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THE EARL OF EGLINTON, SCOTTISH CONSERVATISM, AND THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE VINDICATION OF SCOTTISH RIGHTS*

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ABSTRACT. *This article re-evaluates the role and importance of the thirteenth earl of Eglinton as president of the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights (NAVSR). Departing from the established historiography, which depicts his career as a romantic absurdity because of his organization of a medieval tournament in 1839, it shows Eglinton to have been a political figure of substance, who played a significant role in public life during the mid-Victorian era. The article emphasizes the importance of 'administrative devolution' as a feature of long-term Conservative political thought and points to activities of Eglinton and his circle as an example of the need to give more weight to the importance of Conservatives in modern Scottish history.*

I

The National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights (NAVSR) has been called 'the eccentric grandparent of the modern [Scottish] nationalist movement'.[1] Unlike the best-known examples of mid-nineteenth-century European nationalism or the modern Scottish National Party, this movement did not demand an independent state. Its programme expressed loyalty to the United Kingdom and the constitutional arrangements on which the Union of 1707 was based. Its demand for 'Justice for Scotland' rested on grievances relating to the neglect of Scottish interests at Westminster, the suppression of Scottish governmental institutions, the paucity of state expenditure in Scotland, and a number of symbolic issues relating to heraldic insignia. These were to be rectified by the appointment of a secretary of state for Scotland who, together with additional Scottish representation in the House of Commons, would ensure that the public

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[1] Colin Kidd, 'Sentiment, race and revival: Scottish identities in the aftermath of Enlightenment', in Lawrence Brockliss and David Eastwood, eds., *A union of multiple identities: the British Isles, c. 1750–c. 1850* (Manchester, 1997), p. 121.

opinion, special needs and distinctive status of Scotland received adequate attention from the United Kingdom government.[2] Recognizing that these demands would not be conceded without pressure on parliament, in 1853 and 1854 the NAVSR attracted an impressive amount of support. It held large meetings, issued publications, organized petitions, and brought on a debate in the House of Lords. Then suddenly it suspended its efforts during the Crimean War.

The NAVSR's programme was less 'eccentric' than it might seem. It expressed an ideology of national identity that has been called 'Unionist Nationalism' according to which Scotland was a member of a coalition of nations in the United Kingdom, each of which had distinctive rights derived from the Scottish and Irish Acts of Union.[3] Nonetheless, one aspect of the eccentricity imputed to the movement awaits sustained research: its leadership. The NAVSR was heterogeneous in its political composition, but, unlike the best-known European nationalist movements, which had been predominantly liberal in inspiration during the recent revolutionary ferment, it was heavily reliant on the direction provided by an influential group of Conservatives that included Archibald William Montgomerie, the thirteenth earl of Eglinton and Winton (the movement's president), and two well-known Scottish writers, William Edmonstoune Aytoun and Archibald Alison.

The historiography of the movement, an eccentric phenomenon in its own right, is remarkably uninformative about the participation of these men. It is accepted that they strongly influenced, even 'dominated', the leadership of the movement,[4] but little has been written beyond some references to their romantic mentality. This criticism applies especially to the place attributed to Eglinton. Far from receiving serious evaluation, his involvement is mentioned only to reinforce the charge of eccentricity. Sir Reginald Coupland's *Welsh and Scottish nationalism*, the first major study of the NAVSR, ignored Eglinton.[5] Subsequent historians have referred to him, but their assessments are little more than echoes of each other. It has sufficed to state that Eglinton staged a medieval tournament in 1839 at the commencement of the railway era, an absurdity that condemned everything with which he was associated to futility for the rest of his days. The most frequently quoted of these historians has been H. J. Hanham. His *Scottish nationalism* omitted Eglinton's participation in the NAVSR,[6] but an earlier essay offered an unsubstantiated interpretation of Eglinton's role. The NAVSR had 'an astonishingly high romantic content' as indicated by a petitioning campaign against heraldic devices that belittled Scotland's status in the United Kingdom; although there had been 'nothing peculiarly Scottish' about his tournament, the petitions were sent to 'that most heraldic nobleman Lord Eglinton' for

[2] *Hansard*, House of Lords Debates, 6 Apr. 1854, 3rd ser., CXXXII, 496–507.

[3] Graeme Morton, *Unionist nationalism: governing urban Scotland, 1830–1860* (East Linton, 1999). The definition of Unionist nationalism offered here differs from Morton's.

[4] T. M. Devine, *The Scottish nation, 1700–2000* (London, 1999), p. 287.

[5] Reginald Coupland, *Welsh and Scottish nationalism: a study* (London, 1954).

[6] H. J. Hanham, *Scottish nationalism* (London, 1969), pp. 74–8.

presentation to the queen; regardless of his 'little real influence in political circles either in England or in Scotland', Eglinton subsequently became the 'figurehead' of the Association, where his 'picturesque' presence alongside other 'old-fashioned Tories' – Alison, Aytoun, and Alexander Baillie-Cochrane – set the 'dominant tone'. For Hanham the episode showed the tendency of Scottish nationalism to indulge in 'an outpouring of emotions about the past rather than of political aspirations for the future'.[7]

Recent writings by, for example, Thomas Devine and Colin Kidd remain close to this interpretation.[8] Admittedly, a new sense of direction has been indicated by Graeme Morton, the historian who has made the term 'Unionist Nationalism' part of a historical discourse in which the NAVSR appears as 'the group that structured the nationalist "we" in Scotland'.[9] Unfortunately, Morton's definition of 'Unionist Nationalism' as an ideology that served the interests of bourgeois civil society in Scotland raises a pertinent question about Eglinton's association with the NAVSR: why would such a movement have requested a landed tory aristocrat whom Morton describes as an admirer of 'English chivalry' to become its president and why would he have acceded?[10] Morton's most recent reference to Eglinton does not advance significantly beyond Hanham's answer: the earl was 'an intellectual romantic, living in a Gothic castle in Ayrshire and noted for organising the grandiose chivalric tournament in 1839'; he was brought forward to serve as a 'figurehead' for the NAVSR.[11]

This article re-evaluates Eglinton's importance by restoring him to a different context, one that takes account of his relationship to the early Victorian climate of opinion, for, although there were those who resembled Karl Marx in lampooning 'the Don Quixote who wanted to resuscitate the tournaments of chivalry',[12] contemporaries were more approving of Eglinton's place in public life than historians have recognized. Very much a man of his era, Eglinton earned widespread popularity and became a political figure of substance. Employing 'Unionist Nationalism' in a broader sense than Morton's definition that connects it to 'the laissez-faire state and the triumph of the bourgeoisie' in urban Scotland,[13] this article points to the importance of Conservatives in Scottish public life during the nineteenth century, a time when the Liberals dominated Scottish parliamentary politics. Endorsing David Miller's view that 'Nationalist

[7] H. J. Hanham, 'Mid-century Scottish nationalism: romantic and radical', in Robert Robson, ed., *Ideas and institutions of Victorian Britain* (London, 1967), pp. 145–71.

[8] Devine, *Scottish nation*, p. 287; Colin Kidd, *Union and unionisms: political thought in Scotland, 1500–2000* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 268–71.

[9] Morton, *Unionist nationalism*, p. 135.

[10] Ibid., p. 19. See also Graeme Morton, 'Scottish rights and "centralisation" in the mid-nineteenth century', *Nations and Nationalism*, 2 (1996), pp. 262–3.

[11] Graeme Morton, 'Scotland is Britain: the union and unionist nationalism, 1807–1907', *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies*, 1 (2008), p. 135. Morton briefly lists some of Eglinton's activities.

[12] Karl Marx, *New York Daily Tribune*, 11 Jan. 1859, in *Karl Marx Frederick Engels: collected works* (50 vols., London, 1980), XVI, p. 134.

