

## CHAPTER IX.

### *THE ANNUITY-TAX.*

1833

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FOR the information of readers whose personal acquaintance with Edinburgh politics is of recent date, it may be necessary to state what the Annuity-Tax was. It was, in brief, a personal tax of six per cent. levied on the occupiers of houses and warehouses to provide salaries for the city clergy. The tax was of some antiquity, having been first imposed in the time of King Charles I. It was regarded by most Dissenters in the present century as a badge of servitude to a Church to which they owed no allegiance, and by not a few its payment was felt to be inconsistent with their religious professions as dissenters from the principle of an Established Church depending on the State for patronage and support. The tax, besides being objectionable in principle, was rendered odious by the numerous exemptions which the law recognised. Incredible as it may appear, these exemptions included the entire legal profession, from judges to solicitors and advocates' clerks. The exemption was, in fact, claimed, with cynical indifference to public opinion, by a body who were more or less concerned in the enforcement of the statutory obligation against other classes of the community.

To understand the origin of the Annuity-Tax agitation, it is necessary to go back to the year 1834, the time when the philosophic and large-hearted Chalmers sought to engage the sympathies of the Christian world in a veritable new

crusade—a scheme of Church Extension, whose primary aim was the “excavation of the heathen” at home, amongst whom Dr. Chalmers doubtless included a due proportion of the “scribes and lawyers,” and “indifferent” upper classes, as well as that substratum of the “poor” which the existing Church organisation had failed to reach.

As an opponent of the then aggressive policy of the Established Church, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, while admiring Dr. Chalmers as a Churchman in the large sense, felt constrained to offer opposition to his Church Extension scheme, and notably to the proposal to erect a city parish church in or near the Cowgate, in furtherance of his benevolent “excavation” or social reclamation designs. Dr. Chalmers’s proposal in its main aspect supplies a most suggestive illustration of what in those days even the best and most public-spirited of Established Church laymen considered liberality. Thirty of these laymen, under the liberalising influence of the Doctor’s teaching, agreed to subscribe £100 each for the erection of a church capable of holding 1000 sitters, and to meet the expected wants of a new parish to be restricted to 2500 souls, on this remarkable condition, that they should at no time receive from the Town Council (who were invited to take over the new church and parish) “more than four per cent. for the outlay of their money” until the advance should be repaid, and that they (the subscribers) should also retain the patronage and management in their own hands for ten years. It is needless to say that this Cowgate Church scheme was not fitted to withstand the scathing criticism passed on it by the Dissenters. Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren pointed out that four per cent. was fair interest on the contributions, and that even apart from the rights of patronage and management reserved, these “lenders to the Lord” were, if not literally making the temple a house of merchandise, seeking

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Dr. Chal-  
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to utilise it as a safe and profitable investment. He further pointed out that the concession of Dr. Chalmers's claim that a parish should not consist of more than 2500 souls, implied that fifty-four city parishes should be created in Edinburgh, with fifty-four city ministers, each receiving a salary of £600.

In a letter written from "Chapter Coffee-House," London, dated April 18, 1835, in reply to some reflections by Dr. Welsh on the magistrates for refusing another proposal, that Dr. Chalmers and his friends should offer to pay the rent of one of the city churches for a couple of years, and offer the seats to the poor, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren remarked:—

"The Joint Stock Church Building Company proposed by Dr. Chalmers was to keep up the fabric of the churches and pay all other incidental expenses out of the seat-rents, besides paying four per cent. to the stock-holders out of the remainder, if the sum realised were sufficient for the purpose; which would certainly have been the case *with any one church* let so much cheaper than all the others. Now, if Dr. Chalmers and his friends will offer to the Town Council the rent of £120 for each of their Old Town churches, taking all the other expenses on themselves, as proposed by the Joint Stock Company, and paying at the same time a reasonable feu-duty for the ground on which the churches are erected, as they must have done with the Cowgate church, I have not the least doubt that the Town Council will most readily agree to the proposal, *as these churches have never yielded nearly £120 each, free of all expenses.*"

But neither was this counter-offer accepted, although the old city churches cost from two to three times more than the outlay proposed to be expended on the Cowgate church.

The incident referred to may be regarded as the starting-point of the Annuity-Tax agitation, which terminated in

the abolition of the hateful impost, after a struggle extending over a period of nearly forty years.

1836

Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren was connected with the movement from its beginning. As early as 1836, when a highly respected citizen, Thomas Russell (afterwards a Magistrate of Edinburgh), was confined in the Debtors' Prison because of his refusal, on conscientious grounds, to pay the Annuity-Tax, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren placed himself in the front of the movement by the publication of a pamphlet entitled "History of the Resistance to the Annuity-Tax under each of the four Church Establishments for which it has been levied, with a Statement of its Annual Produce since 1690."<sup>1</sup> This pamphlet, extending to ninety-eight closely printed pages, and embracing the results of painstaking original investigations in historical byways hitherto almost untrodden, rapidly obtained a large circulation. It became a Dissenter's textbook, and indeed a standard of reference for disputants on the question.<sup>2</sup>

History of  
Annuity-  
Tax contro-  
versy.

In various other ways, through the arrangement regarding seat-rents, but more especially the Annuity-Tax, the Council, as guardians of the public interests, were constantly brought into conflict with the city ministers, the represen-

<sup>1</sup> Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black.

<sup>2</sup> Among numerous letters expressing high appreciation of his services was the following from the Rev. Dr. John Brown (father of John Brown, M.D., and Professor Crum Brown):—

16th July 1836.

MY DEAR SIR,—Many thanks for the present of your "History of the Resistance to the Annuity-Tax." I had procured it immediately on its publication, and have read it with great satisfaction. It must have cost you a great deal of labour, but I trust it will not be lost labour. I hope the legality of the exaction will soon become a subject of investigation before the Court of Session. With kind regards to Mrs. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, I am, my dear sir, yours faithfully,

JOHN BROWN.

1836

tatives of privilege and monopoly. At the same meeting of Council at which Dr. Chalmers's Cowgate Church 'scheme was submitted, a committee reported that during 1833, 846 persons had been prosecuted for the non-payment of the Annuity-Tax; that the several sums of assessment prosecuted for amounted to £4707, 4s. 3d., that the several sums of expenses on 1st January 1834 amounted to £1127, 3s. 1d.; that the sums recovered were: of assessment, £1658, 15s. 1d.; of expenses, £70, 14s. 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., leaving still unrecovered of assessment, £3048, 9s. 2d.; of expenses, £1051, 8s. 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.,—total unrecovered, £4099, 17s. 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. The committee recommended "That something should shortly be accomplished whereby the Annuity-Tax might be done away with, and the clergy provided for in some other way."

At a subsequent meeting, Mr. McLaren seconded a resolution proposed by Mr. Adam Black, then Treasurer, to the effect, "That the Town Council consider the Annuity-Tax, and all other compulsory assessments for support of the city clergy, unjust in principle, adverse to the interests of true religion, and oppressive to the inhabitants, and are therefore willing to concur in any lawful measures by which the support of the clergy may be placed upon a proper footing, without infringing the rights of present incumbents." This resolution was lost by twenty-two votes to nine.

The chief object of the pamphlet was to prove that from the date of its first imposition the tax was regarded as an injustice, and that the people of Edinburgh consistently maintained their protest against it. The Act of the Privy Council establishing the tax in 1634, in the face of the opposition of magistrates and people, represented that it was founded on the principle that all "who hear the Word and participate in the benefits of the Church ought to pay for the

same ;” while it was notorious that the original object of the tax was to provide for the sustenance of the Episcopal clergy, whom the people would not hear. Mr. McLaren very effectively exposed this inconsistency as deceit, and likewise called special attention to the shameless selfishness, if not the immorality, of the judges of the Court of Session in 1687, in passing a judgment exempting themselves, and all the members of the Faculty of Advocates, and all writers—the wealthier professional classes—from liability for this ecclesiastical tax. But the chief point on which he founded was the “smuggled clause” in the Act of 1809, by which the clergy furtively obtained an enlargement of the assessment to provide for the salaries of eighteen instead of six ministers—in other words, tripled the pecuniary liability of the citizens for the support of the State clergy. “Every one knows (wrote Mr. McLaren) that when any local Act is to be applied for, it is necessary, in compliance with the standing orders of the House of Commons, for parties who intend to introduce the bill to publish notices in the newspapers and on the church-doors, distinctly specifying all the objects to be embraced in the bill, and that any clause beyond the notices which finds its way into a bill is considered a fraud upon Parliament, and is instantly expunged on the discovery being made, if the bill is not at once thrown out.” The notice of the Act of 1809 simply intimated a desire for the extension of the royalty of the city over certain grounds. It was manifestly incompetent under this notice, Mr. McLaren proceeded, “to introduce any clause making a change in the property of the tax, or any claim increasing the sum formerly authorised to be raised, or any claim authorising it from being limited to the payment of the stipends of six ministers to be applied in payment of the stipends of all the seventeen existing

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ministers, together with such additional number as might be added for the two new churches authorised by the Act to be built; all these matters being clearly beyond the notice. Yet a clause framed by the ministers which effected all these changes was at their urgent entreaty smuggled into the Act without the knowledge of the ratepayers. The ministers obtained the consent of the Town Council to the introduction of the clause in consequence of a threat that they would oppose the bill unless their request was complied with. That all these changes followed from the insertion of the clause was afterwards distinctly proved by the opposite decisions of the Court in the cases of Edinburgh and Montrose under circumstances precisely similar, with the exception of the one party having the advantage of the smuggled clause, and the other having no such auxiliary." Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's historical studies confirmed his own and the ratepayers' antipathy to the tax. "The history is a history of frauds," exclaimed one newspaper critic of the tract; and the opposition to the collection continued to increase in intensity and to extend in area. Poindings, sales of furniture and goods, and arrestments and other modes of legal oppression, continued to be used for the enforcement of payment from an unwilling community. Eventually the friends of that religion claimed a settlement of the question on the lines laid down in Mr. Black's rejected resolution as a necessity for civic peace, and in the interests of the Established Church itself, as well as on the grounds of justice.

The Disruption of 1843, which caused a pause in the Disestablishment agitation so vigorously carried on by the Voluntaries, likewise brought a temporary abatement of the agitation on the Annuity-Tax grievance in Edinburgh. People had to find their bearings politically and ecclesiastically under the new conditions created by the startling

Influence  
of Disrup-  
tion.

ecclesiastical revolution. But it quickly became evident that, so far as the Annuity-Tax was concerned, no lengthened pause in the demand for reform could be possible. "It was tolerably certain," one writer remarked, "that two-thirds of the individuals for whose benefit the tax is in future to be levied will preach to almost empty pews." The Free Church exodus was in Edinburgh almost complete, and several of the city churches were almost entirely denuded of congregations. The injustice and indefensibility of the tax were thus made increasingly palpable; and, in obedience to a very general demand for some attempt at legislative settlement, Sir George Grey, then Home Secretary, sent Mr. J. G. Shaw-Lefevre to make a thorough investigation of the whole question in Edinburgh. Mr. Lefevre, an able and impartial official, arrived in Edinburgh in October 1848; and in April 1849 he presented to the Government of the day an exhaustive and masterly report, in which he stated that he had refrained from holding a public inquiry, because he "was aware that the evils of the existing state of things were patent and notorious," and because he feared a public inquiry would interfere with an amicable adjustment. His leading recommendation was that in lieu of the Annuity-Tax a commutation grant should be settled by Parliament on the ministers of the ancient and extended royalties of Edinburgh of £8800, whereof £6250 should be permanent, and £2550 temporary, and subject to gradual diminution. Among various other suggestions were these:—that the College of Justice should be invited to waive their exemption; that the stipends of the then ministers should be £600 per annum, but that the stipends of their successors should be fixed at £550, and that the number of the ministers should be reduced gradually from eighteen to fifteen. The practical advantages of

1843

A Govern-  
ment  
inquiry.Mr. Le-  
fevre's  
scheme.

1849

this arrangement were thus described: "When the commutation annuity is finally reduced to £6250, an important pecuniary relief will have been afforded, for £6250, with the expenses of collection, would be  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. upon the present valuation of property for the Annuity-Tax, and little more than 3 per cent. when the privileges of the College of Justice cease. The burden will thus be 3 per cent. instead of the present liability to 6 per cent." He admitted, however, that his scheme would not meet the objections "felt by many which are directed against an endowed Church, or to the support by general or local taxes of an Established National Church." Two years later the opponents of the tax obtained the appointment of a Select Committee of the House of Commons. To this Committee the Town Council held forth that the last-mentioned ground of objection was fatal to a peaceable settlement, "because by all the plans which met with any large share of public attention, the tax, although intended to be lessened in amount, and to be levied in a less direct form as an ecclesiastical impost, would in effect be continued."

A fatal objection.

Evidence before Parliamentary Committee.

Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, who continued to be identified with the opposition to the Annuity-Tax, went to London to be examined before the Select Committee of 1851, and during his absence he was re-elected a member of the Town Council, as a popular manifestation of the confidence with which he was regarded by his fellow-citizens. While, therefore, he did not in 1851 appear before the House of Commons Committee as the plenipotentiary of the Council, as he did when negotiating the settlement of the city's affairs in 1838, he nevertheless held a position of scarcely less authority as the spontaneously chosen representative of the ratepayers. Naturally he was examined at great length, as the man best informed on the whole question, and possessed of great influ-

ence with the citizens. But the interest of his examination centred in the revelation he made regarding what has already been described as the "smuggled clause" of the Act of 1809. He showed that if that clause had not been put into operation, and if the magistrates had levied no more than they had formerly levied, viz., a sufficiency for the stipends of six ministers instead of eighteen, the Annuity-Tax would have been reduced from six to two per cent., as in the case of Montrose. He re-told the story narrated in his "History of the Resistance to the Annuity-Tax," and maintained his contention in the face of prolonged cross-examination. At length the chairman, the Right Hon. Henry Tufnel, interposed and said, "I understand you to be of opinion that if Section 17 had not been introduced into the Act of 1809, the only law in Edinburgh on this subject would have been that of 1661, which limited the number of ministers to be paid out of the Annuity-Tax to six." Mr. McLaren at once replied, "Yes; and I am glad you have put the question. If this Committee would just pass an Act repealing Section 17 of the Act of 1809, the inhabitants of Edinburgh would never trouble you again; they would not ask for a grant from Government for anybody else. The repeal of Section 17 of the Act we feel satisfied will put us in the same position as we were in before the Act of 1809 passed, and you will never hear a complaint from the inhabitants of Edinburgh again."

But Mr. McLaren did not really expect so summary a mode of settlement. He was willing, as a compromise, to agree to nine ministers instead of six, but beyond this he would not move. Sir William Gibson-Craig pressed him to make a further concession. "Supposing," Sir William asked, "the Committee felt that that was a measure which it was impossible to propose to Parliament, what other

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arrangement do you conceive would be proper?" But Mr. McLaren replied, "None occurs to me except that which I have stated. If the Committee think they cannot carry a reduction through Parliament of less than thirteen, I think they ought to find the ways and means of providing the additional funds from the bishops' teinds, which we think we have a claim to."

The  
bishops'  
teinds and  
an English  
Voluntary.

This introduction of the disposal of the bishops' teinds into the controversy gave rise to a very smart passage at arms between his friend Mr. J. B. Smith, one of the members of the Committee, and the witness. Mr. McLaren had carefully studied the bishops' teinds question in its relation to Edinburgh; he had both written and spoken much on the subject; he had satisfied himself that the teinds were an Edinburgh endowment, and he had brought himself to the conclusion that while justice required the restoration of these teinds, their application to the ministers' fund in relief of the ratepayers might facilitate an amicable settlement of the complicated and perplexing Annuity-Tax question. But the doctrine shocked the less-informed but sensitive mind of a Voluntary purist like Mr. John Benjamin Smith.

"*Mr. J. B. Smith.*—You, as a Voluntary, object to the grant to Maynooth and to the *regium donum*; how then can you sanction a grant of public money to the Established Church in Edinburgh?—I have already said that I do not think this can be considered a grant to Edinburgh.

"It goes out of the public purse?—But it got into the public purse when it ought not to have got there.

"Supposing a grant were made to the Established Church of Scotland, would it not be necessary to raise an amount of taxation equal to that?—It would, unless you reduce the expenditure of the Commissioners of Woods and Forests. I see that they dispose of 12s. in the pound of all they collect without accounting to Parliament for it.

“*Mr. J. B. Smith.*—You are opposed to the grant to Maynooth in Ireland, and to all grants for religious purposes in England, and yet you are in favour of a grant to the Church of Scotland; do you think that compounding of your principles is likely to secure the respect or the confidence of Parliament in those who profess the Voluntary principle?—I do not admit that I am compounding my principles. I have stated that I see no ground for considering it in that light. Honourable Members of course have a right to form their own opinion. If Honourable Members think my views inconsistent, I am willing to bear their displeasure in whatever way it may be shown, but it does not affect my conscience; I see no inconsistency in it.

“*Mr. J. B. Smith.*—Do you think the Voluntaries, generally speaking, throughout Edinburgh, would be willing to support the grant of public money in the way you suggest?—Yes; as I before said, I do not call it grant of public money. I must adhere to my own explanation of it.

“Do you think it a just principle to shift the burden from the Voluntaries in Edinburgh to the Voluntaries in England?—No; I deny that interpretation of it. Scotland provides £200,000 public money from the teinds for other parishes; it provides nothing for Edinburgh. We should have as good a right to our share of that £200,000, if it were to be allocated to-day, as any other parish. We find that the Crown has in its hands a certain portion of that which has not been appropriated, and we say to the Crown, Do us the justice that you have done to other parishes.”

Mr. Smith pressed hard for the withdrawal of the concession of nine in place of six churches, and showed that Mr. McLaren's own figures proved six to be sufficient. Mr. McLaren replied that, as an arithmetical question, six would be more than sufficient, as matters then stood; but he looked to the future, and he agreed with the evidence given by a preceding witness, that if the Annuity-Tax, which inter-

Number  
of city  
clergy.

1851

were abolished, the Established Church would have a better chance of attracting adherents. He wished to put himself in the shoes of an Established Churchman, and looking at the question as dispassionately as he could, he thought the proposal to fix the number of ministers at nine fair and reasonable.

Mr. Smith, returning to the charge, asked—

“Do you think the clergy are likely to assent to any diminution of their number?—I do not. I never knew clergymen assent to anything of the kind, however reasonable, when it was proposed.

“You never, in your reading, knew of a Church reforming itself?—No; they have always said, ‘Give, give;’ that has been the constant course for the last two centuries.

“If you ask for such a change as is just and reasonable, do you think that you ought to have more than six churches to meet the present wants of the people attached to the Established Church?—I have already stated that, if you regard it as an arithmetical question as to the present wants of those who are attached to the Established Church, it is more than sufficient; but if you look at the arrangement of the Established Church as a large question, if I were a Churchman I should object to such an arrangement.”

Sir William Gibson-Craig reminded the witness that he had not alluded to the exemption of the College of Justice as one of the grievances of the Annuity-Tax. “No,” Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren rejoined; “I cannot characterise that exemption in terms sufficiently strong to express my own opinion upon it; it is a nefarious exemption, because it was the College of Justice deciding for itself the question.” He continued—

“Incidentally the exemption of the College of Justice is one of the greatest grievances, when you trace its operation; for it comes to this: in Edinburgh the aristocracy are the lawyers; they occupy the highest-rented houses, and they are exempted; they are the parties who chiefly remain in the Established

The exemption of  
College of  
Justice.

Church. The poor, and what we call the shopocracy, have almost all left the Church. The effect therefore is, that the Annuity-Tax is levied in Edinburgh on the poor for the support of an Establishment for the rich. The poor man living in a £20 house, and paying £20 a year for the rent of his shop (take the case of a grocer, or a shoemaker, or a spirit dealer), has to pay Annuity-Tax on his house and his shop, and in fact on everything that he has, in order that the rich gentlemen may receive the benefit of religious instruction from the Established Church at his expense. That is the operation of the tax in Edinburgh."

The report of the Select Committee fell very far short of the minimum requirements stated by Mr. McLaren. It proposed the reduction of the number of stipendiary ministers from eighteen to fifteen, by the gradual discontinuance of double charges in the High, the Tron, and St. Andrew's Churches, and it accepted the rate of stipend proposed by Mr. Lefevre. Its recommendation caused great disappointment. It increased the popular irritation against the tax, and the popular determination to effect its abolition. The result of the next municipal election was the return of a decided majority of Town Councillors opposed to the tax, and favourable to the appointment of Mr. McLaren as Lord Provost, with the view of hastening a settlement on conditions acceptable to the citizens. The scene of action was now transferred from the constituency to Parliament. A series of bills were introduced and successively failed:— Lord Dalhousie's bill in 1851; Lord Advocate Inglis's bill in 1852; Lord Advocate Moncrieff's bill in 1853, framed after consultation with Lord Provost McLaren and Mr. Macaulay,<sup>1</sup> and supported by the Voluntary party, but suc-

Unsuccessful bills—  
Mr. Macaulay's  
Act.

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ALBANY, LONDON, *March 17, 1853.*

MY LORD,—The Annuity-Tax Bill has been drawn as we agreed that it should be, and yesterday the Lord Advocate mentioned the subject to

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cessfully opposed by the Conservatives; another bill by Lord Advocate Moncreiff in 1857, and Mr. Black's bills in 1858 and 1859. The latter were supported by the Town Council, and the bill of 1859 passed the second reading in the House of Commons by a majority of fifty-four. These various measures failed to obtain the assent of both Houses of Parliament; and in 1860 Lord Advocate Moncreiff, who in the preceding year had become one of the city Members, introduced a scheme of compromise, with the view of putting an end to the civic strife and division of the Liberals of Edinburgh.

The Lord Advocate's object was laudable. In the interests of all parties—the city of Edinburgh, the Established Church, and the Dissenting community—a settlement was urgently required. The grievances of the conscientious opponents of the tax were sufficiently real. They were not limited to the seizure of goods, but included cases of imprisonment. “Some of the best citizens of Edinburgh,” proceeds a State-

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Lord Aberdeen. Lord Aberdeen seems disposed to do everything that we could wish, always, however, under one reservation. He and the Chancellor of the Exchequer will not consent to lay any charge in any event on the general revenues of the kingdom for the support of the ministers of Edinburgh. The matter has not yet been mentioned in Cabinet, and therefore we must not consider the Government as irrevocably bound, though I hope there is little danger in that quarter. I should have thought it desirable that the Lord Advocate should take charge of the bill. I find, however, that he, and, if I understand him rightly, Lord Aberdeen, would much rather that I should bring it in. I am perfectly willing to do so, if, on a full consideration, that shall be thought the best course. The difficulty about the standing orders remains as it was; and whether we shall be able to get over it seems to be very doubtful. I have had the honour of receiving a letter from your Lordship on the subject of probates and letters of administration. I need hardly say that I entirely agree with the Town Council as to that matter.—I have the honour to be, my Lord, your Lordship's faithful servant,

T. B. MACAULAY.

The Lord Provost, &c.

Popular  
hostility  
to tax.

ment from the ratepayers, " clerical and lay, had suffered in the cause. In 1849 companies of infantry and cavalry were called out to enable a sale of the goods of Dissenters to be accomplished. Among others who suffered in 1850 was the late Mr. John Tod, an engraver. For refusing to pay the tax he was sent to prison, where he remained eight weeks. Such was the indignation felt at his treatment, that a subscription was raised in pennies to pay his fine, and he was, while in prison, elected a member of the Town Council. On his release he was escorted in a carriage and four from the prison to take his seat in the Council-chamber.

" In 1851 a petition was sent to Parliament, signed by 49,000 persons, asking for a complete abolition of the rate. . . . In 1857, the clergy having obtained warrants against a great number of citizens, proceeded to put them in force. In the early part of August four were arrested, one of whom was thrown down in his own house, manacles were attempted to be put on his wrists, his clothes were torn, and he was conveyed to jail at midnight, contrary to the rule of law which forbids arrest for debt between sunset and sunrise. In the beginning of September two citizens were lodged in jail, and a third, on being conveyed from his shop in a cab with manacles on his hands, excited such feelings on the part of the assembled crowd that the warrant could not be executed. A criminal trial for deforcement ensued before the High Court of Justiciary, but the jury found the accused not guilty."

It is not wonderful that in these circumstances Mr. Moncreiff, as the chief representative of the Government in Scotland, as well as one of the Members for the city, should have resumed his efforts to end the quarrel. Undoubtedly he took great pains to ensure the success of his measure. He negotiated with the Conservatives; he studied how best to meet the objections of former Liberal opponents, who

Mr. Mon-  
creiff's  
com-  
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scheme.

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were unwilling that Edinburgh should enjoy any special relief; and he was assiduous in his endeavours to secure the assent of the Council to his ideal compromise. But the bill he produced, after many communings, oral and verbal, proved extremely unsatisfactory to the citizens. Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren condemned it as the worst measure that had yet been offered; and though Mr. Black acquiesced in it in the interests of peace, his own more drastic measures, and many of his suggestive declarations as to the essential principles of a settlement, were quoted against him as a supporter of the Lord Advocate's arrangement. One of the strong points of the bill was the abolition of the "unconstitutional exemption" of the members of the College of Justice. Unfortunately it proposed that the tax should be levied to the extent of one penny per pound beyond the bounds of the royalty, contrary to one of the clauses of a recent Municipal Extension Act. It assessed the value of the seat-rents at the paltry sum of £1600, the sum obtained when the fortunes of the Established Church were at their lowest; while Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, whose consent to the compromise was desired, had at a public meeting, in presence of Mr. Moncreiff, stated that he would wash his hands of any scheme that assessed the seat-rents at less than £2500 per annum. The bill transferred the administration of the churches and seat-rents from the Town Council to Ecclesiastical Commissioners; and fixing the minimum payment at £7800 (stipends of £600 each for thirteen ministers), minus the £2000 due by the Leith Dock Commission, and the £1600 supplied by seat-rents, it left £4200 to be provided by taxation to be levied in combination with the police rates. But, most objectionable of all (though this condition was strenuously insisted on by the Lord Advocate), it placed the whole city property under a mortgage in security of the clerical annuities to the amount of this £4200.

Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's opposition.

Mr. McLaren was not left alone in his opposition to the bill. The Town Council, the Merchant Company, the Chamber of Commerce, the inhabitants of the southern districts, the heritors of the West Kirk parish, the citizens through public meetings and petitions—one of which bore 15,000 signatures—joined in a protest. Mr. McLaren vigorously encouraged and supported the opposition by speeches in public as opportunity offered, but more especially by letters and articles in Edinburgh and London newspapers he strove to convince the Legislature, wearied of the prolonged strife and willing now to accept any measure, that the Lord Advocate's bill would only make matters worse. Nevertheless the bill passed the House of Commons, as observed at the time, "with the opposition of the smallest fraction of Scotch members, and with the almost unanimous support of the House of Commons," and became law.

1860  
Support  
of public  
bodies.

Bill passed.

The bill did not in reality settle the question. Mr. Moncreiff certified that the Annuity-Tax was as dead as a door-nail, and predicted that the Act of 1860 would never be repealed; but the agitation was renewed with increased vigour. The tax received the nickname of "Clerico-Police Tax," because the assessment for the ministers was mixed up with the police-rate, and the old difficulty as to collection was revived. The Rev. Dr. Peter Davidson, one of the most scholarly and peace-loving of the ministers of the United Presbyterian Church, at the request of his Dissenting brethren, addressed an open letter to the Lord Advocate, entitled "Conscience and the New Police Rate;" and afterwards the Rev. Dr. George Johnston, whose goods were seized by the tax-collector, further enforced the protest in a series of letters. Various other Anti-Annuity-Tax manifestations occurred. In the Council an unsuccessful attempt was made to arrest

Increased  
hostility  
to tax.

1862

the operation of the Act. The Treasurer signed the bonds in favour of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners under protest, and a deputation of ratepayers presented a memorial describing the Act as unjust and as tending to disturb the peace of the city, and entreating the Council "to use all lawful and constitutional means to obtain the entire repeal of said Act." Ex-Bailie Fyfe, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's right-hand municipal ally, offered, and for a time effectively, opposition. He raised an action in the Court of Session challenging the legality of the whole assessment; and the Lord Advocate, as the defender of the 1860 arrangement, responded by introducing and carrying again, in the face of the opposition of the Council, another bill "to declare the limits within which increased assessments are authorised to be raised under the provisions of the previous Act." Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, who was in London when this bill was introduced, at once wrote to the Council, objecting to the measure as "unexampled in the legislation of the United Kingdom, its object being to legislate respecting an action now pending in a court of law;" and the Council, on the motion of Lord Provost Brown Douglas, petitioned Parliament against the supplementary bill on this ground, adding a declaration of opinion "that no amendment of the Annuity-Tax Act will be generally satisfactory which does not secure a more equitable arrangement for the ratepayers than that made under the Act of last session." The declaratory Act, however, passed, and under it a decision was given against Mr. Fyfe. This result was certainly discouraging to the Dissenters of Edinburgh and to the Advanced Liberal party. A number of their leaders retired from the Town Council, and on the expiry of Lord Provost Brown Douglas's term of office, the combined Whig and Tory forces obtained a majority in the municipal parliament in favour of the finality

A legal question.

