



Most affectionately
D. W. Lacey

1876

THE
LIFE AND WORK
OF
DUNCAN M^cLAREN

BY
J. B. MACKIE

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THE LIFE AND WORK
OF
DUNCAN M^CLAREN.

CHAPTER XV.

RELATIONS WITH ENGLISH LIBERALS.

MR. M^cLAREN'S active participation in the Anti-Corn-Law agitation made his name almost as well known in political circles in England as it was in Scotland. When he went to London on League business in 1842, he was in correspondence with Lord Brougham, probably the most distinguished amongst the statesmen and jurists who had left Scotland for the wider sphere of English public life. To this period belongs the following note, dated Tuesday, 8th February 1842 :—“The Edinburgh Conference petition will be presented in the House of Lords this evening soon after five. If Mr. M^cLaren wishes to be present, and will come then, Lord Brougham will take care to have him admitted below the bar.” Lord Brougham did not cooperate with the League, and was opposed to, rather than a supporter of, the thoroughgoing nature of its policy ; but he welcomed Mr. M^cLaren as a citizen of Edinburgh whose work and character had gained his esteem, with whom he had held confidential political correspondence, and who, in former years, had engaged his humanitarian sympathies in the cause of Prison Reform in Scotland. Thus in 1839, in forwarding a petition from the Convention of Royal Burghs in favour of a bill for the improvement of prisons and prison discipline in Scotland, Mr. M^cLaren wrote :—“The truth is, that the state of the Scotch jails is

1842

Lord
Brough-
ham.

1842

a disgrace to the country. In the great majority of cases, the sole expense of their erection and maintenance, and of the maintenance of prisoners, fall on the boroughs, without any aid from the county population, and their revenues being very inadequate to support them, as they ought to be, on an improved scale both of accommodation, classification, and discipline, nothing could be done of any consequence under the present law to remedy the existing evils. Hence the jails have been for years the *grand nurseries of crime*. I hope the death-blow will be given to the system by the passing of the present bill into law. You will do an essential service to morality by devoting your great talents to the cause; and I feel confident, if you do so, there will be no fear of the measure being longer delayed." Lord Brougham was interested in this subject, and in full sympathy with his correspondent.

New work brought new friendships and imposed new duties and responsibilities. These proved neither few nor light. The English Radical party, with whom Mr. M^cLaren now cast in his lot, welcomed him as a valuable ally. During the Anti-Corn-Law agitation he was frequently appealed to by English Radicals to assist their candidates to seats in Parliament; and in 1842, after Mr. Joseph Hume's defeat at Leeds, Mr. M^cLaren willingly and successfully used his influence with the Anti-Corn-Law party in Forfarshire to obtain for Mr. Hume, who had previously been mentioned in connection with Edinburgh, Leith, and Fife, nomination in the Montrose Burghs. Sir John Bowring especially was urgent on the subject of obtaining a seat for Mr. Hume, and wrote to Mr. M^cLaren that the Whigs had plotted Mr. Hume's exclusion from Parliament. He was greatly pleased with the victory that was secured. "You never had a better recompense," he wrote Mr. M^cLaren, "than that you have obtained

Mr. Joseph
Hume.

for your admirable exertions—an excellent lesson to every *cunning* tactician and an invaluable service to the good cause. I hope you will tell your fellow-labourers in the boroughs, that Hume's return is better than a mere *local* triumph, and that we are all sincerely thankful to them." The result of the election, too, confirmed the friendship with Mr. Hume, which had been begun several years before from sympathy on public questions; and the Member for the Montrose Burghs became a most energetic and sympathetic parliamentary correspondent of the leader of the Advanced Liberal party in Edinburgh, keeping him informed of all the movements and plans of the English Radicals, and reporting progress in the discussion of the Corn-laws, Church questions, national expenditure, &c. Probably enough Mr. Hume's letters intensified Mr. McLaren's distrust of the Whigs and their ways. More especially he gave early warning of the surrender of both parties in the state to the demands of the Roman Catholic clergy. He believed that Whigs and Tories were equally prepared to accept the principle of concurrent endowment in order to gain the political support of the Roman Catholic clergy. In 1843 he wrote to Mr. McLaren:—"I am sick of party strife. The public interest seems to be sacrificed to party. It is evident that the Whigs are of opinion that they would gain Ireland by buying the clergy, and, regardless of the principles of religious equality, they will, when they have the power, make that one of their schemes." Mr. McLaren was doing his utmost to secure that, so far as Edinburgh and the Scottish Dissenters were concerned, no encouragement should be given to the party to play fast and loose with their principles on the question of the Maynooth grant. In 1844 Mr. Hume was still more apprehensive of danger. He wrote Mr. McLaren assuring him that a measure for the endowment

of Roman Catholicism would certainly be proposed as a buttress for the Established Church, and earnestly counselling the formation of a League or Union of all Dissenters after the manner of the Anti-Corn-Law League. "I reason thus," he wrote. "If Sir Robert Peel thinks it right to waste a million of money in maintaining a force of 50,000 men in arms, and all for the *support of a sinecure Church*, he will not scruple to propose £300,000 for bribing the priests, if he can succeed in removing their hostility to the Established Church."

Mr. McLaren had every reason to be gratified with the result of his intervention in the Montrose Burghs. On the day of Mr. Hume's unopposed return (14th April 1842), Mr. David Binny wrote him from Forfar reporting the happy issue. "Mr. Hume," said Mr. Binny, "was nominated by his old and intimate friend ex-Baillie Clerk of Montrose, a brother Seceder, and seconded by our Provost. I moved, and Mr. Buchanan seconded, that a vote of thanks be tendered to you and Dr. Bowring for your powerful and well-timed support of Mr. Hume, which was unanimously carried at a full meeting of Mr. Hume's Committee." But though in this case the result was in every respect satisfactory, Mr. McLaren was extremely chary in after-life about interfering personally with local elections outside of Edinburgh. He knew that the independent electors, who formed the mainstay of the Advanced Liberal party in every constituency, were ready to resent anything like outside dictation; and sympathising with this feeling, he was careful not to attempt to assume the rôle of intermediary. Up to the close of his life he was frequently applied to by political sympathisers and admirers in nearly every constituency in Scotland and by Advanced Liberal candidates for information and guidance. But whatever faults were imputed to

him by political opponents, he never was accused of acting the part of a parliamentary election wire-puller; and when consulted, he generally confined himself to giving an opinion as to the merits of the candidate, without seeking to influence the choice of the electors. He always insisted on local initiation and action, recognising as supreme the right of the constituencies to chose their members for themselves.

Mr. McLaren had no difficulty in responding to appeals for the aid of his advocacy in organising public political work in harmony with his convictions and sympathies. His head and heart continued throughout with the Liberalism of Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright; and though he felt that these friends had formed an exaggerated estimate of his power to help, he never failed them when the opportunity for effective co-operation occurred. The most important of these occasions after the abolition of the Corn-laws was the controversy regarding the maintenance of a British naval squadron off the coast of Africa, presumably as an Anti-Slavery Police Force. The subject was introduced to his notice by the following letter:—

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Political
helpful-
ness.The Afri-
can squad-
ron.MANCHESTER, *January 15, 1851.*

MY DEAR SIR,—It is very odd that when a Whig job is to be done, the political whippers-in turn their attention to Scotland. The upholders of the African squadron, with Palmerston & Co. at their head, have been lately pulling the wires of the clubs, and setting the cliques of Glasgow, Aberdeen, &c., to work to get up public meetings, calling on Government to enforce the treaties for putting down the slave traffic, which means that the Whigs shall continue to spend £700,000 or £800,000 in literally doing mischief. I am surprised that people so far north should play into the hands of the tax-gatherer. No such meeting could be held in Manchester or Leeds, or if it were, common sense would carry the day. Can you warn any of our sound-headed friends

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to be on their guard? Make use of my name or show this note if you like.

Let the Scotchmen who join in the foolish cry not blame the Government, but *themselves*, if they have still to read taxed books and papers, and wash themselves with taxed soap. The worst of it is they are lending themselves to a job which involves the taxation of us Englishmen as well as themselves. A word from you may put some of our friends on their guard; and believe me truly yours,

R. COBDEN.

D. M^cLaren, Esq.

P.S.—The worst of it is, that the parties who are moving in support of the slave squadron are passed off by Government in debate as the Anti-Slavery party, whereas, on the contrary, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society have for several years been protesting and petitioning against the slave squadron, which they denounce as having aggravated the miseries of the traffic. My friend Sturge of Birmingham, who is the very soul of the Anti-Slavery party, is resolutely opposed to the squadron.

Investigations and conclusions.

As an ardent friend of human freedom, he had been predisposed to regard with favour the maintenance of a British squadron on the African coast for the suppression of the slave-trade; but he was quickly undeceived. His investigations showed that, on account of the immense line of coast to be watched, the operations of the squadron were and must be hopelessly ineffective. According to the *Times*, the slave-trade squadron was a hypocritical humbug and a philanthropic sham; and while it imposed on Britain a direct burden of from £700,000 to £1,000,000 per annum, and indirectly much more, it enforced on the slave-trader precautions and overshipments that immensely increased the horrors of the "middle passage." "If," said Mr. Gladstone, "in order to set at liberty 5000 or 6000 persons, we caused the death of 9000 and aggravated the sufferings of many thousands more, he was justified in saying that the sum of

human misery as regarded slaves carried across the ocean was increased by the repressive system." Mr. M^cLaren saw the force of these views, and in order to educate the public mind on the subject, he prepared an exhaustive statement of the result of his investigations, and published it in the form of a letter addressed to Councillor Gray. He supported his conclusions by quotations from the reports of two Parliamentary Commissions, *Times* editorials, and the testimony of the Anti-Slavery Societies, and even that of the commander of the squadron himself. The array of condemnatory opinion which he presented, formidable both in bulk and authority, was quite conclusive as to the futility and the mischievousness of the squadron. But in full sympathy with the Anti-Slavery sentiment, which then beat strong in the country, he proposed a substitute policy, based on the principle that this trade, "the sum of all villainies," could be most successfully attacked, not at the source of supply, but at the source of demand—in other words, at the slave-trading ports of Cuba and Brazil.

"Spain and Brazil," wrote Mr. M^cLaren, "have most shamefully violated their treaties with this country, after receiving our money and other advantages as the price of compliance with our wishes. In 1817 we paid Spain £400,000 as an indemnity for abolishing the slave-trade. She retains our money and yet refuses to perform the contract. If our cruisers must be employed, why not order them to blockade the ports of Cuba as strictly as they recently blockaded Athens for a much less important claim, until Spain shall either repay us our £400,000 with interest since 1817, or perform the conditions for which that sum was paid? And in like manner, if Brazil shall still systematically violate the treaties she made with us, and if a squadron must be employed, why not blockade her principal ports till she fulfils her engagements? There can be no doubt that a strict blockade of this kind would result in abolishing the slave-trade within six months,

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while there is no prospect of the present system producing the same result in a century."

Immediately on the publication of this statement, Mr. M^cLaren wrote to Mr. Cobden, and forwarded him a copy. In reply he received the following letter:—

LONDON, *February 12, 1851.*

MY DEAR SIR,—Many thanks for your letter and the accompanying newspaper with your communication upon the African squadron, which contains a masterly summary of the arguments upon that question. I hope you will prevent your Councillors from falling into the Whig trap. Really you ought to devise a political *detective force* to protect the Scotch lieges against the insidious efforts of the Whigs to convert them into the tools of the Government. *London and Scotland* are the favourite fields of the tactics of Whiggery.

Mr. Cobden
on Church
questions.

I am glad to see that you are moving in the new agitation against State Churches. This Papal outcry must come to *that*. But the English Dissenters as a body (particularly the ministers) seem to have forgotten their principles, and are willing to let Parliament undertake to *protect* them from Popery, forgetting that, if it be the duty of Parliament to put down by Act one sect, it must, by the same principle, have the right to set up another. You will have observed that the ministers of the Congregationalists (three denominations) in London have presented addresses to the First Magistrate on her throne against Popery! This comes of allowing priests of any denomination to act apart from the laity. It ought to be laid down as a rule that the ministers of no religious sect ought to be allowed to act in the name of their congregations on any public question, unless in conjunction with laymen in proportion of at least two of the latter to one of the former. I hope, when your Anti-State Church Conference meets, you will adopt as a fundamental principle a resolution repudiating the right of Parliament to interfere, either to promote or to discourage any religious faith, by temporal rewards or penalties. This principle must embrace the Roman Catholics, or it is not worthy of the name of religious freedom. I exhort you

to try to turn the tide of intolerance, which threatens to endanger our liberties in more ways than one. The Whigs are dragging nearly all our good men through the mire. If we go on at this rate, there will be no public principle which professing Liberals will not have violated, and the Tories will by and by be again welcomed into power by the masses.—Believe me, yours truly,

R. COBDEN.

Mr. McLaren's statement, though it did not prevent the adoption of the Lord's Provost's motion in favour of the continuance of the squadron, soon had the effect of changing the opinion of the Scottish Anti-Slavery party as to the value of the service, in which they had on mistaken grounds felt a pride.

As regards the Church question, on which Mr. Cobden asked for aid and gave warning, it was in one form or another seldom out of Mr. McLaren's mind, and his relation to it has been described in a previous chapter. By and by another question arose which completely effaced for the time being all recollection of the African squadron from the public mind. Russia quarrelled with Turkey, and Britain began to drift into war with Russia. Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright, as resolute opponents of the war policy, seemed to forfeit their once commanding influence with the great mass of their fellow-countrymen. But, heedless of their lost popularity, and convinced of the justice and wisdom of their political views regarding war, they bravely confronted the storm, and applied themselves to the conversion of the nation to the ways of peace. Again they appealed to Mr. McLaren for counsel and aid. Could he repeat the service of the Anti-Corn-Law Conference? Could he organise a national demonstration in Edinburgh in favour of peace when the thoughts of the people were full of war, as he formerly did in favour of Free Trade

The Peace party.

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when the public sentiment was beginning to run strong against Protection? Mr. M^cLaren was not by any means sure. But he felt that the task ought to be attempted, and he did not stay to count the cost to himself in personal popularity and authority as Chief Magistrate of the capital of Scotland. He knew the temper of his countrymen—that they were being misled by a strong antipathy to the Czar Nicholas as a supposed foe of human freedom; and recognising that a conference of the friends of peace in Edinburgh would provide a valuable education for them, and in that respect, at all events, prove helpful to the Peace policy advocated by his accomplished and trusted political friends, though it might not immediately arrest the war feeling, he resolved to promote the meeting. His promise of aid was joyful news to the Peace Society; and Mr. Cobden, full of appreciation of the courage of his Scottish ally, wrote him the following letter, containing as clear and as convincing a statement of the principles of the Peace Society as has ever been penned:—

Mr. Cobden on the Peace Society.

BOGNOR, SUSSEX, *September 19, 1853.*

MY DEAR SIR,—You are going to do a very good but courageous act in giving your countenance to the Peace Conference. Nowhere has the movement fewer partisans than in Scotland; and the reason is obvious. First, because your heads are more combative than even the English, which is almost a phrenological miracle; and secondly, the system of our military rule in India has been widely profitable to the middle and upper classes in Scotland, who have had more than their numerical proportion of its patronage; therefore the military party is very strong in your part of the kingdom.

In this Peace Conference movement we have not the same clear and definite principle on which to take our stand that we had in our League agitation. There are in our ranks those who oppose all war even in self-defence; those who do not go quite so

far, and yet oppose war on religious grounds in all cases but in pure self-defence; and there are those who, from political, economical, and financial considerations, are not only the advocates of peace, but also of a diminution of our costly peace establishments. Amongst the latter class I confess I rank myself; for, without ignoring the religious aspects of the question, which are so well advocated by others, I must admit that I have been led to an active co-operation with the Peace party from a conviction that their views and principles harmonise with my Free Trade and economical plans. And it is probably the best augury for the complete future triumph of the Peace principle that we have attained that age in the world's progress when man's secular policy in his international relations is, from motives of interest and state necessity, brought to the confirmation of the truth of revealed religion. But unfortunately very few of those who join in the advocacy of Free Trade understand the moral bearing of the question. They cannot see that Free Trade throughout the world and peace and good-will amongst all nations are really convertible terms. Besides, we cannot disguise from ourselves that the military spirit pervades the higher and more influential classes of this country; and that the court, the aristocracy, and all that is aping the tone of the latter, believe that their interests, privileges, and even their very security, are bound up in the maintenance of the "Horse Guards." Hence the very unfashionable character of our Peace movement, and hence the difficulty of inducing influential persons to attend our meetings. Nor must we lose sight of the eminence and social power which is given to the military party by not merely the rank but the emoluments which are bestowed on a great and united body, having their connections throughout the length and breadth of the land, thus spreading their roots into almost every family of influence in the kingdom. Recollect that we spend annually in England and our colonies, including India, *nearly thirty millions sterling* for our military and naval establishments—certainly twice as much as any other country in the world excepting France, and 50 per cent. more than in that country. And although in India the expenditure is partly upon the native regiments, yet *all the commissioned officers are British*. This vast

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amount of income going into the pockets of the military class gives it a money power which is felt in the House, and for which the press will be naturally found to cater. If we add to all this that the character of the English people is arrogant, dictatorial, and encroaching towards foreigners, and that we are always disposed to believe that other nations are preparing to attack England, it must be apparent that, in seeking to diminish our warlike establishments, we have to encounter as tough an opposition as we had in our attack on the Corn-Law monopoly, whilst we look in vain for that powerful nucleus of support which gave us hope in the latter struggle of an eventual triumph.

The tactics of the enemy have hitherto been cunning enough. The soul of the Peace movement is the Quaker sentiment against all war. Without the stubborn zeal of the "Friends" there would be no Peace Society and no Peace Conference. But the enemy takes good care to turn us all into Quakers, because the "non-resistant" principle puts us out of court as practical politicians of the present day. Our opponents insist on it that we wish to totally disarm, and leave ourselves at the mercy of Louis Napoleon and the French,—nay, they say we actually invite them to come and invade us. Now in this respect the enemy is much more exacting than our "Friends," for the latter do not insist upon all who join them in the Peace agitation declaring themselves advocates of the non-resistance principle. The object of this Peace Conference movement has been to construct a platform (as the Americans say) on which all may meet who want to diminish in the slightest degree the chances of war or to reduce to the smallest extent the amount of our military establishments. Nothing is required by the Quakers (who are the most practical and the most tolerant of agitators) beyond the abstinence from all acts or resolutions on the part of the Conference in violation of the principle which they conscientiously advocate. They do not, in fact, insist on our professing their faith—all they ask is that we do not call on them to join in condemning it.

My own connection with the Peace movement arose from no

abstract or theoretical notions on the subject. It occurred thus:— On my return from my long tour on the Continent in 1847 (in the autumn), I found the newspapers filled with the cry of our *defenceless* state and the dangers of a French invasion. The Duke of Wellington's letter to General Burgoyne was published about the same time, which added fuel to the flame. There was a senseless panic created, which I denounced at several public meetings, and was well abused for it. However, when Parliament met, Lord John proposed an increase of our armaments, the mustering of the militia, and at the same time laid before the House and the country his plan of increasing the income-tax. The country was at the time in great distress, and there was a universal opposition to an augmentation of taxation. He was obliged to withdraw his Budget. Now bear in mind that all this took place during the financial year 1847, in which it will be found we expended upwards of nineteen millions for warlike preparations (including the Kaffir war), and whilst Louis Philippe, the "Napoleon of Peace," was still on the throne. There never was a more impudent attempt to impose upon the public, and it was followed by a *reaction* which led to a *reduction* of our warlike establishments. But then came the advent of Napoleon III. to the imperial throne, and again we heard the cry of our "defenceless situation" and the danger of an "invasion." This time the cry was more successful. The country was prosperous; there was a surplus revenue, and the Whigs again revived and carried their old project of a militia. From that time to this we have had a succession of appeals to the military spirit of the country in the "camps," "reviews," and public funerals of martial "heroes;" and never was there a more warlike feeling in England than has been witnessed during the last two years, and never was there less occasion or justification for such a feeling. It has been under these circumstances that I have been battling against an increase of our armaments. I may add that every pretence for the augmentation of our forces has been invariably exploded within six months of the time when it was put forth, and yet our opponents are as confident and impudent as ever in their tone. In fact, they know they have the prejudices of the people with them, and it is to

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gain the people to the side of common sense that we hold these Peace Conferences. I have no doubt that we can triumphantly meet our opponents at a public discussion, and I hope they will venture to appear at the Edinburgh gathering. I feel little doubt about being able to popularise our Peace principles after a time, and the result of the Edinburgh Conference will have an important bearing on the future success of our agitation. I hope you will induce as many influential people as possible to meet us on the platform, and it is with a view to place you in a position to be able to explain to them the character and objects of our "Peace Congress" that I trouble you with this long letter.

My wife desires to join me in kind remembrance to Mrs. M^cLaren and yourself, and believe me ever yours sincerely,

R. COBDEN.

D. M^cLaren, Esq., Lord Provost
of Edinburgh.

It was during the second year of an unprecedentedly busy Lord Provostship that this call came to Mr. M^cLaren; and though burdened with other public work to an extent which would have been sufficient for any ordinary man, he found the time and means of doing for the Peace Society as abundant service as could have been expected from him if he had had no other occupation. Under his vigilant superintendence arrangements were at once made to organise a national demonstration. A local committee was formed with William Miller of Millerfield and John Wigham at its head, and a London committee, directed by Henry Richard, ably assisted them. Two hundred thousand pamphlets and tracts were distributed throughout the country; and the United Presbyterian Church again cordially and efficiently co-operated in this preliminary advertising and educational work. The Conference, which was held in the month of October—a few days after the Sultan, assured of British and French support, had declared war against the Czar—attracted

National
Conference
in Edin-
burgh.

sympathetic visitors from all parts of Scotland, and a large contingent came from England. Mrs. M^cLaren was keenly interested in the work, and she was zealously supported by what a contemporary journal described as a small circle "of elegant and cultivated women, who would lend attractiveness and grace to any cause which they might espouse, and who have long taken the cause of peace to their hearts, and whose influence contributed materially and in various ways to the success" of the demonstration. The hospitality of these ladies was severely taxed, but the demands made upon it were met with pride and pleasure. An interesting gathering assembled at Newington House on that occasion, of men and women distinguished for philanthropy and Liberal politics.

The meetings were successful beyond expectation. They extended over two days, including conferences during the day and public meetings in the evening. The committee had engaged the Queen Street Hall for the conferences, but as the hour of the commencement of the proceedings approached, it was evident that the accommodation provided in Queen Street would be insufficient for the increasing host of members and visitors. An adjournment was made to the Music Hall in George Street, and this larger building was quite filled during the day and was densely packed at the evening meetings. The chair on the first evening was taken by Mr. Cowan, one of the Members for the city, and Mr. M^cLaren presided at the other gatherings, and conducted the proceedings with his usual skill. His opening speech was in harmony with Mr. Cobden's letter, and proved the keynote of the whole demonstration.

1853

Mr.
M^cLaren's
statement.

"The Peace Conference," he explained, "consists, in fact, of two sections—those who hold the principle that war, in every

1853

form, for every purpose, is unlawful, as being opposed to the precepts of Christianity and to the holy spirit of the New Testament. Many members hold these principles as broadly, as strongly, and as unqualifiedly as it is possible to express them; but other members do not hold them, though they cordially concur in deprecating the war spirit, wherever it may be found, in doing everything in their power to repress that war spirit, and in thinking that the armaments, not only of this nation, but of all the nations of the world, are far too powerful; that they lead to war inevitably from the great preparations always made to meet it; and though, no doubt, they are said by our opponents to be made for the preservation of peace, still we believe, however good the intentions of the parties are, they do have the effect of fostering the war spirit. We believe they lead to an enormous waste of the national resources in employing men, who are not required, for no really useful purposes. We therefore agree in thinking that everything should be done in our power to promote the peaceful spirit, to repress the war spirit, and to keep down those great armaments—to act in such a way to all the world that no other nation is likely to have any just cause to quarrel with us. Then, above all, we hold that one great means of preventing war would be an arrangement made between nations when they are in a friendly position towards each other, by getting clauses inserted in the national treaties, providing that any dispute arising may be solved, not by the parties themselves, but by arbiters named in the treaties, to whom the questions shall be referred. In that way those feelings of bitterness and wounded pride, often arising from trifling incidents, but which are blown upon by those who wish to propagate a war spirit, would be kept in abeyance, and the arbiters, irrespective of such feelings, would decide those questions as they arose.”

Thus in 1853 Mr. McLaren laid down the principle which Mr. Gladstone and the Liberal party applied in 1871 to the settlement of the controversy with the United States arising out of the depredations of the *Alabama* privateer.

Mr. McLaren, as in the case of the Anti-Corn-Law Con-

ference, was ably and heartily supported by the United Presbyterian ministers. The venerable Dr. John Brown invoked the divine blessing upon the proceedings, and the first resolution was proposed by his accomplished and warm-hearted colleague, Professor M^cMichael of Dunfermline. The Rev. Dr. George Johnston, of Nicolson Street Church, Edinburgh, the Rev. Henry Renton, of Kelso, the Rev. Dr. Joseph Brown, then of Dalkeith, afterwards of Glasgow, likewise took part in the proceedings, and sustained the reputation of the denomination in those days for public spirit and patriotism. The chief speakers were Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright. Mr. Edward Miall, Mr. J. B. Smith, Mr. Hadfield, Mr. Charles Hindley, Mr. Lawrence Hayworth, all Members of Parliament; Mr. Biggs (Newport), Mr. James Bell, Mr. Samuel Bowly (Gloucester), Mr. Joseph Sturge, Mr. Thomasson, Mr. Henry Richard, with Bailie Fyfe, Dean of Guild Blackadder, Mr. W. Miller, Mr. H. Wigham, and other prominent citizens, assisted in the discussion. At the concluding meeting the following resolution, proposed by Mr. William Crosskill of Beverley, and seconded by Mr. Richard, was adopted:—

1853

The aid of
Dissenting
clergy.

