CHAPTER ONE ✤
EARLY YEARS

SCOTLAND [ff. 1–2”]

During the earlier part of my boyhood I lived with some very near relations at Aberdeen,—

"la bella Aberdona
Che del gran fiume Dea in riva è posta”;¹—

where I was in the habit of hearing much talk about Lord Monboddo, Lord Gardenstone, Dr. Beattie, and Major Mercer,—the three first being personages then very celebrated in the north, and the fourth a well-known resident at Aberdeen.

I was often in the company of the daughter and grandchildren of Lord Monboddo; but I do not remember to have heard any anecdotes about that truly profound thinker and learned writer, though very frequent allusions were made to his belief that men were originally furnished with tails, and he was very generally described as being "an oddity."²

Lord Gardenstone—far inferior in intellect and acquirements to Lord Monboddo—greatly surpassed him as "an oddity": when he ate fish, he always used his fingers instead of a knife and fork; and when he had occasion to travel from Edinburgh to Aberdeen, or vice versa, he in-
variably went round about by Stirling rather than expose himself to the dangers of crossing the Queen’s Ferry."

Dr. Beattie was a good deal over-rated by his fellow-citizens of Aberdeen: but, though his prose essays are now not undeservedly forgotten, his *Minstrel*—at least the First Book of it—will continue to be read with pleasure and to secure for him a respectable place among our minor poets. He was truly unfortunate in his domestic circumstances,—in the insanity of his wife, and in the death of his two beloved sons—his only children. It is, therefore, the less to be wondered at that he was occasionally tempted to have recourse to wine for relief from his afflictions, and that he should have been seen—as Mr. Peter Mylne, the member for Aberdeen, declared that he had seen him—kneeling in a state of intoxication before the Duchess of Gordon. When, during his last illness, he was deprived of the power of speech and motion by repeated fits of paralysis, with an almost total loss of memory and of his mental faculties generally, his niece Mrs. Glennie tried in vain to make him understand that his old friend Sir William Forbes had come from Edinburgh to see him; nor did he recognize Sir William.

There is nothing of poetical fiction in the following passage of *The Minstrel* which expresses his intense dislike of the crowing of the cock:

> I have heard his intimate acquaintances say that it invariably affected his nerves in a most violent and painful degree;

> "Fell chanticleer, who oft hast reft away  
My fancied good, and brought substantial ill,  
O, to thy cursed scream, discordant still,  
Let harmony aye shut her gentle ear," &c. Book i. st. xxxvi.

Beattie's younger son Montagu (so named after the authoress of *The Essay on Shakespeare*), who died in his eighteenth year, though much inferior in acquirements to his earlier-deceased brother, was endowed with no ordinary talents. The late Dr. Brown [?] [ . . . ] was one of his youthful companions, and told me that, while they were making together a botanical excursion in Scotland, Montagu "discovered a new species of grass."
The name of Major Mercer is now, I presume, scarcely remembered even at Aberdeen: but he was a highly accomplished gentleman, and composed verses which rose considerably above mediocrity. A collection of his *Lyric Poems* was published by Sylvester Douglas Lord Glenbervie, whose sister was his wife. They reached a third and enlarged edition in 1806. The Memoir prefixed to them informs us that “His eldest daughter was now married to a gentleman of good family and fortune in the county; and for some years both he and Mrs. Mercer and his other daughter passed a considerable part of the year with them”; and that at a later period he was visited “by a severe domestic misfortune, which, notwithstanding the consolations of friendship, philosophy, and religion, clouded the remaining days both of himself and Mrs. Mercer.” p[p]. xlili[-iii]. The “gentleman of good family and fortune in the county” was Mr. Gordon of Wardhouse. His wife, Mercer’s eldest daughter, a lady of exquisite beauty, several years after her marriage ran away from her husband and children with Colonel Woodford: this was the “severe domestic misfortune which clouded the remaining days of Major and Mrs. Mercer.”

As it is more than probable that the readers of the present work have not the slightest acquaintance with Major Mercer’s compositions, I adduce the following specimens of his poetry. . . .

