JOHN STUART BLACKIE

THE police inspector was very polite. He had much pleasure in returning to the signore tedesche their passports, and they might rest assured that the Kingdom of Naples was honoured by their presence.

The three German ladies—a mother and two daughters—smiled an uneasy appreciation of the official compliments. There was a suggestion of unpleasantness to come. Their party numbered four, but only three passports had been returned. The inspector took the fourth from his pocket, glanced at it, frowned, put it back in his pocket and blew out his chest.

" But the signore capitano cannot proceed," he announced.

A hurricane of protests broke out in which a shrill cackling male voice rose high above the melodious German accents of the ladies, and far surpassed them in fluency of invective. It declaimed in more or less choice Italian against officials and tyrannies, principalities and powers, and, when Italian was exhausted, broke out afresh in German, quoted Latin and occasionally clinched matters with a pithy observation in the broadest

Aberdonian and a great guffaw. The ladies became alarmed. Their indignation at the police changed to tearful depreciations of their companion's vehemence. He was only doing himself harm. He was asking to be imprisoned, tortured, shot, hung. Ach, lieber Gott, let him be moderate.

Ah, luckless speech! It heated the Scotsman's wrath seven times over. "Moderate, madam!" he shouted. "I hate and abominate moderation and compromises and discretions and all such subtle crafts and devices invented by the Father of Lies for the destruction of the soul. Moderate when I, a free British citizen, *civis Britannus*, am hindered in my lawful occasions by a Neapolitan Dogberry," etc. etc. etc.

The police inspector, who was not really a bad man, took it all in good part.

"Pazienza, signore capitano——" he began.

"Capitano!" yelled he of the strident voice. "Am I, a student of humanity in the singular and in the plural—mark that, singular *and* plural—a scholar, a philosopher and a Christian soul, which is a grand thing to be, though I grant you a poor profession, am I for ever to have thrust upon me the title and designation of some demented swashbuckler that has gotten into the brains of you and your superiors like a maggot in a rotten ploom? Capitano! In the name of all the gods and saints whom you ignorantly worship, do I look like a capitano?"

A grin of Italian breadth and richness transfigured the official's countenance as he answered, " Davvero no, signore filosofo ".

And indeed, for all its ferocity of language and bearing, anything less military than the figure of the suspect could hardly have been imagined. He was an undersized and slightly built youth of two-and-twenty, clad in a shabby and ill-fitting summer suit that had once called itself white. His fine light brown hair flowed about his shoulders, according to the fashion that betokened the German student of the 'thirties. His hands were white and small. That his face was blotched with a disfiguring skin complaint was a pity, for his features were unusually delicate and regular and were saved from being merely beautiful by a pair of restless blue eyes in which intelligence, fury, impishness and good humour sparkled all at once—the eyes of a born actor. His movements were ungraceful but amazingly lively and expressive. He stamped and danced round the common-room of the *albergo*, flung his arms about, shook his mane, and finally threw himself on a bench in an attitude of grotesque despair.

The inspector was sympathetic, but what could he do? All he knew was that an English name very like the signorino's appeared on the black list of the Neapolitan police. No doubt there had been a mistake, but that would be at once rectified when the signorino's passport had been

sent back to Rome for verification. That would take some days, and meanwhile the signorino must consider himself under open arrest.

A groan came from the figure on the bench.

"Ma che, signore filosofo," rejoined the inspector, "la prima delle virtuti filosofiche, non è la pazienza? Pazienza e coraggio, signore."

Whereat John Stuart Blackie, student of the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Göttingen and Berlin, leaped from his recumbent gloom, kissed the police inspector on both cheeks, and shook him warmly by both hands. "You're right, man," he said solemnly, "categorically and completely right. Cicero had to put up with more than this at Mola di Gaeta, and who am I that I should complain? Will you do me the pleasure of drinking a bottle of wine with me?"

The policeman did, and Mr. Blackie communed delightedly with the shade of Cicero for several days until, having been certified from Rome as neither *capitano* nor *carbonaro*, he took an affectionate farewell of the police inspector and went on his way to Naples.

I have taken the liberty of reconstructing this little incident of Blackie's youth for the sake of the picture it gives of the man, not only as he was in 1831 but as he remained in all essential respects throughout his long life. He died in 1895, in his eighty-sixth year, having enjoyed for nearly half a century a unique position in the regard of his fellow-Scots. He was not precisely respected:

nobody could ever harbour so chilly a feeling as respect towards Blackie. He was not precisely admired, partly because he was not precisely admirable and partly because admiration implies something that is beyond our power to imitate. Rather he was adored, with that vicarious and deeply revelling satisfaction men feel in the contemplation of their national genius made flesh. For every patriotic Scot, however staid he may appear, cherishes in some corner of his being the notion that in spirit he is a Blackie.

