From the Armagh Guardian, 6th March 1848

A MEETING TO ADDRESS WILLIAM BLACKER, ESQ.

*(Reported for the Armagh Guardian)*

A meeting of the tenantry on the Markethill, Graham, and Baleek Estates of the Earl of Gosford was held In the Court House, Markethill, on the 28th instant, to consider the propriety of presenting an address to William Blacker, Esq., on his retiring from the agency of these estates.

On the motion of WILLIAM GILLIS, Esq., seconded the Rev. A. G. Ross,

JOSEPH M’KEE, Esq., J.P., was called to the chair, on taking which he said—Gentlemen, you have already been informed by public notice of the object which has brought us together on the present occasion, namely, to consider the propriety of presenting an address to Mr. Blacker, on his retiring from Lord Gosford's agency,—in the fitness of which I fully concur. No person could have exerted himself with greater zeal, and perseverance for our improvement than Mr. Blacker has done since he came amongst us.

Of the utility of his plans it is unnecessary that I should speak —that is fully proved the prosperous and thriving condition of tenants on this property, and still more by their general adoption throughout Ireland; and now, when advanced years, and declining health, have obliged him to resign his office, we would, I think, he deeply ungrateful, did we, who have benefited so largely by his labours, permit him to retire without testifying our appreciation of his services.

CHARLES M’ANALLY, Esq., then proposed—

“That an address be presented to Mr. Blacker on his retiring from Lord Gosford’s agency.” He said, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, I regret my inability to do justice to Mr. Blacker’s merits, but I feel convinced that the weakness of the advocate cannot prejudice the cause in a meeting like the present. During the thirty years which Mr. Blacker has spent among us, he has spared neither mind, his body, nor his purse in exertions for our improvement. The success of these exertions must be apparent to all, but perhaps they cannot more clearly shown than by the fact, that while the tenantry are in as prosperous—if not more prosperous condition, than those in any other property, there will scarcely a tenant in arrear, the next gale day[[1]](#footnote-1).

From Mr. Blacker’s agricultural plans I have derived the greatest benefit, and I have no hesitation in saying that the better these plans are known, and more fully they are tried, the more clearly will their wisdom and utility appear. I will only add in conclusion, that it gives me very sincere gratification to propose the resolution which has been intrusted to me.

GEORGE GRAY, jun., Esq., of Glenann, seconding this resolution said—Mr. Chairman, I fully agree the remarks which have already been made on Mr. Blacker’s merits, as an agent. Though my residence this property has been but short; I have seen sufficient to convince me that Mr. Blacker well deserves the gratitude of the tenantry, for the zeal and ability with which he has discharged the general duties of an agent, and more especially for his wise and judicious **advice on the cultivation of land, by drainage, and green cropping, which I think we must in a great measure ascribe it that these estates suffered comparatively so little from the loss of the potato crop.**— Mr. Blacker may have his faults, (who is faultless?) but as an able, judicious, and considerate agent, I know of none superior, and few equal to him. I have great pleasure in seconding the resolution which has been just moved.

It was then proposed by WILLIAM GILLIS. Esq., and seconded by William Simpson, Esq.—“That the following gentlemen do constitute a committee for the purpose of drawing up the address."—Rev. Charles Seaver; Rev. A. G. Ross; Charles McAnally, Esq.; William Simpson, Esq.; J. M. Lynn, Esq., M. D.; and Mr. Pollard.”

These gentlemen then retired, and in a short time returned with the address, which was then read to the meeting. [see later]

It was then proposed by Doctor LYNN,— “That the address, which has just been read, be adopted, and that the following gentlemen form a deputation to present it;— Rev. Charles Seaver, Joseph M’Kee, Esq., Doctor Lynn, George Gray, Esq., and William Simpson, Esq." He said—Mr. Chairman, the pleasure that I feel in coming forward upon the present occasion does not arise from sense of my own sufficiency to do justice to the subject, but from an earnest desire to contribute my humble mite of praise to one who is worthy of all honour. It may be considered presumptuous in me, in the presence of such extensive farmers, to speak upon the improvements effected on the Markethill, Graham, and Baleek estates of the Earl of Gosford, under the administration of Mr. Blacker; but it must be recollected, Mr. Chairman, that I am a farmer myself, and such have often received valuable hints from Mr. Blacker’s literary labours, and valuable advice from his agriculturist.

