

GEORGE EDWARD CLERK, FOUNDER OF THE
"TRUE WITNESS"
A PIONEER OF CATHOLIC ACTION

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During the reign of James V of Scotland, who was very fond of sport, occurred the following incident: The king with his suite was hunting one day some miles from Edinburgh, in a forest that bordered the river Esk. All the hunting party in the excitement of the chase were widely dispersed, but one of his followers by the name of Clerk, with several of the dogs, pursued the deer along the banks of the river. Suddenly he found himself entirely alone and near a large rock. The idea came to him to climb the rock and by a blast from his horn to try and rally the royal suite which was so scattered. He blew three loud piercing blasts, and listening, after a pause he joyfully heard an answering call in the distance. He called again, and soon the king and all the other members of the hunting party arrived and found Clerk with the dogs and the slain deer.

The King was so delighted with the resourcefulness of his follower that he therewith created him a baronet and gave him a portion of the royal domain (between Edinburgh and Penicuik) sufficient to do honor to his new rank, but he stipulated, as a condition to his gift, that if he or any of his successors should be hunting in this territory, Clerk and all future proprietors of the land should climb the rock and again sound the horn three times in commemoration of the event.

And so the legend goes that it was for this reason and in memory of this event that the family of the barony of Penicuik adopted for its crest the device of a huntsman winding a horn, with the words "Free for a blast."

The Clerks are an old and honorable pratican family, the first known of whom, John Clerk, was distinguished for his loyalty and attachment to the cause of Mary Stuart. His grandson John Clerk, a person of great ability and of an enterprising commercial spirit, settled in Paris, and, in a few years acquiring a considerable fortune there, returned to Scotland, and in 1646 purchased the lands and barony of Penicuik, county Edinburgh, which have ever since continued the residence and title of this family.

Sir John Clerk, 1st baronet of Penicuik, was M.P. for Edinburghshire, 1690-1702, was twice married, and had seven sons and seven daughters.

His eldest son, Sir John Clerk, 2nd baronet, was distinguished for great learning, was one of the barons of the exchequer of Scotland, and one of the commissioners for the Union, and carried titles of F.R.S., F.S.A., as well as being M.P. for Withorn. He also was married twice, and had a large family of eight sons and six daughters.

His son, Sir George Clerk, 4th baronet, was one of the commissioners of the Customs, Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer in the Exchequer, and a trustee

of the fisheries and manufacturers of Scotland. He married his cousin, Agnes Clerk-Maxwell, and by her had five sons and four daughters.

A grand nephew named James Clerk-Maxwell, of Middlebee, F.R.S., was a professor of experimental physics at Cambridge. He gave his name "Maxwell" to a unit in electricity.

Sir John Clerk, 5th baronet, having died without issue the succession passed to his nephew, the Right Honorable Sir George Clerk, P.C., F.R.S., D.C.L., 6th Baronet, born in 1787 and married, August, 1810, to Maria, daughter of Ewan Law of Horstead Place, Sussex, and first cousin of the Earl of Ellenborough, then Viceroy of India, by whom he had eight sons and four daughters. He was a Privy Councillor, and was M.P. for Edinburghshire, 1818-32 and 1835-37, for Stanford, 1838-47, and for Dover, 1847-52.

During his political career, he held office in several administrations. He was also president of the Zoological Society and a member of the council of the Philharmonic Society, and annually spent the "season" with his family in London. His *eldest* son became Sir James Clerk, 7th baronet.

His *second* son, and the subject of this paper, George Edward Clerk, was born at Penicuik, March 18, 1815. Young George, though born to aristocratic tastes, was also born to poverty as a younger son of a hereditary baronetcy with lands and property entailed, and after his school days at Eton his father obtained for him an appointment in the Royal Navy. As midshipman he cruised along the west coast of Africa, being present at the capture of several slavers. He made one of the crew of the warship placed by the British Government at the disposal of Sir Walter Scott for his cruise on the Mediterranean. Sir Walter was well known to the Clerks of Penicuik.

A change in ministry made it necessary for George Edward to resign from the navy after two years, as his was what is known as a political appointment.

There were few professions open to the younger son of such a family, except the navy, the army, or the church. As his short career in the navy had given him a taste for travel and neither of the other two professions appealed to him – and it was impossible for him to remain idle at Penicuik – he decided to go to Australia.

There, in partnership with Charles Lockhart, another younger son of a Scottish family, he bought from the Australian government a large tract of land near the Bulldong range of mountains, which he speaks of by the musical name of Tallandoon, and engaged in the business of sheep raising.

