

Lord M'Laren. By Professor C. G. Knott.

(Read December 4, 1911.)

JOHN M'LAREN, Q.C., LL.D. (Edin., Glas., Aber.), Lord of Session from 1881, was born in Edinburgh on April 17, 1831. He was the eldest son of Duncan M'Laren, one of the most prominent figures in political and municipal life of Edinburgh in his day and generation. He was a delicate boy, and his life was in serious danger through a severe illness which followed a bad wetting he experienced when about the age of twelve. For years he lived much abroad, visiting such places as Madeira, Jamaica, and Algeria. He had a great thirst for useful information and possessed a retentive memory, so that his broken school life did not impede his career when he passed into college and began to study for the Law.

In 1856 he was admitted a member of the Faculty of Advocates, and, chiefly by his literary work, soon established a reputation as an able and erudite lawyer. His treatises on *Trusts* and *Wills* appeared respectively in 1863 and 1868; and the third edition of the combined work in 1894 is regarded as the leading authority on these subjects north of the Tweed. The seventh edition of Bell's *Commentaries* was edited by him in 1870, and holds a very high place in the estimate of the legal profession. It is a recognised piece of legal etiquette that the opinions or verdicts of a living judge cannot be quoted in court as being of any authority; and when an advocate had to refer to Lord M'Laren's writings on Trusts and Wills, as was not unusual before Lord M'Laren himself, it had to be done in a mysterious way, without explicit mention of the author, but yet so as to leave no doubt as to the "authority" who was being appealed to.

Lord M'Laren was married on December 14, 1868, to a daughter of H. L. Schwabe, of Glasgow. In 1869 he was appointed Sheriff of Chancery, resigning the appointment in 1880 when he entered public political life.

In politics Lord M'Laren was a Liberal, and came to the front in 1880, at the time of Gladstone's famous Midlothian campaign. He was elected Member of Parliament for the Wigtown Burghs, and on the formation of Gladstone's Government became Lord Advocate for Scotland. At the succeeding by-election, necessitated by his accepting a Crown appointment, he lost his seat, and it was not till January of 1881 that he regained his place in Parliament as one of the members for Edinburgh. In August of the same year, however, he retired from parliamentary life, and accepted the judgeship on the Scottish Bench, which he adorned to the end of his

life. He made an admirable judge, his opinions and judgments being models of lucid exposition.

Throughout his life Lord M'Laren took a keen interest in science, especially in botany and astronomy. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh as early as 1869, and in 1883 was elected a Member of Council. From that date to the year before his death he served faithfully on the Council, filling three terms of office as Vice-President, namely, from 1885 to 1891, from 1893 to 1899, and from 1901 to 1906. He took his full share in presiding at meetings both of the Council and of the Society, acting in this capacity on more occasions than have fallen to the lot of any other Fellow. He was also of invaluable service to the Society when delicate questions arose requiring careful deliberation and knowledge of affairs. His skill in drafting documents was in continual request, and several of the more recent modifications in the rules of the Society were framed by him. In the negotiations which preceded the transference of the Society from its original rooms in the Royal Institution in Princes Street to its present abode in George Street, Lord M'Laren's advice and support formed an important factor.

Outside the Royal Society, Lord M'Laren's scientific activities found expression in his interest in the Royal Observatory on Blackford Hill, the Scottish Meteorological Society, of which he was President for several years, and the Ben Nevis Observatory, of which he was a Director. In the organisation of the Royal Observatory he was closely associated with Lord Lindsay and Professor Copeland; and in helping to carry out the work of the Ben Nevis Observatory, he ably seconded the efforts of Dr Buchan, Sir John Murray, and others in keeping the great experiment before the minds of his countrymen.

Although never of a robust constitution, Lord M'Laren continued to do his work till within a year of his death, which took place at Brighton on April 6, 1910. To the end he remained in touch with the affairs of the Royal Society and of the Royal Society Club, of which he had been a member since 1883. He was a close friend of Lord Kelvin, who was frequently his guest when Royal Society business brought the great natural philosopher to Edinburgh.

Lord M'Laren was an amateur of science in the highest sense of the term, and devoted himself whole-heartedly to the advancement of the varied interests of the Royal Society.

As will be seen from the list of published papers given below, Lord M'Laren was an analyst of considerable skill, as well as a student of astronomical science on its observational side.

The following is the list of papers published in the *Transactions* and *Proceedings* of the Royal Society of Edinburgh:—

1. Tables for Facilitating the Computation of Differential Refraction in Position Angle and Distance. 1886. *Trans.*, vol. xxxiii.
The Tables contain the values of two quantities calculated for the parallel $55^{\circ} 56'$ and $57^{\circ} 30'$, and for each interval of two degrees of declination from 40° north to 90° .
2. On Systems of Solutions of Homogeneous and Central Equations of the n th Degree and of Two or More Variables; with a Discussion of the Loci of such Equations. 1888. *Trans.*, vol. xxxv.
The underlying idea of this elaborate paper of 55 pages is to find exact solutions in equations between variables, so that the precise form of plane curves and contours of surfaces may be determined.
3. On the Four Surfaces of an Aplanatic Objective. 1888. *Proc.*, vol. xv.
4. On the Solution of the Three-Term Numerical Equation of the n th Degree. 1890. *Proc.*, vol. xvii.
The solutions are obtained in an interesting manner by use of what are known as addition and subtraction logarithms.
5. On the Reflexion-Caustics of Symmetrical Curves. 1890. *Proc.*, vol. xvii.
6. Equation of the Glissette of the Two-Term Oval $x^n/a^n + y^n/b^n = 1$ and Cognate Curves. 1891. *Proc.*, vol. xviii.
7. On the Eliminant of the Glissette Equations of the Ellipse Glissette. 1892. *Proc.*, vol. xix.
These two papers are a following up of Professor Tait's glissette investigations.
8. A New Solution of Sylvester's Problem of the Ternary Equations. 1893. *Proc.*, vol. xix.
9. Elimination of Powers of Sines and Cosines between Two Equations. 1893. *Proc.*, vol. xx.
This is an extension of the process of No. 7 above.
10. Symmetrical Solution of the Ellipse-Glissette Elimination Problem. 1899. *Proc.*, vol. xxii.
In this last attack on a difficult problem of elimination the author gives the general eliminant as expressed in the form of a single symmetrical bordered determinant.
11. Opening Address, Session 1901-2. *Proc.*, vol. xxiv.
Contains an estimate of the work of Professor Tait.