[13] Morton, *Unionist nationalism*, p. 10. As Keith Robbins's review, *English Historical Review*, 115 (2000), p. 224, noted, Morton's 'urban Scotland' is confined to Edinburgh.

ideas may … be appropriated and used in different ways by conservatives, liberals, and socialists, even within the political tradition of a single country',[14] it relates Eglinton's activities to the emergence of 'administrative devolution' as an enduring policy of Scottish and British Conservatives.

II

By campaigning on Scotland's place within the United Kingdom polity, the NAVSR raised the vexed issue of what that polity was. One response was to assert that Scotland was an anomaly and that Scots should accept assimilation to English ways. *The Times* was an especially belligerent proponent of this approach. Faced with the Association's demands, it denounced the notion of Scotland's 'separate nationality' as 'an anachronism' that had no worthwhile purpose other than to 'diversify ballrooms and enliven festivals'; Scots should rejoice that they received so many visits from the queen and English noblemen. It was pointless to cherish usages derived from 'past isolation and barbarism': the Act of Union had been intended to ensure that 'all questions of a national character should cease'.[15]

The proposition that the constituent parts of the United Kingdom should not survive as anomalies in an increasingly centralized polity has often been voiced in political discourse. The mid-nineteenth century was one of these times, when the reforms introduced by whig and liberal conservative governments often took the form of suppressing old institutions and replacing them with ones that were centralized in London. During the ensuing debates the structure of the United Kingdom was challenged by a profusion of counter-proposals for decentralization. The best known was Daniel O'Connell's repeal movement, but there were also Irish schemes for a federal system of government, to which Joseph Sturge and his circle of British radicals contributed.[16] Other spokesmen envisaged an ambulatory parliament occasionally leaving London to conduct sessions in Dublin and other cities.[17] There were heated debates that rallied spokesmen from various parts of the political spectrum in defence of the Irish viceroyalty.[18] In England groups ranging from Chartists to Conservatives sought to restrict the powers of Westminster in favour of agencies of local government.[19] The *Westminster Review* carried an article envisaging the division of the United Kingdom into districts each of which would have a legislative centre to initiate private bills for ratification by parliament.[20] In Wales there was an upsurge of national feeling occasioned by

[14] David Miller, *On nationality* (Oxford, 1995), p. 4.

[15] *Times*, 21 July 1853, p. 5, and 5 Nov. 1853, p. 6.

[16] Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the moral radical party in early Victorian Britain* (London, 1987), p. 147.

[17] James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: reaction and orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760–1832* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 154; Joseph Spence, 'Isaac Butt, nationality and Irish Toryism, 1833–1852', *Bullán*, 2 (1995), p. 47; *Economist*, 9 Sept. 1848, p. 1010.

[18] *Freeman's Journal*, 21 June 1851, p. 3.

[19] C. A. Williams, 'The Sheffield Democrats' critique of criminal justice in the 1850s', in Richard Colls and Richard Rodger, eds., *Cities of ideas: civil society and urban governance in Britain, 1800–2000* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 96, 102, 119.

[20] Quoted by *Commonwealth*, 21 Jan. 1854, p. 383.

'the Treason of the Blue Books', a name devised in protest against an official report in 1847 that disparaged the Welsh as lazy, backward and immoral on a scale that could only be overcome by assimilating them to English language and culture.[21] In 1837 Robert Nicoll, the Scottish editor of the *Leeds Times*, called for a Scottish parliament or regional legislatures across the United Kingdom to deal with local issues, a proposal that was renewed by the Glasgow *Commonwealth* in 1853.[22] In 1850 Dr James Begg, a Free Church of Scotland minister, called for a Scottish secretary of state with 'a council of Scotsmen', and as a last resort he envisaged an elected body to deal with Scottish matters, much as he had seen in the colonies.[23] Most extreme of all, in 1844 John Steill demanded the dissolution of the Union 'out and out'.[24] From all over the British Isles a chorus of protests agreed with the Dublin *Freeman's Journal*'s censure of government policies that gorged the 'huge gastric organ of Middlesex'.[25]

The NAVSR took its place in this constitutional cornucopia. Its Conservative leaders based their demands on Unionist Nationalism, but its context and characteristics differed from the bourgeois-liberal version described by Morton. Its origins are well known. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Scottish aristocrats and Conservatives constructed an invented tradition of Scottish national identity in which they would hold pride of place. Its principal inspiration was the *mise en scène* that Sir Walter Scott created in his writings and public theatre, most notably in 1822 when he choreographed the royal visit to Edinburgh as a 'plaided panorama' in which a kilted George IV saluted his bemused Scottish subjects as 'the chieftains and clans of Scotland'.[26] Taken up by the next generation of Scottish aristocrats during Queen Victoria's first visit to Scotland, this carefully crafted vision of Highlandism as a special relationship between the British monarchy and the Scottish people culminated in the phenomenon known as 'Balmorality', the portrayal of Scotland as a country characterized by clan-based hierarchical loyalties and Highland rituals, presided over by chiefs and a tartan-clad monarch.[27] The outcome was that by 1850 the British monarchy emerged as an institution that patronized a highly conservative representation of Scotland's distinctiveness.

The political corollary of Scott's activities went further. This could be seen in *The letters of Malachi Malagrowther* (1826) where he defined Scotland's place in the United Kingdom. Scott had been provoked by the British government's decision

[21] Gwyn A. Williams, *When was Wales?* (London, 1985), p. 208.

[22] *Leeds Times*, 10 Sept. 1836, p. 3, and 4 Mar. 1837, p. 3; *Commonwealth*, 12 Nov. 1853, p. 153, and 10 Dec. 1853, pp. 248–9.

[23] *Memoirs of James Begg*, DD (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1888), II, pp. 144–50.

[24] [John Steill], *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* (Edinburgh, 1844), p. 7.

[25] *Freeman's Journal*, 18 Mar. 1853, p. 2.

[26] J. G. Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bar.* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1888), II, p. 513; Hugh Trevor Roper, *The invention of Scotland* (New Haven, CT, 2008), pp. 212–16.

[27] Alex Tyrrell, 'The queen's "little trip": the royal visit to Scotland in 1842', *Scottish Historical Review*, 82 (2003), pp. 65, 67.

to withdraw the right of Scottish banks to issue notes of less than £5 in value, but, as his modern editor has noted, the *Letters* ranged so widely that they amounted to 'the first manifesto of modern Scottish nationalism'.[28] Starting from the premise that Scotland and Ireland enjoyed a special status within the United Kingdom, Sir Walter ascribed eighteenth-century Scotland's progress to the benign neglect of British politicians. Alas, this was changing, and Scotland was becoming an 'experimental farm' conducted by any 'juvenile statesman' who cared to look north. The motto seemed to be that 'All must centre on London', a city that was emulating the baneful example of Paris, that 'corrupted metropolis'. Against this centralizing principle Scott contrasted 'the national diversity between different countries [which] is but an instance of that general variety which nature seems to have adopted as a principle through all her works'. Careless people might dismiss Scotland's grievances as trifles, but symbols carried messages; governments should remember that 'England lost America about a few miserable chests of tea'. Scott deprecated violence, but he wished to set the 'heather … on fire' in the form of petitions, threats by electors to reject unsatisfactory MPs, and the withdrawal of the Scottish MPs and peers from parliamentary business until they were given a fair hearing. Turning to Ireland, he called on 'Pat' to join the Scots in 'a league offensive and defensive against all such measures as tend to the suppression of any just right belonging to either country, in virtue of the Articles of Union respectively'.[29]

There was a strong connection between Sir Walter Scott's Unionist Nationalism and the programme espoused by Eglinton's circle. Conservatives looked to Scott as more than the author of 'Gothick' tales of derring-do; in his writings they found a past golden age when the social ranks respected each other's roles.[30] The 1839 tournament was an enactment of this political message; it offered the spectacle of a colourfully dynamic aristocracy delivering a symbolic blow against what one contemporary called 'the sordid, heartless, sensual doctrines of utilitarianism' that whig reformers were spreading across the British Isles.[31] This was not the romantic antiquarianism to which historians have referred; like other paternalists of his day, Eglinton objected, not to modern technology, but to the ideological carapace that had been imposed on it. As a staunch defender of the corn laws he might have been expected to own fields of golden wheat, but his fortunes were as ineluctably bound up with the Industrial Revolution as John Bright's. His estates provided Scottish industry with coal, iron, fireclay, railways, and a port.[32] His economic commitments were so diverse, and he was so involved with promoting them, that he was compared with the

[28] Sir Walter Scott, *The letters of Malachi Malagrowther*, ed. P. H. Scott (Edinburgh, 1981), Preface.

