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# **INTRODUCTION**

# **EMERSON TENNENT**

# **PAPERS**

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# Emerson Tennent (D2922)

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## Summary



*Sir James Emerson-Tennent  
1<sup>st</sup> Bt*

The Emerson Tennent Papers number c.5500 documents and c.75 volumes, 1773-1916, and mainly comprise the personal, political, estate and business papers of Sir James Emerson Tennent, 1st Bt (1804-69), of Belfast and of Tempo Manor, Co. Fermanagh, politician, civil servant and man of letters.

The papers were deposited in/purchased by PRONI in a series of instalments and transactions. Major deposits were made in 1973 and 1979 and were amalgamated and listed by the end of the latter year. A copy of that list will be found at D2922/A/6. A small purchase was made in 1980 and then, in the course of the 1980s, there were two major withdrawals of parts of the deposited material. Finally, in 1995, the withdrawn parts of the archive were returned and all the previously deposited material, together with a major addition amounting to approximately one-third of the whole, were purchased. This meant that a major job of rearrangement and re-listing was necessary. But, because the material covered by the 1979 list had been indexed as well as listed, it was important to avoid altering the existing numbering system. As a consequence, the additions, where they constituted new sub-sections as opposed to additions to existing sub-sections, had to be inserted by means of suffixes (A, B, etc). The end result is an arrangement which is not quite as logical as it would have been if everything had been available for listing at the one time, and a list which, because of the suffixes, looks untidy and needs to be studied carefully to avoid errors in ordering documents.



## **Background: Sir James Emerson Tennent's career**

There is an inadequate (and slightly inaccurate) resume of Sir James Emerson Tennent's career in the DNB, but fuller biographical and autobiographical information is to be found among the papers themselves. The following is a brief resumé. He was born James Emerson, and double-barrelled his name to Emerson Tennent in 1832 under the will of William Tennent of Belfast and Tempo, a wealthy banker whose daughter and heiress, Letitia, he had married in the previous year. He began his political career as a Whig, but was espoused by the local Conservatives in his first election for Belfast in 1832 and in 1834 went over to the Conservatives under the aegis of his political mentor, Lord Stanley. (He later claimed that the Whigs never forgave his defection and had their revenge in 1850-1851 when they made a party-political question of his controversial period of office in Ceylon.) He was MP for Belfast, 1832-1845 (and his portrait, full-length, hangs in the Reception Hall of Belfast City Hall), originator of a milestone Copyright of Designs Act (1842), Joint Secretary to the India Board, 1841-1845, Colonial Secretary in Ceylon, 1845-1849, Permanent Secretary to the Board of Trade, 1852-1867 (and usually regarded as the inventor of competitive examination for the Civil Service), author of major books on Greece, Ceylon, natural history, antiquities, etc, friend of Dickens and other literary and artistic people, and builder of Tempo Manor, Co. Fermanagh (to the designs of Sir Charles Lanyon), 1861-1869. He was knighted in 1845, and created a baronet on his retirement from the Board of Trade in 1867.



## **The Papers: The Tempo Estate and Tempo Manor**

The earliest documents in date relate to the Tempo estate, Co. Fermanagh, acquired by Emerson Tennent's father-in-law, William Tennent, when Emerson Tennent was still a boy. They include: leases, 1773, 1875 and 1790-1861; a schedule of title deeds and leases, 1778-1846; rent rolls and written surveys of the estate, 1799 and 1813-1831; correspondence, 1813-1832, of William Tennent, concerning his purchase of the estate in 1814 and its administration, including letters from the previous owners, Constantine Maguire and Samuel Lyle, from the Tempo estate agent, the Rev. Henry Leard, and from tenants, employees, etc; legal papers, 1798-1816, relating to the purchase of the estate in 1814; account books recording household expenses, labourers' wages, etc, at Tempo, 1816-1821; plan and estimate for alterations to the house at Tempo, 1821, updated by Emerson Tennent, c.1860; and a copy of the will of William Tennent, 1827.

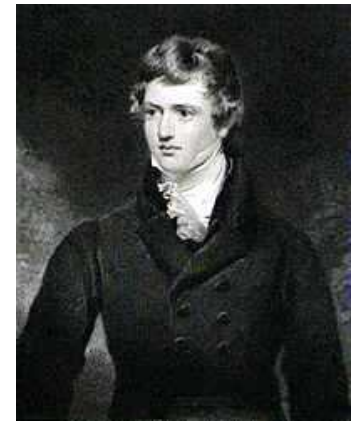
Papers relating to the estate and house at Tempo during Emerson Tennent's own time and later, include: agents' letters to Emerson Tennent from the successive Tempo agents, Thomas Adams of Monaghan, 1834-1858 (with many gaps), and M.H. Sankey of Lurganbrae, Brookeborough, Co. Fermanagh, 1860-1869; surveys and valuations of the estate by Robert Montgomery, Charles H. Swiney and Richard M. Daly, 1844 and 1860; architectural plans, correspondence, etc, relating to the rebuilding of Tempo Manor, which include letters and plans of W.H. Lynn & Sir Charles Lanyon and numerous, very detailed letters of instruction from Emerson Tennent, c.1860-1869; maps and papers about tree planting, the establishment of rookeries, etc, in Tempo demesne, 1862-1867; catalogue of the Tempo Manor library, 1865, and inventories of silver plate, 1859-1868; estate and business correspondence of his widow and his son, Sir William Emerson Tennent, 2nd Bt, mainly 1873-1874, of his daughter, Miss Eleanor Emerson Tennent, c.1880-1915, and of his granddaughter (daughter and co-heiress of Sir William Emerson Tennent), Ethel, wife of Sir Charles Langham, 13th Bt, 1884-1885 and 1890; and Tempo estate rentals, 1867-1925 (with many gaps).



## Sir James Emerson Tennent's correspondence

Emerson Tennent's political, literary and personal correspondence, which form the nucleus of the archive, is arranged - in line with what there was of an original system – alphabetically by principal correspondent and chronologically by topic, with the usual confusion to which such a 'split' arrangement gives rise.

