

THE REV. DR. M'LEA, AND ROTHESAY OF HIS TIME (1765-1824).

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In the history of the Royal Burgh of Rothesay, two dates stand out prominently. On 12th January 1400, Robert III. signed and sealed the Charter in favour of the Burgh and so confirmed its right to take its place among the Burghs of Scotland. No doubt the inhabitants duly appreciated the distinction thus bestowed upon them and looked forward with pardonable pride to the place which they could occupy in the counsels of the nation. But great expectations are not always fulfilled and the little town had a checkered career before it. It suffered through the loss of the Royal patronage; it suffered from war and the unfriendly attentions of neighbouring highland caterans; it suffered, along with the rest of Scotland, in the hard times which brought in the eighteenth century, and what seemed to impress John Blain on his arrival to take up the duties of Town Clerk¹ was that the town lay almost in ruins and contained very few inhabitants. But 1764 saw a great awakening. The Earl of Bute, ever solicitous for the welfare of the town, resolved to attempt to develop the natural resources of the place. At this time no colonial produce could be landed in Ireland without first passing through a British Port. Rothesay might get a share of this trade if only it had a Custom House. So Lord Bute exerted himself on this behalf, and although not opened for another year, arrangements were made for establishing a Custom House in 1764. This was the signal for fresh activities—and these not confined to the town—for the Commissioners of Supply and Freeholders, in the

¹ 1761.

same year, resolved that all the roads in Bute and Arran should be repaired—the first to be undertaken being the road to Kingarth, the road by the Mill of Greenan, and the road to Kilmichael Ferry by the way of Gartnakeilly and Cranslagvourity. So in 1765 we find the ruined town of two years previous being rebuilt, the Custom House in full working order, the fishing thriving and boats being built in the yard at the foot of the present Bishop Street.

Such was the condition of the Burgh when on 31st October 1765, Archibald M'Lea was admitted as Minister of the Parish of Rothesay. For 59 years he was destined to labour here, outliving his two brothers who were his Co-presbyters—John, the Minister of Lochgoilhead, and Duncan, Minister of Inverchaolain. He saw the dawn of the town's manufactories and of its shipping, he lived to see and derive the benefit of steam navigation, and to grumble at the development of the Burgh into a Watering Place.

Mr M'Lea was the son of the Rev. Duncan M'Lea, Minister of the Parish of Dull, Perthshire. He was educated at Glasgow University, and at the close of his college career was presented to the Parish of Kilarrow and Kilchoman, Islay, and as stated was translated to Rothesay in 1765. The reasons offered by the Presbytery of Dunoon for his translation were:—

- (1) That Rothesay Parish includes the Burgh, a port town and head burgh of the County.
- (2) The Parish was more populous than Kilarrow and Kilchoman, and therefore offered greater scope for his talents.
- (3) It was nearer the seats of general and provincial assemblies of the Church,

and last, but I presume not least, the stipend was much more considerable than that of his then present Parish. The prospects were promising, but the young minister soon found that all had not been told—especially with regard to the salary.

Blain¹ details how the salary was made up, the total value of which he reckoned to be worth £94 Sterling per annum, exclusive of Manse and Glebe. The Minister's own valuation was £100 per annum including Manse and Glebe. Mr M'Lea discovered that the former incumbents had been in use to grant tacks to the family of Bute of certain parts of the teinds of the Parish, and he was asked to follow this practice. He thought that this was somewhat out of the usual, but he agreed to let matters remain on the old footing till he got further information. Negotiations were entered into between Mr M'Lea and the Agents for Lord Bute, but as twenty years brought no settlement, Mr M'Lea raised an action against the Earl of Bute to declare that the Minister was entitled to the teinds. The monetary difference between the parties when the action was raised was about £60, and the Earl of Bute argued that if the Minister got his way his stipend would be larger than any other Minister in Scotland—a statement not admitted by Mr M'Lea. But the Minister argued when the circumstances were all taken into consideration the larger stipend was not too large for (1) the Parish of Rothesay comprehended much more than one half of the island of Bute and contained upwards of 3,000 inhabitants; (2) the Royal Burgh of Rothesay was a free port, and from its neighbourhood to Greenock, the dearest market in Scotland, the expense of living was uncommonly high—to give only one example, the price of fuel was so exorbitant that 8 cwt. of coal cost 6s. 6d., more than double the price in the City of Glasgow. The case dragged on for other twenty years, and then was decided in Mr M'Lea's favour, the increased salary dating back to 1794.²

At the time of Mr M'Lea's induction the island was divided into two parishes—Rothesay Parish comprehending the northern portion of the Island, and Kingarth the southern. The area of the parish was therefore extensive, but the population was small—only 2658—about one half being in the town of Rothesay.

