosphere there was little doubt of the result and the bill passed comfortably with a majority of 121; the one being Charles Leach's vote. The Lords now had to do their worst.

On 4th May, not content with one battle, the government in the shape of Lloyd George the Chancellor of the Exchequer, introduced its National Insurance Bill. This had two sections, part I introduced a universal health insurance scheme, and part II an unemployment insurance scheme, but limited to certain industries subject to cyclical lay-offs. Though, after funding the pension scheme, the government could only afford part of the costs, it overcame the problem by making the employees and employers also contribute, and thus being a form of insurance. Despite the limitations, this was the first attempt in Britain to address these issues, and showed a clear change away from the laisez faire thinking of the nineteenth century.

Charles Leach was happy that two more of the great issues on his list were being addressed. However, the devil was in the detail, and by the 8th May he was raising Parliamentary questions to try to discover the precise extent of the bill. He straight away put his finger on a weakness in that only those in employment and their families were covered by the invalidity insurance. He wanted to know if there was any provision for widows with young children, or for the blind or those with other physical or mental defects that meant that they couldn't earn their own living. The answer was no if they hade never contributed.[3]

Lloyd George's stamina was amazing. While the bill did not have much difficulty passing its parliamentary stages with Liberal, Labour and some Irish support, it was the large number of questions that it raised, that provided the heavy workload. These ran at anything up to ten a day during the whole session. Most, like Charles Leach's, were not of a hostile nature, merely trying to find the limits of the bill. In all he alone raised more than a dozen questions.

On the 1st August during the committee stages he rose to make his contribution: 'I am unwilling to take the time of the House, but as this is my first speech on this Bill in this House, perhaps the Committee will bear with me for a few moments. I am, like my hon. Friend behind, a very earnest supporter of this Bill, but I am anxious as hon. Gentlemen who sit below the gangway and in other parts of the House, to see it improved.'[4] His point concerned what happened when someone was in hospital or another institution, where they would not receive the payment. It was really about the complexity of how hospitals were funded, which he felt should not be left to charity. He continued: 'That is a very serious matter, and does not seem quite right. I think it would be better to give a little more consideration to the sick father and mother and less to class interests. We think of the doctors and the friendly societies and convalescent homes, but we think very little about the person who is suffering.'[5]

He was looking ahead to a more ideal state – a national health service that wasn't to be realised for more than a generation – but he saw how he wanted it to be. In the meantime Lloyd George was having to compromise to keep the existing insurers, and friendly societies, on board, but his biggest difficulty lay with the doctors to whom he had to promise increased payments to keep them in the scheme. Despite the problems Charles Leach remained a supporter. He would always rather have half a loaf than no bread at all.

Two days later he was on his feet again during a debate on the Local Government Board, where the President, John Burns, was under attack. Despite the excitements he was still concentrating on the concerns of his fellow man, and in particular the poor and disadvantaged.

'Unlike most of those who spoke today upon both sides of the House, I have neither a grievance to air nor a complaint to make. I want rather to speak a few words of earnest commendation of the right hon. Gentleman who presides over the Department whose affairs we are discussing, assisted by his excellent staff. For a long time past the Local Government Board was not very popular, and outside the House, as well as inside it, it was always easy to get a cheer if you made an attack on that Department. I am not quite sure that I did not often do that myself, but under the rule of the present President there has been introduced a more humane spirit than characterised it for a long time previous. I think the Department has softened the rigours of the life of the poor, and is teaching guardians to regard themselves as guardians of the poor rather than merely as guardians of the rates. And if only for what the Local Government Board has done on behalf of the children I should be willing to give them commendation. They have made great efforts and are still making great efforts to keep children who come under the care of the poor system, apart from the taint of the workhouses. That is a most excellent thing. In my judgement the Poor Law children ought to be kept entirely separate from the workhouse.'[6]

It just showed how the new twentieth century attitudes were beginning to filter through the system, though there was still much work to be done.

Charles and Mary Jane Leach in their later years – a rare moment of relaxation

By 24th July, after a pause for the coronation of King George V, the Lords had passed the Parliament Bill, but in doing so, they had amended it sufficiently to effectively destroy its intent. In this state it returned to the Commons, where the government, after some thought, returned it to its original form; attaching their reasons for rejecting the amendments. The political temperature was rising seriously.

On 7th August, the Tories, still angrily resisting, called a vote of confidence in the government on the basis that the extraction of the promise to create more peers from

the King was 'a gross violation of Constitutional liberty.' The government survived that easily by 246 to 365 votes, with Charles Leach's, of course, among them. The atmosphere was more like the rowdyism of a Public School than a legislative House facing one of its most important decisions ever. The Lords resolution of no confidence was passed with a large majority, but could be safely ignored.

On a steamily hot day on 10th August the Parliament Bill returned to the Lords. There were six amendments, and the Lords sat in the evening to consider the Commons' rejections. On five of these they accepted the Commons' arguments without a division, but it was on the last, the substantive one which would have destroyed the intention of the bill, that they had a vote. The Tories had now divided into two factions, the 'Ditchers' who wanted to fight to the last one, and the 'Hedgers' prepared to compromise to avoid something worse. They didn't want to see the Lords swamped by large numbers of new Peers. In the end it was the latter who prevailed, aided by 13 Bishops, to effectively pass the bill by 131 to 114 votes. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief, not least King George V, who promptly signed the Act into law. The Liberals had at last a weapon to force their Bills through parliament should the Lords continue with their outright opposition to their reforms. Charles Leach was happy; here at last he had been party to passing one of the great pillars of the Liberal programme that he supported – the curtailment of the power of the Lords' veto.

It has often been said that the period before the First World War was a golden age of warm summers, and peace. Nothing could be further from the truth, particularly in 1911. The weather was warm, but so were tempers. The old order was changing and there were winners and losers; so many were unhappy. The stresses industrially had burst out into numerous strikes. On 11th August Members were asking questions of the government as to the position of the various disputes, particularly the lightermen. Charles Leach was not comfortable with the way things were progressing and asked: 'Has the right hon. Gentleman any information to impart to the House as to the troops that have been summoned to London?'[7] Mr Herbert Samuel avoided a proper answer, but Joseph King the member for North Somerset, and as a fellow Congregationalist, a man with similar views to Charles Leach, added a further comment: 'I hope that the matter of troops will not be lost sight of, and the unnecessary irritation that it will cause if there is any suspicion that they may be called up, when now, really, the reason for their presence has gone. I am sure that point ought not to be overlooked.'[8] Gradually peace was restored without the use of troops, but it was a long hot summer.

Three days later there was more excitement in the House. Though they couldn't find time for a Trade Union Bill, the government decided to tackle the other half of the problem, and pay Members of Parliament who were not receiving salaries as ministers. To simplify the way they achieved this they attached a section to the Civil Services and Revenue Departments Estimates to pay Members £400 per annum. Despite various attempts to reduce the sum, it was easily passed with a majority of 123. Charles Leach voted for it. Yes he was a beneficiary, and it would be very welcome as he had been living on his savings only alleviated by the bits and pieces he could earn from writing and lecturing. On the other hand, he could salve his conscience as it was an undoubted benefit, not only to the Labour Party, but would open the way for many people without private means to become Members. So, given time, it would alter the Commons to become less dominated by the rich, and more representative of the population in general; again one of his objectives.

Things were calmer by the autumn when in October he had the pleasant duty of being part of the opening party for Chorltonville a new garden suburb that had sprung up on the south side of Manchester. He was particularly pleased that it 'showed how

good houses could be built without philanthropy, and how an Estate could be developed and conducted on sound commercial principles.'[9] One of the first mock Tudor suburbs, it was all curved roads and houses in black and white almost like living in Elizabethan times. As so often in England the temptation was to reach back to what were thought to be happier times; after all modernity had created the dire industrial cities. Despite this, the houses still had electric light, and gas for the stove and wash-boiler.

After having lived in the city he was very conscious of the poor housing conditions there and how this led to health problems. He knew these things personally to his great cost. 'There were two great scourges which did immense mischief in this country, and both were very prevalent in Manchester. One was infant mortality. A great slaughter of the innocents went on in Manchester, and was greatest in the slum districts, where the people are most crowded. We had not yet quite solved the problem of how to find dwellings for the poor at rents they could afford to pay. Land was difficult to get and cost so much. The other great scourge was consumption. He read in the Manchester Guardian the other day that a thousand people died in Manchester every year from the disease. Here, again, the evil was worst in the slums, and the sooner they were cleared away the better for all. But he would like to suggest that it was wrong to drive people out of their wretched dwellings until others had been provided for them within reach of their work and at rents they could afford to pay. Otherwise they only squeezed into other districts and created new slums, so the last state was worse than the first. The City Council should take a leaf out of the book of the managers of the Chorltonville estate.'[10] He, at least, now had a clear view of the issues surrounding housing and health.

As the autumn slowly progressed so did the National Insurance Bill. Lloyd George was still fielding the flood of Parliamentary questions, as Charles Leach had said, in attempts to improve it. Despite all the trials and tribulations, the bill had wide support and it passed its third reading on the 6th December by the huge majority of 324 to 21 votes. In the next ten days it passed all its stages in the Lords though it was amended, returned to the Commons, and then back to the Lords. With a measure of this sort the Lords did not think they should block it. What they considered to be popular measures should not be impeded. The irony was that the Act turned out not to be very well received due to the contributory element. Those who had never bothered with these sorts of things were now forced to contribute and saw it is a reduction in their income, not as a benefit. A common reaction was that their earnings had been reduced; they received their wages, minus the 'Lloyd George'.

