

**THE SERPENT'S TRACK: A  
NARRATIVE OF  
TWENTY-TWO YEARS  
PERSECUTION, PP. 3-62**

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THE  
SERPENT'S TRACK.

A NARRATIVE OF TWENTY-TWO YEARS  
PERSECUTION

BY THE

REV. CHARLES ROGERS, LL.D.

"There are calumnies against which even innocence loses courage."—NAPOLEON I.

If the reader can point to any parallel or counterpart in the history of the persecution of an individual equal to that which is recorded in these pages, I will learn what is new.—THE AUTHOR.

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1880

But I have been systematically assailed and harassed during the period of twenty-two years, and for upwards of twenty openly traduced and vilified, and subjected to scorn. It is my sole object in the present narrative to relate as accurately as if I were on oath, the origin of the persecution, and its development, progress, and present culmination.

When ministering at Dunfermline in 1850—just thirty years ago—I first conceived the notion of celebrating by a public monument on Abbey Craig, near Stirling, the Scottish patriot, Sir William Wallace, who had been the hero of my boyhood. I published a guide-book connected with the Abbey Craig district in 1851, under the title of "A Week at Bridge of Allan," and in this little work ventilated my idea as to the monument. A patriotic Scotsman, the late Mr John Steill, of Edinburgh (who, dying a few years ago, bequeathed several thousand pounds for a monument to Wallace at Aberdeen), had, unknown to me till very lately, proposed to the late distinguished Professor John Wilson, of Edinburgh, to initiate a Wallace Monument movement in 1848. Nothing came of his proposal; but when he renewed it, in March 1856, in a newly started Glasgow newspaper, I was asked by the proprietor of that journal to join him in agitating for a monument to Wallace on "the Green" at Glasgow. I declined to do this, but my correspondent agreed to join me in my proposal as to rearing a monument on the Abbey Craig.

I found a little nucleus of support at Edinburgh; and suggested to my Glasgow correspondent to convene a few persons in that city favourable to the movement—my object being that the Chief Magistrate of Stirling might receive two separate requisitions, inviting him to call a public meeting of the leading residents of that place and neighbourhood. Among the few persons who, consequent on my suggestion, met at Glasgow (on the 1st May 1856), was a Mr William Burns, who was invited to preside. As the whole of the subsequent narrative hangs on the proceedings of Mr Burns in relation to myself, I must refer to him somewhat particularly. He was born at Ardrossan in 1809; and after practising many years as a soli-

citor at Glasgow, died at Moffat in 1876. He was, I believe, in all the relations of life pure and circumspect, which causes me to regret all the more keenly that his allowing one idea to override the suggestions of his better nature, has led to the misery which for nearly a quarter of a century I have experienced.

Sometime in 1852 a movement took origin at Edinburgh and Glasgow, which afterwards developed into the "Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights." The greater number of the original adherents, there can be no doubt, were sincerely desirous of reforming actually existing abuses, and of awakening the attention of Scottish Members of Parliament to the duty of more deeply concerning themselves in Scottish affairs. But it soon became evident that the promoters of "The Rights" movement were malcontents—persons disposed either to gratify a puerile vanity or to re-awaken international dissension. Of these Mr William Burns was perhaps the most conspicuous. In the *Times* he proceeded to denounce Lord Palmerston for, in his rectorial address to the students of Glasgow College in 1853, having, as he put it, "insulted Scotland" by using the expressions "England" and "Englishmen." He joined in a complaint which took the form of a Memorial to the Queen, asserting that Scotland was not only "plundered of her name, but robbed of her arms," since, as was alleged, "they were imperfectly quartered in the national escutcheon." He petitioned the Lord Lyon that the florin now in circulation might be recalled, and "the same re-struck with the arms of Scotland in their proper place!" In an Edinburgh newspaper he maintained that "Scotland was insulted," because the British fleet, then in Mediterranean waters, had in southern journals been styled the "English fleet." In a publication issued in 1855 under the pseudonym of the "Professor of Ancient History in the College of St Mungo," he described Lord Palmerston as a "Palmist," and England as "a thief, who held Scotland's sons as bastards, and sent English inquisitors of excise to inspect her whisky-casks and gauge her beverages." It was not, however, until the infatuated pro-