The material organised according to principal correspondent includes: letters, 1847-1854, from George Byng, 7th Viscount Torrington, Governor of Ceylon, 1847-1851, during the greater part of Emerson Tennent's Colonial Secretaryship there; letters, 1832-1835 and 1855-1868, from members of the Cole family, Earls of Enniskillen, mainly about Co. Fermanagh political and estate affairs; similar letters, c.1853-1866, from the two successive John Crichtons, 3rd and 4th Earls Erne; letters, 1851-1853 and 1868-1869, from Richard Davison of The Abbey, Belfast, Conservative M.P. for Belfast, 1852-1860, and Emerson Tennent's solicitor; letters, 1842-1868, from John Doyle, the caricaturist; letters, 1851-1856 and 1867, from William Emerson of Belfast, Emerson Tennent's



*Edward Geoffrey Stanley,  
later 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby*



*Statue of the Earl of Belfast  
by P. MacDowell*

nephew and, apparently agent; originals of letters, 1830-1834 and 1851-1868, from Emerson Tennent to John Forster, the biographer of Dickens (mainly about Belfast and Irish politics, rather than literary matters); letters to Emerson Tennent, 1837-1842 and 1863-1864, from and about the Belfast-born sculptor, P. MacDowell; letters, 1851-1852, 1859 and 1867-1868, from Joseph Napier, Emerson Tennent's legal adviser during his appearance before the Ceylon Committee of the House of Commons in 1851 and Attorney-General for Ireland in 1852; letters, 1824-1826 and 1843, from Emerson Tennent's fellow-Hellenist, the Hon. Leicester Stanhope, later 5th Earl of Harrington; letters, 1835-1867, from his political mentor, Edward Geoffrey Stanley, Lord Stanley, later 14th Earl of Derby and Conservative Prime Minister; letters, 1851-1869, from Stanley's son and successor, Edward Henry, 15th Earl of Derby, a Ministerial superior of Emerson Tennent at various times and also a co-trustee of the Peabody Trust; letters, 1844 and 1851-1857, from James Torrens of Davison & Torrens, partner of Richard Davison in the Belfast firm of solicitors employed by Emerson Tennent; and letters, 1830-1832 and 1843-1869, from James Whiteside of Killyhevlin, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, a Conservative Law Officer and, ultimately, Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, 1866-1874, about various political, literary and personal matters.

Other 'bit name' figures in literature, science and the arts who feature in various parts of the archive and for the most part are represented by only a couple of letters each, include: William Harrison Ainsworth; Robert Browning; Henry Thomas Cockburn, Lord Cockburn; Thomas Crofton Croker; the Rev. George Croly; Charles Dickens; Lady Eastlake; Sir Henry Ellis; Michael Faraday; J.A. Froude; Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell; Mrs Anna Maria Hall; Charles Kingsley; James Sheridan Knowles; Letitia Elizabeth Landon; Sir Edwin Landseer; Charles Lever; Samuel Lover; Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Lord Lytton; Francis Mahony ('Father Prout'); Daniel Maclise; Sir John Everett Millais; Richard Monckton Milnes, 1st Lord Houghton; Sydney Morgan, Lady Morgan; John Murray; William Parsons, 3rd Earl of Rosse; Charles Phillips; H.W. Pickersgill; Miss Jane Porter; David Roberts; Thomas Roscoe; William Howard Russell; George Gilbert Scott; Jared Sparks; Philip Henry Stanhope, 5th Earl Stanhope; James B. Swinton; Anthony Trollope; Edward Matthew Ward; Alaric Watts; and Richard Westmacott.



## Politics

The political papers of Emerson Tennent arranged by topic include the following: letters and papers, 1830-1836, about reform meetings and political dinners in Belfast and elsewhere in Co. Antrim; letters and papers, 1832-1842, about Emerson Tennent's elections for Belfast, his successful petition against the 1837 return, etc, including 'The original requisition from the electors of Belfast offering their representation ...' to him, 1832, subscription books for his campaigns in 1832 and 1842, and letters from F.R. Bonham, Lords Belfast, Farnham and Hillsborough, George Robert Dawson and Sir Fredrick Shaw; letters and papers, 1834-1837, about Emerson Tennent's change of political allegiance in 1834 and political adherence to Lord Stanley; letters, 1834-1836, about Co. Antrim election politics and the appointment of magistrates for that county; letters, 1834-1845 and 1852, about legislation for the benefit or improvement of Belfast; Co. Fermanagh electioneering letters, 1834 and 1852-1868; letters, pamphlets and other printed matter, 1840-1843, about Emerson Tennent's Copyright of Designs Act of 1842; letters, 1841-July 1845, to Emerson Tennent as Joint Secretary to the Board of Control of India; letters, April 1845-March 1852, about his controversial term of office as Colonial Secretary in Ceylon and the parliamentary inquiry into his conduct on his return; subsequent correspondence, 1850-1869, about India and Ceylon; letters, 1852-1853, about the borough of Lisburn, Co. Antrim, for which Emerson Tennent was twice elected in 1852, letters about the general election of July 1852 in other constituencies, and letters, 1857-1868, about miscellaneous elections in Ulster; letters, March-September 1852, to Emerson Tennent as the short-lived Joint Secretary to the Poor Law Board; letters and papers, April-September 1852, reflecting Emerson Tennent's membership of the Wine Committee of the House of Commons, and letters, April-June 1855, about his book on Wine and the Wine Duties; and letters, 1852-1869, to Emerson Tennent as Joint Secretary to the Board of Trade, 1852-1867.



## **Literature and Travel**

The literary (and travel) papers of Emerson Tennent arranged by topic include the following: volumes of journals, September 1824-August 1825, recording his impressions of travel in Italy and Greece; letters and papers, 1824-1837, 1840-1845, 1852 and 1863, reflecting his enthusiasm for Greek independence and relating to his *History of Modern Greece* (1830); passport, journals, correspondence and other papers, 1840-1841, concerning a tour made by him on the Continent, particularly in Germany and Italy, and similar papers, 1844-1845 and 1848, about his tour of the Holy Land, trip up the Nile and visit to Egypt; letters and papers, 1851 and 1858-1868, about his *Natural History of Ceylon* (1858), his *The Wild Elephant and the Method of Capturing and Taming it in Ceylon* (1867) and his *Christianity in Ceylon* (1867); notes, drafts and correspondence, 1861-1867, in connection with his proposed 'History of Ireland'; and the autograph manuscript of, and correspondence about, his book on firearms, 'The Story of Guns' (1864).