With so much heavyweight legislation, and other matters such as the Copyright Act, which Charles Leach largely opposed as it gave unnecessary rights; it was unsurprising that some things fell by the wayside. Among the victims were the various Trade Union bills intended to reverse the Osborne judgement. Charles Leach's bill and that of the Labour Party soon disappeared in the morass of the Parliamentary timetable, while the government's bill struggled on, but after being delayed some dozen times it was finally withdrawn in December. It had to wait for another session, and another year, before it was finally to make its way into the statute book.

So ended 1911, one of the most dramatic years in Parliamentary history; and Charles Leach had been in the thick of it. With the strong support of a new breed of Members like him, this was a great reforming government with a huge backlog of matters on their list. They had only just begun to tackle all the things they wished to achieve.

26

Welsh Disestablishment, Ireland, and Battleships

1912 opened with the start of the campaign for disestablishing the Welsh Church. It is easy to see why a Welsh Nonconformist like Lloyd George should support the separation of the Church of Wales from the State, but less clear why English Members of Parliament like Charles Leach should be interested. He, like so many of his contemporaries, was looking for a level playing field for all religious organisations. This could never be achieved while one had a special position as the state sponsored church. Freeing the Welsh church was also a stepping stone to tackling the more difficult subject of the Church of England. The Free Church ministers, and their supporters in Parliament, were optimistic that the government was serious about the subject and would really push the Welsh bill through.

Sure enough, in the King's speech there was Welsh Disestablishment, but more contentiously a Home Rule for Ireland proposal. During the debate on the address in the Commons the opposition raised a wrecking amendment, which gave Charles Leach an opportunity to speak and lay out his position with regard to the great issues of the day:

'Home Rule stands first. We have been told today, in language most eloquent and convincing, that this subject during the last twenty-five years has been in the programme of the Liberal party. I lived in Birmingham when Mr Gladstone introduced his first Home Rule Bill. I was then a Home Ruler, though it was not so safe to say one was a Home Ruler in those days. I am still a Home Ruler, and probably shall be to the end of the chapter… I think it is high time we began to govern Ireland according to Irish ideas. We have tried every other method ever since I have been in politics, and they have all failed. The whole Irish people, not only in Ireland, but in every part of our Empire, seem to stand opposed to our present policy in Ireland. I think I am entitled to say that you may take it as an axiom, that when the whole people are against you, there is something the matter with your proposals and your rule, and the sooner you put it right the better. We want Home Rule with due and proper safeguards. We are anxious that no one should suffer, not even at Ulster, when the new Act is passed. In my judgement, Home Rule will not only give peace in Ireland, but it will secure the loyalty and goodwill of Irishmen in every part of the Empire.'[1]

This seems a naïve hope now, but it didn't seem unreasonable at the time. He continued on to other subjects: 'Another matter, it is said, is improper to proceed with is Welsh Disestablishment. I could say much upon that subject… Then there is the question of the franchise. I believe in one man one vote, and one woman one vote… and I wish there had been a proposal not only to reconstruct the House of Lords, but to reconstruct it entirely out of existence, for the sooner it is ended the better for all parties, for then we should have room to secure a proper House of Lords, which would command the confidence of the people.'[2] It was a measure of the climate of the times that remarks of this nature could go by without comment. Change was in the air, and almost everything was up for grabs, though in reality both he and his party were quite clear about what was practical to achieve, and what was not.

Three days later he got his opportunity to add his name as a supporter to Landsbury's Municipal Corporation's (Qualification of Clergymen) Bill. It had always been a bone of contention that as a pastor he could not serve on a local council. The Bill sought to remove the disqualification of Clerks in Holy Orders and other Ministers of Religion

from being Municipal Councillors. Needless to say, as a private member's bill, it got lost in the timetable, and attempts were still being made in 1919 to right this matter.

A month later the amount of money required by the Navy was being debated. This was the age of a naval arms race with Germany, and the budget reflected this. Again he rose to speak, but it was a subject on which he had some difficulties:

'I should like to say to the Financial Secretary – and he must forgive me for saying it – that, after all, those large amounts expended on the Navy are straining the loyalty of some of the warm friends of the Government… I should like the Financial Secretary to notice that there is a growing mass of opinion outside this House in favour of peace, and it seems to some that these large expenditures lead towards warfare. I shall be told by the party opposite that the way to peace is by a strong and efficient Navy. I am not in a position to question that. I am not, and never have been, a man of war… I am bound to say that, in my own judgement, a strong Navy is cheaper than a bitter war such as we recently had, and if I could be convinced, and if I really felt in my heart, as many men do, that a strong Navy will secure peace, I am not quite sure that I would not be more pleased to vote for the Estimates than I shall be now. I was greatly rejoiced to hear the First Lord state in his speech that our Navy is for defence and not for offence. That gave me immense satisfaction, but I could not help wondering since Monday if the First Lord and those associated with him had given as much thought and time in trying to secure a better understanding with the naval Power of which we have been so long suspicious, and if they had given the needful attention trying to secure an understanding could they have avoided this large expenditure… I should like to say I am, and always have been, in favour of a strong and efficient Navy. I do not think any hon. Member or right hon. Member on this side of the House would wish to have a Navy unworthy of the great Empire to which we belong. It should be equal to all defensive purposes. It should be equal to the protection of our trade and preserving to us all our oversea Colonies. I agree to all that, but I would remind hon. and right hon. Members that there are other things beside warships which make a nation great. The greatness that is built upon power can only be maintained by power. That greatness is most lasting which is built upon the love and comfort of a peaceful and happy people, well housed, well paid, well fed and well clad, and such greatness endures when other so-called greatness will pass away. It will abide when the counsel of those who deal in war is brought to nought, and when the counsel of those who mean mischief is scattered to the four winds of heaven.'[3]

Despite such eloquence it is unlikely that the course of events could have been altered. Great forces were already in motion, and they were on a collision course. Despite the naval expenditure, the country was largely unprepared for it, and so was he.

In April a private members bill came up for its second reading, which at first sight he would have been expected to approve. Its title was the Cottage Homes for the Aged Bill, but this was rather misleading. It had been put forward by some Tories including Charles Bathurst the Member for the Wilton division of Wiltshire. It was only concerned with cottages in rural areas where the intending tenants had resided for 20 years, and claiming that they could be built for £120. The devil was in the detail, and it was heavily attacked by Liberal members, Charles Leach among them. He didn't ascribe improper motives to the supporters, but saw through it. 'It would encourage lower wages… I do not think it is within the range of possibility to build suitable houses for people to occupy, even aged sixty-five years of age, at the price mentioned. I have built, bought, and sold cottages, and I am sorry to say it has never been my good fortune to be able to buy or build cottages at any such price as those mentioned. I much question that decent or proper houses can be provided at such a figure. I am entirely in favour of everything calculated to improve the conditions of the poor, but I am bound to say I do not think this Bill would help in that direction.'[4] It is strange that

a man so opposed to landlords should, by his own admission, be one himself. It was claimed at the time he became a Member of Parliament that he owned property in both Elland and Illingworth.[5] Perhaps the latter had stemmed from assisting members of his family.

A month later the Established Church (Wales) Bill came up for its second reading and he, as could be expected, rose to give what, for him, was a long speech:

'I am glad I have lived to see the introduction of this Bill, and to have a seat in parliament at its introduction… All my ancestors, so far as they had any religious convictions – and I have traced them back a very long way – were Church of England. I was born into its atmosphere, and one of my earliest recollections is that of being taken to the Parish Church by my relatives. I am a Nonconformist, and it is by conviction. As a Nonconformist, I claim equality before the law with any Churchman. But you will not give it to me… I say most sincerely, most earnestly and devoutly, although I am a Nonconformist and an ardent Radical – too Radical for many of my comrades – that if I could believe that this Bill would injure the Church in Wales as a spiritual institution, nothing would induce me to vote for it. I love religion too well, and have served her interests too long, even to lift my finger to do what I thought would injure the progress of religion in any Church, but I do support this Bill because I do not believe that it will injure, but rather that it will assist the Church in Wales…These are the reasons why I shall heartily support the Bill and vote for it and hope that it will become law; because the Church is no longer the Church of the Welsh nation; because all forms of religion should be equal before the law; because religious belief is a matter between man and his Maker, and because the best interests of the Church, its spiritual interests, will be served by its separation from the State.'[6]

Though he could be expected to support it as a Nonconformist, he genuinely believed that the Church would be improved by the separation from the State. As the Bill progressed through its stages in the House, he was to make more contributions, but on detail to do with endowments and the payment of clergy. With his involvement with the Congregational Superannuation Fund, he knew a great deal about the pensions paid by Nonconformists. He was surprised to find that the Church of England did not pay retirement pensions, and he stated that one of the first things a Disestablished Welsh Church should do was to make better provision for its clergy.

It was in the middle of 1912 that he began taking an interest in sources of raw cotton. 'Cotton is the staple of one of our greatest industries, and we cannot be dependent for our raw material chiefly on one source of supply. I rejoice greatly that the Government are not only encouraging the growth of cotton in British East Africa, but also in India, and I trust nothing will turn them aside from that policy…'[7]

Over the next couple of years he was to ask no less than 25 Parliamentary questions around this subject. There were a number of reasons behind this. His constituency, like Halifax, though basically a woollen producing area, also contained cotton mills. No doubt some of the mill owners were requesting their MP to obtain detailed figures, but there was also concern about supplies. In October he was tabling specific questions that pointed up the problem: 'Mr Leach asked the Under-Secretary of State for India whether he is aware of the opinion of the cotton spinners of the world that an increase in the production of cotton is an absolute necessity; and has he any official information showing that India, with its fertile soil, suitable climate, and skilled agriculturalists, offers facilities for an increase in the raw material?'[8] To this he received an unsatisfactory reply.

