

## REVIEWS

to a spectacular revival in the prominence of liberalism in British government, but whether it's a sustainable revival or a revival that comes with an in-built self-destruct button remains to be seen. (Nick Clegg, p. 374).

*Duncan Brack is Editor of the Journal of Liberal History; he also wrote the chapter on the Liberal Democrats in Duncan Brack and Robert Ingham (eds.), Peace, Reform and Liberation: A History of Liberal Politics in Britain 1679–2011 (Biteback, 2011).*

of Scottish Rights, the opposition to Macaulay's representation of Edinburgh in the 1840s and 1850s. Further, he was intimately connected with a wider Liberal culture in which Scotland was very important on account of its consistent delivery of a large number of Liberal seats and its support of key Liberal causes. His third marriage to Priscilla, younger sister of John Bright, helped to deepen these connections but he was also close to Richard Cobden; indeed, the Cobden–McLaren connection is certainly worthy of further exploration. Pickard is especially good at bringing out the atmosphere of Scottish politics in this period and McLaren's wider connections. This has certainly been done in books by Hutchison and Fry at a more general level but the biographical focus of this study provides an exceptionally good window on the key features of the political landscape of Victorian Scotland. While Pickard's view is generally a positive one, he does not elide McLaren's more than occasional narrowness of view, which renders him an unappealing character at times. He was certainly representative of the belief in individual effort and responsibility which was central to Liberalism of this period. His

## Scottish Liberal

Willis Pickard, *The Member for Scotland: A Life of Duncan McLaren* (John Donald, 2011)

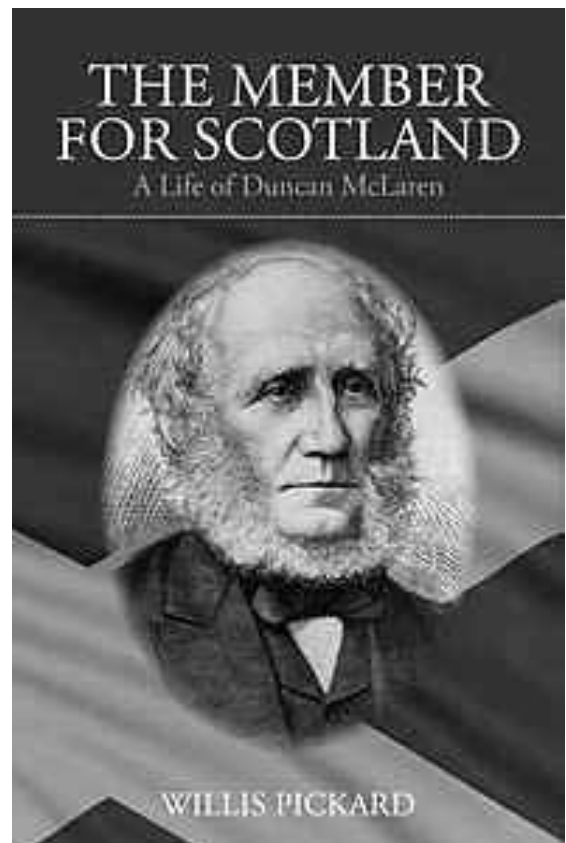
Reviewed by **Ewen A. Cameron**

**W**ILLIS PICKARD, VERY well-known in journalistic and educational circles in Scotland, has performed a signal service to Scottish history by writing this extremely well-documented biography of Duncan McLaren. Reading Pickard's notes and bibliography, it is striking that the last major biography, by J. B. Mackie, was published in 1889. Despite the fact that Mackie's book was commissioned by the McLaren family and its tone was in the tradition of Victorian hagiography, Pickard quotes the view of John Bright (McLaren's brother-in-law) that 'not one quarter of the praise due to McLaren has been given to him.' (p. 270). Pickard's book lies on the spectrum between this extreme and that of the modern contextualised biography where the subject can disappear entirely. Indeed, Pickard maintains a good balance between the details of his subject's life and career and the contexts – Edinburgh, Scotland, Voluntarism, Liberalism – in which he operated during the nineteenth century.

Despite his prominence in nineteenth-century Scotland, he is something of a forgotten figure, although many of the political campaigns in which he was involved have been much studied by recent writers on Scottish history, such as Graeme Morton. Iain Hutchison, Michael Fry and Robert Anderson. McLaren was born in 1800 to a family which had roots in the highland county of Argyll but he spent most of his life in business and political circles in the lowlands of Scotland. He was most prominent in Edinburgh, where he entered the drapery business and prospered; his

other business interests, in banking, property and railways, were less profitable. He carved out a career in local politics, his first election to the City Council came in 1833, a very difficult time for Scotland's capital which was virtually bankrupt, and he rose to be Lord Provost from 1851 to 1854. He contested Edinburgh's parliamentary representation for the first time in 1852, was elected in 1865 and served until his retirement in 1881. He died in 1886. These bare biographical bones do not do justice to the significance of McLaren's career or to the interesting material contained in Willis Pickard's excellent biography. Pickard has immersed himself in McLaren's voluminous correspondence and his extensive and disputatious published works. This research has produced a very clearly written and, as far as the Scottish context is concerned, successful account of McLaren's career.