“That the sincerest thanks of this meeting be presented to the Right Honourable the Lord Provost, for the great judgment and ability with which he has presided over this Conference, for the kind and generous welcome he has accorded to its members, and for the cordial manner in which he has lent his great personal and official influence in promoting the objects of the Conference.”

The vote of
thanks.

Three ringing cheers, led off by Mr. Cobden, emphasised this vote of the Conference. In his reply Mr. M^cLaren spoke of the work he had rendered as a labour of love, and recalling the humble origin and ultimate success of the Free Trade movement, in which he had locally been associated with Mr. Wigham, he expressed his unbounded conviction

1853

in the ultimate, though it might not be the early, triumph of the Peace principle.

“Believing,” he said, “as I firmly do, in the Scriptures of truth, I am often amazed how men can appeal to these records and throw ridicule upon the present cause, when they remember that one of the prophecies that we have, and which I for one most sincerely believe, is that the time will come when men shall learn the art of war no more. If men will learn the art of war no more, assuredly the cause of the Peace Conference will then be promoted. I think that everything indicates the growing importance of this great cause, and I will just counsel our friends to follow the same course which was followed in the case of that confederation for Free-Trade which has proved such a blessing for this country, to go on perseveringly, straightforwardly, and determinedly, neither turning to the right nor left, abusing nobody, going into no collateral question, but just holding right at it and keeping it before the public mind. The public mind will be in the end enlightened; your members will be enlightened; and Parliament will then give effect to the wishes of the constituency. The Government of the day will give way; they will exercise their influence in this direction; and the influence which they will have on the other Governments of Europe will be such, that I have no doubt there are persons in this meeting at the present time who will live to see this cause all but triumphant.”

According to the testimony of the press of the time, whether friendly or unfriendly to the objects in view, the Conference was a magnificent success; and its representative character, as well as the high tone and ability of the speeches, powerfully affected public opinion throughout the country. The *Herald of Peace* regarded the Conference as certainly equal in interest and importance to any “of the series of remarkable meetings for the purpose of promoting international peace which during the last five or six years have been taking the round of the European capitals;” and after recit-

ing various causes which contributed to the great success achieved, the official organ of the Peace Society concluded :—

1855

“ But perhaps more than all other circumstances of a local nature was the fact that we had as Chief Magistrate of the city a gentleman of rare abilities, and of a commanding weight of character, who did not hesitate to identify himself with the Conference, not only by presiding over several of the meetings with admirable wisdom and tact, but by giving to us the advantage of his counsel and experience in private, and by welcoming with the most large-hearted and generous hospitality the strangers who visited the city on the occasion. Nor must we forget the characteristic frankness and cordiality with which Mr. Cowan, one of the Members for the city, consented to bear part in our proceedings.”

This Conference undoubtedly proved influential in steady-
ing public opinion in Scotland, and more especially in encouraging the Nonconformist clergy in their fidelity as public teachers of the gospel of peace. But in England the war feeling strengthened as the terrible struggle in the Crimea proceeded, and the Peace party found their political position increasingly precarious. Mr. McLaren’s sympathy, however, did not fail, though he declined an earnest invitation from Mr. Sturge to go with him on a Peace Mission to St. Petersburg.

Mr. Bright’s steadfastness also remained unshaken. Throughout he was irreconcilably opposed to the Crimean War. In a letter dated March 5, 1855, he wrote to his brother-in-law :—

Mr. Bright
and the
Crimean
War.

“ I am one of those who believe the fundamental error to be in the *policy* rather than the management. The latter may be bad, but no management could have repaired the idiotic blundering of the policy. To go to the Crimea was lunacy, and no amount of *method* will make lunacy anything but lunacy. . . . The death of the Emperor of Russia is supposed to be favourable to peace. I believe he was for peace, and that his opponents were not. I

1857

shall rejoice, however, if this startling event shall put an end to the war. My speech for an armistice met the feelings of the House, and probably more than fifty members on both sides have told me so in private. I hope it will have done something to make peace more possible. . . . The Peelites sit on our bench—have, indeed, taken our seats—but I know not if they have any notion of acting with us. Lord Aberdeen, I believe, advised them to consort with us, though he was opposed to their resignation of office. I suspect, however, we go too *straight* in our course, and too uncompromising to permit of our ever becoming a numerous party. We can pioneer, but we cannot lead, when there is so little principle and so much self-seeking abroad.”

But the secession of the Peelites from the Government caused no sensible diminution of the strength of the war party. On the contrary, it seemed to strengthen the authority of Lord Palmerston, who, in popular estimation, was the head and front of the war policy, and who, after the close of the Crimean War, made himself in public estimation increasingly necessary to the nation by his management of the controversy with China which then emerged. More and more he became master of the situation, and more and more did the seceding Peelites and the Peace party feel their political influence as friends of peace decline.

In anticipation of the general election of 1857, Mr. McLaren wrote to Sir James Graham, as one of the leading Peelites, for his view of the situation. Sir James in his reply, dated House of Commons, 12th March 1857, did not conceal his apprehension that a terrible defeat was impending. “The reports,” he said, “which I receive from the country lead me to believe that the Liberal party will give effect in these cases to a blind confidence in Lord Palmerston, which I cannot express, because I cannot feel it.” This prognostication was only too fully verified. Sir James Graham himself retained his seat for Carlisle, though not

Defeat of
the Man-
chester
School.

without a struggle; but the Peace party, then generally described as the Manchester School, was temporarily banished from the parliamentary arena.

The reaction soon came, and one of the first signs of the change was Mr. Bright's unopposed return for Birmingham. The general election which proved so disastrous to the Peace party was fought in April, and by the following August the rejected of Manchester was the unanimously chosen of the capital of the Midlands. The unexpected vacancy in the representation of Birmingham was caused by the death of Mr. George F. Muntz. At this time Mr. Bright, shattered in health by the prolonged strain of his conflict with the war party in Parliament, deeply suffering, too, from the patriotic grief caused by the profound conviction that a disastrous national blunder—in his eyes a great crime—had been and was still being committed, was resting at Newington House after his return from a holiday in the South of Europe. The telegraphic despatches urging Mr. Bright to accept nomination at Birmingham reached him there, and were followed by a visit from Mr. Joseph Sturge to press the request still further. Both Mr. and Mrs. M^cLaren earnestly and affectionately advised compliance with the call, and Mr. M^cLaren promptly offered to abandon his other engagements for the time, and to place himself unreservedly at his service till the election should be over. Fortunately for Birmingham and the country, Mr. Bright yielded, and Mr. M^cLaren accompanied him to Tamworth, where they met representatives of the Liberal party from Birmingham. There Mr. Bright penned his election address; and feeling unfit at the time to face the ordeal of a personal canvass or a public meeting, he gladly and gratefully consented to let Mr. M^cLaren go to Birmingham as his deputy. To the

1857

Mr. Bright
and Bir-
mingham.

1857

general surprise, no opposition was offered. A Conservative candidate had been spoken of, but when it was known that Mr. Bright had consented to solicit the suffrages of the constituency, Mr. Adderley, the then local leader of the Tory party in Birmingham, wrote intimating that the seat would not be claimed, and courteously invited Mr. Bright to accept the hospitality of his house. Mr. McLaren, speaking from the hustings on the day of nomination, made graceful acknowledgment of this generous behaviour on the part of a political opponent. He likewise, in Mr. Bright's name, very cordially thanked the constituency for the high distinction which had been so handsomely conferred upon him.

Mr. McLaren on the hustings.

"They were aware," he said, "that Mr. Bright, in the careful and toilsome attention he devoted to the duties of his office, in his painstaking and conscientious attendance in committees by day and at the debates of the House by night, had so seriously impaired his health that it was impossible for him any longer to take part in public matters. His affection was not merely a physical ailment; it was the result of an overworked brain in the service of his country. His medical advisers said, that although he might seem to be pretty well, although he could read and speak as well as ever he did in his life, that he must give his brain at least two years' repose before he ventured into any kind of excitement, and they laid down a strict injunction, that not only should he refrain from public speaking, but he should not appear at public meetings, where exciting circumstances might occur to bring back the disorder, which, he trusted and hoped, a merciful Providence had now removed. Eighteen months of that period had now elapsed; the two years will have expired ere he could be called upon to take his seat in Parliament, and it was his (Mr. McLaren's) firm belief, and Mr. Bright's own hope, and the hope of his friends, that when Parliament assembled he would be able to take his place and to advocate their interests in the Commons House of Parliament."

Few of Mr. McLaren's public acts afforded him more genuine satisfaction than this participation in the introduction of Mr. Bright to a political connection which has been maintained unbroken for more than thirty years. He welcomed the unopposed return at Birmingham not merely as a personal compliment to Mr. Bright, but as the sign of a healthy change in public opinion; for, referring to his friend's address penned at Tamworth, he showed the change was not with him. "Mr. Bright," he said, "came forward with no apology, with no retractations, with no expressions of sorrow, and with no promises of amendment; but he came forward saying that he had been advocating his country's interests and the rights of the working-classes, that he was the supporter of good legislation of every kind; so he would continue honestly to advocate the views which he believed to be right, whether they should be consonant or not with the popular opinions of the day." But possibly Mr. McLaren's chief satisfaction was derived from his knowledge that Mr. Bright was at the time turning his attention to a work dear to his own heart, viz., the enfranchisement of the working-classes; and he was assured that the new Member for Birmingham would make use of his commanding position and his commanding talents for the advancement of this cause. "They knew," said Mr. McLaren on the hustings, "that a Reform Bill was talked of, and that Government intended proposing one; but John Bright would have no sham measure of reform; and he would be supported by the power of Birmingham in devoting his time, his talent, and energy to the promotion of the enfranchisement of the great body of the people."

Reform.

In a speech previously quoted at the Edinburgh Peace Conference of 1853, Mr. McLaren confidently anticipated the recognition by the country and the Government of inter-

1857

national arbitration as the only right and satisfactory means of settling international disputes. Public opinion, however, ripens slowly. It was not until twenty years afterwards that a resolution was passed by the House of Commons affirming the principle of international arbitration, although in the previous year the British Government had so far entered into the views of earnest Liberals on this question as to concur with the United States in a reference of the "Alabama" claims to an International Court of Arbitration at Geneva. This resolution, brought forward by Henry Richard, was passed on the 6th of July 1873, on which day Mr. and Mrs. M^cLaren celebrated their silver wedding. This coincidence is recorded in one of Mrs. M^cLaren's interesting letters:—

" . . . You will be sorry to hear of the disappointment which attended the celebration of our silver wedding. We had expected to have had a very interesting 'at home,' as so many of our friends seemed interested in it, and I was especially pleased that so many of our parliamentary friends had agreed to come, as this gratified your father. But there is often a law of compensation in our disappointments, and certainly it was so in this case. Henry Richard, the Member for Merthyr-Tydvil, had a motion in favour of arbitration, and on that very night the debate came on. He made an admirable speech. Mr. Gladstone replied, but the motion was carried by a majority of 10 in a House of nearly 200 members. This kept all our parliamentary friends tied to the House, but I wrote to Henry Richard congratulating him upon having had the great honour of carrying, for the first time in the House of Commons, a vote in favour of arbitration, and said I would rather have had our silver wedding associated with that event than with the most brilliant assemblage London could have gathered together."¹

¹ Congratulations were sent to Henry Richard from Garibaldi, Senator Sumner, &c., &c., and he afterwards travelled to the Continent to receive support for his views, and a banquet was held in his honour in Rome.

CHAPTER XVI.

INDEPENDENT LIBERALISM IN EDINBURGH.

ALTHOUGH Mr. M^cLaren never lacked among his fellow-citizens recognition of his talents and services, as expressed on one occasion by a public testimonial, at other times by elevation to local offices of dignity and authority, and at all times by the confidence of friends and the respect of the citizens generally, yet the distinction of parliamentary representative was withheld from him longer than his political associates in England and his admirers in Scotland expected. His special aptitude for parliamentary service was known and acknowledged beyond the limits of the constituency of the Scottish capital, long before he appeared in the parliamentary arena. That he did not sooner obtain the opportunity through the natural and legitimate channel, the suffrages of his fellow-citizens, was the subject of frequent remark, and of much regret amongst statesmen who had been brought in contact with him through Edinburgh business, and who knew his influence and power, and especially among the Anti-Corn-Law Leaguers and members of the Manchester School, who valued him as one of their most accomplished allies, and also among the Scottish Dissenters and Radicals, who trusted him as their leader. But Mr. M^cLaren was not, in the ordinary sense of the term, an ambitious man. To him public service was at once a duty and a pleasure, to be sought not merely for the gratification

1841

Parliamentary aptitude.

1841

of personal ambition or the promotion of personal interests, but from a patriotic regard for the public welfare. He diligently strove to qualify himself for the highest form and sphere of this service. But as a public man his aspirations were not centred in St. Stephens. We could cite many of his letters, written to his public friends as well as those of a private character, to show how steadfastly he resisted all proposals that he should enter Parliament. The applications for him to do so were frequent both in England and Scotland; but he never yielded, even where there was an assurance that his election expenses would be paid. He occasionally said to those to whom he could speak in confidence that he could only be tempted to enter Parliament under one condition, namely, as Member for the city of Edinburgh, which would be to him a proof of the trust reposed in him by his fellow-citizens. And when at last this proof was so abundantly given, no one ever entered St. Stephens with a greater feeling of pride and pleasure.

He was resolved that, if he ever entered Parliament, it should be as an independent Member. It was this sterling quality of independence, possibly carried in some instances too far, which aroused against him antagonisms of which less single-minded men know nothing. In Edinburgh the forces of the great parties were organised under a system approximating to military discipline, and under such a system no place could be found for one who thought for himself, and who even flouted the opinions of "heads of the party." Monopolists and sinecurists of course regarded him as an inveterate and incorruptible enemy, and Mr. McLaren had reason to know better than most men the hold which privilege had on Edinburgh under the restricted franchise, which was maintained until 1868.

When, therefore, proposals were made to him to accept nomination as a candidate—as they were on the occasion of every vacancy that occurred after the elevation of Mr. Abercromby to the peerage and of Sir John Campbell to the Lord Chancellorship—two considerations naturally presented themselves to his mind, though he did not parade them. First, there was the economic difficulty, because Mr. McLaren was at no time a wealthy man; and secondly, he had to consider that the upper classes, and all the partisans of privilege in “Church, Army, Physic, Law,” would, under the guidance of the political committees, array themselves against him, and that he could only look for success when the Liberal sentiment of the constituency was sufficiently strong and the Liberal party sufficiently organised to overbear the combined forces of Whiggery and Toryism. These considerations forced him to resist the innocent stratagems of eager friends to allure him into acquiescence in nomination on the resignation of Sir John Campbell in 1840, and again when they judged it necessary to oppose Mr. Macaulay in 1846 and 1847, and to wait until time should declare itself on his side.

To the removal of these hindrances to Radical progress he for many years applied his talents and energies as a political leader and organiser. He set himself to establish an Independent Liberal party in Edinburgh—a party comprehensive yet compactly knit together, combining the various cohorts of Dissenters, Free Traders, and Social Reformers, into one invincible legion, deriving its strength from conviction and mutual sympathy, as well as from discipline and loyalty, and making its influence felt in the constituency and in Parliament as representative of men in earnest about Liberal principles.

At the time of the changes in the representation of the

Organisa-
tion of
Independ-
ent Libe-
ralism.

1841
 city caused by the elevation of Mr. Abercromby and Sir John Campbell to higher spheres, Mr. M^cLaren had not yet broken with the Whigs, and he was a consenting party to, though not an active promoter of, the selection first of Mr. Macaulay and afterwards of Mr. Gibson-Craig; but he had given expression to his dissatisfaction with the close system of nomination by committees, and his desire that the representation of the capital of Scotland should be in the hands of men independent of Ministerial influence and official rank. Without causing any breach of friendship, he had frankly told his views to Mr. Abercromby on his elevation to the peerage as Lord Dunfermline; and on this and cognate subjects he continued to receive from him for many years afterwards long and elaborate letters. With Sir John Campbell, then Attorney-General, he had been equally frank, and when, in 1841, the Attorney-General was suddenly transformed into the Lord Chancellor of Ireland, Mr. M^cLaren received from him the following note:—

LONDON, *June 21, 1841.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I am exceedingly solicitous that you should have no misgivings respecting the sincerity and good faith with which I have acted with a view to the coming election. When I sent down my address which has appeared in the newspapers, I do solemnly assure you that I had not the remotest notion that anything could have occurred to prevent me from offering myself as a candidate, and if chosen, serving as your representative. It was not till within a few hours of my farewell address that I knew to the contrary. And now I will cordially thank you for all your kindness to Sir J. Campbell, although the Attorney-General has lately thought himself a little hardly used by you. Of course I cannot in the smallest degree interfere in the choice of my successor, but I do most earnestly hope that the constituency of Edinburgh will long enjoy their present reputation for purity and independence, for public spirit and moderation, and

for the steady pursuit of attainable objects.—I remain, dear Mr. McLaren;

J. CAMPBELL.

1841

Mr. McLaren in his answer appears to have expressed his wish that the city should have the service of two Independent Liberals, and the Lord Chancellor in his letter of acknowledgment said :—

“ I must ever take a hearty interest in Edinburgh affairs, and I thank you most cordially for the explicit avowal of your sentiments and intentions.

“ But I cannot help hoping, that if you find that you have two Members who vote for all the public measures you wish to support, and satisfactorily transact all the private business of the city, you will be contented with them although they are called Whigs.”

In anticipation of Mr. McLaren's nomination for one of the seats, a Church and Tory writer referred to him as “long the pet of the Whig clique” and “now to be the protégé of the Whig Government.” The separation, however, as has been shown, was in actual process at the very time the Church and Tory party thought the union fastest. Mr. McLaren's robust and progressively Liberal principles were becoming increasingly masterful in determining his political course and relationships, while the Edinburgh Whigs, falling more and more under the domination of officialism, were disappointing and offending old friends by the adoption of a time-serving rest-and-be-thankful policy. This divergence, as has already been seen, was greatly accelerated during the Free Trade struggle, and, like the old Secession fathers, Mr. McLaren was forced by stress of conscience to go “without the camp.” Henceforth his former political allies became his bitterest opponents. Tory opposition remained, and he never sought to conciliate it; but it was a toothless, harmless

Divergence
from the
Whigs.

1841
 Opposition
 to Mr.
 Macaulay.

thing compared with the animosity of the men who professed a creed similar to his own, yet feared to apply it lest they should injure party interests. Mr. McLaren, on his part, was equally resolute and active, and proved a foe of indomitable courage and ever-growing strength, who plainly meant to win, and had no thoughts of acquiescence in his own suppression. His first great battle with the Whigs was a sufficiently notable success. Mr. Macaulay's Liberalism was of a different type from his. It had shown itself irresolute and compromising during the Free Trade agitation; it was comparatively apathetic with regard to parliamentary reform; and it looked at concurrent endowment, and not at disestablishment, as the means of meeting the irresistible demands of religious equality. Those leading Liberals in the constituency whom the Whig chiefs had estranged not unnaturally applied to the gentleman whom Mr. Macaulay had indicated as his probable antagonist. A deputation, consisting of Sir James Forrest, Mr. Thomson of Banchory, and Mr. Campbell of Monzie, waited on Mr. McLaren and offered him the support of the Free Church party; but, for the reasons already referred to, he declined nomination. He, however, readily entered into the proposed opposition, and Mr. Charles Cowan, a prominent Free Churchman, and long an intimate friend of Dr. Chalmers, was named as a candidate. Mr. McLaren, willing to bring Dissenters and Free Churchmen together on the common platform of resistance to endowments, organised the coalition, which, while it secured the return of Mr. Cowan, also laid the foundation of the future "Independent Liberal" organisation, which, under Mr. McLaren's leadership, became the dominant political force in Edinburgh.

Mr. Cowan's
 candida-
 ture.

At the general election of 1852 the first serious reverse was sustained. In anticipation of the election, and in the

knowledge of Sir William Gibson-Craig's withdrawal from parliamentary life, the committee which had secured the return of Mr. Cowan at the previous election met to consider whether they and the opposition Liberal Committee could not agree to the unopposed return of Mr. Bouverie as Mr. Cowan's colleague. At this meeting Mr. McLaren, who was then Lord Provost, moved and carried a resolution to the effect that the Independent Committee should prefer a candidate who favoured vote by ballot and triennial Parliaments. This resolution was interpreted by the Whigs as tantamount to the rejection of the candidature of Mr. Bouverie; and most of Mr. Cowan's "Moderate Liberal" friends, taking alarm, withdrew from the committee. Meanwhile the friends of Mr. McLaren in the Independent Committee pressed him to accept nomination for one of the two seats about to be declared vacant, and they received the following reply:—

1852

Temporary
break-up of
Independent Libe-
ral party.

EDINBURGH, *June 10, 1852.*

GENTLEMEN,—I feel much gratified by the information you have conveyed to me, that, at a numerously attended meeting of the Independent Committee, specially called for the purpose of considering my claims, it was resolved, by a nearly unanimous vote, to request me to allow myself to be nominated to represent the city in Parliament, in room of Sir William Gibson-Craig, who, to the general regret of the inhabitants, has declined again to solicit their suffrages, and that the meeting pledged themselves to use every legitimate effort to secure my return.

The candi-
dature of
1852.

I have, at the same time, carefully considered the opinions expressed to me, to the effect that the same degree of unanimity which was manifested by the committee may be fairly assumed to exist amongst the great body of the independent voters, by whom that committee was elected at the different ward meetings throughout the city, and that the feeling in my favour amongst other sections of the Liberal party, not connected with

1852

the Independent Committee, is such that I may reasonably calculate on the cordial support of a large majority of the whole Liberal electors.

Assuming that these anticipations were well founded, I should feel it to be my duty, in the circumstances, to respond to the call; and if elected, I would do my best to represent the interest of the inhabitants of all classes. If, however, it were found that my nomination did not meet with that measure of support from the Liberal party generally which you have anticipated, and that some other candidate could more successfully unite the different sections than I could hope to do, in that case I should greatly prefer remaining in my present position to being returned by a narrow majority, or by any merely sectional influence; for without the moral power which would flow from being returned by a decided majority of the whole Liberal electors, I feel that I could not fill the office either with advantage to the public or comfort to myself.

In these circumstances I place myself in your hands, leaving it to you to ascertain the feeling in my favour in such a way as you may think best.

With the most grateful feelings towards you, and all the other members of the committee, for your kindness, and for the great honour which has been done me, I am, gentlemen, yours faithfully,

D. M^cLAREN.

To Wm. M^cCrie, Esq., Chairman, and the other Members
of the Independent Committee.

Five days afterwards a public meeting of the electors held in the Music Hall confirmed the committee's invitation, and Mr. M^cLaren decided to go to the poll. By this time he had discovered that an active effort was being made to withdraw support from him on the ground that his opposition to the Maynooth grant was based on Voluntary, and not on "sound Protestant principles." Mr. M^cLaren, in taking note of this objection, boldly and successfully vindicated his consistency as a Protestant and a Voluntary.

He declared "without qualification or hesitation" that he held as decided Protestant principles as any man in Edinburgh; that his Protestantism and the Protestantism of the United Presbyterian Church, with which he was connected, was based on the New Testament, which is "opposed to the whole spirit and genius and scope of Popery;" that he considered Popery scripturally wrong and most injurious in its effects on civil and religious liberty, and that these convictions had been greatly confirmed by personal observations of the operation of Roman Catholicism in Madeira and Spain. But he was opposed to the Maynooth grant on the ground of the injustice of all Government grants to religious bodies, and not only because of his objection to the endowment of error; and he was ready to vote against all grants as he had opportunity. He continued:—

1852

Objection
to State en-
dowments.

"The body to which I belong has no grant. It desires none. It would take none. I am prepared to put other bodies having grants in the same position. Therefore I will do what I can to abolish the Maynooth grant; but I repudiate the principle which some gentlemen hold, that unless you class them altogether, the Maynooth grant, the Regium Donum, and all other grants—unless you put them, as it were, in a bag and set fire to them altogether, you are not to touch any of them. I repudiate any such principle, and will hold by the Scripture precept to do good as I have opportunity; and, opposed as I am to all these grants from the Consolidated Fund, apart from the question of Church Establishments, which stands on its own footing, I will vote against them all as they turn up, without regarding which comes first or which comes second. If the Maynooth grant comes up alone, I will vote against it; if it comes up with the Regium Donum, I will vote against them both; if the Regium Donum comes up first, I will vote against it. If the grant for the Episcopal clergy in the West Indies comes up, I will vote against

1852

it; and let them come in whatever form or shape they please, I will vote against them all."

Election
tactics.

The supporters of Mr. Cowan generally refused to be conciliated, and a second Free Church candidate, Mr. Campbell of Monzie, was started, apparently for the purpose of preventing the second votes of Free Churchmen going to the Lord Provost. At this election Mr. Macaulay was nominated without his consent being asked. It was felt by many Liberals that Mr. Macaulay's high position and past services to Liberalism marked him out as a suitable Member for the metropolitan constituency, and that, since the Corn-laws were repealed, minor differences might on this occasion be overlooked. And although the two men differed so widely as to the basis of their Liberalism, some of the most intellectual and earnest Liberals in Edinburgh supported the candidature of Mr. Macaulay and Mr. McLaren, on the common ground of political integrity, knowledge of affairs, and ability to serve the country.