He tried again: 'Mr Leach asked if, seeing that America is getting within measurable distance in time when she will need all the cotton she can produce for her own mills and to clothe her own people, and seeing that we cannot expect during the present

generation to see any really substantial extra contribution from the new cotton growing districts of Africa towards meeting the present needs, and the annual increase of over two million spindles, the Government will consider the advisability of fostering the growth of cotton in India, which is capable of vastly increasing the amount of cotton output?'[9] This finally drove the minister to say that they were taking it seriously, and to mention that there had been a deputation of cotton manufactures to the government back in July. He had carefully asked previous questions, such as the capabilities of Sudan and Egypt, to establish the facts before pressing his point.

It would seem that he was acting as somewhat of a mouthpiece for the cotton manufacturers, but clearly there was cause for concern. He no doubt remembered the distress caused during the American civil war when supplies from there were interrupted. A series of questions on the amounts of Indian cotton supplied to Germany, Austria, and other countries that might be belligerent, showed that he was thinking strategically despite his pacifism. He did cause a minor disturbance when he mentioned 'natives' in one of his questions and was ticked off by his old friend Keir Hardie for this, on the grounds that it was 'offensive to the Indians'.

When the Government of Ireland Bill came to its committee stage in July he was making his position quite clear. Like so many people at the time, though he had always advocated Home Rule for Ireland, this did not mean independence. 'No vote of mine, if I know it, will be given to any clause that will give to the Irish Parliament or any other Parliament the right to deal as they choose and which will not leave them subject to the control of this House.'[10] He felt that this was absolutely necessary in the interests of Ulster and to guard against religious persecution.

By 1913 he was well into his stride as a Member of Parliament and during that year asked no less than 51 questions on a whole range of subjects from the denomination of prison chaplains to unemployment in the woollen trade. One particular subject of interest was the working of the Small Holdings Act. The objective of this had been to make land available to individuals to run small holdings as a method of allowing people to drag themselves out of poverty. He regularly asked for the statistics of the amount of land obtained and the numbers of applicants. Partly this was to obtain the relevant figures, but also to keep the department on their toes.

In the middle of the year he was party to the discussions on the Mental Deficiency Bill, and particularly the composition and salaries of the members of the proposed Board of Control, which would take over from the Lunacy Commissioners and be responsible for supervising Mental Institutions and their inmates. There was a certain irony in this in view of what was to happen later, when the bill had become the Act.

Outside Parliament he was still involved with the temperance movement and so it was no surprise at all that he should support Timothy Davies' Bill to prohibit or regulate the sale of Intoxicating Liquors on Sundays. Like so many of these initiatives it disappeared into the timetable, and was never seen again. A similar fate awaited a number of other bills. The Plural Voting Bill sought to remove the multiple vote entitlements that some people had collected. If a person had a second address either of a business or by owning property he could have another vote. It was again a subject in which he had a personal interest. 'This Bill takes from me the extra votes which I happen to possess, for I am one of those wicked men, a pluralist, and I am anxious to be robbed of every vote except one, if it is to be done all round.'[11] Again this showed that he owned a number of properties.

Yet another attempt was made to introduce an Education Bill to correct the problems of the 1902 Act. As it was only the introduction, and the details were not known, he was suspicious that the religious tests for teachers might not be removed. Because this

had been one of the bones of contention of the passive resisters he assured the president of the Board of Education that there would be trouble if it wasn't included. He needn't have bothered as the bill suffered the fate of the others, and never saw the light of day.

He had long been concerned about the usurious rates of interest charged by moneylenders to the poor, and when his name came up again in the ballot for private members bills he took the opportunity to introduce the Moneylenders Acts (1900 and 1911) Amendment Bill, with no less than seven supporters. By now he fully understood the Parliamentary system and it was no surprise to him when it progressed no further.

In 1913 he was 66 years old and was finding representing Colne Valley a strain. His last act was to be present in August at the stone laying for the new Golcar Liberal Club. In November 1913 he announced to the Liberal Council 'his intention not to seek re-election for the Colne Valley Constituency owing to the hilly character of the Division and its widespread area.'[12] Whether that was the whole reason, or did the change of Unionist candidate from Boyd Carpenter to CN Armstrong have anything to do with the decision? Perhaps it was the spectre of Victor Grayson standing again. Far from giving up, by May 1914 he had become adopted as the prospective Liberal candidate for South Wiltshire, Charles Bathurst's very rural constituency. Undoubtedly it was closer to London, and easier to reach, but why should he want to go from a Yorkshire woollen area where he knew the trade, and the mentality of the people, to a southern agricultural area? Clearly he took the potential move seriously in that he stopped asking questions about cotton and substituted ones about Wiltshire, rural matters and the Army camp at Bulford.

On 15th April he tried to make his contribution to efficient running of the Commons by introducing the motion 'That in future no Member shall, except by leave, speak in this House for more than twenty minutes, or for more than fifteen minutes in Committee of the Whole House, Ministers, ex-Ministers, and Movers of Bills and Resolutions excepted.'[13] He was careful not to speak for too long in presenting his motion. Despite that, the fate of this initiative was inevitable – it was talked out!

It was quite a day for him, because in addition to his motion he asked a straightforward question of the Prime Minister – 'if the Government have definitely decided in favour of the Dissolution of Parliament in June; and if the General Election will take place in July?'[14] The Prime Minister denied it, but it created quite a furore in the press as they had spotted a number of signs that pointed in the other direction. With the amended length of the life of the House following the Parliament Act there was still a possible year or so to go, but constitutional problems might have tempted Asquith.

As the spring of 1914 turned to summer the war clouds gathered, but the work of the House carried on as normal. On the 30th July, as the mobilisation timetables across the Channel ran towards their inevitable conclusion, he was asking the President of the Board of Agriculture 'when he expects the next and final stages of the Government Housing Bill to be taken in this House; and if he intends that cottages shall immediately thereafter be erected for married soldiers and other Government workers for whom no cottages are now available in the districts in which their work lies?'[15] They were expecting to consider it in Committee the next day. The atmosphere was unreal in those final days of peace, and the feeling was that even at this late hour it somehow wasn't going to happen, or if it did, it wasn't going to involve Britain.

27

War

In those early days of August 1914 as Europe descended into war, the position of one country, Britain, was uncertain. It was a flaw in Germany's Schlieffen Plan for conquering France - though it might also have been beyond their resources - that it required a right hook through Belgium. Had it not done so, the United Kingdom's decision to enter the War was far from a foregone conclusion. There was great support for the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey's tireless efforts to try to maintain peace, but it was the violation of Belgian neutrality which united everyone. The Germans, particularly the military, didn't rate Britain as a land power, but that was a mistake as time and the Kitchener armies were to show; and also there was the Navy, able from the very first day to impose a very damaging blockade.

How then was a man like Charles Leach, one of those most opposed to the Boer War, to react? Unfortunately his views never reached the public domain, but his actions told their own story. We can make a fair assessment from the comments of some of his fellow anti-war protestors which have come down to us. Dr John Clifford, an old associate, initially had recommended neutrality but when Germany, as he put it, 'broke into Belgium' everything changed and he said 'The path of duty, shone out in clearest light, and wherever it might lead us we had to go. It was the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. We must follow.'[1]

Lloyd George was an even more interesting case, as he was the Chancellor of the Exchequer and at the heart of the Government, but had also been on the committee opposing the Boer War. Close to events he had to make his decision early and it was the invasion of Belgium that clinched it. As part of calming the City of London he gave a speech in the Queen's Hall: 'There is no man in this room who has always regarded the prospect of engaging in a great war with greater reluctance and with greater repugnance than I have done throughout the whole of my political life. There is no man either inside or outside this room more convinced that we could not have avoided it without national dishonour… If we had stood by when two little nations were being crushed and broken by the brutal hands of barbarism, our shame would have rung down the ages…'[2]

It was typical that Lloyd George should put his finger on the spot and be addressing everyone, and telling them what they should do; but he was talking for all those like him who had always opposed war. This was quite different from the previous conflict, and most of the immediate instinctive pacifistic reaction evaporated within days. Charles Leach was carried along with this tide, and his opposition to war swept away by the seeming justness of the cause.

For some like him it took a little while, but before the end of August he was back asking questions in Parliament, concentrating on supplies and on those who might suffer. On the 28th he asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Agriculture 'what steps, if any, his department is taking to restrict, during the continuance of the war, the use of grain for the manufacture of beer, which manufacture in the year ending 30th September, 1913, consumed over fifty-two million bushels of malt?'[3] Hence, neatly he combined concern for food supplies with his temperance views. Sir Harry Verney replied, noncommittally, that they were carefully watching the situation. Charles Leach's struggle, and its resolution, was made clear in his call for a day of universal fasting and prayer.

Having made his decision to support the war, it was natural for a restless man like him to want to do something to help. The Baptist and Congregational Unions had got together and were putting forward names as Chaplains to the Forces. At his age, now 67, there was no possibility of active service but there was a need for someone to visit the London Hospitals. On the 30th of September he volunteered for this duty. There then followed a bureaucratic saga in the War Office.

Curiously he desired to wear military chaplain's uniform, perhaps feeling that the men would relate to him better that way, rather than in civilian clerical dress. It still seemed odd for a lifelong pacifist, and showed how much he now associated himself with the war. However, as Mr Strange of the Chaplain's department pointed out, for that you had to be a commissioned officer, and they had to dedicate themselves completely to the army. He didn't need to add that as an MP he couldn't carry out the chaplain's duties full time. After a considerable exchange of memos in the War Office, suddenly the situation changed. On the 13th October Mr Strange gave in, with somewhat bad grace, and wrote to him: 'With reference to recent correspondence between yourself and the Financial Secretary of the War Office, I am directed to say that as it is understood that you are now devoting your whole time to military duty you will shortly be gazetted as a temporary Chaplain to the Forces, 4th Class which appointment will carry with it the right to wear the uniform authorised for members of the Army Chaplains Department.'[4] As an MP he had known who to approach to get the problem resolved.

