

**A letter to the Lord Provost on the best ways of spoiling the beauty of  
Edinburgh / by Lord Cockburn.**

**Contributors**

Cockburn, Henry Cockburn, Lord, 1779-1854.  
Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

**Publication/Creation**

Edinburgh : A. and C. Black, 1849.

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/m5585mj9>

**Provider**

Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh

**License and attribution**

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. The original may be consulted at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. where the originals may be consulted.

This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

royal library  
from Maclellan & Stewart  
1848

LIBRARY  
COLL. REG.  
MED. EDIN.

A

LETTER

TO

THE LORD PROVOST

ON THE

BEST WAYS OF SPOILING THE BEAUTY OF  
EDINBURGH.

BY

LORD COCKBURN.

THIRD EDITION.

EDINBURGH:

ADAM & CHARLES BLACK, NORTH BRIDGE,

BOOKSELLERS AND PUBLISHERS TO HER MAJESTY.

MDCCCXLIX.

EDINBURGH :

PRINTED BY ROBERT INCHES, OLD ASSEMBLY CLOSE.

R55288

## LETTER.

---

MY DEAR LORD PROVOST,

I HAVE often blamed myself for not conferring with my fellow-citizens, quietly, and in the only way that I now can, on a matter so entirely disconnected from faction and agitation, as the preservation of the beauty of our town.

In doing so at last, to whom can I address myself so naturally as to the Chief Magistrate?—whose duty it is, and whose inclination it ought to be, as I know it is your Lordship's, to protect us from hurtful projects, and from hurtful indifference.

Yet I have nothing new to say, and probably nothing old that is much worth saying. But an alarm, which has long possessed me, about the ultimate fate of Edinburgh, is gaining strength; and therefore I may perhaps be excused if I presume to call the attention of the well-disposed, and especially of the public authorities, to their prospects and their duties, in relation to the perpetuation of what chiefly distinguishes this place.

I am very unwilling to believe that there are many here to whom this is a matter of contempt. There are undoubtedly



some.—Some who see nothing valuable in a city except what they think convenience. To these people, taste, or at least the abstinence from desecration which taste sometimes requires, is ridiculous and odious. They hold a town to be a mere collection of houses, shops, and streets; and that, provided there be enough of these, duly arranged on utilitarian principles, all anxiety as to whether the result shall be a Bath or a Birmingham, is mere folly and affectation. If it were proposed to erect a distillery on the summit of the Calton Hill, or to dignify the top of Arthur Seat by a pillar, (which indeed has actually been proposed more than once), these schemes would certainly find supporters. And if these supporters could connect their schemes with any particular object of their own, it is mortifying to think what a number of adherents they might get; and by what a quantity of confident and plausible nonsense their plan would be defended. But though this class exists, and from its activity and imperviousness is always to be feared, I see no reason to suspect that it forms anything like the majority. If it did, it would be all over with us. But the majority seems to me to be sound, and not to have often erred except from being left uninstructed.

That majority agrees with me in thinking that, of all his external blessings, there is not one which, to a right Edinburgh man, affords such constant delight as the various aspects, inward and outward, of his beautiful city. There may be few of them who care to consider what it is that causes their pleasure, or what would extinguish it; but they are conscious of it, and it is their hourly luxury. These persons could not think without sorrow that what they, in their day, have been so intensely admiring, may be all obliterated. And there is a still

greater number, who are less moved by this enjoyment, than by a just and useful civic pride.

I wish I could impress upon them, and indeed upon the whole community, the fact, and its consequences, that, for its public importance, Edinburgh, except its beauty, has really very little to depend upon.

It has little trade; which, in some views, may be a misfortune. Mercifully it has almost no manufactures,—that is, tall brick chimneys,—black smoke;—a population precariously fed,—pauperism, disease, and crime, all in excess. Some strange efforts have occasionally been made to coax these things to us; but a thanks-deserving Providence has hitherto been always pleased to defeat them. For though manufactures be indispensable, they need not be everywhere. Blight should be confined to as few parts of the field as possible. There should be Cities of Refuge. Hence the envy which it is said that Perth sometimes has of Dundee, is nearly inconceivable. One would have thought that there was no Perth man (out of the asylum) who would not have rejoiced in his unstained tranquillity,—in the delightful heights that enclose him,—in his silvery Tay,—in the quiet beauty of his green and level Inches. Yet it is said that some of them actually long for steam-engines on Kinnoul Hill, and docks, and factories, and the sweets of the Scouring burn. But I do not believe this. It is incredible. Long may both they and we be spared. We have better things to give us an interest.—Chiefly some traces, the more interesting that they are faded, of the Ancient Royalty and national independence of Scotland, and of a once resident nobility;—the seat of the Supreme Courts of Justice;—a College of still maintained celebrity; and our hav-



ing supplied a greater number of eminent men to literature, to science, and to the arts, than any one town in the empire, with the single exception of London.