¹ Blain's History of Bute, p. 402.

² The salary was subsequently augmented and, according to Blain, was value of £325 per annum. History, p. 411.

The Church as it stood when Mr M'Lea came here was a very small building, "52 feet long by 22½ feet broad, with an aisle projecting 19 feet within walls and 20 feet in width." At most it could not seat more than 520 persons. It could thus only accommodate about one-fifth of the population of the parish at the time of Mr M'Lea's induction. But the population was rapidly increasing, and in 27 years the population of the Parish had increased to 4801, or an increase in the period of 2143. By this time the Church was in a ruinous condition and it was resolved to build a new Church. Plans were accordingly prepared by Adam Russel of Leith for a Church to accommodate 1500 sitters at an estimated cost (exclusive of pulpit and spire) of £2024. This cost was apparently too much, for these plans were dropped and it was resolved to get new plans, after the model adopted for the Gaelic Chapel at Greenock, for a Church to accommodate 1000. Mr Robertson Buchanan drew plans accordingly, but "he departed from the 'model pointed out to him so far as to add somewhat by way 'of ornament together with a pediment and bell-house all on 'the front in the hope that the Committee would see fit to 'adopt the improvement suggested by him in said plans." This suggestion was agreed to, the extra cost being £50. The local contractors were the lowest offerers but they made excuses and the contract was ultimately accepted by Fleming & Ferguson, Greenock, their price being £1259, 6s. 8d. Three years passed before the Church was completed, it being opened for public worship on 4th September, 1796.

The change of plans on the part of the heritors—reducing the sitting accommodation in the Church from 1500 to about 1000, seems to have given a reason for the promoters of the Chapel of Ease to build their Chapel. It was built in 1798 at a cost of £1060 and accommodated some 900 sitters. After it was erected the promoters applied to the Presbytery to receive it as a Chapel of Ease. The reasons given for its erection were that the Parish Church had only sitting accommodation for 1050; that there was an Anti-Burgher Congregation in town but it had not more than 40 members, and as there was not sufficient accommodation in the Parish Church many

would be driven into secession—a thing they did not want. It appears that the Marquis of Bute and Lord Bannatyne had proposed to build a Church, to be placed about half way between Rothesay and the North end of the Parish, this part of the Parish to be disjoined and erected *quoad sacra*, but before this could be carried out, the Chapel was built—as Mr M'Lea said “in a situation which cannot afford any ‘accommodation to the distant parishioners, being placed ‘between the Parish Minister's Manse and the Parish Church,” but it had the effect of stopping the proposed new Church and Parish. Considerable bitterness ensued over the building of the Chapel. The promoters were not well versed in Church Court procedure, and objected very much to the Presbytery insisting on the proper procedure being carried out. Dr. M'Lea did not approve of Chapels of Ease, as being a “troublesome excrescence upon the constitution of the Church,” but he did not oppose its being received as such. But he and the first incumbent did not pull together and the controversy raged for many years. As late as 1811 a writer in the *Greenock Advertiser* went into the history of the Chapel and alleged that it was the result of political party feeling in the Burgh. In reply to this letter it was stated “that the Chapel took its ‘origin owing to the Parish Minister refusing the use of his ‘place of worship at the desire of his people to preachers in ‘his own connection, yea even liberty to set up a tent for ‘them within the bounds of the Parish obliging one of them ‘to preach within the sea-mark, though they were there only ‘on a party of pleasure.” Whatever may have been the real reason for the erection of the Chapel, it is clear that the Parish Minister did not approve of it, and would have preferred the erection of a *quoad sacra* Parish with a Church in a different situation—and subsequent events have proved that Dr. M'Lea was right.¹

Part of the Manse still stands behind “Campbell's Land,” High Street. In 1790, Dr. M'Lea made representations to the Presbytery as to its condition. A visitation was appointed

¹ This Chapel now forms part of the Corporation Gas Works.

and it was reported that the Manse required considerable repairs—the internal arrangements required to be improved, the office houses to be rebuilt and as the garden was enclosed by an old and insufficient hedge it was requisite that a stone wall should be built round it. The work was begun in 1791, but the Minister complained that the plans were not carried out in their entirety, some slight alterations being made by which according to Dr. M'Lea the Contractors were the gainers. A good deal of correspondence ensued and the repairs were not fully completed till 1796.¹