On 26th October he was appointed Officiating Minister to the Baptist and Congregational Soldiers in the London General Hospitals. Mr Strange still dragged his heels despite a further letter to him and it was only on the 5th November that the appointment finally appeared in the London Gazette. He was now a temporary Chaplain 4th Class, a rank equivalent to an Army Captain.

At the outbreak of war a large number of military hospitals were set up around the country. In London there were four, with a fifth added later. No 1 was in Camberwell in the commandeered St Gabriel's College and run by Barts. No 2 was in St Marks College Chelsea. The Territorial Army had theirs, No 3, on Wandsworth Common, in a converted school, while the fourth was a Denmark Hill, and run by King's College Hospital. Though they had relationships with the existing civil hospitals they were largely separate organisations. By the time Charles Leach was appointed there were already considerable numbers of injured in them. He was involved with three hospitals; probably the Territorial Army had their own arrangements in Wandsworth.

Far from being full time on this, he was still trying to carry out his duties as a Member of Parliament as well. He had had a break in October as the Commons hadn't been sitting, but in November he was attempting to do both jobs. On 16th he asked six questions and two more the following day. They were mostly on agricultural matters with concerns about the effect of the war on rural labour and hence production from the land, but also on pensions for soldiers disabled by war. All through this period the questions were either about food supplies, and the prices, or detailed concerns about people or groups who might be left out of support schemes in the changed circumstances of the conflict.

In France and Belgium a grim struggle was taking place culminating in the first battle of Ypres where the Germans all but broke through the allied lines. The result was considerable casualties on both sides, the many British gradually filtering back to the hospitals in England. Each day the visiting Chaplain would have fresh faces and more souls to minister to.

As if the strain of all this wasn't enough, a fresh blow fell in December when his granddaughter, Mary, contacted pleurisy. Frighteningly this was caused by tuberculosis, and the fear in the family was that the vulnerability to this disease had passed to yet another generation. On top of this, he was still preaching when the occasion arose. A few days before Christmas, he was at the Wesleyan Central Hall in Westminster, just across the square from Parliament. Fortunately the Commons had a recess in December and January, which reduced the workload, but the number of casualties was constantly increasing as the fighting intensified.

On 1st January 1915 his son-in-law Charles Shave followed him into the Chaplaincy. At the age of 42, and with his artificial foot, there was no chance of him going to the front. They did, however, find an ideal place for him at the Codford training camp on Salisbury Plain. He, too, was made a Chaplain 4th Class, and he found the job very satisfying. Working among the fresh and hopeful volunteers was a very different story from that of trying to minister to the injured and maimed who had been through terrible experiences in muddy trenches.

What surprised and thrilled Charles Leach were the stories he heard of the bravery and heroism. He was amazed 'how little the men complained in spite of wounds and mutilation. In one of the three hospitals he visits there are nearly 500 men and hardly any of them do not want to go out again to pay the Germans out for what they have done to their fellows.'[5] At this stage these were mostly the professional soldiers of the old army. The fresh volunteers of Kitchener's new forces were as yet untested in the field.

Once the Commons was back in February he returned to his usual stream of questions. Now they were on shortages of agricultural labour, and prices of flour and coal, which had been rising alarmingly. On the 23rd he was asking the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Agriculture the penetrating question: 'if his Department is taking such steps as will prevent a scarcity of bread-stuff for our people at the end of the present year; and if so can he briefly state to this House what such steps are?'[6] The minister, Sir Harry Verney, though not confident, had issued advice to farmers who were making energetic efforts to increase the acreage under cereals. While not a military expert he had his finger on the important civilian issues. Never before had a war been fought on this scale; but he was alive to the implications for the nation as a whole.

On 2nd March he was worrying about the effects of the war on Wiltshire, trying to discover the rise in wages for agricultural labourers and railwaymen, and the numbers who had joined the army. He received no satisfactory answers, but these seemed perfectly sensible questions for a Member to be asking. It is a little odd that he was entirely concentrating now on Wiltshire, his intended new constituency, and had forgotten about Yorkshire where he was still an MP.

Then on 8th March he was asking for 'figures for the last five years of the amounts of Manchester goods imported into Southern Manchuria and Eastern Mongolia, respectively?'[7] While there may have been something behind this, it is a very odd question, and not surprisingly the minister was unable to supply an answer. The next day, a Tuesday, he asked no less than five questions. For three of these the minister referred him to answers given on the previous Thursday. With the cycle time of submitting questions it is likely he could have seen those answers before submitting his own questions.

The new armies were to be tested when the battle of Neuve Chapelle commenced on the 10th March. The early promise was illusory, and in the end nothing was achieved except large losses. The full horrors of trench warfare were beginning to sink in. In the

hospitals, after a relatively quiet winter, the numbers of injured started to rise alarmingly.

For the last half of March and the first half of April the Commons were not sitting, allowing him to concentrate on the chaplaincy work. Though on the 20th April he was still worrying about food supplies but asked a very odd Parliamentary question: 'to what extent milkmaids are now being employed in the Midland counties?'[8] The reply was that no figures were available but not many want women milkers. They were not taking him very seriously. The strain was beginning to tell.

Two days later the Germans used chlorine gas for the first time. Near Ypres the line broke and was only restored by heroic efforts of Canadian and British troops. With no gas masks and only handkerchiefs with water and bromide it was inevitable that large numbers of men had their lungs badly affected. Within a few days these 'gas cases' were appearing in the London Hospitals. To the Chaplain it seemed that a new level of horror had been reached. For the onlooker it was very difficult to bear, and though the cause was still felt to be right, what terrible things would it be necessary to endure before it was all over?

A funeral of a Member shook the House of Commons. WGC Gladstone, the grandson of WE Gladstone the Grand Old Man of the Liberal Party, had volunteered and joined the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. As Lieutenant Gladstone he had been wounded in the trenches, but did not survive. Because the ceremony took place at Hawarden, a memorial service was held in St Margaret's, Westminster. Present were most of the Cabinet, and a large delegation of Members including Charles Leach.[9] Nothing brought home the reality of the situation like the loss of one of their own.

Still the British Generals wanted to support the French and prove their mettle, so on 9th May they attacked at Aubers Ridge. This achieved little except to produce ever more casualties. Things had taken a much uglier turn, and there could no longer be any doubt about the nastiness of trench warfare. To Charles Leach it must have seemed that all he had fought for, throughout his life, was now in ruins. It was no longer just professional soldiers, but those 'working men' he had struggled to help over so many years, who were now being brutally slaughtered in the Flanders mud.

He had now turned 68 and was still trying to fulfil his Parliamentary duties as well as the nerve shredding experiences trying to give support to all those injured men. On 18th May, also a Tuesday, he had another five questions for oral answer which meant that he had to be present. He was still worrying about advances in wages on the land, but also to medical staff in Naval Establishments. The latter, no doubt, coming from his experiences alongside the medics. He was also raising the subject of the price of coal, but once again this was similar to a question asked by another Member on the previous Thursday.

He then asked about the men at war being able to vote in the coming elections. While one was due by December, the difficulties should have been obvious, but again this was new territory as never before had there been so many involved in fighting. With the Parliament Act newly into force, limiting the term to five years, it would be very embarrassing to turn round and wish to extend the time. While that question seemed sensible, the next was distinctly odd. He asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 'the number of British subjects who are allowed to remain uninterned in Germany?'[10] Understandably the minister was taken aback, and had no idea. There might have been something behind the question, but it is difficult to see what it was.

Clearly he was struggling to keep both balls in the air; hardly surprising for a man of his age. Then there was one more blow. On 26th May, after a good deal of behind the scenes manoeuvring Asquith announced a coalition Government. The Unionists were

being brought into the fold. Winston Churchill, for whom he had a great respect, was eased out and Lloyd George apparently demoted to the Minister of Munitions. Clearly the high hopes of reform, with which he entered Parliament, were over. With the new Government nothing further would be done on the range of social issues so dear to his heart.

To bring the war even closer to home, on 31st May there was a big air raid on London. German airships, the Zeppelins, came over dropping 90 incendiary bombs on the capital, starting a number of fires. Four people, all civilians, were killed and a number of others injured. Two of the dead had been a husband and wife who were found kneeling by their bed. The war had now reached ordinary innocent people, not just those who had volunteered to fight. On top of everything else; it was the final straw.

28

Breakdown

After Charles Leach's Parliamentary questions in May, he appeared to vanish from public life. All through the Commons sittings over the summer he asked no questions, despite his record of regularly doing so, and other members tabling large numbers. Though there were only a few divisions, he did not vote in any of them. Outside Parliament he didn't attend anything where his presence was recorded. At this crucial stage this was most unlike his normal pattern.

A clue to what had occurred was in a very short newspaper piece, on 16th July, buried away amongst the miscellaneous items. 'The condition of Dr Charles Leach, MP for the Colne Valley division of the West Riding, was last night reported to be favourable. Six weeks ago Dr Leach had a nervous breakdown.'[1] That was all it said. It is surprising that even this much reached the papers as this was a great disgrace and the family, which in practice meant Mabel, would have taken care that as little as possible leaked out.

There was no further sign of him until, on Wednesday 27th October, six Parliamentary questions came up for answers. As they required written replies there was no need for him to be present, and it could well have been that someone else took the questions to the Tabling Office a few days before. He could easily keep abreast of what was happening as the Hansard reports of the day before would be delivered to him by breakfast time.