A Supplementary Act.

Discouragement of Dissenters.

of Mr. Moncreiff's Act. But the reaction was nearer than was imagined.

The chief factor in convincing the citizens that the Lord Advocate's "final settlement" could not stand was the unflinching opposition of a large section of the ratepayers, including several ministers of religion, to the payment of the new police tax, on which the stipends were chargeable. They were confronted with the terror of the law, but remained unappalled. They were sneered at as martyrs by mistake, and as sham heroes, seeking fame at little cost; but they answered scorn with scorn. The social war steadily increased, alike in extent and intensity. The Act of 1860, which was heralded by its author as the certain cure for the civic ailment, introduced into the community not peace but a sword; and at times it seemed as though the whole municipal administration would be brought to a dead-lock. For ten years previous to the passing of the Lord Advocate's measure, no sales of furniture had been necessary to enforce the recovery of arrears of the police taxes, but after 1860 sales at the Town Cross became alarmingly frequent. The arrears of police rate increased from £9515 to £19,924; and in one year no fewer than 3475 summary warrants were put into the hands of sheriff-officers for collection.

Deter-  
mined  
opposi-  
tion.

1864

"So strong was the feeling of hostility, that the Town Council were unable to procure the services of an auctioneer to sell the effects of those who conscientiously objected to pay the clerical portion of the police taxes, and they were consequently forced to make a special arrangement with a sheriff's officer, by which, to induce him to undertake the disagreeable task, they provided him for two years with an auctioneer's license from the police funds. In March 1865 it was found necessary to enter into another arrangement with the officer, by which the Council had to pay him 12½ per cent. on all arrears, including the police,

1865

prison, and registration rates, as well as the clerical tax; and he receives this percentage whether the sums are recovered by himself or paid direct to the police collector, and that over and above all the expenses he recovers from the recusants. But this is not all. The Council were unable to hire a cart or vehicle from any of the citizens, and it was found necessary to purchase a lorry, and to provide all the necessary apparatus and assistance for enforcing payment of the arrears. All this machinery, which owes its existence entirely to the Clerico-Police Act, involves a wasteful expenditure of city funds, induces a chronic state of irritation in the minds of the citizens, and is felt to be a gross violation of the principles of civil and religious liberty.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus the efforts of the Lord Advocate as an exorcist completely failed. His attempt to allay the evil spirit of the Annuity-Tax unfortunately increased its mischievousness, and his conspicuous want of success weakened his political position. The Dissenters, on the other hand, quickly recovered from their despondency. Convinced of the necessity of trustworthy parliamentary assistance in carrying their struggle to a successful issue, they rallied round Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, and in 1865 placed him in the honourable position of senior elected Member for Edinburgh. During that contest Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren warned them of the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of a private Member overturning, after so short an interval as five years, an Act carried by the Government of the day, and he declined to give any pledge as to new legislation. His view of the difficulty in the way of repeal was increased when he found that Lord Advocate Moncreiff was his colleague in the representation of the city.

Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, however, resolved to make the best of his case, as opportunity offered. Experienced in parliamentary

<sup>1</sup> Statement of facts handed to Select Committee of 1866 by Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren.

tactics, though a new Member of the House, he first looked about for an advantageous starting-point, some special *locus standi* which might explain his demand for the repeal of a Government Act five years after its introduction. He sought first to find this advantage in the practical admission of the Lord Advocate that his Act was a failure, and in a conditional promise he made on the hustings after the election to assist Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren if he attempted an amendment. Referring to the Annuity-Tax Mr. Moncreiff had said, "Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren first introduced me to that subject in 1853. I have now done my best with it, and I now return it to him from whom it came. If he thinks he can, with the consent of the community and of Parliament, do anything better than what I have done, he may depend upon it that, as far as my assistance and co-operation go in anything that is just and equitable, they shall not be found wanting. If he can satisfy the community, and satisfy those who have interests concerned in the question, I shall be very glad indeed to give him any assistance I can." In a speech delivered eleven days afterwards at a large meeting held in the Music Hall in celebration of his return, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren declared that for himself, a new Member of Parliament, at once to propose the repeal of an Act passed with the authority of Her Majesty's Government, would be held to be a piece of impertinence. He was a practical man, fully alive to what was practicable and proper and the reverse; and therefore he declined the Lord Advocate's offer, unless it meant that Mr. Moncreiff would consent to the reintroduction of what was generally called Mr. Black's bill, but in the preparation of which Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren himself had a large share. If, however, the Lord Advocate himself would attempt the needed reform, he promised to undertake any amount of labour with the accounts, and otherwise to assist and facili-

1865

An offer  
from the  
Lord  
Advocate.

1865

tate his efforts. He stipulated for one condition, viz., the separation of ecclesiastical imposts from the police tax. "Of all the multitude of bills," he said, "that ever were introduced to settle the Annuity-Tax question, there were none that connected it with the police tax except the Lord Advocate's, and he connected it by his own sovereign will and pleasure, not only without the consent of the Town Council, but against their most urgent remonstrances."

Nothing, however, came of this negotiation, and the next attempt to secure united action, in conformity with the wishes of the general body of the electors, and more especially the Liberal party in the city, when an influential deputation from the Anti-Annuity-Tax Association waited on the Lord Advocate and Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren in the official chambers in Parliament Square, was equally unsuccessful. Mr. Moncreiff even declined to promise to support the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry as to the operation of the tax recommended by Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren; and sturdy, single-hearted George Laing plainly told the Lord Advocate in parting with him that there could be no compromise with principle. On the religious side of the question, he said, the objectors to the Act recognised a higher authority than man, and they would not obey the laws of man when they were in conflict with that higher authority.

Nevertheless progress was made. The inquiry which Mr. Moncreiff discouraged was ordered. Accompanied by his old friend Mr. Murray Dunlop, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren and a deputation from the city went to Sir George Grey, then Secretary of State, who, after hearing their case, at once issued the Commission. Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren and Mr. Moncreiff were appointed members, and Mr. Bouverie, the Member for the Kilmarnock Burghs, was chosen chairman. Both parties were fully heard,

An appeal  
from elec-  
tors.

Parliamen-  
tary in-  
quiry.

and Mr. McLaren and Mr. Moncreiff submitted their respective versions of the state of affairs to the committee. The testimony offered by the citizens concurred by prearrangement on these four points:—“(1.) That the greatest dissatisfaction exists with the Lord Advocate’s Act of 1860. (2.) That it is essential to the peace and prosperity of the city that the Annuity-Tax should be finally and for ever abolished, always saving existing life-interests. (3.) That looking to the state of several of the city churches, and the undue proportion that the number of ministers bears to the population compared with other burghs, the number of clergymen should be reduced to ten. (4.) That while the citizens are willing to provide for the life-interests of the existing incumbents, they agree in addition that the Established Church should receive the £2000 annuity from Leith, the whole of the seat-rents, valued at £4000, and the church-door collections—a sum which would give £600 yearly to ten ministers, and admit of the church-door collections being applied to the upholding of the fabrics and the supplementing of the ministers.” But the evidence on which Mr. McLaren most relied for the time being was that bearing on the unsatisfactory operation of the Act of 1860. He wished to provide justification for amending legislation which Parliament could not dispute, and as he considered the evidence reported to the House amply supplied that necessary justification, he was well satisfied with the result. Accordingly, though still conscious of the weakness of his position, arising from the presence of Mr. Moncreiff as his parliamentary colleague, he, early in the session of 1867, introduced his bill. The second reading was moved on February 21, 1867, and its chief opponent was Mr. Moncreiff. “While my colleague,” said Mr. McLaren afterwards in speaking to his constituents, “was absent during the rest of the session,

1866

Mr. McLaren’s Bills.

1867

the only thing he did in the way of the promised assistance was to go expressly to London for the purpose of speaking and voting against the bill which I had been induced to prepare and introduce." The second reading was lost by 107 votes against 74. But Mr. McLaren was far from discouraged. His bill had obtained the approval of the Town Council, of a public meeting of the citizens, of a majority of the Select Committee of Inquiry, of several members of the late Liberal Government, and of "many of the most distinguished men in the House." It was defeated by the Tories and Conservative Whigs; and as he confidently expected that the coming election would considerably weaken this obstructive coalition, he regarded the rejection of his measure as only a temporary check. Indeed, the first-fruits of victory were reaped even before the election. In his speech on the second reading he made out a case as regards the Canongate so strong that even the Tory Government could not deny redress; and on the death of one of the two ministers of the Canongate, Lord Advocate Gordon introduced and carried a measure for one of the objects of Mr. McLaren's bill—the reduction of the burden of the Annuity-Tax in Canongate by the cost of one minister. But the Member for Edinburgh gave notice at the time to all concerned, that while "an aiding party to the reduction of a burden, he could not be held precluded from getting the other half of the burden removed as soon as he possibly could." As an earnest of this determination, he reintroduced his bill in the session of 1868, though he did not look for success, and in a thin House it was rejected by 86 votes against 59.

In 1869 the conditions Mr. McLaren had desired as essential to success—the presence of a colleague from Edinburgh supporting his views and a working Liberal majority in the

Second  
reading  
carried.

House of Commons—were provided, and the second reading of his bill was carried by 151 votes against 142. The Liberal Government over which Mr. Gladstone presided felt that, in a House of Commons based on household suffrage, opposition to the repeal of the Act of 1860 could not be continued; and Lord Advocate Moncreiff (who now sat for Glasgow and Aberdeen Universities) changed his attitude so far as to say that the compromise he had made in 1860 could not be held binding on a new Parliament; and that though he himself had not been prepared to disturb that settlement, and had in consequence withdrawn from the representation of Edinburgh, he would not oppose the second reading of the bill. In a letter written shortly after the division Mr. McLaren describes the extraordinary efforts made by the Tories, who got “one of their most important leaders” (Mr. Hardy) to oppose the bill most vehemently; the fidelity of the Government and of many Liberal members, headed by Mr. Gladstone, who made themselves late for the Lord Mayor’s dinner rather than let the measure be defeated by their absence from the division; that but for the dinner the bill would probably have obtained thirty additional votes; and that of the Scotch members twenty-five Liberals had voted for the second reading, while only five Liberals and seven Tories had voted against it.

But the end, though even in sight, was not yet reached. Negotiations ensued, in which the late Lord Advocate, who by this time was Lord Justice-Clerk, Sir Graham Montgomery, the city clergy, Lord Provost Law, all figured along with Mr. McLaren, and a basis of arrangement was framed, under which the city clergy were to receive an immediate payment of £53,000, to be advanced by the Government, and repaid in ten years by the Council. These negotiations failed chiefly through want of support from

1870

the city clergy. Accordingly, in the subsequent session of 1870, Mr. McLaren reverted to his own bill and plan, proposing, in place of the £4200 raised by taxation along with the police rate, to give the whole pew-rents, now amounting to £4300 a year, but which previous to the Disruption yielded upwards of £7520, the Leith annuity of £2000, and £1200 a year for miscellaneous purposes from the collections, which, by Act of Parliament, were devoted to the support of the poor-rates. The financial bearing of his proposals he exhibited in these two tabular statements:—

## FIRST VIEW.

*Income.*

From seat-rents . . . . .	£4333
From Leith property belonging to City of Edinburgh, commuted into an annual pay- ment . . . . .	2000
Restricted amount under the bill . . . . .	2050
Additional annuity for nine ministers at £50 each . . . . .	450
	<hr/>
	£8853

*Payments Preferably Secured.*

Nine stipends at £600 . . . . .	£5400
Four stipends at £550 . . . . .	2200
To the minister of Canongate in part of his stipend . . . . .	250
	<hr/>
	£7850

Surplus available for other purposes . . . . .	983
Of which required for church expenses (in addition to the £1200 from collections) . . . . .	600
General surplus not at present required for any purpose . . . . .	383

SECOND VIEW, when three of the Ministers now receiving £600 a year of Stipend have Died or demitted their Charges.

*Income.*

Seat-rents . . . . .	£4333
City property in Leith commuted . . . . .	2000
Restricted annuity (assuming that the Canon- gate minister is still living) . . . . .	250
Additional annuity for six ministers at £50 each	300
	<hr/>
	£6883

*Payments Preferably Secured.*

Six stipends at £600 . . . . .	£3600
Four stipends at £550 . . . . .	2200
Minister of Canongate, in part of his stipend .	250
	<hr/>
	£6050

Surplus available for other purposes . . . . .	833
As the expenses connected with three churches will then be saved in £514 (three-thir- teenths of £1800), the deduction for church expenses (other than the £1200 from collections) will be only . . . . .	86
	<hr/>

Leaving a general surplus not required for any purpose of . . . . .	£747
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Mr. Young, the successor of Lord Advocate Moncreiff, now interposed, and secured an adjournment of the debate, in order to introduce a Government measure, framed on the lines of the arrangement sketched out in the previous written negotiations. Four days afterwards he presented his measure, which proved more favourable to the clergy than even the rejected basis of arrangement. It proposed to place in the hands of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, in addition to the Leith £2000 as a substitute for the clerical tax, the

Government inter-  
vention.

1870

produce of the pew-rents, the interest of a capital sum of £60,000 and the half of the church-door collections. This financial settlement was at once opposed both by the Council and a public meeting of the citizens, and a memorial was addressed to Mr. Gladstone by the Annuity-Tax Abolition Association, representing—"That the main provision of the bill, granting £60,000 as compensation for life-interests, is one strenuously resisted by the Town Council, and is much larger in amount than was approved of by the Home Secretary Mr. Bruce, the late Lord Advocate Moncreiff, and several members of Parliament, friends of the Church." Ultimately, after some excited meetings and a somewhat bitter controversy, in which Bailie Lewis distinguished himself by his eloquent championship of the claims of the Dissenters, and Lord Provost Law earnestly and prudently acted as mediator, the sum of £56,500 was substituted for £60,000, and general agreement was arrived at by all parties—the Government, the Council, the city clergy, and the citizens. Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren met his friends in the saloon of the Royal Hotel on 28th April, and having reported the result, practically took leave of the question. He said:—

End of the  
battle.

"Now that both the Council and the citizens have agreed to this arrangement, and it has been also approved of by the clergy, I feel as if a great load were removed from my shoulders for the future. Many of you know that I never made the non-payment of the tax a matter of conscience, as very many of my brethren have done. I believe that, as Dissenters, they acted more consistently in refusing than I did in paying. (Hear, hear.) But the fact remains that I have paid the tax for forty-six years without resistance, either legal or passive. I cannot therefore claim the merit of having made any great sacrifice in the cause. It has been well said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, and it may with equal truth be said that the martyrs

in this cause—those who suffered imprisonment and the spoiling of their goods—were the men who have settled this Annuity-Tax question—(applause)—and not any Lord Advocate, or Lord Provost, or Members of Parliament. Among those who suffered imprisonment, I may name my much-venerated friend, Bailie Thomas Russell, who has long since passed to his reward; and my no less excellent friend Bailie Stott, who still survives, but with seriously shattered health, brought on solely by his exertions to promote our cause. Those who suffered from arrestments, and poindings, and the sale of their goods at the Market Cross may be counted by hundreds; therefore I forbear to single out any of that band of martyrs by name. But you know them, and bear their labours in grateful remembrance. (Applause.) Many of you know that I have written pamphlets, and letters, and articles in newspapers, and made speeches, I do not know how many times, against this odious tax, and I believe there is no one in the city who feels more relief than I do at my labours in this department being ended, as I hope they soon will be. But the clauses of the bill are still to adjust between the Town Council and the Presbytery, and I hope no new ground of difference will arise out of this adjustment. . . . By the agreement now unanimously made the bill is to be imperative, the same as my bill of last session was. Even the single original idea in this bill of £60,000 has been changed to £56,500. I daresay you all remember a jocular remark by a distinguished nobleman in this neighbourhood, ‘that the word “whereas” was the only part of Mr. Disraeli’s Reform Bill which had not been changed.’ I suspect, when this bill is licked into proper shape, every part of it will be in substance my bill of last year, except the sum mentioned, and that sum, as I have said, is not original.”

In answer to an elector, Mr. McLaren explained the mode of operation agreed upon for the last ten years of the existence of the tax:—

Operation  
of the Act.

“The tax will be continued for ten years, and during those ten years the whole amount of the assessment, the whole amount

1870

of the threepence, will be paid to pay off the sum of £56,500, which has now to be borrowed. The whole sum of threepence is not now required to pay the annuity of £4200 a year, so that during those ten years you will not only pay all you are now paying, but you will pay a little more, inasmuch as threepence now produces more than the £4200. The Act of 1860 requires that threepence to be laid on as part of the police assessment, and not to be distinct in the police assessment; and in the future the police collector just hands over the £4200 to the Magistrates or to the Church. Supposing £5000 is collected, £800 remains in the hands of the collector of police, and it goes for police purposes. In place of remaining in his hands, it will go to the creditor who lends the £56,500. I believe, from a close calculation, that the tax will expire in about nine years; but although that may be the case, nobody would lend money upon a closely fitting calculation. There must be a clause declaring that the tax shall be leviable until the sum borrowed is paid off. Without such a clause no sensible man would ever lend you a shilling. As I have said, I believe the tax will be paid off in less than ten years; and by my bill of last year it would also have been paid off in less than ten years. (Applause.)”

The real  
hero.

Thus ended the battle of the Annuity-Tax. Lord Advocate Young was nominally the author of the Abolition Act, but the real champion of the struggle was Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, and in popular estimation nearly all the prestige accruing from the successful issue of the protracted contest fell to him. In the earlier stages of the parliamentary conflict, he assisted both Liberal and Tory Lord Advocates in devising legislative settlements; he drafted the greater part of Mr. Black's bill, which in successive years held the confidence of the Council and the citizens; and he was the chief agent in ripening public opinion, both within and without Parliament, for the abolition of the tax. As a contemporary writer remarked when the end was in sight, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren from first to last was the active force of the opposition.

“If the abolition of the Annuity-Tax,” said this writer, “had been his sole object, instead of merely one of the aims of a busy life, it could not have had bestowed upon it more sustained and unwearied attention. As to the judgment with which, under Mr. McLaren’s guidance, the agitation has been managed, we need say nothing. The world is generally content to judge by results. Let it do so in this case. The test is often a fallible one, but in this instance it is safe. The end not only crowns the work, but it also indicates the character of the work done. Having set his face to the task, Mr. McLaren has never looked back; and after long years of apparently hopeless effort, embittered by the most envenomed abuse and the most unscrupulous calumny, he will have had the satisfaction of bringing about the only possible permanent settlement of the Annuity Tax—its abolition.”

This more than thirty years’ war was not a mere “local squabble,” as some critics chose to represent it. Leal-hearted Dissenters in all parts of Scotland regarded the battle as theirs. They followed every movement of the conflict with the keenest interest, and they regarded Mr. McLaren with grateful admiration. In the towns, villages, and hamlets of Scotland, wherever Dissent was known as a living force, Mr. McLaren’s name became a household word, and fathers and mothers transmitted to their children a feeling of confidence in and veneration for the courageous and talented Edinburgh citizen who successfully withstood the oppression and aggression of a powerful and ambitious Church Establishment, and, undeterred by obloquy and opposition, asserted the civil rights of the Dissenting communities. It was then that Mr. McLaren gained that wonderful hold on the hearts and minds of the Voluntary party, by virtue of

Gratitude  
of the  
Dissenters.

1870

which he held their political leadership, and they under that leadership became the backbone of Liberalism in Scotland.

“The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.”

And because of his unflinching fidelity as a Voluntary, Mr. McLaren was loved and valued as a proved friend by thousands of his countrymen and country-women who never saw his face.

## CHAPTER X.

### *EARLY CORRESPONDENCE WITH MR. MACAULAY.*

IT was as the champion of the Scotch Dissenters that Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren first came into conflict with Mr. Macaulay. He hoped to find the distinguished city Member an advocate of religious equality and friend of the Dissenters, and to induce him to use his influence and talents, if not for the enforcement of the political claims of the Nonconformists, at least for protection against Established Church aggression. Observant of the keen controversy then being waged between the Church and the civil authority, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, as a Dissenter and a Liberal, resented the disposition of the Government of the day, and of English statesmen generally, to make concessions of principle with the view of conciliating the powerful Evangelical party in the Church of Scotland, and inducing them to forego their claim to spiritual independence. In this frame of mind Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren wrote to Macaulay a long statement of the case from his point of view. This proved the starting-point of a most interesting correspondence, conducted on both sides with marked ability, though we can only gather the purport of Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's letters from Mr. Macaulay's replies. In a letter dated January 4, 1840, Mr. Macaulay assured Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren that he had spared, and should spare, no exertions to prevent Dissenters from being aggrieved and to restrain the violence of extravagant High Churchmen. He continued :—“ I will

1840

Appeal  
to Mr.  
Macaulay.

1840  
The reply.

only notice that part of your letter which relates to a personal matter. I suggested that the wisest and most honest man may, without knowing it, become heated in dispute, and may really act from passion while he fully believes that he is acting from principle. This is only what I shall readily admit of myself, and of much better persons than myself. You seem to think that I was led to make this suggestion by some remark which I had heard respecting you. I assure you, on my honour, that it was not so. I have not heard nor read, since the beginning of this unhappy dispute, a single word, directly or indirectly, reflecting on your character or conduct. My observation was founded solely on the papers which you sent to me, and which seemed to me to indicate a feeling on the part of the Dissenters such as was not justified by any provocation which they had received. Nor was my observation intended to apply particularly to you. I really think that the whole party with whom you act is open to it. The merits of that party I gladly acknowledge. For their kindness to myself I am most grateful. But I should be a mere flatterer if I did not say that I think their present temper a little punctilious and resentful, and that I am afraid of their being hurried by angry feelings into courses which will not raise their credit or give them satisfaction in the retrospect. You will see, I am sure, that though I say this, I by no means arrogate to myself any superiority over so many good and able men, except the superiority which necessarily arises from the circumstance that in the present unhappy disputes I am impartial, and that they cannot be so."

In another letter, dated June 15, Mr. Macaulay strove to gain Mr. McLaren's adhesion to the doctrine that Government may justifiably "humour those on whom they could not depend at the expense of those on whom they could

depend." Mr. Macaulay proceeded:—"I will put you a case. Suppose that you knew that you could not have carried your City Customs Bill unless both the Attorney-General and the Lord Advocate supported it. The Advocate and the Attorney differ about one clause. The Advocate says that unless the clause be passed to suit his views, he will oppose the whole bill. The Attorney, though attached to his own view, yet says that he will in any case support the bill. What would you do? I have no doubt that although you might agree in opinion with the Attorney, you would adopt the Lord Advocate's clause precisely because he was a less thoroughgoing friend of your bill than the Attorney.

1840  
Conces-  
sions to  
oppo-  
nents.

"The education question is of just the same kind. The Dissenting body both in Scotland and England are staunch friends to national education. There is much hostility to national education in both the Established Churches. To maintain such a system against the opposition of both these Churches would be impossible. Is it not wise then and right in the Government to humour these Churches in matters not essential, even at the expense of the Dissenters? The consequence may be that a few unreasonable, irritable, or greedy Dissenters may desert us. I do not believe this of the body. It would give me the deepest pain to believe it. I am ready for my own part to quit office and Parliament later on. I am sick of both. But I should be sorry that the blow came from the Scottish Dissenters."

Feeling that nearly all the public interests he held dear were the objects of Established Church intolerance, Mr. McLaren was not disposed to accept these philosophic political discourses on compromise as embodying the essence of practical wisdom in statesmanship, and he felt that Mr. Macaulay's personal indifference was due to the absence of

1840  
 personal experience. The outbreak of the conflict over the nomination of Mr. Adam Black for the Lord Provostship furnished a local illustration which he thought Mr. Macaulay would appreciate; and in writing in October to the city Member on public business (the subject being the provision of an adequate salary for the Principal of the University), he took occasion to inform Mr. Macaulay that Mr. Black's election was being opposed by Whigs as well as Tories, on the sole ground of his being a Dissenter. Mr. Macaulay was at the time much occupied with Ministerial duties; he, however, wrote this brief but friendly reply:—

LONDON, *October 12, 1840.*

DEAR MR. M<sup>c</sup>LAREN,—I have been a good deal vexed about the turn which things have taken respecting Dr. Lee's case. I will make another attempt to have the thing put on a right footing. But as you guess, we are so much occupied with matters of life and death that it is difficult to get a hearing on any other subject.

I have been greatly concerned about the Provostship. I should have been at Edinburgh before now but for the schism between two portions of the Liberal party. In November, when the election is over, I hope to be among you, and to talk freely and fairly with you over some of the important matters to which your letter refers.—Ever yours truly,  
 T. B. MACAULAY.

Mr. Black lost his election, and the disappointment of the Dissenters was intensified by the feeling that the political party whom they had helped to place in power had lent their influence to opponents. In a letter dated November 16th of the same year, Mr. Macaulay incidentally referred to the battle for the Lord Provostship, assuring Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren that in this case his sympathies were with the Dissenters, and remarking, "Rely on it that no man will suffer in my

The  
 Church-  
 men and  
 Mr. Black.

Another  
 appeal to  
 Mr. Mac-  
 aulay.

opinion for having supported Black, since, had I had a vote, I should undoubtedly have done so myself." Mr. McLaren responded, inviting Mr. Macaulay to take Mr. Black's side publicly with the Dissenters, and to let it be known that he disapproved of the conduct of local Whig supporters, who had opposed Mr. Black's election on sectarian grounds. At the same time he recited the various grievances from which the Dissenters were suffering at the hands of the Whig Government, and warned him of the growth of a feeling of resentment and alienation on the part of the Scottish Non-conformists that might prove disastrous to the Whig party at future elections. Subjoined is Mr. Macaulay's reply, containing a handsome recognition of Mr. McLaren's statesmanlike qualities, but also an earnest and able remonstrance against the uncompromising policy of the Voluntary party:—

A friendly  
remon-  
strance.

LONDON, *December 5, 1840.*

DEAR MR. M<sup>C</sup>LAREN,—I am much obliged to you for the information and advice which are contained in your last letter. It would not have been proper in me to take a part in your municipal proceedings; still less would it have been proper to send a reprimand to the Town Council after they had made their choice. But I have never disguised my opinion, and perhaps have stated it more strongly to Mr. Dunlop, the only supporter of the Lord Provost with whom I have had any communication, than to anybody else. I think the conduct of the Whigs who opposed Black most highly censurable. Indeed, I must eat all the words that I ever uttered in my life on the subject of religious liberty if I were to admit that, because a man is a Dissenter, or even a Voluntary, he is to be considered as unfit for civil office.

At the same time I must say that I do not approve of the spirit which shows itself in a part of the Dissenting body. I observe that almost every Dissenter with whom I correspond—and I have the happiness of corresponding with several whom I greatly respect—disclaims for himself the sentiments which he

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describes as common among the class to which he belongs. The speech of Mr. Alexander<sup>1</sup> is, however, if I understand it rightly, a distinct avowal of what I must consider as very unreasonable sentiments and very unjustifiable purposes. To you I speak quite explicitly; for, without flattery, I may say that I have seldom found among men employed in the highest functions, and accustomed to the management of great affairs, a mind more statesmanlike than yours. Consider then for a moment what the interests are which are staked on the event of the contest between the great parties in this country. Consider how nicely balanced those parties are. Consider that it is in the power of the Scotch Dissenters to bring in a Tory Government with a decisive majority in the House of Commons. Consider how serious a trust the election franchise is. Consider that it is a power given to be used for the general good, and not for the gratification of private or natural feelings, either of an interested or of a vindictive kind. Consider then to what the provocations enumerated by Mr. Alexander amount. Some trifling matters of punctilio—some little slight about the printing of the Bible, or about the appointment of school inspectors. Are these things seriously to be maintained as aggressions on religious liberty? Look backwards to your own youth, and consider how gladly you would have compounded for one half of the progress which since that time religious liberty has made under the fostering care of Whig statesmen. I do not defend what was done about the Bible or about the inspectors. I tried to remove both grounds of discontent; and as to the first, I thought that I had succeeded. But say that the grievances were ten times as great as they are, would they justify the Dissenting body of Scotland in taking the course which we are told they mean to take? I am familiar, I am sorry to say, and so are all men in office, with the low selfishness of mankind. One man gives you to understand that unless his earldom is turned into a marquisate he cannot continue to support the Government. Another stays away from the House of Commons on an important division because his father is not made Lord-Lieutenant. Your precious townsman

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<sup>1</sup> Afterwards well known as the Rev. Dr. Lindsay Alexander.