But none of these things, nor all of them, make it Edinburgh. Other places have some of them, or greater attractions. But no other place excites the same peculiar interest. Deducting foreign students, there is probably not one stranger out of each hundred of the many who visit us, who is attracted by anything but the beauty of the city and its vicinity.

It is not our lectures, nor our law, nor our intellectual reputation, that give us our particular fame. It is our curious, and matchless, position,—our strange irregularity of surface,—its picturesque results,—our internal features and scenery,—our distant prospects,—our varied, and ever-beautiful neighbourhood,—and the endless aspects of the city, as looked down upon from adjoining heights, or as it presents itself to the plains below. Extinguish these, and the rest would leave it a very inferior place. Very respectable; but not what it is.

These natural advantages have been improved by modern art. Holyrood, though not in such bad company as it lately was, is still polluted by the almost actual contact of base works and houses. And the Castle is still allowed to be degraded by dull walls and hideous roofs. But these evils are old. The better modern spirit is manifest and gratifying. Heavy uniform lines are rapidly breaking into variety; scarcely a street is contented without its ornamental edifice; respectable chartered companies, with a proper social pride, vie with each other in the splendour of their offices; sculpture aids architecture; and, besides handsome secondary buildings, there are several of a higher character, and of the greatest excellence.

The High School, Victoria Church, Scott's Monument, and the Portico of the Commercial Bank, do honour to their respective designers, Hamilton, Graham, Kemp, and Rhind;—while the interior of the College, the Terrace and Lodge of Heriot's Hospital, Regent Terrace, the Royal Terrace, the Royal Institution, the Free Church College, Stewart's Monument, and especially Donaldson's Hospital,—of itself sufficient to adorn a city,—attest the genius of Playfair, and make Edinburgh his trophy. The approaches to the town are all admirable. We can never be too grateful to the Commissioners of Woods and Forests for their operations on Arthur Seat and Salisbury Crags. They have not merely given us a magnificent drive, but have cleared and purified the whole Park, and put it under keeping which secures its preservation and comfort. The Mound,—that receptacle of all things,—has long been disreputable. But it will be so no more. If we could have been sure that its surface could have been kept permanently open, the propriety of erecting *anything* upon it would have been more than questionable. But it was idle to hope that such a space, in the heart of the town, and in the state of the municipal finances, could have been long preserved free. It is fortunate, therefore, that it has been acquired by government, and that it will soon be adorned by the least obstructive, and the most elegant, gallery for art that can be procured. Art, of which the brilliant rise within these thirty years is the most striking circumstance in the modern progress of Scotland, will then be accommodated as it deserves, and will grace what contains it. This is the next great step in the architectural advance of Edinburgh. We owe it entirely to Mr William Gibson-Craig; whose merit as a



citizen, a representative, and a public officer, this is not the place to do justice to. The improving spirit has evinced itself in nothing more agreeably than in the reformation of our last homes. The contrast between the old loathsome town churchyards, and the recent spacious, pure, and breezy cemeteries, is creditable both to the taste and to the feelings of the age.

Since Edinburgh has so much beauty, and depends so entirely upon it, we might have expected that there would be a strong general resolution among the inhabitants to protect it. Such a popular watchfulness is common on the Continent, where buildings, and parks, and works of art, remain safe for generations, under little protection beyond the attachment of the people. Is there such a feeling in this place?—I hope there is. But if there be, it is surely very timid. There is an abstract aversion to have the town spoiled. There are few who, when they hear of something horrible, do not say, listlessly, that “*it is very wrong*,”—and “*a great pity*,”—and that they “*wonder why it is submitted to*,”—and “*surely somebody will interfere* ;” and then they cast the matter from them, and can never be made to stir a finger about it. Meanwhile the mischief proceeds. Of those who are known by their works, there are some (and generally the same) individuals, who are always to be relied upon. It would be a pleasure to name some of them ; but I fear that they might not like the publicity. But I cannot resist mentioning Dr Neill, because he has often come forward, openly, in this cause. Witness his unaided and successful defence of the Flodden Tower. These persons can best tell whether they blow a cold, or a hot, coal, when they try to kindle a right spirit in a collision between folly and the public interest. They never find much, or any, disinterested

opposition. The mere feeling, where it is impartial, is always towards what is right. But they are chilled by the aversion to action; an aversion not unplausibly represented by spoilers as proceeding from agreement with them, or at least from indifference.