The first question was to ask the Secretary of State for the Admiralty 'if he will state why pensioners in the Coastguards do not receive any subsistence allowance; and can he adopt some method of dealing with the matter?'[2] The reply by Dr MacNamara was blunt: 'I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on the 21st Inst to a similar question asked by the hon. Member for Tavistock, in which I stated that subsistence allowance is not payable to men serving at their usual place of duty.'[3] It was a curious question for him to be asking, but the clue lay in the original one posed by Sir John Spear who had asked the same minister 'if he will say why pensioners in the Coastguards do not receive any special subsistence allowance, as in the case in other branches of the Service; and will he remedy the grievance?'[4]

It is clear what had happened. The two questions, while the words are not absolutely identical, are essentially the same, and he would have had time to read about the previous one in Hansard before tabling his. The other five were on deduction of income tax from bank deposits, helmets supplied to the troops, women worker's hours, war bonus for railway employees, and the Brussels sugar convention. None of these appeared to be his usual concerns, and in every case they were near copies of ones asked by other people on that previous Thursday, 21st. Clearly something was very wrong and he was considerably confused. He was never again to ask any questions in Parliament.

In early November an article appeared in Farrow's Bank Gazette, the house journal of an obscure bank. It was by Dr Charles Leach MP and entitled ' Looking Forward', and was introduced by a glowing piece of editorial about the author. Unfortunately, it did not examine the future, merely being a review of business in various trades, and had clearly been lifted from other documents. From a reference to September figures, it would appear to have been written in early October. It was far from being up to his usual standard, and only served to illustrate his decline.

By the middle of December small pieces started to appear in the press about his condition such as: 'Mr Charles Leach, MP (Colne Valley), who has been unable to attend to his Parliamentary duties for some time owing to illness, was yesterday reported to be in a grave condition. Mr S Firth, of Marsden, the hon. Secretary to the Colne Valley Liberal Association, received a letter from Mr Leach's daughter stating that her father was much worse since she last wrote, about a fortnight ago. Mr Leach had a nervous breakdown some months ago. He is now in a nursing home.'[5] There were numerous others in a similar vein.

Mabel had been trying to control the situation, but had been forced to say something, and it had leaked into the press. Even then what was being reported was very bland compared to what had actually happened. Clearly things had got out of hand and she had called the doctors, who after examining him, had had him taken to Northumberland House, Green Lanes. On the 15th of December he had entered through the impressive lion gate to a place which was not, as reported, a nursing home, but a privately run Lunatic Asylum. He had been committed.[6]

Because Charles Leach was a Member of Parliament the curious little 'Lunacy (Vacating of Seats) Act 1886' defined what should happen next. The three doctors involved, Dr Halliday, his general practitioner, Mr Adler who he consulted, and Dr Hart the Medical Superintendent of Northumberland House, all had to send reports to the Speaker of the House of Commons. He in turn sent them to the Board of Control, who, after some discussion in early January 1916, sent two of their senior members Sir Frederick Needham, a medical man, and the lawyer Mr AH Trevor to visit him. There was an irony in that, as two years before in Parliament he had been examining the proposed salaries of these men, when the Mental Deficiency Bill was going through the house; and now they were examining him, and claiming their powers from that Act.

They reported back to the Speaker that Mr Charles Leach MP was 'of unsound mind and suffering from Brain deterioration and loss of memory'.[7] This does not sound at all like a 'mental breakdown' except in the most general sense. It is far closer to a classic description of a dementia such as Alzheimer's, but normally that comes on gradually. There had been at least two sudden deteriorations in his condition. Even before the first one there had been some signs that all was not well and that he had been struggling, though it had been easy to put it down to the strain he had been under, and having to face the wreck of his life's hopes.

By October he would have expected to have largely recovered from a 'mental breakdown', but clearly he was still in a very confused state and his memory was not working properly. We cannot be sure, but the symptoms suggest a physical cause, rather than just a 'mental breakdown' or the more poetic 'his mind has given way.'[8] It is possible that the old enemy tuberculosis had affected him as well, because though it most commonly goes to the lungs, it can affect other organs, including the brain. This though, doesn't quite fit the symptoms.

There is, however, a form of mental deterioration called vascular dementia, caused by small strokes or a number of conditions and diseases which damage the arteries of the brain. Unlike most other dementias, the sufferer remains steady for a time and then suddenly declines as a result of another incident. This seems to fit the facts much better. Another clue is that his father had died of 'paralysis', and so he might have inherited a tendency to cerebral bleeds.

The matter must have become quite serious for Mary Jane and Mabel not to be able to cope with him at home, and to take the awful decision that he should be committed. While the doctors carried out the process, the family must have initiated it and it

would, in practice, been a matter of whether they felt they could look after him, or it had gone beyond their capabilities.

The Colne Valley Liberals wrote to the family offering condolences, rather pointing up how little they had known about the situation. Mabel replied at the end of the month saying that there was little improvement in his condition. The Colne Valley Guardian had got hold of the story, but they had their own version of what had happened. 'After spending some time as a chaplain at the front, Mr C Leach returned to his home in London in enfeebled health, which prevented him attending to his parliamentary duties. Since then his health has given rise to great anxiety.'[9] Either they had done too much addition on the few facts they knew, or maybe someone had fed them a plausible line to explain the situation. It is not probable that a man of his age would have gone to the front, and in any case there is too much evidence of him being in the London Hospitals and present in London during 1914 and the first part of 1915.

It the spring of 1916 another report leaked into the press: 'Dr Charles Leach MP is recovering from his serious illness, but is not yet able to resume his Parliamentary work. Dr Leach does not intend to contest the Colne Valley at the next election, but he has no intention of retiring immediately from the House of Commons.'[10] Whether there was any real degree of recovery is unclear. He had already stated that he wasn't going to stand again in Colne Valley, but with the election already overdue, he would have expected one soon and could quietly retire at that point. The House of Commons had already got into the position of having to extend its own life, and what he probably didn't understand was that there was no real chance of an election while there was a war on.

The 'Lunacy (Vacating of Seats) Act 1886' specified that there should be a second examination of the Member after six months. It didn't happen; but in August, after eight months, two different members of the Board of Control visited him. They reported to the Speaker of the House of Commons that 'Mr Leach is still of unsound mind.'[11] The Speaker had requested the visit and as soon as he received the report he 'placed it on the table', at which point, under the Act, Charles Leach ceased to be a Member of Parliament. The Speaker regretted to announce the warrant for the election of a new Member for Colne Valley. The already selected Liberal candidate, FW Mallalieu, succeeded him, unopposed.

The 1886 Act has never been used at any other time, though there have been a number of candidates. The situation was unusual in that the Parliament had already sat for eight months beyond its five years, and there was no real chance that this situation was going to change in the near future. An election could not be held during the war, and that had reached a stalemate with no end in sight. It is notable that Parliament was prolonged again on the same day that he lost his seat. The Speaker's action was thus probably deliberate. Whether or not Charles Leach was in a state to understand what had happened, he remained in Northumberland House. He had not recovered to a level where taking him home could be considered, which again points to a physical cause of his difficulties.

Mary Jane and Mabel Leach. In her last years Mary Jane was not a well woman and the strain of his illness must have great

The following year there was a fresh blow for the family when, on 19th May, runaway artillery horses at Codford knocked Charles Shave off his bicycle and trampled him. He was taken to the nearby military hospital and put on one side; with concussion, compression of the skull and his jaw broken in two places; he was expected to die. After a while they realised he was still alive and a New Zealand brain surgeon, who happened to be serving in the hospital, decided to operate. They trepanned his skull on both sides to release the pressure and saved him. Unfortunately he was blind in one eye, and was to remain a noise sensitive invalid for many years; his ministerial career was over. He had been promoted to Chaplain 3rd Class, equivalent to a Major, and was in the process of being raised again to 2nd Class, Lieutenant-Colonel. Unfortunately it hadn't been gazetted at the time of the accident; otherwise he would have received a better pension.

Whether Charles Leach comprehended much of this or what was going on in the world is not recorded. Certainly he remained in Northumberland House until the war was well over. It was almost another year when around the end of October 1919 he had a cerebral haemorrhage, tending to support the possibility of previous episodes of this sort. He lingered on for another month until Broncho-Pneumonia finished him off. On 24th November 1919 he died; still in Northumberland House.[12] He was seventy-two.

The Leach family headstone in the graveyard behind Bethesda Chapel, Elland. It records the resting places of all the members of the family, including Mabel and Elizabeth interred elsewhere

It only seemed only right to take his body back to his roots in Yorkshire and place him in the grave in Elland Bethesda graveyard alongside his children, in a plot he had owned for all those years. His name was added to the gravestone underneath those of four of his children. In addition to Mary Jane, the only family left to mourn him were Elizabeth and Mabel. A few days later a memorial service was held in Harecourt Chapel, conducted by Rev James Cregan who had succeeded him at Cavendish in Manchester. It was an emotional experience for his family and old friends, singing the hymn 'Rock of Ages', and listening to the choir rendering the anthem ' And God shall wipe away all tears'. Rev Cregan didn't disappoint either with his address based on the text 'A good soldier of Jesus Christ'[13]; a fitting obituary.

There was a last surprise with his will. He had left £14,128, a fabulous sum, at the time, for the lad from Ratten Row. No doubt this would have been more had he not needed care for his last few years. There was another unexpected element in that he didn't leave everything to Mary Jane. She received the household contents and after legacies of £500 to each of the daughters the rest was to provide a trust fund to support her for the rest of her life. After her death, it would all go to the girls. Even from the grave he was still making arrangements that meant that his wife need not deal with business matters. It is tempting to think that was because she was a woman, but that seems unlikely as Mabel was named as executor. Maybe she still had never learnt to write, and so business matters were beyond her, even after all these years of marriage to a man who pulled himself up from a worsted mill to Westminster.

OLD MONEY

Pounds, Shillings and Pence - £ s d

Before the pound sterling was decimalised in 1971 a system of pounds, shillings and pence was used, designated £ s d; the d standing for denarius which derived from Latin and was used for the penny. At decimalisation the pound was retained and only the smaller sums converted. There were 20 shillings to the pound and 12 pence in a shilling, making a pound worth 240 pence. Originally there were also halfpennies and farthings which were a quarter of a penny.