One of the duties of the Parish Minister of those days was the oversight and examination of the Schools. The original parish school stood somewhere in the vicinity of the East U.F. Church. It was a small building—20 feet long by 17 feet broad, with thatched roof and earth floor. But before Mr M'Lea had been settled here the school had been removed to a room in the Bishop's house. The increase of the town demanded more houses, and a new street began to be formed through the Bishop's Garden—called Bishop Street—the first feuar of this Street being Mr Robert Sharp, and known from that fact as “Bishop Sharp.” The Bishop's house had to be removed in 1786 to allow of the completion of the new street, so the Council resolved to fit up the old Schoolhouse, to be used until another more convenient and capacious one could be provided. The old school required a good deal of repair, and the Schoolmaster, William Macartney asked, “that something should be done to make the house convenient and ‘decent as well as warmer than it can be with earthen floor ‘and a tile roof and also for new tables and seats” as there had not been anything of that kind furnished for upwards of 30 years. The Council resolved to plaster the roof, but nothing further was done for a year when on another request for tables,

¹ If the Rothesay tradesmen were slow and somewhat unsatisfactory, those in Dunoon seem to have been much worse. Rev. Mr Melville of Dunoon on 17th February 1796, asked Dr M'Lea to get the body of a cart made for him, and in the course of his letter he says, “When we depart from the trifling or clumsy implements of husbandry in this country, we have not a tradesman who can or will, if they can, set them to rights when wrong or furnish us with new ones when wanted.”

seats, and flooring, the Marquis of Bute offered to furnish for that purpose "scots fir in logs at Mountstuart provided the 'town will be at the expense of carriage, sawing and other 'workmanship and materials." The Council agreed to these terms and advertised for "offers from tradesmen who were 'willing to undertake the work on the easiest terms."

For several years after Mr Macartney's death the Authorities had difficulty in securing a suitable teacher and they repeatedly advertised in Glasgow and Edinburgh newspapers. But these advertisements did not secure a teacher with the qualifications desired. As "the Schoolmaster and his 'Scholars were much worse accommodated than any of the 'private Schoolmasters or Schools in the place," the Council realised they could not get a good Schoolmaster until they had a satisfactory Schoolhouse, and they resolved in 1798 to build a new School (now the Parish Council Chambers) the first Master being Archibald Currie. The Marquis of Bute contributed the site and £50, and the balance of the cost was raised by subscription.

Dr. M'Lea reporting in 1818 to the General Assembly stated:—

"It is believed that all are taught to read, and by far the 'greater number of all the males and many of the females to 'write."

"The average number of scholars attending the School 'may be about 70. The fees paid by each scholar per quarter 'depends upon what they are learning. The Schoolmaster 'cannot afford to teach many gratis, but there are a number 'whose quarter wages are paid by the Marquis of Bute and 'some other well disposed individuals."

"The branches of education which the Schoolmaster, by 'the terms of his election, is required to teach, are Latin, 'English, Writing, Arithmetic, Bookkeeping, Navigation."

"Besides the parochial school there are in the Burgh eight 'other schools—six taught by males and two by females—

'none of which are established by any public body or carried 'on by private individuals money. Upon an average there 'may be 330 scholars taught in these nine schools. There has 'lately been a night school opened in the cotton mill at the 'sole expense of the proprietor for the benefit of the children 'employed in it. The number of the children entered is 'about 130."

The teacher of the Parish School at the time of this Report was the Rev. Daniel Macbeth. His predecessor had allowed the School to go back so far that during his last year (1812-13) he had only seven scholars, all receiving instruction in navigation only. The most popular school, judging by the number of scholars, was that taught by Stewart M'Alister, who had over 100 scholars. He had five classes for boys and girls in his school, viz:—

- 1st class—Small preceptor
- 2nd „ Reading made easy
- 3rd „ Testament
- 4th „ Bible
- 5th „ Elocution and writing.

and an additional class, arithmetic for boys. Needless to say the qualifications for a teacher were not high. Donald Graham, a boy of 14, taught a school of 42 scholars in Port Bannatyne. John Hill was a weaver and turned teacher. John M'Kay was disqualified by disease from working at his trade, but made a fairly successful teacher.

The Schoolmaster's salary, in addition, of course, to fees paid to him, had been settled in 1700 as follows:—

5/- Scots out of every merkland within the Country Parish of Rothsay.

£40 Scots to be paid out of the Common Good.

£30 Scots to be paid by the Kirk of Session "if soe much 'be in their box out of the first and readiest thereof."

6/- Scots for every baptism and 16/- Scots for every marriage from the party marrying or having their children baptised.