The Conservative party, of course, supported their own candidate, the Hon. T. C. Bruce: of these, only 35 gave their second votes to Lord Provost McLaren, while Mr. Cowan received 398 Conservative votes, and Mr. Macaulay 186. A large number of the Tory electors kept themselves in reserve until the last hour; but about three o'clock they held a meeting, and finding from the state of the poll, which was, in those days of open voting, known from hour to hour, that Mr. McLaren stood second, and would be returned as Mr. Macaulay's colleague, they went in a body to give their votes for Mr. Cowan, and thus secured his return; a proceeding which called forth a strong condemnatory expression even from Mr. Cowan himself, whose high moral nature shrank from the position of owing his seat to an electoral manœuvre,

and entering the House of Commons by the power of the Tory vote. Considering the unfortunate effect of the cross-voting on his candidature, it is not surprising that Mr. McLaren only came out third at the declaration of the poll. The result of the poll was: Macaulay, 1872; Cowan, 1754; McLaren, 1559; Bruce, 1066; Campbell, 626. Mr. McLaren was undoubtedly the popular candidate. He obtained the "show of hands," which in those days preceded the actual election, and he found comfort in the fact that he had received the support of the majority of electors who claimed to be Liberals. At the declaration of the poll he said:—

1852
Popular
candidates
defeated.

"I have the honour of having had recorded in my favour the votes of 1559 independent electors, not gathered together from all the corners of the globe, but the very heart's-blood of the Liberal party. All of us are united as the friends of civil and religious liberty. We recognise no large parties among us—neither the Conservative party, nor the old Whig party, nor the Church party, nor the Catholic party, nor the Free Church party, nor any party, but the citizens of Edinburgh, who wish to support me irrespective of party combinations. The great effort," Mr. McLaren added good-humouredly, "that has been made to keep me out is the greatest compliment that was ever paid to me. The fact that the Tory party thought it worth while to come forward at the end of the day, and thought fit to make this effort to throw me out, was the greatest compliment that could be rendered to me. I feel exceedingly proud of the distinction that has thus been conferred."

The hostile
coalition.

A point in Mr. McLaren's character that often extorted the involuntary admiration of his opponents was that throughout life he was able to maintain an even temper and a cheerful exterior under adverse circumstances. On this occasion Mr. McLaren, unmoved by defeat, returned to

1856

the congenial duties of Lord Provost, which, as shown in another chapter, he discharged with unsurpassed efficiency and popularity. In a letter referring to his defeat he said, "The disappointment is greater to my friends than to myself; the result has not cost me five minutes' sleep."

A bye-election.

Shortly after the expiry of the Lord Provost's term of office, the retirement of Mr. Macaulay from the representation of the city was announced, and Mr. McLaren was again earnestly pressed to accept nomination. He explained in a letter to the chairman of his electoral committee, Mr. W. McCrie, that he did not feel the call of any urgent public question with which he was closely associated at that particular moment, and that the conditions which observation and experience had convinced him were essential to a successful candidature did not then exist. The wounds inflicted by the Independent Liberal party on themselves were indeed beginning to heal, but the party organisation was far from satisfactory; and besides, it was not at a bye-election, when only one seat was vacant, but at a general election, when the question of the whole representation of the city was to be decided, that he intended again to enter the field. He wished, if sent to Parliament at all, to go with a like-minded colleague, and with a definite popular commission to serve the city in the House of Commons during the full lifetime of a Parliament. Many of his friends were more confident than he, and they persuaded Mr. Francis Brown Douglas to accept nomination as an Independent Liberal against Mr. Adam Black, proposed by the "Aggregate Liberal" or Whig committee. Mr. Brown Douglas's candidature quite coincided with Mr. McLaren's scheme of party reconstruction. As a trusted Liberal, and as a loyal energetic Free Churchman, Mr. Brown Douglas brought the larger sections of the Nonconformists

Mr. Brown Douglas's candidature.

once more to the same political platform, and prepared the way for the ultimate union. His disinterested attempt to keep together the "Independent Liberal" organisation proved advantageous to the party with which he connected himself, but it did not, unfortunately, reward him with the personal success which, under other circumstances, his talents and high character might have attained. The name and record of Mr. Black's services to the city outweighed the claims of the Independent Liberal candidate, and secured for the Whig committee another decided victory at the poll.

Mr. M^cLaren did not initiate the opposition to Mr. Black, but he openly and energetically supported it. In his letter written to Mr. Black's sons after the publication of the "Memoirs" in 1885, he thus explained and defended his action:—

1856
—
The opposition to Mr. Black.

"The account given of your father's election, in so far as my agency in the matter is concerned, is calculated to mislead. I am made to appear as having acted from personal motives against Mr. Black. Nothing could be more incorrect. I was opposed to him on all the pressing questions of the day. He was a staunch old Whig, and one of the leaders of that party. I was a staunch Radical. I was opposed to him about the Maynooth grant and the extension of the suffrage. I was for the total abolition of the Annuity-tax; and I had been, as a member of the Anti-Corn-Law League, in favour of *total and immediate repeal*, while Mr. Black took the part of the Whigs, who would be content with a fixed duty, as is explained in Mr. Macaulay's letter printed in the 'Memoirs.' Mr. Black was in favour of the *principle* of total repeal, but could not persuade his friends to go for it; and he did not go against the Government or Whigs on that point, as we of the League did. It was because I was opposed to the candidate on all the leading political questions of the day that I opposed him. He did not represent my political opinions, and therefore I did not support him.

"Again, it is in effect stated that I had personally managed

1859
 to bring together all the political sections who are said to have combined to oppose Mr. Black and support Mr. Brown Douglas. I was very active in the cause individually. I have no recollection who proposed Mr. Douglas, but I am quite certain that I never met with or canvassed any of the separate sections who are said to have combined against Mr. Black. My belief is that they did not act as separate bodies, but as men each acting on his own opinion. I acted with the Voluntaries, and perhaps as their head. I believed that Mr. Brown Douglas would better represent my opinions than Mr. Black, and therefore I gave him all the support in my power, as it was my duty to do as an honest man. Mutual friendships imply mutual obligations and mutual rights, equal on both sides.

“One of the brothers whom I have the pleasure of addressing recently made a speech in entire accordance with my opinions,¹ and if my relative, Mr. Renton,² had held old Whig opinions, I should certainly have voted for Mr. Black, if I had possessed a vote. In like manner I should certainly have voted against Mr. Goschen, and in favour of the Radical candidate, who holds my opinions. I entirely disapprove the principle in vogue in some quarters, that a vote for an M.P. may be dealt with as a mere matter of personal friendship or liking or disliking. I hold it to be a great moral wrong for a voter to act on such views. In 1852, when I stood, Mr. Black did not give me his influence or even his personal vote, but exercised some influence—I don’t know how much—against me, as is substantially admitted in the ‘Memoirs’ (p. 165); but I never complained, publicly or privately, of this, believing that Mr. Black acted according to the dictates of his own conscience. Why, then, should I not have equal liberty to exercise any influence I might have from pure motives for the supposed public good against him?”

In 1857 Mr. Cowan and Mr. Black were returned with—

¹ Mr. Adam W. Black, who stood as a candidate for the Central Division of Edinburgh at the general election of 1885.

² Mr. James Hall Renton, who contested the same Division.

out opposition; and in 1859 Mr. Moncreiff, then Lord Advocate, taking the place of Mr. Cowan, obtained, in company with Mr. Black, a tenure of the seat till 1865. The two Members had thus a long period of probation, and during its course they did not succeed in winning the support of the Independent Liberals. It may be doubted whether any efforts of theirs would have achieved such results, because there was the element of personal preference of Mr. McLaren as a representative. Matters were still further complicated by the well-meant but unsuccessful efforts of the city Members to settle the Annuity-tax. Against this so-called settlement of the Annuity-Tax controversy thousands of persons protested as an aggravation of the evil, which made roupings (distrainments) for ministers' money in the midst of exasperated crowds a painfully frequent occurrence. In the next place, Mr. Black, veteran reformer though he was, had, in opposition to one of the established articles of the Liberal creed, spoken and voted against schemes of franchise extension submitted to the House. Nor had the growing desire of constituencies that Members should give an annual account of their stewardship been met by Messrs. Black and Moncreiff, who abstained entirely from addressing the electors during the existence of this Parliament. This neglect, combined with other sources of dissatisfaction, added to the unpopularity of the Members.

In the summer of 1865 a few resolute men, with the Anti-Annuity-Tax Association as a nucleus, recognising Mr. McLaren as the true leader of the Advanced Liberal party, raised again the standard of independence. During his absence at Clifton, near Bristol, whither he had taken up his winter residence on account of the health of one of his children, these friends promoted a requisition calling on

1859

Reorgani-
sation of
Independ-
ent Libe-
rals.

The requi-
sition of
1865.

1865:

him to accept nomination as a citizens' candidate.¹ The first intimation of their intention was conveyed by a letter from Mr. Josiah Livingston; and before Mr. McLaren could return to Edinburgh the requisitionists had obtained upwards of three thousand signatures, had induced Mr. Miller of Leithen to accept the position of second candidate along with Mr. McLaren, and had organised themselves into a powerful electoral committee. Mr. Hugh Rose, one of the ablest representatives of one of the most resolute sections of Liberal Dissenters, and Mr. W. McCrie, the genial-hearted chairman of the electoral committee who fought the battle of 1852, were joint-chairmen of Mr. McLaren's committee, and Mr. John Wilson (afterwards Member for one of the present divisions of the city) was honorary secretary. Associated with them were staunch friends like Bailie Fyfe, Mr. David McLaren, Mr. T. Ireland, Mr. James G. Marshall, Mr. Millar of Sheardale, Dr. Moir, Mr. Josiah Livingston, and Mr. Thomas Nelson, prominent citizens and influential Free Church laymen; Anti-Annuity-Tax irreconcilables of the stamp of Councillor Stott, Mr. James Richardson, Mr. George Laing, Mr. J. G. Tunny, Mr. George Burn, Mr. J. H.

¹ Subjoined is a copy of the requisition which was presented to Mr. McLaren asking him to stand as a parliamentary candidate in 1865:—

“ To Duncan McLaren, Esq., of Newington House.

“ SIR,—We, the undersigned electors in the city of Edinburgh, in view of the approaching general parliamentary election, hereby request you to allow yourself to be nominated as a candidate for the representation of the city; and in the event of your compliance with this requisition, we pledge ourselves to give you our active support. (Signed) Francis Richardson, G. Burn,* Andrew Fyfe, John Cochrane, William Paterson, J. H. Stott,* Archibald Young,* David Lewis,* A. E. Macknight, Thomas Menzies,* Robert Murray, A. Alexander, Peter Methven,* John Richardson, James Tunny, Hugh Wetherston,* George Laing,* James Richardson.* ”

[The asterisk after the name denotes that those affixing it had had goods sold at the market-cross for non-payment of the Annuity-tax.]

Balgarnie, and Mr. Pirrett; Mr. Thomas Knox, Mr. David Lewis, Mr. David Dickson, and Admiral Peat, honourably distinguished as social reformers and enjoying deserved popularity; outspoken Councillor Ford, Mr. Fullarton, publisher, Mr. John Weir, Mr. James Young, Mr. Robert Goodsir, Mr. John Greig, Mr. Hugh Brown, and many others known to be true to the Independent Liberal programme. The spontaneity and unanimity of this summons, the evidence of thorough organisation which was afforded, and the provision of a second candidate, meeting as they did all the requirements of success for which he had formerly stipulated, gave Mr. McLaren much gratification; and on his return from England he unhesitatingly and unconditionally placed himself in the hands of the requisitionists. Shortly afterwards, at a crowded and enthusiastic meeting of citizens in Queen Street Hall, the action of the requisitionists was fully endorsed, and the candidature of Mr. McLaren and Mr. Miller formally approved.

At this meeting Mr. McLaren delivered a telling electioneering address. He reminded the electors that he had not of his own accord come forward to claim the seat for himself and Mr. Miller against the Lord Advocate and Mr. Black, but he had been called forth by the rightful owners of the seats. Mr. Black and the Lord Advocate, he said, "were elected for a definite term of years. The present Parliament has lived longer than any Parliament in our recollection. The term is expired, the seats are vacant, and it is not for them to say 'The seats are ours.' The seats are yours, and it is for you to say whom you want to represent you." Ringing cheers, again and again renewed, welcomed this vindication of free popular election against the monopolising claim of "the Government Whig party, by far the

Mr. McLaren's acceptance.

smallest party in the city.”¹ Quite as hearty and resolute was the applause which enforced the speaker’s protest against the objectionable Annuity-Tax Act of 1860, and “the arbitrary and despotic manner” in which that Act had been enforced upon the community. Specially effective was the exposure of Lord Advocate Moncreiff’s supposed inconsistency in accepting as a colleague one who, as a Member, had opposed the Government’s Reform policy. Pressing home this inconsistency, and daringly testing popular opinion as to the sincerity of the Palmerstonians as Reformers, Mr. M^cLaren continued:—

“Now, if the Lord Advocate be regarded as the head and organ of the Government in Scotland, I would like to put this question, which I hope he will answer at his next meeting. How comes it that he allies himself with a man who has so strongly opposed the Government on these important occasions? and how does it happen that he links himself to Adam Black for the purpose of

¹ It is perhaps not too much to say that the popular dislike of the Whig committee, or “clique,” had as much to do with the electoral defeat which it sustained in 1865 as the personal popularity of Mr. M^cLaren or the jealousy of official influence, supposed to be represented in the persons of Lord Macaulay, and afterwards of Lord Moncreiff. This committee maintained itself by co-optation, pure and unadulterated. Its meetings were strictly private, the names of its members were unknown outside its charmed circle, and it was even said that Liberals who would have been admitted by the “Reform” or “Brooks’s” were liable to be unceremoniously blackballed by the chairman or secretary for the time being of this irresponsible *junto*. It is needless to add that the gentlemen who composed the committee were in their private capacity estimable, and probably perfectly inoffensive, citizens. A good deal of the animosity created by the alleged “domination of the Whig clique” was perhaps founded on misconception; and impartial history, should its notice fall upon this curious product of Reform legislation, will perhaps pronounce the “Whig clique” of Edinburgh a corporation of very innocent persons; at worst, a court of registration for carrying out the decrees of the Government Whips, who had relegated Edinburgh to the category of nomination burghs.

opposing me, who supported the Government on these occasions, for I attended the public meeting in the city which supported the Palmerston Reform Bill? I think it would be well for the Lord Advocate to answer this, for if he does not, the impression will get abroad that, if he be the accredited exponent of the opinions of the Government, the Government must be very hollow and insincere in regard to its professions in favour of Reform. (Loud and continued applause.) If that be true of the Government—if it be the tactics of the Government, through the Lord Advocate as their exponent in Scotland, to oppose all those candidates who have supported Reform, and to support all those candidates who have opposed Reform, like Mr. Black—(laughter)—then I say that the sooner the Government is turned out and another put in its place the better will it be for the country. (Loud applause.)”

The grounds of opposition to Mr. Moncreiff and Mr. Black, it will thus be seen, were sufficiently broad and distinct. Referring in his letter on the “Memoirs” to the loss of popularity sustained by both Members through the Act of 1860, Mr. McLaren remarked:—“The Annuity-Tax Bill, in my opinion, did more to lose Mr. Black’s seat than any *one* point. The tenpence-halfpenny per pound on the *real* rents of the police-roll was computed to be equal to the six per cent. on the lower roll of the stentmasters (taken usually as four-fifths to three-fourths), and was made *part of the police-tax*, so that no one could thereafter resist it as a direct ecclesiastical tax; and this avowedly was done with that view. The inhabitants were infuriated against it, and I was a most willing leader, although I never refused to pay the original tax, or wished to have my goods distrained for it, as not a few of my friends did—as Bailies Russell and Stott and Mr. Tait, by going to prison rather than pay. By the arrangement which my efforts ended in, the direct taxation is altogether abolished, and the stipends of thirteen

Grounds of
opposition
to sitting
Members.

1865
 ministers are fixed at £550 ; but by the voluntary liberality of their flocks they get more than £600 a year." Certainly the reports of the election proceedings in 1865 bear out Mr. M^cLaren's view of the keenness of feeling and resoluteness of purpose excited against the Act of 1860. One example, taken from the *Caledonian Mercury's* report of Mr. Hugh Rose's speech at the public meeting which first endorsed the candidature of Messrs. M^cLaren and Miller, may be given :—

"We live in an age," said Mr. Rose, "when, from the vast amount of difference of opinion in regard to the religious questions of this country, the time has gone by when a single shilling of the public money should be voted for the support of any religious sect whatever—(tremendous applause)—whether these votes or this class legislation bear upon the endowment of Roman Catholic colleges or upon the continuation of taxation for ecclesiastical imposts, whether dignified by the name of church-rates in one country or police-rates in another. (Great cheering, continued with deafening effect.) I trust the time has come—(renewed cheers and hisses)—I trust the time has come—(here the excitement was tremendous, the chairman's voice being completely drowned)—when we will endeavour to send from this city—(renewed applause)—men who will say to the Legislature, 'Gentlemen, the thing does not work.' (Loud and prolonged cheering.) We are not here, gentlemen, either to accuse or defend the gentlemen in this city who are giving their strong opposition to the clerico-police rates. This is not a place for such a subject of consideration ; but I hold the scenes which late legislation have caused to be enacted in this city are a disgrace to this age of civilisation. (Tremendous applause.)"

Mr. Black's opposition to the lowering of the franchise likewise operated most adversely against his candidature. It tended to alienate from him the class of voters who were not deeply interested in politico-ecclesiastical questions. Mr. Black's views on the subject of reform (conscientiously held

and maintained against his own immediate electoral interests) may be best given in his own words :—

“Though he was not bound,” he said, “to the support of Lord Palmerston’s or any other Government, he was generally found voting along with the Lord Advocate, and that on the question of the franchise, as no Government would now introduce a bill for a mere lowering, apart from the accompanying safeguards of education, taxation, or property, he was perfectly certain that on that question too they would be found acting together. It was a gross misrepresentation to say that he was opposed to the extension, or even the lowering, of the franchise ; he only wanted that some qualification other than mere rental should be required in any large addition to be made to the constituencies.”

Such a declaration could hardly be regarded as reassuring by the parliamentary reformers who formed the mass of the Liberal party in the city. The reports of the canvassers showing that many electors who had voted for Mr. Black in 1856 as a reformer were now resolved to divide their support between Mr. McLaren and Mr. Moncreiff, led Mr. McLaren to say more than once during the canvass, that whoever might be placed at the head of the poll, Mr. Black would not be that man, and this statement he repeated with much emphasis on the hustings on the day of nomination. Two days later, when all parties were again on the hustings to hear the declaration of the poll, Mr. Black, referring to this remarkable testimony to Mr. McLaren’s accuracy, said : “I confess that when I heard Mr. McLaren on Wednesday state so strongly that he was sure to be at the top of the poll, because he had tested the lists by every means in his power, and was perfectly certain of the fact, I knew that Mr. McLaren would not speak in that way unless he believed it, and I felt that he must have had some good ground for saying it.”

The canvass was carried on with great vigour on both sides, but the reception awarded to Messrs. M^cLaren and Miller at the numerous public and ward meetings which they held, and also at the hustings, proved beyond the possibility of doubt that they were the popular candidates, that the great mass of the citizens were on their side, and that whatever might be the issue of this election under the restricted £10 franchise, the extension of the franchise, for which all reformers pleaded, would be fatal to Whig supremacy in Edinburgh. Mr. M^cLaren, as an old electioneering adept, confidently calculated on the success both of himself and his colleague even under the £10 franchise. The canvassers reported 4561 pledges for himself, and 3829 pledges for Mr. Miller; and with the experience of previous elections in his mind, he was satisfied that these pledges, obtained by honest voluntary workers, secured the success of the Independent Liberal party. If these expectations were only partially realised, it was not because the promises obtained were to any material extent unfulfilled, but because of the unprecedentedly heavy vote recorded, and because of the united support given by the Tories to Mr. Black and the Lord Advocate. In anticipation of the polling, the Conservative Association advertised the following resolutions:—

“(1.) That at the ensuing election, there being no Conservative candidate, Conservative electors ought to give their support to Mr. Black.

“(2.) That, in present circumstances, Conservative electors should not pledge their second votes; and that unless in the case of any Conservative electors who have resolved to vote for Mr. Black alone, or who may have already pledged their second votes, it will be expedient to abstain from voting before twelve o'clock, by which time an opinion may be formed whether it will be pos-

sible to give second votes without endangering Mr. Black's return."

1865

This policy was strictly followed out, but the Conservative vote which defeated Mr. McLaren in 1852 was happily unavailing against him in 1865.¹

Victory of Independent Liberals.

The return of the voting made by the Sheriff showed this to be the result :—

McLaren	4354
Moncreiff	4148
Black	3797
Miller	3723

Referring to this election in his letter previously quoted, Mr. McLaren said :—

"The polls were then published every hour or every half-hour, and I was always at the head from the opening to the close. My colleague, Mr. Miller, was next to me till about one o'clock, when the leading Tories, who had by agreement abstained from voting, held a meeting at which they resolved to vote for our opponents as the least of two evils; and they were thus rapidly advanced, and my colleague lowered on the poll till he was the lowest. My opponents got nearly all the Tory votes, and this was what Mr. Black expected, as he told Mr. Bright.²

"If all the Tory votes were deducted, my majority of Liberals must have been very large indeed, thus proving that I had the

¹ In the remarks made here and elsewhere regarding the Tory policy at Edinburgh, no disparagement of the Conservative party is intended. Being a minority in Edinburgh, and unable to carry a candidate of their own, they had of course a clear right, and even a duty, to espouse the cause of the candidate whose views came nearest their own on the questions of the day.

² After Mr. Black's repeated votes in Parliament against Reform, he was sarcastically asked by Mr. Bright how he was getting on in Edinburgh, and if all the Tories would support him; to which he replied, "I hope so."

1865

confidence of the Liberal party in an overwhelming degree. I need add nothing about the general principles involved in the contest, as these are amply discussed in the case of Mr. Black's first election. There is one other point I may notice. It was rumoured, and generally believed among my friends, that Mr. Black did not wish to stand at this election, but that his party over-persuaded him to stand against his own judgment. This report is in effect confirmed (p. 227 of his 'Memoirs').¹

"The town gossip went further to say that the Whig party urged Mr. Black to stand in order to keep me out, as they believed no stranger would have a chance of being returned against me."²

To show how strongly his candidature was opposed by those who had hitherto ruled over the political situation in

¹ "Very much perplexed about retiring from Parliament at the approaching election, or leaving it to the committee to decide."

² The subjoined analysis of the polling shows which were the Tory and which the Radical wards in the city. It likewise shows that the "New Town" went most largely for Mr. Moncreiff and Mr. Black, that the "Old Town" was the stronghold of Mr. McLaren and Mr. Miller; while the residential suburb of Newington was almost evenly divided between the four candidates:—

Wards.	McLaren.	Moncreiff.	Black.	Miller.
1. Calton	316	287	259	263
2. Broughton	189	228	237	159
3. St. Bernard's	280	355	336	233
4. St. George's	115	356	352	91
5. St. Stephen's	232	372	352	172
6. St. Luke's	278	346	307	224
7. St. Andrew's	242	328	315	201
8. Canongate	433	345	312	385
9. St. Giles'	392	292	256	328
10. St. Cuthbert's	522	348	296	448
11. George Square	434	259	228	382
12. St. Leonard's	554	272	227	503
13. Newington	367	360	330	334
	4354	4148	3797	3723

Scotland, the late Rev. Dr. Guthrie said to Mr. McLaren :—
“It would surprise you to see the number of letters I have had begging me not to give you my vote ; but when I saw that all the Catholics and all the publicans were against you, I asked myself how could I, as a Protestant Christian minister and an avowed Temperance man, shirk my duty as a citizen and withhold my vote ? And,” he added, “I never knew what it was to be persecuted till after I had voted for you ; it only shows how much it was felt by the ‘ruling classes’ that you were the champion of true Liberalism in opposition to class and privilege. I never voted before in any parliamentary election, but I have never regretted giving you that honest vote.”

This victory was a great triumph for the Independent Liberal party ; it was also a high personal distinction for Mr. McLaren. Being highest on the poll, he was placed in the position of senior Member for the capital of Scotland, with the chief Scotch representative of the Ministry as his colleague. And he had gained this position in open and honourable contest. He could say on the hustings :—“I have taken no pledge ; I have catered to no prejudices. I go free and independent into Parliament.” But this assertion of independence in no way diminished the confidence of his constituents. “You’ll no’ turn your coat,” shouted an elector from the crowd ; and he did not. In the House of Commons he was faithful to the principles of Independent Liberalism as he professed them, namely, the general and hearty support of the policy of the party, with a reserve veto in case of conscientious disagreement. His conduct in Parliament, and the respect and authority he quickly gained there, caused him to be generally accepted as the future, and in a manner permanent, representative of his city. The conspicuous success of his parliamentary service greatly

Unpledged
but
trusted.