[29] Ibid., pp. 10, 64–6, 72–8, 83–8, 136, 142–4.

[30] Chris Brooks, *The Gothic revival* (London, 1999), pp. 130–52.

[31] Peter Buchan, *The Eglinton tournament and gentleman unmasked* (1840), quoted by Sara Stevenson and Helen Bennett, *Van Dyck in check trousers: fancy dress in art and life, 1700–1900* (Edinburgh, 1978), p. 114.

[32] *The topographical, statistical, and historical gazetteer of Scotland* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1848), I, pp. 57–8; *Newcastle Courant*, 27 Nov. 1840, p. 1; *Times*, 3 Apr. 1848, p. 6, and 2 Oct. 1849, p. 5.

'merchant princes' of Renaissance Italy who 'did not disdain to connect the rank of Sovereigns with the name and occupation of merchants'.[33]

Eglinton's ideas resembled those of his friend and neighbour, Alexander Baillie-Cochrane, a prominent member of the Young England movement whose novel, *Ernest Vane*, echoed themes in Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil*. Baillie-Cochrane deplored the 'emporiums of vice and misery' that were spreading across Britain, but he did not agree that factories were 'in themselves pernicious'; there were 'manufacturing communities where the master and his servants are associated together by the ties of love as well as interest'. Parliament should encourage this example by repudiating 'the cold callous doctrines' of political economy that plunged multitudes into 'unutterable misery'. It had been different when there were 'real old families' and community sports had conferred 'manliness' and stability on the nation.[34]

Eglinton's Scottishness has not been given due importance by historians. Born in 1812 he was educated at Eton, spent part of every year in London, and was married in Lambeth Palace by the archbishop of Canterbury.[35] Nonetheless he cherished a lively association with his ancestral country. This was evident at the tournament, which Hanham incorrectly depicts as an event with 'nothing peculiarly Scottish' about its presentation.[36] Eglinton asked spectators to wear plaids with bonnets and a sprig of heather, and Lord Glenlyon participated as the 'Knight of the Gaels' accompanied by an escort of kilted Highlanders.[37] This was one of many occasions when Eglinton took part in competitions before enthusiastic crowds; he often brought men of all ranks together to witness his demonstrations of manly endeavour or to vie with him in popular sports. Many of these events occurred on his Ayrshire estates.[38]

Five years after the tournament, Eglinton's Scottishness was again evident when he presided over an attempt by a group of Conservatives to seize the commanding heights of cultural nationalism in Scotland. Sir Walter Scott's evocation of chivalry had endorsed the ideal of gentlemanly authority; now the temper of the times seemed to urge the desirability of extending the appeal of Conservative opinions by appropriating the public memory of Scotland's demotic literary icon, Robert Burns. In 1844 Eglinton together with a group of contributors to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* – Alison, Aytoun, and Professor John Wilson – organized the first of the national festivals in Burns's memory. The outlook of Scottish Conservatives was dismal: their opposition to the 1832 Reform

[33] *Freeman's Journal*, 2 Sept. 1852, p. 3.

[34] Alexander Baillie-Cochrane, *Ernest Vane* (2 vols., London, 1849), I, pp. 20, 35, 44, 69–72.

[35] *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 20 Feb. 1841, p. 3.

[36] Hanham, 'Mid-century Scottish nationalism', p. 145.

[37] Tyrrell, 'Queen's "little trip"', p. 68; Ian Anstruther, *The knight and the umbrella: an account of the Eglinton tournament, 1839* (London, 1963), plate 13.

[38] John Burnett, *Riot, revelry and rout: sport in Lowland Scotland before 1860* (East Linton, 2000), pp. 176–98; John Tolson, 'The thirteenth earl of Eglinton (1812–1861): a notable Scottish sportsman', *Sport in History*, 28 (2008), pp. 472–90.

Act was held against them; the Disruption of the Church of Scotland had weakened their hold over their dependants in many areas; and the reforms initiated by Sir Robert Peel's liberal Conservative government seemed scarcely less threatening than the policies of whig cabinets. Ominously, Chartist spokesmen and the Anti-Corn Law League were calling for a new political and social order. At the Robert Burns festival Eglinton and his friends offered a version of Unionist Nationalism as a counter-ideology in which an organic society was presided over by paternalist landowners.[39] Shorn of the radical ideas for which he had been noted in real life, Burns was celebrated as the poet hero of a loyal peasantry living in a hierarchical Scotland where, as Wilson put it, aristocrats like Eglinton were 'endowed with the qualities that best secure attachment between the Castle and the Cottage'. Hailing the 'union with noblest England', speakers urged Scots not only to honour Burns as their national bard but also to respect the great English and Irish men of literature. The vision was one of Scotland as a nation within the United Kingdom, remaining true to a distinctive tradition in which a sturdy peasantry deferred to a paternalist aristocracy.[40]

Confronting what they saw as the worsening situation after the repeal of the Corn Laws, Eglinton and his friends at *Blackwood's* gave their cultural nationalism a sharper political edge. They did not speak for all Scottish Conservatives – there were Scottish Peelites – but they promoted what has been called a 'Scotch Tory way of life' where patriotic and paternalist landowners were 'unsullied by the ideas of political economists or the City of London'.[41] Their notion of an organization like the NAVSR emerged at this time. Writing in *Blackwood's*, Aytoun attacked centralization in 1847 as 'the favourite theory of our government', which was destroying Scotland's nationality. His article was suffused with the sense of decline that was evident in Scottish intellectual circles: Sir Walter Scott's protests had been ignored; 'the besom of reform' was sweeping Scottish institutions aside; a brain-drain was attracting Scots to London where most of the public expenditure took place; and Scottish institutions including the universities were languishing as a consequence. 'Reformers and the Whigs' were the principal culprits, but Conservatives were blameworthy too as shown by Peel's 'wanton aggression' against the Scottish banking system. Scotland needed 'a national movement' headed by 'some intelligent and patriotic nobleman – some true and generous Scotsman, such as we all know the Earl of Eglinton to be'.[42]

[39] David Roberts, *Paternalism in early Victorian England* (London, 1979), ch. 2, relates their ideas to his model of early Victorian paternalism. See also Gerald Warner, *The Scottish tory party: a history* (London, 1988), pp. 108–9.

[40] Alex Tyrrell, 'Paternalism, public memory and national identity in early Victorian Scotland: the Robert Burns festival at Ayr in 1844', *History*, 90 (2005), pp. 42–61.

[41] F. W. Fetter, quoted by Walter E. Houghton, ed., *The Wellesley index to Victorian periodicals, 1824–1900* (Toronto, 1966), p. 8.

[42] [W. E. Aytoun], 'Letter from a railway witness in London', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 62 (1847), pp. 74, 78–9.