——— (but this is between ourselves) tells me that he shall withdraw his support from me because I have positively refused to ask Lord Melbourne to make him a Grand Cross of the Bath. These things are pitiable, but I am used to them. I do hope, however, that the whole Dissenting body of Scotland is not about to lower itself to the level of such people as I have mentioned. Only imagine a great party, containing as much intelligence as any equal portion of the British nation, and distinguished during many years by manly sense and zeal for the common government, addressing a Government thus:—"We believe your continuance in office to be for the advantage of the Empire. We believe that your fall would be a public calamity. But you have not treated us in some matters of precedence with sufficient respect. You have, indeed, given us an immense power in the State and in the local government of towns, such as we never possessed before. You have done more than all the Administrations that ever existed for those principles of civil and religious liberty to which we are devoted. But you have, in order to conciliate other parties whose support in your arduous situation was necessary to you, denied us twice or thrice some mark of respect, some mere feather in the cap; and therefore we will be revenged, though our revenge be fatal to the whole Empire. We will have you out, cost what it may." What is the plain meaning of these threats? I do not believe that they will ever be carried into effect. If they are, I shall grieve most deeply, not for the loss of my office and my seat—for I am sick of both—but for the irreparable infamy which will be brought on the very name of Scotch Dissenter. I must not run on any longer. I have not time even to read over what I have scrawled. It may be incorrectly expressed. But it is, I assure you, both honestly and kindly meant. And I leave it with perfect confidence to your candour and good sense.—Ever yours truly,

T. B. MACAULAY.

It was obviously a pain to Mr. Macaulay to differ with Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren on a question of Liberal policy. He highly appreciated his personal talents, recognising that he had

seldom found, even "among men employed in the highest functions, and accustomed to the management of great affairs, a more statesmanlike mind." He was conscious, too, that in his case great political capacity was strengthened and ennobled by uprightness of character and the absence of self-seeking motives. He further recognised his correspondent as the trusted representative of a political party powerful in numbers, and still more powerful from their intelligence and their devotion to the cause of Reform. Mr. Macaulay wished to stand well with Mr. McLaren and his political friends. On the other hand, Mr. McLaren wished to gain Mr. Macaulay as the advocate of the Scottish Nonconformist party, and he was disappointed to find that, though he believed his parliamentary representative was at heart with the Dissenters, he, under the benumbing and fettering influence of Ministerial position and party connection, set himself to belittle their grievances, and to induce them, in the interests of Whig supremacy, to acquiesce in a policy inconsistent with their ecclesiastical position and their convictions. Accordingly he once more put Mr. Macaulay on his defence, and again he elicited an extremely able but unconvincing reply:—

LONDON, *December 11, 1840.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I assure you that I give the fullest credit to your declaration that wounded pride and vindictive feeling are not the motives by which you are actuated. At the same time you will, I doubt not, allow me to suggest that the best and wisest men may, unconsciously, attach to their own pretensions an exaggerated importance, and feel undue resentment for slight injuries offered to themselves. And I own that, after reading the very able paper which you have sent me, I cannot, as an impartial man, doubt that this is the case with the Dissenting body of Scotland.

I am indeed glad to learn that you do not find in anything

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Mr. Macaulay's appreciation of Mr. McLaren.

Mr. Macaulay on compromise.

that has been done a sufficient ground for withholding your support from the Government. That the Government should so grossly misconduct itself towards the Dissenters as to forfeit all title to support, I do not credit. That it has as yet done so, you do not contend. So far we are quite agreed.

But when I look at your list of grievances, I must own I am a little astonished. It is a list which proves to me only how little ground you really have to complain. I know something about one of your charges, that respecting the printing of the Bible. I went myself with Mr. Gillon and others to the Home Office to plead your cause. I was spokesman on your behalf. I obtained from Lord John Russell an assurance that your representations should be considered. I was subsequently in communication with your delegates. I was positively and repeatedly assured by one of them that the arrangement which was finally made was perfectly satisfactory. Now, after all this, how great must be my surprise to see it asserted that on this occasion "the remonstrances of the Dissenters were disregarded." Can you be surprised if I feel a little inclined to suspect there is, in some of my Dissenting friends, a punctilious disposition—a disposition, not perhaps suspected by themselves, to make the most of small injuries and to remember them long? Of your other grievances I know little, and can therefore say little; but surely, even as stated by yourselves, they do not bear out your conclusions. As to the prisons, for example, I perfectly agree with you that Dissenting teachers ought not to have been excluded. The Government did not intend to exclude them. In the House of Lords, where the opposition is more than two to one, the excluding clause was inserted. Probably, for I really was not aware of the circumstances, the Minister of the Home Department thought that he must either drop the bill altogether or take it with this objectionable clause.

It was then his business to compare the inconveniences of the two courses. The bill was, I believe, good, and indeed necessary. In your paper it is mentioned with general praise. The excluding clause was exceptionable. So are many hundreds of clauses for which I have voted in my time in order to secure the passing

of good bills. There are bad clauses, very bad clauses, in the Reform Bill, in the bill for abolishing slavery, in all the best bills of my time. The question is one of comparison. Does the measure on the whole do more good or harm? I really do not think that a candid Dissenter would say that in this case the Government decided wrongly. But I may be in the wrong here; for, as I tell you, I am but very imperfectly acquainted with the facts. Of this, however, I am sure, that there was no ground for serious offence.

About the inspectors of schools I really think the Committee of Council judged wisely. Consider the whole question together, and not merely that corner of it which relates to the precedence of Churchmen or Dissenters. A system of national education is essential to the virtue, peace, and prosperity of the nation. It is an object for which the greatest sacrifices ought to be made. It is an object which eighteen months ago seemed almost unattainable. It now seems attainable. The mass of prejudice which was opposed to us has yielded. The clamour which seemed likely to unseat the Government has died away. How has this been brought about? Chiefly, I believe, by making some concessions—not, I admit, in themselves desirable, but a very small price for a very great benefit—to the bishops in England and to the General Assembly in Scotland. If you are determined to look at every question merely as Dissenters, you may resent this. But you are not only Dissenters—you are also citizens. As citizens, you must feel that there may be evils even greater than the giving to the Kirk a feather in her cap, which I acknowledge to be something more than her due. That millions of children should grow up with as little moral or intellectual training as the Hottentot,—that while we are squabbling about Intrusion and Non-Intrusion, multitudes of youth should, in every great city of the realm, be ripening for the brothel and the treadmill,—this is, I do think, as serious a public calamity as can well be imagined—a much more serious one than any that is set forth in your paper. The etiquette between Scotch sects is not the only thing that a Government has to look to. It is charged with the care of the physical and moral interests of a vast community. It

may well happen that, in times like these, it may be impossible to carry some measure of vital importance to the great whole without the help of persons who insist on conditions open to just objection. I am sorry for this; but what am I to do? Even what I did in order to obtain the Reform Bill, the abolition of slavery, the abolition of the East India monopoly—voted for many things which I disliked, but which were necessary to the passing of those valuable measures.

These are my views as to the grievances of which you complain. As to Black's defeat, I am sure that no member of the Government had anything to do with it; nor have I heard one among them speak of it but with deep regret. As to the disputes between the Kirk and the civil power, I must make a distinction. Of course the Legislature is supreme. Any pretension to the contrary on the part of the Establishment I regard much as you do. But what the Legislature in the exercise of its supreme power ought to do is quite another question. I think that, if it chooses to maintain the Kirk, it ought to put the Kirk on the footing, whatever that may be, which may make the Kirk, while it exists, most useful to the country. I will not enter on the question of the Veto, about which I admit that there is much indeed to be said on both sides. I only mean to say I should discuss it just as I should discuss the question whether there should be a popular veto on the appointment of Commissioners of Supply or colonels of militia. I should examine in what way the public was likely to be on the whole best served, and should decide accordingly. You will, I think, admit that these principles are sound, supposing that we are to have a Church.

I have little more to say, except that as to tests, pledges, or whatever else you may call them, my mind has long been made up, and has often been publicly declared. My opinions, except where secrets of State are concerned, may be known to anybody for the asking. But I will never, while I live, give any promise as to any particular vote. I never did so, when an obscure and needy young barrister, to the Marquis of Lansdowne. I never did so to Leeds. I have never done so to the people of Edinburgh. If a life, during which I never, to the best of my belief,

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wrote, or said, or did anything inconsistent with an honest attachment to the principles of religious liberty, is not a sufficient security to the Dissenters, I have no other to give them.

I have written ten times as much as I intended to write. I hope I have expressed myself good-humouredly. I am certain that neither to yourself nor to the great body of Scotch Dissenters do I bear any other feeling than kindness and respect. Indeed, I can assure you that, if you were to see my letters to High Churchmen, you would find that they are in a very different tone from this.—Ever yours truly,

T. B. MACAULAY.

It is much to be regretted that the letters written by Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, to which this and the others previously quoted were a reply, have been destroyed, but Mr. Macaulay never kept any letters, and therefore we can only gather Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's arguments from Mr. Macaulay's answers to them, which naturally place the former at a considerable disadvantage. Nevertheless, it is clear, even from the few instances chosen for reply, that the Dissenters had substantial grievances of which to complain; and while, taken singly, it was easy to make each one appear trifling, yet taken altogether, they showed that the Whig Government were overriding the legitimate claims of the Dissenters on every occasion, and perpetually sacrificing their rights to the necessity, real or assumed, of conciliating the Church and Tory party in order to pass some bill. It was this combination of small wrongs which embittered the Dissenters, and made them feel that the settled policy of the Whigs was to sacrifice them to conciliate powerful opponents. For this Mr. Macaulay was not responsible, but it was inevitable that in his constituency he had to bear the sins of his leaders. And when charged with them, he naturally made an able defence, and tried to show that the complaints were due to the Dissenters attaching an exaggerated importance to their own pretensions.

Mr. McLaren, however, did not give up his attempt to win Mr. Macaulay to the direct and active service of the Dissenters. In continuance of his own work as the opponent of Established Church aggression, he wrote a controversial pamphlet in the beginning of 1841, and a copy sent to Mr. Macaulay produced a reply which satisfied him that, if the Liberal Member for the city would not act in entire harmony with the views and wishes of the majority of his political supporters, he was directly hostile to the claims of the Non-Intrusionists.

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The Non-  
Intrusion-  
ists.

LONDON, *January 30, 1841.*

MY DEAR SIR,—Thanks for the tract. It is clear and able. Indeed, as to the particular point at which it runs, it is unanswerable.

I conceive that I am not inconsistent in saying that I do not think it necessarily wrong to have an Established Church,—that such an Established Church, being in some sense a civil institution, must be under the civil power, but that the civil power ought to regulate the Church, so as to make it in the highest degree efficient and respectable,—and that if a popular veto on ministers would conduce to the efficiency and respectability of the Church, the civil power may and ought to permit such a veto.

But the high Non-Intrusionists consider this as a low worldly view of the question. They are not content even to receive the veto as an improvement made by the State in the constitution of the Church. Nor will they even discuss the question whether lay patronage may, under certain modifications, be harmless or useful. They deny the right of the State to do anything with respect to the Church, except to give it money and to imprison Dissenters who refuse to pay rates. The civil magistrate in their system is nothing more than a bum-bailiff to the priest. Much is to be said in favour of Church Establishments, and much also in favour of the Voluntary system; but nothing at all, so far as I can see, in favour of the ecclesiastical polity which Mr. Guthrie

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and his brethren would give us. We would have all the evils of an Establishment and all the evils that have ever been imputed to the Voluntary system together.

While the State and the Church are connected, the State must control the Church. It ought indeed to exercise its powers in such a way as to make the Church in the highest degree useful to the people. But it must control. And I will never put the State under the feet of that Church which it feeds out of the common funds of the Empire. To establish the supremacy of law seems to me to be now the first object. To reform the law where the law requires reformation is the second.

You will have seen by the report of the proceedings of the Lords that Government means to do nothing at present except carrying into effect the law as the law now stands.—Very truly yours,

T. B. MACAULAY.

Unsatisfactory result of correspondence.

The correspondence thus ended was probably not altogether satisfactory either to Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren and the Dissenting body which he represented, or to Mr. Macaulay and the Whigs. But the two men retained their respect for each other; and for some time after, their friendly and confidential intercourse was maintained. In April 1841 Mr. Macaulay wrote with great frankness on the subject of his relations with his Ministerial colleagues, especially of those connected with the administration of Scottish affairs, adding that "he would not speak so plainly to any other person," but that "your discretion and honour deserve this confidence." "I wish that everybody were as scrupulous." It was not till the Corn-Law controversy arose that the friends separated.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE CORN-LAWS.

THE Corn-Law agitation of 1840–46 found Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren in the maturity of his powers, or, it might be more correct to say, afforded scope for their further development, and an arena for their exercise greater than he had yet enjoyed. He was early associated with the movement, which had its headquarters at Manchester; indeed, he might not unfairly be described, though a Scotsman, as one of the founders of the Manchester School of politics. At the end of August 1840, Mr. Cobden presented to Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren in Edinburgh the following note from the Rev. Dr. Heugh, a gifted and liberal-minded minister of the Secession Church and public-spirited citizen of Glasgow:—

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Introduction to Mr. Cobden.

GLASGOW, *August 29, 1840.*

MY DEAR SIR,—Allow me to introduce to you Mr. Cobden of Manchester, of whom, and whose talents and just influence, I am aware you must have heard, particularly in connection with the movement of the Anti-Corn-Law League. His conversation is full of intelligence, and his manners distinguished by their gentleness and urbanity. I am sure he will find in you a willing and zealous Anti-Corn-Law auxiliary, which will greatly delight him.—Believe me, my dear sir, yours with esteem,

H. HEUGH.

D. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, Esq.

Mr. Cobden was agreeably surprised to find that Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren was much more than a sympathetic listener; that

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he had carefully studied the question, and was able to give as well as willing to receive instruction, and that he was heart and soul with the newly-formed League. At this interview he supplied Mr. Cobden with information as to the effect of the Corn-laws on the prices of provisions in Edinburgh, which was afterwards used with much success in speeches delivered both in England and Scotland for the purpose of popularising the principles of the League. Sympathy of feeling and conviction, and a common devotion to a work which both foresaw would be arduous, but both knew to be necessary, quickly brought the two men near to each other, awakening a sense of companionship and producing a friendship which never wavered or weakened, but grew in trustfulness and affection till death intervened.

A lasting  
friendship.

Willing to engage in the work, and already known and highly appreciated in Manchester as a merchant and politician, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren was almost immediately appointed a member of the Council of the Anti-Corn-Law League, and in this capacity he was brought into intimate association with Mr. Bright as well as Mr. Cobden, and with a band of able and devoted coadjutors. In this society, peculiarly congenial to his political convictions and aspirations, he formed many highly prized and enduring friendships. His thorough mastery of the politico-economical questions involved in the controversy, his rare business capacity, and his unwearied personal services, quickly placed and throughout kept him in the front rank of the movement. This was exemplified by the confidence shown in his judgment on the occasion of the great Conference of the Anti-Corn-Law delegates which met in London in February 1842. There was so much difference of opinion amongst the delegates as to what was the most advisable course to pursue, that

Intimacy  
with Mr.  
Bright.

The Lon-  
don Confer-  
ence.

it appeared as though no good results would accrue from the Conference. Mr. McLaren, in a private memorandum, gives a much more modest account of the matter than the friends who witnessed the proceedings. He writes:—  
“When the meeting was called, there were two parties among the friends of abolition. One was the old Whig party, who would be content with a fixed duty. The other section, and the stronger, was in favour of total and immediate repeal. It was because it was known that I was firm on this point, and could not be talked over, that I was selected by Joseph Sturge and other influential local members of the deputation to be proposed as the first chairman, in order to set matters fairly afoot. It was feared there might be a kind of split on the subject; but there was not. The Whig section came in good force from about Leeds: Mr. Edward Baines was one of them, and Mr. Hamer Stansfeld another. The Conference lasted for six days. I was chosen to act as chairman for the first three days, and was succeeded by Mr. Taylor, father of P. A. Taylor, late M.P. I don't think there was any opposition to my election or to Mr. Taylor's; we were both in the same boat.”

The second day on which the Conference met was a notable one in the history of the struggle, for in the evening Sir Robert Peel brought forward his scheme in the House of Commons for altering the sliding scale, so that the duty should be at the maximum of 20s. when the price of corn was under 51s., and should gradually go down to 1s. when the price of corn was 75s. In anticipation of the Ministerial statement, the members of the Conference, to the number of 600, left the “Crown and Anchor,” where they had held their meeting, and, with Mr. McLaren, as chairman, at their head, marched down to

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the House of Commons. The treatment they received there was described next day by Colonel Perronet Thompson. He said, "Only one hundred gained admittance, the rest were locked out. It was within his memory that the last time Sir F. Burdett was elected, his Tory mob, horse and foot, went in procession to the House of Commons, and when he (Colonel Thompson), who was a member of that House, arrived there, he found the lobby filled with his infantry, who wore his colours in their hats. On that occasion the House had no objection to allow a mob with election colours to enter within its walls; but when six hundred gentlemen, the representatives of the oppressed country, went to the House of Commons, they were treated uncourteously; they were treated unhandsomely; indecency was thrust in the face of each of them, and that House had declared itself to be what they had found it, what they would find it, and what it would always remain till they had altered it."

The hundred who were admitted remained, however, till the close of Sir R. Peel's speech, when they adjourned to Brown's Coffee-house, and unanimously passed the following resolution, signed by Duncan M<sup>c</sup>Laren, chairman:—

"That in the opinion of this meeting, the measure announced by Her Majesty's Government on the subject of the Corn-laws, so far from holding out the slightest prospect of any relief of the distress of the country, is an insult to a patient and suffering people; and the deputies view such a proposal as an indication that the landed aristocracy of this country are destitute of all sympathy for the poor, and are resolved, if permitted by an outraged people, to persist in a course of selfish policy which will involve the destruction of every interest in the country."

This very strong resolution was submitted to the Conference the next day, and was adopted as the opinion of

the whole of the members. Thus the Government and the country were warned that nothing short of total and immediate repeal would satisfy the League.

To the education of the country in the principles of Free Trade, and the final conflict with landlord influence and monopoly, it is well known that the Scottish Liberals largely contributed. A prize-essay written and a series of speeches delivered by George Hope of Fentonbarns exerted a powerful educational influence on the tenant-farmers. Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's sphere of work was more general and practical. He was the business man of the League. He planned the lecturing tours, and arranged all their meetings in Scotland. Cobden and Bright, when they visited Edinburgh, were always his guests; and the first in counsel, he was also the most abundant in labours. Among the most characteristic of these labours was his collections for the League funds—his appeals for the free-will offerings of the people for the provision of the sinews of war. "One year," he states in his private memorandum, "I sent a circular by my own clerks to every elector in the city, asking a subscription to be sent me for the League, and got between £1100 and £1200. Another year I sent circulars to every name in the 'Edinburgh Directory,' also addressed by my own clerks, and got above £1800." A portion of this, however, came from sympathisers in different districts of Scotland. In referring to this successful undertaking, the *Glasgow Argus* took notice of the presence in the subscription list of the poor man's mite and the handsome donation of his more wealthy fellow-citizen, and remarked:—"By the prevalence of such determined spirit did aristocratic Auld Reekie make her proud appearance in this righteous cause; but it must not be forgotten that the management of this matter was in the hands of that man

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The Scot-  
tish cam-  
paign.The League  
Funds.

1842

who on so many occasions has distinguished himself in the cause of truth and justice—Mr. Duncan M<sup>c</sup>Laren.” It was not unusual for the contributors to make grateful acknowledgment of the stimulus and guidance in political study they received from the chief organiser of the fund, and sometimes this admiring gratitude was expressed in rhyme, of which one sample may be given. The lines accompanied an offering of 2s. 6d. from a working man :—

Though my mite is but small, my heart's in the cause,  
To expose and suppress the odious Corn-laws.  
Staunch Cobden, press onward ; in the fight never fag  
Till “ Free Trade Triumphant ” emblazons our flag !  
With support of good Bright, and such stars of the nation,  
And Auld Reekie's true friend—honest Duncan M<sup>c</sup>Laren.

The following letter from Cobden to Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, alluding to some manifestation of unfriendliness on the part of the Whig leaders, gives an amusing instance of the way in which subscriptions were obtained and the excitement kept up :—

MANCHESTER, *December 8, 1842.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I have been running “to and fro,” and have only just got your letter. Your dilemma with your old Whig leaders is one that I have so often encountered in other places, that it only brings smiles into my face at the thoughts of the prevalence of the foolish subserviency to cliques in this country. Don't fancy for a moment that I am personally annoyed. I'll come to Edinburgh to convince you to the contrary. I should not have accepted a *personal* compliment had it been offered. In reply to the Glasgow invitation, I agreed to come only on condition that the demonstration was for Free Trade, and *not* for myself personally. I cannot come to Scotland till the beginning of next month. Consult with the Glasgow people as to time. Bright will come, and I hope we may bring Colonel Thompson.

Since you cannot catch the Whig *leaders*, the only plan is to carry off their *rank and file*. Therefore make your arrangements for the largest meeting possible in the largest place you can get, whether temporary or not. Let it be an unmixed and unqualified Free Trade and Anti-Corn-Law meeting, without the slightest alloy of the principle.

Last night I witnessed an extraordinary meeting in Rochdale, where £1300 was subscribed to the great League fund in the room in sums from £2 to £100. The bidding (for it was really an auction) was continued till midnight. It was a tea-party,<sup>1</sup> at which Bowring, Bright, Buckingham,<sup>2</sup> and I attended, and after our addresses the subscriptions commenced, led off by the chairman, Mr. Fenton, the late Member for the borough, with £100. It was a most amusing and interesting scene. The gallery was filled with operatives, who called out the names of the leading men on the platform, and prompted them in the sums they were to give, amidst roars of laughter. The good-humour, life, and liberality of the meeting were perfectly intoxicating to the friends of Repeal.—Believe me yours very truly, RICHARD COBDEN.

Many other notes of encouragement and expressions of gratitude came from the headquarters of the League, and more especially from Mr. Bright, who actively superintended both the financial and literary business. Mr. Bright became enthusiastic over Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's success. "Your subscriptions are of appalling length," he sometimes observed, when oppressed with the difficulty of finding space for their acknowledgment in the *League Journal*. "You are a glorious people, notwithstanding your peculiarities," he wrote on another occasion. Keenly interested in the work in Scotland, he ventured to give a hint of an apparently neglected field. "I hope some of the Free Church people," he wrote on the last day of 1843, "will

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<sup>1</sup> A public tea-party held in the theatre.

<sup>2</sup> James Silk Buckingham.

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Mr. Bright  
and the  
Free  
Church.

come out now for us and give us a help. This district has done much for them. Rochdale, I think, has given them near £400." When Mr. McLaren had explained that Free Churchmen were for the time too fully occupied with the pressing claims of their Church to be able to aid the League much, Mr. Bright rejoined, with excellent taste and feeling:—"It may be that I have spoken too unfavourably of your Free Church people (in relation to the League). I don't forget, when comparing their subscriptions with yours, that they have had many calls upon them of late, and that now and for some time to come they must be chiefly occupied with their own question. Time will show what they will become. I trust that they may rival your body (the Secession Church)."

Action of  
the Dissen-  
ters.

But the most important service rendered by Mr. McLaren to the cause of the League was his masterly array on its side of the Nonconformist Churches. Acting in harmony with his Dissenting friends in Edinburgh, and assisted by a committee consisting of the Revs. John McGilchrist, A. Fraser, W. Peddie, and James Robertson, Messrs. John Wigham, junior, James McLaren, John Grey, Thomas Russell, and John Howieson, he in 1841 instituted an inquiry as to the effect of the operation of the Corn-laws.

From upwards of four hundred ministers he received answers condemning the laws on account of their injustice and immoral tendency. A meeting of Dissenters, held in Broughton Place Session-house, to whom these answers were submitted, certified that they were "nearly unanimous in regarding the corn and provision laws as unjust in principle, vexatious and oppressive in their operation, and the main cause of all the distresses of the country, and in advocating their total repeal and the establishing an entirely free trade in corn;" and that the ministers "condemn these laws as

being alike opposed to the principles of religion and the precepts of morality." The preparation of these answers could not fail of itself to stimulate political inquiry and activity in every district of the country in which the inquiry was conscientiously conducted by the ministers and their elders. It was equally apparent that the publication of this great body of opinion in an orderly and intelligent form could not fail to exert a guiding and bracing influence on the Liberal party as a whole, and more especially on its leaders and parliamentary representatives. Mr. McLaren was requested to undertake their publication in abstract, and this delicate and responsible work he successfully performed. The publication of the pamphlet was a fit preparation for the great Conference which was afterwards held in South College Street Church on the 11th, 12th, and 13th of January 1842.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> At this period of his life Mr. McLaren's extensive personal acquaintance among the Dissenting clergy of Scotland had ripened into many valued friendships, amongst which the most noticeable was the affectionate intimacy which bound together the Rev. Henry Renton of Kelso and himself. They were brothers-in-law, but they were far more. They were typical men in their spheres of life, Mr. Renton as a minister, and Mr. McLaren as a layman; the one the most unworldly of men, a ripe scholar, a cultured gentleman; the other skilled in the management of worldly affairs, unsparing in his public services, dignifying the title of merchant-citizen;—both at once austere and chivalrous, grasping clearly and tenaciously the same principles of life and duty, and resolved to follow them out regardless of the cost to personal comfort or popularity. During many heated and arduous controversies regarding Church and State, Education, Free Trade, and the policy of the Peace Society, the two men stood together, helping and stimulating each other, as their example helped and stimulated hundreds and thousands more. Mr. Renton accompanied Mr. McLaren to London as a delegate to the great Anti-Corn-Law Conference held in 1842. In a note to Mr. McLaren, in which he expresses himself strongly against any compromise with Whig officialism, Mr. Renton remarked to his friend that he was "working double tides" in order that his congregation might not suffer during his prospective temporary absence

A more purpose-like gathering had, perhaps, never before assembled in Edinburgh than that Conference of ministers and representatives of congregations. Great pains had been taken to make it thoroughly representative of the Dissenting denominations, and to induce the delegates to furnish themselves with facts and arguments collected and endorsed by their constituents; and these efforts were rewarded with a success which surpassed the most sanguine anticipations. In the first place, the attendance was much larger than had been looked for: 976 invitation circulars were issued to Dissenting ministers; 712 delegates promised attendance, but the actual number who came with the necessary authorisation was 801. The statistics of the sederunt were thus summarised:—

	Promised Attendance.	Actual Attendance.
Secession Church . . . .	384	429
Relief Church . . . .	130	156
Independent Church . . . .	110	109
Baptist Church . . . .	52	60
Smaller sects . . . .	36	42
Deputations . . . .	0	5
Totals . . . .	<hr/> 712	<hr/> 801

In addition to the 801 members of Conference who alone took part in the proceedings, 150 tickets of admission were issued to friends to witness the proceedings and subscribe to defray the expenses, and about 500 family tickets of admission were presented to those families who were hospitably lodging and entertaining ministers and members who had come from a distance. Thus there were from 1400 to 1600 persons constantly present, and the Conference lasted three days.

“Assuming,” Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren afterwards remarked, “that

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on the business of the Anti-Corn-Law League, for he never allowed the public work in which he interested himself to interfere with the conscientious and punctilious discharge of his duties as a minister.

the opinions of 500 congregations were fairly represented by the meeting, and that on an average each congregation consisted of only 200 families of the usual size, the Conference, even at this very reduced calculation, would truly represent a population of half a million of souls. The importance of the opinions promulgated by such a meeting, based as they are, in the words of their address to the people, on a conviction of the 'sinfulness and injustice of these laws, as being alike opposed to the revealed will and providence of God,' can hardly be over-estimated by the Legislature and Government of the country." The character of the speakers and of the speeches added to the significance and impressiveness of the demonstration. The order of business, the speakers, and the subjects had all been definitely arranged beforehand, in the full knowledge and with the aid of the delegates themselves; and while the movers and supporters of resolutions came fully prepared with local information, and as nearly as possible first-hand facts, a definiteness of purpose ran through the whole proceedings, with perfect freedom of discussion. Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, in his introduction to the report of the speeches afterwards published, recorded his opinion that the meeting was perhaps the most interesting and successful ever held in the city. "This," he added, "is admitted by all who witnessed its proceedings, and those who had an opportunity of conversing with the ministers and members from a distance are all strongly impressed with the conviction that they left the Conference for their respective localities with the fixed resolution never to cease denouncing the wickedness of the Corn-laws until every shred of them shall be erased from the statute-book, until the means employed shall be effective to convince the Legislature that 'he that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him, but blessings shall

be upon the head of him that selleth it,' and that it is the path of duty and safety 'to do justice and love mercy.'"