£20 Scots part of £40 Scots mortified by the Synod of Argyle for the Schools of the Parish,

and 5/- Scots out of every merkland in the Parish of Kingarth. At a subsequent period these payments had been changed into fixed sums, and prior to 1803 the total salary was £9 Sterling. The Act of 1803 fixed the Schoolmaster's salary at not less than 300 and not more than 400 merks, and he also was to be provided with a garden. The Rothesay Schoolmaster's salary was fixed at the maximum—£22, 4s. 5d. But as he had no garden he was allowed an annual sum of £1, 13s. 11d., in lieu thereof. In addition he received the £20 Scots (£1, 13s. 4d. Sterling) from the mortification above mentioned, so that his total salary was £25, 11s. 9d.

Dr. M'Lea added a note to the report above mentioned:—
 "The zeal of the Minister of our Chapel of Ease has induced him to keep a Sabbath Evening School for some time. Neither Chapels of Ease nor Sabbath Evening Schools are congenial with the constitution of the Church of Scotland, which declares that every Parish shall have its own Minister and every family be a Sabbath Evening School."

The Kirk Session had also the supervision and care of the poor. There was no assessment for the poor—Dr. M'Lea being of opinion that an assessment would quadruple the applicants and be the means of rendering the lower classes less industrious than they were. The Church door collections, after deduction of communion expenses and other funds at the disposal of the Kirk Session were devoted to the relief of the poor—the average from all sources for 10 years prior to 1817 being £122, 3s. 4d. per annum. This amount was supplemented from time to time by voluntary contributions and extraordinary collections for specific cases, e.g., two special collections made for parishioners, while Prisoners of War in France, realised £115. No particular sum was allotted to any applicant, but

individuals were given more or less from time to time as funds could afford. Most of the people were members of the Church of Scotland—there only being a small congregation of Anti-burghers and some Roman Catholics, the latter mostly labourers who had migrated from Ireland. No distinction was made between the indigent seceders and the Church poor, but the Catholics were not admitted to the Poor Roll. They had no funds out of which they could receive help, and it is not to be wondered at that they resorted to begging¹, and, according to Dr. M'Lea, to other means not so defensible "to carry themselves through and although we are desirous to get quit of them yet find it a thing next to impracticable." The begging was a serious nuisance. Attempts were made by the Magistrates to put it down, but these attempts were not very successful. "The Parishioners," wrote Dr. M'Lea, "being generally of a charitable disposition do give them too great encouragement. Many of the Parish poor who are able to travel about do beg. Badges were at one time given them, but they considered the using them as a degrading distinction imposed even on a pauper, consequently they were soon permitted to fall into disuse."

The relief given to the poor was partly in money and partly in meal. The list then and a list now read much the same,—the aged, the lame, the blind. But one name deserves a passing mention. On September 28th 1764 the Council conferred the freedom of the Burgh on Malcolm M'Vicar, barber and wigmaker, the first of that profession who had settled in Rothesay. But the patronage he received did not enable him to make a fortune, for 36 years later the old barber's name appears on the minister's charity list.

Mr M'Lea was kept fully occupied with his multifarious duties, and in all things he was most methodical. In one of his sermons he said "True industry is evermore guided by discretion. It is not a hurry of business nor a torrent of the spirits in labour, but a cool and a methodical proceeding." And he practiced

¹ The Act of 1672 authorised issuing of badges to beggars when Church contributions insufficient.

what he preached. He examined his parish once a year and recorded in his Examination Rolls the names of all the inhabitants in the Parish.

The streets were first named in 1768 but some of the names have been changed, *e.g.*, the New Vennel is now Stuart Street, and the Old Vennel is now Russell Street. The Chapel Street of Dr. M'Lea is now Columshill Street. The old Tolbooth and Market Cross have disappeared. The house in High Street, known as the Old Mansion House, was in Dr. M'Lea's time the Custom House. One of the largest houses in the town was Springfield. It has gone and its site is now occupied by the Chapelhill U.F. Church, while the glory of Colbeck has departed although the name is retained in Colbeck Place. Even the names of persons have changed. The M'Gilchiarans are now Sharps; M'Conachy is now, in most cases, Duncan; Tois is M'Intosh; Geily, Gillies. Generally no designation or other identifying mark is put opposite the names, but where the parties did not receive Church privileges they were indicated. Thus the Irish, the vagrants and the dissenters were all distinguished; and any peculiarity was also noticed, as for example "Alex. Glass, Idiot."