## Personal and Family Correspondence

The personal correspondence in the archive, mainly that of Emerson Tennent, includes: papers, 1831-1916, about the genealogy of the Emerson Tennent, Jackson and Kennedy families; letters, 1856-1863, from Emerson Tennent to his son, William, containing autobiographical information about Emerson Tennent's own career and the inveterate hostility of the Whig party towards him following his change of allegiance in 1834, although the context of the letters is the paternal advice and background information about family settlements and finances which he is imparting to William; letters, 1843 and 1846-1856, to William Emerson Tennent from his mother, Lady Emerson Tennent, many of them written from Ceylon; letters, 1843-1854, to William Emerson Tennent from his sister, Eleanor, who was with their parents in Ceylon in 1847-1849; miscellaneous family correspondence, 1845-1849, 1852 and 1855, between and among Emerson Tennent, Lady Emerson Tennent, and their children; letters, 1851-1853, to Emerson Tennent about the death of his daughter, Edith Sarah, and the monument to her in Kensal Green Cemetery; and letters, 1903-1909, to the late Sir William Emerson Tennent, 2nd Bt's, daughter and co-heiress, Ethel Sarah, Lady Langham.

D2922/A/4 consists of a series of newspaper obituaries on Emerson Tennent, one of which, published in *The Belfast News Letter* of 13 March 1869, is itself a pot pourri of obituary tributes that had previously appeared in the *News Letter* and elsewhere. The following are extracts:

'... Sir James Emerson Tennent was born in 1804. His father, William Emerson Esq., was an eminent merchant of this town [Belfast]. He was partly educated here, and thence transferred to Trinity College, Dublin, where he graduated LL.D. Having completed his collegiate career, which throughout gave promise of his ultimate success as a statesman and writer, he readily joined some of the ardent spirits, who, like "the most celebrated Englishman of the 19th century" sighed to achieve independence for Greece. He left Belfast, accompanied by the only son of Dr Tennent, a name which he was destined to bear - to join the expedition to which Byron had given a certain splendid, though melancholy, interest. ... Mr Emerson, the subject of this notice, arrived in Greece in October 1824, and was immediately presented with a commission by the Greek Committee, from whom he got letters to their representatives in Missolonghi. His friend and companion, Robert James Tennent, also received a commission. Both remained for a considerable period fighting in the popular cause. ... On his return to London, in 1827, he published a series of letters in Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine* under the title of "Letters from the Aegean". In the following year these were published in a collected form. Some time afterwards he wrote *Greece in 1825*, and at no very distant interval there followed a *History of Modern Greece*, which contains some highly interesting details in relation to the establishment of the monarchy. ...

Shortly after the appearance of his larger work on Greece, he was called to the bar at Lincoln's Inn. In 1831 he returned to Belfast, and about the close of the year he married Miss Letitia, the only daughter of Mr W. Tennent, the celebrated banker. In

July of the following year, during the terrible prevalence of Asiatic cholera in Belfast, his father-in-law died while courageously and unselfishly engaged in mitigating the terrors of the visitation. Mr Tennent was one of the first who fell a victim to the disease. Succeeding to the estates of his father-in-law, Mr Emerson assumed, in addition to the paternal name which he had hitherto borne, that of Tennent.

In August 1832, at the first election after the Reform Bill, considerable difference of opinion existed amongst the leading politicians of Belfast as to who should be put forward in the Conservative interest. It was at length resolved to put Mr Emerson Tennent in nomination, and a deputation of Conservatives waited on him at his residence, The Lodge, to ask him to come forward and contest the borough. He did so, and after a severe contest was returned in the September of that year. Very soon after his return to parliament, he was recognised as one of the rising young men of the day. He was then in his 28th year, bearing a high name in the literary world, famed as one of the most finished speakers, and yet it was marvellous how careful he was as a young member in the House not to intrude himself on the attention of that assembly. For the first two or three years he was in parliament, he rarely spoke, but when he did so his speech was considered most effective. ...

Lord Stanley, the present Lord Derby, manifested a peculiar interest in the young member for Belfast, who in the course of a memorable debate on the Union, made one of the finest speeches that had ever been delivered in the House for years before. In 1837, during the general election, he was beaten by Mr James Gibson, barrister; but on a petition, Mr Gibson was unseated in February 1838, and Mr Emerson Tennent returned in his place.

In 1841, shortly after Sir Robert Peel was returned to office, Lord Stanley being then a principal member of the new ministry, Mr Tennent was made one of the Secretaries of the Board of Control, and that office he filled until 1845, discharged the duties with great satisfaction, introduced several reforms during his time of office, and received the marked thanks of the India Board for his efficiency. At that time he was made Civil Secretary to the Colonial Government of Ceylon under Lord Torrington, the newly appointed Governor [actually, under Sir Colin Campbell, Torrington's predecessor] and was created a knight. ... He continued in Ceylon till the recall of Lord Torrington in 1851, when he came to London [actually he returned to England at the end of 1849]. In January 1852 he was returned member for Lisburn, and in the course of the next month he received the appointment of Secretary to the Poor Law Board. At the general election which took place in July the same year, he was again returned for Lisburn. In September, Mr Porter, one of the Joint Secretaries for the Board of Trade, died, and Sir James Emerson Tennent was appointed to the vacant post.

We will mention but one fact in connection with his very active parliamentary life ... . If, with all his facility and information he seldom spoke in the House, his industry was incessant, and to him a very extensive department of the manufacturing interest in the United Kingdom is indebted for the getting up and passing into law the Copyright of Designs Bill, one of the most valuable acts of parliament ever carried in connection with the ornamentation of textile products. Previous to the enactment of that measure, every effort of genius in the decorative arts was considered as public

property, liable to be pirated by anyone who chose to take advantage of his neighbour's talent. ... Under the provisions of Mr Tennent act of 1842, a cheap and ready system of securing the copyright of any design was placed within the reach of every inventor who wished to take advantage of the provisions of that law. ... The cotton printers and factory owners of Lancashire, who had watched with the most intense interest the progress of the measures through parliament, were in a state of great exultation when it was finally adopted, and at a banquet given to the Honourable Member for Belfast by the merchants of Manchester, a magnificent service of plate, valued at £3,000, was presented to their guest, in token of their high sense of the important services he had conferred on the republic of manufactures.