Unfortunately the chief organiser of this remarkable demonstration of public opinion and resoluteness of aim was unable to be present at the meetings. He was detained at home, prostrated by the effects of the fatiguing preliminary work he had been conducting for weeks. The resolutions and the whole order of procedure bear, however, the impress of his well-informed convictions and practical genius, while his compilation of the reports previously sent in by the five hundred ministers was the text-book of the speakers. John Wigham, who presided at the opening meeting, expressed the general sentiment when he said, "To Duncan M<sup>c</sup>Laren the friends of Free Trade and justice to *all* are indebted chiefly for the constitution and the arrangements connected with this meeting, and not least to the labour he has bestowed in carrying them so far into effect. While we are deprived of this gentleman's services, I trust this meeting will be so conducted as to answer the important end his disinterested mind contemplated."

Mr. Cobden, in a letter excusing his absence on account of a sudden attack of cold with slight inflammation, made grateful acknowledgment of Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's "able and energetic efforts in promoting the Conference." Towards the close of the proceedings, Rev. James Robertson, Edinburgh, moved, "That the heartfelt thanks of the Conference be returned to Duncan M<sup>c</sup>Laren, Esq., and the other gentlemen with whom this Conference originated, and by whom the preliminary arrangement was made. Of Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren he begged leave to say that he knew no man of greater capacity of mind, of greater integrity of character, of greater modesty of disposition, and whose energy was more disinterestedly and cordially devoted to the public good." He was

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Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's services.

appointed convener of the committee chosen to superintend the printing and circulation of the address to the people of Scotland adopted by the Conference, and under his personal direction practical effect was given to all the resolutions, so far as these bore on the future conduct of the agitation.

As a citizen, Mr. McLaren endeavoured to carry his fellow-electors along with him in the support given to the League, and as Edinburgh, then represented by Mr. Macaulay, was one of the keys which controlled the direction of the Liberal party, this local work was one of great importance. Mr. Macaulay's support was earnestly coveted by the Free Traders. And as this influential statesman and thinker, unlike some of his Whig colleagues, cordially and unreservedly accepted the Free Trade doctrine, Mr. McLaren made it his care to fortify him in his position of economist and Free Trader against the subtle devices of social influence and party by the constant pressure of his constituents in favour of "total and immediate repeal." In these efforts Mr. McLaren was less successful than in his more public labours on behalf of Free Trade. For a time all went well. The Member and his Liberal supporters, now organised into an Anti-Corn-Law Association, of which Mr. Wigham was chairman and Mr. W. Miller, S.S.C., secretary, and in which the "Parliament House" was well represented, seemed completely united in conviction and desire. Mr. McLaren attended a banquet given to Macaulay in 1840, and in proposing the toast of "Freedom of Trade and the Abolition of the Corn-Laws," expressed sentiments which apparently commanded universal acceptance. As a plea for the repeal of the restrictive laws the speech was apt and effective. It brought home to his fellow-citizens a conviction of the nature and extent of the burden the Corn-laws placed upon them. By a few figures

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Cost of Protection in Edinburgh.

and calculations it was shown that "Protection" to the agricultural classes, as sanctioned and maintained by Parliament, entailed on each of the 30,000 families comprising the population of the city a bread-tax amounting to fifteen pence per week, or £3, 5s. per year; a total assessment on the city of £97,000 per annum, or £27,000 more than was extracted from the taxpayers by all the other local taxes, including the police-tax, the annuity-tax, the road-money, the poor-money, water-duty, improvement-tax, &c. It is important also to note that at this early stage of the agitation in the company of Mr. Macaulay and his friends, and apparently with their hearty approval, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren clearly and definitely pronounced for total abolition.

"It has been said," he concluded, "we should petition, not for the total abolition of the Corn-laws, but for a fixed duty. A fixed duty would, no doubt, be a great improvement on the present system, which is one of speculation and gambling; but if we believe that any system of duties would be a system of injustice, we are bound honestly to express our opinions, and to petition only for a total repeal. As friends of the slave, we did not petition for a transition state of apprenticeship, but for the total abolition of slavery. The transition state was originally suggested by the opponents of immediate abolition, and ultimately tolerated only as a compromise by the friends of the slave. Let us pursue the same honest course of policy with the Corn-laws. Let us petition for the total abolition of a system of injustice, and leave it to our opponents to offer terms of capitulation. If they shall offer a transition state of fixed duties, to terminate in seven years, it will then be for the friends of abolition to consider the proposal in a spirit of conciliation. But the toast is in favour of freedom of trade in all other articles as well as in corn. When we refuse any protection to the landowners, we ask none for the manufacturers. We seek no protection for our cottons or woollens, for our

cutlery, or silks, or gloves. We seek equal justice for all classes of the community. Let Parliament impose such taxes as they may think best for the purposes of national revenue, but they should impose no tax for the purpose of protecting any interest, whether agricultural or manufacturing; and this feeling has been strongly expressed in petitions emanating from the mercantile and manufacturing interests of all parts of the kingdom."

It will here be noted that Mr. McLaren in this, as in other reforms with which he was associated, did not commit himself to the doctrine of unpractical extremists, that a part must be refused when the whole is unattainable. When he thought public opinion or party organisation was not sufficiently strong to carry a complete measure of reform, he was in general willing to accept an instalment, but without abatement of the original claim, founded on justice and public right. But being a courageous, resolute man, he was often disposed to form a more hopeful estimate of the possibilities of reform than associates who appalled themselves with visions of difficulties, and always saw the conventional "lion in the way." In the following year, as chairman of a meeting of Dissenters held to consider the representation of the city, Mr. McLaren carried a motion for a "petition to Parliament in favour of the measure recently introduced by Government relative to the sugar, timber, and corn duties; the petition to state that although in the opinion of the meeting justice and sound policy alike require the total abolition of the Corn-laws, they consider the plan now proposed by Government of a fixed duty a great improvement on the present system." But as the movement for the total abolition advanced and grew in strength with the progress of the times, partly under the educational influence of the League's propagandism, and still more under the pressure of industrial distress, Mr.

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M<sup>c</sup>Laren also advanced, and he was not by any means inclined to halt, or to go back to suit the opportunism of his more cautious allies.

In support of the forward policy of the League, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren unhesitatingly employed all the political influence he possessed. In connection with municipal, ecclesiastical, and city election business he had many opportunities of forming acquaintanceships among the leaders and officials of the political parties; and in the interests of justice he for some time actively exerted himself to induce the political representatives of the old Reform party to adopt the Anti-Corn-Law platform. An instance of a similar effort in a different direction may here be given. Acknowledging receipt of a pamphlet sent him by Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren in the autumn of 1841, Sir James Graham at once wrote:—"I shall read it with the respect and attention due to whatever you recommend to my notice;" and five months afterwards, in reply to an earnest expostulation, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren received another letter from the then Home Secretary, dignified in tone and apparently fatal to the hope of relief from the Peel Government, which was nevertheless eventually to take the decisive step in the settlement of this great question. The letter is as follows:—

WHITEHALL, *January 31, 1842.*

DEAR SIR,—I have received your letter denouncing the Corn-laws in no measured terms.

I give you full credit for the sincerity of your opinions and for your frankness in declaring them to me.

I am the last man to undervalue or disregard the deliberate judgment of the middle classes; and when it has been formed on sound reasoning and is distinctly pronounced, it will never fail to overpower all opposition. But you must not mistake the views of public meetings in cities for the voice of the community; and I suspect that Free Trade in foreign corn has

The  
Whig  
leaders.

A rebuff.

stronger and more numerous opponents than you may be prepared to admit.

I will not, however, argue the matter adversely with you. I believe it was your honest wish to convey to me information which you thought it was important I should possess; and I answer your letter, as written to me, in a friendly spirit.—I am, yours very faithfully,

JAS. GRAHAM.

D. McLaren, Esq.

Never was a public movement more frowned upon in its earlier days by statesmen than the Anti-Corn-Law agitation. In the House of Peers Lord Melbourne said “he had heard of many mad things in his life, but before God, the idea of repealing the Corn-laws was the maddest he had ever heard of;” and afterwards, replying to a deputation from the League’s London Conference, over which Mr. McLaren presided, his Lordship said, “Why, gentlemen, you might as well talk of abolishing the throne!”—an observation which provoked from Mr. Rawson, the treasurer of the League fund, the startling retort, “Well, my Lord, these laws must be abolished, even if the throne should go.” On another occasion, Sir James Graham interrupted Mr. John Brooks of Manchester with the exclamation, “Why, you are a Chartist;” and when Mr. Henry Ashworth was speaking he accused him of being “a leveller.” At an earlier stage Lord John Russell had advised the House of Commons to refuse to hear evidence on the operation of the Corn-laws; while the Conservative leaders, the Duke of Wellington, Lord Stanley, and Sir Robert Peel, were, if possible, more pronouncedly hostile.

Plain speaking.

In the face of opposition such as this the League had a hard battle to fight. The whole strength of the aristocracy was used against it for the most selfish reasons; hence the League was compelled to declare, in the words of the

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Power  
of Anti-  
Corn-Law  
League.

resolution of 1842, previously quoted, that the landed aristocracy were destitute of all sympathy for the poor, and were pursuing a policy which would involve the destruction of every interest in the country. The *Times* was against it. But the League was composed of men resolute and able. They had first-class talent and first-class character on their side; facts and arguments and experience were all with them; and when the great subscription of £50,000 was raised in support of the agitation, the *Times*, then in the zenith of its influence, was among the first to discern the inevitable result. It saw the nation was in earnest, and in a leading article which has become historical, it proclaimed the League "a great fact!" It more strongly recognised this when a further subscription of £100,000 was raised, which, when proposed at a public meeting by Mr. Cobden, served only to rouse the enthusiasm of the people to the highest pitch. There was another scene, which baffles description, when in December 1845, at a meeting held in the Town Hall in Manchester, composed of bankers, merchants, manufacturers, and others, a resolution was proposed to raise another great fund of £250,000, of which £60,000 was subscribed before the meeting separated. The Liberal leaders began to waver; then compromise was offered and rejected. In 1846, after meetings and conferences, addressed by the first orators of the day, had been held everywhere throughout the kingdom—four years after the protest of the London Conference, signed by Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren as chairman—Sir Robert Peel was converted, and Free Trade was carried. It will be remembered, as characteristic of the candid and high-minded English statesman, that he gave the credit of this great reform to "the unadorned eloquence of Richard Cobden."

Surrender  
of the Gov-  
ernment.

When the end came suddenly in sight, the parliamentary

chiefs of the League, who had, in frequent conference with Mr. McLaren during the progress of the struggle, learned to trust his sagacity and knowledge as well as to admire his readiness of resource, at once consulted him as to the acceptability of the Government's proposals. Mr. Bright, in reporting them, did not conceal his own favourable opinion. Writing on 25th January 1846 he said:—

LONDON, *January 25, 1846.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have your letter of the 19th inst., and your remarks on the meeting and the speakers are interesting. The old Whig leaven seems a something which no experience can eradicate, and in truth I have no hope of any great good from this generation of the subordinates of the party. . . .

Peel has made a clean breast of it; at least, he is finally committed to Free Trade, and I believe will give complete liberty to our commerce before he has done with it. His measure will be total—we are not sure it will be immediate—but I confess I think it not unlikely. Beyond three years no one expects any delay. Cheese and butter are to share a like fate, and we have reason to believe that a really great measure is in contemplation, by which a large number of articles will be entirely freed from duty, and our import duties be levied from a very few of the most important articles. We are on the eve of great changes, and they will not all be confined to commercial matters. The Lords and squires are savage enough, but there are symptoms of cooling down, although the subordinates of the Government seem oppressed with a sense of the insecurity of their position, and talk of the almost certainty of another resignation or a dissolution.

Mr. McLaren in his reply expressed the opinion that the battle was over, and advised a prompt and hearty support of the Peel Ministry in their Free Trade policy. Mr. Cobden then penned the subjoined note, which tells, without a word of boastfulness or self-commendation, the sacrifices he had made, illustrates his vigilance and fidelity as a leader, Victory.

1846

and touchingly anticipates his restoration to peaceful home life:—

MANCHESTER, February 2, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,—Your view of the Peel measure is precisely that which Villiers, Bright, Gibson, and myself took of it, and I find our friends here acquiescing in the same opinion, though at first they were rather disposed to go into opposition to Peel. *It is a great measure*, and would have been a complete one if Peel, Graham, and Aberdeen could have induced the Duke and the rest of the Cabinet to have agreed to total and immediate. As it is, I don't quite despair of making it *immediate* with the consent of the agricultural party, when they reflect upon the obvious injury which a gradual repeal will inflict upon the farmers. But we shall not endanger the measure in the House by our opposition. Villiers will take a vote upon his old principle in such a way as will preclude the Protectionists from giving us a cross vote, and, failing this, we shall lend our support to Peel. Out of doors we must stick to our principles, for it is not certain that the measure will pass the Lords, and in case of a general election we shall want our old watchword and bond of union, *total and immediate repeal*.

You may well believe I look forward with joy to the prospect of my emancipation from a vortex of agitation, in which, for nearly seven years, I have neglected almost every private claim and domestic duty, almost to the forgetfulness of my own identity.

Believe me truly yours,

RICHARD COBDEN.

D. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, Esq.

The Government accepted the amendments which the League desired, and the bill was passed without a Ministerial defeat, without a collision with the House of Lords, and without a dissolution of Parliament.

This agitation, like that which preceded it and which resulted in the freedom of the slave, had its roots in every household; it was a domestic question though fought with

political weapons, and women came forward instinctively to join their husbands, fathers, and brothers in these two great struggles. They attended the Anti-Corn-Law meetings in great numbers, and gave substantial aid to the funds of the League. They held a great bazaar in Manchester. In those days (upwards of forty years ago) large bazaars were less common than now, and it was a great work to realise £10,000; but the ladies handed this sum to the League Fund, as the proceeds of their patriotic labours. On the 15th of May 1845 they held another bazaar of greater magnitude in the Covent Garden Theatre, London, which lasted for three weeks, and realised upwards of £25,000. This was the ladies' contribution towards the fund of £100,000. Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, Paisley, and Dunfermline furnished stalls which for value and beauty were comparable with the contributions of the larger English towns. The chief inspirers of this Scottish manifestation of interest and zeal were undoubtedly Mrs. Renton (Mr. McLaren's mother-in-law) and Miss Eliza Wigham; while Mr. McLaren's future wife, Miss Bright, presided, at both bazaars, over the stalls furnished by the ladies of Rochdale and its neighbourhood.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst we are becoming accustomed to women taking part in all moral and political movements, it may be interesting to quote from an article in the *Times*, written at the conclusion of the Anti-Corn-Law Bazaar, to show how much influence that great agitation had in bringing women to the front in all patriotic and beneficent work.

The bazaar, "regarded simply as a spectacle, was one of the most gorgeous ever beheld in London, but which, as a manifestation of moral power, is without a parallel in the world's history. There were aggregated there ladies who, for seventeen days, had devoted their time, their toil, and, we fear their health, with unwonted assiduity to advance the great cause of humanity and justice—ladies who had manifested an intelligence, tact, and spirit of self-sacrifice which cannot be too highly estimated or too gratefully remembered. They were not conscious of the capabilities they

1846  
—

possessed until they found them developed in action by the force of circumstance. . . . Collected together from all parts of the British Islands, those who had never seen or heard of each other in their lives found themselves encircled by friends though surrounded by strangers, community of feeling becoming the basis for community of affection. . . . No one could gaze for hours together, as we have done, on the continuous stream in which the crowd flowed through the hall, without being deeply impressed by the order, the forbearance, and the conciliatory demeanour of every individual in the vast multitude; women went about fearless of insult, and children without danger of injury. It was a striking evidence of the improved culture and higher tone of moral feeling which the discussions and instructions of the League had infused into the public mind. It was a manifestation of the intellectual and ethical character which a great political movement assumes when kept free from the exacerbations of party."

## CHAPTER XII.

### CONTROVERSY WITH MR. MACAULAY.

1841

As a party to Mr. Macaulay's election, as a public man, and a "Leaguer" deeply impressed with a sense of the evil influences of the Corn-laws, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren felt himself bound to endeavour to prevent a misrepresentation of his views and of the views of the electors in Parliament. With this object he entered into correspondence with Mr. Macaulay on the subject of the motion annually submitted to Parliament by Mr. Villiers, which was to the effect "that all duties on the importation of corn shall *now* cease and determine." At first the attitude assumed by the distinguished representative of the city was not discouraging. On 8th May 1841 Mr. Macaulay wrote:—

"We are not likely to come to the discussion of our Corn-law plan for some time. We shall be beaten on Lord Sandon's motion by a league of landed gentlemen and old slave-drivers, mingled with two or three honest but mistaken enemies of slavery. We shall then, of course, either resign or dissolve. My own opinion, though not absolutely made up, leans at present towards resignation. I am quite satisfied that the measures which we have proposed will in no long time be carried, and I shall not be surprised if they should be carried by the very men who now lead the Opposition. I am afraid you will think the 8s. duty too high. I am convinced that it is the lowest which there is any chance of obtaining for a long time to come; and, for my own part, I would very much rather have a fixed duty of 10s. than the present system."

Government troubles.

1842

Macaulay's forecast was justified by events. The Whigs were defeated both in Parliament and at the poll, and in September Sir Robert Peel became Prime Minister. But freedom from the restraints of office was not followed by the acceptance of Free Trade principles. The policy of the Whig party was to temporise on the question, and Mr. McLaren's suspicion of Mr. Macaulay's reliability as a supporter of the League received unexpected confirmation from a speech delivered by the right honourable gentleman against Villiers' motion in the House of Commons in February 1842. In this speech Mr. Macaulay declared that in the then existing circumstances he was not in favour of the total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws, though he would not carry his opposition to the extent of voting against the parliamentary champion of the cause. Mr. McLaren, indeed, was not unprepared for this answer. In a letter written some time afterwards, giving an account of his relations with Macaulay at this period, he said:—

Mr. Macaulay and the League.

“Shortly before that date (February 21, 1842, when the speech against Mr. Villiers' motion was delivered), a petition in favour of the total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws had been signed in Edinburgh by 27,000 inhabitants. It was sent up to London by the Association, with a request that Mr. James Aytoun and myself, then in London as Anti-Corn-Law delegates, would wait on Mr. Macaulay officially as a deputation from the Association, and request him to present it to the House, on the single condition that he would support its prayer by voting for Mr. Villiers' motion. We accordingly waited on him (having made a previous appointment for that purpose) at his residence in the Albany. We stated the object of our mission, and explained what we believed to be the state of public feeling on the question in Edinburgh. He received us with great courtesy, but at the same time told us that he could not present the petition on these terms, and that he could not vote for Mr. Villiers' motion, because he

was favourable to a fixed duty. We stated that, in these circumstances, our instructions were to give the petition to some other Member who would support its prayer. He assented to the propriety of this course, situated as we were, and accordingly the petition was handed to Mr. Ewart, and presented by him. Again, in 1843 a petition, signed by upwards of 30,000 inhabitants, praying for total and immediate repeal, was sent to the Hon. Fox Maule, and presented by him, because neither of our Members would support its prayer, as we had ascertained from their answers to our letters. And I may mention here that this course met with the unanimous approval of Mr. Moncreiff (the present Lord Moncreiff), Mr. Craufurd (afterwards Lord Ardmillan), Mr. Montgomery Bell, and the other learned gentlemen who now differ with us on some other points."

Before the presentation of this second petition, Macaulay had written a letter to John Wigham, which was interpreted as a retrogression on the question of Free Trade, and as a direct defiance of the opinions of his constituents:—

"In speculation," he said, "my opinion is that all protecting duties whatever are bad—that protecting duties on the necessaries of life are of all protecting duties the worst, and that a protecting duty raised on foreign corn according to a sliding scale is a protecting duty of the worst sort, raised in the worst way. But I do not, even in speculation, pronounce all duties on foreign corn to be indefensible; for I conceive that there are cases in which such duties, when levied in good faith, solely for the purpose of revenue, may be justified. When I come from the speculative to the practical question, I am met by great difficulties. I am firmly convinced that the total and immediate repeal of the Corn-laws, whether desirable or not, is unattainable; and that the only effect of demanding such repeal, in the way in which some of my friends demand it, and of rejecting all fellowship with the supporters of a moderate fixed duty, will be to prevent all change for the better, and to prolong the existence of the sliding scale."

1842

A pledge  
refused.

And he added, "Thinking thus, I will not pledge myself to vote for total and immediate repeal, *and I am perfectly ready to take the consequences.*" Nevertheless Macaulay, in spite of this refusal to consider himself pledged, had, in the same session in which he delivered an adverse speech and withheld his vote, supported another amendment moved by Villiers and directed against the Peel Government in favour of total repeal. It was in this speech that Mr. Macaulay denounced the Peel tariff in vigorous phrases, which have passed into the stock-in-trade of the hack orator of our day. He described Sir Robert Peel's plan as "a measure which unsettles everything and settles nothing; a measure which pleases nobody; a measure which nobody asks for; a measure which will neither extend trade nor relieve distress." And again in 1843 and 1844 he voted with Mr. Villiers. His position was this: he was in favour of Free Trade in principle, subject to duties "levied in good faith solely for the purposes of revenue;" but he did not believe that Free Trade, with the modifications which he considered necessary, could then be carried, and as a party man he was unwilling to make the repeal of the Corn-laws a vital principle of policy.

This view Mr. Macaulay elaborated and reiterated in a long correspondence which he conducted with Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, in which each sought to gain the other over to his position—Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren labouring to induce a parliamentary representative whose talents he admired to accept the policy as well as the platform of the League; Mr. Macaulay devoting many hours of a busy life, with other urgent claims upon his time and energies, to earnest efforts to win from the League and for the Whig party a constituent whose probity and capacity he held in equal respect. Evidently a common ground of argument could only be reached by

the conversion of one or the other; and as the controversy proceeded the impossibility of agreement became increasingly evident. By and by Mr. Macaulay's sensitiveness and Mr. McLaren's views of duty brought the two allies, though really not far apart, into stern conflict. Even in the first letter of the series, which merely acknowledges receipt of some Anti-Corn-Law literature, the city Member marked out the difference which made ultimate agreement impossible. It was the root difference between the Ministerialist and the Radical—the man of expediency and “the man in earnest.”

ALBANY, LONDON, *January 29, 1842.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I have to thank you for several very interesting documents. It is hardly necessary for me to tell you that my views as to the corn question agree with yours, except perhaps that my hopes of success are less sanguine, and my disposition to accept any tolerable compromise consequently greater. Of any tolerable compromise there is, I fear me, not the smallest chance, and we may therefore adjourn, I am sorry to say, to a distant period the discussion of the question whether it would be right to accept a large instalment of what is our due and to waive our claim to the rest.—Ever yours very truly,

T. B. MACAULAY.

The following letter, evidently in reply to one suggesting an advance along the line in support of Free Trade, is specially interesting because of the accuracy with which the writer forecasted the public policy of the Non-Intrusion party in the event of disruption from the State Church:—

Urgency admitted, but abolition impossible.

ALBANY, LONDON, *April 13, 1842.*

MY DEAR SIR,— . . . I agree with you in thinking that the Corn-laws, as the worst of all commercial abuses, ought to go first; then perhaps the sugar-duties ought to follow. But we cannot effect this at present, and when we shall effect it is quite in the dark. Are we, therefore, to prop up all other monopolies?

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Far from it. I do not think we are beginning our inroad on this system at the right end. But, after all, the whole system hangs together, while at whatever end we effect a breach, the whole is in danger of ruin. Hitherto the landlords have pointed to the protection enjoyed by various trades. Every trade, as soon as its protection is menaced, has pointed to the great monopoly of the landlords. One abuse has been made the plea for another, and we have gone on in what Lord John well called a circle of false reasoning. "Why is bread to have protection?" "Because shoes, cork, &c., have protection." "Why are shoes and cork to be protected?" "Because bread is protected." It would be best to reform the whole system together. It would be next best to begin with the greatest evil, the corn monopoly. But it is a good thing to begin to reform anywhere. And I have no doubt that just as your High Churchmen, if they lose their benefices, will all turn Voluntaries before long, so will all the small protected interests, as soon as they lose their protection, fall with zeal never before known on the great interest which still retains an undue protection. On these grounds I intend, in the main, to support with all my power the new tariff; and I trust that you will think that I act rightly. If we choose to join with the Tories to oppose it, we shall certainly throw it out and unseat the Government. But I should think a change of Ministry at present a great public calamity. We cannot at present carry any really good measure. We can only maintain good principles, and those principles we shall maintain with more freedom and effect in opposition.—Yours very truly,

T. B. MACAULAY.

Mr. Macaulay on his defence.

The progress of events illustrated only too painfully and conclusively the soundness of Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's view as to the urgency of the question. Trade was depressed; wages were low and bread was dear; famine stalked through the land, and a dangerous social agitation was threatened. Writing from Rochdale in August 1842, Mr. Bright said:—"Our prophecies are being fulfilled. The people are all out or are ceasing to work. They refuse to work until they

have their rights. Wages and food they demand. The towns in this district are nearly all in the hands of vast bodies of workmen and women. Has the revolution commenced? It looks very probable. The authorities are powerless. Troops cannot be had for every body of turn-outs. We are truly in a strange and fearful position. All are peaceable as to person and property, but hunger in a few days must overturn good resolutions. What will Peel, Graham, and Co. say?"

Conscious of the danger to public order caused by the increasing popular distress, fortified by evidences of local opinion in favour of the policy of total and immediate repeal, and strongly advised by his English friends to use all his influence to gain Mr. Macaulay, and with him the Whig party, to the platform of the League, Mr. McLaren continued the correspondence with his parliamentary representative, traversing and retraversing all the ground of controversy, urging the claims of the electors to representation of their opinions in Parliament, citing proofs of popular sympathy with the League, answering the frequently-used excuse for delay, that though the cities were for repeal the counties were not, by pointing to the opinions of the intelligent Scotch farmers; and above all, claiming support for "total and immediate repeal," because justice, and therefore wise statesmanship, demanded the abolition of the Corn-laws. Mr. McLaren apparently had not made copies of his own letters, but so much may be gathered from the replies which follow.<sup>1</sup> Thus put on his defence, Mr. Macaulay wrote the series of able letters which follow:—

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<sup>1</sup> This was in accordance with Mr. McLaren's usual practice. He appears not to have made copies of his letters, unless when he contemplated publication, either by his own desire or at the instance of his correspondent.

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ALBANY, LONDON, *January 4, 1843.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I am not quite sure that I fully understand you; but if I do, I am afraid that I must differ from you. You seem to me to lay down this principle, that no revenue ought to be raised for the exigencies of the State by duties of customs on the importation of any article from abroad, unless an equivalent duty be imposed on the production of that article at home. I have not studied these questions very deeply, but I have a strong impression that no financier or political economist ever maintained such a proposition as this.

I hold the doctrines of Free Trade as strongly, I believe, as any person who has ever written about them; but I cannot admit that when a Government wants money, and is under the necessity of raising money by taxation, it ought to reject every tax which may interfere with the freedom of trade. That a tax interferes with the freedom of trade I admit is an objection, and a grave one. But there are, as you well know, objections to all taxes; and the business of the Legislature is to choose the least evil among the evils which present themselves. Though it is an evil that a tax should interfere with the freedom of trade, it may be a greater evil that a tax should be such as can only be levied by a most vexatious process or by means of a very costly machinery. The advantage which the customs have over other modes of taxation is this, that the collection causes scarcely any annoyance to the body of the people, and that the expense of agency is exceedingly small in comparison of the sum raised. Now this seems to me to be a sufficient reason for laying duties or customs on the importation of many articles, though the production of these articles at home is not taxed. Take timber, for example. I think a duty on the importation of timber defensible in a country which, like ours, requires a large revenue. The duty is got with very little deduction. So bulky an article is not likely to be smuggled. The payment is made at the port, and the body of the people never see the face of the collectors. But suppose that, in order to prevent any interference with the freedom of trade, we were to lay an equivalent tax on British timber, what vexation must inevitably follow, unless, indeed, the tax were to

be a mere dead-letter. An army of spies must be paid to fill all our woods and parks, and to besiege the shops of the joiners and builders. I therefore think it right to tax imported timber, and yet not to tax British timber. This, you say, acts as a protection to the British timber. I admit it. I cannot help it. It is not my object to protect British timber. My object is in good faith to get revenue which must be got somewhere, and to get it in the least vexatious and in the least chargeable way. If I cannot do this without incidentally affecting the freedom of trade, this is an evil. But still it may be the less of two evils.