Mrs M'Lea, a sister of Lord Bannatyne of Kames, was quite as methodical as her husband. While her husband was fully engaged with his parochial duties, she very efficiently looked after the household affairs, while the Minister's man—for many years Duncan M'Lea—cropped the glebe and attended to the garden. Like many of the inhabitants she kept two cows, and the butter made at the Manse could be purchased in the shop of James Miller & Co. Bread was purchased by her from William Peddie—whose name still survives in Peddie's Lane. But her carefully kept housekeeping books do not tell from whom she bought chickens at 6d. per pair; eggs at 2d. or 3d. per dozen; nor beef at 5d. per lb.; mutton at 4½d. per lb. or a sheep's head at 4d. For the winter's provision a supply of beef and mutton was provided in November. By 1815 the price of these had increased as the following account shows:—

9 stone 6 lbs. cow beef at 10s. per stone.
the half of a cow "inneords" 5s.
28 lbs. of mutton at 8d. per lb.

The tea usually was bought in Edinburgh at 4s. to 6s. per lb. While in Edinburgh the Dr. used to lay in his store of snuff, 3 lbs. for 10s 6d. Then to Thomas Weir, tailor, the Dr. paid 13s. 6d. for "making a shuete of close," while to Malcolm McVicar he paid 1s. for getting his hair cut. Tea did not in these days occupy a prominent place in the diet of the working man. Two painters were boarded with James Bannatyne, Treehouse, Port Bannatyne, at 4s. 6d. per week, and they complained of their food which was—"porridge and milk, oatbread and milk in the morning, the like to their supper. Broth and beef to dinner one day; beat potatoes and milk, calops, oatbread and milk the second day. On Sabbath day tea." Mr Bannatyne felt quite aggrieved at the complaint as this was the "ordinary fare of the House."

Dr. M'Lea's papers do not give much information with regard to his personal friends in Bute, but it is clear that he enjoyed in a very special degree the friendship of Dr. Morrison, who came here for health reasons, and for a few years occupied Stewart Hall. Although not in practice in Bute, he took a very active interest in the welfare of the people. For a time smallpox was very prevalent, and Dr. Morrison willingly gave his services gratuitously. Many of the children who had been vaccinated took smallpox and Dr. Morrison invited all the poor people who complained of the expense, to have their children re-vaccinated by him free of charge. Writing to her sister on 23rd February 1809, Mrs MacLea says—"This I hope will have two good effects—first, the poor getting it done gratis and next, depriving our worthless surgeons from laying the country under a big contribution by high charges, and after all not doing the business effectually." On account of the amount of sickness in town and the inability of many to get medical aid owing to the failure of the herring fishing, Dr. Morrison suggested that a public dispensary should be started, but although the suggestion was approved by the Council it does not seem to have been carried out. Dr. Morrison's name naturally leads one to speak of the Medical men in the town at that time. Whatever their qualifications may have been, they did not impress Dr. or Mrs M'Lea favourably. A Dr. Stewart wrote to M'Lea in 1788 asking if a surgeon had been

got to fill Dr Marshall's place, and if not what encouragement was offered. Mr M'Lea replied that he had a subscription paper made out and that a sum of £20 would be guaranteed for one year, but if Dr. Stewart was coming he should come at once "and so prevent our present practitioners (there were two) from taking deeper root." Dr. Stewart came but does not appear to have remained for any length of time. Fifteen years had evidently not made the Burgh more popular with the medical profession. Dr. Duncan Robertson, who also had the farm of Breakoch and sent in his milk cart to town daily, died in 1773, and as the town and island were left entirely without medical assistance, the Town Council applied to the Earl of Bute to assist in inducing a "surgeon of proper skill to settle in Rothesay."

The general character of the inhabitants of a district may often be ascertained from a perusal of old criminal records. In the time under review there were no police officers, and it is stated that if a quarrel arose amongst the fishermen a message was sent to Dr. M'Lea, whose appearance was sufficient to quell the disturbance. But however successful the Doctor might have been with men he was not always successful with women. A Lillias Taylor—a reputed drunkard—got drunk and abused her mother and father who were bedfast. Dr. M'Lea was passing the door and was called in. When he was exhorting her to a proper behaviour he was abused by her, and instead of taking his advice she came to the door after him and called him a scoundrel. As a result she was apprehended and lodged in the Tolbooth. Drunkenness seems to have been a common offence in those days. On 20th January 1784 the Magistrates felt compelled to take action towards suppressing the number of clandestine whisky houses—about 50 in number—although there seems to have been sufficient licensed houses—in 1814 there were 36. Drinking was not wholly confined to adults. I have not been able to ascertain whether the Schoolmaster, following the custom of the times, treated his scholars to toddy in return for their Candlemas offerings, but four boys—aged from 8 to 10, determined to run no risks in the matter. So with their Candlemas gifts they bought a gill of rum, three gills of whisky, and some oranges from Neil M'Intosh, who was convicted "for affording spirituous liquors