England was then peopling that vast land with her convicts, those of her own citizens who could not adjust themselves to society, and the New South Wales farmer (there was no other colony) was compelled to hire these undesirables. Consequently, companionship with people of his own class and education was impossible and it is probable that his loneliness in Australia bred in Clerk that dislike for mere social contact for which he was noted. He says in his diary that "visiting is a bore" and "parties are tiresome."

From Tallandoon he made several expeditions to the far interior of Central Australia which were rich in ethnological, geographical and botanical results,

but with that singular dislike of publicity he could never be prevailed upon to give a detailed account of those dangerous and exciting journeyings. The love of exploration and bush life which he experienced in those early days in Australia never left him, and he was never happier in later years than when he was on a hunting or a fishing expedition.

After about fourteen years in Australia he began to suffer from inflamed eyes, a common disease in that dry, sandy country, and he was advised to give up ranching.

But Australia was yet to give him a precious gift before he quit her shores – as he did not then realize – forever.

Overtaken by a storm at some distance from his house he sought shelter in a cabin inhabited by an Irish family. To pass the time he took out his pipe and to light it took hold of an old book which was lying on the chimney-piece.

Before tearing the leaf he glanced at the first sentence and was so struck by its style and the matter it contained that he sat down and continued to read until the storm was over. When about to leave the cabin he expressed regret that he could not read the whole volume. His host said: "Take it with you and welcome." The old book was a copy of a Cardinal Wiseman's Lectures on the Catholic Church.

Through such a seemingly slight incident did the Catholic Church and especially the English-speaking Catholic body in Canada receive a devoted champion. The penetrating and logical mind of Mr. Clerk having been once aroused to inquire after religious truth, the result could not be doubted. And yet here is where we find discrepancies between the newspapers' accounts of his life and his own diary. The short biographical sketch published at his death in the *True Witness* states: "He returned to Scotland in the early part of 1844, and on the 28th of June, same year, he was admitted into the communion of the Catholic Church at Edinburgh by the Rev. George Bigger. Mr. Clerk was now twenty-nine years of age."

He probably left Australia in 1844 and returned to Scotland, but he did visit Bermuda, New York and Halifax, and this voyage may have been made during the next two years.

It is scarcely conceivable that a man of his deliberate, though somewhat impatient temperament, would have hurried through the instructions necessary to his conversion. He had little or no knowledge of religion during his youth – and I can imagine him on his return to Scotland getting in touch with a priest-savant to help him on his search for truth, also engaging in numerous arguments so that all possibly knotty points be made clear to him. – Unfortunately, no diary or other record of this period of his life is known to have existed.

However, he was baptised on June 28, 1847, and received his first Communion on June 29. Whenever possible in after years he commemorated the latter date by approaching the Holy Table. These dates are verified in his diary, and again in a letter from his sister Isabella to Madame Clerk, in which she definitely states that he was at Penicuik during the summer of 1847.

This important step having been taken, instinctively truthful, he immediately informed his father, a stiff "church and king" Episcopalian, a member of the British Parliament, who was greatly angered. It was inconceivable that such a prominent man as he could keep in his house this son, possible heir to the baronetcy, as a practising Catholic – the public embarrassment would be too great. Consequently, it was decided that George Edward should return to Australia. He planned to go via America.

He remained at Penicuik until Sept. 16, 1847, sailed from Liverpool on Sept. 19, arrived in New York on October 3, and decided to visit Montreal, which he reached on October 7, 1847. This he intended to make only a temporary visit, but an attack of rheumatic fever brought on by the extreme cold, damp, autumn weather delayed his departure for that winter.

No doubt he had introductions from his father to prominent government and military officials – a relative, Colonel Dynely, was attached to the garrison in Montreal – and the time passed pleasantly in a round of visiting, games of chess and curling.

In May and June of the following year, with a friend, Mr. Crofts, he went on a salmon-fishing expedition to the Godbout River, which he declared to have the finest salmon-fishing in the world, a trip he repeated in 1849.

We find him during the winter of 1849 devoting his time to charitable work, to overseeing the business affairs of Madame St. George at whose home he resided, reading, taking long walks and visiting the rink every fine day for a game at curling. While he expresses his loneliness for Tallandoon he remains in Montreal hoping for some employment. He seems very undecided as to what he should do, and yet he does not definitely make up his mind. It would seem that for a period Divine Providence kept him semi-inactive so as to better prepare him for his life work.