We might multiply instances of the permanently beneficial effects which his parliamentary and official efforts produced. He held his position at the Board of Trade until recently [1867]. On the occasion of his retirement, the Queen, as a mark of approbation of his long and faithful services, created him a baronet. His duties in parliament and in office, however, did not arrest his activity in his most congenial domain. He produced a whole library of valuable books, amongst which we may mention his *Belgium*, *A Treatise on the Copyright of Designs for Printed Fabrics*, *Christianity in Ceylon*, *An Account of Ceylon*, *Physical, Historical and Topographical*, *Sketches of the Natural History of Ceylon*, *Wine: its Uses and Abuses*, and a large number of other works. His book on Ceylon, published in 1859 [sic - 1858], was one of the most popular works which had appeared for a number of years, either at home or abroad. It was translated into several foreign languages, and at home ran through several editions. Upon natural history, Sir James Emerson Tennent was a high authority. Until he had written about the habits of the elephant, practically nothing was known in regard to an animal perhaps the most interesting of the brute creation.

For some time past he had withdraw from the public gaze ..., devoting himself mainly to improving his estate in Co. Fermanagh. At Tempo, in that county, he had erected a beautiful mansion, and the whole of the property was rapidly showing signs of his liberal and intelligent efforts. Warm and sincere in his friendships, the death of his friends Dr Cooke and Mr Richard Davison, late MP for Belfast, grieved him deeply. ...'

'... Sir Emerson [sic] was one of the most complete links between the present and a now almost forgotten generation to be found in the whole Empire. Belonging essentially to the latter, he was nevertheless as well known to the former as if he had been its most brilliant ornament. ... With a mellow and experienced age, he united in a singular degree a still vigorous and unimpaired grasp of mind not unbecoming the intellectual activity of the present day, though unlike it in the modesty which ever chastened and adorned his researches. ... He would repeat, with the accuracy of an unflinching memory, conversations and incidents which occurred thirty or forty years ago. ... In business aptitude, his success lay in his punctuality. He had a time for everything. In the matter of economising time, he affords a bright example. His minutes were always occupied, and he was incessantly taking notes, all of which he put aside for future use with a systematic care that never defeated itself. ... How else could he have accomplished one half the work which he has left behind him? ...'

'... In the world of London, where the greatest men of the age are so often found congregated, he made a name for himself as a writer when little beyond the years of

boyhood, and after his return as one of the representatives of Belfast, he became a welcome guest at the table of many of the leading politicians. The present Earl of Derby, the late Marquess of Hertford, Sir Robert Peel and the Hon. W. Baring (with whom he was joined at the Board of Control), and many others of the higher ranks in the Senate, were among his attached friends. In literary circles, he was ever a special favourite, his vast accumulations of knowledge, his marvellous powers of memory and admirable style of description, causing him to be looked upon as an authority by all the young members of the republic of letters. In 1845, when the Dramatic Authors' Committee was arranging for an application to the Prime Minister on behalf of James Sheridan Knowles, Sir James at once assented to an appeal for his aid in the matter. He was then preparing to leave for Ceylon, but he readily gave his assistance, and when the formal movement was made, Sir Robert Peel received the deputation with much cordiality, and said it would delight him to place the author of *Virginia* on his list. It will perhaps be recollected by those who take an interest in these points of history that in some time afterwards and before the affair had been finally settled, the Conservative had given place to a Whig ministry, and Lord John Russell, having succeeded the Rt. Hon. Baronet as Prime Minister, placed a hanger-on of the court on the literary pension list instead of J.S. Knowles. After a period of three years had elapsed the modern Shakespeare's claims were recognised, and he received from thence £200 a year. ...

As one of the Trustees of the Peabody Fund, Sir James E. Tennent put forth all his business habits, and spent much time in giving full effects to that princely gift of the benevolent American. During the short period of his representation of Lisburn, he made many new friends for himself in that town, and among them several of the electors who had been most opposed to his return. We remember hearing him say that, once a member was elected by a constituency, he should try to forget all feeling save that of kindness to every member of it, as he was then the representative of the entire body - those who voted against as well as those who supported him. Such were his feelings on this great point, and his whole career as a member of parliament verified the practical truthfulness of the sentiment.'

'As a practical statesman, the lamented baronet must hold the highest place ever gained by any member for Belfast, not even excepting Lord Cairns himself; and as a courteous and kindly representative, those who widely differed from him in political affairs have never failed to speak of him in the warmest terms. Never did a senator of such ability carry his honour so modestly as he was willing to do. He stood far above petty jealousy, and never dreamed of indulging in small resentments. ...'

'In addition to his other distinctions, he was Knight Commander of the Greek Order of the Saviour. In his advanced years, he adhered to the policy of Sir Robert Peel, and from Lord Palmerston's government he accepted his baronetcy. ...'

'The death of Sir Emerson Tennent [sic] recalls to the public recollection a series of modest but distinguished services, rendered where merit is but little regarded. The great civil servants of recent times have not only set examples of intense and various activity, but have, as it were, pointed those examples by particular endeavours to raise the tone and kindle the ambition of their juniors. And of these great civil servants, few have been more remarkable than the late Permanent Secretary of the

Board of Trade, who has just suddenly and prematurely died. Sir James Emerson Tennent filled in his time several important offices. ... In all these offices ... [he] displayed great ability, which was recognised by members of all parties, and throughout his career he justified the high estimation in which he was held by many literary proofs of the activity and practical character of his mind. His works were of course of various degrees of merit, but all were fruitful in suggestion, and exhibited the workings of an observing and critical intelligence. He travelled in Belgium, and wrote of his travels. He wrote a History of Modern Greece, and cherished to the last, we believe, those sympathies for the Hellenes, which were rife in his youth, and from which a later generation has to a great extent mistakenly and ungenerously departed. His residence in Ceylon was prolific in results, collected with great industry and published in the most engaging form. Physical, historical and religious enquiries engrossed with equal tenacity the powers of Sir Emerson's mind. In all these incidents of a busy life we see precisely those qualities which civil servants ought to aspire to emulate. They do not all enter the civil service through the portals of parliament, or with the prestige of successful authorship. Of competitive examination, which is, as we have said, a spur and incentive to the new and better spirit by which our public departments have of late been characterised, Sir James Emerson Tennent was one of the warmest and most influential supporters. He knew the value of brains, and was for having the brains in the public pay well cultivated. ... Of late years, Sir Emerson Tennent had chiefly devoted his abilities to the management of the Peabody Trust, and it was no doubt greatly attributable to him that that trust so thoroughly fulfils the intentions of its founder, and so well escaped, as the lately published report showed it had escaped, the errors and failures into which it was generally expected to fall.

