

“MANCHESTER GUARDIAN,”

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“BY the death of Mr. William Royle Manchester has lost one of her most devoted citizens and Rusholme a constant friend and benefactor. Mr. Royle carried into politics the same heartiness and disinterested zeal which he applied to his social and religious activities. He was ever a good party man, active and capable in all the machinery of politics, but his Liberalism had nothing mechanical about it; it rose out of the pure fount of a disinterested desire to serve the community and sustain the moral standard of the nation. His politics and his religion came pretty close together, and both were unselfish and served a common ideal. But with his idealism there went a powerful practical strain which gave him balance and effect. He was an excellent businessman and skilful organiser, and in this union of qualities he found and merited success. He set a fine example of the true civic life. In Rusholme he was born, and in Rusholme he was content to work and to live to the end of his days. To him it was no dismal region of congested houses or submerged gentilities. It was his home and his delight, and he brought to it the pride and the devotion of the citizen of no mean city. It was transfused by his ardour and made better in a thousand ways by his efforts. There was in its streets and homes no more familiar figure, none more beloved. It is a small thing to say that he will be sorely missed and deeply mourned. He lived a fine, even a heroic life, and his name will smell sweet for many a long day among the many who have known and loved him.

William Royle was born in his much beloved Rusholme in the year 1854. He came of a humble but very strictly living family, and his early years gave him a Puritan cast of mind and life which he never lost. In the middle and later periods of life public affairs carried him much into the atmosphere of clubs, and few men could enter with more zest and enjoyment into the joyful and festive side of party or settle down more contentedly for a good gossip about all that was going on behind the scenes of politics. But though he thoroughly enjoyed Rome he never quite did as the Romans do. No one could warm more genially to the walnuts-and-wine moods and moments of life, but for him at any rate there must be no wine. He was the most clubbable of men, but he did not even smoke. It is practically certain that he disapproved of the theatre. He looked very much like a Cromwellian, but no friend of William Royle could see anything of William Royle except the light that seemed to be permanently settled on his forehead and the upper part of his face, and it was this light which modulated him from the Cromwellian into the Christian citizen.

William Royle went into the Manchester trade when he was quite a boy and had been for many years in the service of the firm of N. P. Nathan's Sons in Lower Mosley Street. Early in life he was threatened with a serious lung trouble, and he lived for six months in the Canary Islands returning to Manchester, as his subsequent career shows, effectually cured. He rose to a high position in the firm with which he was connected, and eventually towards the close of his life became a partner. In his own branch of the Manchester trade he was a considerable expert. Very often he acted as one of the arbitrators whom the Chamber of Commerce supplies to settle disputes between Manchester merchants, and it was a cause of some pride with him that so few of his decisions were ever challenged by an appeal to the law courts.

His active connection with the Liberal party began many years ago. Mr. William Simpson, who had much to do with the beginnings of the Manchester Liberal Federation, discovered William Royle's value as a party manager, and started him along the course which led ultimately to his becoming chairman of the Executive Committee of the Federation, an office which he held until the close of his life. It was what might be called the "key" office of the Federation, and from it William Royle exercised great influence over the affairs of the Liberal party in Manchester, acting as friend and "father" to all Liberal candidates for the divisions of Manchester, not excluding, as they would themselves be among the first to admit, Mr. Winston Churchill and Sir Gordon Hewart. During this long period no great Liberal meeting in Manchester would have been complete without him. Except at small divisional meetings he did not himself speak, and even at these chiefly for the purpose of encouraging organisation. But no one who went much to the Free Trade Hall on the great party occasions which came to an end with the war, will forget William Royle in his place in the front row of the platform, the tension of his figure, his "Hear, hears," which were more frequent than the "Hear, hears" of anyone else, and were some-times a solitary ejaculation, and the visible effort he was personally making to spread rapport between the speaker of the night and the audience. For a man who was singularly incapable of hurting a fly he had a fierce and sometimes it seemed an almost truculent joy in the hard knocks of party fighting. He got nothing out of his many years of Liberal work except the satisfaction of serving the cause and a lot of enjoyable fellowship. Twice at least he refused a knighthood, and though he had so much to do with recommending appointments to the bench he was not a magistrate himself. He would probably have liked very much to stand for Parliament, but it was not his fortune.

William Royle was a Manchester patriot, and inside his love for Manchester there was wrapped a still more intimate love for Rusholme. It was owing to his

prompt exertions that the ninety acres of Platt Fields were saved from the builder and secured to the use of the city as a public park. This was his great achievement in local citizenship.

At one time he had a habit of giving a lecture not less to his own enjoyment than that of his audience, on “Bygone Rusholme,” and eventually he expanded the lecture into a book which he called the “History of Rusholme,” and which may be read with pleasure for the glimpses it gives into the past, both near and remote, of a very old settlement of population. His service to the poorer people of Rusholme was incessant and was carried on without the least regard for his own comfort or convenience. It might be said that not a sparrow could fall to the ground in Rusholme, but he knew of it. He was a familiar figure in all the poor streets of the district. There were times when he might have been seen in the small hours of morning fetching a district nurse to some case of illness to which he had himself been called out of his bed, and a friend who once sat with him throughout the whole of a Saturday after-noon and evening counted precisely thirty rings at his bell during that period, most of which brought demands on him for money or for trouble and time. His busiest day was Sunday. William Royle was a Wesleyan. He was the life and soul of the McLaren Memorial Institute in Rusholme. Some years ago, he suffered a blow which his friends feared would overcome his spirit. His only son, a very promising boy, was killed in the war, and almost at the same time he lost his wife. It was in these circumstances that the work which he was always doing for others came to his own rescue and, being continued without a moment’s cessation, saved the structure of his life.