1868

The Lord
Stanley
opposition
of 1868.

strengthened the position of his party in Edinburgh. Mr. M^cLaren, however, did not attain this position until he had fought in more than one electoral campaign. In anticipation of the general election of 1868, and encouraged by a slight schism in the ranks of the Reform Union—an association of which Mr. B. F. Dun, an honest and outspoken Radical, was the chief orator, and which had organised the Reform Bill demonstrations of the preceding year—the Edinburgh Tories promoted a requisition to Lord Stanley (now Lord Derby, then one of Mr. Disraeli's Ministerial colleagues), under the impression that that political *rara avis*, the Conservative working-man, largely abounded amongst the newly enfranchised householders, and on the representation that Mr. M^cLaren and Lord Stanley were political friends. At an excited and noisy meeting held in the Music Hall in July 1868, Mr. M^cLaren gave the finishing stroke to these dreams and also to the Stanley candidature. He ridiculed the Conservative working-man idea, and roundly declared that the requisition, to which it was said 6000 signatures had been obtained, was not a *bona fide* production, but the work of hirelings. "Do you think," he asked, "that Lord Stanley, who is far too acute to be taken in by paid hirelings—£3 per week for working-men is, I understand, the rate at which they are paid—do you think that Lord Stanley would be so gulled as to go to the poll and be ignominiously defeated with 6000 votes on his side, and probably 16,000 on the other? For my part, I do not believe that his friends in this city would ever allow such a thing to take place. I believe all this opposition will end in smoke, notwithstanding the turmoil which it has occasioned in this city."

A finishing
stroke.

With reference to his alleged sympathy with Conservatism (apparently founded on the support which Mr. M^cLaren gave to the Disraeli Household Suffrage Bill), Mr. M^cLaren was

equally emphatic. "If the Conservatives can vote for me as an honest man who has tried to do his duty to the best of his ability, good and well; but if they resolve to vote for me because I am of the same political opinions as Lord Stanley, I beg them to keep their votes to themselves, or at all events not to give them to me." As a matter of fact, a few Tories had always supported him, both in municipal and parliamentary elections, on the ground on which he valued their help, "as an honest man who had tried to do his duty to the best of his ability," and whose devotion to the interests of the city and of the nation could be recognised in spite of political differences. But as a party, the Tories had always been, and he knew must always continue to be, his natural opponents, if he continued faithful to his political creed.

Exhausted by the fatigues of the session, he had gone to Harrogate to recruit immediately after the prorogation of Parliament. But the needed rest came too late. He became dangerously ill, and he remained there in a critical state for some months. Thanks, however, to his own sound constitution, the careful nursing of Mrs. McLaren, and most attentive medical skill,¹ the progress of the sickness was stayed; and the first task attempted during his convalescence was a letter written by his own hand to the Independent Liberal Committee in Edinburgh. In this letter he reminded the committee that the Stanley opposition was really directed against Mr. Miller, and intimated his wish, if a contest should take place, and there should be a splitting of votes on the part of any, that the split votes should be given

Serious illness.

¹ During this illness he was greatly indebted to the generous kindness of his friend Dr. Macleod of Ben Rhydding, who frequently came to give help and encouragement, and to watch over the invalid during the night.

1868
An unop-
posed
return.

to Mr. Miller rather than to himself. But, as he formerly predicted, the Stanley requisition ended in smoke, and when the day of election under the household franchise approached, neither ancient Whig, modern Conservative, nor any combination of reactionary politicians ventured to show their faces. Mr. Moncreiff retired, frankly confessing that he did not possess the confidence of the electorate on the Annuity-Tax question. Recognising that their main difference was on this local question, Mr. McLaren took an opportunity of commending the candidature of his former colleague as Liberal competitor for the suffrages of the newly-created constituency of Glasgow and Aberdeen Universities, as in 1852 he had commended his candidature for Leith. In Edinburgh the Independent Liberal party were left in undisputed possession of the field, and Mr. McLaren and Mr. Miller were returned without opposition. On the hustings, after his election, Mr. McLaren renewed and extended his declaration of independence. "In the past," he said, "in more cases than nineteen out of twenty, I have given a most zealous support to the Liberal party, but in some instances, when I thought they were wrong, I gave effect to my own opinions and not to theirs, and I know from very good sources that I met with your approval. I intend to follow the same course when I go back to Parliament. . . . In acting as I have done, I have sought no favour from the Whig Government when in office, and none from the Tories when they were in office, either for myself or any one connected with me. I have been independent of all parties and all men, endeavouring to take an honest view of everything for the good of the public."

The Independent Liberal party undoubtedly made good use of their victory, and one of the most notable results was the pacific settlement of the Annuity-Tax controversy,

with its two-century history of grievance and dissension. But on one occasion a section of the party were tempted, by the consciousness of the giant strength they possessed, to try to use it tyrannously, and against their own friend and victorious leader, Mr. M^cLaren himself. In the summer of 1873 a disagreement broke out between a number of working-men representatives and Mr. M^cLaren. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, particularly those clauses which were directed against "picketing" workmen who disowned the authority of the Trade Unions, gave great offence to the Trade-Unionists; and an extensive and formidable agitation arose for the repeal of the recently enacted law, which sought to protect Non-Unionists from this form of intimidation, practically a combination for the purpose of preventing workmen from accepting employment during a strike authorised by the Union. Mr. Miller sympathised with this agitation, and promised to support repeal. Mr. M^cLaren, as an economist and Free Trader, and, it may be added, one who illustrated in his own career the principle of "individualism," could no more tolerate or connive at social tyranny amongst working-men than he would accept it from the political coteries from which he had suffered. He therefore offered an uncompromising opposition to the proposals for the repeal of the "picketing" clauses. A movement, headed by Mr. Paterson, the secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Joiners, was set on foot for the purpose of coercing the refractory Member into compliance with the Trade Union demands. An "Advanced Liberal Association" was formed; an imposing trades demonstration was organised; and on the platform of a trades meeting held in the Queen's Park Mr. M^cLaren was denounced as a "traitor." Later in the year a deputation was sent to Newington House, where the whole question was discussed with great

1873
Dissatis-
faction of
Trade-
Unionists.

The
Queen's
Park de-
monstra-
tion.

1874

earnestness, without, however, changing the position of either of the parties.

Unjust and
ungene-
rous at-
tacks.

Matters came to a crisis at the next annual meeting of the electors with their Members, which took place in Queen Street Hall. The meeting was chiefly composed of working-men interested in the desired trade legislation, and who were much irritated at the position Mr. McLaren had maintained. Mr. McLaren spoke amidst considerable interruption and uproar, and in the end Mr. Paterson moved and carried a resolution to this effect—"That this meeting of the electors of Edinburgh, being dissatisfied with Mr. McLaren's answers to questions put, and with his conduct and irregular attendance in Parliament, has no longer confidence in him as their representative; also awards a vote of thanks to Mr. Miller for his past services, and for his clear and explicit statement on the laws affecting working-men."

A characteristic incident occurred at this meeting, which caused a momentary reaction in Mr. McLaren's favour. At the close of his speech he was subjected to the usual "heckling," which in this case took the shape of a string^{of} prepared argumentative questions, put seriatim by Mr. Paterson amidst the cheers of the Trade-Unionists. Mr. McLaren answered them all with courage and clearness; for in his platform appearances he never showed to greater advantage than in meeting opposition and interruption. When the last question was reached, a voice from the gallery was heard to exclaim, "No shuffling, Duncan! Answer the question." Mr. McLaren fixed his keen eye on the interrupter and instantly replied, "I have answered all the questions. I fear no question, and I fear no man!" An enthusiastic cheer burst from the audience, proving that the author of the random shot had signally missed his mark. The reference to irregularity of attendance was also quickly resented by

the meeting amid cries of "Shame," as Mr. McLaren was well known for his constant devotion to his parliamentary duties, and Mr. Paterson, seeing that he had gone too far, offered to withdraw the offending words.

The controversy caused Mr. McLaren some pain. His heart had always been with the working-classes. He knew the hardness of their lot, and had striven to mitigate it. He had sympathised with their honest and healthful aspirations after social advancement, and he had helped them with what was to many of them the priceless boon of free education. He had always striven to secure for them the benefit of equal laws, and to accomplish their political emancipation. And now he saw them making use of the power and the franchise he had laboured to secure for them in days when parliamentary reform had few active friends, for the purpose of exercising a form of social tyranny upon their fellow-workmen. Mr. McLaren did not, however, accept the view of the Trade Union leaders that they had the whole working-class population at their backs, and he prepared to defend his seat, in full consciousness of the strong opposition that was awaiting him. He, however, recognised the perfect right of the meeting to pass a vote of want of confidence if it thought it right to do so; but he frankly said that he would not accept the decision of a one-sided meeting in Queen Street Hall, but should submit his case to the judgment of the 25,000 electors of the city. "I distinctly deny," he indignantly said, "that I have acted against the true interests of the working-classes in this matter. My whole life has been a refutation of it. There is no one who has done more for working-men than I have done in my own sphere, and all the allegations to the contrary are incorrect." He had confidence that, notwithstanding this demonstration, the working-men

1874

of Edinburgh would do him justice, and the event justified his confidence.

Nearly all his old electioneering friends, with Mr. McCrie and Mr. Hugh Rose as joint-chairmen of his committee, rallied around him; the ward committees were reorganised; and Mr. McLaren, appealing to his past conduct and opinions as the credentials of the character of his Liberalism, and promising to do in the future as in the past, went on his own course, apart from Mr. Miller and the seceding Liberals. In his address soliciting re-election Mr. McLaren said :—

“Forty years have elapsed since I first entered the service of the city, during which period I have filled many important offices, and devoted much time and labour to promote the best interests of my fellow-citizens of all classes. The experience thus acquired has been of great value in enabling me to form a calm and dispassionate judgment, not only on local, but also on Scottish questions generally.”

Mr. James Cowan, then Lord Provost, was nominated by the “Aggregate Liberal Committee.” The Tory party, seeing three Liberals in the field, asked Mr. J. H. A. Macdonald (now Lord Justice-Clerk), then a popular Volunteer officer and leading Tory politician in the city, to champion their cause.

Mr. Cowan received a considerable share of support from Mr. McLaren’s friends, and Mr. McLaren had the general support of the Liberal party of all sections, including many individuals who had hitherto actively opposed him. The result was a complete triumph for Mr. McLaren. This was the first election in Edinburgh under the Ballot Act, and Mr. McLaren, in spite of the Trades Council opposition, obtained the extraordinary poll of 11,431 votes; Mr. Cowan was chosen his colleague with 8749 votes; Mr. Miller

obtained 6218 votes ; and even in this year of Tory reaction, in spite too of his popular gifts, Mr. Macdonald was left at the bottom of the poll with 5713 votes. When, in 1876, the Tories, in their eagerness to conciliate the working-classes, introduced amending legislation, which the Trade-Unionists accepted, Mr. McLaren found that the principles he maintained in 1874 were substantially the same as those embodied in the new Act.

The severance between Mr. McLaren and Mr. Miller was greatly regretted by many of their mutual supporters, as Mr. Miller was a faithful and earnest Liberal, and probably the Independent Liberalism of the city has never been so well represented as during the six years from 1868 to 1874, when these two Members sat side by side below the gangway of the House of Commons.

As colleagues Mr. McLaren and Mr. Cowan worked well together. The Liberalism of the new Member was less advanced than that of his senior ; but Mr. Cowan had a genuine respect for the political acquirements and knowledge of Mr. McLaren, and the two Members were seldom found in different lobbies. But when the next general election came round in 1880, many ardent Liberals desired to provide a politician of more robust type than Mr. Cowan as a colleague for Mr. McLaren. Mr. Cowan met this demand to some extent by accepting the principle of Disestablishment, and Mr. McLaren, while not personally interfering in the action of the new United Liberal Committee, was glad to find that it resulted in the continuance of their confidence to Mr. Cowan, who certainly had not done anything to justify them in encouraging opposition to his candidature. The result was that, after consideration and discussion, the United Liberal Association, under the presidency of Mr., afterwards Sir George, Harrison, unanimously adopted Messrs. McLaren and Cowan

The new
colleagues.

1880
—
The crown-
ing victory
of 1880.

as the Liberal candidates; and as Mr. Macdonald was again induced to enter the field in the Conservative interest, the Liberal Association proceeded to organise and carry through, with a minimum of expense, a most efficient canvass on behalf of the two candidates. The greatest of all Mr. M^cLaren's electoral victories, and the greatest of all the Liberal victories at the election of 1880, was then achieved. Mr. M^cLaren was again placed at the top of the poll, but this time with 17,807 votes; Mr. Cowan was next, with 17,351; while Mr. Macdonald was left with even a smaller vote than he obtained in 1874. He polled 5651 votes, and Edinburgh thus pronounced in favour of the Advanced Liberal candidate by the unprecedented majority of 12,156 votes. Mr. M^cLaren was deeply moved by this splendid manifestation of the confidence and regard of his fellow-citizens, and he felt specially indebted to Mr. Harrison for his services as chairman of the great organisation which contributed to this decided success. His period of public service had now extended to forty-eight years, and of the many encouragements and distinctions that cheered him during almost half a century of unceasing struggle, often against tremendous odds, for the public welfare, none afforded him livelier gratification than the act of homage rendered him in the eighty-first year of his age by the 17,807 voters who so zealously and disinterestedly supported him in his last electoral contest.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DUTIES OF CITIZENSHIP.

WHEN he first took his seat as Member for Edinburgh, Mr. McLaren found that his new position opened for him a greatly extended field in which to labour. But, faithful as he was to the House of Commons, he did not give up his interest in those Edinburgh institutions which had engaged his attention in former years. His idea of the duty of citizenship was never dimmed by the wider sphere of duty to which he was called. While his active participation in work which came within the province of the Town Council naturally ceased, or was limited to watching over the municipal interests of the city in Parliament, he continued to take a leading part in the transactions of such bodies as the Chamber of Commerce and the Royal Infirmary. Of the Merchant Company he had been a member ever since 1826, when he had just commenced business, and of the 500 or 600 members belonging to it at that time, he survived all except one, Mr. John Miller, of 26 Nelson Street, who was admitted a member in November 1825. Mr. McLaren had served as an Assistant-Master of the Company in the years 1841-42, and also as Governor of George Watson's and James Gillespie's Hospitals;¹ but he never took a prominent part in directing the Company's affairs,

1841

¹ Educational institutions under the control of the Company.

though he kept himself intimately acquainted with them, and gave a hearty support to the husbanding policy pursued during the mastership of Mr. Duncan, and also to the scheme for the conversion of the "Hospitals" into high-class secondary schools, a reform devised and carried out mainly by the exertions of Sir Thomas Boyd, afterwards Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and Mr. Thomas Knox.

In the Chamber of Commerce, however, Mr. McLaren had greater scope for action. Here, as in the Merchant Company, he found not a few colleagues thoroughly conversant with and interested in the discussion of commercial questions in their relation to public interests. The more prominent of those with whom Mr. McLaren found pleasure in co-operating were his predecessor in the chairman's office, the late Mr. James Richardson, his immediate successor, whom he nominated for the presidency, the late Sir George Harrison, Mr. David McLaren, and Mr. Josiah Livingston. Without claiming too much for Mr. McLaren in this connection, it may be said with truth that it was during his chairmanship, extending from 1862 to 1865, that the Chamber of Commerce first acquired the position of authority which it now holds as one of the institutions of the city. It was not without some hesitation that he consented to remain in the chair for so long a period, but the following letter and other similar assurances induced him to waive his objections:—

7 ROXBURGH PLACE, EDINBURGH, *March 2, 1864.*

MY DEAR SIR,—Mr. Harrison and I had a little conversation yesterday as to the arrangements for the Chamber of Commerce next month. I see Mr. Harrison feels very strongly, as well as myself, the great desirableness of our getting you to retain the chair, and I can hardly tell you how important I feel this to be. I am sure you would be gratified did you know how cordially all, even those who have been your keen political opponents, express

their satisfaction at seeing you at the head of the Chamber, and their perfect confidence in your judicious management ; and every member of the Chamber feels that all is going well so long as you are in the chair. I do not think we ask anything unreasonable when we ask the favour of your continuing as chairman for another year, and your consenting will be highly esteemed both by the Chamber and the public. To myself it will be an obligation ; in matters of that kind I would rather act under you than under any other man.—I am, my dear sir, yours faithfully,

JOSIAH LIVINGSTON.

On his initiation the Chamber united the Town Council, the Merchant Company, and the Trade Protection Society along with itself in a common effort to protect the public interests against the proposed amalgamation of the Caledonian and Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway Companies. It was his diligence in collecting and skill in presenting facts and statistics bearing on the passenger and traffic rates that made the case of the public against the powerful railway combination irresistibly strong. His correspondence with the chairmen of the Companies, and his intimate association with the negotiations and struggle both in Edinburgh and London, gave to the result the appearance of, for him, something like a personal triumph. For several years thereafter the Chamber made the careful examination of all Scottish Railway Bills one of its special duties. In his successive positions as chairman of the Chamber and Member for the city, Mr. McLaren was at least as jealous of the interests of the city when affected by these measures—more especially the North British schemes in the days of Mr. Richard Hodgson's dictatorship—as of the interests of the commercial community. His experience as a railway director at an earlier period had made him conversant with the arts by which a corporation of capitalists can attract to itself public and parliamentary

influence, and he was more concerned to guard the public from the rapacity of companies than at any time to champion their cause. When, at a later period, a ruinous competition arose between the North British and Caledonian Railways, and a joint-purse agreement or amalgamation was proposed in the interests of the shareholders, whose dividends had become a vanishing quantity, he advised the Chamber not to entertain a motion submitted by Mr. Charles Cowan recommending some arrangement between the companies; his view being that the railway directors and shareholders might safely be left to look after their own interests, and that the public welfare was more likely to be advanced by fair competition than by combination and monopoly.

Before leaving the presidential chair of the Chamber of Commerce to carry on his public work in the more responsible position of a Member of the Legislature, Mr. M^cLaren invited the Chamber to make recognition of the splendid services Mr. Gladstone had rendered to the mercantile classes as well as to the general community by his great fiscal reforms, based on the Free Trade principles, which the country had now finally accepted. The following correspondence ensued:—

EDINBURGH, *November 6, 1865.*

DEAR SIR,—I have the honour to send you a minute of the Chamber of Commerce, from which you will perceive that you have been elected an honorary member of that body.

It is the first case in which we have availed ourselves of this power of appointment under our new rules and regulations. I may state that the Chamber was incorporated by royal charter in 1786, and consists of nearly 500 of the principal merchants, manufacturers, and other traders within Edinburgh, Leith, and other towns in the county of Midlothian, and that your election was quite unanimous and most cordial. Enclosed is a slip cut

1865

Honour to
Mr. Glad-
stone as a
Free
Trader.

Mr.
M^cLaren's
letter.

from the newspapers of the proceedings of the meeting which took place on the occasion.

1868

I enclose a printed copy of a petition presented to Parliament by this Chamber in 1820 in favour of Free Trade principles in all their breadth; and the result of a good deal of inquiry has proved that this was the first petition ever presented to Parliament broadly advocating the principles of Free Trade. Shortly after our Chamber had sent off their petition, a meeting of traders in London was held on the same subject, and a petition was also presented by them about the same period.

I have only to add that it gives me great pleasure personally to have the honour of making this communication.—I have the honour to be, dear sir, yours very respectfully,

D. M^cLAREN.

The Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P.,
Chancellor of the Exchequer.

11 CARLTON HOUSE TERRACE,
November 9, 1865.

MY DEAR SIR,—I have to thank the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce for the high honour they have done me in placing my name upon their roll, and I beg you will take a suitable opportunity of conveying to them my grateful acknowledgments.

Mr. Gladstone's reply.

I have to thank you also, and very much, for the documents you were kind enough to send me. The petition is a composition of peculiar interest. Great indeed is the honour due to those who move *early* in the right direction, and all the more because, at the moment of the eventual triumph, they are too commonly forgotten.—I have the honour to be, my dear sir, faithfully yours,

W. E. GLADSTONE.

D. M^cLaren, Esq., M.P.

As a Member of Parliament Mr. M^cLaren continued to take an active interest in the work of the Chamber, and its testimony in favour of Free Trade principles was continued and emphasised. In November 1868 the Chamber elected Mr. Bright its second honorary member, on the occasion of his receiving the Freedom of the City during the Lord Provost-

1863
 the Free
 breakfast
 table.

ship of Mr. William Chambers. It was in his speech¹ acknowledging the civic distinction that the eloquent champion of Free Trade sounded the new cry of "A Free Breakfast Table." Mr. David M^cLaren—no relative, but in almost complete agreement with Mr. Laren's political views, and an ardent upholder of the doctrines of the Manchester School—at once began in the Chamber of Commerce to explain and to popularise the Free Breakfast Table policy. The senior Member of the city assisted him in many speeches. Many other politico-commercial questions were discussed in the Chamber from time to time, such as the French bounties on shipping and on sugar, gambling on the Stock Exchange, mercantile morality, the amalgamation of the Board of Customs and Excise, the law of bankruptcy, the exemption of private property from seizure at sea during war, the Board of Trade and railway management, the law of partnership, the assimilation and codification of the mercantile laws of the United Kingdom, not to speak of numerous local and Scottish subjects. On these and kindred questions it may be said generally that Mr. M^cLaren, while contributing much valuable information, advocated views in harmony with Advanced Liberal principles, and tending to the purification of our commercial system. In 1872, in his examination before a Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Trade Partnerships Bill, he gave an interesting and suggestive explanation of the refusal of the Edinburgh Chamber to join the Associated Chambers. "I will state the reason why," he said to the chairman, Mr. Norwood. "The custom has now become so inveterate of putting a line in bills that 'this bill shall not apply to Scotland,' that our Chamber found that they would have very little in common with other Chambers, and therefore they would not join. Our

neglect of
 Scotland
 by Legisla-
 ture.

¹ See Mr. Bright's Addresses, vol. iii. p. 106.

Chamber not only petitioned in favour of this bill, but they wish it to be extended to Scotland." By way of explanation, Mr. Norwood interjected, "You remember me telling you last year that the reason I could not accede to make my bill apply to Scotland was that the legal machinery of England and Scotland were not identical." Mr. McLaren's reply was characteristic: "The Chancellor of the Exchequer," he dryly remarked, "has never any difficulty when laying on the taxes to adjust the clauses so as to make them applicable to Scotland."

No public-spirited man can reside long in Edinburgh and remain uninterested in the noblest of its institutions—the Royal Infirmary. Mr. McLaren's first connection with the management of the Infirmary was almost contemporaneous with his entrance into the Council; and from that time forward, through a period extending to over half a century, he laboured to promote the efficiency and prosperity of this institution, alike in relation to the public and to the Medical School of the University. With characteristic zeal he threw himself into the front of every controversy which affected the financial well-being or the public usefulness of what he regarded as a national and not merely a local charity.

In 1868–69, by the exertions mainly of Sir Thomas Boyd, Mr. John Millar of Sheardale, and the Directors of the Infirmary, a large sum of money had been subscribed by the public for the rebuilding of the Infirmary on its original site. An opinion then gained ground that the Infirmary ought to be transferred to a more airy situation. Mr. McLaren was one of the earliest and staunchest supporters of its removal to the site of George Watson's Hospital, adjacent to the "Meadows," which was strongly advocated by Mr. Syme, then Professor of Surgery in the University of Edinburgh. Although the physical strength of that brave-spirited man

1868

The Royal
Infirmary.The battle
of the sites.

and world-famed surgeon was then visibly declining, he continued by speech and pen, always forcibly but temperately, and with the firmness that generally characterises moderation, to plead for the Watson Hospital site, on the double ground of humanity and economy. Mr. M^cLaren was prevented by his parliamentary duties in London from attending the deciding meeting of the subscribers. He therefore addressed an open letter to the ladies and gentlemen entitled to vote, disposing of the objections urged against Mr. Syme's plan, such as "the alleged great distance from the College," "the low level of Watson's grounds," "the difficulty of drainage," "the insalubrity of Watson's ground," &c., and he reminded them that the original site, when selected in 1738, was in the country. "There was," he said, "no South Bridge then, there was no Nicolson Street, and no Drummond Street. There were no houses between Potterrow and the Pleasance; and the space between the Infirmary and the College was all garden ground." He continued:—"The town has now extended a mile to the south of the Infirmary of 1738. Why should not the poor inmates of 1869 have as free air as the inmates of 1738? Place the poor patients of 1869 as nearly as you possibly can in the same relative position as their predecessors of 1738; and if you cannot remove the Hospital to Liberton, where the authorities of old placed their lepers ('Leperton') for sanitary and curative purposes, do the best you can in existing circumstances by placing them in the grounds of Watson's Hospital, removed from all the insanitary influences of the Cowgate and surrounding districts."

As soon as the battle of the sites had been decided in favour of removal, so far as the contributors to the Infirmary were concerned, the opponents of the Watson Hospital site transferred the scene of conflict to the Merchant Company, who were the owners of the institution. Here they seem to

1869

letter to
the sub-
scribers.

Opposition
in the
Merchant
Company.

have changed their grounds of opposition. Influenced largely by the objections of residents in George Square and the neighbourhood, they disputed (1) the advantage of the offer made to the Merchant Company, and (2) the powers of the Company to sell the land. At a meeting of the Merchant Company Mr. McLaren successfully answered both objections—the first by a reference to the unsuitability of Watson's Hospital to the educational schemes of the Company, then in contemplation, and to the ease with which far better accommodation could be secured for a less sum than the purchase-money offered by the Infirmary, and the second by showing that the George Square proprietors had no right to object.