An entry on October 24, 1849, states that "Mde. Denault and Mlle. Dupuis called and spent the evening" and again "Mde. Denault and her niece left for Laprairie." Then he crosses to Laprairie and returns "well pleased with my little visit."

"Wrote a note to Laprairie." "Received a bookcase from Laprairie." "Crossed to Laprairie and accompanied Mde. Denault and niece to dinner." "Called on his Lordship, the Bishop of Montreal, who referred me to Monseigneur Pellissier, (?) the curé. I do not think there will be any difficulty," "Called on the curé and got the necessary papers." "Pretty busy time this, making all the needful arrangements for the important affair of next week," and his wedding to Marie Louise Elizabeth Dupuis, daughter of Casimir Dupuis, took place at Laprairie on November 27, 1849.

Modern would-be benedicts would probably be overjoyed were a honeymoon to cost as little as did that of these newlyweds, for after going to St. John's by train, thence to Burlington, where they remained for three days, Mr. Clerk "Settled the bill at the American Hotel which amounted to nine dollars and a half, with another half dollar for the porter."

His marriage made a great change in his life. He was now no more alone, he says he is happy "to find one creature on God's earth that loves me, I have one fond heart to sympathize with me, to share all my joys, to partake and by partaking diminish all my sorrows," and when he arrives at his new home he "found the house nicely arranged, and it seems as if I had indeed found a home at last."

His love for, and generosity to, his wife were evinced by purchasing for her New Year's gift a piano and immediately arranging for lessons in singing and music.

The coming of children was a great joy to him – there were eleven, nine of whom lived to maturity and married. His eldest son, Georges Edward, was born September 4, 1850, and Charles François on October 4, 1851. From the time these two lads were able to toddle their father made companions of them. He took them for long walks with him nearly every afternoon, summer and winter, he taught them to skate, and bought for them, when they were barely ten and nine years old, guns, fishing rods, and long boots so that they could accompany him on his hunting and fishing trips. He always regretted the opening of school in the autumn as that meant for him the end of the holidays and also the end of constant companionship with the boys.

He is careful about the religious instruction of his sons. He especially notes their first confession, and the day of the first Communion was celebrated by a *fête en famille*, when father and mother received the Holy Eucharist with the children. He sees the boys and girls attend the Sacraments regularly and especially notes that they make their Easter duty. He exercises the same care in regard to the servants in his home, and he notes that they too are faithful in their religious duties. One servitor named Paul remained with him for twenty years, and his sudden death was a cause of real grief to Mr. Clerk and his family. Needless to say all the funeral expenses were borne by Mr. Clerk, who also arranged for requiem Masses at which the family all assisted and many of them received Communion. On Paul's death, Mr. Clerk took into his home this man's twelve year old son Joe, and took upon himself the responsibility of his education and upbringing.

Mr. Clerk's second son, Charles François, married Noemi Bertrand on June 30, 1873, and Mr. Clerk had the happiness of seeing the first of his numerous grandchildren before his death. Charles later became a Medical Doctor and settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts, – the only one of the children to leave Canada.

Two other marriages he also attended in January before he died, that of his eldest daughter, Marie Louise, to Charles J. C. Terroux, and of his eldest son, Georges Edward, to Henriette Davignon of St. Hyacinthe.

His second daughter, Emily, became Madame Jeanotte and her family is known as Clerk-Jeanotte. Mme Jeanotte's daughter is married to Wilfrid Pelletier of New York Metropolitan Opera fame. The third daughter, Isabella, married Horace St. Louis. Alexander Clerk, the well known composer and choir director of St. Louis de France Church, Montreal, was his fifth son. Jean

Pio Robert, the youngest son, became the husband of a daughter of the late Senator L. O. David. This family now lives in Quebec City. The alliances made by the sons and daughters of G. E. Clerk were, as those of their father's ancestors, with members of distinguished families, and, also like those of his ancestors, were productive of many children, so that if the son of the present Sir George James Robert Clerk, 9th Baronet, were to die without a male heir, there would be many of his Canadian cousins to carry on the title and the distinguished traditions of the Clerks of Penicuik.

The founder of this Canadian family himself upheld the noble traditions of his name, adding to them the still greater glory of a return to the religion of his ancestors, and although George Edward Clerk did not become a Catholic until he was thirty-two years of age, his life was exemplary in all that was possible for a devout son of the Church. He not only knew his religion but he practised it constantly and with devotion. In his diary he frequently commends himself to the protection of God and his saints. On his wedding day he writes:

At 9 o'clock went to Church, and there in the presence of God and his Saints, I was united in the bond of Holy Matrimony, to my well beloved Marie Louise. Oh God do thou bless our union. Sanctify it to the honor and glory of thy Most Holy Name, grant that we thy servants may live in holiness and purity before Thee, and do thou at last admit us to Eternal Bliss for Thy dear Son's sake. 'Amen.