Almost the only occasion on which I remember a proper practical spirit being shown in opposition to what was thought injurious to the beauty of the town, was in 1817, against the North Bridge Buildings. It is all one which party was right. The public feeling at the time was that the proposed erections would obstruct some striking views, chiefly one from the Calton Hill; and, under this impression, the inhabitants, not content with sighing and bemoaning, girt up their loins and gave battle. They were defeated; but they fought. The fact that, in defence of the scenery of the city, a great public meeting was held, at which John Playfair presided, and Henry Mackenzie spoke, (saying that he was no orator, but that *facit indignatio versos*), was worth the whole affair. I do not mean to recommend perpetual agitation; especially as agitation has always two sides, and the loudness may be in the one, while the sense is in the other. What I want is, to encourage the formation of correct opinions, and of a right spirit, over the community; so as to secure the existence of a general and intelligent attachment to what is essential to the city. If devotion to the beauty of their town was known to be a part of the nature of the inhabitants, it would operate preventively, and would very rarely need to be called into action.

Part of people's habit of passive acquiescence arises from an idea which we often hear broached, that nothing that can be done can materially hurt us. This scheme they admit to be



absurd, and that one to be disgraceful ; however, “ *Let them do what they like, they can never spoil Edinburgh.*” This lazy notion rests chiefly on the singular inequality of our surface, which, it is supposed, must always prevent our prospects from being excluded, and must preserve many striking internal features. There is no truth in this whatever. This place is not exempted from the doom which makes everything spoilable. Nothing would be easier than to reduce the town to mere rows of vulgar double-sided streets. Look at the steep sides of the ridge between the Castle and Holyrood. If anything could baffle a mason, these deep slopes should. But every inch of them is crammed ; and with the loftiest houses. Eminences are as ready receptacles of ugliness as of ornament ; and they make both equally conspicuous. If your Lordship wishes to see how a coigne of vantage may be made use of for prominent deformity, raise your eyes to the Bank of Scotland, and to Nelson’s Monument.\*

But the true way to settle whether we be so safe as that we can afford to be indifferent, is, to recollect some of the dangers from which we have, and some from which we have not, escaped. And there cannot, on other accounts, be a more useful review. For it is wonderful how soon unrecalled warnings are forgotten. There should be an Ædilian survey of what has been done in towns every ten or twenty years. I lay aside scores of lesser absurdities ; and select only a few schemes which were all vital, and all alarmingly supported ; it is unnecessary to say by whom.

\* This monument to a dead hero, has a tavern, or at least a refection shop, in its inside. It is probably the only monument in the world that is let ; and where honour to the dead is combined with feasting for the living.

It is now scarcely credible, that, within these few years, the following projects were not merely propounded, but urged, and some of the worst of them within an inch of being carried.

1. Within the last forty years the Castle Hill was a very narrow ridge. The present esplanade was not made, and there was no enclosure on either side. There was nothing to obstruct the view between the hill and Princes Street. Not a shrub. It was all open. What are now gardens, planted and maintained by local assessment, and consequently most justly enclosed, was a fetid and festering marsh, the receptacle for skinned horses, hanged dogs, frogs, and worried cats. The green bank of the Castle Hill was the only ground that the eye could rest upon with pleasure. It was in these circumstances that it was proposed to *have a row of about 20 or 30 little detached brick cabinets, a few feet down the slope, on the northern edge of the hill.* Each was to be entered by an eastern door; to have a slate roof sloping to the west; and a hole in the wall, for a window, looking towards Princes Street. I forget whether the consent of the Ordnance had been obtained, or was only expected, or had been overlooked. But the plan was so seriously persevered in, that if it had not been for the active and indignant vigour of Mary Lady Clerk (of Pennycuik) who lived right opposite, it would apparently have been executed. But this able and peripatetic lady poured out her expostulations and ridicule so energetically, that she raised a sort of Princes Street rebellion, and defeated the measure.

2. One of the most fortunate peculiarities in the composition of the site of Edinburgh is the valley between the new and



the old parts of the town. For effect, the deeper this valley can be kept the better ; especially towards the east, where its depth is indispensable for that most curious of all city scenes, the northern slope of the old town. But there was a scheme, still fewer years ago, of *filling this part of the hollow entirely up ; and it actually was filled up to the extent of from 16 to 20 feet*. This operation occupied about a year ; amidst the perfect silence of the spectators. I ventured to remonstrate with the Lord Provost ; and his answer was, that if, as he expected, it was brought to the level of Princes Street, it would be the most valuable building ground in Edinburgh. So it would. But where would Edinburgh have been ? This fatal design was stopped by the arrangements connected with what is known by the name of the Improvement Act.