During the six years that elapsed before Aytoun's suggestion was implemented Eglinton confirmed his credentials as the person to lead a Scottish movement against centralization by plunging into the world of parliamentary politics. Hitherto his membership of the House of Lords had made few encroachments on his sporting life; after 1846 he was consumed by his 'utter detestation' of Sir Robert Peel's 'iniquity' in repealing the corn laws.[43] Regardless of the benefits that repeal was believed to offer his industrial interests, he called on the House, as 'the hereditary guardians of the people, as the protectors of their rights, as Peers of Great Britain', to uphold its code of *noblesse oblige* by championing the corn laws.[44] During the debates in 1846 he became a whip for the Protectionists, and for the next fifteen years he was the close ally of Lord Stanley (the earl of Derby after 1851), who became prime minister in 1852 and 1858.[45] Hanham's assertion that Eglinton had 'little real influence in political circles' is wide of the mark.[46]

Eglinton was active on a broad front of activities in Scotland throughout the 1840s and 1850s. Angered by Peel's regulation of the Scottish banks, he echoed Sir Walter Scott by denouncing a 'tendency to centralization, which, though high in favour with Sir R. Peel, was very differently viewed by the people of Scotland'.[47] He became the vice president of the Scottish Protective Association which favoured the restoration of the corn laws.[48] He was a spokesman for Scottish interests in the House of Lords, as in 1847 when he protested against government imposts that harmed spirit distillers in Scotland.[49] He served as the lord lieutenant of Ayrshire, and his patronage of sporting clubs and competitions helped to win him a reputation as the most popular peer in Scotland. He was chosen as the lord rector of Marischal College and Glasgow University,[50] an elective office for which the students campaigned in support of prominent men of the day. Seeing these contests as something like opinion polls that indicated the loyalties of the educated men of the coming generation, Conservatives were heartened by their victories.[51] There was nothing eccentric about Eglinton's emergence as the president of an association that claimed to speak for Scotland.

[43] Eglinton to William Mure, 16 Dec. 1846, National Library of Scotland (NLS), MS 4950, fos. 124–5.

[44] George Crosby, *Crosby's parliamentary record: containing debates in the Lords and Commons on the corn laws, in the memorable session of 1846* (2 vols., Leeds, 1848), II, p. 531.

[45] Eglinton's closeness to Derby can be traced through their correspondence in the Scottish and Liverpool archives. For example, Derby to Eglinton, 30 Jan. 1855, Scottish Archives (SA), GD3/5/1361, 15; Eglinton to Derby, 14 June 1859, Derby papers, Liverpool Record Office (LRO), 920 DER (14) 148/2a. See also John Hogan, 'Party management in the House of Lords, 1846–1865', *Parliamentary History*, 10 (1991), pp. 127–34.

[46] Hanham, 'Mid-century Scottish nationalism', p. 163.

[47] *Times*, 5 Aug. 1846, p. 3.

[48] *Scotsman*, 22 Mar. 1851, p. 1.

[49] *Times*, 24 Apr. 1847, p. 2.

[50] Ibid., 22 Mar. 1851, p. 4, and 3 Dec.1852, p. 8.

[51] Angus Hawkins, *The forgotten prime minister: the 14th earl of Derby* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 153, 191; Archibald Alison, *Some account of my life and writings* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1883), II, pp. 34–5.

III

Something like the NAVSR had been in the offing for several years; there was widespread agreement with the evidence that Aytoun had cited as proof of Scotland's decline at the hands of centralizing British governments. The trigger was a new batch of centralization measures around the time of the 1852 general election, when James and John Grant, Patrick Edward Dove, and others called for a 'Protection of Scotland Association'.[52] The Grants were relations of Sir Walter Scott, and James, the author of romantic Scottish tales in his own right, was described as 'well versed' in the 'abstruse science' of heraldry and 'chivalrous sentiments'.[53] Their first move was to launch a petitioning campaign against heraldic usages that downgraded Scotland's place in the United Kingdom. They asked Eglinton to present the petitions to the queen.[54] As the knight of the tournament and a peer with political influence in Scotland and Westminster, he must have seemed an obvious choice as the president and parliamentary spokesman for the Association that emerged from these beginnings. Heraldry and insignia of all sorts mattered for many supporters of the NAVSR. The great meetings organized by the Association in Edinburgh and Glasgow were replete with symbols that drew on the invented tradition of Scotland's past. At the banquet that was held in Eglinton's honour in October 1854, in addition to the St Andrew's flag and the Union flag, the royal standards and the royal arms of Scotland were displayed to show the appropriate heraldry. Side by side with Lochaber axes, claymores, and shields to celebrate the military prowess of the Highland past there were curling stones and golf clubs portraying a peaceful vision of the present. The Association had its own tartan; there was bagpipe music; and some members dressed in the Highland style.[55]

At these gatherings Eglinton's coat of arms was prominently displayed and he wore his Order of the Thistle. Nonetheless his activities during the 1850s reveal him also as a practical man of the railway age, not merely the 'purveyor of pageantry' depicted by historians.[56] When, for example, the House of Lords discussed the clock face that would be appropriate for the new houses of parliament, he rejected the use of figures that would be familiar only to those 'who had obtained some knowledge of medieval art'; he preferred a 'modernised' look.[57] His attitude to Highlandism was restrained. The jockeys of his famous racehorses sported tartan colours, but Eglinton declined to wear Highland clothing on the

[52] 'Ian' [John Grant], 'The government of Scotland: to the editor of the *Caledonian Mercury*', 9 Apr. 1852, in *Scottish Rights Association*, 'Scottish Rights Association', Newscuttings and pamphlets, NLS, NE 20, fos. 13–14 (hereafter Newscuttings).

[53] 'The Lyon king of arms', *Morning Post*, 11 July 1866, in ibid.

[54] John Grant, 'The royal arms of Scotland', 26 Nov. 1853, in ibid.

[55] *Glasgow Gazette*, 7 Oct. 1854, p. 2; *Glasgow Constitutional*, 7 Oct. 1854, p. 2.

[56] Murray Pittock, *Scottish nationality* (Houndmills, 2001), p. 94.

[57] *Hansard*, House of Lords Debates, 15 Feb. 1856, 3rd ser., CXL, 807.

grounds that he was a Lowlander.[58] In a letter that must have surprised James Grant he even confessed to knowing little about genealogy.[59]

Eglinton was no mere 'figurehead' of the NAVSR. The Grant brothers had launched the movement; James was one of the secretaries; Patrick Dove wrote the original statement of grievances; and there were vigorous pamphleteers including William Burns and John Steill as well as the Grants.[60] Nonetheless Eglinton and his *Blackwood's* friends assumed the right to define policy at the Association's public meetings and in parliament. Eglinton's correspondence with Aytoun shows them arranging the speakers at the Glasgow meeting in December 1853 and setting out priorities to ensure that 'enthusiasm does not degenerate into nonsense'. The treatment of Scotland's heraldic arms, they agreed, should be excluded from the NAVSR's petition.[61] In his opening speech to the Association Eglinton insisted that the creation of a secretaryship of state for Scotland must be the 'first step'.[62] His speech showed more concern for political substance than national emotion. He used the words 'Secretary of State for Scotland' but declined to be constrained by terminology; his aim was to have Scotland represented in the cabinet. If need be, he was willing to accept a de facto Scottish secretaryship of state by attaching its duties to one of 'the useless offices at present in existence' such as the lord privy seal or the chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster. Possibly the lord high commissioner, the office-holder who was appointed by the crown to preside over the general assembly of the Church of Scotland, might take on the role without creating an additional budgetary requirement: his current responsibilities amounted to 'sitting still for a certain number of hours in the course of a year'. As befitted a former parliamentary whip, Eglinton envisaged an equally practical form for his second step: the number of Scottish MPs must be increased; there was no better way to influence Westminster than 'good solid votes'.[63] This down-to-earth attitude pervaded his presentation of the movement's parliamentary business. On 6 April 1854, when he opened the House of Lords debate on the NAVSR's petition of grievances, Eglinton repudiated the jibe that the Association was obsessed with such 'secondary' matters as heraldry and national dress. His concern was with Scotland's rights in the United Kingdom.[64]

Alison and Aytoun, Eglinton's closest associates in the NAVSR, were similarly hard-headed in their attitude to Scottish governance. Described by Michael Fry

[58] *Morning Chronicle*, 23 Mar. 1857, p. 2.