On the last day of each year he makes a short résumé of important events in his family, in the Church, in politics, and in world affairs, and finishes by expressing his trust in God, thanking for graces received during the year just ending, and asking blessings for the year about to begin.

It is conceivable that he must have had letters of introduction to the Catholic clergy of Montreal, as he otherwise could scarcely have so quickly identified himself with the activities of the Church. One of his first friends and his spiritual director was the Rev. M. Larocque, who later became auxiliary Bishop of Montreal, and then the first Bishop of St. Hyacinthe. With M. Larocque he attended many lectures, and even official functions. Recording one of these we see a glimpse of Clerk's rare and subtle humour. His diary reads ... Feb. 10, 1849 – "Mons. Larocque called on me at 9 A.M. and at his invitation, I formed one of a large party to St. Hyacinthe, on the line of the Great Atlantic Railroad. Thirty miles are finished which we traversed in an hour and a half. At St. Hyacinthe there were addresses, answers, luncheon, champagne, and the usual quantity of speechifying, when the Governor found a true bill of patriotism against the railroad company, who good honest men had only thought of dividends."

After the departure of Mgr. Larocque to St. Hyacinthe, he chose one of the Jesuit fathers for his spiritual director. Confession was always to him a most important duty and he went nearly every Saturday, and always on the vigil of any special feast or anniversary that might be celebrated by the family. He usually made an appointment, and if he found the confessional crowded would not wait in line for his turn, but would go home and return the following day.

As a member of the Congregation des Hommes de Ville Marie, which he attended for the first time on Feb. 25, 1849, he went every Sunday morning and on all feasts of Our Lady to the Recollet Church at McGill Street for the office of the Congregation, Mass and Holy Communion. After the disposal of the Recollet Church, the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception, as it was generally known, met in the church of Notre Dame des Anges on Lagauchetière Street, but the greater distance made no change in Clerk's faithful attendance. Except when ill he attended early Mass for many years, even assisting at 5.30 on a morning before leaving by an early train for a hunting or a fishing trip. Even when too unwell to go to his office or to take a short stroll, he seldom missed an evening visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the Chapel of St. Joseph on Cathedral Street. (This Chapel was demolished two years ago to make way for the new Post Office now under construction.) For the building of this Chapel, Mr. Clerk donated generously, as he did also, to the best of his means, for any worthy Catholic endeavor.

He joined the Conference of St. Vincent de Paul at the Parish Church shortly after his arrival in Montreal and was elected a member of the Conseil Particulier as early as 1848. He was active on the prison visiting committee and had charge of the Saint Vincent de Paul fund for the Sainte Madeline home for women, and in later years he was ever faithful to visit "his families" and see that they received needful supplies. He was a staunch supporter of La Congregation de la Foi, in which he had a family membership.

His usual Sunday program began with attendance at the 6.30 Office of the Congregation, followed by Low Mass and Communion, then High Mass at the Cathedral. In the afternoon, meetings of the Conference of Saint Antoine, Saint Vincent de Paul, and perhaps the Conseil Particulier, after which he would visit his poor families, and in the evening, service of the Archconfrerie and Salut at the Cathedral.

He was deeply religious and his new found faith was ever a joy to him. He loved to devote hours to the practice of its external offices, but he found that he must consider a more practical situation. Upon his marriage he decided to settle in Montreal and he found it necessary to adopt a profession or take up some means of livelihood, as the annual allowance from his father would scarcely support a wife and family. So we find in his diary – Jan. 10, 1850: "Waited on Mons. Brault by appointment and accompanied him first to Mons. Laparre N.P. It seems that by some strange interpretation of the Act, the board of notaries throw all kinds of impediments in the way of aspirants to their profession. I fear this will cause me a great delay if it does not upset completely my schemes." – And then on Jan. 11: "Mr. Brault advises me to wait until a new bill for the notaries shall have passed which he says is to take place next session." Jan. 12: "Devoted the forenoon to reading Latin in case of examinations."

For some time he continued his daily studies in preparation for adopting the profession of notary. Through his friendship with Bishop Bourget and Rev. Mons. Larocque he had access to the Seminary Library, and as he was a

voracious reader he was constantly borrowing books on deeply philosophical and theological subjects. However, his desire of becoming a notary public was never fulfilled, and when the notarial profession lost an able advocate, Canadian Catholic journalism gained for itself an able champion.

