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SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE.

LETTER

ON THE

NECESSITY OF DISSOLVING THE UNION BETWEEN
ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND,

AND ON

RESTORING SCOTLAND TO HER ANCIENT SUPREMACY
AS AN ENTIRE AND DISTINCT NATION.

“ Wha will be a traitor knave ?
Wha can fill a coward's grave ?
Wha sae base as be a slave ?
Traitor ! Coward ! turn and flee !”

(Addressed to the Editor of the Glasgow Examiner.)

SECOND EDITION.

EDINBURGH:

· SOLD BY ·

J. LESLIE, 18 EARL GREY STREET.

GLASGOW: J. H. COWAN, 8 DUNFAS STREET.

1845.

SCOTTISH HISTORY



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LETTER.

SIR,

I KNOW not whether you have ever thought of the subject which I am to bring under your notice, but I own it has always been a favourite theme with myself, and I address these few lines to you in particular, because I believe you have too much candour to refuse to listen to sentiments that you may be opposed to, or to pronounce opinions absurd, simply because they are not popular, and not recommended by the advocacy of men of rank and influence.

The Union between Scotland and England was one of the blackest transactions in history; and, like every other measure originating in selfishness, fraud, and injustice, that Union is producing its natural fruits, and promises very soon to realize the worst consequences that our Scottish ancestors anticipated from it — to become, in short, a positive practical nuisance. In this light the Union is already begun to be considered by many in Scotland, and I should not be surprised but an agitation may ere long be commenced on this side of the Tweed with respect to that matter, which will not merely vindicate Scotsmen from the apathetic indifference with which they have long regarded national rights, but which will, if wisely conducted, be productive of results far transcending in importance every scheme that has yet been propounded for the elevation of our land.

Deeply and conscientiously as I am opposed to the Union however, my hostility does not arise because this bad thing and the other bad thing has been done by England to Scotland. It was easy to foresee, from the nature of the compact entered into between the two kingdoms, that Scotland would be continually getting *rubs* of this description, and that when England had a purpose of her own to serve, however prejudicial it might be to her weaker neighbour, no obstacle would be allowed to stand in the way of its attainment. But I base my opposition to the Union on broader ground. I see in it the reduction of my country to a state of vassallage and dependence which no man ought to brook, and which is the more intolerable when one reflects on the treasure that was wasted, the blood spilt, and the heroism displayed by our forefathers to guard their posterity against those very evils of which we have daily cause to complain. And, indeed, in thinking indignantly over these things, I often wonder all the while, whether I am treading on Scottish soil, and if it can be possible that the

people I am surrounded by, are the descendants of those who fought at Bannockburn and Stirling Bridge.

It is in vain to tell me that Scotland has thriven since the Union, and that the tranquillity and ease we enjoy is not too much to pay for the annihilation of our independence and very name as a nation: slavery might, on the same principle, be upheld as a good thing by its abettors, because the victims of that system are said to be well cared for, and to get fat under it. But I maintain that the so-called prosperity of Scotland is not owing to the Union, but to the intelligence and indomitable perseverance of Scotsmen; and I have yet to learn that the same, and even an infinitely greater, amount of prosperity might not have been the lot of our country had there been no Union at all. Sure I am, that when Scotland had her own kings and her own parliaments, she was not behind England in the arts of civilized life, or the means of defence either; and as we contemplate her at the present day, she surpasses her southern sister in energy and enterprise, and in all those moral and physical qualities that ought to make a people prosperous and happy. But although Scotland has thus abundantly within herself the elements of becoming a great nation, she is *sternly* interdicted from stretching out her arms and bringing those elements into play: England must first be consulted before a single step can be taken by Scotland in any walk of improvement; and here it is that the Union is felt to be a degrading and oppressive grievance. Then, again, as to political advancement, the returns to Parliament demonstrate that our people are more inclined to take on the impress of democratic institutions than the English are; yet this avails us nothing, for the voice of our Scottish members, in the misnamed British Senate, is drowned amidst the tumultuous clamours of iron-hearted Tories, bloated corruptionists, and hordes of other venal creatures, who have been sent by the pure and enlightened constituencies of England to manage the business of the realm, and to bear down all opposition before them. Nay, such is the direful effects of the Union on the progress of Scotland, that (without stopping to enumerate the instances in which it has been manifested of late) though the aspirations of the Scotch after national regeneration were to be of the most magnificent and compendious description, and enforced in Parliament by the patriotic fire and fervid eloquence of another *Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun*, John Bull would scowl upon and laugh at all such schemes, just because he did not understand them, and had not a soul to be moved by them. With these facts before me, and looking at the practical bearings of the whole subject, I venture to assert, that had Scotland been blessed with an independent government of her own, uncontaminated by English influence, cheering as the picture is that she now presents in some particulars, it would have been more cheering still. Scottish enterprise would have had a wider field to exert itself in than it has,—