Only sixty-five years of age when he died, this eminent man deserves honourable remembrance amongst all who watch the action of the multiform agencies of our public life. The death of Sir James Emerson Tennent, while it spreads grief among his personal friends, may fitly remind the public at large that in science and practice of government, the highest and most various powers may at all times find wide fields of usefulness. ...'

D2922/A/1/1, a letter of paternal advice from Emerson Tennent to his newly-come-of-age son, dated 12 October 1856, also contains elements of the 'testament politique', particularly in regard to one of the most controversial aspects of his political career, his change of party in 1834:

'... As you are well aware, my own family, when I was of your age, could do little or nothing for me. My father was a man of no fortune. He died leaving us little to live on except the business in Belfast, which yielded a bare surplus, and enabled my mother to educate us - no more. ... I had no relations of either wealth or influence, no powerful friends of any kind, and what real friends I have now, or what real position I occupy, I made myself after I as 25 or 30 years of age. ...

At length I prepared to marry, but your grandfather firmly refused his consent, inasmuch as I had no profession, no means of support .... I then turned my attention earnestly to law again, and I entered as a pupil with Mr Chitty and read law systematically for upwards of twelve months. But it was uphill work, and though I was

resolved to force my own inclination and master it, I never really liked the study. In 1831, your grandfather gave a reluctant consent to our marriage, and after that I still continued with Mr Chitty reading law, till in 1832 your grandfather died, and we inherited under his will. Just at that moment, Belfast wanted a member of parliament, as the Reform Bill had opened up the borough; and attention was turned to R.J. Tennent and myself, as we had both made characters as public speakers, etc. I had always, so far as [I] professed any politics, been of the Liberal and Whig party; but I was mortified that instead of choosing me along with R.J. Tennent to be put in nomination they passed me over and named him and Mr Sharman Crawford. The Conservative party had no one to stand, and they applied to me. I pointed out to them that our politics did not agree, but they said that did not matter, and they would accept me with all my own views - and I agreed to stand.

This was a great error on my part, and I have felt the consequences of it all my life to the present hour. It is all very well to say that my political opponents took me up irrespective of the difference of our views, and left me free to assert my own opinions though opposed to theirs. This may be very well in theory, but in practice it is impossible, and my conduct was a virtual desertion of my own party – not only that but a positive junction with their enemies. But what made the breach irreparable was that I was successful. With the aid of the Conservatives I utterly routed the Whigs, I carried the town triumphantly and for twenty years kept the seat to myself, in spite of the Whigs, by large majorities in most furious contests. It utterly broke down the Whig party - and for this I was detested by the Whigs, and that feeling remains against me, as you know, to the present hour, although, I being no longer in parliament, many of them have softened towards me of late and we are personally friends again. But, politically, I have never been forgiven.

The cause of the Whigs of Belfast was of course taken up by the rest of the kingdom. In every town where there was a Whig paper or a Whig party, I have suffered for twenty years incessant abuse, and the Whig governments in England, all of whom in succession I opposed in the House of Commons, came to hate me and do to this hour, as I kept their candidates out of Belfast in every successive parliament from 1832 to 1845, and did them all the mischief I could in parliament. I entered nominally as a Whig, to be consistent with my old professions, but the Whigs naturally gave me the cold shoulder. I attached myself to Lord Stanley, who was then Whig Secretary for Ireland in Lord Grey's government. But in a few years Lord Stanley left the Whig party to become their opponent, and in this I joined with him and left the Whigs too. For years I was thus kept in opposition to the Whigs, till in 1841 Sir Robert Peel formed a Conservative government along with Lord Stanley, and then I got office in the India Board, whence I went to Ceylon in 1845. In 1850, when I returned, the Whigs were again in power, and hating me as much as ever they treated me as you know, turning me out of Ceylon and banishing me to St Helena - as a punishment for my old offences in deserting them. Then, providentially, in 1852, Lord Derby got in for six months, and most fortunately was enabled to place me in office in the Board of Trade.

But from what I have stated, you may well imagine how angry the Whigs must be to find me fixed in the Board of Trade in spite of them. Me, whom for so many years they have hated and abused, and whom so late as 1852 they thought to have utterly

ruined by recalling me from Ceylon. The present President of the Board of Trade (Lord Standley of Alderley), was for many, many years the whipper-in of the House of Commons for the Whigs. He knows my whole career, he knows the trouble and vexation I have uniformly been to his party, and though he is officially civil to me, you see yourself that he is nothing more, that we have no intercourse, and that he would be delighted to get rid of me if he could.

In fact, the Whigs having been in power since 1832, every office in Downing Street is now filled with Whig clerks. There is not a single Conservative in the Board of Trade, except you and me. So you may fancy how sore the government must be to find me there, after their persecuting me for twenty years, in retaliation [for] my opposition to themselves. ...'

D2922/C/19 contains a statement by Emerson Tennent, [written in the spring of 1851], about the other controversial episode in his career (and the one which is most fully documented in these papers), his term of office as Colonial Secretary to the Government of Ceylon, 1845-9. The general administration of Ceylon under its Governor, Lord Torrington, as well as Emerson Tennent's particular part in it, was the subject of exhaustive parliamentary enquiry, at the end of which he wrote the following self-justification:

'Before proceeding to show by facts that cannot be disputed that the conduct of Sir Emerson Tennent [sic], from the time of his arrival at Ceylon until the close of the enquiry of the [parliamentary] committee, was under difficult and trying circumstances, in every respect consistent with his duty and the public interest, it is important to correct an error disseminated by the Quarterly Review to the effect that Sir Emerson Tennent had not been sent home to give evidence before the Committee.