From his coming to Montreal that alert ecclesiastical director and organizer, Bishop Bourget, had been observing Mr. Clerk, had noted his abilities, his clear-thinking brain, his superior education, his intense Catholicism and his mastery of the English language – and was quietly planning for him his work. The following dates and entries in his diary are significant:

- March 18, 1850: "Called on Mons. Larocque in the afternoon, and had a long conversation with him respecting some articles in the "Witness."
- April 1: "Called on Mons. Larocque with whom I had a long conversation. Wrote a few remarks upon an article in the last number of Witness."
- April 12: "Met some gentlemen at Mr. Sadlier's with whom I had a long talk about the possibilities of establishing a Catholic journal."
- April 14: "High Mass at the Evêché and afterwards dined with His Lordship and met Mr. Brownson."
- ay 6: "Called at the Evêché and saw Monseigneur Bourget about establishing an English Catholic paper. . . saw Mr. Sadlier upon the same subject. . . called upon Mons. Brault and upon Mons. A. Larocque who will give his assistance."
- May 7: "Met Mr. Sadlier by appointment and in company with him waited upon His Lordship of Montreal about the same business as yesterday."
- May 8: "Waited by appointment on His Lordship of Montreal by whom I was introduced to all the Bishops of Canada. Had a long talk about the newspaper undertaking."
- May 28: "Had some conversation with Mr. Sadlier respecting our long talked of newspaper, which I do not expect myself will ever see light."
- June 8: "Mons. Larocque called upon me in the afternoon to speak about the paper which it is the Bishop's desire to set a going."
- June 13: (Thursday) "Mons. Larocque called on me while I was out. On my return I drove down to the Evêché, where I heard that the clergy at Quebec were very anxious that a prospectus of the new paper should be sent down to them if possible by Sunday. Promised to do my best to draw one up."
- June 14: "Busy at work on the prospectus. Mons. Larocque called and I showed him the plan of the work which he approved as did Mr. Sadlier and Mr. Chauvin (?). Made a fair copy of manuscript."
- June 15: "Called at the Evêché left my manuscript for inspection and if approved to be forwarded to Quebec . . . The Bishop requested me to start for Quebec . . . to see the Rev. Mr. McMahon about the prospectus."
- June 16: At Quebec. "Called on the Archbishop's secretary – spewed my draft of prospectus to the Rev. Mr. McMahon, who quite approved of it, and promised to call a meeting next Sunday to take it into consideration."
- June 17: "Rev. Mr. McMahon is very enthusiastic in the cause and seems to be very sanguine of success."
- June 19: At Montreal. "Attended a meeting where several resolutions respecting the new paper were agreed to and my prospectus approved."

June 24: "Got proof from the printer which was well done."

June 26: "Sent 200 copies of the prospectus to Monseigneur for Bytown."

June 27: "Sent 200 copies of the prospectus to Quebec. Called at the Bishopric and spoke about buying a press and type. Meeting at Mr. Sadlier's when it was agreed to set about getting up a subscription list."

The "True Witness and Catholic Chronicle Printed and published every Friday by J. Gillies for George E. Clerk, editor and proprietor," distributed its first number on August 16, 1850.

When one realizes the immense amount of labor such a project involved at that time, the appearance of the *True Witness* within four months from the day the idea was first mooted is truly a remarkable achievement.

Like his ancestor who stood on the rock and by a blast from his horn rallied the scattered hunting party, George Edward Clerk embraced the opportunity presented by Divine Providence to be free and to blast for his new Lord.

When Mr. Clerk drafted the prospectus of the new Catholic organ which he proposed to publish, he outlined for himself a wide and definite program. We quote from his first editorial: "To our Catholic fellow citizens of Canada":

It has often been the subject of wondering remark, that, that numerous portion of the community, who professing the Catholic faith, speak the English language, should not possess, throughout the entire Province, a single publication ... Although the *True Witness* will be essentially a religious publication, it is not intended that it should be so exclusively. The discussion of obtruse points of Catholic theology, or treatises upon the mysteries of our faith ... are topics too vast, too holy to be lightly treated of, in the fleeting columns of a weekly periodical.

To explain what are the doctrines of the Catholic Church and what her teaching to her children, – to declare what as Catholics we hold, and what reject, – to repel the charges of idolatry, and of superstition, brought against us – these will be our objects, these the end of our efforts.