I am persuaded that you will, on consideration, agree with me that, in imposing taxes for purposes of revenue, freedom of trade is only one of several important considerations by which the policy of a Government ought to be guided, and that it may be right to lay duties on the importation of an article from abroad without taxing the production of that article at home.

Whether corn be an article which ought to be thus dealt with is quite another question—a question respecting which I have still much to learn, and on which I have not given, in Parliament or elsewhere, an opinion. I content myself with saying that on the question of duty imposed for the purpose of protection, my mind is made up.

I should be glad to learn whether we differ as to the principles which I have laid down. To me—perhaps from not having thought very much on financial science—they seem impregnable.—Yours very truly,

T. B. MACAULAY.

ALBANY, LONDON, *January 12, 1843.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I am glad to find that we do not differ on any matter of principle. We both think duties imposed for the purpose of protection indefensible. We both think that it may sometimes be fit to impose duties on the importation of articles the home production of which is not taxed. We both see that such duties must to a certain extent operate as a protection. But we think that, for the purposes of revenue, that evil must sometimes be incurred. Whether any particular article is of such a kind that it ought to be taxed when imported, and not taxed

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when produced at home, is a question which must be determined, as we both agree, by many considerations of convenience. You think with me that timber, in the present state of our finances, is such an article. The question whether corn be such an article is not to me equally clear. You confidently pronounce that it is not; I must examine into that matter much more deeply before I pronounce.

As to the credit which I may gain or lose, it is the smallest part of my care. I will most willingly consent to be called a mere party man all my life, if by taking that name on myself I can promote the abolition, or even the mitigation, of the present system of monopoly.

I will not detain you longer, as you must be busy at this time. I wish you a good meeting, and unmolested by the Chartists.—  
Ever yours truly,

T. B. MACAULAY.

ALBANY, LONDON, *February 24, 1843.*

MY DEAR SIR,— . . . The only question between us is one of fact. Is it the fact that a duty on home-grown corn could be collected with as little risk of evasion, as little charge of collection, and as little interference with the freedom and comfort of home life as a duty on foreign corn? If this be so, I at once admit that there ought to be no duty on foreign corn for purposes of revenue without a countervailing duty on home-grown corn. But as to this fact I feel considerable doubt. And that doubt is not removed by the circumstance that most versatile and unscrupulous debaters, whose great object is to defend the sliding scale, take the view contained in the speech which you have sent me.

I have been a little misunderstood by you if you think that I am friendly to a duty on corn for purposes of revenue. I have no decided opinion on the fiscal question. All that I say is this, the fiscal question and the commercial question are quite distinct, and must be decided on different principles. As to the commercial question, I have made up my mind fully. As to the fiscal question, I see very much to be said on both sides, and I will not give a decided opinion.

“As to the question of the Corn-laws generally, I wrote yesterday to Mr. Wigham. I daresay that my conduct will be much censured; but my mind is made up. I am certain that the great object of the Tory squires is to effect a complete breach between the fixed-duty men and the no-duty men. They have for a time succeeded. While that breach continues, the sliding scale is in perfect security. The experience of a very few months will, I hope, teach many of my friends that it is far better to take half, and only half, than to stickle for all and get nothing. But be this as it may, I shall leave with them the responsibility of throwing away what is attainable in the pursuit of what is unattainable, and of dissolving the alliance which at last general election seemed to be firmly established between all who are honestly desirous to give a large extension to the freedom of trade.—Ever yours truly,

T. B. MACAULAY.

ALBANY, LONDON, *March 1, 1843.*

MY DEAR SIR,—It was quite unnecessary in you to assure me that you meant me no personal disrespect. Your expressions were quite within the limits of courteous discussion. Had it been otherwise, I know how to make allowance for a little controversial warmth. You will extend to me the same indulgence if I should happen to need it.

I repeat, I consider your proceedings as imprudent and your objects as unattainable; that I believe it to be utterly impossible to obtain at present a perfectly free trade in corn, and that, in my opinion, the only way in which you will be able to obtain any important mitigation of the existing evil is by joining with more moderate reformers to support a fixed duty. I do not say an 8s. duty, but the lowest upon which we can agree to co-operate—perhaps a 6s. duty, perhaps a 5s. duty.

At this you express great amazement, and say that either I must of late have been shut up from the world, or must fancy that you have been so shut up.

You are quite right. I do firmly believe that you have been so shut up. A man may be shut up from the world, in my sense, though he lives in a great city, though he reads much, speaks

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much, hears much, attends meetings of many thousands of people. In a society composed of many elements, he whose converse is with one element alone may properly be said to be subject to all the illusions of a recluse. I say this not of you alone. I have said so to other valuable men,—to my friend Adam Black, for example. You live in a great city, it is true; but great cities do not make up the whole of the United Kingdom. And you seem to me to be under a complete delusion on that subject. You talk of public opinion; but you mean only the public opinion of that portion of the nation which is crowded together by a hundred thousand to the square mile. I need no other proof of what I say than your letter, which is before me. You describe strongly, and I believe justly, the intense feeling about the Corn-laws which exists at Edinburgh and Glasgow; and this feeling seems to you to be the same thing with the national feeling. I am not, I assure you, so completely shut up from the world as not to be quite aware that a strong feeling in favour of a perfectly free corn trade exists in most towns of 10,000 inhabitants and upwards, and in none more than in Edinburgh. But is the whole rural population to go for nothing? You must admit, I think, that almost the whole strength of the party which is for perfectly free trade in corn lies in towns of 10,000 inhabitants and upwards. The inhabitants of the small market-towns are generally, as far as I have observed, more prejudiced in favour of agricultural protection than even the neighbouring farmers. Now, what proportion of the people of the United Kingdom lives in the towns of 10,000 inhabitants and upwards? In England, I think, not quite a third. In Scotland, certainly not a third. In Ireland, not a tenth.

I give you a great deal indeed if I give you seven or eight millions of the people, if told by the head. There remain about twenty millions. Are they with you? Of the counties of England which may be said to be purely agricultural, there are about thirty which have more inhabitants and more voters than Edinburgh. There are several, Devonshire, Kent, Somersetshire, Norfolk, which have more inhabitants and more voters than Edinburgh and Glasgow put together. You tell me of the

strong feeling of Edinburgh and Glasgow against a fixed duty, as if that were to decide the question; and there is not one of the thirty counties of which I speak where a candidate who is not for an extravagant amount of protection dares to show his face. At this moment a division of Warwickshire, with more inhabitants than Edinburgh, is vacant. The Tories will walk over the course, I am told, because no gentleman who is even for a modification of the Corn-laws will have the least chance of support. All these circumstances you seem to me to overlook altogether; and you merely repeat, what I admit, that the Liberal electors of Edinburgh have a strong objection to any tax on corn. This is a decisive argument certainly, if the only object which you suppose me to have in view is the keeping of my seat for Edinburgh. But I am sure you think better of me, and that you would not address to me any reasonings grounded on interests merely selfish. Let us then quit all local considerations, and speak, not about my seat, which, God knows, I would gladly resign to-day if by so doing I could make the quarter loaf a farthing cheaper, but about the public interests.

I am certain you must mistake the cry of those who surround you, and with whose cry your own is mingled, for the voice of the nation. I know that yours is the stirring party and the noisy party; but I know that it is the weaker party—weaker in numbers, in wealth, in constitutional power, in physical power. What, then, ought to be your course? I should say to my friends, to consider all as with you who are not wholly against you; to be grateful to everybody who is disposed to assist you in getting half or a quarter of what you want. What is your course? To reject all allies who will not go the extreme length with you—to treat Lord John like Mr. Christopher,<sup>1</sup> and Lord Fitzwilliam like the Duke of Cleveland. If this policy answers, I am a very bad politician.

But, you say, it cannot be wise to support a fixed duty, for no great party is for a fixed duty. The Tories are not for it. The Anti-Corn-Law League are not for it. No public meeting clamours for it. No petition asks for it. A sliding scale has

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<sup>1</sup> Protectionist Member for Lincoln.

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friends; total repeal has friends; a fixed duty has no friends. Surely you are not the dupe of your own fallacy. Might not all this have been said of every compromise that ever took place in the world? Was ever a compromise made on the terms which either of the contending parties had demanded? Take the boundary dispute between England and the United States. "We have a right to all this territory," said England. "No; we have a right to it all," answers Jonathan. Neither the one nor the other proposed to halve the territory. At last, after years of bickering, extreme inconvenience and danger induce both to be content with what, at first, would have satisfied neither. Each is grumbling. Each thinks that too much has been ceded. But still the compromise is made. I think this a parallel case to your Cornwall controversy. I know that, at present, a fixed duty is equally detested by you and by the Tories; but I know also that they like it better than a perfectly free trade, and that you like it better than a sliding scale. When the struggle has lasted a certain time, when you are afraid of getting nothing and they of losing everything, you will all, as has happened ten thousand times, be glad to take some intermediate measure. The effect of the course now taken by your party will be that you will have to wait for such an intermediate measure some years longer than is at all necessary.

These are my views as to the public. My seat at Edinburgh is not of the least value to me unless I can hold it with honour and independence. Nor shall I ever suffer any selfish considerations to guide my conduct as to a question which is so important to the welfare of the whole Empire.—Ever yours truly,

T. B. MACAULAY.

Mr. Macaulay's letters are evidence of the ability, the vigour, and the courtesy with which Duncan McLaren conducted the controversy. But the leaders of the League, while recognising the value of the service Mr. McLaren was rendering in trying to persuade Mr. Macaulay to more active effort, their own leanings were rather in the direction of taking public action against the Member whom they believed to be misrepresenting his constituents as well as his convic-

tions, and also against the ex-Minister whose obduracy was the mainstay of the Whig policy of expediency. Joseph Sturge, in an appreciative letter, said, "I think T. Macaulay will not find his standard of political expediency answer quite so well in the long-run as he calculated upon." In February 1843 Mr. Bright wrote: "Macaulay is a Total Repealer at heart and in principle, and only holds back because he is an *attaché* of the old Whig party. Therefore I think it would be perfectly just to turn him out if his constituents are Total Repealers. The wisdom of this course depends upon the probability there is of sending a better man in his place. If he were to resign and stand again on *fixed-duty* grounds, and be returned, we should be greatly injured. If a Total Repealer could be got in, the reaction would be all in our favour; and I am persuaded that an election on Total Repeal principles, if successful, would be an immense advantage to the cause. Now all depends on the temper of your constituency. If a large majority of Liberals are staunch to the League faith, the experiment would be well tried; if not, I would not recommend it. You can judge probably better than any one else." Whatever might be the issue, Mr. McLaren was now convinced that further letter controversy would be profitless, and that on the points raised an appeal must be made to the public. He appears to have intimated as much to the city Member, at the same time expressing his deep regret that a statesman so gifted and high-minded should subordinate his own convictions of what was right and just to the momentary exigencies of party. He solemnly referred him to the law and the testimony as the safe guide of conduct—"To him who knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."<sup>1</sup>

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Mr. McLaren's  
League  
friends.

<sup>1</sup> James iv. 17.

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To this exhortation Mr. Macaulay at once replied:—

ALBANY, LONDON, *March 7, 1843.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I agree with you that it would not at present be of any use to continue our controversy.

I have given no distinct answer to the question about Villiers' motion, for this simple reason, that I do not know what the terms of the motion are to be.

I quite agree with you that "to him who knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." If I vote against Villiers' motion, it will be solely because I am convinced that by supporting it I should be doing not good, but harm.—Ever yours truly,

T. B. MACAULAY.

Mr. McLaren's fidelity.

The temptation to Mr. McLaren to surrender was great, and if he had been a self-seeking man it would doubtless have been irresistible. The Whig party was powerful, and it had many gifts to bestow for such a man as the leader of the Liberalism of Edinburgh and of Scottish Dissent. It could smooth his way to a political career; it could elevate his social position; it could hold out the prospect of office and the patronage of offices; it could secure for him the association and the support of great political leaders, who believed with Mr. Macaulay that he possessed in an eminent degree the faculty for statesmanship, and anticipated for him, if he chose to become a partisan, high party rank and a bright political career. What had the League to offer as a counter-attraction? The sacrifice of time and money and friendships; arduous labour, of which the end was not in sight, ever becoming heavier and more exacting in its demands. His personal sense of fidelity to a great public cause was, however, strengthened by the consciousness of the confidence reposed in him by thousands of his countrymen, and by the example of his companions in the struggle. He knew he was associated with men who had left all at the

call of national duty and in obedience to the inspiration of Christian patriotism,—business, money-making, personal and political friendships, sweet domestic comforts, aye, and domestic duties and responsibilities.

At the bidding of the higher duty Cobden was letting his private business go to ruin, and, very shortly, domestic grief was added to his anxieties. In the latter end of May of this year (1843) he wrote his fellow-labourer in Edinburgh: "My little girl, six months old, was a week since in blooming health. Last night my boy called me out of the Bristol meeting to announce the melancholy intelligence that she had been seized with convulsions, and her innocent spirit had been called hence. This is my first trial as a parent. You can sympathise with me." In February Mr. Bright wrote: "Under pressure to go to Sheffield. My brother ill. My business, my friends, and my country!—what am I to decide for? Cobden says I *must* go and be returned, even if I stay at home half the session. The League must fight and win a battle." Such was the spirit of the men with whom Mr. McLaren was associated, and he was kin with them. He was not made of yielding stuff. Moreover, having faith in the invincibility of truth and justice, he was not afraid of the host encamped around him—the aristocracy, the monopolists, probably the majority of the electors, as yet not fully instructed, and the chiefs of the parties, who take their direction from electoral majorities. He believed the League was on the winning side. "We rise higher after every blow," reported Mr. Bright in reference to the attacks of Brougham, Roebuck, and Peel, which he said "have done us essential service." And this was Mr. McLaren's experience of the progress of events in Edinburgh and in Scotland. Public opinion was steadily growing in favour of "total and immediate repeal."

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Patriotism  
of League  
leaders.

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He saw that compromise, even though it were morally permissible, would be a tactical mistake, and he would not declare for compromise to retain the friendship of Mr. Macaulay or to purchase the favour of the Whig party.

But he made a further effort to put both right, this time by public speech, and not by private letter. At a meeting of the Anti-Corn-Law Association of Edinburgh he urged the right of constituencies to have their views represented in Parliament, and among other proofs adduced the fact that 1100 electors of the city had contributed to the League fund as evidence that Mr. Macaulay's constituents were in favour of the total and immediate abolition of the Corn-laws. Alluding apparently to a letter from Macaulay to the Anti-Corn-Law Association (which has not been found), he described Mr. Macaulay's argument in favour of a revenue duty as the greatest fallacy that could be stated, for there was no difference between a duty for protection and a duty for revenue; and he was surprised and amazed that a man of Mr. Macaulay's sagacity and talent should have had recourse to such a distinction. He did not, as Mr. Macaulay in his reply assumed, admit that the majority of the people and of the aristocracy were against the policy of the League. But his argument was this:—Supposing they were adverse, what does it matter? If the people are opposed to it, it is because they do not yet understand it; if the aristocratic classes are hostile, it is because they assume their interests are in danger. But ignorance and self-interest cannot long withstand truth and justice; and truth and justice are with the League; so is the logic of debate; so are the Liberal electors of Edinburgh. Proceeding next to deal with the objection that the chiefs of the parties were against the League, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren continued:—"He tells us, last of all—as if it were the most

Public  
meeting in  
Edinburgh.

important point in his estimation—that we are in a small minority among the chiefs of parties. Let us tell him in reply that the time has happily gone by when the enlightened public opinion of the middle classes can be turned aside or controlled by the chiefs of parties. United, as in the present case, we can succeed without their support, but they can do nothing without ours. Our movement is not directed for the purpose of interfering with the chiefs of parties. If they shall think fit to place themselves at its head, we will go forward, as we have hitherto done, with all the power and energy which our principles, and our union, and the sympathies of the enlightened portion of our fellow-countrymen secure to us; but if they shall place themselves in our way to obstruct our progress, they need not be surprised if they are either trampled on in our progress or thrown aside, that we may be enabled to proceed in our onward course.”

After the meeting Mr. McLaren at once wrote Mr. Macaulay:—“You will see from the report in the *Scotsman* of to-day (11th March 1843) that I have made a very easy path for you to go forward, and that to go backward is impossible. In fact, every one expects you will go forward, and that there can be no doubt about it.” But Macaulay refused to say he would go forward. He was irritated at the pressure to which he was subjected, and refused to be converted to belief in the practicability of the reform demanded by the League in the then existing state of public opinion. He replied by return of post:—

ALBANY, LONDON, *March 13, 1843.*

MY DEAR SIR,—I do not at all complain of your speech, but I do not agree with it. You have not touched my proposition that a perfectly free trade in corn is unattainable, and therefore you have in my opinion done nothing.

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Mr. Macaulay urged to go forward.

Mr. Macaulay's irritation.

1843

My facts you acknowledge. You own that we have against us the majority of the people told by the head, the majority of the 800,000 electors, in other words, of the middle class, and, lastly, a very large majority of the rich, the great, and the chiefs of the parties. Then you attack all these majorities in turn. You show that each has its faults and weaknesses, and you give instances in which each has been overpowered. You attack the multitude in the language of an aristocrat, and the rich in the language of a democrat. The people are not to be regarded because they are stupid. The great are not to be regarded because they are oppressors.

My answer is this. I know that there have been instances in which numerical majorities have been forced to yield to the upper and middle classes. The refusal of the Charter is an instance. There have been instances in which the majority of the middle and lower classes have been forced to yield to the firm union of all the chiefs of parties, as in the case of the Catholic Bill. There have been instances in which the upper class has been forced to yield to the majority of the middle class. Witness the Reform Bill. But my assertion, admitted, I think, by yourself, is this, that on the subject of the Corn-laws you have against you a majority of all the three classes, low, middle, and high. Now show me an instance of a measure carried against such an opposition, and you will have shaken my argument. But this I may safely defy you to do.

One word about the chiefs of parties. Perhaps it was unwise in me to mention them in my letter. I might have guessed that an Anti-Corn-Law Association would not feel the force of that argument. But people who know anything of the way in which this country is really governed know that there is in fact a certain small class of men who have a real veto on all public measures which they agree to oppose. There must be a Government. You cannot make a Government out of men without weight, talents, knowledge, or experience; and if you did, they would soon make themselves and everything that they took up odious and ridiculous. It is quite impossible that a Ministry composed of such men as Dr. Browning, Colonel Thompson, and Mr. Wil-

liams of Coventry can ever hold power. It would expose itself to universal contempt within three days. Try to make a list of a Cabinet of Total and Immediate Repealers. I will engage that you will yourself burst out a-laughing at it. Now, that the Corn-laws will not be repealed till a Ministry takes the matter up, you will, I suppose, admit. You must also admit that among the supporters of immediate and total repeal there is not one whom you would not be surprised to see even in the second rank of a Ministry. It is very easy to declaim about throwing the chiefs of parties aside or trampling them down, but not so easy to understand how affairs are to be managed with Mr. Wallace<sup>1</sup> at the Colonial Office, Mr. Ewart<sup>2</sup> at the Foreign Office, and Mr. Hume<sup>3</sup> made First Commissioner of the Treasury, and sent to lead the House of Lords. Nothing except an outbreak like that which overthrew the old monarchy and aristocracy of France can produce such an effect. I conceive, therefore, that the unanimous declaration of the chiefs of parties against total and immediate repeal is a very grave circumstance, and deserves much more consideration than it has received from you.

I have not time to proceed. I can say nothing about Villiers' motion, for he himself seems to know neither what he shall move nor when.—Yours very truly,

T. B. MACAULAY.

Notwithstanding this letter, Macaulay was really in closer agreement with the principles of the League than he was willing to admit. The debate on Villiers' motion took place in May, and Mr. Bright, who was then Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's chief London correspondent, was able to report, "Macaulay has yielded to your pressure." But he yielded ungracefully. He complained very bitterly of the pressure put upon him by Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, and he actively co-operated

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<sup>1</sup> Member for Greenock.

<sup>2</sup> Member for Dumfries Burghs.

<sup>3</sup> Member for Montrose Burghs.

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with the Whig party in the hope of checking the growing power of the League. His personal relations with the English leaders of the movement also became increasingly unfriendly, and the Council of the League began to perceive it would be necessary to treat him not as a friend, but as an opponent. In December 1843 Mr. Bright wrote Mr. McLaren: "As to Macaulay, he is the chief of Whig 'half-way-house men.' He is a waiter not on Providence, but on the fortunes of the party to which he has tied himself. You must cure him. The constituency pill is the only medicine for his complaint. Macaulay hates us cordially, and you will have to choose between him and our principle. Lord John, it is said, is balancing, and I should not be surprised at his taking another step. There is some scheme on foot to swamp us with a fixed duty; some coalition of aristocratic parties to accomplish this is talked of. Our Covent Garden meeting gave it a great blow. . . . The papers are consternated; 'the great fact' grows greater hourly; and if we remain true to each other and our great principle, our triumph is not far off. Evidently the present law is given up by all parties, and it remains for us to extinguish all hope of a compromise." In the following month he wrote: "I am glad Macaulay is becoming unpopular with you. He has no claim to be a representative of *the people*. Office has raised him out of his senses and good feeling. The late meetings and all your printing must have saturated the Scotch mind with Free Trade doctrines. Next election will help us with you, I feel certain. . . . The M.P.'s begin to fear us greatly; and I suspect Cobden and I will be no great favourites with many of them in the House." As to Mr. McLaren's own relations to Macaulay, and the course he should follow in taking public action against him because of his practical

Mr.  
Bright's  
advice.

unfaithfulness to the cause, Mr. Bright proffered his advice as follows:—

“I see the course the *Scotsman* has taken. The only valid excuse for him is that your Members have either already voted with Villiers or intend to do so on the next occasion. Fox Maule is annoyed at your disturbance of Macaulay and Craig—so, of course, are all the Whigs. Some of them do you the injustice of charging you with a wish to get into Parliament by turning one of your present Members out. Of course, to damage an opponent is with them as good a thing as to prove his cause bad. You will not regard this, especially seeing how much the proof in your favour preponderates.

“Now, I take it that you don’t want to dislodge Macaulay and Craig *per se*, but to make them serve you well, and in the public meeting it will be desirable to keep out any animus against them, and to show a steady resolve that whoever sits for Edinburgh must give a hearty support to Free Trade. I think you may manage so as to secure your object without driving the more timid of your party away. Put it this way: Macaulay is and must be a Free Trader in sentiment; he was a member of the late, and hopes to be of the next Government; he is Member for Edinburgh, and ought to serve you. Which is his first duty? Certainly to his own opinions and to his constituents. A good argument for your cause may be had thus: The small boroughs are in fetters and can’t speak out—the counties are in the hands of landlords; from Edinburgh, then, with its free constituency, a powerful and steady and uncompromising expression of opinion should go forth. You can’t sacrifice a great principle from personal feelings to a particular man. If the case applied to some other borough, would the *Scotsman* take the same course? The case requires able management, and in no other hands should I feel it so safe as in yours.—Ever truly your friend,

“JOHN BRIGHT.”

Mr. McLaren’s view of the political situation was in complete agreement with Mr. Bright’s, and quite different from

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Dissatisfac-  
tion with  
the expedi-  
ency  
policy.

Mr. Macaulay's. He thought the times were ripe for Free Trade legislation, and held the Member's irresolution a hindrance to the accomplishment of the desired reforms. He was now not at all disposed to take a lenient view of Macaulay's conduct. He knew well that the Member was giving the Free Trade party among his constituents little encouragement, even denying them his countenance at the great meetings addressed by Cobden, Bright, Colonel Thompson, and others, and sending, in answer to an invitation to attend the Music Hall demonstration (January 1844), a note of declinature so curt that it elicited sounds of disapprobation from an audience composed of constituents who had hitherto been proud of their distinguished representative.

At a meeting of the Anti-Corn-Law Association held in Edinburgh on 22nd April 1844, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren said they were now prepared to tell their Members that unless they not only voted for Mr. Villiers' motion, but were prepared to give it a cordial and welcome support, the constituency must look out for other Members when their term of office expired. He thought Mr. Gibson-Craig was with them already, and he hoped, or at least he wished, that Mr. Macaulay would take the same course. "If he did not, their duty was to do the thing that was right, leaving him to do what he thought right. . . . With regard to what had been said by Bailie Gray as to Mr. Macaulay being fettered by his party, he thought that he (Bailie Gray) had hit the nail on the head. If Mr. Macaulay had not been a member of the late Government, and if he did not expect to be a member of the next, he would now have been found fighting in the foremost ranks of Corn-law repeal; and this should be a lesson to them that, in looking to fill their Members' seats in case of a general election, they should

neither look to men who were in place nor to those who were expecting places.”

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The Association unanimously passed a resolution expressing a hope that the city's representatives would support the immediate and entire abolition of all duties on the importation of foreign corn; and in particular, that they would be prepared to give their cordial and unqualified support to Mr. Villiers' motion for the immediate and entire abolition of these duties. By an overwhelming majority another resolution was carried recommending the timely selection of candidates for next general election holding views on the question of Free Trade in unison with the opinions of the great body of the electors.

Pressure of  
the elec-  
tors.

The timely and effective action of the Edinburgh Association afforded the Council of the League great satisfaction. Mr. Bright wrote: "I rejoice at the result. Such a decisive demonstration cannot fail to have a powerful influence on the opinions and policy of the Whig party. They are an infatuated and imbecile party, and are every day working their own destruction. After all, I have no expectation Macaulay will resign. You may as well be prepared with a candidate in case he should try resigning and stand again to prove his hold on your electoral body. . . . I expect the Whigs would be consternated somewhat, for your city is regarded as their stronghold; but everywhere with a leader of tact and courage the mass of the voters are in favour of thoroughgoing principles." In another letter Mr. Bright remarked: "I know exactly what the lawyers (the Parliament House supporters of Mr. Macaulay) mean, but I can't see how you can act otherwise. It is no use holding up true principles unless we are prepared to urge the representatives to adopt them. And then Macaulay's refusal is doubtless caused by his connection with

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the Whigs, and the League is not a pleasant subject with them. . . . I hope the effect of your proceedings will be salutary upon waverers in other quarters."

Mr. Mac-  
aulay in-  
censed.

Mr. Macaulay was greatly incensed. On 1st May 1844 he wrote a long letter in reply to the resolutions of the Association. In the first place he sought to establish the identity of his views with those of the Anti-Corn-Law Association. He wished, he said, to see the Corn-laws totally repealed, and he should vote in 1844, as he did in 1843, for Mr. Villiers' motion. "Of what do you complain?" he asked. "Of my opinions respecting Free Trade? They are your own. Of my votes? They have been such as you requested me and are now requesting me to give. In what division on the Corn-laws have I been in a different lobby from Mr. Villiers and Mr. Cobden? I remember none. My crime is simply this, that I have recommended union; that I have refused to concur in a policy which tends to divide against itself a force already too weak. As I have acted I will continue to act. When a motion is made for the total repeal of the Corn-laws, I think it right to mark my opinion by my vote. But I am certain that the total repeal will never take place till the views of a large part of the agricultural population have undergone a great change, and I apprehend that such a change in the views of such a population must be gradual." In short, he did not think the country ripe for a reform which he desired, and while in agreement with the Anti-Corn-Law Leaguers on the question of political economy, he was against them on the question of practical politics. "It is easy," he proceeded, "for the members of any Anti-Corn-Law League to deceive themselves about their strength. They are generally inhabitants of great towns. Everybody with whom they converse is for Free Trade. If they attend a meeting

on the subject of the Corn-laws, they see every hand held up for total and immediate repeal. No supporter of the sliding scale, no supporter of a fixed duty, can obtain a hearing. It is not strange that even people so intelligent as my constituents should go home from such meetings with the conviction that the voice of the nation is the voice of the League, and that the good cause is on the point of triumphing. I am certain that you deceive yourselves. The House of Lords is against you almost to a man. But this is the smallest of the obstacles which lie in your way. If the House of Commons were with you, the Lords might find it necessary to yield. But you have against you a great majority of the House of Commons. If the constituent body were with you, you might hope to procure at the next election a House of Commons favourable to your views. But you have against you, I grieve to say, a majority of the constituent body."