This misconception has arisen from an expression of Mr Hawes [Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office] in the House of Commons on the 6th February 1850, that Sir Emerson Tennent was accidentally in England on his private affairs by leave obtained from the Secretary of State [for Colonial Affairs, Earl Grey]. This statement of Mr Hawes' was made evidently without a knowledge of the facts, which are as follows:

Sir Emerson Tennent never applied for, or obtained, leave to visit England on private affairs, but in June 1848, being then in bad health, he applied for leave "to come to England for medical advice, should emergency render it indispensable". The leave was granted by Lord Grey in August 1848, if necessary. Sir Emerson Tennent made preparations to return to England in the spring of 1849, and sold off a portion of his furniture and perishable effects with that intention. Fortunately, his health suddenly rallied. He abandoned the idea of going home, communicated with the Governor his change of plans, declined to avail himself of leave of absence granted only in the event of its being necessary, replaced his effects, made a fresh agreement for his house, and remained in the colony until December 1849, nearly twelve months after he had intimated to Lord Torrington that he had found it unnecessary to go home on such leave.

In the meantime, the Committee of the House of Commons commenced its enquiries in 1849 into the affairs of Ceylon, at the moment when there was scarcely an individual in England who happened to be present in Ceylon during the progress of the events which were to be enquired into. Neither Lord Torrington nor the members of his administration had the slightest intimation of the points into which the investigation was to enter, or the specific charges which were to be made. Mr Woodehouse, who had gone home in April 1849 on leave of absence, was the only person connected with the government who gave evidence in that year, and so thoroughly was Lord Torrington sustained by the consciousness that every portion of his policy would bear the closest investigation that, although his official intercourse with that gentleman had not been uniformly agreeable, he relied on his assurances at parting that he would be prepared to justify his Lordship's policy and to defend his measures. Indeed, Lord Torrington had reason to look to him confidently for testimony in his support, as his measures had been all along discussed and matured in concert with Mr Woodehouse and with his general approval and assent.

The effect of Mr Woodehouse's evidence, however, proved to be the reverse of that on which Lord Torrington had calculated. It reached Ceylon in September 1849, and to his surprise the Governor found that its tendency was in almost every particular to support the allegations of his assailants, and to condemn in succession almost every act and measure of the Ceylon Government.

The enquiry was adjourned in 1849 till the next session of parliament. Lord Torrington was authorised in the interim to send home witnesses for his defence, and he immediately signified to Sir Emerson Tennent his wish that he should proceed to England in that capacity. Sir Emerson Tennent accordingly wrote to Calcutta to secure his passage by the home steamer of December, but a few days later Lord Torrington intimated that, for reasons which he afterwards explained by letter, he was desirous that Sir Emerson Tennent should go home in the capacity of an officer despatched on public duty to afford information and explanations to the Secretary of State, and that if called on as a witness before the Ceylon Committee, he should appear there rather on the part of the home government than in Lord Torrington's personal behalf.

In consequence of this communication, Sir Emerson Tennent stated by letter (20 October 1849) his readiness to meet his Lordship's views, but expected to be protected from loss of salary, etc. On the 1st of November, the Governor wrote to him in reply expressing his full concurrence in the justice of his claim that his expenses should be paid "as an essential witness without whom the enquiry could not conclude". Conformably with this arrangement, he embarked for England in December 1849, and by the same mail Lord Torrington wrote an official despatch to Earl Grey (7th of December, No. 173) in which he announced that he sent by Sir J.E. Tennent a variety of documents, and had put him in full possession of his views upon various points of policy connected with the administration of Ceylon, on which his Lordship might require further information, and he added, "Sir Emerson Tennent's health since the receipt of your Lordship's despatch No. 268, 8 August 1848, has been such as not to make it necessary to revisit England at the present moment, and his journey has been undertaken by the wish to afford such useful explanations on the affairs of this colony as may seem desirable. ..." ... From the

20th August to the 3rd of December, when Sir Emerson Tennent ceased to be Colonial Secretary, his full salary has been paid by order of Earl Grey, as an officer at home on public service, whereas, had he been at home on leave for private affairs or the recovery of health, he would have been entitled to but one half.

The papers laid before parliament the 4th February 1851 show at pages 5, 6 and 7 the circumstances under which Sir Emerson Tennent was sent out to Ceylon as Colonial Secretary, at the request of the Governor, who represented that he had no member of the local civil service whom he could recommend for that appointment. The same papers show the irritation which this occasioned among the disappointed candidates for the office, their resentment at this intrusion of a stranger into what they had theretofore considered their own monopoly of public employment, and the obstructions and annoyances to which Sir Emerson Tennent was subjected in consequences.

The chief parties affected with these feelings of resentment were Mr Woodehouse and his friends. The same papers show (page 6) that Sir Emerson Tennent was throughout the object and the intended victim of these animosities, but in no instance or degree either their author or fomentor. They show, on the evidence of despatches and letters from the Governor and other public officers, that he made every exertion to conciliate those who were opposed to him, and it is remarkable that throughout the whole of the documents - evidence, printed papers, despatches, etc., - there is not to be found a single allegation or suggestion that Sir Emerson Tennent on any occasion by any act or expression of his own either provoked or retaliated or kept alive these dissensions. Lord Torrington by a letter so late as July last to Lord John Russell has spoken of these transactions in the following terms: "From the moment Sir Emerson Tennent came to Ceylon, he has been subject to the grossest persecution and injustice from various public servants (a body known here and named by Sir Colin Campbell [the previous Governor] 'the family compact'). Every effort was made to damage his character in my eyes; and the determination of this party, of which Mr Woodehouse was the head, was to get rid of him at any cost. You may wonder I was not ... acquainted with all this before. I did know it, but I could not bring my mind to believe that so great a conspiracy could be for such paltry reasons. Every charge that could be imagined against a public servant has been laid on Sir James Emerson Tennent's door, and all this because he came to an office that they were all considered incapable of filling. These attacks being so steady and determined to a certain extent they have taken root, both in India and in England, and something should be done to right him before the public, to mark his conduct as a public servant who has done his duty faithfully, to prove the confidence of government and what they think of the treatment he has undergone ..." ...