'in his house to young boys to the ruin of their morals and health 'and for the sake of unlawful gain to himself." Other offences did not differ materially from those tried in the Police Courts of to-day, but in the present day of motor cars it might be interesting to note that on 27th December 1820 William Young, Carter, was charged "with riding in a cart, driving the horse which conveyed 'it quickly, and no person on foot leading it along Mill Street, to 'the imminent hazard of the lives of foot passengers." He was fined 3s. The sentences imposed sometimes appear to be unduly severe. Thus Colin Mackenzie, Farmer in Windyhall, stole some hay belonging to Dr. Marshall. He was fined 20/- and was "ordained to be imprisoned in the Tolbooth to remain until 'Wednesday next (two days) being a public fair day at 12 o'clock 'noon, and at that time to be taken thence and placed in the 'Juggs at the Cross with his hands tied behind his back, a bottle 'of hay slung about his neck and a label affixed to his breast 'with this inscription in large letters, "For stealing hay," in 'which situation he is to be kept for half-an-hour and then dismissed."

In those days it was the duty of the townspeople to guard the Tolbooth, by themselves or deputies. If they did not turn out when required by the Officer they were liable to be fined. Sometimes the guards treated their duties somewhat lightly. Two men were called out to guard the Tolbooth. They came as required, but about 10 p.m. and again about 1 a.m. they went to their houses to light their pipes. They were only absent five minutes they said, but the Magistrate marked his disapproval of their conduct by fining them 5s. The Tolbooth evidently required guarding. A prisoner, while waiting his trial at Inveraray, was confined in the Tolbooth in 1797. The prisoner "dug up part of 'the pavement and of the earth below with a view to get out 'under the wall, and was detected in the act of attempting to make 'his escape. He was handcuffed and fastened by a long chain to 'two iron weights. His handcuffs were so slack that he could 'take out one hand and replace it at pleasure. Notwithstanding 'his handcuffs he shaved his beard and wrote frequently with 'his own hand. He had a comfortable room with a large sliding 'sash window open to the street so that he talked freely with 'people who were without; gave and received potations of whisky;

'amused himself with reading books, newspapers, the Annals of Newgate, &c.; tamed and fattened mice, and it may be added fattened himself, having suffered no disquiet either of body or mind."

The punishment of culprits was not wholly left to the Magistrates. The Session also dealt with offenders. Thus John Jamieson received a sessional rebuke for selling spirits on Sabbath, and Mary Campbell was ordered to leave the parish because she sometimes read cups for amusement. But although the Kirk Session and the Magistrates repressed the reading of cups even for amusement, the people of that time did not take their pleasures so sadly. Stage plays were occasionally performed in the Tolbooth, while dances were sometimes held in the Tolbooth and sometimes in the Schoolhouse. On one occasion John Campbell of Auchawilling, Colonel of the Buteshire Volunteers, asked Dr. M'Lea to give the use of the Schoolroom to the Volunteers for a dance. The Minister replied that he had no power to do so. On the Colonel reporting this answer to Robert Duncan, Major; John M'Kay, Captain of the Rothesay Company; and Ninian Bannatyne, Captain of the Kingarth Company, they declared that in view of this refusal by the Minister they would march the regiment to Church next day (Sunday 1st July 1804) with drums beating and fifes playing before them, a thing they knew the Minister disapproved of and had formerly put a stop to upon public fasts and thanksgiving days. And against the wishes of the Colonel they carried out their threat, "marching past the Minister as he was stepping out at his gate upon his way to the Church with their fifes playing a reel before them." The Minister talked the matter over with Major Duncan who undertook, if no further notice was taken of the matter, not to play the fifes again either on a Sabbath or on any public Fast or Thanksgiving Day. But on Thursday, 5th December, on the occasion of the general thanksgiving for Lord Nelson's victory, the Major forgot his promise, and marched the Volunteers to Church in the afternoon to the Gaelic Service, and comparatively few of them knew Gaelic, with their fifes playing and attended by a mob of children and rabble. But the Major did not know the

Minister. He was not so easily beaten, for on reporting the matter to headquarters in Edinburgh an Order was issued requesting that the Volunteers should not play music when going to Church. And a few years afterwards the Town Council practically forbade dances being held in the Schoolroom.

