

BATLEY AND MORLEY FROM THE INSIDE

THE NEWS of the candidature of Ashley Mitchell at Batley and Morley appeared as a bright spot in a cloudy and confused political landscape, and the invitation from Mr. Mitchell to act as his election agent was accepted by me at once as a mark of distinction. There were many advantages and some disadvantages. Favourable factors were the candidate himself, his outstanding personality and fine platform gifts; added to his programme based on crystal clear principles. His decision to stand as independent, entirely free from party directives, was another strong point; and when the local Liberal selection group were so well advised as to adopt Mr. Mitchell on those terms, the most vital elements were established for a challenging campaign. On the other hand, we were going in rather late in the day; the whole organisation had to be quickly built up; there were the technical problems of getting paper supplies and printing when others had been there before us. We expected to find the best committee rooms already booked, as well as the public halls and the best dates. In the event, however, matters turned out far better than we feared. We booked the best site in Batley with modern shop premises as our central office; that was the advantage of knowing something about site values. We found a friendly printer almost on the doorstep, who turned out a most presentable election address in express time. Other printers in the three towns of the division, Batley, Morley and Ossett, also rendered excellent service. The local Press were readily accessible and gave us ample space. The *Batley Reporter* in particular became almost a Land Values journal for the weeks of the election; one week's issue containing a column article on the taxation of land values that left nothing to be desired by any Henry Georgist. If one more paper may be mentioned, the *Morley Advertiser* agreed to circulate with every copy the week before the poll, one of our leaflets on Free Trade and the taxes on commodities. It also had an article entitled "A Bouquet for Ashley Mitchell," giving the particulars of a local instance of land monopoly with which the local Council were faced that same week.

The first great job of addressing 48,000 envelopes and then filling them with the election address and with a selection of the eight leaflets we had had printed and published especially for the election, was undertaken. It was, of course, our one way of getting our message into every home, and, whatever the result of the poll, the educational value of this part of the fight cannot be overestimated.

As for the public meetings, we had our share of the three Town Halls each of the three weeks the fight lasted, and judging from our reports our meetings were more than comparable with those of our opponents, in numbers and certainly in enthusiasm. It was a great experience to hear the Land Song at our

last great Batley rally, taken up vociferously by the audience, with A. W. Madsen at the piano and Wilfrid Harrison as choir-leader. Children were taught the song at open-air meetings and before polling day were singing it in the streets.

Individual names of those who came to speak for us will be mentioned later, but one may be singled out here, that of Mr. Theodore C. Taylor, the veteran pioneer of profit-sharing and co-partnership, who in his 95th year appeared on the Batley Town Hall platform and spoke vigorously for nearly half an hour on Free Trade. It was a unique event. A letter sent previously by Mr. Taylor in support of Mr. Mitchell had been made full use of in the Press and as a placard on the hoardings. A welcome feature at our meetings was the valued help of local speakers who showed themselves well versed in the kind of Liberalism for which Ashley Mitchell stood. We may, perhaps, single out as representatives, Mr. Herbert Brook, of Batley, the chairman of the Liberal Party in the division; Alderman D. Dickinson, of Morley; Miss Elsie G. Taylor, J.P.; Mrs. North, J.P., who has since contributed a fine account of the campaign to the local paper; and Alderman Patterson, of Ossett, whose speeches one remembers as so effective and convincing. There were, of course, others who on the platform and in the more humdrum work gave unstintingly of their time and energy, and without whom the work could not have gone on at all.

Supplementing the local efforts were those workers from our movement who came from afar, such as Mr. A. W. Madsen; Mr. and Mrs. Wilfrid Harrison, of London; Mrs. Sumner, of Clitheroe; Mrs. Mellor, of Penistone; Mr. Pryce Olver and Mr. Renton, of Leeds; Miss Noble, of Manchester; Mrs. Culley, Mrs. Blamires, Mr. and Mrs. Oldroyd, Miss Stridgen, Mr. and Mrs. E. T. Sykes, of Huddersfield; Mr. F. Bentley, of Bradford; Mr. R. Scaife, of Shipley; Alderman Austin Brook, of Hanley. (Most of these are members of the Liberal Liberty League.)

I have spoken already of the work of the ladies. The unofficial "Women's Auxiliary" was led by Mrs. Ashley Mitchell, and great things were done under her stimulating initiative, especially in canvassing. Although limited time and numbers did not allow of a complete canvass of all voters, Mrs. Mitchell's drive accomplished much more than anyone could have expected. Special meetings for women voters were also arranged and addressed by Mrs. Mitchell and her valiant helpers.

We eventually overcame our weakness in cars and loud-speaker equipment, and by the day of the poll our car-owning friends from near and far gave a good account of themselves, and the loud-speaker had been heard in many parts of the constituency.

The last few hours of the poll presented the usual hectic activity at each of our committee rooms, and at Batley our forces began to assemble to share experiences and wind up the campaign. About eighty people soon gathered under the genial chairmanship of Mr. Brook, and speeches were made by leading Liberals of Batley, Morley and Ossett, all paying tribute to Mr. Ashley Mitchell for the way in which he had revived true Liberalism in their constituency. Mr. Brook spoke of the many unattached people who had been impressed by Mr. Mitchell's forthrightness and fearless devotion to his political beliefs. "We were proud of him," he said, "as our candidate, and were glad to have won the friendship of him and Mrs. Mitchell." Alderman Dickinson, of Morley, declared that the Liberals had polled well. Alderman Patterson, of Ossett, also spoke of the inspiration the candidature had been to the Liberal cause. When Mr. Mitchell rose to reply he was greeted with hearty and prolonged cheers. His voice had nearly gone, but he managed to speak and convey his thanks to his enthusiastic workers, and once again he carried us with him, in his inspiring speech, to high levels of thought and purpose, reminding us of the great things achieved and of the work for justice and liberty still to be accomplished.

D. J. J. OWEN.

[The foregoing, as is obvious, was written before the declaration of the poll. Mr. Ashley Mitchell's many friends compliment him on a gallant fight. But it is evident that in the present political circumstances and under the present electoral system independent candidates have an arduous road to success.—Editor, L. & L.]

GUSTAV BÜSCHER, Zurich, writes: "At last the most horrible war is over and I can write you a letter telling you that I am still alive and wish to thank you for sending me *Land & Liberty* all those years. I have always found things in it which interested me. Reading the opening article in your June issue, I want to inform you that I have tried to promote the same idea in Switzerland—that Free Trade is the most necessary thing to restore the world economy. It is the *only* means to make another world war impossible. Now is the time when England can do more for the world in peace than in war, re-establishing a sound economic order, Free Trade and Free Access to the Land. If we only get first a bit of Free Trade, then the war will not have been in vain."

Mr. Wm. Reid writes to intimate the loss of a valuable supporter of the Land Value Taxation movement in Scotland in the person of Alex. Campbell, Stancastle, Irvine. Like the late A. J. Mace and some few others he will be very difficult to replace either for energy or loyalty to the cause. About a dozen years ago he retired from the position of foreman gardener with the Scottish Wholesale Co-operative Society, but continued to cultivate the ground, having obtained a holding in Irvine. As a practical man he had much influence with his conversation and writing on the land question.