This may seem a paradox, for excepting his pedantry, his vanity, his constant itch to be improving people in and out of season, his occasional bad manners and his almost invariable bad taste, Blackie had nothing in common with that conglomerate of the bleaker virtues and more sordid vices that is the conventional image of the Scot. He had not even the conventional humour of the Scot, for, strictly speaking, he had no sense of humour at all, but only a sense of fun, which is not the same thing. Of the Scot's proverbial caution (which is but another name for self-distrust) he was utterly devoid. His reckless tongue and manners landed him in many a scrape, and on one occasion all but ruined his career. He was boisterous, bombastic, theatrical, affectionate and generous to an embarrassing degree. His opinion on any subject requiring judgment was liable to change at least once in every twenty-four hours and in spite of all changes was invari-

ably wrong. An exception may be made in favour of his views on the pronunciation of classical Greek and the importance of preserving the Gaelic tongue, which he maintained to his dying day. Yet, within a few hours of his death, he made as his confession of faith that the only things that mattered were " the poems of Burns and the Psalms of David, but the Psalmist first ". One can hardly help feeling that had he lived a day longer he might have reversed the order and died protesting with his last gasp his innocence of any inconsistency.

The Celtic temperament has been held responsible for so much that it would be no great addition to its burden to saddle it with Blackie's flightiness, but it would be entirely wrong. For Blackie, though he inaugurated a mild Celtic revival in Scotland, was no Celt. He was a Lowlander born and bred. He came of an old Border stock ; he was born in Glasgow ; and he spent most of his childhood, youth and early manhood in Aberdeen—a city which, being an outpost settlement, is rigorously anti-Celtic alike in speech and culture. He had a slight strain of Highland blood that his parents thought important enough to be commemorated by the name of Stuart being given to him in baptism, but it does not appear that he himself took any interest in his remote Highland connections, or that he was ever guilty of the foolish Lowland snobbery that boasts vaguely of a Highland ancestry.

Blackie was too simple and too much of an egoist to be a snob, and the idea that descent could be worth a moment's consideration beside the eternal miracle of the individual man would have seemed to him the height of absurdity. It is true that he laboured hard to bring about a Celtic revival in Scotland, but his motives were perfectly disinterested. He was a romantic philologist just as Walter Scott was a romantic antiquarian, and his enthusiasm for the Gaelic tongue proceeded solely from a patriotic desire to preserve a national treasure that was in danger of being lost. He was far advanced in life when the fad came upon him. During a holiday in Skye he casually asked the local postman, who did his rounds on a pony, what was the Gaelic for horse. He was told *each*, and the sudden realisation that *each* must be the same as *equus* and ἱππός convinced the Professor of Greek at the University of Edinburgh that Gaelic was a language of some importance. The Gaels were appreciative of his interest. They presented him with illuminated addresses and plied him with as much flattery as ever he could absorb; but they never failed to snigger when he attempted to speak their mother-tongue.

That a being so inconsequential in character and attainments should have attained a commanding position in the academic life of Scotland may seem strange, but it is in part at least explained by the conditions that prevailed in the Scottish

universities until the middle of the nineteenth century and even later. On the strength of a comparatively low percentage of illiteracy in the general population Scotsmen persisted, with a Chinese complacency, in boasting of their superior "education", and took a childish pleasure in recalling the fact that their little country had four universities when mighty England had but two. Except that the motive of bringing learning to every man's door was praiseworthy, there was really nothing to boast about, and much to regret. The country could barely afford one university, and the pretence of maintaining four could not fail to be disastrous. It resulted in a chronic state of penury and stagnation in which the very idea of a university came near to perishing altogether. It is true that in the eighteenth century Edinburgh developed a famous school of medicine and that in Glasgow also medical and scientific studies may be said to have flourished. Divinity was perhaps in no worse case in Scotland than anywhere else, and it is at least to the Kirk's credit that it always required candidates for its ministry to have a reasonable knowledge of Hebrew. Law was hardly taught at all, and aspirants to the Bar, who really wanted to learn something, betook themselves to the schools of Leyden and Utrecht. But it was in the liberal arts that the academic nakedness of the land was most apparent. The occasional appearance of a commanding figure like Adam Smith, Dugald