[MARY ANN PATON; f. 57]

But no record exists of his having written a farce called *The Schivas* Carrier, which, though never printed, was acted at the theatre in Aberdeen. It must have been a difficult matter to form a collection of old pictures in that northern region: he, however, possessed a whole roomful of them—such as they were—in his house in Castle-street; where, as also in a sort of arbour which he had erected in a wood on the banks of the Dee in the neighbourhood of Aberdeen, I have frequently breakfasted with him, and always found him an entertaining and instructive host. The last time I ever saw him was at a small evening-party to which we were invited by a gentleman in Aberdeen to hear the singing of Miss Paton and of her mother, who happened to be on a visit to that city. Miss
Paton was then a little girl, and had not yet appeared in public; but she was wonderfully precocious and confident, and gave full promise of the excellence which she afterwards attained: she concluded her performances by reciting, with a superabundance of gesticulation, Dryden’s *Alexander’s Feast*, and towards the end of the ode, she scampered round the room, leading on the Macedonian conqueror to fire the palace of the Persian kings. Mrs. Paton was an accomplished musician, with a powerful voice, and sung—somewhat in the manner of Catalani—Italian songs of the highest class.

**Sir David Ochterlony [ff. 9-10']**

This very distinguished man was nearly related to my paternal grandmother, Mrs. Dyce—née Miss Ochterlony of Tillifrisky in [ . . . ],—who took him into her house at Aberdeen during his boyhood, treated him as one of her own children, and equipped him when he sailed for India as a cadet. Though he never returned to Britain, he retained the warmest affection for my grandmother and her daughters; as is proved by the following long letter addressed to my aunt Miss May Dyce,—a letter which, if written by a person of less celebrity, would perhaps be hardly worth printing.

"I have this instant, my dear cousin, received yours of the 12th Oct', and very much fear I did not keep my promise of writing to you more fully subsequent to my letter of Nov. 1812. I am a shocking procrastinator, and so readily find excuses that are *satisfactory to myself* for not engaging in so terrific an employment as writing, that I am afraid your expectations of a letter have been disappointed. If I have, however, been by some accident a good boy, and told you how welcome, though undeserved, your letters are to me, and how happy I am to hear of all of you, but more particularly of your esteemed and respected mother, still a line in corroboration will not be unwelcome. If you look at the map, my dear cousin, you will find me at the very John O’Groat’s House of Hindostan; and I send my letters to Calcutta without knowing that a ship is under dispatch, and seldom know by what conveyance they have been sent; and as I do not keep copies or memoranda for reference, I
would not venture to assert that I have written to you once, though you may have received many more proofs that Aberdeen, my beloved old friend your mother, and all those who talk of leading-strings are remembered with regard.

Thank you, my kind cousin, for your purse, which, I suppose, is a kind hint to me to economize and fill it as soon as possible; but I fear, my dear friend, you did not consult mamma in this present, or she would have told you that it was quite needless to send one to an Ochterlony, whose spendthrift dispositions may be traced in the Family Pedigree duly by the sale of estates from the large Barony of that name now Kelly to the last remnants of Tulerfrosky [sic] and Pitforthy, which I sincerely wish had been purchased by Alexander; that one or other or both might have belonged to a descendant of the name; as I am sure I shall never be able to call them mine, or even return to look at the domains of my ancestors.

When I tell you, my dear cousin, that long before you receive this, my eldest daughter will be married to a young officer of cavalry, and that I have marriage-portions to provide for five more, beside the expense of education and their equipment to India, your worthy and beloved mother will not expect I shall have the happiness of personally expressing my sincere and affectionate regard. If I have not hinted at these circumstances before, it is from that natural unwillingness that we feel to disclose our transgressions; though, had I sent them to Scotland, I know no one to whose liberality, kindness, and humanity I would have confided them with greater confidence. They are not the less entitled to my affection for being what they are, and I have only to hope and trust that the sins of the father will not be visited on his offspring.

In the last dispatch of shawls I have taken such precautions that it is next to impossible they should not be received; and I beg you will never thank me by saying anything about them more than acknowledging their receipt; for I can assure you, if you think them worthy of acceptance, I shall be the party obliged.