“Watson's Hospital,” he said, “never paid a shilling for the land, but merely paid a feu-duty, which last year (1868) amounted to £47, there being £5 additional paid to the Town Council for a strip of ground at the north. Surely, then, if they got £43,000 for the property to be retained as one holding (which was the condition on which it was originally got), this would be a far better and more honourable course to follow than (even if they had the power) to cover the ground with buildings. George Square property was feued out on the same day with Watson's Hospital property. In both cases the parties were bound never to put any houses upon their respective garden-plots; each was to be retained as one holding. Lord Ross was the superior of the George Square and Park Place districts, and after the lapse of thirty years the feuars set to work to thwart the conditions of his grant. It was therefore Watson's Hospital that ought to go to the proprietors of George Square and say, ‘You and your predecessors have violated the equal conditions which we and you came under; the moral obligation lies on you to pull down your houses and make an open space. After you have done that, then we will both be in the same position; for each of our feu-charters binds us to preserve a great open space near Heriot's Hospital.’”

1870
An un-
favourable
sale inter-
dicted.

These and similar arguments prevailed, and the controversy seemed to be at an end, when a new difficulty arose, which gave another proof of Mr. M^cLaren's unceasing watchfulness over the interests of the poor. The Infirmary Managers, having acquired the Watson Hospital site, proceeded to arrange for the disposal of the property they were about to quit, and as the University authorities were at the same time considering a scheme for the extension of their buildings, Mr. M^cLaren was one morning startled to learn that the Managers had agreed to sell the whole grounds and buildings of the Old Infirmary to the University for £20,704 16s., a sum fixed upon by mutual valuation. Regarding the bargain as a disastrous surrender of Infirmary interests, he hastily consulted a few private friends, Mr. Josiah Livingston, Mr. Hugh Rose, and others, and having with them satisfied himself that the property in open market would bring a much larger sum than £20,704, he and Mr. Rose, on 21st January, applied to the Court of Session for an interdict against the Managers carrying out their agreement with the University. Two days afterwards he wrote a letter offering, on behalf of Mr. Livingston and himself and five other gentlemen, an upset price of £30,000 for the property, the offer to be held binding for three months, and afterwards extended to six months. A protracted controversy ensued, embittered by an indiscreet attack made on the interdictors by Sir Alexander Grant, Principal of the University, at the annual dinner of the Royal Scottish Academy, and complicated by a second arrangement, whereby, as a compromise, the University increased its offer to £25,000. In October, the Judge who heard the case in the first instance (Lord Gifford) decided in favour of the interdictors and against "the sacrifice of £5000 of the Infirmary funds" by the Managers. In his judgment Lord Gifford said:—"The

course which the Managers ought to adopt in the unfortunate circumstances which have arisen is to expose the whole subjects for sale by public roup"—he assumed that Mr. M^cLaren would renew his obligation to offer at the public sale £30,000—"and thus a great benefit will be secured to that important charity, which, notwithstanding the past liberality of the public, stands in need of all the funds it can obtain." The Managers acquiesced in this judgment, and they afterwards wrote Mr. M^cLaren, asking whether he would abide by his offer, although the period of six months during which it was to be held binding had expired. On 30th November Mr. M^cLaren replied:—

"We are of opinion that the proper time to make the inquiry will be when the committee has reported, and the Managers have adopted the report, and resolved to expose the property to public sale in the manner recommended by Lord Gifford, as being the proper rule to be followed in such cases. When these matters are all fixed, and also the date of delivery, we will be glad to hear from you on the part of the Managers, addressed to Mr. Livingston, when a meeting of the parties to the former offer will be held; and any such communication will be favourably considered, with the desire to prevent the property from being sold for less than £30,000. I may say, on the part of my two friends and myself, that we think no property can be so advantageously sold as when the seller is able to deliver it within a short time after the sale; and that, if this rule be followed, the property will not be knocked down at the upset price of £30,000, but will bring a larger sum for the benefit of the Infirmary, the interests of which alone induced us to interfere in the matter."

The Managers thereupon wisely declined "to take any steps at present towards a sale," and their decision, while proving of great financial benefit to the Infirmary, saved Mr. M^cLaren and his friends from any temptation to become

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property-jobbers ; for subsequent events proved that if they had acquired the property at the price of £30,000, they, if so disposed, could have far more than recouped themselves for their outlay.

Another controversy arose at this time of much wider interest—that regarding the medical education of women in the University. This is not the place to give a detailed account of that episode in the history of the University of Edinburgh, which its best friends would doubtless wish to leave unwritten. It is sufficient to say that in 1869 Miss Jex Blake and four other ladies (the number being afterwards somewhat increased) applied for permission to study medicine at the University. The Medical Faculty of the University, in a momentary impulse of liberalism, and influenced by Sir James Simpson, Professor Hughes Bennett, and Professor Balfour, granted the application, subject to the condition that the lady-students were to be taught in separate classes. The Senatus and the University Court confirmed the resolution of the Medical Faculty, and regulations were inserted in their Calendar, of which the first was, “Women shall be admitted to the study of medicine in the University.” During the session which followed all went well, and had the ladies been wise enough not to achieve any marked success in their classes, their opponents, who probably counted on their failure, might have acquiesced in their continued studies. The ladies, however, gained some of the highest honours open to them, and this proof of coming success roused the smouldering animosity of the hostile faction, or, let us say, the professional jealousy of the medical students. Every possible difficulty was now put in the way of the lady-students, and after they had attended the classes of the few medical professors who bravely stood by them, and the four extra-mural classes that were allowed

by the rules of the University, they found the path to all further progress hopelessly barred. One necessary part of the education of a medical student is the giving attendance in the wards of an hospital of a certain size for two years. The Edinburgh students have always received this part of their education in the wards of the Edinburgh Infirmary, and here the ladies also applied for admission; but the influence of the hostile professors, led by Professor Sir Robert Christison, was now paramount alike in the University and in the Infirmary, and the Infirmary Managers refused to admit them. The lady-students appealed to the Court of Contributors, *i.e.*, the subscribers to the Infirmary, who elect annually a certain number of the Board of Management. In January 1871 a stormy meeting was held to elect the new Managers, when the chief question at issue was the admission or non-admission of lady-students to the Infirmary wards. Neither party spared any effort to ensure the success of their candidates, many subscribers coming considerable distances to vote; but the hostile professors won the day, and the ladies were kept out of the Infirmary.

Both Mr. and Mrs. McLaren had warmly sympathised with the ladies from the commencement of the struggle, and actively helped them in this Infirmary contest. Mr. McLaren attended various meetings in their favour, and publicly identified himself with the movement, only stipulating for separate classes for the ladies in some few subjects.

“There were some classes,” he said, “which, if he had a say in the matter, he would not have mixed, but separate. In regard to a large proportion of the medical classes, however, he saw no reason whatever why they should be separate. He saw no more reason why ladies should not walk into certain gentlemen’s classes than why they should not walk into church and sit beside gentle-

1871
men there. In old times ladies sat on one side of the church and men on the other. He believed the opposition manifested in the present case was just the remains of that sort of feeling; and as men and women now sat together in places of worship—with the single exception of that small and highly respectable body the Friends, who still kept to the old plan—he did not see why any separation should exist in the class-rooms of the University except in the case of particular classes which he should not name. He was therefore quite in favour of a lady paying her fee and walking into any ordinary class in the University, and being subjected to the same examinations and getting the same honours and degrees as a man was entitled to get. The strong point to his mind was, that there were thousands of women of all classes in this country who earnestly wished to have highly educated women as their medical advisers. It was not merely a question of the seven—or even if it were seven hundred—women applying to be medical students; it was for the women who would wish to consult female practitioners that the committee were attempting to legislate. In the case of the former, there might be personal hardship in their not being allowed to follow the calling for which they thought they were peculiarly fitted; but in regard to the latter, the course pursued amounted to punishing one half of the whole human race for the supposed benefit of a small close body like the professors of the University of Edinburgh, who imagined that they had a right to put up this barrier to stop the progress of education. He thought the thing was altogether indefensible on any sound principle.”

On every occasion his advice and help were at the service of the ladies, and, in company with Professors Masson and Calderwood and others, he strenuously fought year after year for justice and fair-play in the Infirmary contests. At one time, indeed, they obtained the victory, but they were not able ultimately to make headway against the prejudices of the medical profession. The following letter testifies to the valuable help given :—

10 REGENT TERRACE, *January 1, 1872.*

DEAR MRS. M^cLAREN,—I cannot let this evening pass without saying to *you* how much I feel we were indebted to Mr. M^cLaren to-day. The number of strong points on our side he brought out (that about the firms especially), and the calm acuteness, wisdom, and force with which he brought them out, struck me particularly. Without his presence and interposition at critical points, we should have lost much of our strength to-day. Doubtless he will watch all the immediate sequel; but I would fain convey to him, through you, my hope that he will follow up what he has done to the uttermost, by observing every point for us, and giving his advice.—Yours very truly,

DAVID MASSON.

The ladies had many friends of whom Edinburgh may be proud, both among the citizens and in the University, as well as among the students, and they received the greatest help from the press. An action was eventually brought in the Court of Session to try the question whether lady-students were entitled to be enrolled with the view of qualifying for a medical degree. It was determined in the negative—a decision much regretted at the time, but which did not prevent the opening of the medical profession to women through other universities and medical schools.

As Mr. M^cLaren was never lacking in the discharge of the duties of citizenship, such objects as the relief funds in connection with the distress in Lancashire during the American civil war, the Indian and China famines, and the City of Glasgow Bank failure engaged Mr. M^cLaren's administrative skill in addition to his platform advocacy. As he had opportunity or as he perceived necessity, he gave personal aid, but always unostentatiously. An illustration of the extent of his private beneficence was unexpectedly revealed in 1865, eight years after its spontaneous and generous bestowal. A journalist having, with what was

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at the time characterised as "unexampled impertinence," called for a catalogue of Mr. McLaren's acts that were not purely selfish, elicited from Mr. John Gray of Edinburgh an unexpected reply. Mr. Gray felt called upon to refute the sneer, and he most effectually did it by the publication of a simple but touching narrative:—

"I was," he wrote, "a partner in the Western and Edinburgh and Glasgow Banks when they failed, and by the calls made upon the shareholders of the former I lost my all—the produce of forty years of hard labour. Mr. McLaren, hearing of my misfortune, called at my house, kindly sympathised with me, and presented me with the handsome sum of £100. I may state that this was the first time Mr. Duncan McLaren ever entered my dwelling, and I never obliged him in any way whatever. I am only his neighbour as to our residences. I leave the public to judge whether this was an unselfish act or not."

Instances of his unobtrusive generosity might be multiplied in cases where he had known that fidelity to duty in the public good had involved pecuniary difficulties, for he could warmly sympathise with those who sacrificed material advantages for the sake of principle. But although many cases of a similar nature might be cited, matters such as these are best kept private, except where, for public reasons, such as those that influenced Mr. Gray, they are made known.

An interesting occasion of public jubilation in which Mr. McLaren took part was the celebration of the marriage of the Duke of Edinburgh with the Grand Duchess Marie Alexandrovna in January 1874. The marriage was extremely popular, and was generally and gratefully accepted as a pledge that the great and costly blunder of the Crimean War would not be repeated. The British public were willing to believe that at the coming of the Russian Princess,

the Czar's "own imperial flower" and his "people's pride," clouds would disperse—

"And some diviner air
Breathe through the world, and change the hearts of men."

In the universal jubilation, Edinburgh, as the giver of their popular title to the Prince and Princess, heartily participated. The citizens held a soir e, which the late Lord Gifford happily described as "a wedding party," and Mr. McLaren, as one of the wedding-guests, proposed a resolution expressing "the citizens' loyal and unfeigned attachment to the throne and person of the Queen, and their grateful acknowledgments of the manifold blessings which under God have accrued to the British Empire from her Majesty's long and happy reign."

From citizens' meetings for the consideration of burning questions of the day which might be regarded as non-partisan and non-municipal Mr. McLaren was seldom absent. In this category may be placed demonstrations such as those which denounced the proclamation of martial law in Jamaica by Governor Eyre in 1865, the Fugitive Slave Circular issued by the Tory Government in 1876, and the Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria at a later period of the same year. At the meeting held in condemnation of the Jamaica massacres he vindicated the missionaries, prominent among whom were United Presbyterian ministers, from the Governor's reckless charges of complicity in rebellion, arson, and murder, and he demanded that Mr. Eyre and the three subaltern officers he had employed as a summary tribunal for the conviction of Mr. Gordon and his friends should themselves be brought to England and arraigned for murder;—"three young men," said Mr. McLaren scornfully, "who, it is very likely, if they were asked the difference between treason, conspiracy, and

sedition, would not be able to tell." "We know," he proceeded, "how the last great rebellion in this country was put down by the Duke of Cumberland when he burnt Highland cottages and slaughtered people, but there were not so many lives taken then, even after the Highlanders had fought two battles with the Queen's troops and gained one—there were not so many put to death in that great rebellion as at this paltry outbreak in Jamaica." He concluded by demanding that Governor Eyre and his three petty officers should be recalled, and that they should never again be employed in her Majesty's service. In this demand Mr. McLaren only anticipated the verdict of public opinion, on which the "services" were compelled to act.

The Fugitive Slave Circular meeting was a noisy and excited gathering. The Tory party in the city attended in force to defend the circular, and thus associated the Conservatives with the new policy to a greater extent than even the promoters of the demonstration were disposed to do. But the result was none the less satisfactory because the proceedings were stormy; and Mr. McLaren at the close, in moving the vote of thanks to the Lord Provost for presiding, expressed himself well satisfied. "The meeting," he said, "called to remembrance old times forty or fifty years ago, when Edinburgh exhibited an Anti-Slavery sentiment that was well known throughout the United Kingdom. There was another reason too which pleased him, and that was that the speaking had been strictly to the question of slavery, and that the occasion had not been made one for attacking the Government or for attacking anybody. They had simply asserted the principle that British ships of war should be used, so far as they were used in this connection, in mitigating the horrors of slavery, and in certain circumstances in allowing poor slaves to escape."

At the Turkish Atrocity meeting he again raised his voice in favour of human freedom. He proposed the leading resolution condemning the misgovernment of the Turks, and in concluding his speech he thus outlined the policy which most harmonised then, and still most harmonises, with the best traditions of British policy and the happiness of the people of South-Eastern Europe:—"I have no hostile party feeling against the Tory Ministry. If they would use their influence to get good government for these Turkish provinces; if the government were to be of such a nature that practically it would be self-government, as suggested by Mr. Gladstone, with only a tie of union with Constantinople by payment of an annual sum as tribute—if our Government could accomplish that—enfranchise the Christians and free them from those horrors to the end of time, my opinion is that they would be forgiven for all that has been done in the past."

In 1874 Mr. McLaren was present in Westminster Abbey at the funeral of Dr. Livingstone. Few lives ever touched him with the enthusiastic sympathy that he felt for the simple heroism of the great African missionary and explorer who had begun life as a poor factory-boy; and he was deeply gratified at being asked to act as one of the pall-bearers when the last sad honours were paid to his distinguished countryman. Twenty-two years before, in his official capacity as Lord Provost, he had attended the funeral of the Duke of Wellington in the same historic sanctuary. On both occasions the nation mourned a hero "without fear and without reproach," who had gone through life facing death obedient to duty, and true to the principles each held dear. But even the obsequies of the great Duke, laid to rest in his ripe age, with the highest in the land among his chief mourners, had not for Mr. McLaren the holy and

1876

The
Turkish
atrocities.

1876
pathetic interest which surrounded the grave of the African missionary. Struck down in the midst of his work, and dying alone in the far-off desert, with the quiet courage that had characterised his life, he little dreamed how his earnest longing to rest in his own country would be thus marvelously fulfilled. Two years later Mr. McLaren joined in the unveiling of the statue of this great man by Mrs. D. O. Hill in Princes Street Gardens. Mrs. McLaren was greatly interested in this work, both from her love and admiration for Dr. Livingstone himself, and from the pleasure it gave her to see the work of a distinguished woman thus honourably recognised. In a letter dated August 1876, she thus describes the ceremony:—

“Dr. Moffat (Dr. Livingstone’s father-in-law), who Christianised the Bechuana tribe in South Africa, was the centre of interest among those assembled. Eighty years of age, he stood there, noble, erect, with a face and eyes that seem to have all the fire of a tropical sun—those splendid eyes, that tell you they have looked upon the grand wilderness of Nature, and looked with noble courage upon the wild heart of the desert, and yet beam with all the tenderness for mankind and hope of the future which his love for his Saviour had called forth, and which the conscious possession of a Saviour’s love has beautified and deepened. I never saw a finer face. I liked to see him and papa stand together—so different, and yet so like in the grand realities of devotion and courage. I once saw them and William Chambers sitting—the three side by side, at a meeting of Gavazzi’s; and I felt that Scotland did certainly produce wonderful men. Mrs. D. O. Hill¹ wished me to unveil the statue, and so did Mrs. Falshaw, as I had been so much interested in the work. I said it was the Provost’s wife who should do it; but they kindly made me take part. It was a pretty sight to see the young ladies place the wreath upon the statue. Your

¹ The sculptor, sister of Sir Noel and Mr. Waller H. Paton.

father had the pleasure of driving Mrs. Hill and her sister afterwards to a meeting of the Livingstone Memorial Committee in George Street, where we had cake and wine, and he, as Member for the city, proposed a vote of thanks to the gifted sculptrix in a beautiful little speech which came warm from his heart, and which she seemed much to appreciate. We afterwards lunched with Mrs. Hill, and I sat next one of Livingstone's sisters, and watched her countenance with intense sympathy. There was no face there with half the expression *hers* wore. I knew so well all she felt, and turned to tell her so. I said, 'No one can feel like a sister, not even a wife.' She said, 'I believe you are right.' I added, 'I see in your face all the memories of the past; the thought of your father, your mother, the early home; you trace everything in your brother's life, and think what he and all those who lived with him would feel could they see the present; none can enter into all this but yourself.' She pressed my hand, and seemed glad of my sympathy. How my heart went out to her she could scarcely know!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

PARLIAMENTARY WORK.

1865
enters Par-
liament.

MR. M^cLAREN was sixty-five years of age when he entered Parliament. Most men, when they reach this mature age, think themselves entitled to seek repose; but in 1865, when he was chosen by his fellow-citizens to represent them in Parliament, Mr. M^cLaren had no such desire. He had been at work since boyhood; for more than thirty years he had held a front place among the public men of Edinburgh, and his holidays had been few. Notwithstanding all the wear and tear to which it had been subjected, the spring of his mind retained its elasticity unimpaired. Experience had taught him wariness and wisdom, but it had not closed his mind against susceptibility to new impressions. He was quick as ever to observe and learn, to gauge public opinion, and to respond to the spirit of the times in so far as it was progressive and healthy. The enthusiasm which makes early manhood chivalrous had not left him when he entered the House of Commons.

Qualifica-
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vice.

And while no young man could have been inspired by a fresher ardour than Mr. M^cLaren, it may safely be said that in other respects he enjoyed qualifications for parliamentary service greater than many new Members possessed. Time had brought him knowledge and experience. Few possessed a wider and more intimate acquaintance with political questions. He was familiar with parliamentary manners

and with the forms of the House; he was unhampered by official connections or the desire of office. Occupying the corner-seat on the third bench below the gangway, which had formerly been occupied by Mr. Bright—a part of the House in which a sturdy band of Scottish and English Radicals usually sat—he found himself among associates and friends, old Free Traders, disciples of the Manchester School, uncompromising Liberationists, who appreciated his talents and welcomed him as an ally. Mr. McLaren soon found that he was almost as well known in the imperial senate-house as on the public platform of an Edinburgh citizens' meeting. It is not to be wondered at that, in these circumstances, he achieved in his own way a parliamentary success. A more enthusiastic gathering than that which he addressed when rendering an account of his stewardship at the close of the first session could rarely be seen. Its tone throughout was one of triumph. The electors recognised that the conduct of their senior Member, the work he had done, and the influence he had acquired, had falsified all the adverse predictions of his opponents. "Mr. McLaren," said Mr. Rose, "had been the Member of his political opponents as well as of his friends, the representative of the poor as well as of the rich;" and on more occasions than one the Town Council had felt themselves called upon to thank him for the efforts he had made on behalf of the city. "We did great service not only to Edinburgh, but to Scotland and to the United Kingdom, in returning Mr. McLaren," was the testimony of Mr. David Dickson in proposing the vote of thanks at the close, and the crowded meeting most heartily assented. Mr. Charles Seeley, then Member for Lincoln, writing to Mr. McCrie, the co-chairman of the Independent Liberal Committee, said:—

1865

Friends at
Westmin-
ster.Friends at
home.

1866

“Mr. M^cLaren is a man whose judgment is much esteemed, and he is listened to in the House whenever he speaks with great respect. Firm, temperate, and courteous, he is of course much liked and respected. It is a great honour for any man to represent Edinburgh, but Edinburgh will not lose in position by having Mr. M^cLaren for its Member. If we had a hundred and fifty M^cLarens in the House, we might not have such long speeches, but there would soon be a considerable improvement in the management of the public business.”

Devotion
to duty.

But though the conditions under which he entered Parliament were highly favourable, Mr. M^cLaren had to work hard to win and to maintain his parliamentary reputation. He applied to the discharge of his duties all the methodical business habits and self-exacting scrupulousness he had displayed in the municipal sphere. He shirked no duty imposed upon him either by the Committee of Selection or by his constituents; and while as a member of parliamentary committees he showed himself alike faithful and useful, he left no municipal deputation unattended, and no elector's letter unanswered. His correspondence, which related to nearly every Scottish subject discussed at Westminster, and which extended to every constituency in Scotland, was in itself a heavy burden. In a long letter dated Park Hotel, St. James Street, 8th March 1866, Mrs. M^cLaren gave to their eldest son, now Lord M^cLaren, then recruiting his health at Algiers, a graphic account of the family life in London, and of Mr. M^cLaren's work in Parliament. That work engrossed Mr. M^cLaren's whole time and energies.

“ You will excuse his silence,” she wrote, “when I say he has about a score of letters to answer every morning, besides reading up for the House. . . . I never saw any one so persevering and conscientious, and who had so few

selfish wants to supply. I have often been very anxious about him lest his health should give way. He looks thin; but he enjoys his new sphere of duty; and I am well satisfied to have some self-denial to practise for the sake of his being put, though as it were at the eleventh hour, in his right place. But when I see his wonderful adaptation to fill the highest post, that not only his own city, but parliamentary life could confer, I regret that a longer time has not been given him to prove his power to advance the interests of the nation."

His place was seldom vacant when the House assembled at four o'clock, and in the earlier portion of his sixteen years' service he generally waited till the adjournment. Mr. Seeley, in the letter previously quoted, said:—"Mr. McLaren was so constantly in his place in the House, that I pointed out, I believe on more than one occasion, that his health must necessarily be impaired if he gave up so much of his time to his parliamentary duties." This warning was unheeded session after session, until the doctors intervened and authoritatively forbade late attendances. In 1868 Mr. McLaren, during his convalescence after his serious illness at Harrogate, already referred to, writing to his committee, said:—"I have indeed been stricken very low; and the wonder is that I have survived to profit, as I hope I shall, by the warning to be always ready, not knowing when our time may come." But this warning did not cause him to make any relaxation in his round of duties. Happily his recovery was rapid; and by the time the new Parliament reassembled, he was as eager for work as the youngest Member of the House. It was not till some years after this illness that he consented to withdraw his attendance at the House shortly after midnight. But he always broke the half-past twelve limit when any Scottish or other special business or any important division required his presence; and unfortunately

1881

many calls of this kind were made upon him. During his last parliamentary session in 1881, this legislator of more than fourscore years was frequently seen in the House as late as two or three o'clock in the morning, waiting to defeat the efforts of the Education Department to push forward their Educational Endowments Bill at some unexpected, and therefore, for them, auspicious moment; and on his arrival at home he would briskly relate the night's proceedings to his wife before retiring to rest.

Mr. M^cLaren's parliamentary work with reference to educational, ecclesiastical, and to some extent also municipal questions, is fully described in other chapters. But that work, important and extensive though it was, formed only a fraction of his parliamentary service. He was essentially a practical politician, and though warmly interested in imperial questions, he mainly concerned himself with home affairs; and the poorer and humbler classes were his peculiar care. To befriend individuals or sections of the community beyond the circle of official influence, and neglected because of their comparative helplessness, afforded him true pleasure. Such instances as the following were by no means uncommon. During his first session of Parliament, a widow, whose son had enlisted in the Royal Marines, and who had with difficulty raised the redemption-money, brought her case under the notice of Mr. M^cLaren. He at once prepared a statement of facts; he went with it personally to Sir John Pakington, then First Lord of the Admiralty, who could not have paid more attention to it "though it had been the case of a colonel or an admiral;" and by and by he was rewarded by a call from the man to thank him for his successful exertions to secure his release, and to tell him that instead of getting 3s. 6d. per week as a marine, he was earning 25s. 6d. per

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week as a plasterer in Edinburgh. On another occasion, Eliza Wigham, also a friend of the friendless, directed his attention to the injurious operation of the hawkers' license against the weak and the aged, who could earn a living by hawking during the summer months, but were unable to carry on their trade during the cold and inclement winter season; and after some patient and persistent negotiation at the Treasury Office—for evil is sometimes done more by want of thought than by want of heart—he succeeded in obtaining an alteration of the law, allowing the issue of licenses for the summer six months, and saving the humble but honest people referred to half of the outlay for which they had been formerly held liable. A deputation of coach-workers brought under his notice a one-sided and vexatious application of the duty on cabs and hackney-carriages, under which the poorer classes of coachmasters were required to pay a heavier proportion of duty on each cab than their wealthier neighbours. He called on Mr. Gladstone, and afterwards sent to the Treasury a full statement of the grievance. The inequality was quickly redressed, and soon afterwards Mr. McLaren, when being driven home one evening, received the thanks of his cabman, who said he had been saved £5 by the alteration of the regulation. In 1870, on the representation of his philanthropic friend Mr. George Laing, of Edinburgh, he exerted himself to secure a modification of the stamp-duties exigible on the conveyance of land for workmen's houses of £10 rental and under, and ultimately he induced Mr. Stansfield, then Secretary of the Treasury, to adopt the following clause in his Consolidated Stamp Duties Bill:—"No lease, or tack, or agreement for a lease or tack in Scotland of any dwelling-house or tenement, or part of a dwelling-house or tenement, for any definite term not exceeding a year, at a rent not exceeding

1865

Oppressive
licenses
and duties.

the rate of £10 per annum, is to be charged with any higher duty than one penny." In the following year, with Mr. Baxter at the Treasury, he obtained the abolition of another still more inequitable and vexatious stamp-law, that, namely, which rendered people who obtained valuation merely for their own information liable in a ten-shilling stamp duty. In this session also he found opportunities of letting the poor Highlanders know they had a friend in Parliament. Mr. Lowe was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Mr. M^cLaren pleaded hard though unavailingly with him to secure the exemption of the Highland crofters from the 15s. duty on ponies and carts, which, in addition to agricultural work, were employed in conveying them and their families to church, frequently a long distance from their homes.