3. Another thing included in these arrangements, was, the absolutely insane project of *building houses along the south side of Princes Street* ;—that is, of utterly and for ever cutting off the view of the old town, including the Cathedral and the Castle ; and this by converting the magnificent terrace of Princes Street into a very commonplace street. This atrocious conception was well encouraged. That large, but since rather penitent, portion of the public, who were then eager for the success of the Improvement Bill, on its own account, loudly backed its inventors. And it was owing entirely to the firmness of a majority of the Faculty of Advocates, who refused to suspend their exemption from local taxation unless the fancied (but utterly groundless) power of closing up Princes Street was put down permanently by statute, that the accursed imagination was not realised. Those who have succeeded the

struggle, and only enjoy the victory, can hardly persuade themselves that there could have been sincerity in so infernal a machination. Those who remember the battle, have scarcely drawn their breath freely since.

4. The Calton Hill is the glory of Edinburgh. It has excellent walks; it presents us with the finest prospects both of the city, its vicinity, and the distant objects; and it is adorned by beautiful buildings, dedicated to science and to the memory of distinguished men. The monuments of Stewart, and Playfair, and Burns, are there;—the High School; the Astronomical Institution; and that striking fragment of the Parthenon,—begun to be revived upon a site nobler than that of the original,—and which I can never permit myself to doubt that some future generation will complete. And there is nothing at present to degrade. That sacred mount is destined, I trust, to be still more solemnly adorned by good architecture, worthily applied. So as the walks, and the prospects, and the facility of seeing every edifice in proper lights, and from proper distances, be preserved, and only great names, and great events, be immortalized, it cannot be crowned by too much high art.

Well,—but your Lordship cannot have forgotten that, within these twenty years, *certain persons wanted all our public executions there*. They pretended that these terrible legal sacrifices, far more frequent then than, happily, they are now, were connected naturally with the Jail; and that, as the ancient Heart of Midlothian had been removed from the old town to a street close beside the Calton Hill, the exhibitions ought to follow it; especially as, while the ceremony was performing on the roof of the prison, the spectators, instead of being crushed



into a street, could see it comfortably from the hill. It would be idle to examine the reasons that were clamorously urged in support of a change, which was to remove the most odious, and the most rabble-collecting, of all spectacles, into the most decorated and thoughtful spot in the whole city. The pretence was, the connection between the place where a criminal is confined and the place where he is killed ;—a connection entirely fanciful, as both Tyburn and the Grassmarket vouch. The truth was, that those on whose district the misfortune had fastened wished to rid themselves of a nuisance they had submitted to long enough. A strong reason for them ; but all the weaker for others. Yet the alteration was so nearly resolved upon, that I think I could name the very case that was to have set the example. But we were saved by the Lord Justice Clerk (Boyle) and the Court of Justiciary ; who, acting judicially, adhered to the ordinary style, and ordained the sentence to be carried into effect at “ the *usual* place of execution.”

5. It is hardly worth while noticing a recent plan for converting Bruntsfield Links, one of our principal fields for popular recreation, into the place for our great annual fair ; because it was speedily abandoned ; though only because the dealers disliked it. But a kindred scheme, of turning the space between Scott’s Monument and the railway *into a vegetable market*, was very nearly successful. Now this space is very conspicuous ; it almost touches the monument ; and it forms a portion of the valley ; which, abused though it has already been, may yet be partially rescued by purity and neatness. Yet upon this spot was it most seriously wished to fasten a vegetable market ! A walled, and paved, acre or two of

booths and stalls ; rotten cabbage, and bruised onions ; cripple carriers, with nasty baskets,—old female hucksters, and wrangling ! We shall be better able to appreciate this design, after the ground shall be laid out, as it soon will be, by the taste of Mr Cousin, and we then fancy what it might have been.

6. Nobody knows better than your Lordship the various devices for *widening the North Bridge*. The appetite of my worthy townsmen for wide streets is sometimes rather extravagant. The torrent of life rolls far more rapidly at Temple Bar in London, and even in Argyle Street in Glasgow, and in many other as narrow places, than it does on our North Bridge; yet on the whole, the walkers, and riders, and drivers, pass in very reasonable safety. But our New Town gives us a taste for streets of grand and melancholy solitude.\* However, let the bridge be widened, by all means, since many excellent and sensible people desire it, *if this be possible without greater injury than gain*. But the injury will be greater than the gain, if one jot of the prospect *of the bridge, or from it*, be impaired. It is an essential spot. There is no rival to it within the town.

Now, most of the plans had the serious, and probably the unavoidable, defect of great lateral projections ; with very questionable effects on the bridge's appearance. Others were liable to the absolutely conclusive objection, that they implied closing up the arches, by solid buildings from the ground. And one, which was patronised by most respectable people, but not encouraged by the Council, announced the horrific project of not only closing the arches, but *of raising a row of*

\* I have heard of a foreigner who lately supposed that the chairmen were hired to stand and represent population.