But retaliation on the League was not the chief motive of Mr. Macaulay's elaborate epistle. Looking on Mr. McLaren as the mainspring of that organisation in Edinburgh, he determined, if possible, to crush his political influence; to hold him up to public reprobation as the utterer of "such counsels" as "have often brought gain to the demagogue who gives them," but "have never brought anything but disaster to the ignorant whom they have misled." Assuredly Mr. Macaulay must have been very angry when he penned the concluding paragraph, which too obviously recalls the prayer beginning, "I thank Thee, O Lord, that I am not as other men." "I see that one gentleman who harangued the late meeting favoured his hearers with new definitions of Toryism, of Liberalism, and of hypocrisy. According to this teacher of politics and morals, a Member of Parliament who does not submissively conform to the

Attack on  
Mr. McLa-  
ren.

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voice of his constituents is essentially a Tory, and if he calls himself a Liberal, is guilty of adding hypocrisy to Toryism. My notions of right and wrong have been learned in a different school. I have been in the habit of considering a man who injured his country in order to curry favour with his constituents, not as a Liberal, but as a knave. I do not believe that Edinburgh will ever send to the House of Commons a man abject enough to sit there on such terms; at all events, I will not be that man. If you wish to be so represented, you can have no difficulty in finding an intriguing sycophant every way qualified for the purpose. It will be for you to consider whether your dearest rights can be safely intrusted to the care of one who is destitute of honesty, courage, and self-respect. As for myself, while I continue to be honoured with the confidence of the electors of Edinburgh, I will attempt to show my gratitude not by adulation and obsequiousness, but by manly rectitude; and if they shall be pleased to dismiss me, I trust that though I may lose their suffrages I shall retain their esteem."

This letter did much to forfeit for Mr. Macaulay the suffrages and esteem of his constituents. It did no harm to Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren. In the Association Mr. Macaulay's friends did not resist a motion containing a declaration that there was much in his letter of which they disapproved; and amid enthusiastic applause another resolution was unanimously carried expressing thanks to Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, and assuring him of "the high confidence of the meeting in his sincere and disinterested devotedness to the interests of the Association, gratitude for his unwearied exertions in the cause of Free Trade, and especially for his valuable services in twice superintending the collection of the contributions to the Anti-Corn-Law League, in which he gratuitously performed an immense amount of labour."

Effect of  
Mr. Mac-  
aulay's  
letter.

Mr. R. R. Blyth, in seconding this resolution, which was proposed by Mr. Archibald Thomson, interpreted it as "a practical refutation of the groundless insinuations contained in Mr. Macaulay's letter." On this episode the Edinburgh Whig party had the good sense to preserve a discreet silence. Mr. Prentice, editor of the *Manchester Times*, who happened to be present at the meeting, spontaneously certified that Mr. McLaren was considered by the Council of the League the most efficient auxiliary they had in the country; and the *Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle*, in commenting on the proceedings, lamented Mr. Macaulay's letter as the "betrayal of a pettiness unworthy of his high character;" adding, "The plain insinuation of sinister motives which he throws out against a citizen not more remarkable for intellectual eminence than for inflexible integrity, and more distinguished for both endowments than any other individual it would be easy to name, is contemptible in the last degree. Mr. Macaulay has mistaken his man."

If Mr. Macaulay forgot for the moment the ability as well as the character of the opponent against whom he directed his wrathful explosion, he was quickly reminded of both. Mr. McLaren answered for himself, and with powerful effect. He did not make use of offensive epithets, but he did not conceal the scorn he felt for the scorn of his antagonist. He expressed his abhorrence for the sentiment imputed to him by Mr. Macaulay, that Members are bound to vote against their conscientious convictions, even to the injury of their country, to please their constituents, and challenged the production of anything he had said to justify the imputation to him of such a plea. He showed that Mr. Macaulay was not by any means the immaculate Corn-law abolitionist and supporter of the League he was ever anxious to make his constituents believe

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him to be. Out of his own mouth he condemned him, appealing to the declaration in favour of a duty for revenue contained in the letters written to Mr. Wigham in answer to the attempt, now studiously and carefully made, to convey the impression that he had never expressed opinions in favour of any duty or revenue, and that he had always opposed a fixed duty for protection. Nay, in that letter to Mr. Wigham, Mr. Macaulay had distinctly refused to promise to apply the principles which he now told the Association he had always supported, for he had explicitly and emphatically declared, "I will not pledge myself to support total and immediate repeal, and I am perfectly ready to take the consequences." Further, in the presence of Mr. Moncreiff, of Mr. Craufurd (afterwards Lord Ardmillan), and other Parliament House political chiefs, he quoted the testimony of Mr. Macaulay's most devoted adherents against himself. "Who," he asked, are the parties that argued incessantly that Mr. Macaulay was conscientiously opposed to a total and immediate repeal, and in favour of a small duty either for revenue or protection?" He answered, "They were Mr. Macaulay's own friends and supporters;" and pointing to chapter and verse in support of this answer, he did not meet a single denial. He repeated and justified his former contention that it was not scruple of conscience, but party connection, that made Mr. Macaulay oppose the voice of the great body of his constituents when he refused to present their petition in favour of total and immediate repeal, and spoke against Mr. Villiers' motion in February 1842; that "any man who might thus set the opinions of his constituents at defiance acted on Tory principles, and, if a professed Liberal, only added practical hypocrisy to Toryism;" and that if party or other considerations prevented him or any other man similarly situated from truly representing the sentiments of those

who elected him on the great public question of the day, justice and fairness required that he should resign his seat. In other words, he held that the Member of Parliament is chosen to advance the interests of his constituents and not his own, and that if personal interest or party connection require him to misrepresent the known views of his constituents, as Mr. Macaulay confessedly had done in his speech against Mr. Villiers' motion in 1842, he should resign his seat. In that speech Mr. Macaulay had objected to Mr. Villiers' motion because it contained the word *now*. "He had no objections, I daresay," Mr. McLaren continued, "to these laws being abolished next century, or after he had ceased to be Member for Edinburgh, or at any other time; but as to their being abolished *now*, he would have nothing to do with any such measure. And yet this is the man who wishes to persuade us that he has always held our opinions, and was always to be found in the same lobby with Messrs. Cobden and Villiers." Mr. Macaulay practically adopted as "an unanswerable argument" the stale fallacy of the country squires, that land would be thrown out of cultivation and that farmers would have to become shopkeepers if the Corn-laws were abolished. For he had said in his 1842 speech, "I am not disposed to take away at once all protection from the English farmer. I think that time should be allowed to enable him to transfer his capital from one branch of industry to another; and therefore I consider *now* in the honourable Member for Wolverhampton's motion objectionable;" and in 1843 he had written a letter affirming that his views were unchanged, and that he could give no pledge regarding future votes.

Nearly eighteen months previously Mr. McLaren had examined and satisfactorily answered this plea for delay on the ground of consideration for the farmer. At one of the

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meetings addressed by Mr. Bright and Mr. Cobden in Edinburgh in January 1843, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren showed that the interests of the farmers were far more likely to be injured than protected by a process of gradual abolition:—

“I have spoken with many farmers, and I know the opinion of others; and though they are certainly not all in favour of the entire abolition of the Corn-laws, I know of none who, if these laws were to be abolished at any rate, would not much rather that the question should be settled at once; and they gave good reasons for this opinion. If a fixed duty were once agreed to, on the plan of diminishing one shilling every year, when the farmer went to pay his rent and sought an abatement, his landlord would tell him, ‘Oh, the duty’s only reduced a shilling, and you have had an excellent crop; you have sustained no loss by the change; it is, therefore, not necessary for me to give you any abatement.’ When he went back next year, although he had not a good crop, the landlord would have some other reason for withholding redress. He would perhaps say, ‘Corn is now fetching a high price, although the quantity is not great; you are doing very well; I can give you nothing.’ Another year he would refer to the high price of cattle, or sheep, or wool, as a reason for not listening to the farmer’s claim. In short, he would always have some reason for not letting down the rent. (Cries of ‘Hear, hear.’) This is certainly the opinion of many farmers regarding the gradual abolition of the Corn-laws. In place of being in favour of the farmers—the farmers themselves being judges—the gradual abolition plan is of all plans the worst, and the one they most hate.”

To his mind, therefore, the plea in which Mr. Macaulay sought justification for inaction was an exploded fallacy.

Mr. Macaulay naturally showed no abatement of resentment after the discussion in the Association, and the ready sympathy of the political friends who shared his mortification made him feel and act as a deeply wronged man.

Mr. Bright reported, “The Whigs are more savage than

The Whig  
party  
offended.

ever against us. Fox Maule will not second Villiers' motion on account of the badgering—'bullying,' he calls it—to which Macaulay has been subjected." When Mr. Villiers' motion was brought before the House in June, both the Members voted for it, but Mr. Macaulay and his friends, in their anxiety to show they considered themselves ill-used, wronged themselves. Mr. Bright in his note to Mr. McLaren graphically described the relations of the Whig leaders to the League, and the scene in the House during the debate. "Doubtless the Whigs hate us. Nobody denies it. And yet what can be done that is not done? Most of their hatred is laid to the charge of the Leaguers of Edinburgh, because they bothered Craig and Macaulay; and yet I can see no wrong you did to goad on the shufflers. Macaulay came into the House the second night of the Corn-Law debate and lay down on a bench up in the gallery, and slept or appeared to sleep there I believe for hours. The front Opposition bench was wholly unoccupied during the whole night; and the whole question was treated by the Whigs, and by Macaulay among the rest, with the utmost contempt; and doubtless his vote was only secured by your compulsion."

Apart from the personal interests and questions involved in the controversy between Mr. Macaulay and the Edinburgh Leaguers, Mr. McLaren enunciated in the speech from which we have already quoted the principles of Independent Liberalism with which he was ever afterwards identified, and which the political party in Edinburgh and Scotland that accepted his leadership heartily endorsed. The Whig doctrine that the political principle professed in election addresses, and accepted by the electors, could be held in abeyance for an indefinite period in the supposed interests of the party, or at the bidding of a small section of it, he repudiated

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as fatal to all reform, and as practically Toryism plus hypocrisy. He maintained that Liberal Members of Parliament were bound to be in earnest about the business which they were elected to advance, and were faithless to the cause of Reform when they sought excuses for postponement instead of pressing for legislative settlement at the earliest possible moment. He saw that if all Corn-Law abolitionists in principle were like Mr. Macaulay—afraid to proceed to legislation lest they should temporarily injure a privileged class, or encounter opposition in the House of Lords, or endanger the possession of office by their party—the work of the League would never be accomplished. And so with all other reforms. Happily the League was composed of men of strong political fibre and great political prescience. They continued their work with ever-increasing firmness of purpose and rapidly growing public approval; and the day of the great reform, of which in 1844 the Whig orator could only dimly discern the glimmering of the dawn, broke in fullest splendour within the brief period of two years. In 1846, with the consent and assistance of both parties, and in the certain conviction that the change would be to the advantage not merely of the general community, but also of the agricultural classes hitherto privileged, the Corn-laws were totally repealed. Parliament and the nation confirmed the verdict given by the Edinburgh Anti-Corn-Law Association against Mr. Macaulay.

The verdict of the nation.

Attacks by the *Scotsman*.

So far as regards personal consequences, the speech in the Anti-Corn-Law Association meeting proved disastrous to Mr. Macaulay, while it separated Mr. McLaren definitely and finally from his old newspaper friend the *Scotsman*. It clearly and distinctly laid down the grounds on which three years afterwards Mr. Macaulay was condemned and rejected by the electors of Edinburgh. It showed that not only

had the right hon. gentleman rendered equivocal service to the cause of Free Trade, but that he was in conflict with his constituents on the subjects of Concurrent Endowment and Parliamentary Reform; that he was in favour of the endowment of Maynooth, and unfriendly to an extension of the suffrage; and in 1847 the Independent Liberals of the city ousted the Whig statesman from the representation, notwithstanding the charm of his oratory and his world-wide reputation as a man of letters.

The penalty paid by Mr. McLaren for his action was his breach with the *Scotsman*. In 1844, after three successive articles had been published containing violent attacks on the Anti-Corn-Law Association and its leading member on account of their treatment of Mr. Macaulay, Mr. McLaren, recognising that "all future co-operation between us in the public questions in which we had previously acted together" was now impossible, undertook his own defence. The tone of his letter, dated 14th May 1844, was courteous and temperate, but its argument was cogent and crushing. It was quite as masterly a performance as the speech on Mr. Macaulay's letter, which letter the journalistic critic charged him with having perverted and distorted. It maintained with fresh force the points against Mr. Macaulay elaborated in the speech, and passing from the defensive to the offensive, it proved to demonstration that the real perverter and distorter of the letter was Mr. Macaulay's newspaper apologist. So confident, and justly confident, was Mr. McLaren in the impregnability of his position, that he wrote to the editor:—

"I will agree to refer the matter to any six men in the city who have formed no opinion on either side of the question, allowing you to select them all; and if any one of the six shall take your view of the question, and think that my interpretation of

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the passage is not a fair and candid one, and that yours is not more justly chargeable with being a 'perversion' of its true meaning than mine is, I shall never complain of your remarks, or again use the same argument against Mr. Macaulay, even although the other five should all give a decision in my favour."

This offer was not accepted, and Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's interpretation and argument triumphantly held the field against all its adversaries, legal, parliamentary and journalistic.

A media-  
tor.

Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren did not enter into this controversy without great and frequent searchings of heart, and this disposition towards self-examination was quickened by the faithful words of a friend. Mr. George Combe, the famous phrenologist and essayist, cherished a sincere regard both for Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, the public-spirited citizen, and Mr. Charles Maclaren, the high-minded editor of the *Scotsman*; and as a friend of both, who nevertheless kept himself outside the sphere of political controversy, he observed with genuine concern the party separation, if not the personal alienation, that controversy was producing. On 19th August 1844 he sent Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren a copy of his "Notes on America," saying, "I beg as a favour to present you with one, as I have no other means of showing the high respect I entertain for your valuable exertions for the good of the human kind in every department open to your zeal." This gift must have been acknowledged by return of post in a manner which enabled Mr. Combe to interpose a word of warning and counsel as a mediator, and he at once seized his opportunity:—

SOUTH CLERMISTON, CORSTORPHINE,  
August 20, 1844.

MY DEAR SIR,—I regret exceedingly to hear that there is any misunderstanding, however slight, between you and Mr. Charles Maclaren. You have often been coupled together as ornaments to the name, and as the ablest advocates of Liberal principles in

Edinburgh, and should continue united. I am glad to learn that personally you continue to be so, and hope ere long every cause of difference may be removed. . . .

I have read your article in answer to Sheriff Alison with the greatest interest and instruction. It is irresistible, and should be widely diffused. I confess, however, that it is not improved in my eyes by a certain tone of self-esteem and combativeness that occasionally leaks out in it; but I know how extremely difficult it is to avoid this in a controversy in which one is in dead earnest and full of the conviction of being in the right. I have had a world of literary controversies in my day, and in my early career fell into that tone irresistibly. But one effect of phrenology was to convince me that the direct effect of these faculties was to rouse the same faculties in the opposite party into corresponding activity, and thereby to increase the obstacles to my making an impression on their judgment and consciences. I therefore strove to suppress these, and to rely on reason, justice, and benevolence, and in so far as I have proceeded in this attempt, I have had occasion to know that I have in such instances best promoted my object. You know Sir William Hamilton's power and temper as a controversialist. When he was waging war against me with all the vigour of his intellect and the utmost bitterness of his destructiveness, and I was doing my best to reply to him, we sent our letters to each other amicably before publication; and on one occasion he willingly cancelled a portion of one, when I informed him that if he retained and printed it, I could no longer treat him as a friend. It is an excellent rule in controversy never to *pen* what you would not *say* to your opponent if you met him face to face before an impartial public. Excuse me for introducing these remarks; some expressions in your own letter led to them; and I entertain so high an estimate of your talents, activity, and attainments, that I should rejoice to see every particle of alloy withdrawn from the sterling metal of your composition. One of Mr. Macaulay's letters was disfigured, in my judgment, by a tone of self-esteem.

GEORGE COMBE.

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Mr. McLaren acknowledged this letter in a grateful and friendly spirit, and Mr. Combe again wrote on the day following:—

“ . . . When I get my house in order, I shall request the pleasure of your spending an evening with us, in order to discuss *viva voce* the questions how far one is justified in supporting a party or views which coincide to a certain extent with one's own, although not entirely, and also how far one is justified in a publication in withholding part of what one believes to be truth, but for which the public mind is obviously not prepared. On these points some of my best and wisest friends differ in opinion, and I acknowledge that I have never been able to see my way satisfactorily through them. My *inclination* is to act on principle and speak out truth, come what may, believing that the world is arranged in harmony with truth and principle *in the long run*. But then so many strong reasons are advanced to show that this is *not the best way of gaining the co-operation and conviction of other men*, without which nothing practical can be accomplished, that my reflective judgment differs from my inclination.

“I am quite prepared to believe that it will cost you no difficulty to lay aside every sort of sneering and contemptuous tone, and the reason why I took the liberty to allude to it was the conviction that it tended to diminish the admirable effect which your clear and vigorous intellect would produce without it. You make ‘a person feel his misdeeds’ most effectually when you place him out-and-out in the wrong, as you have done with Mr. Alison. The rest is a manifestation of your own conscious superiority in having been able to do this, and disposes not only the offender, but readers in general, to *resist* rather than yield to your argument, because they feel that, in doing the latter, they are also yielding to your superiority. Excuse me, my dear sir, for expounding the workings of the faculties in this manner; but you know that I have made the study of mind my hobby, and have also some practical experience in controversy. . . .

“If you will excuse my using phrenological language, I will add that without a good natural endowment of the organs and faculties of combativeness and self-esteem you *could not have accomplished* what you have done. Great moral courage was necessary to enable you, in so many instances, to take your stand against prejudices, ‘principalities and powers,’ and these faculties give you boldness and self-reliance. But at that point their moral effect terminates. We all feel the great advantages which the moral tone gives to the communications of the excellent members of the Society of Friends who write in political controversy ; and I regard this as the result of the habitual restraint under which they keep their propensities.”

Mr. Combe’s intervention was of a kind which obviously could not, as it did not, arrest the political controversy, or even smooth the way to political reconciliation. But Mr. McLaren, willing to believe that “friendship by sweet reproof is shown,” gratefully accepted the advice given in affection, as harmonising with the promptings of his own conscience ; and in this, as in all other controversies, strove to keep personal feeling under restraint, and to avoid indulgence in personal recrimination.

After reading the above letters from Mr. Combe, Mrs. McLaren writes to a friend :—

“I have been deeply interested in reading the valuable and beautiful letters written to my husband by his friend George Combe, as far back as 1844. I send you a copy of both. You will see how gently he reproves him for what I used to call, in stronger words, the rather sledge-hammer way in which he sometimes dealt with an opponent. You will notice Mr. Combe’s phrenological use of the organs of *self-esteem* and combativeness, and that he says without these qualities Mr. McLaren could not have accomplished what he has done. ‘Great moral courage,’ he says, ‘was necessary to enable you, in so many instances, to take your stand against prejudices, principalities and powers, and those faculties gave you boldness and self-reliance.’

“Now I believe, phrenologically speaking, my husband was deficient in self-esteem *per se*, which in its excess leads to arrogance and pride.

“I remember in 1864, when we were residing at Clifton, we visited a photographer there who is quite a character—a phrenologist and fond of mental philosophy. He looked earnestly at my husband, and turning to me said, ‘I do not know the gentleman who is with you, but I am much struck with his head. Do you think he would allow me to examine it?’ After he had done so, the photographer said, ‘It is a remarkable head; the love of justice dominates every organ of the mind, whilst the phrenological organ of self-esteem is greatly deficient; but his great conscientiousness and combativeness and reverence for what is right compensate for this, and will give courage for moral action which most men would think the result of self-esteem. He could give no quarter where he thought there was injustice, and if he were a judge, I would not like to appear before him unless I had truth on my side.’

“A professional phrenologist once told him the same thing. It accounted for what I had frequently remarked in my husband’s character—a shyness which, he often told me, he always had to struggle against. This caused him to have so little personal ambition, and often prevented him from doing things which might have been of advantage to himself and his family. . . . He espoused no principle or cause rashly. He was either firmly persuaded of its moral rectitude or he had tested its justice by the uncompromising testimony of facts and figures; and the strongest feature of his character, the basis of his strength, lay in his power courageously, pertinaciously, or, as some might call it, dogmatically to hold his ground; and in his earnest combat for what he believed to be the truth, he no doubt sometimes appeared to think as little of the feelings of his opponent as he did of his own popularity.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *THE LORD PROVOSTSHIP.*

BEFORE his retirement from the Town Council in 1839 Mr. McLaren had been marked by public though informal selection as a future Lord Provost, and if self-exaltation on the easiest terms had been the object of his ambition, he could have won his way to the civic chair. But he ignored conciliatory arts as a means of self-advancement; and out of office he was as unsparing in his exposure of, and as uncompromising in his resistance to wrong-doing as when, a chosen representative of the people, under obligation to be faithful to their interests, he contended for administrative purity and efficiency. Much more sensitively affectionate in his nature than was generally supposed, the severance of friendships cost him pain keener far than the virulent opposition of monopolists or the cruel misrepresentation of baffled critics. But private friendships as well as personal interests he sacrificed at the call of public duty. As years and experience multiplied, and as his character developed and strengthened, he felt with increasing force that he must be faithful to his convictions, whatever might be the cost. He had within him the spirit of the true reformer: "I am in the place where I am demanded of conscience to speak the truth; therefore the truth I speak—impugn it who so list."

1842

A faithful  
reformer.

To Mr. McLaren, thus inspired with devotion to the

1842

public service, retirement from the Council brought little relief from public work. Over the proceedings of the Corporation more especially he kept a vigilant eye, and he continued to stand out prominently before his fellow-citizens as the best-informed man with respect to municipal affairs in their midst. It may be said without exaggeration that at every recurring election about this time the thoughts of the ratepayers, and more especially of the most public-spirited of the citizens, turned to the ex-Treasurer, and many attempts were made to induce him to re-enter the Council. In 1842 he received the following requisition:—

*September 29, 1842.*

DEAR SIR,—We, the undersigned members of the Town Council, believing that your services would be of incalculable benefit to the community were you returned as a member to that board, earnestly entreat you to allow your name to be mentioned at the ensuing election. Satisfied that any constituency will be proud to return you as one of its representatives, we are, dear sir, yours very truly,

(Signed)	ARCHD. GEIKIE, Jun.
”	AD. BLACK.
”	JAS. GRAY.
”	D. J. THOMSON.
”	ANDW. WILKIE.
”	ANDW. DODDS.
”	JOHN DUNCAN.
”	JOHN ROBERTSON.
”	JOHN RICHARDSON.

Mr. Geikie accompanied the requisition with the following note:—

MY DEAR SIR,—I met one of the committee of the first ward this morning, who, in speaking of the difficulty of obtaining good men to represent the different wards, said that if you would only consent to your name being mentioned, the difficulty would dis-

Requisi-  
tions.

appear, as in such case able and excellent individuals would cheerfully come forward; that possibly were a number of the members of Council to appeal to you, you might reconsider your expressed resolution. The remark struck me at the time, and having a little spare time this forenoon, I saw the several Councillors and Magistrates whose names are in the annexed paper. Had time allowed, I believe I could have obtained a great many more, and thereby have convinced you how much your valuable co-operation is desired. My anxiety must be my apology for intruding the matter on you. But no one who watches the progress of events, and witnesses the gradual declension of the Council, ought to hesitate in doing what he can to remedy the evil, and by endeavouring to obtain gentlemen of talents and reputation to stay the mischief. Allow me to crave your kindly consideration of the enclosed, and believe me to be, my dear sir, ever truly yours,

ARCHD. GEIKIE, Jun.

NORTH BRIDGE, *Sept.* 29, 1842.

In a previous chapter reference was made to the contest for the Provostship in 1840, when Mr. Black lost his election through the defection of the Moderate Whigs and the active hostility of the Church party. Apparently the election had come to depend on the votes of one or two of the Councillors. When, on the eve of the election-day in November 1840, Mr. Black discovered that Dean of Guild Aitken had yielded to the Church party, he penned a hurried note to Mr. McLaren to this effect: "The game is up. The Dean says he is to vote against me because I am a Voluntary, and am just making way for you as my successor." This conjecture was eventually verified. Mr. Black became Lord Provost on the next occasion when he offered his services to the city, and after an interval was succeeded in the civic chair by Mr. McLaren. So early as the year 1843, friends of Mr. McLaren, who desired his assistance in the business of the Town Council, sought

1842  
 to strengthen their appeals to him for his return to the Council by promises of the Lord Provostship. In 1843 he mentioned the subject to his friend Mr. Bright, and also explained the difficulties in the way, the chief of which seemed to have been dislike of the pomp and circumstance attendant on the office of chief magistrate of the capital of Scotland. Mr. Bright, not then his brother-in-law, but a warm admirer of his character and worth, replied in a happy, playful letter, indicative of the personal gratification which the elevation of the most active and valuable ally of the Anti-Corn-Law League in Scotland would afford him.

Mr. Bright  
 on the  
 Lord Pro-  
 vostship.

“You are in the position of a man,” wrote Mr. Bright, “having honours thrust upon him. I don’t suspect you of looking out for a baronetcy, or else the birth of the next prince or princess might give you a chance. I understand the difficulty about the carriage and style, &c. Is it not possible to fill the office without making a fool of oneself? I think a man might make a good Lord Provost and yet maintain only his usual state. The citizens, knowing his circumstances and his usual mode of living, would prefer him, I suspect, as he is, rather than in the trappings and livery which his predecessors had worn.”

A civic  
 tribune.

But neither the entreaties of prominent fellow-citizens nor the gentle coaxings of a friend, who, sensible of his worth, wished for him the honours he had deserved, could induce Mr. Mc Laren at this time to withdraw from the position of independent private citizenship. He did not, however, shirk municipal work, though he determined for the time being to remain outside the Council. He was frequently consulted by its members, and by the higher officers of all the municipal departments; and sometimes, as in 1841, when some disagreement arose as to the constitution of the Royal Infirmary Board of Management, he was able to render

valuable aid to the Corporation. His relation to the citizens was that of a civic tribune, always within call to defend their rights ; and perhaps the most noteworthy and effective municipal service he rendered about this time was his defence of the interests of the ratepayers while the Water Company Bill of 1843 was before Parliament—a commission undertaken at the request of the ratepayers, but at his own expense, the execution of which brought advantage to them, but widened the alienation between himself and the city Members, Mr. Macaulay and Mr. Gibson-Craig, whose “frigid neutrality” he had found “greatly damaging to our cause,” in contrast to the helpfulness of his old friend, Solicitor-General Rutherford, then Member for Leith. At the close of this struggle Mr. McLaren compiled for the “Inhabitants’ Committee” a bulky report, extending to 112 double-column pages, embracing the evidence taken before the Parliamentary Committees, “with numerous notes and documents, including the principal clauses of the new Act.” In a preface Mr. McLaren showed the important advantages gained by the ratepayers in the contest before the Committees, and made special acknowledgment of the “untiring energy and perseverance” of Councillor Macfarlane, his future opponent in his candidature for the Lord Provostship, and of Mr. Morton and other colleagues. From this time the Water Company in all their legislative and other projects had to reckon with Mr. McLaren as an uncompromising guardian of the ratepayers’ interests, and the Council repeatedly availed itself of the special experience and knowledge he had acquired of the relations of the Company to the community, until in 1870 the whole business was transferred to the Corporation to be managed as a municipal undertaking. The official reports of the Corporation, and the newspaper letters he wrote in his contentions with the Company on behalf of the

1843

The Water  
Company.

1843

ratepayers between 1843 and 1870, would form a large volume, which would itself furnish no mean testimony to his industry, disinterestedness, and talent as a citizens' advocate.

The poet  
and the  
statisti-  
cian.

Frequently during his public controversies Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren was gratified and encouraged by spontaneous expressions of appreciation of his services, conveyed sometimes verbally, sometimes by letter. One of these valued communications came to him from Mr. Robert Gilfillan, the author of "Oh! Why Left I my Hame?" and many other popular Scottish songs. The poet wrote, "Accept my grateful thanks for your valuable tractate upon the water question; it is indeed a *Vade mecum*, which no citizen of Edinburgh should be without. Of a surety what Bailie Nicol Jarvie said of Owen in 'Rob Roy' may be said of you: 'He is a man of figures and a man of calculations, and when he speaks o' danger, ruin is no' far off!' The good folks of Auld Reekie owe you *another day at the harvest* for this labour of love."

He likewise gained the respect of many sturdy foes. One of these was the devoted manager of the Water Company, whose measures (in the interest of the ratepayers) Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren had more than once been called to oppose. The Water Company, in his view, were under a statutory obligation to increase the supply of water concurrently with the extension of the city; but the Company naturally preferred to increase its dividends and to put the inhabitants on short allowance of water. Eventually the ratepayers obtained from Parliament the desired guarantee that the Water Company should purchase and bring into the city certain additional springs and running streams from the Pentland Hills. Mr. Ramsey, the Company's manager, in accordance with the instructions of his directors, sent Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren the share of fees due to him as a parliamentary witness. Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren,

however, politely returned the money; and Mr. Ramsey replied expressing regret, but acknowledging with appreciation the consistency and conscientiousness of his conduct.