In passing I may observe that our country is deeply indebted to Mr. Blacker, being the first to introduce this class of “practical instructors" into Ireland.— Men who about from farm to farm, imparting most valuable information in the best possible way. And I am delighted to find that our excellent Viceroy[[2]](#footnote-2), with his well-known acumen, has seen the value of, and is now giving his powerful co-operation to carry out, Mr. Blacker’s suggestions. For upwards of sixteen years, Mr. Chairman, I have, through professional avocations, been intimately acquainted with the farmers of this district. I have again and again heard them speak of the pleasing change which has been effected in these estates during the past thirty years.

I have been often amused by hearing old men, and some young ones, too, relate the opposition they once gave Mr. Blacker and his agriculturist; and I have heard the very same individuals lately say that they are now pursuing the very plans, to their own manifest advantage, which they formerly resisted with almost open violence. But I need not go to hear-say, Mr. Chairman, to prove my position as to the improved state of this properly—I, myself, am a living witness of the great change produced within the last sixteen years.

When I look around me, and view the altered face of the country, the result of straightened marches and levelled ditches, when extensive furrow draining is found every part of these estates—when abundance of green crops beautifies almost every farm—and when we add to these the house feeding of cattle, and the overflowing supplies of milk and butter arising from such green crops, we are constrained, yes, irresistibly constrained, to acknowledge Mr. Blacker one of the greatest benefactors of our race. **That Mr. Blacker’s mind was far in advance of the age is now manifest to all**—his clear intellect and powerful understanding was able to take in at one mighty grasp the entire subject— Yes, he saw the end from the beginning, and we can now look back, and see with wonder and admiration, how well his plans were calculated to effect his object, viz., our amelioration, &c.

With what indomitable energy and perseverance he followed up his views from year to year through good report and through evil report, until all are at length brought to confess that he has proved himself of a truth the “Farmers Friend.” One of the many pleasing and substantial proofs of the value of following such advice is found in the fact, that in the midst of the frost and snow, of the past winter, upwards of 20cwt[[3]](#footnote-3). of fresh butter was sold weekly in our market, every pound of it the produce of this immediate locality. Let me ask the farmers present who can remember the state of matters here sixteen years ago, how much milk and butter could you then sell off your farms, from the first of November till the first of March? Your cows were then wandering all day long through bare stubble, making mortar of the land, shivering with cold, and starving from hunger, and to complete the picture, each poor beast was tied up at a stake, with a lock of dry straw for food! How, in the name of common sense, let me ask, could a cow so treated give either milk or butter?

Contrast that with the present state of things, and ask yourselves through whose instrumentality has this gratifying, this wonderful change been produced? Must not one and all acknowledge that we are now with our eyes beholding, and our hands reaping the benefits resulting from Mr. Blacker’s labours.

I shall turn now, Mr. Chairman, to another subject. From an intimate acquaintance with some of Mr. Blacker’s private charities, I feel myself justified in speaking of him, as one whose heart is filled and overflows with sympathy for the suffering poor, yes, one who “does good by stealth and would blush find it fame.” I have for many years had the high honour of being one of his almoners[[4]](#footnote-4), and I may mention (though I do so without Mr. Blacker’s sanction) that, on looking over my books this morning, I find there have passed through my hands within the past few years, to the sick poor alone, upwards of One Hundred pounds of his money. I need say no more, but conclude, if our country were universally blessed with such Agents as he, she would soon become what nature, and nature’s God intended her to be—

“First flower of the earth, and first gem of the sea.”

The Rev. CHARLES SEAVER, seconding this resolution said—It affords me very sincere satisfaction to be allowed to take any part in the proceedings of this day, and pay my humble meed of praise to one, who has not only largely benefited these estates, with which he has been more immediately connected, but **has done more perhaps than any other man for the amelioration of the farmers and working classes Ireland**.

In the address which has been proposed for your adoption there is nothing of flattery; it is a plain and simple statement of the benefits derived to these estates from Mr. Blacker’s exertions. It is unnecessary for me, in this place and surrounded by this Assemblage, to enter upon a particular statement of Mr. Blacker’s merits. The improved condition of these estates, and the comfortable and highly respectable appearance of the tenantry, are proofs open to the inspection all and sufficient to satisfy the most sceptical.