Rothesay in these days was a small town (the population in 1801 being, including shipping 4010) depending on the fishing and cotton industries.¹ As you all know the promoters of cotton spinning in Scotland fixed on Rothesay as the place in which to start operations, and while their Mill was being erected started their machinery in the old Lint Mill. In 1804 from 600 to 700 persons were employed by the Cotton Company and about 1000 persons were dependent on the cotton industry. But Rothesay was a somewhat out of the way place—not easy of access. There was a ferry from Rothesay to Ardyne which involved another crossing by the ferry between Dunoon and the Cloch. Besides being a roundabout way it was not always otherwise pleasant as witness an extract of a letter from Rev. Francis Stewart to Dr. M'Lea (10/5/1810) "the packet 'landed us yesterday half past eight o'clock at the old Cloch, 'whence we walked to town (Greenock) under very heavy rain 'on roads overflowed with water." Then there was another ferry between Scoulag and Portincross, but it was more convenient to take a packet from Rothesay to Greenock and then proceed by flyboat or coach to Glasgow. The flyboat had a sail, but was more usually propelled by its six rowers, and it has been suggested that it was called a "fly" because the taverns along the Clydeside invited the rowers and passengers to step into their parlours—like the spider of the fable. But even the journey by the packet was not always pleasant

¹ The Town Council did what they could to encourage other industries, thus it is recorded on 13th October, 1780, "James Muir in Barone Park gave in a Petition setting forth that he has bred one of his sons a tanner and currier and another a shoemaker, that he intends setting them up in business here and praying the Council would grant him a feu of the lower part of the field interjected between the burn and the Lade of the Lint Mill as the same is marked off by stakes driven in . . . on which ground the petitioner intends to set down a Tan-work. The petition was granted on paying a feuduty of 1s. 8d per annum.

for on one occasion Dr. M'Lea spent sixteen hours "penned up in a disagreeable packet." But all this was to be changed by Henry Bell and his "Comet." The "Comet" sailed regularly from August 1812 and probably called at Rothesay. It is not certain when the steamers started to make regular calls here as various dates, ranging from 1813 to 1815 are given by different authorities. It would almost seem that one could get to Rothesay in 1813 by steamer, as we now find the summer visitors in considerable numbers. Writing to his sister-in-law, Mrs Grant, on 16th November, 1813, Dr. M'Lea said "This place has been all the season crowded with 'visitors of every description, almost equal to the run that 'was sometime to the Trossachs." In March 1814, Dr. M'Lea was applied to to find summer lodgings for a friend. The accommodation required was "a house or part of a house containing a parlour, two bedrooms and kitchen, and if there is 'a bed-closet off one of the bedrooms so much the better." The Doctor's reply may be quoted at length.

"It is but lately that furnished lodgings have been in request and of course very few are to be got. There is one 'I think will nearly answer the description in every respect 'belonging to a Mr Urquhart, a Boatbuilder, at the west end 'of the town detached from any other upon the sea shore. It 'is a half house built for his own accommodation, clean and 'well furnished. He has a niece living with him. He occupies 'himself a room on the ground floor and kitchen without. 'There is besides a kitchen and bed for a servant, and pantry 'on the ground floor and a coal cellar below. Upstairs a neat 'little parlour and bedroom behind it and a bed-closet at the 'stairhead. Two neat well-furnished garret rooms with a bed 'in each. He is not fond of letting it so early for less than 'three months, as he may have a chance of getting it let for 'that time, if not longer, sometime after this, but if you take it for 'three months you may have it for thirteen guineas. It is the 'only house I think would suit you and upon few days' warning will be ready to receive you."

But the Minister did not like this invasion by the summer visitors. Writing to Mrs Grant on 10th October, 1815, he

says "This place has been crowded by a set of restless 'people who seem not to know how to dispose of themselves 'and their time, steamboats bringing crowds to us almost 'every day. They are now begun to slack a little and I hope 'we will soon be allowed to enjoy our quiet retirement."