*shops on each side of the street.* The objection that the view would be destroyed, was met by the idea of leaving a central opening on each side (to be called Prospect Hole, I suppose), through which the passenger might peep. The railways have hitherto stopped some of these ideas, and want of funds all. If the object be ever revived, two conditions should be sternly observed;—one, that whatever injures the external appearance of the bridge should be adopted very cautiously; the other, that whatever obstructs the view ought to be at once, and utterly, rejected.

We have been preserved, though fearfully, from these imaginings. Therefore, is it often said, we never need be afraid. Let us look, then, at what we have *not* been preserved from.

Sir Walter severely condemns what he calls "*the hideous mass*" of the Earthen Mound, and the removal of the old Cross, which he says was done "*on the pretence*" of widening a part of the High Street. But as these were not the doings of our generation, we may let them rest.—Only, if it be true that the materials of the Cross are still extant, and that it could be all replaced for a very small sum, would it not be worthy of your Lordship to take the lead in getting it restored? But let no Provost try it, who has not nerves for the wide street outcry. Still there are some sad things for which the present generation is responsible.

1. *Look at the west side of the Castle and shudder.* No doubt it was Government that reared the factory-looking erection which deforms the most picturesque fortress in her Majesty's British dominions, by the most audacious piece of abomination in Europe. But was Government instructed?

I have been told that there was not a public murmur at the time. At any rate, there it is,—lofty and offensive;—the disgrace of those who set it there, and not to the credit of those who allow it to remain.

2. I doubt if it be forty years since the *Parliament House* stood venerable in its old grey hue, and with its few, but appropriate, ornaments;—the very type of an ancient legal temple. What is it now? For the modernising of it, who ever heard the shadow of a decent pretence?—That there were paltry wrecks beside it, which it was impossible to save, was only an additional reason for leaving this entire and well-placed historical structure as it was. It dignified the whole vicinity, and would have earned the greater reverence, as what was near it got newer.

3. When the *College* was begun, it was in a large piece of nearly open ground; laid out chiefly in gardens. There were no houses on its eastern or southern sides; nothing on its west side except rubbish, that could easily have been bought; and nothing on its north side that did much harm. It might have stood, though rimmed by street, with much turfed and shrubberied space beyond this rim; with little noise; and the possibility of being seen. It is now jostled by houses all round; without a foot of soil except what it stands on. To be sure, the spare-ground could not have been kept clear without a price; and, considering how long and ominously the College itself remained unfinished for want of funds, nobody perhaps is blameable for its present state. But it is an example, and a striking one, of danger that might have been



avoided, and of the imprudence of letting such things take their own course, and trusting to accidental deliverances. What has happened should either have been foreseen and prevented; or the College ought not to have been placed where it is, and probably would not. As it is, it is nearly lost, externally, as an ornament to the town.

4. Those by whom, or for whom, *the railways have been allowed to get into the Princes Street Gardens* will, of course, justify, and affect to applaud, that permission, and this even on reasons of taste. The rest of the world is very nearly unanimous in condemning it as a lamentable and irreparable blunder. It greatly diminishes the ornamental space; it disturbs and vulgarises what remains; it has introduced into ground by far the worthiest in the whole city of protection, parties who must always have a strong and restless interest hostile to all the interests of taste and recreation. Mr Adam Black, one of the very best and most justly respected Chief Magistrates that Edinburgh ever saw, surprised many of his friends by giving it as his opinion that this valley was apparently intended by nature for the floor of a railway. In point of elevation and shape, this was true; as it is of every stripe of solid surface, enclosed or open, decorated or bare, of which the level fits the *datum* line of the intended work. But I have good reason for believing that this most judicious and patriotic magistrate meant to confine his opinion to the *mere passage* of the railway, and never intended to express any approbation of those worlds of stations, and booths, and coal depots, and stores, and waggons, and stairs, by which the eastern portion of the valley has been nearly destroyed, and its

character practically extinguished. We are told to console ourselves by removed shambles, the comfort of railway travelling, and the certainty that at least the hollow cannot now be filled up. But this certainty had already been obtained by statute. The shambles would have been removed, though not quite so soon, although no railway had purchased them. And no one does, or can, believe, that though this ground had been refused, Edinburgh would have been without a sufficient railway. At any rate, if what has been done injures the beauty of the town, I listen to the plea of convenience nearly as if it were urged in recommendation of a crime.