It is stated in the address “That we are now reaping the benefits of Mr. Blacker's exertions”; but in truth Sir, what we now enjoy is but the first fruits. The harvest will be reaped by others—our children or our children’s children will better able appreciate his merits; and it needs prophetic spirit to predict, that generations yet unborn, will rise and call him blest!— You say “to those improvements you were long opposed, but that you have lived to see your error and amend your ways.” Show your sorrow for your past neglect and your gratitude for Mr. Blacker’s perseverance, by more fully adopting his plans; thus will you benefit yourselves, and thus you will render Mr. Blacker, that recompense with which he will most highly pleased.

But the Address adds “that the utility of these exertions is not confined this limited sphere.” No, truly! His fame has spread through the length and breadth of the land—his essays have received the highest prizes—his works are now standard authorities on the subject—and the more fully and extensively his plans are carried out, the more apparent will be their wisdom and the greater will the benefits derived from them. Some of these plans as set forth by the Royal Agricultural Society and patronized our Noble and excellent Viceroy; are now attracting very general and very deserved attention; I allude the appointment of Agriculturists, or they are called “Practical Instructors," throughout Ireland, and the system of thorough drainage which is now so strongly recommended.

It well known to you that both these plans originated with Mr. Blacker, and that he is justly entitled to the great merit of suggesting them, and pressing them time after time upon the attention of the Agricultural Society and the public at large; but as a report our proceedings today, may be read by others not so well Informed, and it is always desirable that honour should be given to whom it is due, I will give you few extracts from Mr. Blacker's published writings on these subjects. In his prize essay on the management of landed property in Ireland, &c., published in 1834—Mr. Blacker says, “the first thing is to direct attention to the faults of their present cultivation, then follow this up by employing an experienced agriculturist. His business is, first to point out where drainage is required, and how the land is to be cleaned, how manure may be acquired, how green crops may be raised, and house feeding the cattle established."

After setting forth would propose (sic) that the state should take those tracts of the advantage of drainage, &c., goes on to say—“ In reclaimable lands, which the owners continue let remain uncultivated, and after giving fair compensation, try whether they could not be colonised to advantage. Let these tracts be thorough drained, allotments of from ten to twenty acres given to the labourers as reward for good conduct.”

In the second report of the Royal Agricultural Improvement Society, there is a letter from Mr. Blacker, dated 16th October, 1841,—in which he says—“whilst the formation this society was yet in progress, I mentioned my opinion as to the causes which led to the failure of other societies, and offered some suggestions to avert a similar fate in the present instance—this letter was published in the first report of the society’s proceedings, and as all these suggestions cannot be carried out—it is necessary to state the most important, and in this respect I have no hesitation in saying that in procuring the appointment of agriculturists to the different agricultural associations in connexion with this society, as I then stated, is beyond all comparison the most effectual for promoting its object. The plan, is the promoting the employment of agriculturists, and the foundation of agricultural societies, corresponding as to boundaries with the poor law unions.

This plan is much more likely to effect the improvement of the working classes, than any other of which I am aware. **I would therefore suggest that the council should apply their entire funds to keep up this plan for four years—should pay £25 a year of the wages of agriculturist, for the agricultural union society in each county**, in which one or more resident noblemen or gentlemen came forward to guarantee the payment of the remainder."

And in his essay on improving the condition of the labouring classes, published in 1846, he says, “The plan I would propose for ameliorating the condition of the labourer is, to improve the agriculture of small holdings by the introduction of green crops, and practice house-feeding the stock. To effect this change of system, there should be an agriculturist upon each estate, to go from farm to farm. By this means the proportion of land under cultivation is greatly increased, and the labour employed in cultivating it increased in the same ratio. If this were accompanied by an arrangement, rendering the waste land of the country available for the location of settlers, there Is no saying to what extent the improvement would reach.”

This plan he then proceeds to state more at length and then gives the rules upon which a drainage society could act. From these brief extracts it will be seen that so early as 1834, Mr. Blacker propounded these plans employing agriculturists, which are now being carried out others; and although, doubtless, it source of gratification to Mr. Blacker that they are carried out even thus, yet it is but just that should get the credit which he richly deserves of being the originator of these plans.

The address proceeds to speak of Mr. Blacker’s private charities, and I cheerfully add my testimony to that of a previous speaker, that I have ever found him willing to give much more than could reasonably be expected from him to any charitable purpose, for which I had occasion to apply: and especially last winter when he gave more liberally than many large landed proprietors, to the relief of the suffering poor of this neighbourhood.