Earl Grey, by despatch of the 18 January 1848 [had] expressed his "regret that the conspicuous zeal and public spirit of Sir Emerson Tennent, which her Majesty's Government so well appreciate, and after this enquiry [by a committee of 1847 chaired by Lord George Bentinck] appreciate as fully as ever, had not exempted him from attacks which place a public officer in a painful situation, while they remain to be met, though they eventually fail to shake his reputation in the slightest degree."

In April 1847, Sir Colin Campbell, the Governor under whom Sir Emerson Tennent went out to Ceylon, returned to England. Sir Emerson Tennent was a candidate to succeed him, but never having been, when in parliament, a supporter of Earl Grey's government, but on the contrary having held office under Sir Robert Peel and been appointed to Ceylon by Lord Stanley, he had no reason to be surprised that his Lordship selected one of his own party for that office, and appointed Lord Torrington. After Lord Torrington's arrival, the jealousy and discontent of the persons who had considered themselves aggrieved by Sir Emerson Tennent's appointment, so far from being diminished, appeared to have been rather encouraged, by the prospect of misrepresenting him to the new governor, who was not only a stranger, but might even be supposed to be somewhat sensitive and suspicious as regarded one who had been a candidate for his own office. Such, however, was the circumspection and earnestness with which Sir Emerson Tennent conducted the public business for upwards of two years in conjunction with his Lordship, that their harmony continued apparently uninterrupted, and Sir Emerson left the island in 1849 with assurances of Lord Torrington's confidence and esteem.

The attack upon Lord Torrington's government which Sir Emerson Tennent came home to refute, had reference chiefly to the recent rebellion of a province in Ceylon, to its causes (which had been ascribed to his Lordship's financial policy), and to the asserted rigour with which it had been promptly suppressed. It is not intended here to enter upon that public question. The evidence, when printed, will abundantly vindicate the policy of Lord Torrington. It will exhibit the two causes of the rebellion, and justify the measures resorted to by Lord Torrington with the unanimous advice of his Council for its suppression.

Before leaving Ceylon, Sir J. Emerson Tennent as a precaution against any personal misrepresentations in England, applied to Lord Torrington to attest a narrative which he placed before him for that purpose (and which will be found in the evidence of the committee of 1850) containing an expose of the opposition he had encountered on his arrival in Ceylon, and of the forbearance and temper with which he had abstained from resenting it. Lord Torrington did so, and stated in his letter his regret that he had ever listened to Mr Woodehouse's insinuations against Sir James Emerson Tennent, adding "I deeply regret that I ever spoke to him, and if ever I did you injustice in consequence, I equally regret it. Whatever private conversation passed between me and Mr Woodehouse in relation to yourself, I have no right to repeat, but I say unhesitatingly that you have always spoken well to me of Mr Woodehouse, strongly so when I first came, and your anxious desire was to be on good terms with him. I did my best to bring you together, but Mr Woodehouse was impracticable."

On Sir J. Emerson Tennent's first interview after his arrival in London, Lord Grey directed him to place himself in connection with Mr Hawes on the subject of his evidence. He had brought with him from Ceylon copious memoranda digested under distinct heads in refutation of the various charges which had been made against the Ceylon Government in the enquiry of 1849, accompanied by documentary proofs. These drafts of his intended evidence, he placed in the hands of the Under-Secretary of State, for whose use they were transcribed, and some of them printed in Downing Street, and the course of proceeding during his examination was to confer with Mr Hawes or Mr Wilson previous to each day's meeting, to read over the drafts and

arrange the order in which the facts they embodied were to be laid before the committee. His examination on the general policy of the government extended over twenty days. His evidence, as described by Mr Hawes, was "clear, able and unanswerable", and it has since been referred to as containing a complete justification of the measures of the government. In the whole course of his general examination, Sir Emerson Tennent brought no charges of any description against Mr Woodehouse. He carefully avoided importing personality into the enquiry, although it was indispensable for the defence of the government to exhibit the inconsistency between Mr Woodhouse's testimony and the actual facts of the case, and between his oral evidence here and his recorded minutes in Council, in Ceylon.

On the close of his general examination in the latter end of May, Mr Hawes assured him of its success as an unanswerable vindication of the policy of the government, and in reference to his analysis of Mr Woodehouse's evidence in particular, he informed Sir Emerson, both personally and by letter, that he had communicated to his friends in Ceylon the absence of all unkind feeling and the avoidance of any personal expression by which it had been uniformly characterised, and that whatever unfavourable impression might prevail as to Mr Woodehouse's conduct in relation to the enquiry, it had in no way been derived from him, but from the evidence given by Mr Woodehouse himself, and in reference to matters occurring and arising here over which Sir Emerson could have had no influence or control whatsoever.

It having been attempted ineffectually by cross-examination in the committee to weaken Sir Emerson Tennent's evidence in any particular, it was sought to get rid of it en masse by discrediting Sir Emerson Tennent's character as a witness. For this purpose, Mr Woodehouse reappeared with a private letter of Lord Torrington's in his hands, in which his Lordship imputed to Sir Emerson Tennent, in terms the most offensive, a want of sincerity and good faith towards himself. This unfortunate letter was written in May 1849, shortly after Mr Woodehouse had left for England, and during that interval of delusion produced by Mr Woodehouse's insinuations under which, as his Lordship had already acquainted Sir Emerson, he had laboured for a time in regard to him, and under the influence of which he had been betrayed into expressions for which he had subsequently apologised in his letter already quoted... .

Of being informed by Mr Hawes of the production of this letter, Sir Emerson Tennent endeavoured to convince that gentleman that he could not possibly be the individual meant in Lord Torrington's letter to Mr Woodehouse, and showed him as proof to that effect other letters from his Lordship to himself, written not only prior to that addressed to Mr Woodehouse, but subsequently, down to the latest period, all containing the strongest assurances of uninterrupted confidence and unqualified esteem. Although the contents of these letters were sufficient instantly to neutralise the effect of that produced by Mr Woodehouse, Sir Emerson Tennent expressed to Mr Hawes his strong repugnance to resort to the use of private letters to the committee, even for the vindication of his own character, but expressed his intention to submit them to the Secretary of State alone, and to leave the vindication of his honour as a public servant in Earl Grey's hands.