5. Edinburgh, the scene of so much history, used to be so full of historical remains, that several minute and curious works (such as those of Chambers and Wilson) have not exhausted the accounts of them. Many of them are gone, and many are going. The antiquarian soul sighs over their disappearance, and forgives nothing to modern necessities. Where they are private property, which no one will purchase to preserve, they must be dealt with according to the pleasure of the owner. Thus many interesting memorials perish, the extinction of which may be regretted, but can neither be blamed nor prevented. But public memorials ought never to be sacrificed without *absolute necessity*. Edinburgh contained two of these within these two years,—Trinity Hospital and Trinity College Church.

The *Hospital*,—a retreat for a few aged and decayed male and female burgesses, or members of their families, was nothing outside. But the door was no sooner opened, than a



different world appeared. Internally, it was the most curious place in Scotland. Every thing about it, both in its structure, its apparatus, and its economy, was odd and ancient. Nothing living could be seen in this country, so like what we fancy to be a former age. If John Knox could have been replaced at the dark sacramental table there, which was said to have been his, I do not suppose that much more would have been requisite in order to set his very day, in so far as that day would have appeared within this hospital, before us. It contained nothing, except perhaps a few old books and portraits, that were of any intrinsic value, or that can ever have the same effect elsewhere ; but, placed as it was, every thing was appropriate and strange. Time, in its passage over Edinburgh, had left no such picturesque living deposit. This relic is now annihilated ;—not by fire, or flood, or earthquake, or natural decay. It was knocked to pieces about two years ago, to accommodate a very respectable company of carriers !

So was *the Church*, which stood hard by ;—a far more scandalous desecration. It was not only the oldest, but almost the only remaining, Gothic structure in Edinburgh ; and those who understood the subject, revered it as one of great architectural interest. Though never completed, what was of it was quite entire ; in so much, that a congregation met in it. The presence of such a building honours a city. It was imputed to it that it was ill formed and ill placed for modern use. Both true ; but they are objections that enhanced its importance. They disconnected it from modern times, and uses, and associations, and left it to be seen and felt solely as a monument of antiquity. Of what *use*, in the sense of these objections, is any ruin ? Yet this church was sacrificed, not to the neces-

sities, but to the mere convenience of a railway. The railway had been finished, and was in action. But it wanted a few yards of more room for its station, and these it got by the destruction of the finest piece of old architecture in Edinburgh. The spirit that did this, or that submitted to it, would carry a railway through Pompeii. The Antiquarian Society, the natural protector of such things, and which has so often honourably distinguished itself in their defence, aided by a few rational individuals, resisted, as much as reason could at that time resist millions of pounds. But part of the public was under the railway fever, and the rest, as usual, slept. If the people of Edinburgh had known their true interest, they would have risen in defence of their greatest local treasure.

But they got the comic consolation of a clause in a statute, which provides that there may (or is it shall?) be a new church, in "*the same style and model*"! Accordingly, the old stones have been preserved, and we may have the original structure after all. We are to build a new old building. The reverence of four centuries, attached to a structure on one spot, is to be transferred, according to order, to the materials of a similar structure on a different spot. Are not the stones the same? And what is a building but stones? Provided we have the materials, what does it signify whether the Temple be left in Jerusalem or removed to Paisley? It is very right to keep these stones, and very right to use them; only don't let us hear of this as an extenuation of what has been done. "The glory of a building is not in its stones, nor in its gold. Its glory is in its age; and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, or mysterious sympathy, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in the walls that have been



long washed by the passing waves of humanity." (Seven Lamps of Architecture.)

6. And our *Trees*! where are they? There is no element in the composition of town scenery so valuable; and I could name at least eight, but more probably a dozen, of places, all within the city, that I remember being graced by very respectable groupes of them, well placed, and well growing. Had not beams been the only forms in which house-builders like wood, the whole of them might have been preserved. Not a twig of them lives. On the Continent (where, however, shade is more necessary than here) they rather turn a street than destroy a branch. We have more wood now than formerly; because we have the Princes Street and Queen Street Gardens, and one or two planted squares; particularly George Square, the most favourably circumstanced, and the best done, of them all. In time these may make us better foliaged than ever. But their wood is infant; and at any rate its existence was no ways incompatible with the preservation of our old trees. And they are all enclosed. There seems to have been little perception of the peculiar beauty of street trees, or even of a single tree, in immediate connection with building. The system has been to massacre, or so treat as certainly to kill, every outstanding stem. I can't recollect any Edinburgh tree finding a public defender. And at this moment, because the enclosed trees along the edge of Princes Street have not had time to reach a height sufficient to let objects be seen between their trunks, but happen to be at that stage of their growth at which they interfere a little with the sight of the Castle rock, nothing is more common than to hear it proposed

to cut them all down. I would as soon cut down a burgess without a fair trial and a verdict, as a burgh tree. And even with such a law, the tree, I fear, would require many peremptory challenges of the jurors.