McLaren was involved, sometimes tangentially, in many of the major controversies of nineteenth-century Scotland. There are, however, several features of his career which ensure that he is more than the kind of character whom Anthony Trollope might have permitted a brief appearance at the Duke of Omnium's dinner table. The first is that he was the archetypal representative of the thoroughly Liberal culture of Scotland after 1832. To be sure, McLaren was opposed to the Whig clique which dominated its politics in the early part of the period. He was at the forefront of all the leading campaigns which provided a radical challenge to the Whigs: the Anti Corn Law League, the National Association for the Vindication



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strident opposition to trade unions is highlighted as one example of this point of view. Pickard is also sure-footed in his discussion of the complex topic of the intra-presbyterian sectarianism which was such a defining feature of McLaren's outlook. He was a member of the United Presbyterian Church, the leading Voluntary denomination in Scotland from 1847, and a vocal opponent of both the established Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland. The latter attracted his ire due to its adherence to the principle of established churches. Gladstone's failure to commit to Scottish disestablishment was a source of disappointment, as was his commitment to Irish home rule, which McLaren opposed (along, of course, with John Bright). This sectarian outlook is another way in which he can be viewed as a rather narrow politician in some ways. Although he was known as 'the Member for Scotland' because of his frequent speeches and questions on Scottish matters during his parliamentary career, he was especially vigorous in his pursuit of local Edinburgh matters. His political career encountered difficulties with the change in culture in the 1880s with the expansion of the electorate, the quickening pace of political debate

and a more vibrant daily journalism, especially in his home city. As Willis Pickard brings out in this important book, McLaren's career peaked in the years between the reforms of 1868 and 1885. The importance of the book goes beyond the biographical treatment of an important figure from nineteenth-century Scottish political history. It also serves as a reminder that there are many aspects of this period which are still to be studied

in depth by modern historians. Willis Pickard has performed a signal service in providing a detailed picture of the political and religious culture of the period when Scotland was a Liberal nation.

*Ewen A. Cameron is Sir William Fraser Professor of Scottish History at the University of Edinburgh. His most recent book is Impaled on a Thistle: Scotland since 1880 (Edinburgh, 2010).*

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## Gladstone and Ireland

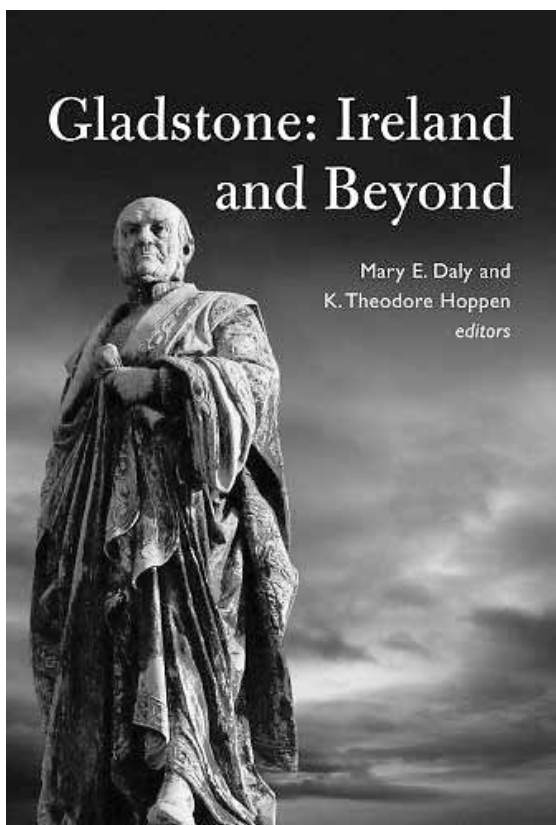
Mary E. Daly and K. Theodore Hoppen (eds.) *Gladstone: Ireland and Beyond* (Four Courts Press, 2011)