[59] Eglinton to James Grant, 19 Mar. 1853, NLS, MS, ACC 8715.

[60] 'Scottish Rights Association', in Newscuttings.

[61] Eglinton to W. E. Aytoun, 25 Oct. 1853, 25 Jan. 1854, NLS, Blackwood's Collection, MS 4896, fos. 117–18 and 125–6; [W. E. Aytoun], 'The late earl of Eglinton', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 90 (1861), p. 643.

[62] *Glasgow Constitutional*, 5 Nov. 1853, p. 1. See also Eglinton to James Grant, 24 July 1853, NLS, MS, ACC 8715.

[63] *Glasgow Constitutional*, 17 Dec. 1853, pp. 2–3; *Glasgow Gazette*, 7 Oct. 1854, p. 2.

[64] *Hansard*, House of Lords Debates, 6 Apr. 1854, 3rd ser., CXXXII, 496–504.

as 'a Conservative without romantic excess', Alison combined the caring with the authoritarian characteristics of tory paternalism. He condemned 'the callousness of contemporary capitalism' but used his authority as sheriff of Lanarkshire to repress trade unionists. A firm defender of 'the ancient Scottish tradition' of law and government, Alison had been angered by Westminster's interference with the Scottish judicial system. He joined the Association at Eglinton's behest and was one of the principal speakers at its meetings.[65] Aytoun was not the incurable romantic described by historians. Too much has been made of the Jacobite sentiments in his poetry, and too little note has been taken of his involvement in current politics. Conservatives fêted him as a Protectionist writer, and he had strongly opposed Peel's banking legislation.[66] Rejecting the sneer that the NAVSR was conducted by 'a number of hot-headed enthusiasts, who desired to see a return to the old system of feudalism',[67] Aytoun based his analysis of Scottish governance on the theme of centralization. In *Norman Sinclair*, a thesis novel which ranged over contemporary politics, he created a tory as the principal character but denied that a 'reverence for the past must necessarily engender a spirit of hostility to modern invention, or of resistance to schemes for the benefit or amelioration of the people'. Another character, Sir George Smoothly, presented the contrasting stereotype of the Peelite reformer. To please English MPs Smoothly legislates to impose 'gigantic poor-houses, like those of Kent and Middlesex' on the Highlands in accordance with 'the tendency of recent legislation [which] is towards uniformity and centralisation'.[68]

Eglinton's pursuit of decentralization does not support Morton's belief that the NAVSR had embarked on an English anti-centralist 'bandwagon';[69] if he was clambering aboard a bandwagon, it was one of Irish manufacture. In 1852, the year before the NAVSR was launched, Eglinton had served as the viceroy (lord lieutenant) of Ireland, a position to which he was re-appointed in 1858. This experience confirmed his interest in Unionist Nationalism by giving him first-hand knowledge of administrative devolution, for, although many mocked the viceroyalty as a 'tinsel' monarchy, the reality was different. Important institutions of Irish national identity had survived the Union in the form of an executive consisting of the viceroy and the chief secretary together with agencies of government in Dublin.[70] Ill-informed commentators only saw the viceroy's

[65] Michael Fry, 'Alison, Sir Archibald', *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (Oxford, 2004); Michael Michie, *An Enlightenment tory in Victorian Scotland: the career of Sir Archibald Alison* (Montreal, 1997), pp. 47, 50, 177–81, 190–1.

[66] Anna Gambles, *Protection and politics: Conservative economic discourse, 1815–1852* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 16, 132.

[67] *Glasgow Constitutional*, 7 Oct. 1854, p. 2.

[68] W. E. Aytoun, *Norman Sinclair* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1861), I, pp. 68, 338.

[69] Morton, 'Scottish Rights and "centralisation"', p. 270. Joshua Toulmin Smith, the advocate of English local rights, endorsed Hungarian, not Scottish or Irish, national rights in his *Parallels between the constitution and constitutional history of England and Hungary* (London, 1849).

[70] Brian Jenkins, 'The chief secretary', in D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day, eds., *Defenders of the union: a survey of British and Irish unionism since 1801* (London, 2001), p. 42. James Mitchell misses Ireland in his *Strategies for self-government: the campaigns for a Scottish parliament* (Edinburgh, 1996), p. 40, where he

ceremonial duties, but his significance depended on personalities and the politics of the day. A capable and determined viceroy wielded extensive power.[71]

Performing the high-visibility aspects of his office with flair, Eglinton was a popular figure, but he was also a hard-working head of the Irish executive. A firm upholder of law and order, he nonetheless pursued policies that were shaped by the need to conciliate Irish public opinion. The viceroy was a political appointment, and Eglinton also promoted the interests of the Conservative party in Ireland.[72] As a consequence he emerged with four convictions that coloured his attitude to the governance of Scotland: administrative devolution conferred a significant degree of political initiative on those who exercised its powers; the Irish political classes had more influence over a Dublin-based administration than they would have over institutions that were centralized in London; the political party that controlled the devolved administration could profit from the patronage it exercised; and, not least, Scotland was faring badly at the hands of reformers when compared with Ireland.

The ideological context within which the government of Ireland and Scotland was often discussed by whig-liberal reformers during the early Victorian era had been summarized in 1836 by Lord John Russell:[73]

> We are endeavouring to improve our institutions. Hitherto they have been lax, careless, wasteful and injudicious to an extreme; but the country governed itself and was blind to its own faults. We are busy in introducing system, method, science, economy, regularity and discipline. But we must beware not to lose the co-operation of the country.

In this spirit Russell carried a bill for the suppression of the Irish viceroyalty through the House of Commons in 1850 and only withdrew it when Irishmen from across the political spectrum rallied in opposition, supported in the House of Lords by the duke of Wellington, Lord Londonderry, and other Irish Conservatives.[74] At a mass meeting in Dublin, speakers defended the viceroyalty, not only as a survival from the era before the Union but also as a guardian of Ireland's distinctive status and economic interests. They were supported by British Conservatives, many of whom resented reforms that had undermined the landed interest.[75]

During his two terms in Dublin Eglinton seized the political opportunity that had emerged. With Lord Derby's endorsement he pledged the Conservatives to defend the viceroyalty against the whig-liberals and offered himself to the Irish as

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refers to the Scottish Office as the 'only example of … administrative devolution' during the nineteenth century.

[71] Kieran Flanagan, 'The chief secretary's office, 1853–1914: a bureaucratic enigma', *Irish Historical Studies*, 24 (1984), pp. 201, 203–4.

[72] For Eglinton's viceroyalty see the present author's 'A card king? The thirteenth earl of Eglinton and the viceroyalty of Ireland' (unpublished paper).

[73] Quoted by A. P. Donajgrodzki, 'Sir James Graham at the Home Office', *Historical Journal*, 20 (1977), p. 103. See also Russell's *Recollections and suggestions, 1813–1873* (London, 1875), pp. 336, 362.

[74] *Hansard*, House of Lords Debates, 27 June 1850, 3rd ser., CXII, 459–70.