Sums of money could be written £3 5s 4d meaning 3 pounds 5 shillings and 4 pence, but if only shillings and pence were involved they could be written 5s 4d or more usually 5/4 or 5/- if there were no pence. Sums up to about £2 were sometimes expressed as shillings only, e.g. 35s, which of course is £1 15s.

In Charles Leach's time the money was £ s d and no attempt has been made to convert this.

Values allowing for inflation

Through the period in which we are interested there was generally very little inflation. Prices could rise and fall from year to year but they were much the same from when Charles Leach got married in 1867 to the start of the First World War in 1914. 1867 to 1875 represented the peak of prices which drifted slowly downwards until about 1896 when they very gradually rose towards the war. In contrast, during the four years of war prices doubled.

Thus for the Victorian period prices need to be multiplied by 70 - 80 to bring them to modern levels. At the end of the war a figure of 35 times is reasonable.[1] Some care has to be used with these. Wages look very low when we think of £1 a week in Victorian times, which reflects increased prosperity. Building costs also seem cheap to us as a sizable chapel could be built for £6,000 which converts to less than £½ million. This would not seem very much today. Nevertheless it gives some indication of relative values.

[1] Office of National Statistics, Consumer price inflation since 1750. The figures only go to 2003 and so are not quite up to date.

WHAT HAPPENED TO:

1) The People

Mary Jane

Mary Jane had suffered from poor health on and off for a number of years when Charles Leach died. Like creaking gates she lived on becoming very thin an ill looking in her later years. She died on 25 July 1926 from cancer, having reached the age of 79. She was still living in the house in Canonbury Park South. She left no will. The arrangements had effectively been made by her husband's will, and everything went to the two daughters.

Mabel

At the time of the death of her mother, Mabel had just reached the age of 44. As the youngest daughter, she had spent her whole life at home, looking after her parents. She had never had the opportunity to marry. She left the big house in Canonbury and moved to Watford Way in Hendon where she could carry on her life comfortably on her legacy from her father.

On the day before the outbreak of war in 1939 she was driving herself and her sister, to her niece Mary's cottage in Upper Heyford in Oxfordshire when she was involved in a car crash. No blame was attached to the other driver, so we can only assume that she was at fault. She was killed and Elizabeth badly injured.

She had done well with her inheritance, leaving £12,156 to be divided between her nephew and niece, though the money wasn't worth quite so much by this time.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth lived a quiet life after her husband's accident. She was 50, and had served her time as a minister's wife. For a few years they had a rather peripatetic life while he recovered, before finally settling in Bushey, Herts. They called the House 'Barry Cottage' in memory of his ministry there. In 1950 the couple celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. She was to die, at the grand of age of 92, in 1960 a couple of months short of celebrating her diamond wedding.

Charles Shave

Left somewhat of an invalid by the accident, he gradually recovered. He couldn't bear much noise for many years and this strictly limited what he was able to do. Also he was blind in one eye. Gradually he took up some preaching again, and returned to one of his first loves, sketching and painting. Over the years he produced hundreds of these. Being younger, he survived his wife by some years, dying again at 92. Their son, Eric, was also to enter the Congregational ministry.

2) The Chapels

Salem Chapel

Salem Methodist New Connexion Chapel was becoming too small in Charles Leach's day, and it was rebuilt in 1877 to seat 1300, in a fancier gothic style, complete with a tower to one side of the front. It survived the Methodist amalgamations in 1907 and 1932 becoming a Methodist church. It was demolished in 1970 to make way for the Halifax inner ring road, being replaced by a modern building nearby in Richmond Road.

Elland Bethesda Chapel

In 1878 the school was enlarged by jacking up the roof and an additional storey built. A medallion likeness of Robert Raikes the pioneer of Sunday Schools was carved and placed over the front window. In 1880 the chapel was rebuilt; but because of the graveyard behind, the building was turned around so that it lay along the road. The entrance was now, inconveniently, in a small yard between the chapel and the school. In 1907 with the first Methodist union it became a chapel of the United Methodist church. With the final Methodist amalgamation in 1932 it survived as a Methodist chapel. The School has now been demolished, but the medallion of Robert Raikes and the foundation stone of the school have been incorporated into a wall shielding the disabled ramp to the chapel door. The school site is now a car park, but this has opened up the entrance of the chapel. The graveyard, beautifully kept, is still behind the chapel with the grave of Charles Leach and his family close to the back right-hand corner. It is the only one of the chapels, with which he was associated, that still exists as a church on its original site.

Attercliffe New Connexion Chapel

Thomas Willets, one of Charles Leach's contemporaries as a 'preacher on trial' succeeded him and the chapel later was known as St Paul's. It survived the Methodist mergers but was demolished in 1978. The site is now a rather run down car park.

Ladywood Chapel

Being a Methodist chapel Charles Leach's successor Francis Robinson was already in place as soon as he left. Robinson had been one of his contemporaries through the 'Preachers on Trial' training. It continued with moderate success, becoming a United Methodist chapel in 1907 and then a Methodist one when they all finally combined in 1932. It was demolished to make way for the Ladywood Middleway when the area was redeveloped, and a smaller modern church built nearby.

Highbury Chapel

After Charles Leach's departure at the end of November 1886, they quickly found a new pastor in Rev CL Allen, and the chapel continued to prosper, and he remained until he retired in 1900. Rev FJ Gould then became the minister. He had been at Queen's Park in London during Charles Leach's time and had been influenced by him to train for the ministry. From 1913 the premises were registered as Highbury Hall until in 1930 they were sold and then used as an Elim Church. Today the building is a Sikh Temple.

Queen's Park Chapel, Harrow Road

Rev Dr J Lawson Forster, who interestingly came from Harecourt, took over the pastorate in early 1897. In 1902 it was the largest and most active chapel in the Queen's Park area, with over 500 attending morning services and 1200 in the evening. Forster made a big effort in 1904 to clear the remaining £3000 of debt on the hall. From 1972 it became a United Reformed Church, but the hall was demolished ten years later. In the 1990s flats replaced the chapel, and a new modern one was erected on the hall site. The foundation stones of the old chapel were incorporated into the wall of the new church.

Cavendish Street, Chorlton upon Medlock, Manchester

Rev James Cregan succeeded Charles Leach as the Pastor, continuing the progress that had been made for ten years. Deeper into the twentieth century the depopulation of the area gradually made the demise inevitable. Towards the end of the century the church was demolished and the site had become part of the Manchester Metropolitan University. Fortunately the records of the church were transferred to the Manchester Archives.

Harecourt Chapel, Canonbury

The chapel survived declining congregations into the twentieth century, becoming a United Reformed Church in 1972. Ten years later it was destroyed by fire, unfortunately before its records were transferred to a local archive, and they were lost. In 1991 a plain replacement was built, but the octagonal pattern of the original is reflected in the reception and ancillary wing.

3) The Places

Illingworth

In Charles Leach's day, Illingworth was a small rural village to the north of Halifax. Gradually building spread north from the town until Illingworth has become a suburb of Halifax. Today it is mostly council estates and could hardly be called countryside.

Ratten Row (or Ratton Row)

The whole area lying between King Street and Halifax Parish Church was pulled down in the slum clearances of the 1890s. Today it is grassed over with small terraced car parks accessed from King Street, leaving a clear view of the Church.

Ranmoor College

James Stacey retired from the college in 1876 to be succeeded by William Cocker, TD Cruthers and JS Clemens. Even with the small numbers it could accommodate, it was never full and when the New Connexion combined with other denominations in the first Methodist amalgamation in 1907 its days were numbered. It was closed around 1917. The building had various uses after that, but was demolished in the late 20th century.

Leach Street

A couple of hundred yards northwards from Ladywood Chapel in Monument Road, Birmingham, was a small mostly commercial street called Wellington Street, in the middle of Icknield Square. Around 1890 this was renamed Leach Street. It remained with this name for approximately a hundred years until it was pulled down as part of the redevelopment of the area. The derivation of the name is not known, but the proximity to Charles Leach's stamping ground and the timing would suggest a connection with him. It wasn't much of an honour as it was rather a mean little street.

Queen's Park Institute

This was very successful, later coming under the control of the London County Council and transferring to Saltram Crescent as the Paddington Technical Institute, now part of Paddington College.

MYTHS

There are a number of stories, mostly appearing in newspapers, particularly when he left Parliament, and obituaries, where things are stated that cannot be confirmed. In most cases the evidence is against them being true at all. Some of them may come from simple slips, but others are more difficult to understand. Subject to more information coming to light, these are my views on some of these.

Descent from James and Sarah Hartley

In the article by WB Trigg in the 1928 issue of the Halifax Antiquarian Society's transactions he talks about James and Sarah Hartley as being two of the first members of the Halifax Choral Society. (around 1817) He later remarks that the Rev Charles Leach DD MP, sometime minister of Cavendish Chapel, Manchester, and Member for Colne valley was descended from these Hartleys, on his mother's side.

Charles Leach's mother was called Elizabeth Clayton. (From the marriage certificate and 1851 census). In the 1841 census an Elizabeth Clayton of the correct age was living with her mother Jane Clayton and siblings Maria, John and Margaret. We know that there was an 'Aunt Margaret'. All this seems quite solid. In 1822 a James Clayton married a Jane Holland, and maybe this is the correct person. However there are gaps in the baptismal records in the Halifax area around this time so possibly this isn't the right Jane Clayton, as Maria, the eldest was born around 1825, which would be a bigger gap than was normal at the time.

It is possible that grandma Jane was actually born a Hartley, the daughter of James and Sarah. Then the whole thing would fit. There doesn't seem enough time for another generation. Unfortunately, the dates are before birth certificates, and reliable censuses. There are also vast numbers of Claytons in the area at the time and it hasn't been possible to sort them all out. While this is unproven, the jury is still out on this one.