Religious intelligence from Rome, from France, Great Britain, Ireland and the United States, extracts from the writings of Catholic Divines – translations from the early Fathers – a record of all the ecclesiastical changes, promotions, and conferments, will compose the religious matter.

Catholicity is of no nation, of no particular shade of politics. The "*True Witness*" therefore will not be a political paper. Confining ourselves to the discussion of those measures, the effects of which may be advantageous or prejudicial to the moral and religious wellbeings of the community – the acts, and not the persons of the members of the Ministry, will alone form the subject of our censures, and of our praise ... It is proposed to borrow largely from the columns of the Irish papers. Translations from, and notices' of, foreign authors, will find place. A full report of the proceedings of the Provincial Parliament, together with the latest intelligence from Europe, the United States, and all parts of the Province, and a regular account of the state of the Markets, domestic and foreign ... will be given our readers.

The "*True Witness*" will be conducted by Laymen, who alone will be responsible for every line and word of every article that it may contain. Articles

of a purely religious or dogmatic character will be submitted to an Ecclesiastical Censorship so that our readers may have a sure guarantee as to the orthodoxy of our matter ...

The launching of a new journal, and distributing it to the Catholic subscribers scattered throughout the province of Canada, required greater financial resources than those at Mr. Clerk's command, and the amount received from subscriptions was far inadequate. So keen was Bishop Bourget that the work of the *True Witness* be continued uninterruptedly that an agreement was entered into by him and most of the Bishops of Canada to provide annual subsidies to help meet the expenses of publishing the journal. All Catholic publishers know that "good will" subscribers are many, but "prompt paying" ones are few, and those institutions which had promised support to the *True Witness* were many times to be found on the delinquent list. Consequently Mr. Clerk and his family depended for subsistence almost entirely on the larger allowance given him by his father after his marriage. Amounts received from advertisements naturally added to the revenue of the publishers of this two-dollar-a-year paper, but Mr. Clerk's determination to keep his periodical non-political was so strong that on more than one occasion, even in his poverty, he refused advertising matter, with its usual emoluments, from the government.

The outline of the policy stated in the prospectus became the creed of George E. Clerk during his long editorial career, which began in 1850 and ended only with his death in 1876.

He took upon himself the entire editorial duties in connection with the *True Witness*. At first he was editor and proprietor with John Gillies as printer-publisher. The ownership was, in 1849, transferred to Mr. Gillies (who, by the way, was an uncle of Rev. J. M. Gillies, C.S.P., the well known editor of the *Catholic World*), but Mr. Clerk continued as sole editor. During the many years of his connection with the paper, even when seriously ill, he did all his editorial work alone. He was a constant sufferer from rheumatism, and during the last fifteen years of his life was continually ailing. For five weeks during November and December, 1860, he suffered from incipient glaucoma during which time he could neither read nor write. He writes: "By the kind intervention of Bishop of Montreal, a Rev. M. Beaudry came to assist me and read at office, whilst I dictated my editorials. Managed to keep the paper, alive by this assistance." Again, in 1864, he sprained his ankle while tobogganing with his children, was obliged to remain indoors, his foot in a plaster cast for ten weeks. However, his reading and writing continued as usual. There were occasional contributions from other persons, but all the leading articles were written by Mr. Clerk.

Some men become known through the publishing of one single book. The writings of George Edward Clerk averaged four newsprint pages each week for twenty-five years. If we allow only two columns for an ordinary book page and calculated 300 pages to each book, his output would fill approximately thirty-five volumes. This is a conservative estimate. The colossal labor

involved may be imagined when we recollect that his editorials and articles treated of doctrinal subjects and must have required research and prolonged study.

Shortly after the *True Witness* appeared, Mr. Clerk was invited to move to Toronto and to publish his journal there. Family reasons, however, kept him in Montreal.

In a letter dated July 20, 1854, the Bishop of Toronto wrote in these words:

I sent you through Rev. Mr. Dowd an opening about giving you an apprentice for your periodical; Mr. Goban is his name; he is a sub-deacon of the Seminary of Montreal, very fond of studies; he would like it; you would form him about contributing to your paper and other sheets of the same kind; he might live and board in the Seminary either in Montreal, or Quebec, if you were to go thither; his expenses and salary would be a trifle for me or for you if he helped you efficiently, or for both ... you may be sick; it would be prudent to secure the continuation of the *True Witness*, and though I want more than any other Bishop, active missionaries, I would be much more pleased in contributing to the success and endurance of your foundation."

This offer Mr. Clerk refused, thus adhering to the promise of his prospectus that the journal be conducted by laymen who would be responsible for their utterances.

