



James Gordon Stuart Grant was born at Granton near Edinburgh, in 1838, and after receiving a grammar school and university education he arrived at Dunedin in September 1855 crammed with ill-digested knowledge and obsessed with the conviction that he had been promised the position of rector of the High School that was shortly to be established. In anticipation of that appointment he started a private school of his own and called it the Dunedin Academy. When the rectorship of the new high school was bestowed elsewhere, Grant conceived a grievance that he was to cherish while life lasted. The academy soon had to be closed for want of pupils, but Grant was dedicated to the prosecution of what he called “a crusade against ignorance”. He lost no opportunity of lecturing to any available audience and in 1864 started a weekly newspaper called *The Saturday Review*. As editor, not only did he write nearly all the articles and news items, but he also sold the paper in the streets. Many of the articles were grossly libellous and he was obliged to make more than one appearance in Court. *The Saturday Review* was succeeded by *The Delphic Oracle*, and *The Delphic Oracle by The Stoic*. With each change of name, the publication became more irresponsibly libellous.

Not content with journalism, Grant made various attempts to cut a figure in politics. In the winter of 1864 he summoned a meeting of the unemployed in the Octagon, Dunedin, and, having addressed them in stirring language, led them to the Provincial Council buildings where the Council was in session. Apparently, he saw himself as being about to emulate Cromwell's action in dismissing the Rump Parliament, but in the event he was merely taken into custody by the Serjeant-at-Arms while his followers scarcely protested. Eventually he was fined £1 and required to sign an apology. The following year he won a seat on the Provincial Council. “Don't pay the members and they will the sooner get through the work” was the nothing if not altruistic programme which carried him to victory. In the Council he was never taken seriously and he declined to seek re-election — not, however, from any sense of failure, but because he had greater ambitions in view. In 1867 he stood for the superintendency of Otago. Macandrew, the successful candidate, polled 2,259 votes; Grant received two, one of them, presumably, being his own. Undiscouraged by this very positive rejection, he persisted for the next 17 years in offering himself as a parliamentary candidate whenever the opportunity occurred. He seldom polled more than a handful of votes.

Little is known of Grant's private life beyond the fact that by 1875 he was a married man with an infant daughter. Incorrigibly eccentric, he came at length to be regarded as a public jester, a privileged libeller, enjoying a high degree of immunity in both capacities. He died on 27 February 1902, in such poverty that a public subscription was taken up to pay his few remaining debts and funeral expenses.

by Randall Mathews Burdon, M.C. (1896–1965), Author, Wellington.