Private Tutors

In many of the reference books, under 'education' it mentions Private Tutors. It is easy to see how this arose, and he may have been responsible for this himself. He had little education apart from elementary school and theological college. In between he was largely self-taught. It is almost certain that he had help with his studies, when preparing for theological college, from Rev WJ Townsend and probably the ministers at Bethesda, Rev David Heath and Rev Benjamin Turnock. Whether this can really be described as 'private tutors' is another matter. The impression was misleading, and that probably was the point – to disguise the lack of formal education. He was often rubbing shoulders with men who had been to public schools and Oxford or Cambridge. He had to keep his end up somehow.

Paddington Mercury

When Charles Leach was adopted as a Parliamentary candidate, in May 1908, the Colne Valley Guardian ran a feature on him, claiming to be an interview. It mentioned that for a considerable time he had been manager, editor and director of the Paddington Mercury. It has proved impossible to confirm this. It is assumed that the relevant years would have been when he was at Queen's Park, but though he is mentioned occasionally in the paper, there is nothing to suggest a close connection. It didn't exist before 1889 and anyway was actually named The Paddington and West London Mercury. The reference books merely mention a proprietor and the address, and never the editor. The Waterloo directory entry for him only refers to contributions to the Congregational magazine and the Examiner. The Directory of Directors only mentions his directorship of the Blue Ribbon/ Abstainers Insurance company and nothing else. The source would appear to be directly from him, so maybe it was true, but it would seem unlikely he would have found the time to do this on top of all the chapel work. As a great self publicist, it would have been expected that there would be more of a trace of his involvement. The result is that we simply don't know.

Justice of the Peace

On August 9th 1907 the Manchester Guardian reported in a very short piece that the Rev Dr Leach, of London, formerly of Manchester, has been appointed a Justice of the Peace. After his appearances before the bench in Manchester this would have been a bit of a surprise. He would have had to deal with passive resisters, and would have been in the strange position of deciding on licenses for selling intoxicating liquor.

Extensive searches of lists of JPs etc have failed to yield a trace of him. Perhaps more importantly no report has ever been seen with JP after his name. Less than a year later when he became a prospective parliamentary candidate, it was not mentioned, even though the chairman of one of his meetings was a JP. If had had been one it is certain that something would have been made of the fact at the time.

We can only assume that the Guardian, who under CP Scott knew him well, had somehow got it wrong. It is unclear quite what the nature of the error was.

Chaplain at the Front in France

This is a very widespread story. It appears to have originated in the Colne valley Guardian, and propagated from there, finally getting into some of the reference books. He was definitely appointed to work in the London Hospitals. There are a number of sources for this, such as his Army Record in the National Archives, and none for service in France. All through the period when he was a chaplain, from the end of September 1914 to May 1915 he was present in London, either in Parliament or elsewhere every month. The gaps when he could possibly have gone to France are thus only a few weeks long. One suggestion was that maybe he went there to accompany a transport of wounded back to England. That is possible, but there is no record. It has to be remembered that he was 67 years old.

Why was this story put out? Either the newspaper extended the facts too far, or maybe someone trying to protect him fed them this story. If you didn't know the detail, and that he was appearing in the House of Commons, it seemed to explain his 'breakdown', and hence was a useful blind. Despite its prevalence, it is unlikely to be true.

LECTURES AND PUBLICATIONS

Over a period of 30 years Charles Leach gave between 500 and 600 Sunday Afternoon Lectures. Some of these were printed in the form of books and are detailed below, though others were included in *The Factory Girl*. In addition he gave numerous other lectures on a whole host of subjects. Here are his main publications. He also contributed many articles to newspapers and magazines.

Date	Title	Publisher	Notes
1875	Sunday Afternoon Half Hour Lectures to working men etc. First Series	1 & 2	Printed versions of the Sunday Afternoon lectures delivered in Ladywood chapel 1875
1877	Sunday Afternoon Half Hour Lectures to working men etc. 4 Series	3	Printed versions of the Sunday Afternoon lectures delivered in Ladywood chapel 1875-77
1877-82	Lamps and Lighters. Sunday afternoon lectures to the masses. Series 1-4, 6	2	Printed versions of the Sunday Afternoon lectures covering much of the same ground as the previous two
1877	The Factory Girl: a weekly magazine etc (Editor) Later Factory Herald	2	A weekly magazine aimed at women working in factories. As well as Birmingham it circulated in London, Manchester, and Edinburgh – it ran for some years.
1878	Homeward Bound…Lectures to the masses on the Prodigal son	3	Further Sunday Afternoon Lectures but based around a theme
1882	Old Friends, lectures	3	Further Sunday Afternoon Lectures
1887	How I reached the masses. Together with twenty-two lectures delivered in the Birmingham Town Hall on Sunday afternoons	4	A description of his methods behind the Sunday Afternoon Lectures, together with some further ones.
1888	Mothers of the Bible	4	A reprint of articles that had appeared in 'Mother's Treasury' about women in the Bible.
1891	The Romance of Religious Begging	3	It has been impossible to locate a copy of this. Published shortly after the fundraising for Queen's Park Chapel, it probably describes that effort

1893	Old Yet Ever New. Lessons of Daily Life from the Old Testament etc	3	Sermons preached in London
1894	Sunday Afternoons with Working Men	3	Sunday Afternoon Lectures delivered in Queen's Park
1897	Is my bible true? Where did we get it?	7	A tract on the background of the Bible for ordinary readers.
1898	Manchester Congregationalism, its rise and progress…Cavendish Chapel jubilee volume.	12	Illustrated booklet on the history of Cavendish Chapel
1898	Our Bible I & II	8	An American publication. 'Is My Bible True?' printed together with RA Torrey's 'Ten Reasons why I believe the Bible is the Word of God'
1902	Shall we know our friends in heaven?	9	A tract giving his views on the literal existence of heaven, and whether we should recognise people. It was subsequently reprinted many times.
1903	The Castle and the Cottage – Christ's new Doctrine of Brotherhood – Parsons and Politics	10	Contributions to 'The Cross and the Dice Box' with other authors including Charles Shave
1904	Bethesda Chapel: a story of the good times, etc	5	A thinly fictionalised collection of stories based around Bethesda Chapel. It is supposed to be in Lancashire but the speech in rendered in Yorkshire dialect.
1911	The Romance of the Holy Land	11	Descriptions of Palestine a Syria (With illustrations) taken from his many journeys in the area.
1911	Christian Endeavour Handbook No 4	6	Article on social reforms he thought necessary in the handbook.
1912	Our Heavenly Home: its location – population – occupation	13	Another tract about his views of heaven
1919	Lyric for School Bell		Words of the song with music by Paul L Specht

Publishers:

1 Name Unknown , 4 London House yard, St Paul's
2 WG Proverbs, Ladywood machine Printing Works, Birmingham
3 RD Dickenson, Farringdon Street, London
4 James Nisbet, London
5 SW Partridge & Co, 8 & 9 Paternoster Row, London
6 British Christian Endeavour Union
7 Morgan and Scott, 12 Paternoster Buildings, London
8 Moody Press, Chicago
9 Arthur H Stockwell, London
10 Manchester
11 London
12 Cavendish Chapel, Manchester
13 Samuel Bagster & Sons Ltd, 15 Paternoster Row, London

ILLUSTRATIONS

The bulk of the illustrations are from the author, either as photographs, drawings or from his collection. However, thanks are due to these sources for the following illustrations:

Birmingham Central Library	Cartoon from *The Owl*
Halifax Central Library	Ratten Row
Sheffield Libraries	Ranmoor College
Doctor Williams' Library	Queen's park Chapel
	Cavendish Chapel
	Harecourt Chapel
	Image of Charles Leach with splendid moustache
Thomas Cook Archives	Leaflet from the 1911 party to the Holy Land
	Camping Expedition

NOTES

Chapter 1 Illingworth

[1] Census 1841
[2] Ripponden Baptismal Records, International Genealogical Index
[3] Marriage Certificate 17 Oct 1846
[4] Census 1851 and most other documents + Ripponden Baptismal Records
[5] Census 1841
[6] Like all spellings at that time it was variable and was sometimes *Ratten* and at others *Ratton.* The surname was sometimes spelled *Leech.*
[7] Censuses 1851 and 1861
[8] Reach, AB, *Directory of the Textile Districts* 1849 p.14
[9] Ranger, W, *Report to the General Board of Health* 1851 p.105
[10] Death Certificate 29 May 1852
[11] Census 1851
[12] Marriage certificate 27 June 1853
[13] Marriage certificate 14 December 1855

Chapter 2 Salem

[1] Christian World 24 August 1916, Colne Valley Guardian, 8 May 1908
[2] Webster, E, *Edward Akroyd (1810-1887)*, (Transactions Halifax Antiquarian Society, 1987), 19
[3] Spencer, C, *Child Labour in the Early Textile Mills,* (Transactions HAS, 1991), 109
[4] Horn, P, *The Victorian Town Child,* 72
[5] Salem Methodist Church, History 1797 – 1997, Halifax
[6] Quoted in Hargreaves, JA, *Methodism in Halifax: Consolidation and Decline 1852-1914* , (Transactions HAS, 2000), 137
[7] Hargreaves, JA, *Methodism in Halifax*, 137
[8] Halifax Courier, 29 November 1919
[9] Chapman, EV, *Two Hundred Years of Sunday Schools* (Transactions HAS, February, 1980), 4
[10] Wadsworth, AP, *The first Manchester Sunday Schools* in MW Flinn and TC Smout (Eds.) *Essays in social History* (1974), 118
[11] The Halifax Courier, 18 August 1877
[12] Hargreaves, JA, *Methodism in Halifax*, (Transactions HAS, 2000), 136
[13] CVG, 8 May 1908
[14] Thompson, F, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 100
[15] Walton, J, *Local Woodcrafts*, (Transactions HAS, 1940), 92
[16] The Times, 4 August 1863
[17] Halifax Courier, 29 November 1919
[18] As 17
[19] Salem Leader's meeting Minute Book, Calderdale Archives, SA17
[20] Methodist New Connexion Halifax North Circuit Minute Book 1856 onward, Calderdale Archives, SA4
[21] Death Certificate 20 August 1865. Today we wouldn't expect anyone to die from such a simple chest complaint.
[22] Marriage Certificate 24 December 1865
[23] Birth Certificate, 18 February 1847
[24] Ranger report for Northowram and Southowram, 1850, Calderdale Library
[25] Marriage Certificate 12 January 1867
[26] MNC Halifax North Circuit Minute Book
[27] Birth Certificate 30 November 1867