Faults in Mr. Blacker’s character it may be possible to discern,—his enemies say they have discerned them,—but Sir, I think the splendour of life spent in the service of his country, and the added lustre of his private virtues, ought to be sufficient to hide these faults from the sight of those whom he has so largely benefited. I know it is possible by the aid of the telescope to discover spots on the surface of the sun, but I think would not envy that man’s spirit, who instead of thankfully enjoying the light, and warmth, and manifold blessings which that luminary imparts, would refuse to acknowledge those benefits, because of these specks, and would occupy his time in dilating upon their supposed number, magnitude, and opacity.

I have much pleasure in seconding resolution which has just been proposed.

The resolution being then put and carried, the meeting separated.

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The address, and Blacker’s reply, were published in The Armagh Guardian dated March 13, 1848.

ADDRESS

To WM. BLACKER, ESQ., J.P.

&c., &c., &c.,

*On his Resignation of the Earl of Gosford’s Agency.*

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PURSUANT to a Resolution to that effect, adopted at Meeting of the TENANTRY the MARKETHILL. GRAHAM, and BALEEK ESTATES of the EARL of GOSFORD, held in Markethill on the 28th February, a DEPUTATION consisting of Joseph M’Kee, Esq., J. P., Rev. Charles Seaver, Joseph Lynn. Esq., M.D., George Gray, Jun., Esq., and Wm. Simpson, Esq., waited on William Blacker, Esq., on the 7th inst., at his residence, Armagh, to present him with the following

ADDRESS.

DEAR SIR,—lt would deeply ungrateful did we, the tenantry on the Markethill, Graham, and Baleek Estates of the Earl of Gosford, permit you to retire from the office of Agent to this property, without giving expression to our grateful sense of the benefits derived from your services, and our deep and sincere regret at your departure.

It is our pleasing duty to record the zeal, ability, and self-denial with which, during the past thirty years, you discharged the onerous and important duties necessarily connected with this situation.

To you we owe that most efficient and practical mode of communicating agricultural information—the appointment of the Agriculturist. To you owe the introduction of that improved system of Agriculture, of which you have been so distinguished and successful an advocate, and the utility of which is fully evinced by its now almost universal adoption.

We well remember with what zeal, talent, and perseverance, you, year after year, urged this subject upon our notice, and with what pertinacity we resisted your advice and suspected your motives; but, thanks to your untiring energy, we have at length been persuaded for our good, and the success of your exertions is abundantly manifest, in the now generally peaceful happy, and prosperous condition of the tenantry: **to these exertions, under Divine Providence, we ascribe it, that we have suffered comparatively so little from the loss of the potato crop**, and have been saved from that terrible infliction—the expense and demoralisation of public works.

The utility of your exertions was not confined to this limited district. Your essays on the management of landed property, and the improvement of small farms, first turned the attention of landed proprietors to the management of their estates, and opened a new era in agricultural improvement throughout Ireland; and your letter on providing food and profitable employment for an increasing population, by thorough drainage, had it been carried out according to your simple plan, might have saved the country from misery and destitution, by creating an unlimited demand for labor, and increasing the produce of the soil.

And we cannot help referring to the different state Ireland would now be in had your suggestions, both in this respect and for appointing Agriculturists (now called Practical Instructors) been more early and fully attended to. Our excellent Viceroy has already patronized the appointment of Agriculturists, and we trust you may yet live to enjoy the high satisfaction of seeing all your other practical and judicious views successfully and universally adopted.

In you, Sir, the industrious and improving tenant ever found an able and willing adviser, and a steady friend. Many, by your judicious advice and kind encouragement, have been stimulated to renewed exertion, which has issued in freeing them from the difficulties by which they were surrounded, and raising them to comfort and competence.

In your private charities, liberal and unostentatious, the poor, while reaping the benefit, seldom knew the source from whence it came; but they shall soon sadly miss the kind benefactor, whose purse was ever open to supply their wants.

A sense of duty, doubtless, rather than an expectation of reward, stimulated you in your arduous career; and although an approving conscience is its own best recompense, still we think it will prove a pleasing and gratifying reflection that your exertions have been, however, inadequately, valued, and that the sincere and heartfelt prayers of those amongst whom you laboured, and in whose cause you have justly merited the title of the “TENANT’S FRIEND” have accompanied you in your retirement.

That a merciful Providence may long spare you to enjoy the well-earned approval of mankind; and that after this life you may, through the merits of the Redeemer, be translated to life everlasting, is the earnest prayer of your obliged and grateful servants!