But, as Mr. Rose justly pointed out in the passage quoted, Mr. M^cLaren was Member for the rich as well as for the poor. The wealthier classes and the learned professions gladly availed themselves of his willingness and his power to serve them. When the Lunacy Bill was before Parliament, the College of Surgeons and the College of Physicians represented to him the injustice to which they were exposed under the existing law, which enabled any man who had been placed in an asylum under a medical certificate to bring an action of damages for false imprisonment, even after all the witnesses who could have spoken to the case were dead; and they quoted in illustration a case which had been raised ten years after the death of the necessary witnesses. Mr. M^cLaren framed a clause which satisfied the Colleges, limiting the time of raising such actions to one year after the liberation of the patient, and this clause was afterwards embodied in the Lunacy Act. When the Life Assurance Companies' Bill was passing through the House in 1870,

1866

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he, as representing a constituency largely interested in life assurance, gave the measure a cordial support; but he, always proud of the reputation of a great Scottish Institution, promptly contradicted an injurious misrepresentation made in debate, to the effect that the Scottish Widows' Fund had undervalued its liabilities by £179,000. "The Scottish Widows' Fund," he said, "was the largest life assurance office in the world, it having an annual income of above £600,000, and its accumulated capital amounted to four and a half millions. Any actuary, therefore, who should have the boldness to come forward and assert that the business of the office was based upon erroneous calculations could never expect to receive the least credit, and would only show his own incompetence for his profession." As regards the Scottish banks, while he had no sympathy with English attacks, and while he cordially assisted them in their claim to open branches in London, which the English bankers so stoutly resisted, he complained of the monopoly, which was ever getting closer, enjoyed by these institutions; and when the Committee on Banks of Issue was appointed in 1875, he made an unsuccessful attempt to get two Members added as representatives of the public outside the banks. In the various attempts at legislative reform regarding the courts of law which were made from time to time, he cordially co-operated in the interests of the public, which he also believed to be the true interests of the profession. He advocated, as desirable changes, the abolition of the double sheriffship; the reduction of the number of sheriff-substitutes as vacancies should occur; the enlargement of judicial areas, through which the sheriffs should travel on circuit, after the manner of the English County Court judges; the increase of salaries as compensation for the increased work; and above all, the

The law-courts.

1877
prevention of delay and the limitation of expense in sheriff-court procedure. In 1877 he supported a motion for the abolition of the double sheriffship; induced the Lord Advocate to extend the limitation of choice for the sheriffship to advocates of not less than five, in place of three years' standing at the bar, and earnestly counselled the adoption of an arrangement under which merit, and not political service or party preference, should be the ground on which the appointments of all judicial officers were made. But he never favoured the elevation of the dignity and the enlargement of the duties of the sheriff at the cost of diminished efficiency in the work of the Court of Session. He wished law and justice to be made easily and cheaply obtainable in the supreme court as well as before the subordinate tribunals. He therefore jealously guarded the status and efficiency of the Court of Session, objecting more particularly to proposals for the reduction of the number of judges from thirteen to eleven, and fortifying his position by statistics showing that the Scottish judges were not only fewer in number than their Irish brethren, but that they did more work and received less pay.

The successive projects of reform in the interests of the tenant-farmer which took practical shape after Mr. McLagan's return for Linlithgowshire enlisted his ready sympathy. He attended meetings of the Chamber of Agriculture and of the Highland Society, to hear the views both of the tenant-farmers and of the landlords; and all that he heard then confirmed the Radical opinions he had early entertained respecting hypothec, the protection of game, primogeniture, and the whole series of questions involved in the land laws. But while seeking to secure for the tiller of the soil a free hand in conducting its cultivation, and suitable security

alike for the crops he raised and the capital he expended in fertilising his fields, Mr. McLaren as a Free Trader was constantly on the watch against the re-establishment of anything like protection of this industry at the expense of other trades. Repeatedly during his parliamentary career the Tory landlords attempted to introduce the thin end of the wedge of Protection, generally in connection with cattle-trade regulations, and latterly in the name of reciprocity; but Mr. McLaren was never thrown off his guard by these devices. In his first session, in connection with the Cattle-Plague Bill, he found professed Liberals as well as Tories connected with the landed interest making use of the panic which had been excited to obtain arrangements under which in large districts the cattle-plague, instead of proving a calamity to the cattle-dealer, really contributed to his enrichment because of the amount of compensation from the taxes voted to him for slaughtered animals. Mr. McLaren and other sound Liberals were not able to defeat this particular scheme for the protection of the landed interest at the expense of all other interests; but one development of this reactionary system he was fortunately able to check. In explaining this particular service at the annual meeting with his constituents he said: "In another part of the bill it was proposed to lay a tax on the burghs of Scotland. On that question I resisted the motion, for I was the first speaker on that occasion—divided the House on it, and beat Sir James Fergusson, who brought it forward. He tried it on a second occasion in regard to still smaller burghs—those having less than 10,000 inhabitants—and again I had the pleasure of opposing and beating him on the question. To show how adversely it works, I may mention an instance of which I was told by a friend of mine, who represents the burgh of Stockport in Cheshire, where the cattle-plague

1866

The cattle
plague
legislation.

was very severe. In one of the clauses of the bill, Stockport was held to be part and parcel of the agricultural county of Cheshire, and liable to be taxed as if it were land; and the consequence was that the share of taxation for the cattle-plague falling on the burgh of Stockport was above £80,000, in addition to its being taxed enormously by the enhanced price of butcher-meat. Stockport and the other towns in the county have lately passed through a very grievous famine—the cotton famine—and it was never proposed to lay a rate in aid on the neighbouring counties. But Stockport did not want to have its rates aided by the agriculturists; and this is the way Stockport has been repaid for its patriotism.”

To purely local questions, apart from those arising out of municipal administration, Mr. M^cLaren gave most careful attention. His efforts to secure the Queen's Park for great public political demonstrations may be quoted as instances of his zeal and pertinacity in this respect. During the Reform Bill agitation of 1866 a proposal to hold a demonstration in the Park was mooted; but some difficulty having arisen as to the right of admission for such a purpose, Mr. M^cLaren addressed the following letter to the Surveyor of the Board of Works for Scotland:—

EDINBURGH, *October 27, 1866.*

DEAR SIR,—A deputation of working-men applied to me, as one of the Members for the city of Edinburgh, to get the proper sanction for holding a great public meeting in the Queen's Park on the subject of Reform, similar to the meeting held in the same place and for the same purpose in 1832, when, according to the most reliable estimates, 50,000 men were present. I am not sure who has the right to grant or refuse the request in any Government department, and therefore I write to you as the principal Government resident officer in that department here,

and if you have not full power to decide the matter, I will feel obliged by your forwarding the application to the proper quarter, with a request for an early answer, as the meeting is proposed to be held within three weeks from this date.

I may mention that I was personally present at the first meeting in 1832, and that it was conducted in all respects in the most orderly manner, and no injury was done to the Park or in any other way. And I have no doubt that the meeting now contemplated will be equally orderly and careful in all respects.

I need hardly remind you that there are no plants, or flowers, or trees in the Park which can be destroyed, and that beyond the memory of man it has always been regarded by the inhabitants of Edinburgh as an open common, to which they had the right of access.—I am, &c.,

D. M^cLAREN.

R. Mathieson, Esq.

On the 1st of November Mr. Mathieson was enabled to inform Mr. M^cLaren that no hindrance would be put in the way of the proposed meeting, and the demonstration passed off without the slightest disturbance. But the question was not then settled. The Parks Bill for the United Kingdom, introduced in 1872, contained general provisions which threatened the old privileges, if not the rights, of the citizens of Edinburgh. In the House of Commons Mr. M^cLaren moved the insertion of a new clause in the Government bill, protecting the citizens' claim to hold public meetings in the Queen's Park, subject to regulations to be prescribed by the Board of Works. He maintained that the Park really belonged to the people, and not to the Queen. "It was at one time," he said, "held by the Earl of Haddington at a rental of £400 a year, but in order to settle the question in dispute, an arbitration took place with reference to the acquirement of the Park by the people of Edinburgh, and the arbitrators awarded £30,000. Everything about it for the benefit of the people was done

The Parks
Bill.

at an extravagant price long before the Crown acquired their present position with respect to it." The Government, however, refused to accept the proposed clause, and a few days afterwards a meeting held in Edinburgh under the presidency of Councillor, now Bailie Cranston, passed resolutions strongly condemnatory of the bill, and plainly intimating that any law passed for the purpose of closing the Queen's Park against public meetings would be deliberately ignored or defied by the people. To this meeting, convened by the Advanced Liberal Association, Mr. McLaren sent a letter explaining his view of the position of the citizens, and the effect of the proposed measure.

"At present," he wrote, "if a meeting be held, the Crown could not punish those engaged in it except for trespass, just as any other landlord could for trespassing on his grounds. But when this bill passes, every one engaged in such a meeting could be fined £5 under the provisions of the Act, unless a strictly legal right could be shown. Edinburgh has a far stronger claim than London, for London has contributed nothing to lay out or enclose the Parks, whereas the Council of Edinburgh from 1552 to 1555 laid out large sums (for that period) for these purposes. We levelled the slopes of the Park of Holyrood, and built the whole of the enclosing walls from the Palace round to Duddingston. This appears from the minutes of the Town Council and the Treasury accounts of that period, which are still in existence. These facts make us in effect joint-owners of the Park, for these outlays never would have been made except on the understanding that all means of enjoying the Park for any purpose whatever would be preserved to the citizens in all time coming."

The speakers warmly commended Mr. McLaren for his efforts. It behoved the citizens, said Mr. Cranston, to do everything in their power to back him up; and Mr. David

Lewis, speaking with gratitude of his services, gave an effective illustration of his indomitable courage. "On one occasion," said Mr. Lewis, "when Mr. McLaren was ordered by his medical advisers to abstain from parliamentary work, a measure being expected in which the interests of the citizens were at stake, he refused to absent himself from the House. He stuck to his post, and rested on a couch night after night in the lobby of the House of Commons, waiting until this measure came up for discussion." Eventually an arrangement was effected practically carrying out the proposal embodied in Mr. McLaren's clause, and the threatened danger was averted. Since 1872 various political demonstrations have been held in the Park under the regulations prescribed by the Board of Works; and the first important gathering after the privilege of public meeting had been secured through the exertions of Mr. McLaren was the imposing trades' demonstration against the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1873, which some of the speakers endeavoured to convert into a demonstration against Mr. McLaren himself.

Mr. McLaren was always a jealous guardian of the status of Edinburgh as the capital of Scotland, and as one of its Members he heartily joined in every movement for resistance to changes which seemed to threaten the metropolitan claims of the city. One of these occasions occurred in 1872, when proposed new postal arrangements, ostensibly in the interests of Glasgow, seemed designed to reduce Edinburgh to the level of a provincial office. Along with his colleague, Mr. Miller, he accompanied an influential deputation from Edinburgh to Mr. Lowe, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Mr. Baxter; and a revision of the arrangements was secured, under which Glasgow, as a great postal centre, obtained greater freedom of action, while the dignity

1866

Metropolitan status of Edinburgh.

1875
 govern-
 ment
 neglect of
 Scotland.

of the Edinburgh office as a metropolitan institution suffered no diminution. As opportunity presented, too, he made use of his position in Parliament to illustrate the stinginess of Government in their relation to Edinburgh institutions compared with the treatment of corresponding offices in London. He was a severe economist, but he was a Scottish patriot as well; and his sense of justice and his patriotism induced him to make frequent complaints in the House of the neglect from which the capital of Scotland suffered at the hands of the Imperial Executive. In 1875, when the vote for the Science and Art Department was under consideration, he drew a contrast between Edinburgh and London arrangements for scientific instruction which vividly illustrated the partiality of the Government. Honourable members, he said, were apt to think that out of London everything was of little importance, but while the number of visitors annually to the whole of the London museums was 2,100,000, the number of visitors to the Industrial Museum in Edinburgh, still uncompleted, was 336,000, and yet it only received one twenty-fifth part of the money spent in the English capital. Professor Huxley lectured to some fifty students in the School of Mines in Jermyn Street, but during the absence of Professor Wyvill Thomson in the "Challenger" expedition he conducted the class of natural history in Edinburgh University, which consisted of 350 students. Yet during the preceding five years the payments to Jermyn Street for education votes and salaries had been £25,181, while the whole votes for the same purpose to the Edinburgh Museum had been £15,169. "The same principle," Mr. McLaren added, "runs through other grants."

Mr. McLaren was in general sympathy with the objects of the Peace Society. He believed in defence, not defiance, and claimed reasonable security for the persons and pro-

perty of his constituents. He accordingly assisted Mr. Macfie, the Member for the Leith Burghs, in his efforts to direct the attention of the Government to the "defenceless state of the Firth of Forth," and in a brief speech delivered in the House of Commons in 1871, he stated the claim of Edinburgh and Leith with great clearness and conciseness, and indicated the simple means of defence which were required. He pointed out that, while the iron-clads of a hostile naval power could not approach Glasgow, or Liverpool, or Hull for want of deep water, they could sail to within three miles of the Scottish capital and bombard it. And a tempting prize was within their reach. He reminded the House that the funds of the Banks of Scotland were kept in Edinburgh, and there was generally in store from three millions to four millions in gold; while the rental of the city, amounting to a million and a quarter per year, was greater than the gross rental of thirty or forty boroughs in England each returning the same number of Members to Parliament as Edinburgh. He claimed, therefore, that there should be reserved for the Firth of Forth a portion of the large sums expended on coast defence elsewhere, more especially in the South of England; and he added:—"When we know what was done in former times, without the advantages of steam, by the predatory raids of Paul Jones and his associates, and what these proceedings cost the country, we must feel that the Government are bound to take a special interest in this matter, and do something for the defence of Edinburgh, irrespective of the general question of the defence of our ports and harbours." He directed the attention of the naval engineers to the island of Inchkeith, situated midway between the Fife and Midlothian coasts, and suggested that the construction of fortifications on this island, supplied with a few heavy guns,

1871

The Inch-
keith forti-
fications.

1878

“would be all that would be required, together with a small body of men to conduct defensive operations.” During the war panic in 1878, when the Government of the day obtained a vote of credit to the amount of six millions, Mr. M^cLaren called on Mr. Hardy, now Lord Cranbrook, who was then Secretary of State for War, and directed his attention to the requirements of Edinburgh and Leith. The result was the almost immediate adoption of the simple plan of defence he had advocated seven years before.

On all questions affecting municipal and local administration, Mr. M^cLaren, with his unrivalled personal experience and knowledge, was recognised as an authority on both sides of the House. In his first session he was appointed a member of the Select Committee which investigated the subject of the erection of houses for working-men, and when Mr. Disraeli was declaring that *sanitas sanitatum* was the foundation of his policy, he gave valuable aid to Mr. (now Lord) Cross in his conduct through the House of Commons of the legislative measures to which the Premier looked as the means of improving the condition of the working-classes and popularising his party. In numerous discussions on the vexed question of Poor-Law Reform he took a prominent part, and his sturdy opposition to the one-sided legislation promoted by the Irish members attracted general notice and commendation. When, in 1875, Mr. Downing moved the second reading of his Poor-Law Removal (Ireland) Bill, Mr. M^cLaren delivered a speech which “scotched” the measure with facts and arguments, quite as effectually as the old Border warriors were wont to scotch their Southern invaders with their hooked axes. “What did this bill do?” he asked. “If a person from the most remote part of Scotland, say from Orkney, Shetland, or the Western Isles, came before the poor-law authorities of

*Sanitas
sanitatum.*Poor-Law
relief.

Edinburgh or Glasgow, and wanted to be put upon the poor-rates there, so as to get indoor or outdoor relief, the question asked him was, 'How long have you been residing here—five years?' and if he said 'No,' then he was sent back to his parish. But if this bill passed, an Irishman would come, and he would be asked whether he had resided, not five years, but *one year*, and he would reply, 'I am an Irishman. I am a privileged person, entitled to a right of settlement after one year, and you are bound to take me because I have resided one year within your jurisdiction.' That was not equal right. Then if a poor Scotchman went to Ireland and told the same story—if he said, 'I have lived for one year in Ireland, and I want poor-law relief,' what did the poor-law authorities say to him? They said, 'We have no system of settlement in Ireland, and you cannot get any relief.' The authorities would not give that man a settlement in Ireland though he had been one year there, or even two, three, five, ten, or twenty years; in fact, they would not give him a settlement under any circumstances." In referring to this subject in his annual address to his constituents, Mr. McLaren analysed a return he had moved for, which showed that in December 1874 there were only 100 Scotchmen in Ireland receiving parochial aid, while 13,510 Irishmen were the recipients of relief in Scotland; that there were only 14 Scotch lunatic paupers in all Ireland, while there were 487 Irish lunatic paupers in Scotland; that Scotland was saving the Irish landlords £11,688 per annum for the maintenance of lunatics, and only receiving £336 in return. It is to be hoped that, small though the number of Scottish paupers in Ireland was in 1874, it is even less now. After the publication of his return, Mr. McLaren received a letter from a gentleman in Dublin stating that he was the honorary secretary of a society for looking after poor

1865

Irish v.
Scottish
paupers.

1865

Scotchmen in Ireland. He was greatly surprised to hear that there were even a hundred Scotchmen in Ireland in receipt of parochial relief, and he asked for the particulars, in order that the society might investigate the cases.

Mr. McLaren was a master of the details as well as of the principles of finance. He generally spoke on Budget nights, and was one of the few men whose opinion on these subjects was respected, if not always deferred to, by the Treasury experts. When in 1871 Mr. Lowe was rejoicing over his lucifer-match-tax, which bore the ingenious device *Ex luce lucellum*, Mr. McLaren was one of the first critics to warn the brilliant Chancellor of the Exchequer that his self-congratulation was premature, as "the tax upon lucifer-matches would never stand the test of investigation," and that if the lucifer-stamp were insisted on, the authorities would need to build new reformatories to accommodate the youthful vendors who would systematically break the law. In numerous speeches, both within and without the House, he advocated a radical readjustment of the incidence of local taxation, and a radical rearrangement of the system of local government, based on the principle of popular representation and control. In 1870 Mr. Campbell, the Member for the Stirling Burghs (now Mr. Campbell-Bannerman, one of Mr. Gladstone's most successful lieutenants), won his parliamentary spurs by proposing, in an able and eloquent speech, that the principle of representation should be applied to the government and financial administration of counties. Mr. McLaren heartily supported Mr. Campbell. "My honourable friend," he said, "has explained in detail that there is not a vestige of representation in county government in Scotland, although there is a little in England. The Commissioners of Supply were originally a body created by

The match-tax.

County government.

Parliament, consisting of a few gentlemen who were deputed to collect the taxes in the case of war, and to see that the supply so raised was duly paid into the Exchequer, and hence the name. It is a mere farce for these bodies to try and regulate the whole affairs of Scotland.”

At Westminster, as well as at home, he was avowedly and consistently “on the side of the Ten Commandments.” He strove to conform the legislation of Parliament to the requirements of the moral law, and to Christianise, and therefore humanise, the whole system of imperial and local administration. It was regard for public morals that induced him in 1868 to claim and obtain the extension to Scotland of the provisions of the bill requiring that the death-sentence should be executed within prison, and not on a public scaffold. As a magistrate he had had the painful duty imposed upon him of attending two executions, and his observation on these occasions had produced the strongest conviction that publicity did harm instead of good. It was a growing conviction of the indefensibility of capital punishment that induced him afterwards to allow his name to be added originally with Mr. Gilpin, Mr. Fowler, and Sir John Gray, and at a later period with his friends Mr. Pease and Mr. Leeman, to a bill for the abolition of the punishment of death for murder, and the substitution of the punishment of penal servitude for life. And in the same session, moved to indignation by reports of atrocities said to be committed in the Medical School of Edinburgh in the name of scientific teaching, he cordially supported Mr. Holt’s measure for the prohibition of vivisection. Doubtless his Scottish Puritanism influenced him as much as his views as an economist in obtaining the suspension for one year of the vote for the Queen’s Plates for Scotland, with the view of attacking the vote for the Queen’s Plates for Ireland in the following

1865

Capital
punish-
ment.Betting
laws.

year; and the same motives likewise guided him in helping to secure the passing of the bill for the suppression of public betting—a measure which the sporting fraternity have fortunately been less successful in undoing than they were in their agitation for the restoration of the Queen's Plates. His experience of the beneficial influence produced in Scotland by the working of the Forbes-Mackenzie Act made him an efficient as well as a hearty supporter of the Sunday-closing bills for Ireland and for various counties in England, introduced at different times into the House of Commons. He was a resolute opponent of the opium trade; and in his advocacy of the suppression of this odious traffic he gave to and received much help from his friend Mr. David M^cLaren, now of Putney, whose name is honourably identified with the anti-opium agitation.¹

He was one of the earliest and throughout one of the most unflinching denouncers of the immoral legislation known by the name of the Contagious Diseases Acts. He regarded these Acts as a disgrace to the statute-book; and in him Mr. Stansfield, the self-denying parliamentary

Contagious
Diseases
Acts.

¹ Mr. David M^cLaren writes:—"I remember a very characteristic incident of Mr. M^cLaren. He was asked, along with a number of public men throughout Scotland, lay and clerical, to sign a protest against the opium trade not long after the second Chinese war, when there was a strong feeling among all who informed themselves on that painful subject. The language of the protest in some passages was perhaps, in consequence, somewhat high-flown. Mr. M^cLaren signed it, but in doing so remarked that it was not without some hesitation on account of the characteristic noticed. He said, 'I have always avoided the use of such language myself. I had recently a letter from Mr. Hill, the Recorder of Birmingham (a well-known authority in matters of crime and prison discipline), a gentleman I have never seen, with reference to some public matter, in which he says, "I have always admired your speeches in one point especially—you never have any peroration." I considered that one of the greatest compliments ever paid me.'"

leader of the movement for their repeal, found one of the staunchest and most fearless of his allies. In his attitude of uncompromising resistance he was in close accord with the kind of public sentiment which he most respected. He knew that good men and good women, irrespective of religious denomination or of party, were on his side; and he was warmly supported, even at the commencement of the struggle, by meetings in, and petitions from, his own constituency, one being signed by 7200, working-men. When the public first became aware of this legislation, which had been passed silently and secretly as a departmental bill, a monster petition was signed throughout the country expressive of indignation, and was signed by over a quarter of a million women. The petition was intrusted to Mr. McLaren for presentation, and in this work he was assisted by the late Mr. Candlish, then Member for Sunderland. This bulky declaration of the opinion of the country was borne up the floor of the House with considerable difficulty by the two Members by means of handles attached to it, and was regarded with interest and astonishment by the numerous Members who were present, and whose curiosity had been excited regarding it by the receipt of a circular the same morning announcing the intended presentation.

A monster
petition.

The following letter, written by Mr. McLaren after attending a large meeting in Newcastle, shows the deep interest he took in this subject:—

NEWCASTLE, *September 28, 1870.*

DEAR MR. GLADSTONE,—I take the liberty of sending you some remarks I made last night on a parliamentary paper issued by authority of the Government, which were very strong, but not nearly so strongly condemnatory as were my real feelings. The occasion was mainly a working-men's meeting here, which I came from Edinburgh last night for the purpose of addressing, at the

1881

urgent request of the Ladies' Association established in London for the repeal of the C. D. Acts. You will see that a crowded meeting of over one thousand persons unanimously desired the repeal of the Acts, and have no desire for any inquiry. I likewise enclose a report of discussion at the Social Science Meeting on the same subject, in case you would like to see it, but I have not been a member of that body for many years. It also unanimously came to the same conclusion. I know personally nearly all the ladies forming the London Committee, and I am satisfied that they feel these Acts to be such an outrage on their sex that they will never desist from this agitation till they be repealed, and they will carry the war into every election until their object be accomplished. My own opinion is, that a speaker last night was correct in saying that if the Acts were not repealed next session, they would be repealed by the next parliamentary election.— I am, dear Mr. Gladstone, yours very faithfully,

D. M^cLAREN.

For Mrs. Butler and the other ladies who bore the brunt of the arduous struggle, which lasted till 1886, Mr. M^cLaren ever retained the highest admiration, and he constantly aided them by speech and pen. Though he was no longer in Parliament when victory crowned their efforts, his sympathy remained undiminished, and he received with joy, during his last illness, the tidings that the Acts, so far as they related to Great Britain, were totally repealed.