Believe me, my dear cousin, affectionately interested in the welfare of the whole family of Rosebank, and that Alexander’s riches are not so much an object of my envy as the happiness he may have enjoyed in
the society, and promoting the welfare and comfort, of your mother, whom I have ever regarded with filial affection.

Your sincere friend and affectionate cousin,

Da. Ochterlony.

Ludianeh, 1 Aug 1814."

MRS. SMOLLETT [f. 13]

While a boy at Edinburgh, I was occasionally in the company of this old lady, with whom my mother, from her childhood, had been well acquainted. She was the daughter of Mr. Renton and of Lady Susanna Renton (daughter to the Earl of Eglinton), and the widow of Mr. Alexander Telfer-Smollet of Bonhill, nephew to the famous novelist. She was very spritely in conversation; and that she had a love of the higher kind of literature was evident from the books which I have seen her reading,—such as *Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, &c &c. But what gave her a sort of notoriety was her fondness for the drama, which had reached such an excess, that (unless prevented by illness or some particular engagement) she went to the play every evening; to the horror of her more rigid presbyterian neighbours, who opined that a woman on the verge of 80 should have long ago renounced such vanities. Regularly, about twenty minutes before the curtain rose, a hackney-coach drew up to her door in Princess Street to convey her to the theatre; whither she was generally accompanied by her daughter; but frequently she went alone. Even when the house was half empty (which was usually the case, if there was not the attraction of some London "star"), Mrs. Smollett might be seen the lonely and attentive occupant of the box next the stage, looking the very picture of a perfect gentlewoman, in her black dress of a rather obsolete fashion, with a large fan in her hand.

To my great delight I was now and then allowed to join her at the theatre; and once when I and several other boys were with her in the stage-box during the performance of Blue-beard, and when, owing to
our position and the crowd upon the stage, we had not a full view of the paste-board elephant with its rolling eyes,—Mrs. Smollett tapped with her fan on the edge of the box, and motioned to the Bashaw's Attendants to stand back a little,—which they immediately did.

Another night I was in her box along with Mr. and Mrs. (afterwards Sir Walter and Lady) Scott, when John Kemble acted Brutus in *Julius Caesar*. On the conclusion of the play, he was announced for Sir Giles Overreach (a part which at that time neither Cooke nor Kemble had been able to render so popular as it was made by Edmund Kean at a considerably later period); and I distinctly recollect hearing Scott remark to Mrs. Smollett that "Sir Giles was Richard the Third in lower life,"—a criticism which, if I mistake not, he has somewhere repeated in his works.

Mrs. Smollett was on terms of intimacy with the manager of the theatre Henry Siddons and his charming wife; who mingled very little in Edinburgh society, most of the northern gentry of those days looking down with contempt on players. She was also the patroness of Terry, who was then a favourite member of the Edinburgh company; as is noticed in the following passage of Lockhart's *Life of Sir W. Scott*,—the readers of which memoir are doubtless quite in the dark as to who "old Mrs. Smollett" was: "A perforated cross," writes Scott in a letter to Terry, speaking of Abbotsford, "the spoils of the old kirk of Galashiels, decorates an advanced door, and looks very well. This little sly bit of sacrilege has given our spare rooms the name of the chapel. I earnestly invite you to a pew there, which you will find as commodious for the purpose of a nap as you have ever experienced when, under the guidance of old Mrs. Smollett, you were led to St. George's, Edinburgh."

A sister of Mrs. Smollett was alive during my boyhood,—Mrs. Sharp of Hoddam, who, under her maiden name of Renton, figures in Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, where Miss Lydia Melford writes to her friend Miss Laetitia Willis thus: "I contracted some friendships at Edinburgh, which is a large and lofty city, full of gay company; and, in particular, commenced an intimate correspondence with one Miss R,—t—n, an amiable young lady of my own age, whose charms seemed
to soften and even to subdue the stubborn heart of my brother Jery; but he no sooner left the place than he relapsed into his former insensibility."  