7. The Calton Hill, rescued, a few years ago, from one pollution, has, within these few weeks, been doomed to another; which, though comparatively slight, and humanely meant, is to be greatly regretted. A part of its higher ground has been set aside for a *public washing green*. Not for a mere drying-field; which the whole hill has always been,—and which only requires air and sun and grass; but for both drying and *washing*. What does this imply? It implies water led to the place artificially; consequently pools; rows of posts, seldom perpendicular; lines of ropes, rarely tight, always broken, and never well tied; rows of worn-off turf, that is, of splashy mud, below these lines; stones, to keep what is spread out steady; articles, whether spread out or hung up, not suggesting pleasing reflections; fires, scorching the turf, and leaving their ashy residues; inverted tubs, on which sit, or thin yellow blankets under which cower, the decorous matrons and timid virgins who watch the habiliments;—whose eloquence let no prudent passenger provoke. No one can have a stronger desire than I have for the comfort of the lower orders; for whom scientific washing-houses ought to be provided. But it is not inconsistent with the sincerity of this feeling, to express a doubt whether the Calton Hill be a proper place for this exhibition.

8. As, while I presume to criticise what is past, I decline mingling in any existing fray, I would not refer to the *General Register House*, did I not believe that the question about its



Screen is settled. And I refer to it merely because it affords an example of the perfect ease with which it can be proposed to sacrifice the greatest ornament to the slightest comparative convenience. Architecturally, that screen is the building.—It is handsome in itself, and absolutely essential for the edifice. Its architect placed it there as the principal feature of his work; and it is the most conspicuous ornamental object in the town. When Waterloo Place was made, a few years ago, it was either brought forward so as to narrow, or not kept back so as to widen, the head of Leith Street. To correct the error, an outcry was lately raised in favour of mangling the innocent screen. Some wanted it narrowed; some would have liked one angle of it cut off; and many would have shouted if they could have seen it all taken away. Public meetings were actually held in furtherance of these views. The better feeling was decidedly against them. Was there any meeting in defence of the screen? *Not one.* But, though abandoned by ourselves, the Treasury (as I understand) did itself honour by resisting such sacrifices, for such a purpose. But an arrangement was necessary, or at least was made so, for placing Steel's noble Statue of the Duke of Wellington in front of the building; and, in order to accommodate a piece of sculpture which will adorn not Edinburgh alone, but Scotland, a concession has been made, which involves a slight recession of the screen. That this, though very dangerous, will, on the whole, be an improvement, I cannot doubt, because it is sanctioned by those on whom I rely. But the important part of the matter is, the extent of what was demanded, and its object. It was not a retirement of six or seven feet, for a statue of a high order, that was wanted; but the virtual destruction of the screen,—and this for the widening of a wilfully

narrowed street. Not a scruple seemed to be felt for the architecture, or the reputation of the architect. And, after all, the street is wider than many far more crowded thoroughfares. The streets on each side of St Paul's are, or at least were, narrower than our Leith Street; but I am not aware that it was ever proposed to widen them by taking a slice off the Cathedral, or even off the screen that surrounds it.

These, my Lord, are examples of the best modes of spoiling Edinburgh. They are all good; some perfect. We have hitherto survived them; and, on the whole, the place has even increased, and is increasing, in beauty. How much better it would have been if certain things had not been done, is a different question. But let no one delude himself with the notion that past escapes are proofs that we shall escape always. The permanence of the danger is certain; each escape doubtful. Looking at things as they are, we may see no mischief that is probable, or near. But we must give mischief time. How will Edinburgh look in 1949, or in 2049? Periods far off to us; but they will arrive; and those who live then will wonder how any other periods were ever cared for. How will it look one hundred years hence? I hope well. But I see hurtful temptations at many points. At so many, that, if not resisted, they must make all that those then alive may read or see in pictures, of what Edinburgh once was, incredible and incomprehensible.

*Intentional* injury can be imputed to no party, public or private. No such wicked or meaningless motive exists. Our danger has always arisen, and will ever arise, from three plain and intelligible causes:—



1. From unfortunate incompatibilities between private and public interests.—A man is the owner of a conspicuous position, which it is desirable should be left open, or occupied by something handsome; but on which it suits him to set up something very bad. As there is no fund for buying off ugliness, there is no remedy (except under what follows) for this case.