the land which God intended to be dug and cultivated minutely, would not have been lying waste or locked up in the custody of a few selfish aristocrats, who, besides spending the produce of it on hunting horses, idleness, and luxury, have the power, when it pleases them, to beggar, starve, and banish, the men and women *born* on it, and who have a better title to *live* by their industry on the fruits of it than their tyrants have. The Highlands and Isles of Scotland, instead of exhibiting, as they now do, the unsightly spectacle of vast experimental gardens of misrule and despotism, would have been (under the eye of a paternal legislature of our own, always ready and on the spot to examine into the wants and necessities of those secluded regions), flourishing and productive provinces; and the chieftains living there, as Fletcher says, would have got "knocked on the head," had they dared to tread down and rob their clansmen, as they have for half a century past done, and are still doing. Enormous as these evils are, however, it is, I fear, almost hopeless for the people of Scotland to try and grapple with them while the Union with England continues. England is herself subject to the rod of an imperious oligarchy, whose ancestors, in the days of William the Bastard, won her by the sword, and it is the interest of these men that the privileges of their order, to pillage, and destroy mankind, should in no corner of the British empire be trenched on, or even called into question. Hence Highland destitution and misery; hence such large ill-gotten estates as those of the Dukes of Sutherland and Buccleuch,— estates which, instead of belonging to two men, ought to be broken up and parcelled out in property among tens of thousands of men. Now, Sir, I put it to you to say, whether we, as Scotchmen, ought to endure such a state of things as this?— or whether *Edward the first*, better known as the MURDERER OF WALLACE, whose fiendish hatred of Scotland was so inveterate, that he spent his last breath in maledicting her, could have desired to have our country more thoroughly under his feet than the Queen of England and her Parliament have it at this moment?

Some worthy well-meaning individuals propose to counter-balance the malign effects of English ascendancy, by contending for having what they call "federal parliaments," to manage local concerns. But this implies English connection, a thing I, for one, abhor; and, besides, the only benefit that a local parliament could confer upon Scotland, would be that it might save persons the expense of sending agents to London to look after their interests, which are probably as well attended to there already, as they would be even in Edinburgh; for, I believe, it is notorious, that when any local Scotch affair, not involving points of *Divinity* or *Politics*, is to be legislated on, English members do not trouble the House much with their presence, and the Scotch, in general, thereby get all their ends quietly accomplished. Moreover, it is a degradation of the whole question, and a useless expenditure

of our strength, to try and stir up a general movement for the sake of the paltry advantages that a mere federal parliament would confer on us, and Scotsmen, in volunteering their aid and countenance to forward such projects, give but too much colour to the supposition that they unintentionally act and think as if their country had always been an appendage of England, and that they are in the habit, like the Irish, of obsequiously blessing England for any little favour she might deign to dole out to them. No! Scotland in her best days never dealt with England on these beggarly conditions, and when she comes to treat with that realm again, she will, I trust, assume an attitude that will atone for the foul stain the Union cast on her, and the parties who conclude the treaty *will not be* a parcel of crazed "gownmen," who valued not national honour, provided they could get their own fanatical Presbyterian Kirk preserved, or treacherous nobles and gentry, who had often before sold their native land to her enemies; but, *they will be* the high-minded people of Scotland at large, who, animated by a consciousness of their own integrity and their own strength, have bravely combined to rid their country of a yoke that was gradually enslaving and destroying her, and to restore her to that rank among the States of Europe which she of old so respectably filled. Yes, Scotland, contemned and despised Scotland, has still a soul to aspire to more dignified aims than the ability of getting a few local bills passed now and then by a sort of *mock legislature* of her own; and as it is no doubt taken for granted by federalists that we are to swear allegiance to the same chief magistrate that the English do, this very circumstance of itself, though we had a federal parliament sitting at the back of Saint Giles' to-morrow, would always give England the pretence to levy what taxes she pleased on Scotland, and to inmesh us in expensive wars and other abominations, just as she is doing at present. Such, appearing, then to me to be the results of federalism, I can see no cure for the evils of the Union, no method by which the practical skill and mental resources of Scotchmen can be fully and fairly developed, both at home and abroad, but to cast off all legislative connection with England whatever, and to acknowledge no other intimacy with that kingdom than what friendly intercourse, unlimited trade, and mutual protection from unprovoked foreign aggression require.