STRAWBERRY-HILL; LORD WALDEGRAVE [f. 224]

"Carter, the draughtsman, designed many of the Gothic ornaments for Strawberry-Hill: and he told me that, during his residence there, he was obliged to have all his meals brought to him from Twickenham; Horace Walpole forbidding the servants to supply him with potatoes, or even to allow him to boil his tea-kettle on the kitchen-fire." Mr. Adair Hawkins.

In 1816 I passed some time at Strawberry-Hill, accompanying my uncle Sir Neil Campbell thither on a visit to his friend and fellow-soldier Lord Waldegrave, who was a Lieutenant-Colonel in the army, and had been present at the battle of Waterloo. The house was then exactly in the condition in which it had been left by Horace Walpole,—a strange gim-crack half-wooden Gothic castle, crammed with very costly works of art and "curiosities" of every description. A portion of these—the more valuable of the miniatures, &c.—was kept under lock and key, and not exhibited to the sight-seeing strangers who on certain days, to the great inconvenience of the family, were permitted to wander through the apartments. We used to breakfast in the Library, to which the dingy volumes on the open shelves gave rather a gloomy air. After breakfast we sauntered awhile about the grounds; where we were occasionally joined by old Baroness Howe, who, "bearded like the pard," had walked over from Pope's famous residence at Twickenham which she had bought, and who, I believe, was almost the only lady-visitor to Strawberry-Hill, its mistress being under a cloud; for she had lived with her lord before marriage, and their eldest son was unfortunately illegitimate. (In 1812 Baroness Howe married Mr. Wathen Phipps, an oculist of note, who subsequently was raised to the dignity of Sir Wathen Waller Baronet, his pretension to the name of Waller being through his maternal grandmother. This marriage was, on the part of the Baroness, a comparatively innocent freak. But not such was her
barbarously levelling Pope’s house to the ground, altering and mutilating his garden, and erecting at the extremity of his property that house which is now occupied as two tenements,—a desecration only inferior to the felling of Shakespeare’s mulberry-tree by parson Gastrell at Stratford: the obelisk erected by Pope to his mother’s memory, with the affecting inscription, “Ah Editha! matrum optuma! mulierum amantisima! vale!” has been whisked away to Gopsall, Lord Howe’s mansion in Leicestershire—what business has it to be there?) My seat in the dining-room at Strawberry-Hill was opposite to Sir Joshua’s picture of the three Ladies Waldegrave, which I had never seen before, and which completely fascinated me.

Lord Waldegrave, who in features bore a considerable resemblance to the portraits of Horace Walpole, was a gentlemanly soldier-looking person, of rather reserved manners. He did not pretend to any knowledge of literature: and it was said that he felt greatly disappointed that no money had been found in the box which, in accordance with the terms of Horace Walpole’s Will, was to be opened when he had “attained the age of twenty-five years” and was then to “be delivered to him for his own.”

The contents of the said box—Memoires of the last ten years of the reign of George the Second and various other manuscripts—were, during my stay at Strawberry-Hill, unpublished; and it would seem that they had not yet been submitted to the inspection of any one who could estimate them properly; for when I ventured to ask Lord Waldegrave “What they were?” he replied in these very words, “A mass of worthless political papers.”

CUMNOR PLACE (from my Diary) [f. 231’]

“Oxford, May 16, 1821. I walked to day with my friend George Sandby to the village of Cumnor, about three miles from Oxford, now rendered an object of curiosity by the novel of Kenilworth. We saw the tomb of Antony Foster [sic], which is erected close to the altar in the church, and on which is inscribed a copy of Latin verses (written probably by some erudite Oxonian) in memory of himself and wife, whose figures are placed above them engraved on brass plates. Nothing remains
of Cumnor Place, which stood very near the church, except the foundations.

