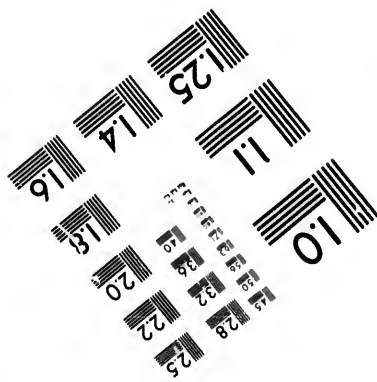
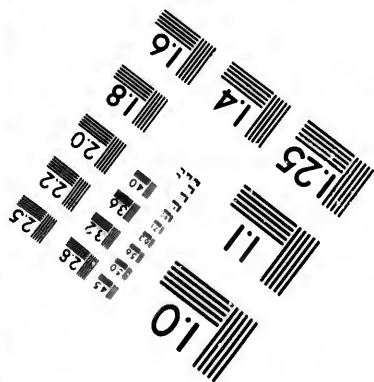
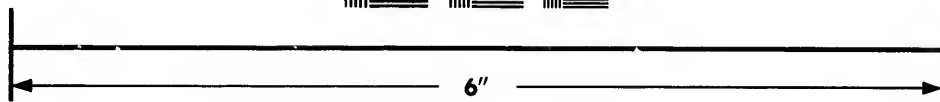
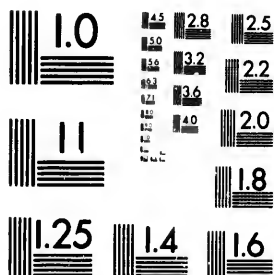


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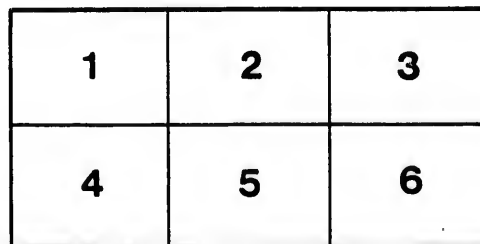
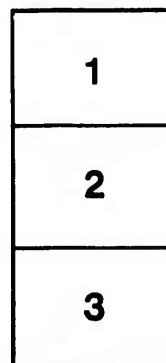
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The Origin and Objects of The Primrose League :

A SPEECH BY

SIR ALGERNON BORTHWICK,

At the opening of the Northumberland Habitation, at Norfolk House,

St. James's Square, on Tuesday Evening, October 27th, 1885,

His Grace the Duke of Norfolk in the Chair.

SIR ALGERNON BORTHWICK, who was received with cheers, said :—

My duty is to address you on the subject of The Primrose League itself, as one of the originators of that League (cheers), to make to you what I may frankly call a confession by narrating some of the original objects, purposes, and aims of the League.

It is just two years ago that ten friends assembled together began the formation of the first Habitation of The Primrose League. To-day we have tens of thousands of members throughout the length and breadth of the land. When we began our task, we did so in confidence that we were appealing to the right sense of the English people. We were jeered at and scoffed at, but we went steadily to work. We did not go to the chiefs of the party, or to the great political associations. We simply appealed to the people themselves. The countenance of the heads of the party came afterwards, when it was seen that we were not inventing some new-fangled Association, with strange names, for the purpose of interference with the Constitutional Associations all over the country, but that to the direct aid of the constituted authorities we were bringing forward a great army of volunteers, who are especially needed now because the law has altered the conditions of elections.

The origin of the League was in the brain of Sir Henry Drummond Wolff. (Cheers.) It was taken up by the members of the Fourth Party, who have now been absorbed by the Government of the country. (Cheers.) Those gentlemen foresaw what was coming. They foresaw the great political crisis and the troublous times upon which we are now embarked. They knew that, throughout the country, the Tory party was not strongly united. In such simple things as mere party emblems, in one town the party colour would be blue, and the Radical yellow ; in the self-same county, the Tory colour would be yellow and the Radical blue. They felt that an

emblem was needed which should unite the whole party. They felt that a name was needed which should be comprehended by the whole nation.

Now it so happened that, although you may go through the list of Tory worthies, I will defy you to find one that appeals to the heart of the nation as does the name of Lord Beaconsfield. (Cheers.) He was a man who sprang from the people; whose career had about it all that romance which is dear to them: who achieved the highest dignities of the state, and—far more than that—left a great name to be revered by posterity. (Cheers.) He not only maintained what are known as the party shibboleths; he not only vindicated the principles which were dear to the Conservative; but Lord Beaconsfield had, above all men, a keen political instinct, and he saw both at home and abroad what was most true, and therefore what was most popular. It was felt that after his death, when the nation mourned him, and when the Sovereign herself attributed that flower to him, by placing on his tomb a wreath of primroses, that that emblem would at once be a nucleus for a new departure in Tory union. We adopted that flower. We felt that its popular character would at once cause it to be understood far and wide—a flower which springs over the whole of our English ground, which is treasured by the Australian or the Canadian, or by any other colonists of the English country abroad, as the dearest memento of England—essentially a national flower—humble, simple, speaking of the people.

