

Glasgow Herald, Thursday, March 25, 1875

Dinner to Mr William Park, Balquhanran

Last night, Mr Wm Park, Balquhanran, was entertained to a public dinner in the School-Room, Dalmuir, on the occasion of his retiring from his farm, which he entered when a young man, and which he has held during the currency of four leases. The chair was occupied by Mr Archibald Orr Ewing. M.P., and the croupiers were Messrs James Black, G.P.McIndoe, and Mr A.D.Pattison. About 100 gentlemen sat down to dinner, and among the number were- Mr Wm Park (the guest), and Mr R Park; Revs R. Henderson and J.Stark; Messrs J.M.Martin, J.R.Thomson, B.Harvey, Wm. Lang, Provost Cumming (Renfrew), ex Provost Gallacher (Renfrew), A Buchanan, R. Back, A.D.McIndoe, D McFarlane, Dr. Gilmour, Paton, Brook, Findlay, Burns, Love, Carswell, McLaren, Allison, Burrell, Bremner, Shank, Kevin, Stewart etc. After the usual perfunctory toasts.

Mr James Black proposed "Both Houses of Parliament", coupled with the name of their worthy and popular member, Mr Orr Ewing. (Applause)

The Chairman, in replying, said he believed no country in the world had greater reason to be proud of its Houses of Parliament than our own. They were truly representative of the nation. The electors had at short intervals opportunities of sending other men to represent them if they were not satisfied. That was so far as the Lower House was concerned, and he trusted the day would never come when they have the same power in reference to the Upper House – (hear, hear)- for, he believed, the having a permanent House, above popular caprice, as the House of Lords was, does much to consolidate the country and to ensure wise and sound legislation.

(Applause)

The Chairman afterwards gave "The Army, Navy, and Volunteers", and, in doing so, referred to the discussion which took place in the House of Commons the other night regarding these forces. He was sorry to say that no question created greater differences of opinion than the recent changes as to the army. We had the large number of 488,000 men connected with the army and the reserve. One would fancy that that was a sufficient number to resist any foe, and capable of doing great deeds even in foreign lands; but it must be remembered that of that force only about 160,000 belonged to the regular army. The Militia and Volunteers were not intended for foreign service, although, he believed, if ever they were required at home, they would prove to the world that they were made of the same stuff as the regular army. When they thought of the enormous amount of work those 160,000 men had to do – that 60,000 of them were in India, besides others that were in other countries – it would be seen that the number was not too great. Unfortunately, too, those who had paid most attention to the recent changes to the organisation of the army, with the exception of those who initiated this great change, were of opinion that it was not at all answering its purpose. The short-term service, he was afraid, was incompatible with a manufacturing country. It might be all well enough if we had conscription, which he trusted, we should never have, but he thought short-term service would never give the class of men who would suit our purposes. The Secretary of War, whom he looked upon as one of the best administrators of the present Government, had intimated clearly that he considered it his bounden duty to give a fair trial to the system which was inaugurated some years ago by the Right Hon Mr Caldwell, a most talented and industrious man, but that if, after giving it a fair trial, he found it did not succeed, then he would not hesitate to propose a change. One of the most powerful speeches

delivered on that occasion was by the hon member for Renfrewshire, who drew a picture of the class of men getting into the army at present, showing them to be low in physique, low in standard, wanting in chest and even inferior in regard to moral character – to be taken, as he stated it, out of gutters and slums of the cities, for they could no longer get men from the country; and he believed it was cruel to take such men, who, if ever they were called into action, would be found to be totally useless. The member for Renfrewshire said that he believed one-fifth part of the army at the present time was composed of men not fit for the duties the country required of them. While it was not for him to say whether these statements were true – they had not, at all events, been contradicted – the question was not yet at rest, for Lord Elcho had given notice of his intention to bring before Parliament the lamentable condition of the army; and if the statements were not correct, they would be explained. All he could say was that at whatever number our army was laid, we must take means to see that it was efficient, and that the men were of the greatest physical strength that could be got, and not of the weakest. As to the navy, he believed it was now as strong and as well equipped as it had been for many years. At the same time, we could not shut our eyes to the alarming conditions of the armed state of Europe, and great as the number of our men was, it was insignificant in comparison with the enormous army which every State in Europe possessed at the moment. Therefore, we must see that our navy was always in a state able to defy the world, and able to prevent the possibility of any force landing on our shores. (Applause)

Capt. J.R. Thomson replied in a few remarks.

The Chairman then proposed the health of Mr William Park, their guest –(applause)- whom they all esteemed, and who, while he had succeeded in the line of business to which he had devoted himself, and was now able to retire to comfort had always earned the respect and goodwill of those with whom he came in contact. (Applause.) He carried with him into his new sphere their best wishes, and their earnest desire that he might yet have a long life of happiness and comfort. (Applause.)

Mr Park, who was warmly received, cordially thanked his friends for the compliment they had unexpectedly paid him, and for the hearty manner in which they had responded to the toast of his health. In his new home across the Clyde, if he experienced the same cordiality he had done amongst his neighbours with whom he had been so long associated, he would have nothing of which to complain. (Applause.)

A number of other toasts followed, and a very pleasant evening was spent.

[William sadly died only a few months later on 24 July at Gledstane.]