

signed by 4,550 persons in a few hours, and presented to the Court of Chester on the 22nd day of April, but no notice was taken of it.

More sensational events occurred in the following June and July. On the 28th of June Sir Charles Wolseley, Bart., of Wolseley Park, Staffordshire, made his first appearance in connection with the Reform meetings, when he addressed a meeting at Sandy Brow, where several thousand people had assembled. The Rev. Joseph Harrison also spoke, both speakers being afterwards indicted for sedition and conspiracy. The arrest of Sir Charles Wolseley took place at his home on July 19th, Mr. Harrison being arrested two days later in London. William Birch, a constable of Stockport, was responsible for the arrest of both these men. On the 23rd July Birch, who lived in Spring Gardens, was shot in Loyalty Place by Jacob McGhinness, a silk weaver, of Edgeley. Birch was not killed, and lived till May 26th, 1834. McGhinness was not arrested until many months afterwards. He was tried on the 8th April, 1820, and executed on Saturday, April 15th. Before his death he wrote a memoir of his life, a copy of which is in the Vernon Park Museum.

The climax of this disturbed period occurred on the 16th August, 1819, when a great meeting was held in Peter's Fields, Manchester, in favour of Parliamentary Reform. It is estimated that over sixty thousand people were present, including men, women, and children, processions being formed from all the neighbouring towns and villages. The Stockport contingent was headed by a coach containing Mr. Hunt, Mr. James Moorhouse, a Stockport coach master, Mr. Joseph Johnson, and others. About five thousand Stockport people took part in the procession, in addition to the female association and a band of music. Below is given an account of what happened, from the "Reminiscences of John Benjamin Smith," Member of Parliament for Stockport for over twenty years, who was an eye-witness of the affair:—

"This meeting was called to petition Parliament for a Reform of Parliament and the Repeal of the Corn Laws, and it is a curious coincidence that on the very spot where the largest public meeting was ever held to petition Parliament for the Repeal of the Corn Laws, in the dispersion of which by military force six hundred persons were killed and wounded, there now stands the Free Trade Hall, erected twenty years afterwards, on Peterloo, for the peaceful and noble object of obtaining bread for the people by the repeal of the wicked laws by which it was prohibited.

"I had no intention of going to this meeting, but my Aunt called at the Counting House and asked me to accompany her to Mrs. Orton's, Mount Street, St. Peter's field, to see the great meeting—a house overlooking the whole space, and next but one to where the magistrates were assembled. We reached there about half-past eleven o'clock, and on our way saw large bodies of men and women with bands playing and flags and banners bearing devices, "No Corn Laws," "Reform," etc. There were crowds of people in all directions, full of good humour, laughing and shouting and making fun. I always wore a white hat in summer, and I found that Mr. Hunt also wore a white hat, and it became the symbol of radicalism, and may have been the cause of the politeness shown to us by the crowd.

"It seemed to be a gala day with the country people, who were mostly dressed in their best, and brought with them their wives, and when I saw boys and girls taking their father's hand in the procession, I observed to my Aunt, 'These are the guarantees of their peaceful intentions—we need have