When Mr. John Stuart Mill, in 1867, brought forward his amendment to the Reform Bill of Lord Derby's Government in favour of extending the parliamentary franchise to duly qualified women, Mr. M^cLaren gave it an unhesitating support, and his influence also led others to do the same. At the close of the debate a distinguished statesman turned to him and said, "M^cLaren, how are you going to vote?" "I shall vote for it, and I don't see how a man who had a good mother can do otherwise,"

Enfranchisement
of women.



Percilla Bright McKean 1884

was the reply. "I had a good and noble mother also," was the rejoinder; and the two went into the lobby together and voted for the amendment. From that time the cause of the enfranchisement of women had no more steadfast friend than Mr. M^cLaren. But he did not regard it merely as a woman's question. While admitting the strictly logical argument that so long as the qualification for the franchise is the payment of rates, a woman who paid rates was as much entitled to a vote as a man in the same position, he was disposed to advocate women's suffrage on the broader ground that it was a desirable measure in itself, for he believed that the influence of women in politics would tend to peace, temperance, and a policy of social and moral reform, from all of which men would gain equally with women. His house became the centre from which all Scottish agitation on the subject was conducted; for Mrs. M^cLaren was the president, and Miss Agnes M^cLaren and Miss Wigham were the secretaries, of the Edinburgh Society for Women's Suffrage. Meetings throughout Scotland were got up by these indefatigable secretaries, and addressed by Miss Jane Taylor of Stranraer, one of the first lady speakers on this subject, who always found that Mr. M^cLaren's name acted as a talisman in ensuring a favourable hearing at that early stage of the question. At the first annual meeting of the Society, in 1870, when he presided, he was surrounded on the platform by the leading men in Edinburgh, including the Principal of the University (Sir A. Grant), Professors Kelland, Masson, and Calderwood, Sir Lyon Playfair, M.P., Sir David Wedderburn, M.P., Mr. Miller, M.P., the Rev. Dr. Wallace, now M.P. for the Eastern Division of Edinburgh, and many more, while Mr. Jacob Bright, M.P., was also among the speakers. The following annual meeting was honoured with the presence

of Mr. John Stuart Mill, who was induced by the high regard he had for Mr. M^cLaren to visit Edinburgh for the purpose. It was the only meeting out of London that he ever addressed on the subject, and the Music Hall was crowded on the occasion. Mr. M^cLaren, in introducing Mr. Mill to the meeting, was able to assure him that public feeling was so cordially with him that the whole parliamentary strength of the Burghs and County and University had been put forth in favour of the movement, and that the Edinburgh Town Council had the distinguished honour of being the first public body to petition for his bill. Many years afterwards, in 1884, a still more remarkable meeting on this subject was held in Edinburgh, the only one, during his long life there, at which Mr. M^cLaren would not have been qualified to speak. It was a meeting entirely composed of, and addressed by, women. The Viscountess Harberton presided, and the Synod Hall was crowded to its utmost capacity by Edinburgh women, assembled to declare that they asked for the franchise on the same conditions as men. This was one of a series of women's demonstrations held in many large towns in the kingdom, at three of which, in Manchester, Bradford, and Glasgow, Mrs. M^cLaren had presided, and, so far as public meetings can settle anything, they may be said to have settled in the affirmative the question whether women want the suffrage or not.

Besides giving his vote regularly in Parliament in favour of this measure, he cordially supported the admission of women to the School-Board and Municipal franchises, and advocated the election of women to School Boards and Poor-Law Boards or Boards of Guardians, feeling strongly that, in institutions where women and children were specially concerned, it was imperative that women should have a

large share in the control. With Mr. Anderson, M.P. for Glasgow, he joined in introducing and carrying the first Married Women's Property (Scotland) Act, which was, in its day, a very important step in the direction of reform, though much wider measures have since been successively passed for Scotland and England. The Scotch Act was prepared by a Select Committee of the House of Commons, of which Lord M^cLaren, then Lord Advocate, was chairman, and became law in 1881. The English Act was introduced into the House of Lords in the following year by Lord Selborne, and passed both Houses in the same year.

CHAPTER XIX.

POSTAL REFORM—COUNTY ROADS.

1838
Postal re-
form.

ONE of the first important extra-municipal works in which Mr. M^cLaren engaged was the reform of the postal system. When he began business in Edinburgh, the postal rates and arrangements were practically prohibitory of mercantile and family correspondence, and the need for reform was universally acknowledged. When Mr. Rowland Hill published his pamphlet recommending a penny-postage, the Chamber of Commerce, the Merchant Company, and the Town Council all passed resolutions in favour of a reduction in the rate. And when, in May 1838, Mr. M^cLaren, then Treasurer of the city, went to London—sailing from Leith, and reaching his destination in about forty-three hours—to give evidence before the Select Committee on Postage, of which Mr. Wallace, the Member for Greenwich, was chairman, he felt he was at liberty to say that, in earnestly recommending the penny-postage, he was not merely conforming to the views and desires of the public bodies named, but was likewise expressing “the general feeling that exists on the part of the community.” He gave his evidence clearly and boldly, and it was no secret at the time that the facts and considerations he presented to the Committee produced a powerful impression in favour of the practicability as well as the advisability of the reform—confirming, as a personal result, a friendship formerly begun with Mr. Wallace, whom Mr. M^cLaren

always regarded in after years as entitled to as much credit for the introduction of the penny-postage as Mr. Rowland Hill himself. As a witness, Mr. McLaren spoke with the knowledge and authority derived from personal experience and observation. He was then in the prime of life, thirty-eight years of age; but he was a veteran in business. "How long have you been in trade?" asked the chairman; and the prompt reply was, "Since I was a boy—I think about twenty-six years—constantly." He frankly told the Committee that the postage law was systematically and extensively evaded, and that public opinion countenanced and justified the evasion. For the purpose of saving the heavy postal rates, letters were made up in the form of parcels and given to the care of carriers; in nearly every parcel received or sent by merchants letters were enclosed for delivery; when any one was known to be contemplating a journey to any part of the country, for pleasure or on business, he was, *nolens volens*, converted into a letter-carrier; and while the Committee were sitting, Mr. Crouch, the well-known carrier, openly conducted an agency for the transmission and delivery of parcels in London for 1s. 3d. per parcel, in which everybody knew that possibly as many as thirty letters were enclosed. Mr. McLaren even did not hesitate to confess that he was himself an evader of the law. "I may mention a circumstance," he fearlessly said to the Committee, "that occurred the very afternoon I left for London. I met a friend in the street in Edinburgh, to whom I mentioned that I was going; he pulled a parcel of letters out of his pocket and said, 'Here are some letters for London; I was just going to Mr. So-and-so, the bookseller, to get them enclosed in his parcel; will you have the goodness to take them?' I put them in my pocket, and said to him jocularly that I

would inform the Postage Committee through Mr. Wallace, whom I had the pleasure of knowing. He stated that he did not pay for one-tenth part of the letters which he either sent or received; that he was regularly in the habit of sending and receiving them in booksellers' parcels, and that it was the practice of the trade."

Mr. McLaren was thereupon asked if the same system of evasion would be continued if the postage were reduced, and he answered, with a claim to prescience in the matter which subsequent experience fully justified, "The advantage of putting a letter into the post-office, and thus securing its rapid delivery, in place of going to ask anybody to get it carried free, would be so great, that nobody would think of any other mode of conveyance than by the post-office." As illustrations of the bad effects of high postages, he gave instances of evasions resorted to by societies for religious and benevolent purposes in communicating with their contributors and sympathisers. He therefore advocated cheap postage as a great advantage to the social and religious world, as well as to the mercantile community. But his strongest plea was on behalf of the poor. "It would do a great deal of good," he said, "in a moral point of view, especially in facilitating correspondence amongst the poorer classes, and thus keeping up a kindly feeling between distant relatives, which is to a lamentable extent cut off by distance, in consequence of the difficulty of communicating arising from the high rate of postage. Poor people, of course, have not the same facilities in getting letters sent by mercantile houses as those engaged in business have, and I believe the effect in many cases is that relations who live at such a distance as between Edinburgh and London never correspond at all, and do not know whether their friends are living or dead."

1838

bad effects
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As a picture of the condition of Edinburgh life fully half a century ago, as well as a further illustration of the advantages Mr. M^cLaren expected to flow from the adoption of the reform, of which he was one of the earliest and most effective advocates, this additional quotation may be given :—

“I observed, in reference to another inquiry in which I was recently engaged, that according to the last census in 1831, there were in Edinburgh 17,000 females more than males. On analysing the classified tables, I found that there were upwards of 12,000 female servants, which I have no doubt accounted for a considerable part of the difference between the males and females; and those servants, to a very great extent, would be taken from the country around Edinburgh, the three Lothians, Fifeshire, Stirlingshire, and Perthshire. The parents and friends of those servants would be delighted to have an opportunity of keeping up a correspondence with them; and I have no doubt that in very many cases it would be exceedingly beneficial, even in a moral point of view. When female servants come to large towns from a distance, they must feel themselves completely isolated beings, without a person that cares for them or sympathises with them, and the means of correspondence by letter, next to that of personal communication with their friends, is most likely to counteract the effect of such circumstances, and to keep alive those kindly feelings which ought to exist amongst relatives.”

After an interval of a generation Mr. M^cLaren assisted in another important postal development. In March 1870 he was a member of a deputation who waited upon Lord Hartington, then Postmaster-General, to urge the introduction of the halfpenny-postage. He assured him of the financial soundness of the arrangement, telling him that private traders were willing to undertake the delivery of circulars at the halfpenny rate, and entreating him to keep the Post-Office from the dog-in-the-manger policy of neither adopting

the halfpenny rate itself nor allowing anybody else to do it. But while satisfied that the Post-Office Department would be a gainer by the change, he pleaded for the reform on the ground of public advantage. "It would certainly," he said, "be a great business gain to the people, and their moral gain would not be less, as the inhabitants of every hamlet in the country could then enjoy their newspapers daily, instead of having, as now, to wait a week for one."

The abolition of the county tolls Mr. McLaren regarded as the fitting corollary to the cessation of the burgh petty customs, and in the early stages of the Road Reform agitation he was one of the first supporters of the late Mr. William Pagan of Cupar-Fife, an astute lawyer, who long held a position of great influence in Fifeshire, and who, in 1845, initiated the Road Reform movement. Little sign of progress was observable, however, until, in 1858, Lord Elcho (now Earl of Wemyss) introduced a bill into the House of Commons. The measure obtained small support, and Lord Elcho, recognising that public sentiment was not sufficiently informed or matured to encourage the hope of satisfactory legislation, was content to accept a compromise in the form of a Royal Commission of Inquiry. Mr. McLaren, who for twelve years previously had been carefully studying the question, and who, in the Merchant Company, the Chamber of Commerce, and Town Council, had by public discussion been endeavouring to gain converts to the principle of free roads, was appointed a member.¹ Twenty years afterwards he thus described his fellow-commissioners:—

¹ This was seven years before his entrance to parliamentary life. It is a noteworthy circumstance that this, the only honour or employment under the Crown ever offered to Mr. McLaren, came from a Conservative Government. In the numerous Commissions issued by Mr. Gladstone's Governments relating to subjects which had been the study of Mr. McLaren's life, his name was "conspicuous by its absence."

“The chairman was Mr. Smythe of Methven Castle, chairman of the Commissioners of Supply, Perthshire—a county in which, I believe, there was the largest number of trusts of any county in Scotland—a man of great experience, formerly connected with the Poor-Law Board, and deservedly enjoying the confidence of the great county in which he held this important position. Had no other man than Mr. Smythe been upon the Commission, his report alone, from his local knowledge and experience in the management of roads, would have greatly outweighed the report of any secret Commissioner. But Mr. Smythe was not alone. One of his colleagues was Sir John McNeil, a man so distinguished as to have been selected to go to the Crimea to investigate into the difficulties and abuses which had existed there [in the campaign against Russia], who made a report which was received with great satisfaction, and for which he received high honours from the Crown, having refused to accept any pecuniary compensation. A third Commissioner was Sir James Fergusson, a gentleman who was long a Member of the House of Commons, who had occupied the position of an Under-Secretary of State, and who had afterwards been appointed by Her Majesty’s Government Governor of two of the greatest colonial dependencies. Sir James was a man of known experience and ability, and I have no doubt that, if he were again fortunate enough to secure a seat in the House,¹ his services would be taken advantage of in some important office by her Majesty’s Government. A fourth Commissioner was Sir Andrew Orr, who had been Chief Magistrate of Glasgow, and who was a landowner in the county of Stirling; and all the four were large landowners.”

It was an Ambulatory Commission. It visited various parts of the country, and held its courts of inquiry in presence of the public; but Edinburgh and Glasgow were its chief centres. At the former place no fewer than thirty-seven witnesses were heard, and at the latter as many as thirty-

¹ Sir James Fergusson is now M.P. for a division of Manchester, and Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

1860

The Commissioners' recommendations.

A National Toll Association.

three. The evidence given left no room for doubt that the prevailing opinion was in favour of the abolition of tolls, and of the maintenance of roads by an assessment on all lands and heritages within the counties and burghs—the counties maintaining the roads outside, and the burghs the roads inside the parliamentary boundaries of the burghs. The Commissioners reported accordingly, and a large public meeting held in Edinburgh in 1860, under the presidency of the late Sir John Forbes, energetically urged the embodiment of the Commissioners' proposal in an Act of Parliament. A general Tolls Abolition Bill, introduced in the following year by Lord Advocate Moncreiff, failed, however, to pass; and though, by Mr. Pagan's unwearied vigilance, the promotion of successive County Permissive Acts discussions in the Chamber of Agriculture and other public bodies, the holding of large and influential public meetings, and a long series of interviews with Lord Advocates and Home Secretaries, the subject was kept constantly before the country and before Parliament, Liberal Governments did not again show any strong desire to promote the legislative reform required. The formation of the Scottish National Toll Association, of which Mr. M^cLaren was one of the leading spirits, gave an impetus to the movement in 1872, and at last, in the following year, a deputation, including more than one-half of the Scottish Members of Parliament, arranged by Mr. H. Murray, the indefatigable secretary of the Association, secured from Mr. Bruce (now Lord Aberdare), the Liberal Home Secretary, a recognition of the existence of a strong desire for a general bill, and a promise to represent to his colleagues "that this was one of the questions that eminently required to be dealt with at their hands." During the recess, at a representative meeting held in Edinburgh, Mr. M^cLaren earnestly counselled

the friends of the movement to press the advantage they had gained; and encouraged by his advice and sanguine expectations, the Association carried on the agitation with increased resolution. But 1874 witnessed the termination of the first Gladstone Government and the beginning of the six years of Lord Beaconsfield's rule. At the earliest possible opportunity the reformers sought and gained the ear of Mr. Cross (now Viscount Cross), the Conservative Home Secretary. Mr. M^cLaren introduced to the new Minister a deputation from the Convention of Royal Burghs, and in a long and masterly speech explained and enforced the case for abolition. "Then the burghs," said Mr. Cross towards the end of Mr. M^cLaren's long and cogent argument, "would have free use of the roads in the counties;" and the rejoinder was quickly and effectively given, "Yes; and the counties would have free use of the burgh roads." He continued:—"In old times we travelled over the county roads, by coaches, to London and Manchester and elsewhere in England, and to country towns and districts, and it was then equitable that we should pay for them by the tolls on these coaches. But now we use the railways, and there is no longer any equitable claim on us to pay for these roads." In concluding, he assured the right hon. gentleman that if he enabled the Lord Advocate to promote "good and useful legislation" of the kind indicated, he would be rewarded with the gratitude of the people of Scotland.

Immediate legislation did not follow, but enough had been done to show that the Government "meant business;" and the attention shown to him in connection with this and many other subjects gradually forced Mr. M^cLaren—strong partisan of the Liberal cause though he was—to the conclusion that Ministers of a Conservative Government listened with more consideration to the representations of

1874

The case
for abolition-

Helpfulness of
Conservative
Government.

1878

the Scottish Liberal Members, and were in many respects more accommodating to those who were their political opponents in matters of administration, than a Liberal Government. During the recess Mr. Cross visited Scotland, and took pains to consult local opinion. Several bills followed, but it was not till 1878 that the work of legislation was seriously undertaken by the Conservative Government, represented by Lord Advocate Watson and Mr. Secretary Cross. Unfortunately this 1878 measure, notwithstanding the time the Government officials had had for consideration, was far from satisfactory, and Mr. M^cLaren found it necessary at first to offer direct opposition. In his view, it unduly favoured the counties at the expense of the burghs, setting aside the equitable principle unanimously adopted by the Commissioners of 1858—no Radical Commission, as he reminded the House, but one appointed by a Conservative Government, and having himself as the only burgh representative—that burgh and county should accept the parliamentary boundary as the dividing-line, and each support the roads on its own side of the line. He ably and persistently defended the rights of the burghs, more especially of Edinburgh and Glasgow; and, in the interests of the smaller burghs stretching alongside the main turnpike roads, used almost entirely for county traffic, he proposed a special amendment, securing for them the option of merging themselves into the counties, so far as the maintenance of roads was concerned, in the same way as they had been merged as regards the management and maintenance of the police. Subsequently, in speaking to his constituents in explanation of his attitude to the Government measure, he said:—

“I had the honour of being one of its strongest opponents in its original state. It was a bill which, while professing to

The Ministerial Bill.

Mr. M^cLaren's amendment.

abolish tolls, kept them up for ten years certain, and as long thereafter as Parliament might think fit. The badgering which it got resulted in this, that the Home Secretary agreed to restrict the period to five years, and that without any parliamentary power to continue the tolls after that date. We who opposed the bill in its original state thought this a very great gain, and that the effect would be to have all tolls very soon abolished, because parties might agree to abolish them before the five years, as they could have agreed before the ten years; but then the fact that the five years are soon at an end would make them much more reasonable in their negotiations than they would have been with the ten years before them. Then another great improvement that we made in the bill was this. As it stood originally, the burghs were entirely ignored; they had no power to move hand or foot. Everything depended on the Commissioners of Supply for the county. But supposing them to be the fairest men in the world, these Commissioners could only move by a majority of two-thirds. Well, I put it to any of you who have knowledge of the world, whether it is a common thing to get two-thirds of any body of men to agree on anything; and the fact I think is, if that clause had stood, there would not have been a county in Scotland in which, by whipping-up, you could not have provided one-third to have opposed the abolition of tolls. Well, by opposing the bill we got the majority reduced to one-half—the ordinary common-sense majority.”

Mr. McLaren also mentioned various minor improvements; among others, one effected by himself in the interests of the smaller burghs, “requiring the Sheriff to inquire and take into account the extent of traffic belonging to the county which passes through the streets of the burgh.” In short, he helped to make the Government bill at once more efficient and more equitable; and three years afterwards this love of equity brought him forward as a witness on behalf of the city when Sheriff Davidson held his inquiry on the application for a Provisional Order

The county roads.

1881

Defence of
city inter-
ests.

under the Act of 1878, which was made by the Commissioners of Supply for Midlothian. Previously, in 1874, he had defended the rights and interests of the city before a Select Committee of the House of Commons appointed to examine the Edinburghshire Roads (No. 1) Bill, and had at the same time expounded and advocated the recommendations embodied in the report of the Royal Commissioners of 1858. His habit of referring to this report, which it may here be explained was written, not by himself, but by Mr. Smythe of Methven, as though it were "the law and testimony" on the subject of road reform, evoked from a member of that committee the question, "May I take it from you that you think the more a bill is prepared in conformity with the terms of that report, the better bill it is—is that your view?" Never was sneer more happily met. "No," quietly replied Mr. M^cLaren; "the lapse of time changes everything, and I am not a believer in the infallibility of Royal Commissions." The official report of his examination on this occasion occupied upwards of thirty large-sized pages in print, and it discloses not merely a perfect mastery of the elaborate statistics evolved during the controversy, but a marvellously accurate knowledge of local and imperial Acts bearing on the subject of road administration. His management of the case for the city before Sheriff Davidson, though a less onerous task, was equally successful, and gave welcome proof to his fellow-citizens that, notwithstanding he had then passed the fourscore years' limit of human life, he was still as unassailable as ever in the domain of figures, however elaborate and complicated; that his mental powers were no less active and strong than was his devotion to the interests of the city, after half a century of service, fresh and self-sacrificing.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MEMBER FOR SCOTLAND.

“ A’ THE world kens that the Duke of Argyle is his coun-
try’s friend; and that ye fight for the right and speak for
the right, and that there’s nane like you in our present
Israel, and so they that think themselves wranged draw to
refuge under your shadow.” This was Jeanie Dean’s beau-
tiful description of the character and of the popular estimate
of the Scottish patriot, to whom his fellow-countrymen in
London were wont to uncover their heads, saying, as he
passed, “ There goes the Prince of Scotland—God bless
him !”

1865

“ His
country’s
friend.”

Mr. McLaren, also an Argyleshire man, won for himself
in London a similar distinguishing appellation. He had
not been long in Parliament before he was known there
as his “ country’s friend,” ready to fight for the right and
speak for the right, the willing champion of the humble
and oppressed, ever standing up for Scotland’s cause.
By his extraordinary knowledge of everything connected
with his country, and his special devotion to its interests
in Parliament, he gained the title of “ The Member for
Scotland.”

Numerous illustrations of the national character of Mr.
McLaren’s parliamentary services have been given in pre-
vious chapters. His ruling idea in the House of Commons
was “ Justice to Scotland,” and he set himself to obtain it

National
character
of services.

1867

if possible. His familiarity with every detail connected with Scotch government made this work at once congenial and natural, while the almost exclusive attention he bestowed on it soon gave him the prominent position just described. The most obvious injustice under which Scotland suffered was lack of adequate representation in Parliament. To make this abundantly clear, Mr. M^cLaren moved for various returns—for he loved to appeal to statistics on any subject—which brought out the fact that, judged either by the standard of taxation or population, Scotland should have a larger number of representatives. The first return, in 1867, showed that at the time of the Act of Union the fair share which Scotland had to pay in direct taxation was one-fortieth part of what was due from England, viz., £48,000 to £2,000,000, but that now Scotland contributed to the Exchequer one-fifth. It was also shown that Scotland did not get back her fair share in the public expenditure, while Ireland got much more than that to which, judged by the same test, she was entitled.

In the discussions on the redistribution of seats in the Reform Bills of 1867–68 he kept this subject constantly under the notice of the House and the country. He showed that under the Act of Union the treatment of Scotland was liberal and generous when she received 45 members. In 1832 the number was increased to 53, on the ground that the revenue of Scotland had increased thirty-eight-fold, while that of England had only increased tenfold. In 1868 the taxation of England yielded £51,300,000; of Scotland, £7,740,000; and of Ireland, £6,015,000; and though he did not desire that revenue should be the only basis for adjusting the representation, he showed that, if it were, Scotland would be entitled to 78 members, and Ireland to only 61. “Why,” he asked, “should Scotland

Claim for
additional
seats.

only have one-twelfth of the members when she pays one-eighth of the taxes?"

He recognised, however, that population must also be considered, and striking the average between the two, he claimed that the Scottish representation should be increased from 53 to 68. This view he was most anxious to impress on Mr. Disraeli, who then led the House of Commons, and had charge of the Reform Bills; but a deputation from Edinburgh, which came for the purpose, failed to secure an introduction, even though Mr. Moncreiff exerted himself to obtain one. Mr. McLaren, however, always on the watch, succeeded in his object, and one evening, when the Speaker left the chair for his usual brief interval for tea, seeing Mr. Disraeli alone on the Treasury bench, Mr. McLaren went to him, and asked permission to state his case. Consent being readily given, Mr. McLaren went fully into the subject. In describing this interview at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, he said he found Mr. Disraeli a very good listener, the few remarks he made were fair and candid, and he had no ground to complain of him. Mr. Disraeli professed anxiety to obtain information, saying he would be happy to receive memorials on the subject; and he indicated that to meet the difficulty he would add seven members to the number of the House. Mr. McLaren saw the difficulty that the Tories felt in this matter, for any additional Scotch members would probably be Liberal, and therefore the Government could not feel very anxious to add to their numbers. Such being the case, it is not remarkable that the Act of 1868 only gave Scotland seven more members, but Mr. McLaren's arguments carried conviction, and in due time bore fruit. When the greater and juster bill of 1885 was passed, Mr. Gladstone, accepting Mr. McLaren's principle of rearrangement, came to

1867

Conference
with Mr.
Disraeli.Concession
of seven
additional
members.

1867
the same conclusion, that Scotland was entitled to sixty-eight members, in addition to the two previously assigned to the Universities by Mr. Disraeli. This was naturally accepted as a fair and reasonable settlement, and a full recognition of the principle embodied in the amendment which Mr. McLaren had moved in 1867, viz., "That no arrangement respecting additional members can be just or satisfactory which does not treat Scotland, as respects the number of its representatives in Parliament, as an integral part of the United Kingdom, entitled to be placed on a footing of equality with England and Ireland, in proportion to its present population and the revenue which it yields to the national exchequer, as compared with the present population and revenue of England and Ireland; and that to establish this equality, at least fifteen additional members should now be provided for Scotland."

Mr. McLaren was equally prominent in the agitation for the reform of the government of Scotland. That agitation was started during his Lord Provostship, and he continued to be its chief guide and advocate until it bore fruit in the creation of a Secretary for Scotland, on conditions and charged with duties very similar to those he described in the speech delivered by him at the first National Convention in 1853, at which the reform was pressed upon the Government on the ground, not of party advantage, but of national right. Indeed, the speech he made on that occasion might, with perfect appropriateness, have been repeated at the second and greater Convention, held more than thirty years afterwards in the Free Assembly Hall, Edinburgh, when the reception accorded to him by a gathering more representative of the public life of the country than any previous assembly in Edinburgh was itself a most impressive demonstration of national gratitude.