Mankind, Sir, will not now be contented with half-and-half temporary expedients. Truth is what is sought for; and there being no denying that a crisis has arrived when Scotland, in order to keep pace with the spirit of the age, behoves to occupy a far different position from what she has hitherto done with reference to England, it is necessary that that position, to be free and unfettered, must, to all intents and purposes, be an *independent and absolute*, not a *controlable and subordinate* one. In other words, I contend for Scotland having the same

power that she possessed in the days of her Alexanders, Roberts, and Jameses, to enact her own laws, levy her own taxes, enter into what treaties she pleases with foreign dominions, supply her own means of defence, internally and externally; and while she studiously avoids interfering with, or encroaching on the privileges of other kingdoms, she will be as jealous and watchful in protecting herself from similar aggression. Let Scotsmen but once in this manner assume to themselves the exclusive management of their own affairs, in their own way, and I much mistake them if they do not make Scotland, as to all that concerns her social, educational, and material weal, in reality “the envy of surrounding nations.” Every spot of earth capable of tillage, which is now lying barren and useless, would be brought into cultivation; pauperism, and that revolting practice which our Scottish nobles and gentry have so long with impunity, to the eternal disgrace of the nation, been permitted to indulge in, viz. the “clearing” of estates, and compulsory banishment of our fellow countrymen into foreign climes, would no more be heard of, — there would be no lack of employment for every man who is able and willing to work; the deserted glens of the Highlands in particular would be re-peopled as of old with thousands of industrious mountaineers, who would have freedom to enjoy the fruits of their labour without the dread of any rapacious landlord or domineering factor to burn their houses above their heads, scatter their poor families, and expel them from their holdings. But the question occurs, How are these animating prospects to be realized, and what mode of government would be best suited to promote the interests of Scotsmen, and perpetually secure to them the complete enjoyment of those prerogatives and benefits I am supposing to be within their reach? It seems to me, that, for these purposes, the Union ought to be dissolved out and out, and that the same deed which annuls the Union ought to invest every sane man, without exception, with the privilege of electing those who are to rule over him. But as the right exercise of the suffrage would be incompatible with the existence of monarchy, and a hereditary feudal aristocracy, both these useless, tyrannical, and all-devouring institutions would require to be swept away, and the nation declared to be a *Republic*, open to exchange commodities with the whole world, without let or hinderance. To such an adjustment of affairs as this, the genius of our people, and the condition of our country, seem both to be peculiarly adapted, and it has the additional merit of being just and expedient in itself, and of harmonizing essentially in spirit with those enlarged schemes for the settlement of Scotland which were advocated at the time of the Union by that generous and enlightened patriot to whom I have already alluded, viz., Fletcher of Saltoun,—a man who devoted his life to the extirpation of despotism, and the establishment of freedom all the world over, and who was inspired with a detestation of English domination, and a

desire to advance the welfare of Scotland, which many of our noisy declaimers of this age would do well to try and imitate. But whatever form of government the Scottish people may choose for themselves, it is manifest that an entire separation from England, in a political and legislative sense, is imperative, both for our safety and well-being. England is obviously actuated by maxims at home and views abroad, which will prove ruinous to herself, and, of course, involve in a like fate every other state that has the misfortune to be entangled with her.

I ask the people of Scotland then to take these things into consideration, feebly and inadequately expressed though they be; and if my poor attempts to arouse my countrymen from their slumbers, and to touch them with a sense of the degraded position they occupy, shall have the effect of bringing an advocate into the field better qualified than I can pretend to be to go into details, and to do justice to the subject generally, I will have got my utmost wishes gratified.

Of yore Scotsmen required no stimulus to prompt them to instant and energetic exertion, when their rights were trampled on, and their national honour invaded. How much stronger is the necessity *now* for our resuming a portion of the spirit of our ancestors, when our fatherland, in consequence of being united to England, has been sunk into a *contemptible province*, stripped of her very name, deprived of the power to remove those crying evils which afflict her, both socially and politically, and when she is left with no other memorials of her former dignity and independence but the moss-covered ruins of her palaces and citadels, whose gigantic fragments but too emphatically tell what Scotland once was, and what she now is. Never was the destruction of an ancient state more complete and humiliating than that of Scotland;—never did a people consent so tamely to surrender their liberties, and submit themselves to the overbearing dictation of another kingdom, as the Scotch have done. No amount of prosperity, whether commercial or agricultural, can excuse or palliate *mean* conduct like this; and however much we may boast ourselves of our enlightenment, and the pretended happiness we enjoy under English rule, were our unpolished, but brave, honest, and shrewd Scottish ancestors to rise from their graves, and to behold in us their descendents the wreck and prostration of that glorious principle of nationality which burned so intensely in their bosoms, and for which they so often enthusiastically fought and bled, they would utterly disown and despise us. I am, Sir, your obedient Servant,

JOHN STEILL.

14 November 1844