moters of "The Rights" movement had produced a list of *thirty* grievances—most of them radically absurd—that the late patriotic Lord Eglinton, at a public meeting in Edinburgh, said, warmly, "Nothing shall ever induce me to lend my aid to anything which shall sow dissension—to anything which can have the effect of sowing dissension, between the two countries. I never will belong to any society which has such for its object."

After casting about fire-brands, the discomfited agitators relapsed into silence; and in 1856, or four years after its commencement, the Scottish Rights movement was remembered only as an object of ridicule. But when a conspicuous member of the Association joined the Wallace Monument movement, an apprehension was created that, under the pretext of celebrating the Scottish patriot, the Scottish Rights agitation might be revived. Among those who entertained this apprehension was Lord Eglinton, who, though highly commending the idea of monumentally celebrating the Scottish hero, remarked, in reference to Mr Burns, that "already he had been *burned*;" and so for a time declined co-operation. It was not, indeed, till a distinct promise had been obtained from Mr Burns that he would not re-introduce in connection with the new movement the vexed question of Scottish grievances, that his name was by the promoters of the undertaking placed upon the committee.

At a meeting of the principal inhabitants of Stirling, held on the 12th May 1856, I submitted a motion that a Wallace Monument should be built, and was unanimously elected Acting Secretary to a Provisional Committee. Mr Burns came to Stirling, and waited on the Committee a few days afterwards. One of our first steps was to arrange a National Meeting, and nominate an Executive or Acting Committee of about sixty persons. When Mr Burns was suggested as a member, his nomination was opposed, less on account of his recent eccentricities than in the apprehension that he would renew them, and so bring contempt upon the movement. But he assured us he would, while retaining his anti-Anglican senti-



ments, refrain from obtruding them upon his colleagues; and so his name was placed on the roll of members.\*

A great national gathering, at which the late Earl of Elgin presided, was held in the King's Park, Stirling, on the 24th June 1856. I was then confirmed in the Acting Secretaryship, and from this period onward, for six years actively, and for other seven less actively, I made the construction of the Monument a grand object of my life.

Shortly after the national meeting, the predicted storm began to loom. The Provost of Stirling had wished me to insert in the original prospectus a description from my "Week at Bridge of Allan" of the locality of the proposed monument. Mr Burns refused to circulate the prospectus; he had probably already meditated a claim as to being founder of the enterprise, which a quotation from my volume would prevent. Two hundred pounds were wasted in getting up a new prospectus. This Mr Burns would not use after all; it did not include his name. He printed a third prospectus, to which his name was appended. This with committee-rooms, rented at Glasgow for about six months, cost at least £100.

In 1857 a collector was appointed; he was to collect in Glasgow under the direction of Mr Burns. He waited on Mr Burns day after day, but on one pretext or another he was not allowed to begin. At his entreaty, I gave him some work of my own, and of course paid him out of my own funds. Mr Burns reported that I had been employing the Wallace Monument collector for my own purposes!

During the first twelvemonths I held meetings in the principal Scottish towns. In the course of the second year I visited and organised movements in London, Birmingham, Manchester,

\* I shall afterwards have to deal with the subject of *prophecy* in a different connection. Meanwhile, I cannot forbear recording in a note a prediction made to me in May 1856 by the late Mr James Pagan, editor of the *Glasgow Herald*. "I shall subscribe to the monument," said Mr Pagan, "and support it in our paper, but I shall join no committee on Scottish matters of which Mr Burns is a member. You say you have placed him on the committee, and that you are secretary of it. Resign, I entreat you, at once, otherwise persecution awaits you, and to your dying day you will regret that you rejected my counsel."