At the earlier meeting held in connection with the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights, under the presidency of the Earl of Eglinton, Lord Provost McLaren proposed a resolution in favour of the restoration of the office of Secretary of State for Scotland, "with all the rights and privileges formerly appertaining thereto." Scotland, he said, had her great officers of state before the Union, and she had her Secretary of State after the Union. What was now asked was that this state of things should be restored; "that we should have this important officer, who should be directly chargeable with the legislative and other business belonging to Scotland, and that we should not be obliged to send deputations from one functionary to another." He complained of the scant amount of attention Scotland received from the Legislature and from Government, and as an illustration mentioned that the Home Secretary, when memorialised regarding a Scottish bill, confessed that he knew nothing about it, although his name had been on the back of it for six weeks previously! He complained further, that, as the result of this indifference and neglect, Scotland did not get a fair share of the Imperial expenditure; and he laid the foundation of his future claim, for which, as has just been seen, he ultimately gained practical recognition, that having regard to her revenue, contributions, and her population, Scotland was entitled to a largely increased representation in the House of Commons.

The consistency he maintained during the prolonged agitation, with new men and new notions periodically springing up with new developments of the movement, illustrates not only his remarkable tenacity of purpose, and his power of influencing political thought, but likewise the maturity of his convictions before he gave them public

1853
The Con-
vention of
1853.

Consis-
tency and
persis-
tency.

expression. He did not join the Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights merely in obedience to a patriotic impulse. He had carefully studied the question, both historically and in its practical bearings, long before this Association was formed; and though he was to the end of his days always open to new light—though his mind continued fresh, acquisitive, and active, and never gave way to the natural conservatism of old age—the claim he formulated in 1853 he steadily maintained, and it remained substantially the national claim, supported alike by Tories and Advanced Liberals, until it was fully recognised by the creation of the Scottish Secretaryship in 1885. Still less ground was there for the charge, not unfrequently made in the excitement and heat of local political contests, that antagonism to Mr. Moncreiff inspired his efforts to terminate the reign of the Lord Advocate as “King of Scotland,” as the holder of that office, in former days, was often called; for, as has been seen, he was connected with the movement long before he came into personal conflict with the author of the Annuity-Tax compromise. He objected to the political supremacy of the Lord Advocates solely on public grounds. He recognised the professional talent of the leaders of the Bar, but, so far from acknowledging this professional pre-eminence as a qualification for political service, he regarded it as a distinct and serious disqualification, because of the heavy demands it made on the time and energies required for the efficient discharge of Ministerial duties. In the next place, he objected to the limitation of the selection for state service to one profession, and held that political prizes in the form of Ministerial position and influence should be open to the best men of all classes and professions. Again, he advocated the reform on the ground of economy. He wished to see business principles applied to the whole system of national administration, and busy

1853

r. McLaren's position.

lawyers, accustomed to the receipt of large fees, were not, in his estimation, the men best qualified for this kind of work. Besides, he judged the old Parliament House system by its fruits, and found that they condemned it. Not only was it extravagant, but it was also inefficient. Its chief, as one of the leaders of the Bar, was overladen with private business which detained him in Edinburgh when his presence was required in London, and which claimed for a multiplicity of clients much of the time and talent that State service needed. Accordingly, a system of costly devolution was constantly in progress. Board after Board was being created, and each Board was giving birth to well-paid offices that were more or less sinecures and beyond public control. In Mr. M^cLaren's claim that Scotland should receive her fair share of the Imperial expenditure, he never suggested or desired that the balance should be restored by means of unproductive outlay. All he asked was that the State should get value for its money in real and efficient service.

A more pliant and accommodating "senior Member" for Edinburgh than Mr. M^cLaren would doubtless have been well content to exhibit a good-natured benevolence towards these Edinburgh Boards. Their officers were his own constituents, and, men of talent and influence themselves, their family and social relations surrounded them with a host of powerful friends. But Mr. M^cLaren did not regulate his public work by the dictates of private interest. Regardless of the personal hostilities and the unpopularity in influential official quarters which he well knew his action would excite, he assailed the Edinburgh Boards, and associated a demand for their curtailment and revision with the agitation for the appointment of a Secretary of State for the transaction of all the non-legal public business of the country, personally responsible to the House of Commons for the

The trial
of the
Boards.

work done and the policy carried out in his name. Accordingly, when the question was revived in 1869 by a representation to Mr. Gladstone from more than two-thirds of the Scottish Members in favour of the appointment of a Secretary, Mr. McLaren wrote to the Prime Minister the following letter, which was afterwards published as a parliamentary paper, in explanation of the issue of a Commission of Inquiry regarding the management of the public Boards in Edinburgh :—

DEAR MR. GLADSTONE,—When I had the honour of waiting on you to urge the appointment of an additional Government functionary for Scotland as Secretary, or under some other name, you suggested that I should write to you on the subject. This I have always deferred doing, partly from knowing how deeply you were engaged with more important matters, and partly because I feared to enter in writing into the wide field which the question naturally embraces. It has, however, occurred to me this evening to write you in the shape of brief notes on different points, and that in this way some good might be done. I shall now, therefore, state such matters as occur to me in this desultory way.

(1.) *Duties.*—The new officer should attend to all Scotch bills other than legal ones, both as respects framing them and carrying them through Parliament; should have a seat in Parliament; should look carefully at all English bills, and, where practicable, should engraft clauses on them making them apply to Scotland, by giving a Scotch interpretation of legal words in addition to the legal one, as was done in the Act of last session for appointing English judges to try election petitions in England. A long list of Scotch equivalent meanings was appended to the bill at the last stage, making it apply to Scotland; and this should be done with nearly every bill, otherwise what becomes of the “United Kingdom”? In other two bills I got the Tory Government to do the same thing—the Artisans Dwellings Bill and the Execution within Prisons Bill. In the former bill, I

proposed the Scotch clauses, and any one could easily do this with a multitude of bills.

(2.) *Future Absorption of Duties.*—The new officer shall be the head of the new Education Board for Scotland, and answerable in his place in Parliament, as is the President of the Poor-Law Board, for the conduct of his department. The new President, when in Parliament, might get £2000 a year. In Scotland he might get £1500 if he were to act just as the Lords have sent down the vote for education only. The only additional expense would thus be £500 a year for his salary. The Lord Advocate's secretary gets £350. The new man's secretary would require the same; I mean for the secretary to be with him in London. Then the office-keeper would get about £100, and the office-rent in London, say £250. This would be £1200 in excess. In Edinburgh he would of course require no separate office, as he would have rooms in the School Board apartments, and would work with the resident secretary there and other two members of the Board when Parliament was not sitting; that is, assuming that other two paid members were required, which I object to.

(3.) *Assistance in London.*—After the passing of the Reform Act of 1832, a Scotch solicitor was, for the first time, appointed in London. The salary, to cover all work of whatever kind, was fixed at £1000. It is an office that changes with the Government, and therefore no one has any vested interest in it. Like all Scotch appointments, the cost has gone on increasing; and this year I see in the estimates the emoluments thus stated:—“Preparation of bills for Parliament under the direction of the Lord Advocate, £1000; for business relating to Scotland, £1400.” I have personal knowledge of the fact that nearly all the Scotch bills are prepared in Edinburgh, and separately paid for; and the cost is included in the accounts of “the Crown Agent.” The office of London solicitor should be suppressed altogether, and two draftsmen appointed, one for the Lord Advocate and one for the new Secretary, and to give their whole time in the two offices to this and such other duties as they might be required to perform in connection with Scotch business. Excellent men could be got for £800 a year each.

This would set free £800 of the solicitor's emoluments. If taken from the increased expense of £1200, the difference would be only £400 for the public to pay by the new arrangement; or the £800 might be applied in some other way when it was required. In the present way the expenditure of £2400 is quite a waste of the public money.

(4.) *Other Duties.*—The new officer should absorb that of Chairman of the Board of Supervision. It was established as a temporary Board to set in motion an improved system of poor-law administration, and it should now cease. The cost of the establishment is now £6867. Two or three clerks and two visiting officers, to be amenable to the new Secretary, would be amply sufficient. The Lunacy Board was also temporary when established. It costs £6206. Two Assistant-Commissioners are all that are required to visit and report to the Lunacy Commission in London.

(5.) *Economy in other Departments.*—The new officer would take a general oversight to the extent of inquiry into any matters of proposed new expenditure, when requested by the Treasury to do so. There are great extravagance and waste in nearly all the departments of Government in Scotland, and great savings could be made. For example, last year, when Mr. Hunt was Secretary of the Treasury, there was a demand from Edinburgh for three additional clerks, with considerable salaries, in the Inland Revenue Office in Edinburgh. I know from two persons of undoubted credit in the office that they were not required, because there were men getting from £400 to £800 who had not one-half of the work required to fill up their time, and some of them were often absent for hours during the day from their offices. All that was needed was a rearrangement of work. I went to Mr. Hunt in the interest of the public, and told him this. He promised to inquire. I also told Lord Advocate Gordon. The head of the Inland Revenue in London wrote to the head of the office in Edinburgh, and was told that they were required; and as I refused to give my authority (in order not to injure the parties), three new men were appointed. The head of the office in Edinburgh is a very good man. He was appointed first as a

solicitor with a small salary, and has now £1600 a year. You could get men of first-rate talent for £1000 in Edinburgh. My informants told me that Mr. Fletcher sat nearly constantly in his own room, and did not personally know about the details of the office, and honestly reported what he was told and believed, but that he was misled.

Fishery Board.—This should be suppressed altogether. It exists on the exploded theory that our herrings would not sell in foreign markets unless each barrel had the Government brand. This requires a swarm of clerks in Edinburgh, and inspectors out of it, and it costs £6073 nett, after deducting nearly £4000 as branding fees for the work done.

To go through the abuses about the swarm of clerks in the courts of law, highly paid, and the Sheriffs and Sheriffs' clerks, and the number of solicitors employed by the different departments, would require a long report to do justice to the subject and show the waste and extravagance that go on. Suffice it to say, that, as a general rule, each department has a solicitor and advocate, all paid by salaries, although there is little to do. One, or at most two, ought to suffice for the whole business of the Crown in Scotland. Then, as to other offices, there is generally a big man with a large salary who does hardly anything. Then there is an "assistant" or "depute," with a smaller salary, who does a large portion of the work; but often there is a third man to assist the "depute" who does the rest of the work, and in some cases nearly all the work. This process has been going on for many years, and the number of persons should be cut down as vacancies occur.

If you appoint a new officer well qualified for the duties, he would save ten times the additional cost of the new office in a few years.—I am, &c.,

D. M^cLAREN.

This letter produced its desired effect, and a Commission, with the Earl of Camperdown as president, was appointed to make full inquiry into the operation of the Edinburgh Board system of management. Before this Commission,

1869
evidence
before
Royal Com-
mission.

Mr. McLaren gave evidence in support of, and greatly amplifying the illustrations of the costliness and needless-ness of the Boards presented in his letter to the Prime Minister. He re-stated his objections to the supremacy of the Lord Advocates, adding, however, a cordial acknowledgment of their ability, whether Whig or Tory; and he prefaced his detailed condemnation of the Local Boards by a general plea as to the healthy influence of publicity and parliamentary responsibility, from which the Edinburgh bureaucracy was largely exempt. "The very fact," he said, "of parties knowing that it is in their power to get questions put in Parliament and answers readily obtained, I have always held as one of the best parts of the working of our Constitution in small matters for securing a good administration—I mean the system of parliamentary publicity. But in Scotland all the Boards are worked in secrecy; public opinion is never let in upon them; public light never shines upon them; no man knows what is done, or who advised certain things to be done, till it is ordered." He repeated his objections to the Board of Supervision, and held that the Lunacy and the Prison Boards were both overmanned. The necessary duties of the Fishery Board, such as the supervision of small piers and the protection of the fisheries, he thought could be transferred to the Board of Trade; and if that were done, there would be no need of a Fishery Board; for its other work was objectionable, "as the last fragment of monopolist and Anti-Free-Trade principles that remains in Scotland." "The Board," he continued, "assumes that nothing can certainly be good unless it has the Crown stamp upon it—that every barrel of herring must be branded by a red-hot iron having a representation of the Queen's crown: this is supposed to give it a value on going to foreign countries, as containing fish that

are well cured under public inspection, and the proof of the public inspection is this branding. Now I object to that as altogether opposed to modern notions. I think it is not the fact that public departments can take better care of the affairs of traders than traders themselves can do; and I think the thing is altogether wrong in principle, even if it did not cost the public a shilling, in place of costing, as it does, several thousand pounds." He explained that the Board of Manufactures was founded on a grant of £2100, agreed upon at the time of the Union for the encouragement of manufactures. But Scotland, he said, had outgrown that kind of nursing; and though he did not object to the transference of the grant to the promotion of the fine arts, as arranged a number of years previously, he suggested that the payments should be made directly from the Exchequer, and not through the intermediary of a Board of Manufactures.

To the office for the registration of births, deaths, and marriages he did not object, but he could not conceive how, for the conduct of its business, three highly paid officers should be required—a chief with £1000 a year, a secretary with £500, and a chief-clerk with £337. Similarly, with regard to the office of Queen's Remembrancer, he suggested that one man could do the work efficiently for £900, in place of the two employed—the Queen's Remembrancer with £1250, and his first clerk with £610—provided that the new man was bound to attend during the whole office hours, and to engage in no other business, either by himself or through a partnership. He illustrated the kind of service he desired for Government offices by a reference to the habits and customs of a former official. He said:—"The late Remembrancer, Mr. Henderson, whom I knew very well, was a model of a public officer. He came to the office every morning at ten

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A model
public ser-
vant.

o'clock. He walked several miles to it, and he was so punctual that the poor people on the road used to set their watches by the time he passed their cottages; and until the last two years of his life, when he became a director in a bank in addition to his office, he never was absent during office-hours; he was in the office from the moment it was opened till it was shut. Now you ought to require every man who gets Government pay to do that; and I would exclude him from being director of a bank or anything else except serving her Majesty during office-hours." He suggested that the Lord Lyon King-at-Arms and the Lyon-Clerk, who also had a deputy, should be merged into one office; he advised the entire abolition of the Bible Board; but other smaller payments, such as those to her Majesty's Limner and Historiographer, given to painters and historians as marks of public approbation, he did not object to. The substance of his evidence amounted to this:—The abolition of all the Boards, with the exception of that for Lunacy, whose organising work in 1870 was scarcely finished; the retention of the Lord Advocate at his present salary, but with his work restricted to legal affairs; and the appointment of a Secretary with a status equal to that of the Lord Advocate, charged with responsibility in and out of Parliament for the work of the departments now transacted through the costly machinery of the Boards. "The legal man," he proceeded, "should have all that pertains to legal matters, and the non-legal man all that pertains to non-legal matters. I think the Scotch Members generally would approve of that division. There is a feeling among many of them who have no connection with Edinburgh that Edinburgh and its lawyers rule everything. Altogether the system is becoming more and more disliked. At present, no man, let his talents be

The legal
and non-
legal
Ministers.

what they may, can ever be Minister for Scotland unless he becomes not merely a lawyer, but a successful lawyer, and gets to the head of his profession; then he may become Lord Advocate, and he may retain the office for a long term of years, thus stopping all promotion. In the other way, the office will be open to men of talent who are not lawyers, and there would be a natural and pleasant emulation between the two chiefs to do good to their country." Looking at the question from the standpoint of a rigid purist, he estimated that, on the existing arrangements, the expenditure might be cut down, without the slightest risk to efficiency, to the extent of £31,500 per annum, while the new arrangements could be maintained in efficient operation for an outlay of £7062—a net annual saving of £24,438.

1869

Estimated saving from new plan.

No immediate result followed this inquiry. The Commissioners prepared a report in defence of the existing arrangements, saying they could not suggest a cheaper or more efficient form of administration than Boards. Yet, since that report, the Bible Board has been allowed to lapse, and other changes in the direction advocated by Mr. McLaren may be looked for as new appointments fall to be made, more especially under Liberal Governments pledged to economy and reform. Nor did the Commissioners speak in a kindly way even of the proposed Secretary of State. They saw no necessity, they said, for the appointment of "an independent and highly-paid officer answering to the Chief Secretary for Ireland," who "would supersede, rather than act together with, the Lord Advocate, while the government of Scotland would be removed from the Home Secretary." In brief, they looked at the question from the point of view of Ministerial convenience, and not from the point of view of a Scotch grievance. They said, Let the Home Secretary be made in fact what he

A non-reforming Commission.

1880

is in theory, Minister for Scotland, with two advisers—the Lord Advocate, and a civil parliamentary officer or Under-Secretary attached to the Home Office; and they remarked that “the appointment of a civil officer, even if he would relieve the Lord Advocate from none of his duties, would at all events silence the complaint that the business of Scotland is conducted too much in deference to legal ideas, and with an undue preponderance to the legal element.”

Renewal of
agitation.

Of course, a makeshift reform of this kind gave no satisfaction, and it was not accepted. Eleven years afterwards, when the agitation was revived, the Camperdown “remedy” was revived with it; and Lord Rosebery submitted himself to the operation of this specific. But his Lordship’s experience as “a piece of Home Office furniture”—a subordinate Minister with no power of effective initiation or authoritative settlement—proved the inefficiency of the arrangement, and the necessity of such a secretary as Mr. M^cLaren and those who sympathised with him had all along contended for, viz., an official practically independent of any English department, controlling, if not superseding, the Edinburgh Boards, directing the administration of Scottish education, approachable by deputations as the one man necessary for them to see, and directly responsible in his place in the House of Commons (membership of the Lower House being specially insisted upon) for the conduct of the whole civil portion of Scottish business. Lord Rosebery’s resignation led to the movement which culminated in the great National Convention of January 1884 already referred to. At this meeting all parties agreed in demanding the new Secretary; Lord Stair and Lord Lothian, Lord Aberdeen and Lord Bute, Lord Elgin and Lord Balfour, the Liberal Members for

The Con-
vention
of 1884.

Glasgow, Mr. A. J. Balfour, and the chief Tory Members for Scotland.

1884

On the 19th of February 1884, Mr. McLaren accompanied the deputation who, as representing the Edinburgh National Convention, waited on Mr. Gladstone to urge immediate legislation on the lines laid down in the resolutions adopted by that large and representative gathering. He delivered a brief speech testifying to the continued insistence of the demand for a Scottish Minister and a Scottish Department for a period of fully thirty years, and to the maturity of public opinion in favour of the reform. He advised the Government to simplify legislation by abandoning the bill of the previous year, the framework of which was "decidedly objectionable," and to start afresh. He likewise discouraged a suggestion which had been made, that the new Scottish Minister should take the office of Lord Privy Seal, in order to save a salary. "It is not desirable," he said, "to mix up the duties of the Scottish Minister with those of another office, and I think, upon the whole, the Government, knowing the large sum which Scotland pays in the form of taxation, is entitled to make suitable financial provision for the new office, apart from any other." The Prime Minister expressed special satisfaction at seeing Mr. McLaren with the deputation and appreciation of his helpfulness in promoting a satisfactory settlement. "We feel," he remarked, "an obligation to Mr. McLaren, whom I am glad to see here in a green old age, as fresh as, perhaps rather fresher than when he lived more in the atmosphere of the House of Commons, for having placed his views in a definite form, and we feel that such proceedings are a real service rendered to the progress of the question."

Deputation
to Mr.
Gladstone.

In accordance with the suggestion made by one of the speakers, Mr. McLaren framed a bill giving effect to the

1884

resolutions of the Convention, printing it in parallel columns with the rejected Government measure, and sending copies to all the Scottish Members of Parliament and other prominent men interested in the question. Many of his suggested amendments were accepted; and by means of his draft bill, which commanded in the House of Commons an amount of attention and consideration befitting the experience and devotion of its author, Mr. McLaren contributed almost as effectively to the ultimate settlement as if he had been personally present in Parliament. Though he had resigned his seat in 1881, his name and reputation as an authority on all Scottish questions were in 1884 still recognised and deferred to in the parliamentary arena with which he was so long familiar.

Private bill
legislation.

Another Scottish grievance—the scandalous cost entailed on local authorities in promoting local or private bills—Mr. McLaren frequently illustrated and protested against. He had difficulties and doubts as to the devolution by Parliament of its power to subordinate bodies; but he always felt that the arrangements for the management of private bill legislation—requiring the presence in London of local witnesses, who might easily have been examined in Edinburgh, if not in their own localities, and the employment of English counsel, with all the attendant costly machinery—constituted an intolerable burden as well as proved a serious hindrance to municipal reforms and local improvements. A few weeks before his death he was induced by the agent for the Convention of Royal Burghs to prepare a statement of his views on the subject of local government, which had been brought before the Convention by Mr. Vary Campbell, advocate, in a memorandum which Mr. McLaren described as “an able paper,” although he himself had “never thought of any plan of reform for

A scheme
of reform.

Scotch affairs of so extensive a character." Mr. McLaren's statement, which is dated 10th March 1886, was afterwards circulated by the Convention, and contained a summary of the author's views on various questions of local government. In dealing with the subject of private bill legislation he made the following suggestion, to which, as his last scheme of constructive reform, a special interest attaches :—

“ An idea has passed through my mind as to how a good local council could be formed in Scotland to promote the passage of any such local bills through Parliament as did not impose any rate or other burden except on the locality which desired to have the measure passed and at its own expense. This Council should not be large. We have 72 Members of Parliament ; one-half of this number would, in my opinion, be sufficient to form an excellent Scotch Council for parliamentary and other Scotch affairs. At every parliamentary election I would suggest that thirty-six additional men should be elected as parliamentary councillors, and by means of the same voting papers, to save the trouble and expense of separate elections. This could be done by taking the votes for this purpose in *two* contiguous burghs, or divisions, or counties, who would thus represent the united electoral body. This Council might meet in Edinburgh or elsewhere. It should be empowered to appoint three committees, consisting of four of their own number, to whom all bills should be referred after being read a first and second time ; and one ordinary Judge from each Division of the Court of Session and one of the Lord Ordinaries shall be told off in rotation to act as chairmen of these committees, which could thus all sit at the same time if required. When a committee passed a local bill, it should then go before the Council to be read a third time, if approved of, and passed. It should afterwards be laid on the table of both Houses of Parliament, and if not disapproved of within forty days, it should become law, in the same way as provisional orders and schemes by Royal Commissions and other bodies are now passed. These committees should act in all respects according to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons and the practice of its committees, and should

1879 — have the same powers respecting the taking of evidence and in all other matters. In particular, the chairman should be allowed to vote only in cases where the four members of committee were equally divided. When any proposed measure was intended to apply to Scotland generally, it should be dealt with only by the Imperial Parliament."

the Free-
dom of
Inverness.

Mr. McLaren's national services did not lack popular recognition outside the limits of his own constituency. One of the most gratifying of these expressions of public appreciation came to him in 1879. As a Scottish Member, and more especially as a Scottish Highlander, who had served his country with fidelity and distinction, Mr. McLaren was asked to accept the Freedom of the Burgh of Inverness. He was spending the autumn recess at Dunain Park, Inverness, where he was joined for some days by Mr. Bright. The Council of the burgh proposed to take advantage of the presence of the English and Scottish Reformers in the capital of the Highlands, and to express the public appreciation of their character and services by conferring on them the highest municipal honour it was in their power to bestow. Unfortunately Mr. Bright's arrangements did not permit him to stay for a public ceremony, but Mr. McLaren was able to accept the invitation; and, without distinction of party, the leading citizens and their lady friends assembled in the court-room of Inverness Castle to witness the presentation of the burgh ticket. The Provost of Inverness, in a happy, graceful speech, recited the more prominent services Mr. McLaren had rendered, not only to the city of his adoption, but to the whole of Scotland. Inverness, he said, could not claim local connection with Mr. McLaren, but it was the capital of the Scottish Highlands; and Mr. McLaren was "a Highlander who, leaving his native glen in Argyllshire when a boy,

won his way in our Scottish capital, by the sheer force of his talents, perseverance, and unswerving loyalty to conviction, to the widespread esteem and influence which he now enjoys;" and it was surely seemly and right for the Council to recognise his services to the country. Mr. McLaren in his reply rapidly reviewed his relation to the public and political questions referred to by the Provost; but the most personally interesting, and perhaps also the most valuable portion of his speech was that in which, earnestly commending municipal service to the patriotic regard of his fellow-countrymen, he said: "As an old Town Councillor, I venerate very much municipal institutions, and I think they should be cherished and respected, whether in small, great, or middle-sized towns. But I am sorry to say that there are some people who affect to despise Town Councils, and think they are too great to have anything to do with such small things. I don't suppose that feeling exists in Inverness, but it does exist in some towns, and exists to a very large extent in the town with which I have the honour to be connected. Nothing can be more suicidal than feelings of this kind, for a great part of the liberties of this country is owing to the training of men in municipal institutions, be they Town Councils, Police Commissions, Harbour Trusts, School Boards, or any or all of those things for which local management is required. In such bodies, men, I think, are trained up to be useful citizens, to think well of public institutions, and to do a great deal of good. This principle of local management is opposed to the spirit of centralisation, which appears to be growing, and which is exhibited, I am sorry to say, in far too many of the Acts of Parliament now being passed. To that state of things I am very much opposed, for I do not

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think that it is for the benefit of this country to encourage centralisation." At the conclusion of the speech the Provost put a gold ring on Mr. M^cLaren's finger; and three hearty Highland cheers were given for the youngest burgess, with one cheer more for Mrs. M^cLaren.