[75] *Freeman's Journal*, 28 Jan. 1851, p. 2, 25 Feb. p. 2, 21 June 1851, p. 3.

someone like a trustee who resided in Dublin and was attentive to local aspirations.[76] His statements amounted to more than a politician's blandishments; they are very informative about the Conservatives' political mentality. By 1852 Eglinton and his political associates had accepted that they could not reimpose the corn laws, but this did not mean that they were virtually indistinguishable from the whigs. Robert Blake's reference to the tories of this era as lacking 'any chance to strike out on some new and contrasting policy of their own' requires modification;[77] during Eglinton's terms as viceroy they directed their core belief in the paternalist duties of the state towards post-famine Ireland. Drawing on the economic theories of Lord George Bentinck, 'the greatest of God's creatures I ever met', Eglinton pursued policies that would be described in the twentieth century as priming the pump. He was supported by Lord Derby, whose opinions combined paternalism with progressive policies,[78] and together they provided government funds for railway building and the development of Galway as a transatlantic entrepot. Eglinton had a keen eye for the electoral advantages of these policies, and his conduct as viceroy played a significant part in making the Conservatives the biggest single party in Ireland at the 1859 general election.[79]

Not surprisingly, NAVSR spokesmen saw the Irish viceroyalty as an inspiration.[80] At their banquet in October 1854 Eglinton contrasted Irish with Scottish governance: 'In Ireland they have a separate government, with a Lord-Lieutenant and a staff of officers, all devoted to Irish interests. God forbid that I should object to that. I am pledged to stand up against any such loss to Ireland.'[81] The office that Eglinton proposed for Scotland was a secretary of state. He did not originate the idea – James Begg and James Grant had anticipated him – but he was strongly attracted to it. He had worked well with Lord Naas, the Irish chief secretary, for whose achievements as an administrator and promoter of Conservative interests he formed a high respect.[82] Admittedly, there was a politician with responsibility for Scottish matters, the lord advocate, but his existence was one of the NAVSR's grievances. Subordinate to the Home Office, he was primarily concerned with legal matters, and his sphere of competence was much narrower than an Irish chief secretary's. A secretary of state who was a peer with a seat in the cabinet, would protect Scottish interests at the highest level of British government – there was even a precedent in the form of an office that had existed until 1746 – and, not the least of its attractions, it could promote two of Eglinton's

[76] Lindsay Paterson, *The autonomy of modern Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1994), p. 24, describes trusteeship as a form of representation where there are 'rulers responsive to the electorate without being accountable to them'.

[77] Robert Blake, *The Conservative party from Peel to Thatcher* (London, 1985), p. 93.

[78] Angus Hawkins, *Parliament, party and the art of politics in Britain, 1855–1859* (London, 1987), p. 275, refers to Derby's 'moderate progressivism'. See also Gambles, *Protection and politics*, p. 3, for the Conservatives' 'alternative political economy'.

[79] Tyrrell, 'A card king?'.

[80] *Reformers' Gazette*, 9 July 1853, p. 1.

[81] *Glasgow Gazette*, 7 Oct. 1854, p. 2.

[82] Eglinton to Derby, 17 Feb. 1859, LRO, Derby papers, 920 DER (14) 148/3.

other concerns: the strengthening of the Scottish peerage and the advancement of Conservatism in Scotland.

Eglinton was anxious to improve the position of the Scottish peerage. In 1847 he moved for a select committee to investigate abuses in the voting system for the sixteen representative Scottish peers: the Lords must 'maintain the character of their order, so that it might continue to command the respect of mankind'.[83] His concern went beyond status; power was the other face of rank. Although the mid-Victorian era is often described as a time of Liberal hegemony in Scotland, it did not follow that the Conservatives played little role in public life; they had a strong corps of supporters in the Scottish peerage and landowners. As a whip in the House of Lords, Eglinton had helped to marshal Scottish votes for the Protectionists, and he continued to take an interest in these matters. His advice was also sought on Scottish patronage.[84] As David McCrone and Angela Morris have shown with reference to the twentieth century, Scottish landowners did not abandon civil society to bourgeois governance; they were transforming their power into new forms of economic activity and a more informal influence over politics and culture.[85] This was apparent at the proliferating Highland Games which Grant Jarvie has described as 'inextricably linked with images of "Balmorality", loyalty and royalty' during the Victorian era when the Highlands were becoming 'a leisure playground for the "sporting landlords"'.[86] Eglinton had striven for a similar effect at the Robert Burns Festival and the sports he patronized in the Lowlands.

These displays of 'soft power' reinforced the place of the Scottish landowners in local politics. Anne Whetstone refers to 'the great, generally titled, men of the country' who dominated the lord lieutenancies of the counties where they influenced the appointment of 'ministers, clerks of the peace, sheriff clerks, commissary clerks and other minor officials'. The Liberals, she adds, had 'no great strength among the Scottish nobility',[87] creating an opportunity for Conservatives such as Eglinton. Describing the lord lieutenancy of Ayrshire as 'one of the chief objects of my ambition', in 1842 he successfully lobbied to secure the appointment.[88] The example of Perthshire is also instructive: in 1856 the earl of Mansfield succeeded in overthrowing the regulation that debarred peers from participating in the meetings of that county's commissioners of supply. Earlier in the century peers were excluded from these meetings in most Scottish counties,

[83] *Scotsman*, 5 May 1847, p. 4.

[84] See, for example, Spencer H. Walpole to Eglinton, 3 Apr. 1852, SA, GD3/5/1356, 6. Hawkins, *The forgotten prime minister*, p. 388, refers to Derby's indebtedness to the 'immense influence' of Scottish peers.

[85] David McCrone and Angela Morris, 'Lords and heritages: the transformation of the great lairds of Scotland', in T. M. Devine, ed., *Scottish elites* (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 170–5.

[86] Grant Jarvie, *Highland games: the making of the myth* (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 13.

[87] Anne E. Whetstone, *Scottish county government in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries* (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 98, 114.

[88] Eglinton to Sir James Graham, 4 Aug. 1842, British Library, Peel papers, Add. MS 40,513, fo. 115.

but by 1856 they usually had acquired the right to participate. Perthshire must follow this tendency, Mansfield insisted: 'questions of importance might come before the meeting'. The outcome must have been gratifying to him: he could participate in the discussions of such matters as the land tax, the appointment of county officials and the maintenance of bridges and roads.[89]

The territorial magnates often took a prominent place in Scotland's 'questions of importance' during the mid-Victorian era. For example, when a public meeting was organized to uphold the interests of the West of Scotland during the economic crisis in 1857, the duke of Hamilton presided and three peers headed the committee that was set up. Likewise when a deputation went to the Board of Trade to press for the creation of a Scottish museum of practical geology there were four peers. Eglinton participated on both of these occasions.[90] Thus, although the Scottish Conservatives had a poor record in parliamentary elections, they had sufficient influence to justify their claims to speak for Scotland. A Scottish secretaryship would bring a powerful political force into play on their behalf. As the example of the Irish viceroyalty had shown, at times when they were in government in London this form of administrative devolution would give the Conservatives the principal political office in Scotland together with opportunities for advancing their interests by high-visibility displays of policy-making and an astute management of patronage. This might even be the next step in Eglinton's own *cursus honorum*. Sir Thomas Gladstone of Fasque thought so: at one of the NAVSR's meetings he suggested Eglinton as a natural choice for Scotland's first secretary of state.[91]

Admittedly, the NAVSR emerged as a combination of heterogeneous forces. In six densely packed pages its committee list contained ten peers, thirty provosts, several newspaper editors, members of the professions, representatives of commercial interests, and well-known figures in public and intellectual life.[92] Men of opposing political affiliations promised support and, like other pressure groups of this era, the Association also claimed the silent endorsement of the highly respectable ladies for whom it reserved seating at its gatherings.[93] In the aftermath of the Disruption, denominational rivalries could have impeded co-operation, but specifically religious demands were excluded from the movement's platform. There were members of the various Presbyterian denominations while Eglinton, Aytoun, and Alison were Episcopalians.