In the letter quoted Monseigneur of Toronto says: "I am sorry we are not prepared to send you to Parliament; it is your mission; therefore, let us combine our means that you may fulfill it at the next general election".

As a member of Parliament, George Edward Clerk would have been following quite naturally in the footsteps of his father, and many of his ancestors. Such an opportunity, so sought after by many of his friends and acquaintances, Mr. Clerk avoided. He disliked public life and many times would have been glad to retire and live quietly with his books and dogs in a spot whence he could hunt and fish frequently, but his tenacity, and the spirit of sportmanship, as developed in an English Public school, made him "play the game" unto the end.

Nevertheless, honor did come to him, unsought, and this from the highest possible source. His own account is typically modest:

May 23, 1861: "The Tablet has a paragraph mentioning the Pope's having named me Knight Companion of Order of St. Gregory."

June 6, 1861: "Received a kind letter from Rev. M. Careau (Quebec) verifying news of the Pope's kindness towards me."

June 8, 1861: Returning from a fishing trip to Rawdon he "received the Cross and order of St. Gregory, left for me by Bishop Horan" who had carried it from Rome.

September 1, 1891: "Wrote out copy of acknowledgement to Sovereign Pontiff, which I entrusted to Bishop of Montreal to be forwarded "selon les regles."

George Edward Clerk was a member of the Catholic Church less than fourteen years when Pope Pius IX saw fit, for his services rendered to the

Catholic cause in Canada, to dub him Knight. Again, a Clerk was honored by his Sovereign for keeping himself "Free for a blast."

At the time of the appearance of the *True Witness* it was scarcely possible to take up a copy of any English journal published in Montreal without meeting some attack against the Catholic Church or some insult to Catholics. When Clerk came to Canada he was a keen enough observer to see at first glance that there was in the city a moral atmosphere of subservience of the Catholics to the antagonistic non-Catholic press, to the Parliament, and to the city government. There was grave need for a vigorous apologist among the laity. The *Montreal Witness* which had been founded in 1845 was bitterly hostile to Catholics, a tone which never changed during all the years of publication of this journal. So dangerous had it become and so relentless in its publication of utterances offensive to Catholics, that on April 5, 1875, it was placed under an ecclesiastical ban and Catholics were forbidden to purchase or to read it.

Prior to the publication of the *True Witness* the English non-Catholic press printed without challenge any items about Catholics or Catholicism, that they wished, whether truth, half-truth or untruth. Immediately Mr. Clerk began his long career of editorship, a change in tone of the secular press was noted, which became more marked with the passing years until finally Catholic people could pick up a journal and read through without being insulted in some way. The *Montreal Daily Witness*, however, was the one exception. Yet on several occasions the *Montreal Witness* did make grudging apology or "eat its words" due to the vigorous defense made by G. E. Clerk to attack. In 1863 an angry anti-Catholic article appeared in the *Montreal Witness*. Mr. Clerk immediately wrote to the editor demanding that he make good his assertions or retract them. Three days later the diary notes that the "M.W. retracts and grumblingly apologizes."

On April 12, 1869, the Deaf and Dumb Institute was attacked in the columns of the *Montreal Witness*. G. E. Clerk visited the institution, ascertained facts and wrote a refutation to the charges, which he submitted to Bishop Bourget, before sending his letter to the *Montreal Witness* with a threat of legal proceedings. On April 20, the *Montreal Witness* published a retraction of its original assertions and made a grudging apology. Again in January, 1870, Mr. Clerk notes in his diary that the "Montreal Witness eats its words of December 3."

Once more, on February 7, 1873, the *Montreal Witness* published an attack on the reformatory. Mr. Clerk, after investigating conditions and, as usual, consulting with the Bishop, instituted legal proceedings for libel against the *Montreal Witness* asking for \$25,000.00 damages. This case apparently was settled out of court, and the *Montreal Witness* admitted that it was in error in publishing the original article without careful attention.

George Edward Clerk was never the assailant, but in refuting attacks on those things which he held sacred he was merciless to his aggressor, his articles were noted for their vigor, their killing exposures, and their biting

sarcasm. He had no respect for friend or enemy, except for his best friend, the truth. He was a champion apologist, but never had he to apologize for a single statement he published. Moreover, he always tried to enlighten the ignorant, to straighten crooked paths, to investigate questionable news, to encourage the weak-kneed, to confound the haughty and to joust fairly with opponents of good faith. His answers were always couched in terms of justice and precision because, by his perspicacity, he could immediately find the essential point at issue. His wonderful command of the King's English enabled him to rout his enemies by emphasizing their own argument in their own terms, but to his own profit, and to confound them and close the discussion with proofs from their own mouths. The truth was spread by his call to all the English speaking and many of the French speaking Catholics, not only of this fair Canada of ours but to Newfoundland and also to the United States.

