

**CRAWFORD, WILLIAM SHARMAN** (1751-1861), politician, was eldest son of William Sharman of Moira Castle, co. Down, a protestant landed proprietor who was for many years M.P. for Lisburn in the Irish parliament, was colonel of a union regiment of volunteers, and died in 1803. William, born 3 Sept. 1781, married, 5 Dec. 1805, Mabel Fridiswid, daughter and heiress of John Crawford of Crawfordsburn, and Rademon, co. Down, and assumed by royal license the additional surname of Crawford. In 1811 he served as sheriff of Down, and in the following years persistently advocated Roman catholic emancipation. Crawford was meanwhile seeking to improve the condition of his tenants on his large Ulster estates, and he gave the fullest possible recognition to the Ulster tenant-right custom. His tenants often sold their tenant-right for sums equaling the value of the fee-simple. About 1830 Crawford resolved to agitate for the conversion of the Ulster custom into a legal enactment, and for its extension to the whole of Ireland. Tenant farmers in the north of Ireland eagerly accepted his leadership, and in 1835 he was returned to parliament as member for Dundalk. On 2 July 1835 he opened his campaign in the House of Commons by bringing forward a bill to compensate evicted tenants for improvements. Owing to the lateness of the session, the bill was dropped and reintroduced next session (10 March 1836), but it never reached a second reading.

Crawford rapidly declared himself an advanced radical on all political questions. On 31 May 1837 he attended a chartist meeting in London, and not only accepted all the principles of the chartist petition, but declared that there was no impracticability about any of them. He was one of the committee appointed to draft the bills embodying the chartist demands (LOVETT, *Autobiography*, p. 114). With O'Connell Crawford was never on good terms. Their temperaments were antipathetic. Crawford declined to support O'Connell's agitation for the repeal of the union, and he was consequently rejected by O'Connell's influence at Dundalk after the dissolution of 1837. In the first session of the new parliament (1838) Lord Melbourne's government passed, with O'Connell's assistance, the Irish Tithe Bill, which commuted tithe into a rent-charge, at the same time as it reduced tithe by twenty-five per cent. Crawford at once denounced the measure as a sacrifice of the tenants' interests. Soon after it had passed he met O'Connell at a public meeting at Dublin, and charged him with sacrificing Ireland to an alliance between himself and the whigs. O'Connell

replied with very gross personal abuse, which made future common action impossible. The tenant-right agitation was still gathering force in Ireland, and Crawford was agitating in England for the chartists. In 1841 Rochdale offered Crawford a seat in parliament. The constituency paid the election expenses, and he continued to represent Rochdale till the dissolution in July 1852. On 21 April 1842 he moved for a committee of the whole house to discuss the reform of the representation, and was left in a minority of 92. In 1843 he moved the rejection of the Arms Act, and supported Smith O'Brien's motion for the redress of Irish grievances. After the Devon commission presented its report (1844), he moved for leave to bring in a tenant-right bill, legalising the Ulster custom, and extending its operation to the whole of Ireland. Delays arose; the government declined to assist Crawford; and the bill was temporarily abandoned. On 29 Feb. 1844 Crawford attacked the government for the proclamation of the Clontarf meeting. On 1 March following he moved that consideration of the estimates should be suspended until the reform of the representation had been considered by the house. Fourteen members voted with him in the division. In succeeding sessions Crawford was the active spokesman of the radicals, and he never neglected an opportunity of bringing the Irish land question before the house. In 1846 the Tenant-right Association was formed under his auspices in Ulster, and this society developed into the Tenant League of Ireland in 1850. In 1847 Crawford's bill reached for a first time a second reading (16 June), and was rejected by 112 to 25. In the second session of the next parliament Crawford's bill was rejected (5 April 1848) by the narrow majority of twenty-three (ayes 122, noes 145). On 22 July 1848 Crawford moved an amendment to the Coercion Bill proposed by Lord John Russell, when only seven members supported him in the division. After taking every opportunity of pressing his tenant-right bill on the attention of parliament, he moved its second reading for the last time 10 Feb. 1852, when 57 voted for it and 167 against it. Crawford's age and declining health prevented his sitting in the succeeding parliament, which met in the autumn of 1852, and his place as head of the tenant-right movement was taken by Serjeant William Shee [q. v.], who reintroduced the Tenant-right Bill. A select committee of the House of Commons, which included Lord Palmerston, examined it together with a proposed scheme of land reform brought forward by the Irish attorney-general, Sir Joseph Napier, and known as Napier's code.

Crawford's bill was condemned by the committee; it was brought in again, however, in 1856 and immediately dropped. The Irish land legislation of 1870 and 1881 embodied most of Crawford's principles.

Many years before retiring from parliament Crawford formulated, in opposition to O'Connell, a scheme for an Irish parliament, known as the federal scheme. He first promulgated it in a number of letters published in 1843, and urged the appointment of 'a local body for the purpose of local legislation combined with an imperial legislation for imperial purposes.' 'No act of the imperial parliament,' he wrote, 'having a separate action as regards Ireland, should be a law in Ireland unless passed and confirmed by her own legislative body.' The federalists soon became a numerous party, and in 1844 O'Connell invited Crawford to come to some compromise with the Repeal Association, but Crawford declined; and in 1846, when the federalists again came to the front, O'Connell ridiculed the whole plan. In 1850 Crawford supported the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, and excited the wrath of Dr. Molesworth, vicar of Rochdale. An acrimonious correspondence followed, which was published in 1851. In spite of strong protestant feeling, Crawford was always popular with Roman catholics, whose political rights he championed consistently. After 1852 Crawford lived at Crawfordsburn, and devoted himself to local and private business. He died 18 Oct. 1861, and was buried three days later at Kilmore. Crawford had ten children, and his eldest son, John, succeeded to the property.

[Times, 19 and 24 Oct. 1861; Shee's Papers on the Irish Land Question, 1863; R. Barry O'Brien's Parliamentary Hist. of the Irish Land Question, 1880; A. M. Sullivan's New Ireland, 1877; Sir C. G. Duffy's Young Ireland (1860), i. 10, 25, 266, 339; T. P. O'Connor's Hist. of the Parnell Movement, 1886; Hansard's Parl. Debates, 1835-7, 1841-52; Lovett's Autobiography, 1876; Lists of Members of Parliament, ii.; Burke's Landed Gentry, s.v. 'Sharman'; Webb's Irish Biography, s.v. 'Sharman.']

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