We were informed by the clerk that the story of the murder of Lady Dudley was a common subject of conversation among the inhabitants of Cumnor, the circumstances of it having been handed down from father to son. He himself had been told the story by his father-in-law, who died about eight years ago, at the age of eighty-seven, and who had learned the particulars from his grandfather. The tradition is, that Foster, having dispatched the servants to a neighbouring fair, assisted by his confidential attendant, drove a nail into Lady Dudley’s head, and left the body lying at the bottom of the stairs, that it might be imagined that her death was occasioned by a fall. Her ladyship’s ghost, the clerk further informed us, was very troublesome, paying frequent visits to Cumnor Place, till at last by means of several clergymen, it was laid in a pond at no great distance from the spot of the murder.”

1. Fortiguerra’s *Ricciardetto*, C. XXIX. 53.

2. It appears to me that his countrymen undervalue Lord Monboddo as a literary character; they seem to consider him less eminent in that respect than his contemporaries Lord Kames, Lord Woodhouselee, and Henry Mackenzie: but surely he excelled them immeasurably in learning, and, unless I am much mistaken, in abilities also.


4. [Mercer’s rehabilitation will have to await another editor. Four poems occupy the remainder of f. 2 as well as ff. 3-4: “To a Fountain,” “The Invitation,” “To the Vine,” and “To Folly.” All are in the Lyric Poems.]

5. Schivas [was] an estate belonging to Mr. Irvine of Drum. [At the top of the leaf, in a hand possibly not Dyce’s, is written, “Qy to whom this relates? probably not Major M.”] I find the following in *Boswell’s Life of Johnson*, ed. George B. Hill, rev. L. F. Powell, V, 2d ed. (Oxford, 1964), 496: “Mr. Irvine of Drum was Alexander, 18th Laird of Drum, 1754-1844. ‘... Married a daughter of Forbes of Shivas, niece of Gardenstone’s, who directs him...’ says the confidential report made in 1788.”

6. Though her style was never of the purest kind, she undoubtedly ranked as one of the best and most attractive of English singers; and during several years drew a large salary at Covent-Garden Theatre, “which,” said Charles Kemble to me, “she very well deserved.” But the deterioration of her singing on returning from engagements in America was piteous,—it had become coarse and vulgar.

7. [I cannot locate Tillifrisky.] In *The Gentleman’s Magazine* for March 1826 [XCVI, N.S. 19, 275-76], is a Memoir of Sir David, in which though the writer mentions that he “went to India when eighteen,” nothing is said about his residence at Aberdeen under the roof of my grandmother.
8. I do not understand the allusion here.

9. My father,—afterwards Lieut. General Dyce. [The Memoir in the Gentleman’s Magazine states that Sir David’s “paternal great-grandfather, Alexander Ochterlony, was Laird of Petforthy, in the county of Angus” (275-76).]

10. His children were all illegitimate.

11. A present to my three aunts of three shawls apiece,—the largest and the most costly that the looms of India could furnish.

12. See above, note [9.]

13. The education of young Scotch ladies, the contemporaries of Mrs. Smollett, was generally very imperfect: few of them could spell tolerably,—The Honourable Mrs. Boyd, an Englishwoman, who died at an advanced age, told me that when in company with her husband (a brother of Lord Errol) she first visited Edinburgh, she went to an evening party at the residence of a person of distinction; that, on entering the room, she seated herself beside two ladies of high fashion, who were in earnest conversation about the annoyance of vermin in a house, and that one of them said to the other, “Yes, Mem, nae dout, boags *[bugs] is bad, but, troth, Mem, I almost think that flechs *[fleas] is waur *[worse].”

14. [“Life of Kemble,” The Miscellaneous Prose Works (Edinburgh, 1841), I, 814: “That singular character [Sir Giles] is Richard in ordinary life, as extortioner and oppressor, confident in his art and in his audacity. . . .”]


17. But the disfigurement of Pope’s villa was begun by Sir William Stanhope, who at the poet’s death became by purchase possessor of his estate. [DNB, s.v. “Pope, Alexander”: “After his death the house was sold to Sir William Stanhope, Lord Chesterfield’s brother. In 1807 it came into the possession of the Baroness Howe, daughter of the admiral. She destroyed the house and stubbed up the trees.” The destruction of “Pope’s famous residence” occurred before Dyce’s visit to Strawberry Hill.]