Mr Hawes assured him in reply that such a course would not be sufficient, for although it would effectually protect his character with the Secretary of State, still, unless this were generally effected with the committee with whom his credit as a witness had been shaken by the exhibition of Lord Torrington's letter, the value of his evidence would be destroyed, and the government in consequence would lose the benefit of his testimony. In short, Mr Hawes assured Sir Emerson Tennent that his character as a gentleman and a public officer would be "annihilated" if he did not remove the impression already created by Lord Torrington's letter to Mr Woodehouse, and that in order to effect this, he had no alternative but to exhibit to the committee Lord Torrington's private letters to himself. ...

At a subsequent stage of the enquiry, a second attempt was made to discredit Sir Emerson Tennent as a witness, Mr Ryder, an intimate associate of Mr Woodehouse, having stated incautiously in the committee that doubts as to Sir Emerson's veracity had been entertained by some of the civil servants in Ceylon, and that the subject had been alluded to in the opposition press of the colony. But Mr Ryder was, however, obliged to admit that he was not aware of one particle of the foundation for such a slander, and that it had no higher authority than the scandal and gossip of the place. On a subsequent day, Sir Emerson Tennent produced the very newspaper to which Mr Ryder referred, and read from it a declaration that, whatever exception might be taken to his political acts, Sir Emerson Tennent, as regarded personal integrity and in all the relations of private life, was "exemplary" (see evidence of 1850 when printed).

This second assault having proved as abortive as the first, Mr Woodehouse renewed the attack the third time by producing a private letter from the Bishop of Colombo, totally irrelevant to the enquiry, but embodying offensive allusions towards Sir Emerson personally. Sir Emerson met this by narrating certain public transactions in relation to church affairs in Ceylon, in which the Bishop had felt dissatisfied with the decisions of the local government, although they had all been approved and confirmed by the Secretary of State. And in order to exhibit to the committee the low state to which society had been reduced in the island, where the character of no individual is protected from aspersion and the assailants are to be found even amongst the most unexpected parties, Sir Emerson showed to the committee certain letters from the Archdeacon, accusing the Bishop of defamation and calumny, which had been placed in his hands by the senior Colonial Chaplain, the Rev. Mr Glennie, with the full knowledge and by the direction of the Archdeacon himself, that Sir Emerson should make a public use of them in Downing Street, where they would "be of service in showing how the Bishop acted with the government". Sir Emerson considered that he was acting in consistency with the authority he had just received in showing them to the committee for the same purpose. ...

Down to the close of the committee Sir Emerson Tennent never had from Mr Hawes or any member of her Majesty's Government the slightest intimation of dissatisfaction either with his conduct in Ceylon or his evidence in the committee. On the contrary, he had received invariable assurances of the high satisfaction afforded by both. The documents sent home from the colony by Sir Emerson, which formed to a great extent the basis of the government policy, were described by Lord Grey in his despatch to Lord Torrington as being characterised by "industry and remarkable

ability". His conduct as a public officer was applauded by his Lordship as exhibiting public spirit, integrity and zeal, and his evidence before the committee as declared by Mr Hawes to be "clear, able and unanswerable", whilst it was divested of all unkind feeling, personality or irritating expressions.

Under these circumstances, Sir Emerson felt much surprised when, shortly after the close of the committee, Mr Hawes intimated to him that after the disagreeable scenes which had been passing in England, and the dissensions which prevailed in the colony, he might not find it altogether "for his own comfort" to return to Ceylon, and he suggested to him the propriety of looking to some other destination for the future.

Sir Emerson told him in reply that he entertained no apprehension on the subject, that he had lived for five years amidst these dissensions, which were now happily exposed and would be discontinued, and that so far as his own comfort was concerned, he had no hesitation in returning to his duty. Beside which, he reminded him that he had but a very short period of service to complete in order to entitle him to his retiring pension. On a subsequent day, Mr Hawes renewed the same subject, but with more earnestness, accompanied by the hint that the public interest might be concerned in an arrangement by which Sir Emerson might not return to Ceylon. Sir Emerson thereupon wrote to Lord Grey in some alarm, and intimated (if any change with respect to him was contemplated) his hope that, as the office ... had been conferred on him by Lord Stanley for life, it could only be exchanged for a government of such importance as would be a recognition of the faithfulness with which he had discharged his duties in Ceylon and of the undiminished confidence of the crown. Lord Grey replied upon the 7th of August (1850), and for the first time declared that "during the late proceedings of the committee, the fact had been brought to light that the public interest had suffered very severely from dissensions and a spirit of bitter hostility between Sir Emerson and some of the principal civil servants, in the course of which neither party were by any means free from blame". ... At the close of the session, Lord Grey promised early attention to the settlement of the Ceylon question, and Mr Hawes assured Sir Emerson Tennent in August 1850 that his honour and his interests would be equally protected by Lord Grey, that a government in a salubrious climate would be conferred upon him, and that his pension would be assigned, not to the full extent to which he would be entitled on the completion of seven years' service, but in proportion to the period of his actual tenure of office connection [sic] with Ceylon.

The result of Lord Grey's deliberations was at length communicated to Sir Emerson Tennent by a letter dated 3rd December 1850 (see papers, 4 February 1851, p.4), in which Lord Grey unexpectedly announced Sir Emerson Tennent's removal from office in Ceylon on the grounds of, first, the existence of personal hostility between himself and Mr Woodehouse, second, the preferment of charges against the gentleman by Sir Emerson in his evidence, and thirdly, the production of private letters to the committee without the consent of the writers. ...'

There then follows a detailed refutation of all three charges.

After these lengthy extracts, no further comment on Emerson Tennent's career is required. The arrangement of the archive is self-explanatory (see the Classification Scheme). Its provenance, as a result of the marriage of the Emerson Tennent heiress into the Langham family in 1893, is explained in D2922/G.

[See also MIC526 for partial microfilm copy].

