

FROM EDINBURGH'S ANNALS

JAMES GRANT'S three-volume (1882) *Old and New Edinburgh: Its History, its People and its Places*, is a show-piece in the bookshelves of the Edinburgh well-to-do for whose delectation it can fairly be said to be written. It is profusely illustrated with engravings and it stands supreme as a romantic narrative of the romantic city. Comfortably, it toadies to the "great people" who have walked across the page; the common people, how they fared through history, are in a sort of hazy background. For instance only two sentences are given to the political martyrs* who were tried and banished from Scotland in 1793 for advocating parliamentary reform and in whose memory the obelisk (no illustration in the book) was erected in the Old Calton Graveyard, in 1844. On the other hand, the infamous Lord Braxted who tried them is thus honoured: "It has been recorded as an instance of Lord Braxted's great nerve that during the great political trials in 1793-4, when men's blood was almost at fever heat, after each day's proceedings closed, usually about midnight, he always walked home, alone and unprotected, through the dark or ill-lighted streets, to his home in George Square, though he constantly commented openly upon the conduct of the Radicals, and more than once announced in public that "They wad a' be muckle the better o' bein' hung!"

In those days Scotland was governed by the Secretary of State, Henry Dundas, Lord Melville, "the distinguished Scottish statesman and lawyer," as Grant has it, servant of the privileged classes and master of the populace whom the Government then so greatly feared. The political martyrs have their obelisk in a graveyard. To Lord Melville the oppressor there is a colossal statue in the Scottish Parliament House and there stands for his glorification, in St. Andrew's Square, one of the most imposing monuments in the City, erected in 1821 at a subscribed cost of £8,000 with a great plate of pure gold in the foundation stone bearing a laudatory inscription. Grant, writing for his clientele, could not point out the significance of the contrast between these two emblems. And he is imitated in most of the guide books to the city, so pervading is the snobbery of that kind of literature. The story of the martyrs, a picture of the obelisk having to be specially taken, is told in the guide book our International Union produced on the occasion of its representative Conference in Edinburgh, 1929 (and in *Land & Liberty*, March of that year), but that little book is no longer extant; what stock we had was lost in the disaster to our Knight-riding Street offices.

Grant, however, gives a fairly faithful and popularly acceptable account of the Porteous Riots and later he lifts the curtain to show something of the condition of the people in the depths as well as to expose one of the gangsters at the top. He is describing the Royal Park surrounding the 800 ft. high Arthur's Seat. In 1820 the pathway at the base of Salisbury Craigs was formed and named the "Radical Road,"

from the circumstance of the destitute and discontented west country weavers being employed on its construction under a committee of gentlemen. This is quoting Grant, who goes on to say: "the papers of this time teem with bitter complaints against the Earl of Haddington who, as Keeper of the Royal Park, by an abuse of his prerogative, was quarrying away the craigs, and selling the stone to pave the streets of London; and the immense gaps in their south-western face still remain as proofs of his selfish and unpatriotic rapacity." The story has this sequel, that in 1843 the sum of £40,000 (an enormous ransom at that time) was paid to Thomas Earl of Haddington "for the surrender of his office of Hereditary Keeper of the Royal Park." Thereafter, at further public cost, extensive improvements were made, one of which was that "All the old walls which had intersected the park in various places, in lots as the Hoddington family had rented it off for their own behoof were swept away," and another was the construction of the Queen's Drive which winds round the park, passes over a great diversity of ground from high to low, slope to precipice, terrace to plateau and commands a panorama second to none in Europe.

The "committee of gentlemen" among whom the Hoddingtons were setting this shining example, supervised the work of the destitute and discontented (*sic*) weavers. Mark the date, 1820—five years after Waterloo and the victory over the then tyrant who would dominate Europe and destroy its liberties. The landless and the dispossessed, of what were they not cheated, reduced to be recipients of charity or to be given work in gangs upon schemes like the Radical Road and the Caledonian Canal, a state of distress that lasted not for five years after Napoleon's downfall, but for five and fifty years through the Chartist agitation and the Corn Law period, even down to our own day. Let those who compare the wars proclaimed for freedom and democracy draw the real parallel in what happened to the common people when the killing ended; the twenty years that followed 1914-18, the while that "committees of gentlemen" lived like gentlemen, the gross disparity of fortune and opportunity that again pushed the unemployed on to the making of roads or compelled them to knock at the door of the public relief officers. Let us make sure that the same shall not happen after the war of 1939—? And let the next guide to Edinburgh take his visitors the walk under the Salisbury Craigs, show where the cliffs were gashed by the false steward and the heap of broken rock still lying unremoved when the rascality was stopped. An eloquent platform for an informing talk, the eye scanning a wonderful landscape that should be the heritage of all and where wealth should abound, but that landlord's law rules over it producing for example the poverty in the congested city districts that lie in the foreground under our feet. The guide, become counsellor, will point to the Martyrs' Memorial across on Calton Hill and urge that political and economic reform shall now be more swift than the 115 years it took to establish those simple political rights in universal suffrage, the mere right of self-government, for demanding which those brave men were shipped as common felons to Botany Bay.

* Thomas Muir, Thomas Fyssh Palmer, William Skirving, Maurice Margarot and Joseph Gerrald.

MICHAEL DAVITT'S VISIT TO TOLSTOY

An Irish Radio Broadcast

By favour of the Irish Broadcasting System we have received the script of a recent talk on Michael Davitt's life and work, between L.M. and S.H., with the following reference to Tolstoy and Henry George.

L.M.: Did you know, Seumas, that Michael Davitt once visited the great Russian writer Tolstoy and in Russia, too?

S.H.: I did not.

L.M.: Well, he did—in 1904. It was at Tula, where all the fighting's been going on recently. They spoke of Ireland, of the Land movements since Parnell's time and of the reforms that had been won from the British Government. And here is what Tolstoy said to Michael Davitt: "That is a great work—80,000 peasants rescued from the awful conditions of poverty you have described and placed in their present security is a very hopeful prospect for the future of your country. But . . . they have paid too much for their deliverance. How will they and the others bear the burden of such payments in time to come? Henry George was right! Compensation to the landlords is morally wrong. It is rewarding a class for the successful robbery of the people."

A CATHOLIC DECLARATION

The *St Louis Post Dispatch*, 8th October, 1941, reported from Jefferson City that a plea to "break up concentrated land holdings" to create "a democratic pattern" of individual self reliance was contained in a resolution adopted by the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. "The land serves the common good best when it is in small ownerships," said the resolution. It proposed breaking up large holdings by "taxing them out of existence." "The people must have access to natural resources and opportunities for some self sufficiency must be made," it declared. "Higher and higher prices for less and less production, higher and higher wages for less and less work do not constitute economic riches. False philosophies, unduly glorifying the state, concentrating ownerships, herding people in cities, stripping them of ownerships and independence, have caused the economic, social and spiritual breakdown of man. A giant war is setting the stage for complete destruction."

The conference was held 4th to 8th October, and on the opening day Professor Harry Gunnison Brown of the University of Missouri addressed it on the subject "Land Tenure; is the Present System Right or Wrong?" Professor Brown could be trusted to expound the real solution in Land Value Taxation and the remission of all taxes on trade and industry. The diary of the conference pointed out that he was the first Georgeist since the 1890's to have a place on a Catholic programme.

I should like to say how much I enjoy reading every copy of *Land & Liberty*. I regret I am unable to make my subscription any bigger, but I wish you every success in the future, and trust that after the war, taxation of land values may become something more than an ideal.—R. B., Esher.