This ambitious coalition collapsed in the face of the political divisions of its members. *The Scotsman*, the voice of whig-liberalism in Edinburgh, was hostile from the outset, and there were reports that similarly minded Scots were holding aloof. Charles Cowan, a Liberal MP for Edinburgh, endorsed the movement, but

[89] *Constitutional and Perthshire Agricultural and General Advertiser*, 7 May 1856, p. 2.
[90] *Glasgow Herald*, 20 Nov. 1857, p. 2; *Morning Chronicle*, 15 Mar. 1854, p. 4.
[91] *Glasgow Constitutional*, 7 Oct. 1854, p. 2.
[92] *Address to the people of Scotland, and statement of grievances* (2nd edn., Edinburgh, 1853), p. 8.
[93] *Glasgow Herald*, 2 Oct. 1854, p. 1.

he did not attend the public meetings, and, although it was hoped that he would do so, he did not present the NAVSR's petition in the House of Commons.[94] John Macgregor, a Liberal MP for Glasgow, repudiated a movement that was intent on 'reviving feudal privileges long since extinct and now not dreamt of'.[95] Duncan McLaren, the lord provost of Edinburgh, attended only the first of the public meetings. As one who had been the most prominent Scottish member of the Anti-Corn Law League he had little in common with the *Blackwood's* circle. The overlap that was soon evident between the leadership of the Scottish Protectionists and the NAVSR attracted hostile comment. *The Scotsman* scoffed that the Association was dominated by 'Lord Eglinton and his body-guard'; they were 'the staff of the Scottish Protective Society'.[96] Eglinton's correspondence shows that he and Aytoun tried to conceal the prominence of Conservatives.[97]

The control exercised by the Conservatives helps to explain the weak performance of the NAVSR as a vehicle of public protest, as well as the brevity of its existence. The movement scarcely existed outside the three great meetings at Edinburgh and Glasgow where policy was defined by a succession of speakers, the most prominent of whom were Eglinton and his associates. The Grants did not address these meetings, and when P. E. Dove departed from the motion that had been assigned to him at the first Glasgow meeting by raising the possibility of a Scottish 'administrative' assembly, he conceded that this was a personal *ballon d'essai*.[98] Attempts to create a popular base for the movement were sporadic. A Glasgow committee proselytized in the west of Scotland, there was a sizeable meeting at Perth, and several branches came into existence,[99] but, as the *Reformers' Gazette* noted, the NAVSR was a very exclusive movement: the cost of membership attested to its 'respectability'; 'No appeal has yet been made to the voice of the country at large.'[100] The 'voice' never amounted to much. Impressive though they appeared in print, the declarations of town councillors, newspaper editors, and other people of influence did not translate into significant political activity in the localities. John Grant's reference to a 'pressure from without' like the Anti-Corn Law League was vacuous.[101]

Eglinton and his friends would not have had it otherwise. When he addressed the House of Lords on behalf of the NAVSR Eglinton denied that he spoke for a 'monster' petition; this was a 'respectful' appeal.[102] He did not press for a

[94] Cowan's *Reminiscences* (privately printed, 1878) omit the movement.

[95] *Glasgow Constitutional*, 27 Sept. 1854. But see *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, 22 June 1855, 3rd ser., CXXXIX, 19–20, for Macgregor's attempt to introduce a motion for a secretary of state for Scotland.

[96] *Scotsman*, 5 Nov. 1853, p. 2, and 4 Jan. 1854, p. 3; *Morning Chronicle*, 4 Nov. 1853, p. 3.

[97] Eglinton to Aytoun, 25 Oct. 1853, SA, MS 4896, fos. 117–18.

[98] *Glasgow Constitutional*, 17 Dec. 1853, p. 3.

[99] *Glasgow Herald*, 20 Mar. 1854, p. 10; *Glasgow Constitutional*, 1 Mar. 1854, p. 2.

[100] *Reformers' Gazette*, 24 Dec. 1853, p. 2.

[101] 'Ian' [John Grant], 'Justice to Scotland: to the editor of the Times', n.d., in Newscuttings.

[102] *Hansard*, House of Lords Debates, 6 Apr. 1854, 3rd ser., CXXXII, 496–504. See also 'Presentation of the petition of the Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights', in Newscuttings.

division at the conclusion of the debate. Lord Derby's son described Eglinton's predicament well when he wrote that 'Conservative leaders are out of place conducting an agitation'.[103] Admittedly, Sir Walter Scott had envisaged a robust campaign in defence of Scottish and Irish rights, but times had changed since the 1820s. Fearful that the NAVSR would escape their control, from the outset Eglinton and his friends checked unwelcome currents of opinion among their supporters. Deprecating instances of 'violent language', Eglinton insisted that the Association must show moderation.[104] There had been 'a little too zealous advocacy', he chided his Glasgow audience in December 1853. 'We are an association, but we do not agitate', Baillie-Cochrane told them.[105] Eglinton's ally, the duke of Montrose, likewise reassured the House of Lords that those who were prominent in the NAVSR were avoiding anything like an agitation.[106] It was only to be expected that Eglinton's circle would be dismayed when this restrained strategy was renounced in language that was evocative of Chartists and Irish radicals. In the words of Aytoun's biographer, Theodore Martin, the Conservatives withdrew from the NAVSR, when they were challenged by 'certain unruly spirits': their 'views disgusted Aytoun and those with whom it had originated'.[107]

Martin did not name the 'unruly spirits', but their identity may be surmised. The Grant brothers denounced 'English proprietors and holiday Celtic chiefs' together with Scotland's anglicized landowners who were spending their money in London and threatening the nation's Presbyterianism by sliding through Puseyism into 'the lap of Rome'.[108] When Eglinton failed to convince the House of Lords, John Grant demanded that the working classes should be roused as 'the first step towards making us feared'.[109] One of John Steill's pamphlets hailed the NAVSR as an indication that the 'final and effectual divorce' from England was impending. A Scottish legislature would lift 'grinding taxation' from the working class, deal with the scourge of capitalists, peers, and 'ruffian landlordism', deny the right of the 'Anglicised nobility' to exclude the Scottish people from 'the heather of our hills', set Scotland free from 'the terrible Irish incubus', and speak for a nation that no longer respected churches and that 'silly and contemptible thing' called monarchy.[110] Patrick Dove had recently predicted a Scottish

[103] John Vincent, ed., *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative party: journal and memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849–1869* (Hassocks, 1978), p. 11.

[104] *Glasgow Constitutional*, 5 Nov. 1853, p. 1.

[105] *Times*, 19 Dec. 1853, p. 6; *Glasgow Constitutional*, 17 Dec. 1853, pp. 2–3.

[106] 'Presentation of the petition of the Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights', n.d., in Newscuttings.

[107] Theodore Martin, *Memoir of William Edmonstoune Aytoun, DCL* (Edinburgh, 1867), p. 142. See also Alison, *Some account*, II, p. 31.

[108] James Grant, 'Centralisation', Edinburgh, 13 Apr. 1852, and James Grant, 'Is Presbyterianism secure?', n.d., in Newscuttings.

[109] [John Grant], 'English aggression on Scotland: to the editor of the *Edinburgh News*', 16 June 1854, in Newscuttings.

[110] John Steill, *Scotland and her union with England* (Edinburgh, 1854), pp. 4, 7–10, 14, 17.

'millennium' when men would live in happiness, governed by reason, peace, justice, and equal rights to property and political power.[111] No less appalling to Conservatives, some members of the NAVSR welcomed the overtures of *The Nation*, the organ of radical Irish nationalism, which offered a 'Covenant' between Irish and Scottish nationalists.[112] Adding to the disgust felt by Eglinton's group, they found themselves in the company of members of the Free Church who saw the British government's imposition of lay patronage on the Church of Scotland as the source of many of the nation's woes. For Alison they were no better than Jacobins or Chartists,[113] and Baillie-Cochrane had railed against them in parliament as radical republicans.[114] The Crimean War offered an escape from people of this sort.