Chapter 3 Bethesda

[1] Census 1871
[2] Whites Directory of Leeds and the West Riding, 1870 for the number of tradesmen, and the Census 1871 for the population figures.
[3] Emerson, G, *The Story of Bethesda*, (Bethesda Church, 1950), 6
[4] MNC Halifax North Circuit Minute Book
[5] *The Story of Bethesda*, 9
[6] As 5, 4
[7] Keighley, WL, *Bethesda 1814-1974*, (Bethesda Church, 1974)
[8] The pulpit was saved and reused when the chapel was rebuilt in 1880; it is still there. An old parishioner remarked that Charles Leach must have preached from that very pulpit.
[9] Bethesda Chapel Minute book 1863 onwards, Calderdale Archives, EMR32
[10] Death Certificate 26 August 1869
[11] Bethesda Minute Book
[12] As 11
[13] As 11
[14] Census 1871
[15] Censuses 1871 and 1861
[16] Crombleholme, RA, Notes and Queries, 1876; S5 – VI:8
[17] Bethesda Minute Book
[18] As 17
[19] As 17
[20] As 17
[21] Birth Certificate 16 October 1872
[22] *The Story of Bethesda*, 9. The 'old chapel' refers to the chapel then, before the rebuilding of Bethesda in 1880.
[23] Bethesda Minute Book
[24] As 22, Halifax MNC District minutes
[25] Minutes of Methodist New Connexion Conference, 1873, College Committee
[26] Bethesda Minute Book
[27] As 25

Chapter 4 Attercliffe

[1] The Times 9 August 1873, 13 September 1873, 29 December 1873
[2] Minutes of MNC Conference 1873, Sheffield Street Directory 1876
[3] Charles Leach, *How I reached the masses*, (London: James Nisbet, 1887), 3 - In the book the name is misprinted as Allercliffe, but has been corrected here.
[4] Figures calculated from tables in Whites Directory of Sheffield and Rotherham 1879, 165
[5] Alfred Gatty, *Sheffield: past and present*, (Sheffield: T Rodgers, 1873), 309
[6] Vine, GR, *The Story of Old Attercliffe* Pt 3
[7] Minutes of MNC Conference 1873
[8] Stainton, JH, *The Making of Sheffield*, (Sheffield: E Weston and Sons, 1924), Sheffield's Life Stories
[9] Townsend, WJ, *James Stacey DD, Reminiscences and Memorials*, (London, 1891) The author was Charles Leach's superintendent from Bethesda, who had supported his application for the ministry.
[10] Minutes of MNC Conference, 1871, 1872, 1873.
[11] As 10 1875
[12] Packer, G, (Ed), *The centenary of the Methodist new Connexion 1797-1897*, (London, 1898)
[13] Nunn, PJ*, Firth, Mark,* Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.
[14] Methodist New Connexion magazine, 1874, 225
[15] O'Donoghue, J, et al, *Consumer Price Inflation since 1750*, Office for National Statistics – see also section on Old Money
[16] MNC Magazine, 1874, 225
[17] As 16, 226
[18] Judd, D, *Radical Joe: A life of Joseph Chamberlain* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), 74
[19] As 18
[20] As 18; & The Times 5 February 1874

[21] Stainton, JH, *The Making of Sheffield*
[22] MNC Testimonials for Preachers on Trial, Methodist Records, John Rylands Library, Manchester
[23] Minutes of MNC Conference, 1875

Chapter 5 Ladywood

[1] Methodist new Connexion Magazine, 1877, 106
[2] As 1
[3] Minutes of the MNC Conference, 1875
[4] As 3, 104
[5] Briggs, A, *Victorian Cities*, (London: Pelican Books, 1968), 197
[6] Dawson, G, *The Laws of Christ for Common Life*, 1884, quoted in above, 201
[7] Leach, Rev C, *How I reached to Masses*, (London: James Nisbet, 1887), V. There is some discrepancy between the various sources as to the actual number.
[8] Leach, Rev C, *Sunday Afternoon Lectures to Working Men*, (Birmingham: WG Proverbs, 1877), 1
[9] MNC Magazine, 1876, 294
[10] As 9
[11] As 9
[12] As 9
[13] Leach, Rev C*, Sunday Afternoon Half Hour Lectures to Working Men*,
[14] As 13
[15] Leach, Rev C, *How I reached the Masses*, VII
[16] Leach, Rev C*, Sunday Afternoon Half Hour Lectures to Working Men*, 1877, 74
[17] The numbers are from the NMC Magazine, 1877, 107, and the pew rentals from the Ladywood Chapel Pew Rent Book, Birmingham Archives, 285953 ZZ32

Chapter 6 Ordination

[1] Death Certificate 3 June 1877
[2] Minutes of MNC Conference, 1877
[3] Piggin, Rev H, *An Ordination Charge*, (London: H Webber, 1877)
[4] Bible with inscription, in the author's possession.
[5] Geological Society Membership Records, June 1877, Member number 3026
[6] Birth Certificate, 23 September 1877
[7] Birmingham Daily Post, 22 October 1877
[8] Leach, Rev C, *Homeward Bound*, (Birmingham, 1878), 38
[9] As 8*,* 50
[10] Leach, Rev C, (ed), The Factory Girl, (Birmingham: WG Proverbs, 1877-)
[11] The Owl, 16 October 1879, p.91
[12] BDP 17 December 1877
[13] BDP 31 December 1877
[14] Leach, Rev C, *Homeward Bound*, (London: RD Dickenson, 1878)
[15] Factory Girl, III, 397, *Fortune Telling*.
[16] MNC Magazine, March 1879, 186
[17] Liverpool Mercury 16 June 1879; Minutes of MNC Conference, 1879

Chapter 7 Highbury

[1] Victoria County History, *A History of the County of Warwick*, Vol 7, 450 This has 1000 as the capacity, but other references give 1300.
[2] Birmingham Faces and Places, Vol 4, 1892, 151
[3] As 2
[4] VCH, Warwickshire, Vol 7, 452
[5] Stuart J Reid, *Sir Richard Tangye*, (London: Duckworth and Co, 1908), 130

[6] Transactions of the Congregational History Society, I, p340. This states that Tangye bought the chapel, and suggests that this was immediately. This conflicts with the Trust Deed which shows that the sale was two years later, and his name doesn't appear, though it could well have been his money that was used.
[7] The Owl, 16 October 1879, 91
[8] BDP 26 August 1879
[9] Transactions CHS, I, 340
[10] The Owl, 16 October 1879, 91
[11] Ladywood Chapel Pew Rent Book
[12] The Owl, 16 October 1879, 91
[13] As 12
[14] 1881 Census
[15] Geological Society Membership Records, Birth Certificate Mabel Leach 20 July 1882
[16] BDP 18 October 1879
[17] Examples are BDP 19 March 1880, and 27 March 1880.
[18] BDP 26 March 1880
[19] BDP 1 April 1880
[20] BDP, 10 November 1880
[21] BDP 5 July 1880
[22] The Dart, 31 July 1880
[23] The Dart, 31 July 1880
[24] Abbott, Dr Lyman, Christian Union, 9 March 1882, quoted in Congregational Magazine 1884, 8
[25] BDP 5 November 1880
[26] BDP 10 January 1881
[27] BDP 7 June 1881
[28] BDP 12 Jan 1882
[29] Trust Deed of Highbury Chapel, Birmingham Municipal Archives, MS 28/8
[30] BDP 8 October 1881
[31] The Owl, 6 April 1882
[32] Leach, Rev C, *Old Friends*, (London: RD Dickenson, 1882)
[33] Birth Certificate, 20 July 1882

Chapter 8 Crusades

[1] Leach, Rev C, *Sunday Afternoons with Working Men*, (London: RD Dickenson, 1894),
[2] Butler, ASG, *Portrait of Josephine Butler*, 1954, 82.
[3] The Shield, 30 December 1876, 375
[4] BDP 14 February 1881
[5] Pall Mall Gazette, 5 August 1885
[6] As 5
[7] Leach, Rev C, *Sunday Afternoon Half-hour Lectures to Working Men*, First Series (Birmingham: Ladywood Chapel, 1875), 18
[8] Temperance, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th Edition, 1911
[9] The Gospel Temperance Herald and Blue Ribbon Official Gazette, 20 May 1882
[10] As 9, 9 June 1882
[11] As 9, 18 May 1882
[12] As 9, 9 June 1882
[13] Manchester Guardian, 27 June 1883
[14] Records of Beacon Insurance, Birmingham City Archives, MS1605 1/1 etc. (Blue Ribbon Insurance changed its name a couple of times becoming Beacon Insurance)

Chapter 9 Politics

[1] BDP 8 February 1881, 12 November 1881
[2] BDP 10 October 1882
[3] BDP 24 October 1882, 25 October 1882, 5 July 1883, 16 November 1883, 16 May 1884, 28 June 1884

[4] BDP, 7 March 1881
[5] Pall Mall Gazette, 1 June 1881
[6] BDP 20 March 1884, 22 March 1886
[7] BDP 13 June 1883, 16 June 1883
[8] Western Mail, 9 April 1881
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