Signed, on behalf of the Tenantry,

JOSEPH M‘KEE. J.P.,

*Chairman.*

28th Feb., 1848

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To which Mr. Blacker was pleased to make the following

REPLY:

Armagh, March 7th, 1848.

GENTLEMEN,—Nothing could give me greater pleasure, now that am retiring from the Agency of the Gosford Estates, than to find I carry with me the good will and good opinion of those amongst whom I have been acting for so many years.

The kind expressions contained in your Address assure me of this. I thank you most sincerely for them, and am truly glad to told that any exertions of mine hare been conducive to the welfare and prosperity of the Tenantry under my care, or that they have in any degree tended to lighten the sufferings which have been, notwithstanding, (I am sorry to say) but too severely felt, both here and elsewhere, daring the calamitous period we have been lately passing through[[5]](#footnote-5). If I have, however, been in any manner instrumental in this respect, I must, in justice to your Noble Landlord, say, that is to his liberality in permitting me to employ an Agriculturist, and to make those advances in seeds, manure, and money, necessary to enable many to follow Instructions, that the chief credit is due.

The suggestions for the general improvement of Ireland, to which you so kindly allude, it is gratifying to me to see sanctioned in principle by the Government, and although the appointment of Agriculturists or Practical Instructors has not been adopted to the extent I could have wished, yet I hope the success of the experiment, even under a limited and temporary trial, will be found to justify, and perhaps lead to its more extensive and permanent adoption. In this respect everything will depend on the judicious selection of skilful and experienced man, who will be able to command the respect and confidence of the people amongst whom they are located.

As to drainage, I regret to be obliged to say, the clauses in the Act itself, and the delays and impediments to its execution, under the regulations of the board of works, have completely prevented that general employment of the population which I had hoped for; and I have to lament that, whilst millions have been uselessly expended in Public Works, or wastefully disposed of in Gratuitous Relief, the repayment of which is now felt in many places to be absolutely ruinous to both landlord and tenant; a source of employment, universally admitted to be the most eligible and best adapted to the present state of Ireland, the expenditure in carrying out what would have been certain of being recovered, not by grinding down the peasant or the proprietor, as is now the case, but would have been paid for out of the profits arriving from its own reproductive nature—and would have gone far to prevent the demoralisation and destitution of the working classes, whilst adding to the amount of subsistence required for their support, has been neglected, and has become useless as a measure of affording general employment, by the difficulties and delays to which it has been subjected.

The interest which the foregoing subjects are so calculated to excite must be my apology for having transgressed the usual limits of reply on occasions like the present.

I now, however, hasten to conclude, by assuring you that the kindness and attachment universally manifested towards me, by the Gosford Tenantry, since my resignation of the agency has been made known, accompanied, as it has been, by the warmest expressions of esteem and regard, from both the Earl of Gosford and Lord Acheson, has made an impression on me which can never be effaced from my recollection.

I bet to offer to you, Gentlemen, my best thanks for the trouble you have taken up on this occasion; and, with the most heartfelt desire for the welfare and prosperity of the Gosford Estates, and for the health and happiness of the tenants, individually, both here and hereafter, I remain, Gentlemen, your much obliged, and faithful servant,

WM. BLACKER

To the Rev, Charles Seaver, Joseph M’Kee, Esq.,   
Dr. Lynn, George Gray, Esq., Wm. Simpson, Esq.

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In 1850, the ….. reported that on July 4th Blacker had suddenly been taken seriously ill. “Mr Blacker was attacked by paralysis…and has continued ever since in a very precarious state….very little hope is entertained of his ultimate recovery.” This description seems to indicate that Blacker had had a stroke.

However, on 25th July he was reported to be “much better”, but by the time of the dinner which followed the Markethill Cattle Show, presided over by his successor William Wann, on August 15th, he was reported to those present as being “very ill again “and a toast was drunk to his health and speedy recovery.

William Blacker of Gosford died 2 ½ years later, on 20th October 1850.

NOTE – As the newspaper style of the 1840s consisted of long blocks of unparagraphed text, I have split such sections into multiple paragraphs to make it more easily readable to modern eyes.

1. The two days a year, often Lady Day and Michaelmas, when rents were due. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. George William Frederick Villiers, 4th Earl of Clarendon, Viceroy (Lord Lieutenant) of Ireland. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Almost a metric tonne! [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. One responsible for distributing charitable funds or goods to the poor. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Great Famine [↑](#footnote-ref-5)