IV

When the NAVSR suspended its activities in 1855 it bequeathed, so historians have written, very little as a basis for future political action: in Hanham's words the Association was a 'bubble' that left 'nothing … except memories'.[115] This is incorrect. For a while some members of the Association continued to discuss strategy, and there were occasional publications that kept the sense of grievance alive.[116] The Convention of Royal Burghs supported a secretaryship of state for several years after 1855, and, when John Arthur Roebuck resumed the attack on the Irish viceroyalty in 1858, there were calls for a Scottish under-secretary.[117] These efforts were fruitless, but there is important evidence behind the scenes in Conservative party deliberations that attests to a more vigorous afterlife of the Association's promotion of administrative devolution. Eglinton, so it was said, had sacrificed his political career for the sake of the NAVSR, but this was a fantasy.[118] He presented the NAVSR petition to the House of Lords temperately, leaving the way open for him to exploit his connections as a senior member of the Conservative party, for he remained close to Lord Derby, and in 1858 he was again appointed viceroy of Ireland.

There were several signs during the 1850s that Eglinton had won a hearing in Conservative circles for his ideas of constitutional reform. Although London journalists had derided the NAVSR, there had been a significant exception. The *Press*, of which Benjamin Disraeli was the proprietor and principal writer between 1853 and 1856, advised its readers to take the NAVSR seriously, partly because

[111] P. E. Dove, *The theory of human progression and natural probability of a reign of justice* (London, 1850), pp. 139, 162, 167, 200, 374–7, 379, 388.

[112] *Nation*, 12 Nov. 1853, p. 153, 26 Nov. 1853, p. 184, 10 Dec. 1853, pp. 211, 216–17; Alison, *Some account*, II, p. 30.

[113] Michie, *An Enlightenment tory*, p. 172.

[114] *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, 7 June 1848, 3rd ser., XCIX, 478.

[115] Hanham, *Scottish nationalism*, p. 78.

[116] For example, James Begg, *The ecclesiastical and social evils of Scotland, and how to remedy them* (Edinburgh, 1871).

[117] *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, 25 Mar. 1858, 3rd ser., CXLIX, 741, 749, 15 June 1858, 3rd ser., CL, 2118–50.

[118] *Caledonian Mercury*, 25 June 1855, p. 4.

there was a case to be answered but 'chiefly because the proceedings of a meeting over which Lord Eglinton, supported by Sir Archibald Alison and Professor Aytoun presided, merit every attention'. The *Press* agreed that, if Scots had 'a responsible Minister to attend to their interests, their other grievances would disappear'.[119] Possibly the financial support that Eglinton had given this newspaper accounts for its sensitivity to Scottish opinion,[120] but Disraeli returned to the theme in 1855 when he devised a constitutional proposal in which administrative devolution played a part. The scheme was not followed through, and it fell short of Eglinton's commitment to retain the Irish viceroyalty supplemented by a Scottish secretary of state, but it envisaged parliamentary secretaryships for both countries.[121]

Eglinton's correspondence shows that discussions of Scottish governance took place at the highest levels in the Conservative party when it returned to power in 1858. In the present circumstances, he told Lord Derby, he would not press for a Scottish minister under that name, but he could not countenance the inadequate attention given to Scottish business by the lord advocate. As a compromise he suggested the conversion of an existing office into a Scottish secretaryship. To this end he revived his suggestion that the lord high commissioner of the general assembly of the Church of Scotland could be given an ex officio place in the cabinet, 'avowedly for the purpose of looking after Scotch business'.[122] The position, which would have combined ceremonial functions with administrative duties and political influence, exhibited features of the Irish viceroyalty and chief secretaryship. In 1855 the commissioner's reception in Holyrood palace was said to have revived 'the ancient regal splendour of the Scottish Monarchy'.[123] The scheme showed Eglinton's habitual concern for the role of the Scottish aristocracy. He coupled it with a recommendation that Scottish business should be managed by the duke of Montrose, a man of ability 'whose rank would overawe the lawyers'. He also requested that the Scottish great seal and privy seal should be bestowed on Lords Selkirk and Hamilton.[124] The compromise foundered in the face of the duke of Buccleuch's objections,[125] and Eglinton was absorbed in his Irish responsibilities until 1859. His sudden death followed in 1861, but it is tempting to surmise what might have happened if he had lived. Eglinton had rejected Buccleuch's arguments, and as a politician who was sufficiently influential to be mentioned as a possible leader of the Conservatives in the event of Derby's resignation,[126] he could have exerted a strong influence on his party's policies.

[119] *Press*, 5 Nov. 1853, p. 627, 12 Nov. 1853, p. 651, 24 Dec. 1853, pp. 795–6.
[120] M. G. Wiebe et al., eds., *Benjamin Disraeli letters* (7 vols., Toronto, 1993), VI, p. 223 n. 2.
[121] W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle, *The life of Benjamin Disraeli* (2 vols., London, 1929), I, pp. 1437–40.
[122] Eglinton to Derby, 17 Mar. 1858, LRO, Derby papers, 920 DER (14) 148/3.
[123] *Caledonian Mercury*, 4 June 1855, p. 2.
[124] Eglinton to Derby, 17 Mar. 1858, LRO, Derby papers, 920 DER (14) 148/3.
[125] Derby to Eglinton, 15 Mar. 1858, SA, GD3/5/1388, 5.
[126] *Globe*, quoted by *Caledonian Mercury*, 7 Oct. 1861, p. 3.

The insertion of administrative devolution for Scotland within the Conservatives' discourse on constitutional matters was probably the most important consequence of the NAVSR's existence. During the crises of the late nineteenth century Conservatives would oppose proposals for legislative devolution, but administrative devolution was a different matter. This policy had distinguished them from the whig-liberal governments of the 1850s, and they held to it. The objection that, unlike legislative devolution, a Scottish secretaryship would be a political appointment that recognized Scotland's distinctiveness without giving the Scots more control over their own affairs, carried no weight for Conservatives. It worked to their advantage in a country where they had done so badly in elections.

Although they failed to create an under-secretary for Scotland in 1878,[127] the Conservatives instituted a secretary for Scotland in 1885 by which time the Liberals had fallen into line, making the decision a bi-partisan one. Hanham describes the outcome as 'a cross between the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and the Chief Secretary for Ireland'; there were executive duties, but it was a position fit for a peer. The duke of Richmond, the first to be appointed, began his term of office with a levée in Dublin castle style.[128] Subsequent Conservative governments extended the powers of the office by confirming its cabinet status in 1892, making it a secretaryship of state in 1926, and repatriating Scottish administration to Edinburgh in 1939. While Liberal and Labour politicians formulated ideas of legislative devolution, the Conservative leadership would advance no further than Edward Heath's 'Declaration of Perth' in 1968 and Sir Alec Douglas Home's plan for an elected 'Scottish Convention' which would have left Westminster with 'the final say'.[129] Even this pallid proposal went too far, and Conservative governments did not implement it; administrative devolution, together with cultural nationalism, would remain a feature of Scottish Conservatism until the 1990s. This outcome would have been recognizable to Eglinton. It is to be hoped that his part in its evolution will elicit more attention from historians than the light-hearted remarks they have lavished on the knight of the tournament and the 'romantic tories'.

[127] James Mitchell, *Conservatives and the union: a study of Conservative party attitudes to Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. vii, x, 17–19.

[128] H. J. Hanham, 'The development of the Scottish Office', in J. N. Wolfe, ed., *Government and nationalism in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1969), p. 51.

[129] Lindsay Paterson, *A diverse assembly: the debate on a Scottish parliament* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 26–30, 51–7.