2. From that bad taste (that is, ignorance) in proprietors which leads them wrong, even when they are disposed to go right.—This is a very common misfortune in all places; and not more frequent here than elsewhere. On the contrary, there is generally a salutary ambition here to aid the general decoration; as the reconstruction of every broken-up front shows. We are immeasurably indebted to the higher class of chartered companies, both for their buildings and their examples. Individuals cannot rival their edifices; but they can learn the important, and scarcely understood, truth, that there is no ornament so beautiful as Proportion; and that it is just as cheap to build in proportion as out of it. It is a mistake to suppose that a beautiful form cannot be as easily cut out of coarse hoddie grey cloth, as out of the finest silk.

3. From the inconsiderate use made of their power by public bodies, and chiefly by public authorities.—They are the administrators of the largest portion of the most important ground;—what they do is generally done on a large scale; and their better judgment is apt to be tormented by absurd schemes and claims. The only remedy besides public control, for this, is, that they should work the principle, that the beauty of the town is paramount to every other consideration,

into the very fabric of their official hearts.—If they cannot direct themselves by this star, and forego inferior objects, and become impenetrable to the demonstrations and seductions of selfish projectors, they are unfit for their places.

I am not aware of anything that can be done to counteract these tendencies, except to instruct the taste, and to direct the attention, of the people. Pride in the beauty of the place should be the *Genius Loci*. There should be such a quick defensive jealousy, that no one could meditate mischief without considerable despair. The known prevalence of this feeling is our quiet and natural security. It supersedes much discussion, and all unkindly sentiments, and all angry words.—And not merely the feeling, but the intelligence necessary for its application, may easily pervade a whole community. At any rate, a population is in a bad state which does not contain minds fit and willing to guide it on such matters. Edinburgh is not in this condition. Besides much general intelligence, it is the seat of very considerable and rapidly-rising art; which has never withheld its aid in any of its departments. Even its sons who have been allured from their native city by the larger market of the South, continue to do what they can for the improvement of the scenery which first excited them. It would be unjust not to mention David Roberts,—the first architectural painter alive,—who has repeatedly given important suggestions, and may always be depended upon for his invaluable co-operation.

But no good can be done unless both the advisers and the advised act on the principle, that the preservation of what constitutes the peculiar distinction of the city, is to be held as, *in itself, an ultimate end*. If they do not, the success, or the



suppression, of any given absurdities, will be made to resolve into concessions and compromises; and in the adjustment of these, the true rule being let down, interest, with its zeal, will make error prevail. Each matter must be taken up as good men take up a principle of moral duty,—not to be modified according to slight convenience,—or scarcely even to be reasoned about,—but to be assumed, and peremptorily acted upon.

Against power or right, this must often fail. But in Edinburgh the power and the right are chiefly in the hands of the Town Council, or of public bodies where Town Councillors prevail. Let us hope that the true friends of the city will always find a cordial ally in that body. This is a matter not connected with party, or polemics, or anything that ought to irritate. It has the strongest claim on the care of our municipal guardians. It brings its own immediate, and visible, reward. If I had the honour of being in your Lordship's position, there is nothing that could haunt me so bitterly, after my reign was over, as the just imputation that I had either been accessory to impairing the beauty of the town, or that I cast away any opportunity of improving it. It is impossible for every chief magistrate to rival the boast of the Emperor who said that he had found Rome of stone, and had left it of marble; because this can only be done once. But I have known few Provostships where projects injurious to Edinburgh,—whose beauty is its existence,—have not been proposed, and alarmingly patronised; and these it *is* in the power of every chief magistrate to distinguish himself by withstanding. He will never fail, if he does so honestly. I have the utmost confidence in your Lordship, and consequently in your Council. If a shade of doubt ever comes

over me, it is solely from a fear lest you should fall\* into the common and very natural, but dangerous, error of letting yourselves be misled by a desire to conciliate those who, though always the most clamorous, are not always the most disinterested, in these matters. However, if any case of threatened mischief should occur, I shall confidently expect an announcement of principle that shall do honour to the existing magistracy, and be an example to all future ones. Do not go out of office with a monument to your discredit in any part of the city. I am told,—but I do not know it, and therefore do not assert it,—but *I am told, that there is one threatened on the Castle Hill at this very moment.*

There is one apology certainly for Chief Magistrates and for Town Councils, which it would be wrong not to state. *They are rarely duly supported, or duly checked, by the right-minded portion of the public.* The contrast between the strong and sound opinions that one hears expressed privately, and the habitual abstinence from public action or even declaration, is distressing and humiliating. Till the inhabitants of sense shall give up this ruinous and contemptible practice, they do not deserve what they enjoy. And it is very hard on those in your Lordship's place; who, with your Council, are thus left to combat mischief, unaided by the community; or have the sadder fate of being left to do it yourselves, uncontrolled.

I have the honour to be,

Your Lordship's faithful well-wisher,

H. COCKBURN.

\* As in the case of the washing-green.