But municipal questions were not the only subjects that kept Mr. McLaren in the arena of public conflict and controversy, and the discussion of which kindled against him new hostilities, while it made clearer and stronger his position as a champion of popular freedom and just laws. The Free Trade campaign, of which he was the chief director in Scotland, widened the breach in the ranks of the descendants of the old Reform party, and made still more urgent the separation of Liberals and Whigs which the Annuity-Tax agitation had previously demanded. By this time Mr. McLaren had, through his association with the Central Board of Dissenters, and by innumerable written as well as platform polemics, won recognition as the foremost lay Dissenter in Scotland, while his mastery of all the intricacies of the Annuity-Tax question made his advice and aid essential to the Council in their efforts to effect a settlement, as a necessity for civil peace. In 1851 he was asked by the Town Council to proceed to London to be examined before the Select Committee of the House of Commons, referred to in a previous chapter, which had been appointed on the motion of Sir W. Gibson-Craig, "to consider the operation of the Acts relating to the Annuity-Tax levied in Edinburgh, Canongate, and Montrose," and it was the struggle which then began that compelled Mr. McLaren to re-enter the Council. While he was absent in London, he was, without his knowledge or consent, nominated for the Second Ward, of which he had formerly been one of the representatives, and unwilling to disappoint or discourage his friends on the eve of what he knew would prove an arduous battle, he accepted nomination. It was as a man of war, therefore,

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The  
Annuity-  
Tax.

1851 that he was again summoned to official service in the Corporation; but a man of war against his will, fighting for a righteous settlement of an irritating ecclesiastico-municipal conflict, as a necessity for an ultimate and an enduring peace.

The con-  
test in the  
wards.

Edinburgh perhaps never witnessed a more keenly contested municipal election than that which was fought in October 1851. Public opinion was strangely excited and divided. The disturbing influences of the Free Church Disruption had not yet spent their force; and while in political life they were still weakening the Tory party, as the natural defenders of Church Establishment, they were beginning to react on the disestablished Non-Intrusionists themselves, forcing them to recognise the Liberal tendencies of their own movement, and gradually drawing them into active co-operation with the Dissenters. One of the earliest and most influential pioneers of this approximation in public testimony and policy of the Free Church with the earlier Secession or disestablished communions was the late Mr. David Dickson, who found in the leader of the Dissenting party in Edinburgh the chief centre of attraction, and who about this time entered with Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren into a close friendship, which lasted until his death in 1885.

The late Mr. Francis Brown Douglas, also a leading layman in the Free Church, assisted this transition. These laymen's hearty and active support of Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren largely contributed to the defeat of the policy, then ably and earnestly advocated by Mr. Hugh Miller in the *Witness*, viz., that Free Church electors should vote solely for Free Church candidates. But the force of Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's character also proved a powerful factor operating in the same direction, and compelled the respect and admiration of his most resolute Free Church opponents. Hugh Miller's testimony

as to the manner of man Mr. McLaren was between 1840 and 1851 is highly interesting and suggestive. In two editorial articles, strongly adverse to Mr. McLaren's candidature, the editor of the *Witness* made these two remarkable acknowledgments:—"In several important respects Duncan McLaren is the most remarkable man now in the field. We well remember when, in the year 1840, he was pointed out to us on the High Street of Edinburgh by a prominent member of the Evangelical party, and we looked for the first time, and not without interest, at the large-headed, broad-browed, thoughtful-looking man, whose name had been so familiar to us during the wars of the Voluntary controversy. 'That,' said our companion, 'is the most formidable opponent the Evangelical cause has at the present moment in Scotland. We shall get no measure from the Whigs that does not satisfy him; and the measure that satisfies him will be of no use to us.' It is really highly creditable to the talents and peculiarly *Scotch* pertinacity of Mr. McLaren, that he who, as Carlyle says of Knox, was not one of the nobles of the land, but simply a subject born within the same—he, a retail dealer of woollens in the High Street of Edinburgh, could, through the influence which he exerted on the Whig Ministry as the lay leader of Voluntaryism, do more to thwart and prevent the right settlement of one of the most important questions Scotland ever saw, than profound talent such as that of Chalmers, and high political position such as that of the Marquis of Breadalbane and the Hon. Fox Maule, could do to secure it. He stands in the van of his party as their most energetic and zealous champion. He has struggled long and hard against the assertion of the Establishment principle, and at length sees as his reward the Evangelical portion of them disestablished for ever." The gifted editor of the *Witness* misjudged to some extent Mr. McLaren's

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Hugh  
Miller's  
acknow-  
ledg-  
ments.

relations to the Non-Intrusionist party and struggle, as he failed to comprehend or foresee the true destiny of the Free Church. But the distrustfulness and unfriendliness of his view of the lay leader of the Dissenting party makes his admission and description of Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's powerful influence alike in the ecclesiastical and political sphere all the more noteworthy.

The candidates.

Three candidates for the Lord Provostship were named in the wards—Mr. Grainger, C.E., nominated by the Tories and Churchmen; Mr. Macfarlane, brought forward by the Free Church party, encouraged by a section of the Whigs; and Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, who in the Second Ward was proposed by Mr. Law, who at a subsequent period became Lord Provost, and seconded by Mr. J. Johnstone, of the firm of Messrs. Johnstone & Hunter. All three were eminently deserving of municipal distinction. They all had served in the first reformed Town Council, and while Mr. Grainger had, outside the municipal sphere, attained a high reputation as an engineer, and was able to place at the disposal of the community professional services of a kind of which they at the time stood urgently in need, Mr. Macfarlane had, as already seen, distinguished himself while still in municipal service by the ability and fidelity with which he had defended the rights of the Corporation in connection with the University and the interests of the ratepayers as against the Water Company. Neither of them, however, as regards amount and value of, or capacity for, municipal service, in the words of Mr. James Aytoun (who also had sat in the first reformed Council), could "hold a candle" to Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, and neither of them was so well qualified for the unravelment of the Annuity-Tax complication. Indeed, it was Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's acknowledged special fitness for this work that was the chief animating cause of the bitter

and determined opposition that was offered to his candidature for the civic chair. The election to the Town Council on the occasion was perhaps the most keenly contested of any that had taken place under the £10 franchise qualification. The excitement in the city was great. The question really submitted to the wards was, Shall Duncan M<sup>c</sup>Laren be Lord Provost or not? The answer was in the affirmative. Of the twelve candidates elected, seven were pledged to vote for Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, four for Mr. Grainger, and one for Mr. Macfarlane; and Mr. Grainger only secured his own seat in the Town Council by a majority of one vote over Mr. David Dickson. The gross vote over the city showed 2925 for Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, 2346 for Mr. Grainger, and 457 for Mr. Macfarlane; and the Council recognised the popular verdict. At the first meeting held after the choice of Councillors, Bailie Fyfe proposed, and Mr. Francis Brown Douglas seconded, the election of Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren to the Lord Provost's chair; and on a division this motion was carried by twenty votes against ten for Mr. Grainger. Mr. Macfarlane was not proposed, and at the next meeting his withdrawal from the Council was intimated. Shortly afterwards the Lord Provost's party in the Council was strengthened by the return of Mr. Dickson, Mr. Grainger having also withdrawn.

Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren's success was welcomed throughout Scotland as a great Liberal victory, and it afforded much gratification to many friends in England. Numerous letters of congratulation were received, and among the earliest was one from his political friend, the veteran Reformer, Joseph Hume, who wrote, "I hope the result will be useful to the city and honourable to yourself. Much may be done by a public officer in your high station to influence the current of public events, and although it cannot be concealed that the settlement of the Annuity-Tax question (so long

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the cause of discontent and trouble) is to be the principal object of your ambition, yet I hope the cause of Reform, so essential for the future harmonious working of our Liberal institutions, will not be forgotten." In a subsequent letter Mr. Hume enumerated his reasons for holding the opinion that the question of Church Establishment was one on which no Liberal could consent to a compromise. Mr. Bright wrote, "I am delighted to find that you are elected in a manner so satisfactory and so flattering; it is a good sign of the feeling of the city to yourself and to great public questions."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *THE CIVIC REIGN.*

EDINBURGH did not enjoy the questionable happiness of dull annals during Lord Provost McLaren's civic reign, which extended to the statutory limit of three years. Public life was intensely active; and the reforming zeal of the Chief Magistrate was the mainspring of this activity. The ecclesiastico-political movements connected with the Annuity-Tax struggle and the opposition to the election of Mr. Macaulay, in which Mr. McLaren was recognised as the champion of the Independent and Advanced Liberal party, not only of Edinburgh but of Scotland, have been recorded in previous chapters; and the multiplicity of the details connected with his searching and thorough local administration forbid anything more than a general sketch of his strictly municipal work. Mr. McLaren's exacting conscientiousness developed within him that infinite capacity for taking pains with small things as well as great, which wise men have declared to be true genius; and the minor affairs affecting the business of the city and lying at the root of efficient administration were certainly not neglected during the three years 1851-54. Mr. McLaren was a rigid economist, and he personally practised what he preached. He generally contrived to combine his municipal journeys to London with those which he took for his own business purposes; and to charge his business or

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Municipal  
activity.

True  
genius.

1851  
 private account with the heavier part of the expenses. As a Director of the York, Newcastle, and Berwick Railway (now the North-Eastern), he possessed a free pass over a considerable portion of the line between Edinburgh and London, and this privilege enabled him to still further limit his charges against the municipal exchequer.<sup>1</sup> In these days of lavish political expenditure it is worthy of note that the total amount of personal expenses charged by Mr. McLaren against the Corporation during his three years tenure of the office of Chief Magistrate, notwithstanding his prolonged visits to London, in connection more especially with the Annuity-Tax Bills in the sessions of 1852 and 1853, was only £81, 13s. 3d. As to the general effect of his economical administration, it is sufficient to say that while, according to the *Scotsman* of December 15, 1852, only in one year before Mr. McLaren's accession to office the Council seemed to have paid its way, the balances in the municipal accounts were now restored to the right side.

Reward of  
economy.

Control of  
officials.

Another feature of his administration was his restoration of the powers of control of all the municipal departments from the officials to the Town Council. He insisted that the representatives of the ratepayers should be the masters, and that the paid officials should be the servants. No man was quicker to appreciate independence of judgment or

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. McLaren justified this use of his Director's pass while engaged on municipal or public business by associating directorial duties with these journeys; but he scrupulously refused to take personal advantage from his connection with the Board of Management. On one occasion when he was staying at Harrogate, he was offered free tickets for himself and family to enable them to join the families of other Directors in going to see the Queen and the Royal Family as they travelled over the North-Eastern line. In declining the tickets he replied that he had not been appointed a Director to enable him to take his family journeys for nothing, but to manage the Company's affairs for the benefit of the shareholders.

honesty of opinion, and to listen to the advice of experienced officers when satisfied of their loyalty to the public interest. But he would brook no dictation ; and he claimed from the official that the authority of the Corporation should be regarded as absolute. His unbending fidelity to the public rights in this respect caused him to challenge the conduct of Dr. Glover, the police-surgeon, in communicating with the Board of Health in London, as with a superior department, without the knowledge or sanction of the Council, and in conflict with its drainage policy. This ultimately caused the termination of the offending official's connection with the service of the Corporation. The same sentiment brought Mr. McLaren into collision with Sheriff Jameson and Superintendent Linton as to the right of the Sheriff and the superintendent of police to send the city constables to Kelso at the request of the Duke of Buccleuch, who apprehended a riot, without the sanction of the municipal authorities. In his assertion of the powers of the Police Commissioners and " of the supremacy of the Lord Provost within the city and liberties," as " High Sheriff" and " King's Lieutenant," as well as Chief Magistrate, he was ably assisted by Bailie Fyfe and supported by Councillor Macknight, both of them accomplished lawyers as well as devoted public servants. Even a wakeful and wary Town Clerk may sometimes err ; but a transgression during Mr. McLaren's Lord Provostship was quickly corrected, as is illustrated by the following letter, written in answer to a note from Mr. Sinclair, the Town Clerk, intimating certain verbal amendments on minutes dictated in the Council Chambers :—

EDINBURGH, *January 30, 1854.*

DEAR SIR,—I have received your letter and draft of proposed minute this evening. The minute I have corrected and now return. I do not approve of your suggestion to alter the resolu-

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tion from the form in which it was proposed by Bailie Morrison and adopted by the meeting, after it had been read over several times publicly and handed about for inspection to all who wished to see it. I do not think either the chairman or the clerk of any meeting possesses such a power. For the same reason, I do not approve of altering the form of the motion proposed by Mr. Hill, or the order in which it was taken up in going through the business. I have, therefore, made the minute exactly as the meeting agreed it should stand.—I am, dear sir, yours truly,

D. M<sup>c</sup>LAREN.

John Sinclair, Esq., City Chambers.

The Chief  
Magis-  
trate's  
status.

Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren was also a strenuous upholder of the dignity of his office outside the Council Chamber. In a letter to his wife, dated May 20, 1854, he wrote in reference to a public meeting in favour of education that was to be held: "I yesterday refused to take part in the proceedings, on the ground that, as Lord Panmure is to be chairman, it would be derogatory to my dignity to be present. It was advertised as a public meeting of the inhabitants, and I hold that the Lord Provost and Lord Lieutenant of the city should never be present at such a meeting except in the character of chairman. However, I said that as an *educationalist* I would rather have Lord Panmure as chairman than have the Lord Provost; for if I were there as chairman, it would be misrepresented as being a *Voluntary* meeting, and numbers would absent themselves."

In after years Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren resented the submissiveness of Town Council majorities to the dictum of the Town Clerks that minorities are entitled to meet, and, in defiance of the law as to quorums and of the decisions of the Councils themselves, issue commissions to Established Church elders as municipal representatives in the Established Assembly. While sympathising with the feeling that

prompted refusal to elect representative elders as a protest against the claims and position of the privileged Church, his own view was that an election could be made in the exercise of a civil right without in any way compromising the Anti-Establishment attitude of the Voluntaries and other advocates of Disestablishment. At the first of these appointments made after his elevation to the civic chair, he took part in the proceedings, and supported as the Council's representative elders men who were pledged to vote for the abolition of tests in the Universities; a reform which at this period was being energetically advocated, and in support of which he in the following winter presided at an influential public meeting held in the Queen Street Hall, and addressed, among others, by Professor Maclagan, Drs. Cunningham and Cairns, Sheriff Craufurd (afterwards Lord Ardmillan), and Mr. Adam Black. In the following year he obtained the election of an elder opposed to the Annuity-tax as a colleague to the Anti-University Test representative. As an illustration of his view of the claims of another religious communion, it may here be mentioned, that when, in the spring of 1854, Bishop Terrot of the Scottish Episcopal Church called attention to some damage done to Episcopal property by the fall of a high stone wall in Leith Wynd, and asked that it might be repaired, the Lord Provost objected to entertain a request from any man in Scotland styling himself a bishop, and therefore claiming precedence and pre-eminence over other ministers. He had no desire to interfere with any religious body in the titles they conferred on their ministers, but he was unwilling to give municipal sanction to a designation unacknowledged by law, yet implying a claim to a status higher than that of ministers of other denominations. His views were endorsed by the Council, who, by 16 votes against 8, declined to entertain Dr. Terrot's application. Subsequently, as a Member of

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The representative elder.

Ecclesiastical titles.

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Parliament, he repeated his testimony against the legislation or recognition of assumed titles of superiority. He voted with a small minority against a motion for the repeal of the Ecclesiastical Titles Act of 1851. "I object," he said, "to the thrusting upon a Presbyterian community of sets of men who are to assume titles of superiority over other ministers in Scotland. . . . Such an assumption of superiority in a Presbyterian country where Presbyterianism is enacted by law is altogether out of the question."

Attention has already been called to the gradual modification of the attitude of distrust and hostility which Free Churchmen, in memory of the old Voluntary controversies, continued to maintain towards the champion of the Dissenters for many years after the Disruption. During the Lord Provostship this process of approximation continued. On various questions, more especially those in which the moral and religious well-being of the people was directly concerned, he showed that co-operation was possible and advantageous, though the platforms occupied might not be precisely the same. For example, with respect to the grant of £30,000 to Maynooth Catholic College, he advocated opposition on the ground of objection to concurrent endowment, as well as on the old Voluntary ground of opposition to all state endowments. As an illustration of this unification of opinion amongst Presbyterian Dissenters, it may be noted that while on 9th December 1851 Mr. McLaren appeared on the platform of the Scottish Reformation Society, then exerting itself as a Protestant institution to secure the withdrawal of state support to the Roman Catholic college, he, on 3rd May 1855, wrote to Mr. A. Murray-Dunlop, M.P., then one of the most prominent laymen of the Free Church, alike as regards talent, service, and liberality of opinion: "I have read with great pleasure

The attitude of Free Churchmen.

in the *Times* the report of your speech on the Maynooth grant. You have taken up the ground which I am satisfied is the one that will ultimately prevail, because it is the only ground really defensible in the present circumstances of the country. Most heartily do I wish you success in the cause; but there are many intolerant people who will not thank you for your advocacy on account of the grounds on which it was based." Mr. Murray-Dunlop saw at an early stage of the agitation that justice and true statesmanship required the withdrawal of the *Regium Donum* to the Ulster Presbyterians as well as of the Maynooth grant to the Roman Catholics, and that, too, as a preliminary to the disestablishment of all the Churches.

Another link of connection between Mr. McLaren and the Nonconformist Evangelical Society, which was then divided upon many political questions, was social reform. He and they were deeply concerned for the moral welfare of the community, and equally recognised that it is righteousness which exalts a nation. Accordingly, when, in the second year of his Lord Provostship, he proceeded to apply himself practically to the cure of Sunday-drunkenness in Edinburgh, he attracted to his side the friends of sobriety and morality in all the Churches; and many good men and patriotic citizens, strongly opposed to him in politics, and dreading him as a more dangerous Voluntary than even Mr. Black was supposed to be, were thankful they had a Lord Provost who was not afraid to combat what was perhaps the greatest public evil and scandal of the time.<sup>1</sup> Here is

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Social reforms.

Sunday-drunkenness.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. McLaren was himself a most abstemious man. He was a friend of temperance in practice as well as in precept; and for twelve years, including the period during which he was Lord Provost, he never tasted wine or spirits, though his sense of the duties of hospitality made him consider it right to place wine on his table for the use of his guests.

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Mr. McLaren's own account of the evil, and of the steps he took to cure it, given before a Committee of the House of Commons in 1868 :—

“At the period to which I have referred, it was a matter of public notoriety that drunkenness prevailed to an enormous extent in Edinburgh, as it did in all the large towns of Scotland; and on Sundays it was particularly marked and offensive, by reason of the fact that well-behaved citizens on their way through the streets saw drunken people reeling about in large numbers, using bad language, and otherwise rendering themselves great nuisances. There was a great desire on the part of men of all classes to put an end to this enormous amount of drunkenness. I, with a view to do something in this direction, called a meeting of the acting Magistrates of the city and of the county of the city of Edinburgh, and I proposed certain matters to them. Then at a special licensing session for the city, resolutions were passed which formed the basis of legislation subsequently. The principle affirmed by the resolutions was, that in cases where publicans were charged with offences in contravention of their licenses, the fact of their keeping their houses open on Sunday should be regarded as an aggravation of the offence committed. The change that took place was almost instantaneous. A large proportion of the persons who had before kept open their houses on the Sunday closed them, and the drunkenness visibly decreased in all quarters of the city. I made it my business to walk through the lowest parts of the city on Sunday evenings, and I can say, as the result of personal experience so gained, that the effect was really startling. Those persons who were noticeable as objecting to what is called Sabbatarian legislation were equally ready with other people to admit the good result which had followed the action taken by the Magistrates.”

But highly encouraging as the immediate results of this tentative reform, based on the voluntary co-operation of the better-class public-house-keepers, were shown to be, it was felt that something more than permissive local legislation

was required. Public sentiment, not only in Edinburgh, but throughout Scotland, stimulated by the admittedly great advantages resulting from Sunday restriction in the capital, called for a general Act; and on business grounds the publicans who sympathised with Sunday-closing supported this demand, because, "as some persons chose to keep open their houses on the Sunday, they took the customers of their neighbours who did so close, not only on the Sunday, but on the week-days also." Mr. McLaren, it will thus be seen, really initiated the restrictive legislation which has since been associated with the name of Mr. Forbes-Mackenzie. As the direct result of the Edinburgh experiment, a bill was framed making general and compulsory the principle embodied in the resolutions of the Edinburgh Magistrates, the application of which had hitherto been local and optional. The measure was brought into the House of Commons by Mr. Forbes-Mackenzie, formerly Member for Peeblesshire, but then Member for Liverpool, and into the House of Peers by Lord Kinnaird, and it was carried in a single session. Lord Kinnaird, writing on 27th July 1853 to Mr. McLaren, announced that he had "succeeded in passing the Public-House Bill, with all the amendments suggested by you and your brother Magistrates, including the one proposed by (I believe) Mr. Douglas, as to summary proceedings against persons selling without having taken out a certificate."

As no man had more contributed to the introduction and rapid passage of the new bill than Mr. McLaren, so no one watched the operation of the Act with keener attention or championed its policy with greater resolution and ability. He early satisfied himself, by a careful examination of the police-court returns, of the healthful influence of the new Act on the social and moral condition of the people. But

1852  
Legisla-  
tion.

The For-  
bes-Mac-  
kenzie Act.

1853  
Operation  
of new law.

he did not content himself with the evidence of statistical tables. He made personal investigation. In one of the earliest of the letters or reports he prepared, which was issued in pamphlet form by the Committee of the Edinburgh Total Abstinence Society, he wrote :—

“ For the last thirty-five years I have spent the greater portion of my time in the Old Town, and therefore will not be thought presumptuous in saying that I know something of the character and habits of its population. On the last Sunday of July and the first Sunday of the present month (August) I spent an hour each day, from nine to ten o'clock at night, in walking through the low neighbourhoods along with a friend. Our course was down the Candlemaker Row, along the Grassmarket and West Port, back by the same course, and along the whole of the Cowgate and St. Mary's Wynd; down the Canongate midway, and back up the High Street to the Tron Church. During these perambulations I saw no person drunk, heard no swearing or obscene language, and saw no fighting or improper conduct, although we passed through numerous groups of the very lowest classes of the inhabitants. I have gone over the same ground on several other Sundays, about the same hour, within the last three years, and knowing what I do of the Old Town population, I can unhesitatingly state that the change for the better on Sundays is truly marvellous.”

Let any one at the present day perambulate on a Saturday night the same districts as those visited by Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, and repeat his inspection on the Sunday night, and he will be able to form some conception of the “ truly marvellous ” improvement that delighted the heart of the Lord Provost and his friends in the summer of 1854.

By and by Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren extended his examination of the results of the new Act over the whole of Scotland. Through the agency of Mr. Murray-Dunlop, Member for Greenock, he obtained a series of parliamentary returns

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designed to illustrate the diminution of drunkenness and crime which had followed the closing of public-houses on Sundays, and to answer the misstatements and misunderstandings of the hostile critics of the restrictive law. An analysis of one of these returns, published in 1858, which he incorporated in a masterly pamphlet, extending to forty-eight pages, entitled "The Rise and Progress of Whisky-Drinking in Scotland, and the Working of the Public-Houses (Scotland) Act, commonly called the Forbes-Mackenzie Act,"<sup>1</sup> led him to the conclusion that "the number of cases of drunkenness alone and drunkenness combined with crime was 165 per cent. greater on Sundays under the old law than under the new in the chief towns of Scotland, including a population exceeding a million." By lectures and speeches, by letters to the *Times*<sup>2</sup> and nearly every other important journal in the United Kingdom, by evidence before a Parliamentary Committee and two Royal Commissions, and by a continuation of parliamentary returns obtained by himself after his election to Parliament in 1865, he maintained his defence of the Forbes-Mackenzie Act and his advocacy of a policy of restriction. Sometimes he offered help and encouragement to the promoters of

1853  
Defence of  
the Act.

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<sup>1</sup> Published by the Scottish Temperance League, Glasgow.

<sup>2</sup> On 1st September 1854 Mr. McLaren received the following note:—"The Secretary of the National Temperance Society, London, presents his respectful compliments to the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and on behalf of the Committee would feel greatly obliged by learning whether his Lordship's permission can be granted to the reprinting of his recent letter to the *Times*. It would be the object of the Committee to make this republication, if allowed, useful to the promotion of the movement for obtaining a law closing public-houses, &c., in England during the whole of Sunday. No pecuniary advantage would be regarded, and should the step taken involve a charge on the Society's funds, this would be gladly borne for the sake of the end desired." Of course the permission asked for was freely granted.

1853

Sunday-closing in Ireland, also in several of the English counties. At other times, acting on the defensive, he combated the view that any good effected by Sunday-closing in Scotland had been neutralised by the increase of she-beens,<sup>1</sup> or exposed mistakes, such as those into which even so expert a statistician as Mr. Leoni Levi fell in a paper he read before the British Association at its meeting in Dundee. Mr. Levi then stated that between 1857 and 1866 there was an increase in the consumption of spirits in Scotland of 23 per cent., whereas Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren showed that there had been "a decreased consumption since 1854, when the Forbes-Mackenzie Act came into operation, of no less than 2,036,924 gallons per annum, being about 30 per cent.," irrespective of the increase of the population. He continued his interest in the question till the close of his life; and in a long letter he contributed to the *Daily Review* in 1884, he used the latest available statistics for the purpose of again illustrating the enormous social benefits produced by the Sunday-closing Act. In his closing sentence he pleaded for a large reduction in the number of spirit licenses in Edinburgh. He endorsed the language employed by the deputations who waited on the Magistrates, and in effect said to them, in the name of the poor wretched inebriates, and those having a tendency to become so, "Lead us not into temptation," by the large number of public-houses which you think "fit and convenient" (in the words of the Act) to establish in the city.

As a Member of Parliament, he cordially supported Sir Wilfrid Lawson's Permissive Bill and resolution, both within and without the House; and on his property of Mayfield, on the south side of Edinburgh, which he feued for building, he

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<sup>1</sup> Unlicensed rooms where drink is secretly and illicitly retailed.

incorporated in his articles and conditions of feu the stipulation that "no feuar or his tenant shall erect, or open, or keep an hotel or a public-house, . . . or sell any excisable liquors, or allow the same to be used on his feu." From the days of his Lord Provostship, and indeed much earlier, Mr. McLaren was in the front rank of temperance and social reformers; and his influence and aid proved of incalculable advantage to the cause. He was one of the chief witnesses examined by the Royal Commission on grocers' licenses in 1877, of which Sir James Fergusson was chairman, and he gave effective evidence in favour of restriction, strongly urging that grocers should not be allowed to sell spirits at all, but should be confined as licensed liquor merchants to the sale of ale, beer, and wines.

Mr. McLaren's courage and success in dealing with the Sunday-drinking scandal won for him the grateful appreciation of not a few Established Churchmen and Episcopalians, interested in social reform, but widely and radically differing from him in general politics; and in subsequent years he was not unfrequently agreeably surprised to find such gentlemen giving him political support on personal or non-political grounds. Of course the reform he carried through aroused against him in certain quarters bitter and unrelenting hostility, and exposed him to much abuse; but his opponents and censors belonged to a class whose support he never valued or sought, and he felt himself abundantly rewarded by the vast benefits which visibly resulted from his work, and which many of the more respectable spirit-dealers frankly acknowledged.<sup>1</sup>

1853  
Precept  
and ex-  
ample.

Non-party  
friends.

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<sup>1</sup> Among other touching evidences of the good results of his labours, he was frequently thanked in the streets by poor women, the wives of working-men, for the boon which Sunday-closing had proved to them; and some even, at times, took his hand and kissed it, blessing him as their benefactor.

1853

The Trinity  
Hospital  
contro-  
versy.