Reviewed by **Iain Sharpe**

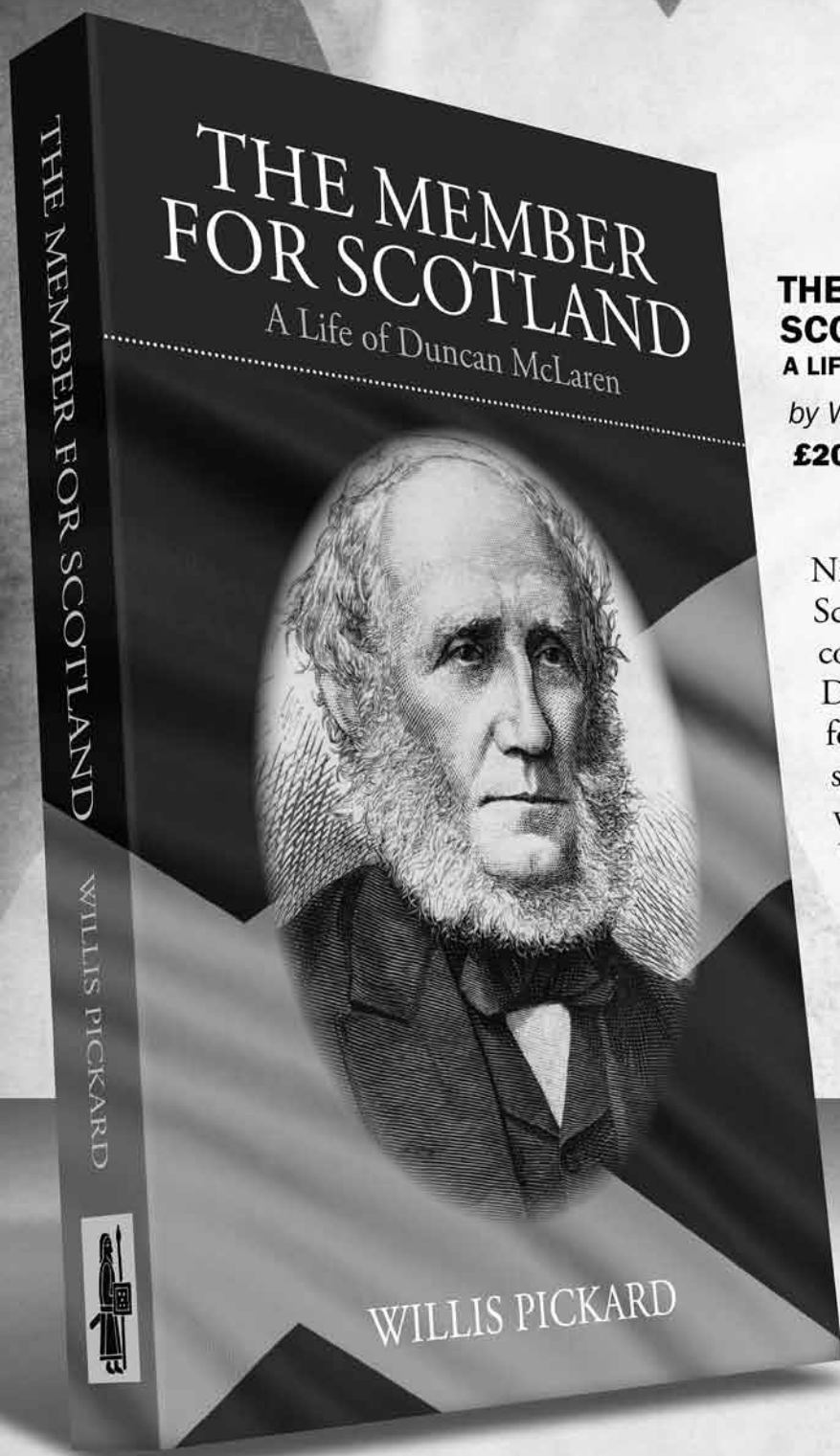
**T**HE GRAND OLD Man's longevity has given Gladstonian scholars a treat over the past few years – the commemoration of the centenary of his death in 1998 being quickly followed by the 2009 celebrations of the bicentenary of his birth. Both were marked by conferences, seminars and other events, leading to a plethora of publications. This volume is a collection of papers delivered at a symposium at St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden (Britain's only prime ministerial library) in September 2009.

Some might wonder, given how much has already been written about Gladstone's engagement with Ireland, what more there is to say. The evidence of this volume gives the resounding answer that there are plenty of new avenues to be explored, from how Gladstone was portrayed in Irish newspapers (including unionist ones) to the interaction of political and family relationships, to how Gladstone's legacy influenced subsequent generations who had to deal with the complexities of Irish–British relationships. Contributors range from established names in Gladstonian and Irish studies to those who have only recently completed their doctoral research. The quality of contributions is consistently high, although one might quibble that the theme of 'Gladstone, Ireland and beyond' is so broad that this is clearly a collection of papers, not a work with a clear unifying framework.

It is the older hands who offer the most insightful perspectives. Theodore Hoppen's chapter on 'Gladstone, Salisbury and the end of Irish assimilationism' highlights the similarities in approach to Ireland offered by the Liberal and Conservative parties, just at the moment when home rule appeared to polarise them. Hoppen argues that both Gladstone and Salisbury fundamentally departed from a previous British consensus that aimed at integrating Ireland into the United Kingdom, making it more like England, or perhaps Scotland. While Gladstone's conversion to Irish home rule was portrayed by opponents as a dangerously radical departure, in fact the Unionists' policy of 'killing home rule by kindness' equally involved recognising that Ireland was different from the rest of the United Kingdom. It focused on land purchase – effectively using large amounts of public money to buy out Irish landlords, transferring property to the tenants, in a way that was if anything more out of keeping with nineteenth-century rules of political economy than was home rule. Hoppen advances here an important, and in my view justified, argument, concluding that late-Victorian party conflict over Ireland was, in the words of Jorge Luis Borges regarding a different conflict, like 'some very angry bald men fighting over a comb'.



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