The increasing number of steamers calling at Rothesay demanded more pier accommodation. Ten years before Dr. M'Lea settled here, the Council, in order to encourage the formation of a fishing fleet, began to build a pier, running in the direction of the present Albert Pier. This pier was extended from time to time until it was 200 yards long and 30 feet broad. But this pier soon proved inadequate and in 1787-89 a new pier was built to the west of the former one and practically on the same site as the present main pier. This new pier, however, was not of sufficient strength and part of it soon collapsed. But when the steamers began to make regular calls it was seen that more pier accommodation was required and after long consideration the original of the present pier was constructed in 1822. Rothesay was now a recognised watering place to which families resorted in summer and even in winter. But the old Minister did not appreciate the change. Writing to Mrs Grant on 14th September 1821, he says, "There have been a number of houses built upon both sides 'of the bay and several more of the foundations clearing out 'for immediate building. If the rage goes on Rothesay shall 'soon become a noted watering place. Notwithstanding all this 'bustle, I recollect with much pleasure upon the social, cheerful, 'pleasing manner in which we passed our days fifty years ago, 'when we had a packet once a fortnight and a post once a 'week.¹ We had at least more real enjoyment." But the Doctor was now within a few days of his eighty-fourth birthday and while he had had honours conferred on him, he had also met with severe disappointments. In 1801 the Glasgow University had conferred upon him the degree of D.D.—an honour which he greatly appreciated. But on 11th May 1812

¹ In 1808 there were two packets each week and a daily ferry between Seoullag and Largs.

Mrs M'Lea died after a couple of days' illness. The loss of one who had been his faithful companion and helper for 25 years affected him greatly. He doubtless contrasted the simple style of their excursions, before the days when Rothesay became a fashionable watering place, with the later fashions. Here is her description of a journey to Ardlamont, "Off we went. We 'got a very good cart with a kind of armchair slung upon it. 'We went in a stile of a London lit on a country excursion—'we two in the carriage and Duncan riding Mr M'Lea's horse. 'We took the Stewart Hall road When we came to the 'landing place we found the boat and four hands waiting us." Then he had been engaged in a litigation and had lost his case. He had objected to pay the assessed taxes on the ground that a parish minister was exempt. The Crown Authorities took steps to enforce payment and he appealed to the Court of Exchequer. In 1813 the case was decided against him. But he was not convinced of the soundness of the decision. Writing to Dr. Macdougall of Lochgilphead, he says, "I am so satisfied of the justice of the cause and 'the disgrace of acquiescing in the present judgment that I am 'ready to risque another hundred pounds or two more to bring 'the business to a final issue. If we are successful I have no 'doubt of being reimbursed, but if not I am satisfied it has 'been expended upon a question which ought to have had a 'different issue." So he appealed to the House of Lords. For six more years the case dragged on and then the Lords dismissed his appeal, without expenses. But while he lost his case he had not lost the esteem of his brother ministers. For 32 years (1774-1806) he had, as Clerk, guided the deliberations of the Presbytery of Dunoon and now to mark the appreciation of his strenuous, though unsuccessful litigation, the Synod of Argyle asked to be allowed to have his portrait painted—"at 'full length in his canonicals"—by an eminent painter to be preserved by the Synod "in testimony of their respect for his 'character and of their gratitude for his persevering exertions in 'defending the claim of the Ministers of the Church of Scotland 'from taxation upon their livings." But while thanking the Synod for their offer he declined it. "I hope however," (he 'wrote, "the Reverend Synod will forgive me for declining the 'having my portrait taken. The honour they have done me in

'expressing the approbation of my conduct in their Minutes is 'more pleasing to my feelings and more lasting than any other 'memorial can be."

When first he came to Rothesay he held his annual examination of the parish in the early months of the year, and visited his friends in July and August; now he had to undertake the work of examination in the summer, and so saw little of his friends. Mrs M'Lea used to complain that her husband was so busy that she saw little of him after dinner; now he had time to play a game of backgammon with his niece and housekeeper, Mrs Lyon, before supper. But still he undertook all his parochial duties—"Being fully occupied (he wrote to 'Mrs Grant) is not unfavourable to health. . . . The weather 'here has been extremely variable and rather more severe than 'usual. I have however, not had the slightest cold. I have 'not been abroad after dinner (4 p.m.) except when called 'officially and I seldom suffer when performing my duties." But in 1823 an ominous entry appears in his expenses book—"Mr M'Lean preaching May 26th to September 28th, paid £1, 1s. each Sunday," and on 11th April, 1824, the Doctor breathed his last having reached the ripe age of 86 years and 6 months. In the course of his long incumbency he had performed his allotted work with thoroughness and vigour. Fearless in expressing his opinions and strict in regard to moral discipline he had doubtless offended many, for he never swerved from what he considered his duty for the sake of pleasing people. But his conduct gained the respect of the great bulk of his parishoners, while his readiness to assist any who were in trouble gained him many friends. His preaching was plain, direct, practical, and indeed in his ideal of life he seems to have anticipated the modern poet who wrote

Question not, but live and labour
Till yon goal be won,
Helping every feeble neighbour,
Seeking help from none;
Life is mostly froth and babble,
Two things stand like stone,
Kindness in another's trouble
Courage in your own.