and Liverpool. We at length got £2000. Mr Burns was dissatisfied, and determined I should be ousted from office; "Dr Rogers must be got quit of." There was no chance for the triumph of the Scottish lion so long as I was on the monumental staff. Nor could the credit of the enterprise be wrested from me while I held the secretaryship. I had got a finely-sculptured statue of Wallace erected at Stirling; my late friend, Mr William Drummond, paying for the statue, while the inhabitants built the pedestal. Mr Burns thought the opportunity suitable for making another attempt to oust me; he wrote to the Provost of Stirling as vice-convener, asking him to summon a meeting of committee, at which he would propose my deposition from the secretaryship on account of my *dividing my energies*. Soon afterwards, a commercial crisis occurred which deprived some bank agents of their posts. One of the deprived received an offer in these words, "If you will support Mr Burns in getting Dr Rogers removed from the Monument secretaryship, you will be made local agent of a Glasgow Bank." When the undertaking was fairly started, I had agreed to accept a salary of £50 for personal services. I would have certainly declined remuneration, but my emoluments as Chaplain of Stirling Castle then amounted to only £80 a-year, and I could not afford to give up a large portion of my time to the secretaryship without a little compensation. My circumstances were known, and Mr Burns argued that if I was deprived of my salary, I would be obliged to retire from the secretaryship. He miscalculated, for when at the end of the first year he proposed that I should be deprived of salary, I acquiesced and retained office. At the end of the second year he proposed that I should no longer receive a grant for the payment of clerks; I assented, but would not abandon my post.

Early in 1858, Mr Burns published at Glasgow a pamphlet entitled, "Scotland and her Calumniators." While commending the injunction "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour," he indulged in invective against England and her people. "The whole history of Scotland," he remarked, "has been one of resistance to their assumption." "They had in the

past," he added, "shed the blood of Scottish Covenanters; and now in the House of Peers they usurped a right of review of Scottish Courts." Having denounced several leading Scotsmen as "contemptible anglomaniacs," and recommended to the whipping-post "architects, builders, and other snobs" who on Glasgow streets recorded the names of London localities, and of the English nobility, he expressed a hope that the Rights Society "would yet produce good fruit."

Having ventilated his views, Mr Burns (who attended nearly every meeting of committee) proposed that we should advertise for designs. A day was fixed for adjudication. Mr Burns had insisted that *native artists* only should be invited to compete, and that no premium should be offered. Few designs were submitted. There was one which suited Mr Burns' views—a piece of sculpture; THE SCOTTISH LION STOOD ASTRIDE ON THE POWER OF ENGLAND, SYMBOLISED BY A CROWNED FIGURE WITH SERPENT LEGS AND DISTENDED JAWS. This, Mr Burns remarked, was "a noble impersonation of Scottish liberty triumphing over English tyranny." He succeeded in carrying its adoption by a majority of one.

A great sensation ensued. The people of Stirling held an indignation meeting.\* The press ridiculed the resolution. The Lord Advocate, afterwards Lord Jerviswoode, convener of the committee, at my entreaty summoned the committee together, with a view to their reconsidering their decision. There was a large and influential attendance. Mr Burns proposed that "the sederunt should be *correctly* made up" by the exclusion of my name—since I was, he said, merely secretary, and not a member

\* Sir William Stirling Maxwell, Bart., the late accomplished member for Perthshire, published a pamphlet ridiculing what was termed the Typhon design. He used these words: "We all know, as Dr Rogers has said, that Edward I. was called Longshanks; and Mrs Nickleby, had he fallen in her way, might have spoken of him as Sheepshanks; but why are we to be expected to recognise him as Serpentshanks? . . . Of the taste and propriety of symbolising our old national feuds under emblems like this lion and snake-limbed puzzle, I supposed, until I saw this group, there could be but one opinion. Our ancestors who lived nearer the days when the Englishman and the Scot were natural foes, and who might have been more reasonably excused for getting up such images, indulged in no such anti-Anglican exhibitions in marble or brass."