The controversies which arose regarding the Trinity Hospital and Church were of a different kind. Trinity College Church, a splendid specimen of old Gothic architecture, built by Mary of Gueldres, and surrounded with many historical associations, was demolished by the North British Railway Company to make room for their Central Station, on payment of compensation. The struggles which followed turned upon the question whether the money thus acquired should be spent in rebuilding the old church in another part of the city, or whether a more suitable and less costly church should be built near the old site in the poorest part of the parish, and the remainder of the money devoted to the charitable purposes of Trinity Hospital. This brought him into acrimonious conflict with old friends, amongst whom was Mr. Adam Black, and with many of the professional and wealthier classes. Their motive was a desire to adorn the city out of this fund. Their distrust pained him, and their opposition he knew to be far more formidable, as it was infinitely more discouraging, than the hostility of a mere "interest" which he had deprived of a privilege injurious to the common weal. Many of his Trinity College critics—members of the Antiquarian Society, advocates, lawyers, men of letters and learned leisure, possessing immense social influence—wielded the pen with powerful effect, and were clever speakers as well as ready writers. But Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren was undismayed; and in a speech delivered to the Town Council on 6th December 1853 (afterwards issued as a pamphlet in thirty-two pages) he proved more than a match for all his acute and merciless adversaries. He showed that the claim of the antiquarians and city beautifiers for the re-erection of the church according to the style and model, stone for stone, of the old building was justified neither by law nor public advantage; that the old church was the most comfortless in the city, and wholly

Reply and  
defence.

unadapted for Protestant service ; and that what was wanted was a church suitable in respect of site and accommodation and structural design to the wants of the parish and the modern forms of worship—the surplus of the purchase-money received from the Railway Company being devoted to an extension of the beneficent designs of the Hospital, or, in other words, to an increase of the number of the beneficiaries.

“For ancient buildings and old ruins,” he concluded, “he had always entertained the greatest veneration ; and he would not, without the most urgent necessity, be a party to the destruction of such relics of other times. It was in vain to say, as had been said, that all the beauty and all the original associations connected with this church would be restored by adopting the plan of rebuilding recommended by Mr. Bryce. No opinion could be more erroneous. Even in the case of existing ancient buildings, which, from necessity, have been partially rebuilt with stones newly dressed, there is a striking deterioration of effect as compared with the ancient time-worn portions which had not been renovated. He had often been forcibly struck with this difference in looking at the exterior of Westminster Abbey. The clean, nicely chiselled, new surface of the restored portions was, in his eyes, far less beautiful and far less interesting than the mouldering stones of the portions which had not been touched by the hands of the renovator. But when, as in this case, the whole of the exterior surface was to be renewed, and the new church to be merely a copy of the old church, with certain alleged improvements in the details, it was in vain to pretend that all the original pleasing associations, and all the original beauties belonging to the church erected by Mary of Gueldres, would be restored.”

“Into the many-corridor’d complexities” of the dispute, which preceded and long outlived Mr. McLaren’s Lord Provostry, raising questions of æsthetics as well as of law, involving the Railway Company and the Presbytery as well as the Corporation, discussed sometimes in public meetings

and at other times in Parliament, but more frequently in courts of law, and producing a countless issue of letters and pamphlets, it would be profitless now to enter. It is sufficient to say that, unappalled by the denunciations of the antiquarians and of members of polite society in Edinburgh, who held him up to scorn as a Vandal, and by the desertion of trusted supporters in the Council, where, after the presentation of a memorial by an influential deputation headed by Mr. Black, he found himself in a minority of two, Mr. McLaren manfully held his ground.

He refused "in deference to mere clamour to remove a church from a poor parish to which it belongs, and also to rob a public charity of a portion of its funds in order to embellish the city by the erection of a church in or near the New Town, where none is required, and where the cost of a suitable site would swallow up the whole balance, which otherwise would go to the Trinity Hospital." He pleaded that the interests of the parishioners, that the policy of the Town Council during the earlier Provostship of Mr. Black himself, that the conditions of sale and purchase as settled in Parliament and interpreted by the Sheriff, and that public utility and common sense were all on his side. And so were the mass of the citizens, as a subsequent election proved. After many years, in which much bitterness of spirit was engendered, much public money was wasted, and the spiritual interests of the parish were neglected, Mr. McLaren's views were, in 1864, confirmed by a decision of the House of Lords, by which it was adjudged that the duty of the Corporation was confined to the erection of a suitable church, adapted to the wants of the parish, and that all the surplus of the price obtained from the Railway Company for the old church ought to be applied to the benefit of the Trinity Hospital Charity.

In a letter to Mrs. McLaren, dated 16th February 1864,

he wrote: "You will be delighted to hear that the Trinity Church case is decided in our favour, as I proposed when Provost. The Charity Fund will get £10,000 by the judgment, in place of spending it all on a church." It is very characteristic that at the moment when this long and angry controversy was decided in accordance with his views, there was no indication of any feeling of personal victory. A church suitable for the parish was accordingly built, and the surplus funds were applied to the original benevolent objects of the Hospital, in accordance with the opinion long previously given by Mr. Inglis, now Lord-Justice General, and Mr., now Lord, Young. At the time of the struggle, the higher scale of pension granted by the Hospital was £20 per annum, limited to forty-two persons, and the lower scale £6 per annum, enjoyed by eighty persons. After the settlement the higher scale of pension was increased to £25 for sixty, and the lower scale to £15 for a hundred beneficiaries; and the Trust remains a distinctly Edinburgh institution, under the management of the Town Council.

At the time he was being denounced as a Goth and a Vandal because of his refusal to undertake the impossible and undesirable task of rebuilding Trinity College Church stone for stone after the style and model of the old building, Mr. McLaren was labouring to promote artistic taste and scientific education in a far more effective way than by the reconstruction of a monument of Gothic architecture. He was employing his influence with the Government to induce them to utilise all the undisplayed stores of the University Museum by the erection of a great National Museum for Scotland, on an equal footing with the British Museum, and open to all persons free of expense. He took an active part with the deputation who waited upon the Government for the purpose of inducing them to begin the

The Industrial  
Museum.

1853  
work, as some small instalment of justice to Scotland, and as a means of providing for the public inspection and use of the hidden treasures of the University collections. The deputation were successful so far, that a first grant of £3000 was inserted in the estimates, and actually voted by Parliament, when the outbreak of the Russian war caused the cancelling of this and similar obligations. Mr. McLaren immediately went up to London alone, called on Lord Aberdeen, then Prime Minister, and Mr. Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and induced them to restore the Museum grant as an exceptional vote. Thus was begun the splendid building which now forms the chief architectural feature in Chambers Street, and which has proved the most popular and instructive of all the Government institutions in Edinburgh. His interest in the Museum lasted long beyond the period of his Lord Provostship. As Member of Parliament he re-opened the negotiations which led to the extension and completion of the buildings by the Government's contribution to the city improvements which distinguished the civic reign of Lord Provost Chambers; and in December 1867 he was cordially thanked by the Council for his services. Nor did his vigilance relax after his retirement from Parliament. The probability is that but for his urgency as a private citizen in requiring the Government's fulfilment of their part of the contract, the extension buildings would not have been completed as they were in 1886—the year of his death.

The Meadows.  
Many other practical advantages were conferred on the citizens during his Lord Provostship. The Meadows were secured as a public park; and in order that the full benefit of this place of recreation might be obtained, and also that an additional access to the town from the south and west might be provided, Mr. McLaren, continuing his work in

co-operation with his successor, Sir John Melville, effected an arrangement by which what was then part of a market-garden was opened up as Brougham Street. The public health and enjoyment were promoted, too, in another way. The Corporation set an example of cleanliness; and while the streets were beautified, a large scheme of drainage was undertaken. In his private memorandum Mr. McLaren says:—"During my period of office I was *ex officio* a Commissioner of Police, and as chairman of the Drainage Committee of that body took a great deal of trouble in getting drains formed on the south side of the town, where there were very few, particularly to the east of Nicolson Street. The Public Act authorised this to be done at the expense of the owners, and we did it to a large extent. After my Provostship was over, I consented to be returned as a Commissioner of Police to endeavour to finish our work, and resumed my duties as chairman of the committee for another year."

1853

Drainage schemes.

The irksome duty of caring for small things Mr. McLaren did not shirk, and his vigorous attention to these secured, to a greater extent than was ever before known or has since been seen in the municipal administration, the maximum of efficiency with the minimum of waste. But the personal superintendence of administrative details did not by any means monopolise his time and attention as Chief Magistrate. Apart from Annuity-Tax and election struggles (elsewhere referred to), he discharged all the public non-municipal work pertaining to the Chief Magistracy. As the head of the community, he placed himself at the call of the directors of charitable and philanthropic societies and the promoters of social and political reforms; and one of the earliest public meetings over which he presided in his capacity as Lord Provost was that held in the Hopetoun Rooms,

Multi-farious duties of Chief Magistrate.

1853  
The Skye  
Crofters.

consequent on Sir John M<sup>c</sup>Neill's report on the condition of the Highlands, in favour of raising a fund to provide for the voluntary emigration of 500 families from Skye. While anxious to aid in practical efforts for the mitigation of human suffering at home, he was ready to listen to the cry for sympathy and help from over the sea. He followed with the keenest interest the struggle for the abolition of slavery in the United States; and as Lord Provost he gave a warm welcome to Mrs. Beecher Stowe when that distinguished lady visited the city to plead the cause of the emancipation of the slaves. He arranged the more important meetings addressed by Mrs. Stowe in Edinburgh, and presided at the banquet given in her honour. Some time after her return to her home across the Atlantic he received the subjoined letter:—

Visit of  
Mrs.  
Beecher  
Stowe.

ANDOVER, MASS., U.S.A.,  
July 11, 1853.

RIGHT HON. LORD PROVOST,—Since my return to America, I find a story very extensively circulated which is calculated strongly to prejudice the people of this country against the good people of Edinburgh, and to counteract any good influence which their proceedings might have had.

It is this, to wit, that at the banquet in Edinburgh in honour of Mrs. Stowe, over which your Lordship presided, the American flag was exhibited, torn and mutilated, the stars without the stripes, amid the shouts of the people.

The story, so far as I can learn, was first told in the Old School Presbyterian newspaper in Philadelphia credited to the Edinburgh *Witness*. It has been confirmed by the following passage in the *Guardian's* report of Dr. Guthrie's speech: "Look (pointing to the flags displayed in front of the platform) at these stars there, though wanting the stripes. (Cheers.)" Now, my recollection is very strong that in front of the platform were displayed both the British and American flags equally honoured, both new and entire. I have no remembrance, either at that or

any other meeting, of a mutilated American flag. On the contrary, the whole tone and spirit of the meetings, and of the people whom I met in private, was altogether respectful and kind towards America and American institutions. (Slavery I do not recognise as an American institution.)

I have written to Dr. Guthrie, and hope to have a speedy answer. But I am particularly desirous of having your Lordship's testimony. You were chairman of the meeting, and it was attended and patronised by the very best men and women in Edinburgh, and indeed I may say in all Scotland.

Whenever anything effective is done against slavery, the method here is to excite some prejudice, to bring in some side issue, to destroy its influence for good.

Will you be so kind as to give us your help in this matter? I shall always retain the most grateful remembrance of your Lordship's attention to us while in your city. Nor can I ever sufficiently express my gratitude to the citizens of Edinburgh and the people of Scotland generally.

We are here in the midst of a terrible conflict, but the Lord is our Helper.—Very respectfully yours,

C. E. STOWE.

The Lord Provost found little difficulty in removing the misunderstanding which had arisen, and the incident closed without any estrangement of feeling among Mrs. Stowe's numerous Edinburgh friends.

In September 1853, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren, as Chief Magistrate, was privileged to render a complimentary service of which he was ever afterwards proud—to confer an honour which itself reflected an honour on the city. Having induced the Council to confer a free burgess-ticket on Mr. Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, he established the connection of citizenship between Edinburgh and a statesman who now ranks as one of the most distinguished men of his day.

Mr. Gladstone and the City Freedom.

1853

The Town Council having discussed Mr. Gladstone's Budget of 1853, the Lord Provost wrote to inform him of their approval of his financial policy.

Writing on May 4, Mr. Gladstone replied:—

MY LORD,—I have not had the honour to receive the copy of the *Scottish Press* to which you refer in your letter of the 27th, nor, therefore, the advantage of perusing the report of the proceedings of the Town Council of Edinburgh on the subject of the financial measures of the Government.

I am unwilling, however, longer to postpone my acknowledgments for your very courteous letter, and the expression of my gratification on learning that a body of so much weight and intelligence as that over which your Lordship presides has declared almost unanimously its approval of the financial policy which, with my colleagues, I have recommended.

The approval of Parliament and of the country has already more than fulfilled all our wishes with regard to the broad outlines and leading principles of those measures, and I trust that, after such an interval as the discussion of subjects so important may demand, we shall see them securely embodied in the law.

I have the honour to be, my Lord, your very faithful and obedient servant,

W. E. GLADSTONE.

The Right Hon. the Lord Provost  
of Edinburgh.

After the Town Council had agreed to recognise in a still more substantial manner Mr. Gladstone's legislative services and eminence as a statesman by conferring on him the Freedom of the City, Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren received the following letter, dated from the seat of the Duke of Buccleuch, Dumfriesshire:—

DRUMLANRIG CASTLE, THORNHILL,  
September 30, 1853.

MY LORD PROVOST,—I have had the honour to receive, at this place, where I have been spending to-day, your obliging letter of the 29th, in which you state that an official communication had

been addressed to me at Dunrobin Castle, with the intelligence that the high honour of the Freedom of the City of Edinburgh had been unanimously voted to me. I have likewise read the report and correspondence on the same subject in the *Courant* yesterday.

I sincerely regret that you should have been put personally to so much trouble on my account. When I receive the official letter which has been addressed to me in the North, I shall better understand whether the vote of the Town Council of itself completes the act of giving me the Freedom, or whether it is in reality a preliminary proceeding only, which takes effect upon personal appearance and acceptance. I shall then form the best judgment in my power as to the terms in which I shall reply to it, or if I shall be favoured by any information in a further letter from your Lordship, I shall endeavour to profit by it. In the meantime, adverting to the feelings which have been expressed by some gentlemen, I less regret than I should otherwise have done that my having fixed my engagements for this week, at the time when I first heard from you, together with the pressure of public business for the next, shall have disabled me from doing what is always very agreeable to me, and would on this occasion have been peculiarly so, namely, paying a visit to Edinburgh.—I have the honour to be, my Lord Provost, your very faithful servant,

W. E. GLADSTONE.

The Lord Provost of Edinburgh.

Mr. McLaren replied, supplying the information desired, and a few days after he reached London Mr. Gladstone again wrote :—

DOWNING STREET, *October 9, 1853.*

MY LORD,—I postponed for a couple of days my acknowledgment of the vote of the Town Council, partly under the pressure of business, and partly in the hope that I might be favoured with information from your Lordship which might serve to guide me. This I obtained in the letter you were kind enough to address to me on the 1st, but which did not come into my hands till the day before yesterday. I prepared yesterday evening too late for post the letter of thanks which I now transmit under

1853

another cover, and which I shall be obliged by your making known to the Magistrates and Council on Tuesday.

With respect to the gentleman whose religious opinions make him apprehensive of what he supposes to be mine, I fear it will be impossible for me to disarm or qualify his suspicions within the compass of a letter, but I have the hope that, if we were better acquainted, he might find me less formidable on that score than he imagines.

I am exceedingly obliged by the trouble your Lordship has taken in supplying me with useful information, as well as by the prominent and decided part which you have borne on this whole question, and I have the honour to remain, my Lord, your most faithful servant,

W. E. GLADSTONE.

The Right Hon. the Lord Provost  
of Edinburgh.

A reminiscence at  
Inverness.

Many years afterwards, in November 1879, when he himself received the Freedom of the Burgh of Inverness, Mr. McLaren pleasantly recalled this incident in answer to a cordial cheer elicited by his mention of Mr. Gladstone's name.

"It may be worth mentioning (he said), that at the time you made him a burghess of the capital of the Highlands, we, the citizens of Edinburgh, made him a burghess of Edinburgh. You were fortunate in having his presence; but we unfortunately missed him. He had to go back rapidly to London, and consequently did not go through Edinburgh; so we had to send him the burghess-ticket, and sacrifice the great pleasure of presenting it to him in person, and of hearing an address from him. I have always looked back with pride on that event; for I happened to be Lord Provost of Edinburgh at the time, and was the suggester of the resolution that the Freedom of the City should be presented to Mr. Gladstone."

Business  
tact.

Mr. McLaren, like most public men, learned to avoid controversy for its own sake. But it may safely be affirmed

that he never declined it when public interests forced it upon him. Like John Knox, "he never feared the face of man," and his dauntless spirit was always ready to combat for the truth and right, whatever were the odds arrayed against him. But regard for public interests was equally operative in causing him to study the things that make for peace. As Lord Provost, he cultivated and maintained most cordial relations with the county neighbours of the city; and though, by this time, the determined opponent of the political influence of Parliament House, he had many friends both at the Bar and on the Bench. To Mr. Inglis (afterwards Lord President Inglis), then a leading counsel, he offered a Deputy-Lieutenancy; and Mr. Inglis, in intimating his acceptance and appreciation, wrote:—"Permit me to add, that it is all the more gratifying that this honour should come to me through the hands of one with whom I have been so much brought in contact as yourself in public affairs—an intercourse which to me, at least, and I hope to both of us, has been productive of so much pleasure and satisfaction." With Lord Advocate Moncreiff he was more frequently engaged in the management of public business; and the following little pleasantry, dated 1st November 1854, testifies to the happy relations that then existed between the civic and Government chiefs:—

Relations  
with Bench  
and Bar.

MY DEAR LORD PROVOST,—Papers are never *mis*laid in the Lord Advocate's hands—only too successfully concealed sometimes. I shall do as you wish, but it must be in more formal shape than you suggest.—Ever yours,  
J. MONCREIFF.

Lord Rutherford (the Solicitor-General whose aid had been given in settling the city affairs) proved a steadfast friend; and Lord Ivory shared his brother Judge's confidence in and admiration for the Lord Provost. In the discharge of his

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Lord Justice-Clerk Hope.

municipal duties Mr. McLaren was brought occasionally into contact with Lord Justice-Clerk Hope on questions of judicial administration, and the learned Judge formed a high estimate of his character and talents. In the spring of 1854, having learned that the Lord Provost was contemplating a journey to London in connection with municipal business, the Lord Justice-Clerk volunteered a letter of introduction to Lord Aberdeen, which led to friendly relations which Mr. McLaren valued. When the Lord Provost's term of office was approaching its close, the Judge earnestly advised Mr. McLaren's re-election; and when he found that at last retirement could not be avoided, he wrote: "I have for long thought, as I said to Lord Aberdeen in the letter I sent you last spring, that there was no one in Scotland who so well understood or could so well employ the powers, the duties, and usefulness, not only for local but public objects, of municipal government, and of the interests and classes it represents. And the state of the representation of this town makes your retirement a misfortune. It is most true that you have given way to no sect or party, and therefore various parties have not supported you." He concluded: "I ought not to say it, but I hope you will look forward to the representation of the town." In another letter his Lordship said, if he had not been a Judge, and as such precluded from taking part in public questions, he would have attended a public meeting, and, in proposing a vote of thanks to Lord Provost McLaren, would have deprecated his retirement as a misfortune for the city. Through Mr. McLaren the Lord Justice-Clerk was led to take a warm interest in the Heriot schools. The successful administration of these schools, where "for three thousand children education goes on without dispute or collision," supplied, in the opinion of the Lord Justice-Clerk, an *experimentum crucis* which was fitted to do more to advance the

cause of educational reform than years of discussion. In the closing days of the Lord Provostship, Mr. McLaren, on the suggestion of Lord Justice-Clerk Hope, who pleaded for the benefit of his "vigorous management," opened in Edinburgh a Patriotic Fund for the benefit of the families of the soldiers engaged in the Crimea.

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The Patriotic Fund.

Before the end of the year 1854, a sum of £16,285 was raised by 11,440 contributors (of whom 2506 had been obtained by a servants' committee) from among a population of 220,000 in Leith, Edinburgh, Portobello, and Dalkeith. Mr. McLaren calculated that if London and the United Kingdom had contributed in the same proportion, the capital would have raised £200,000, and the United Kingdom £1,600,000, whereas the total fund only amounted to £400,000. In conducting this benevolent scheme, Mr. McLaren had many willing coadjutors; and in his speech recording the result at the beginning of 1855, he made special acknowledgment of the aid he had received from General Dyce, Colonel Hope, Sir R. K. Arbuthnot, and Mr. James Richardson.

The Edinburgh subscription.

At the termination of the work he received the following acknowledgment from the Secretary of War:—

WAR DEPARTMENT, *January 6, 1855.*

SIR,—I am desired by the Duke of Newcastle to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, and to thank you for the great and successful efforts which you have made in aid of the Patriotic Fund in Edinburgh, as also for your kindness in forwarding an account of your proceedings.—I remain, sir, yours obediently,

Letters from Duke of Newcastle and Lord Aberdeen.

W. P. C. WINTON.

D. McLaren, Esq.

Mr. McLaren likewise informed Lord Aberdeen of the result of the fund, expressing at the same time his convic-

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tion of the existence of a general desire for a termination of the war. He received in reply the following autograph letter :—

DOWNING STREET, *July 6, 1855.*

DEAR SIR,—I beg to return you my sincere thanks for the interesting account of your exertions on behalf of the Patriotic Fund, to which must in great measure be attributed the contrast afforded by Edinburgh compared with other cities and towns in the United Kingdom.

I am obliged to you for the intimation you give me of the present state of public opinion, which, from the opportunities you possess of arriving at a just conclusion, entitle any statement made by you on the subject to be received with respect and confidence. —I have the honour to be, dear sir, very truly yours,

ABERDEEN.

D. McLaren, Esq.

Discour-  
agement of  
proposal  
for a title.

About the time that Lord Justice-Clerk Hope induced Mr. McLaren to undertake the promotion and organisation of the Patriotic Fund, his fellow-Magistrates proposed to take action to secure for him some mark of royal recognition. Mr. McLaren courteously set aside the proposal the moment it was mooted to him. He announced his decision in the following letter :—

NEWINGTON HOUSE, EDINBURGH,  
*September 7, 1854.*

[*Confidential.*]

MY DEAR SIR,—This morning I have been favoured with your letter of yesterday, communicating the kind intentions of yourself and the other Magistrates towards me; and I beg that you will accept for yourself, and convey to them, my very sincere thanks for this mark of confidence.

I will at once frankly state my views on the subject; for having understood that such an application had been made by the Magistrates on behalf of my predecessor, I thought it not improbable that they might about this time make a similar proposal to

me, and therefore I have had the advantage of turning over the possible contingency in my mind.

The opinion, then, to which I have come is, that an application of this kind might fairly be held to be, although indirectly, an application from myself; and with my views, I would not solicit any honour or reward in any quarter whatever. I make this last remark because I think it would not be difficult for me to find other quarters from which I might also, in the same indirect way, get such an application made.

At the same time, I do not wish, even by implication, to say that other men might not fairly hold and act on the opposite opinion.

When I consented to stand for the civic chair, I resolved, if elected, to act with strict impartiality to all, as if I had neither friends or opponents at the Council, and as if all sects and parties were alike to me. I also resolved to endeavour, as far as my influence would extend, to raise the respectability of the Council as a body by keeping down opposition to men of good talents and position, although they might hold opposite views to mine on many important questions, and to conduct the business of the Council so as to keep down the unpleasant scenes and contests which had often occurred in former times. I hoped also to be able to conduct the general business of the city in all other departments so as to benefit the inhabitants.

These were the objects at which I aimed, and which I have steadily kept in view; and the only honours and rewards I expected were the consciousness of having faithfully discharged the duties of my office, and the approbation of a large portion of my fellow-citizens. These honours and rewards I have obtained to at least as great an extent as ever I expected; and the accompanying amount of opposition, jealousy, and bad feeling has not been greater than I calculated upon; for the uncompromising course I resolved to follow led me to anticipate a large portion of these disagreeables, and I have not been far out of my reckoning.

Having thus obtained all the honours and rewards I ever desired, and being quite satisfied on that head, I have only again

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to thank you and the other Magistrates for the great kindness and honour intended towards me, and am, my dear sir, yours very sincerely,

D. M<sup>c</sup>LAREN.

To Bailie Fyfe.

The  
enduring  
monument.

Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren had no desire for a knighthood or a baronetcy. He looked for his reward in the prosperity of the city and the success of his work; and he did not look in vain.

“ Si monumentum quæris, circumspice ” :—

The financial equilibrium of a great Corporation established as a corollary to its delivery from bankruptcy; the supremacy of the Council in civic administration asserted; a deplorable social scandal checked, and the practical ability and advantages of a prohibitory liquor law illustrated; the rights of the poor and of the many maintained in the face of a powerful oligarchical confederacy; the general health promoted by the acquisition of a central public park, by the completion of extensive drainage schemes, and by the introduction of efficient sanitary arrangements; the sphere of the municipal parliament in relation to municipal life marked out and occupied; and an example set of indomitable probity and vigour in the conduct of public affairs which has long exerted, and will continue to exert, a purifying and elevating influence on municipal administration.

A national  
service.

In the Council Mr. M<sup>c</sup>Laren encouraged the discussion of non-partisan political measures bearing directly on the well-being of the people, and in this way he was enabled to give timely and influential encouragement to the movement for the introduction of a system of national education. As the Lord Provost, too, he greatly aided, if he did not actually start, an association for a political cause which he afterwards made peculiarly his own—the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights. His Lord Pro-

vostship was not merely a civic affair ; it was really a national concern, and it will remain for all time part of the national history.

The contemporaneous verdict passed by the *Edinburgh News*, just as Mr. McLaren was about to bid farewell to the Lord Provostship, is justified by the historical record :—

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A contemporaneous verdict.

“ He has been pre-eminently (says this journal) the civic head of the entire people, refusing steadily to sacrifice his own convictions to a fleeting popularity, or the principle of self-government and the city’s rights either to the blandishments or frowns of imperial power; while his dignity as a magistrate and his deportment as a man have been an ever-present example and rebuke to many with whom office brought him into official contact. These have been more intolerable to some than his Lordship’s unconcealed hatred of Whig chicanery or his resistance to Tory exclusiveness. Party will never forgive his tenacity to principles, far less will some of the heads of party forgive that rigid adherence to dignity of deportment and sobriety of life which have constituted the moral glories of his Lordship’s civic reign. Without professing religion so loudly as his predecessors, he has refused to sully the official ermine by pandering to the dissipations of the rich, and despised popularity from fanning the delusions of the ill-informed poor; while no cause whose object was charity at home or liberty abroad, or whose aim was the moral elevation of any section of the world’s peoples, but what has received from him, officially and personally, when sought, prompt and able support. He has offended palaverers by curt replies, and unmasked self-seeking to the mortification of many. Many more, stung with a sense of their own insignificance as they became dwarfed by his intellectual power, have been soured through envy or made enemies from being ‘snubbed,’ which meant that his Lordship extinguished by a sentence what they had wasted hours in uttering. Among civic weaklings and self-seekers and make-believes he has literally left no friends, and the entire tribe of political partisans, tax-eaters, and expectants, whether

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lay or clerical, hate him with a perfect hatred. But in spite of such sectional wrath he has accomplished much for the community, which is acknowledged by all but the entire people now, and which will ever be remembered with gratitude. This consolation his Lordship will have, his bitterest enemies being judges, that his reign has never seen civic rights sacrificed to gratify centralised ambition or cover the conveniences of party, nor by an easy facility has he deceived all with whom he came in contact. Men may differ from him in opinion, but his example as Chief Magistrate can never be cited as a justification of selfish shuffling or discreditable immoderation, while his ability, energy, and devoted application to the city's business have extorted admiration from the most personal and interested of his revilers. . . . He has secured the Meadows as a people's park and advanced the drainage of a large portion of the town where miasma was dispensing death ; he will leave the city 50 per cent. cleaner than he found it ; he has drained the Water of Leith, effected the removal of toll-bars ; he has secured for the community a constant supply of water, and given the inhabitants thirty public wells which the Water Company had long resisted or refused, and would have been refusing still to a more 'pliable' Lord Provost ; he has abolished the impost-tax, and seen another Heriot's school erected to his honour ; he has secured for the University a reading-room, and for Scotland a National Industrial Museum ; he has opened Holyrood to the people, and will also, we hope, before laying down the chain of office, secure the people access to the College Museum ; he has defended the honour of his office with courage from the ambition of Sheriffs and gracefully corrected the inadvertence of a Cabinet Minister ; he has given his intellect and the influence of his office to the defence of Scotland's right against the accumulated wrongs of generations, and has done that parliamentary business for the city which other constituencies have performed for them by their Members ; and having done all this useful and substantial work, he may doff the ermine with the conscious satisfaction that he has done much for which the public will more and more loudly thank him. . . . He has not been without his faults, and these we have freely challenged

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and opposed ; but as a Chief Magistrate, taking him all in all, he has exhibited a greater amount of both head and heart in action, if not in speech, for the benefit of the entire people than any man who has occupied the 'reformed' chair before him, so far as our experience goes ; and the city will look long and earnestly before they see his like again guiding their civic counsels from the seat of the Chief Magistrate."

END OF VOLUME I.