Long continued and strenuous warfare will wear out even the strongest combatant, and the labors of a quarter of a century finally told on our chivalrous intellectual knight. He suffered from angina pectoris in December, 1873, and his final illness began in February, 1875, with an attack of catarrhal fever, which was followed by a more lengthy illness in March. In April dropsy developed, which finally culminated in his death on September 26, 1875, while he was surrounded by his family and fortified by the rites of the Church he loved and had served so well.

Nothing could, perhaps, better prove the general and deep respect in which George Edward Clerk was held by his fellow citizens than the pageantry displayed at his funeral. Crowds of prominent citizens, professional men, merchants and officials followed the cortège to the Congregational church of Notre Dame des Anges where the office of the dead was recited, and thence to Notre Dame Church where solemn Requiem Mass was chanted.

A pontifical Requiem Mass was sung three days later at the Cathedral by the Right Reverend Bishop Fabre. His Lordship Bishop Bourget decreed this as a mark of respect to the lamented deceased in consideration of his many valuable services to religion.

A great man had departed, but people did not immediately forget the tall journalist. First impressions of this broadshouldered Scot were a clear intelligent gaze from out deep set piercing blue eyes, a high and wide forehead, side whiskers and a mustache according to the fashion of his day, which did not detract from the firmness and character of his mouth.

Eccentric in his habits – he wore blue glasses, high boots and was usually seen with a large cotton umbrella which he had brought from Australia. Careless in his dress, he was a typical outdoor man. Fond of walking, he could be seen every day, except in the most inclement weather, accompanied by some of his children or his friends and surrounded by two or three dogs.

Every year he went on hunting and fishing trips that lasted from one day spent at Lachine to five weeks or more in the bush in the mountains above Rawdon, Quebec, or beyond Calumet on the Ottawa River. In 1861 he purchased a small island close to the family summer home on Isle Perrot. Here

he built for himself a "cabane" where he lived alone with his books and dogs, spending most of his time at his favorite sport, fishing. Even when there he read the current journals, made extracts and wrote necessary editorials and articles for the paper.

George Edward Clerk was a man of rare general culture. He was a forcible, brilliant and polished writer. A deep student, his style showed the imprint of scholarship, and each sentence attracted a reader's whole attention. His extensive and accurate knowledge came from an extraordinarily retentive memory, which was developed through his wide reading on all subjects. He owned a library of several hundred volumes, which included books on theology and kindred subjects as well as many of those on the Index, for the possession of which he had received special permission.

His intense curiosity made him penetrate to the end in search of answers to his questions. He was satisfied only when he was sure in regard to all points of the subject.

One of his friends remarked that he was too well read and too well bred for the surroundings in which he was obliged to live. His high toned character, rare qualities and acquirements raised him far above the level of ordinary men, and secured for him in a marked degree the esteem of those who had the privilege of knowing him. A diary written daily over a period of twenty-six years (1849-1875), betokens perseverance in its author. As in politics he was a consistent conservative in his daily life. He refused to sign a petition for the adoption of the "Maine Liquor Law" because he foresaw the attendant evils of prohibition. His will was so strong that he became dictatorial and would brook no interference to his plans. As his elder sons grew up and naturally turned to companions of their age he resented their departure, and turned into himself, becoming more taciturn and lonely. High principles of justice and honor made him kind and charitable to his family and servants. His serious character and demeanor was relieved by his fondness for playing practical jokes. Outside of the realm of journalism he numbered among his friends men of all creeds, political and religious, and in all ranks of society.

Though brought up with little religious education, his inherited intellectual and moral qualities, by his will, were developed through experience and intense faith. This led him to put into practical form his thoughts. For such a man there is only one step from thought to action. His preparedness, through constant study, research and seeking of advice, made him ready to blast his clarion call in time of need.

The life work of George Edward Clerk is a splendid example for every real Catholic, for every lay apostle, for every knight of the Church, for every leader of Catholic Action, to emulate. In our own time, Pius XI, the Pope of Catholic Action, commands us all to be prepared to combat the attacks of modernism and other current evils, by an intelligent and practical training which could well be modeled on that of the founder of the *True Witness* a pioneer in Catholic Action.