Our object, then, was distinct and clear, but to carry it out presented a certain difficulty, and hence much of the attack and the contumely which our opponents have endeavoured to visit on The Primrose League. (Hear, hear.) We knew perfectly well that if we went to the chiefs of the party, or to men in high position, we should be met with somewhat of ridicule. It was not an idea which would appeal to those in power; those accustomed to use all the methods of organisations. We knew that perfectly well, and, as we had amongst our numbers so many of a particular party, we feared that we might be misunderstood, and that it might be attributed to us that we were seeking to make some divisions in the Conservative ranks for some especial party purpose. For that reason, and for that reason only, was the beginning of the League veiled in somewhat of obscurity. But we appealed to the people themselves. (Cheers.) We put paragraphs and advertisements in the papers; we appealed to the people

of England; and from the moment of that appeal we received a response. We were understood. The heart of our countrymen understood us. From that moment we had day by day largely increasing numbers of adherents, and the formation of Habitations grew fast all over the country. (Cheers.) When that was achieved, all necessity for secrecy disappeared. We had acted honestly and truly in the interests of our party, in the interests of our country; and when the League became a success, then we turned round to the chiefs and to all the persons of influence, and from that day they came willingly to us and gave us their aid and their patronage. (Cheers.) I should like it distinctly to be understood, then, that we never had any idea of forming a secret society,—(cheers)—that that passed away from the moment that our success became absolute, and that from that hour to this we have lived in the full glare of publicity. From that hour to this we have published the names and styles and titles of every adherent of The Primrose League, and it is perfectly understood that at this moment our chiefs are LORD SALISBURY and LORD IDDESLEIGH. (Cheers.) It is perfectly understood that our other officers are also men of the highest position in the Conservative ranks. It is perfectly understood that our Habitations, as in this instance, are patronised and fathered by those of the highest position in England itself. (Hear, hear.) This being made perfectly clear, that in The Primrose League there is no secret society whatever, but a great public organisation, let me now turn to what The Primrose League can do.

In the first place you can always keep alight the flame of Conservatism. You can keep alight an organisation which shall never fail, never falter, never depart from the principles instituted by the League. Those principles never enter into petty party politics. To us there is no High Church, no Low Church, there is no Dissent, there is no equivocation about any matter of any faith, kind, sort or description. We protect religion,—(cheers)—we protect the religious education of our children, and we protect those simple principles which have ever been the honour, the tradition, and the glory of England. (Cheers.) In the same way, we advocate the cause of the Constitution. There, again, we never descend into party politics. Our mission is to aid the Conservative Association wherever it is formed. If you go through the length and breadth of England, if any of you have a vote, your duty as Primrose Leaguers is to vote for the Conservative candidate, at Bristol or Hull, or wherever it may be. We do not enter into any

discussion of the details of policy. We seldom mix ourselves up in the great affairs of the land. We do so sometimes—and not ineffectually. (Hear, hear.)

The Primrose League was the first body in England that felt the call of Gordon. (Cheers.) The Primrose League was the first body in England that caused every Habitation to send up a petition to the Government to rescue Gordon. (Loud cheers.) On public occasions such as that it becomes the duty of the League, as a patriotic body, to move. (Hear, hear.) In all other matters the individual Habitations are subject to the requirements of the nearest Conservative Association for the promotion of the purposes of the Conservative party. And now, at election time, I should warn you that both the Conservative Association and the particular Habitation to which you belong is bound to observe, as a corporate body, a suspended animation. You must not take part in the election as a corporate body in any sense, shape, or form. But in your individual capacity, the moment you leave this door you are perfectly free; the moment you leave your Habitation you are perfectly free. In your Habitation you may consult together as to what is wisest and best to be done, and from the moment you quit your Habitation you may go forth as a volunteer canvasser, or in any capacity which may seem fit to you to promote and help the great cause of Conservatism.

I think I have shown you that The Primrose League has not been without some vital use to the Conservative cause. I am convinced that it will prove of the greatest value in the coming elections. (Cheers.) I know of many instances in which the eager and anxious hearts who have enrolled themselves beneath the Primrose banner are going forth and are doing the most admirable work for the common cause. I know that as to the maintenance of religion, as to the maintenance of the Constitution, and as to the support of the Empire, there is no body throughout the whole country that is so determined, so resolute, and so anxious to preserve all those great principles as this of The Primrose League. (Cheers.) And if you do your duty by your Habitation, if you do your duty by your League, I am certain that you will then best render veneration to that great memory which we all cherish; that you will certainly transmit to your children what is dearest to the hearts of Englishmen, what is the birthright of every Englishman—"Empire and Liberty." (Loud cheers.)