Stewart or Thomas Reid cannot disguise the fact that the teaching personnel was poor and the standards of instruction pitiable. In all the universities the faculties of arts were thronged with students — many mere children of eleven or twelve—of whom the only qualification required was that they could read and write, though if they knew a little Latin grammar, so much the better. At " college " they learned enough Latin to be able to stumble through a book of Cæsar or Livy, to recognise a book of Virgil, and to repeat a few of Horace's odes by heart; enough Greek to read a little Homer and Xenophon; enough philosophy to understand the meaning of *non distributio medii*; and enough mathematics to be able to solve a quadratic equation. Degrees in arts, therefore, were easy to obtain, but though many matriculated few troubled to graduate in a faculty that was regarded as a mere anteroom to the specialised studies of the other faculties. In all the circumstances Samuel Johnson was unusually moderate when he likened learning in Scotland to food in a beleaguered town—where everybody gets a little and nobody gets enough. To aggravate the general conditions, the two smaller and poorer of the Scottish universities kept up the genteel pretence of a collegiate constitution. St. Andrews had three and Aberdeen two " colleges ". To-day the names alone survive, but in 1821, when John Blackie was entered as " *civis universitatis Aber-*

*doniensei*s" at the ripe age of twelve, King's and Marischal were rival institutions, both miserably equipped but equally determined at all costs to maintain their dignity as independent corporations. At Marischal, which was Blackie's college, there was no Professor of Humanity. The students were drilled in Latin accidence and syntax by the rector of the Grammar School, who filled the office of lecturer.

For a lad who was intended for the lower branch of the law, the curriculum was perhaps sufficient; but when, after a short experience of an Aberdeen "advocate's" office, certain adolescent heart searchings convinced Blackie that he had a religious vocation, he was sent to Edinburgh to learn a little Greek and to pick up, if possible, some general culture from "Christopher North". He remained in Edinburgh nearly two years, during which time he learned no more Greek than sufficed to enable him to pick his way through the Gospels with the aid of the Authorised Version, and, after a promising start, grievously disappointed Wilson by his neglect of class exercises. In due course crusty Christopher spoke to him more in sorrow than in anger. "What has been the matter, Mr. Blackie? There is something here that I cannot understand. You gave me in an excellent essay, one of the best I have received this session, and I fully expected to have you on my prize-list; but you have given me only one, and you know

my rule." It is recorded that Blackie wept, but said nothing. He never lacked courage, but there are some communications that simply cannot be made. How, for example, at the age of sixteen could one tell Christopher North that the study of moral philosophy, however excellent, was as filthy rags compared with the acquisition of evangelical truth and the assurance of the life eternal?

Poor John! Edinburgh in 1825, for all its superior culture, was no place for him. There was more free emotion in the air than was healthy for an exceptionally impressionable youth of sixteen. Scotland was on the eve of its fiercest religious struggle since the days of Knox. For a century the Moderate party had ruled the Kirk, often with a high hand, but on the whole in the interests of commonsense and fairplay for the average sensual men for whom, after all, Christ died. Now, however, their long ascendancy was drawing to a close. The Evangelicals, from a contemptible faction, torn by intestine feuds, had become a powerful and disciplined party, which every year attracted to itself in increasing numbers the youth, the enthusiasm, the learning and, what was really serious, the new wealth of the country. In 1825 actual warfare was still some years distant, but the rival parties were massing their forces and concentrating upon strategical points. The Moderates were silent, sullen and bitter, knowing that they would have

to fight a losing battle. The Evangelicals were vocal and arrogant. The citadel was already in their hands, and they could boast from their pulpits (and did) that Moab was their washpot and over Edom would they throw their shoe. Blackie, with his constitutional weakness for being on the side of the angels, succumbed to the prevailing sentiment of Edinburgh. He searched the Scriptures, visited the slums, prayed without ceasing and lamented his lost condition. This was all very well, but it was not what his father had sent him to Edinburgh for. Mr. Alexander Blackie was a quiet but determined Moderate who, as a devout man and a bank manager, knew that there was a time for all things. In consequence of his unseasonable piety John was forthwith brought back to Aberdeen so that he might complete his theological course in an atmosphere which, if chilly, was at least uncontaminated by the hot and clammy breath of the evangelical sirocco that blew over the south and west. It was a happy change. The Professor of Divinity at Marischal College, Dr. Brown, who was also Principal of the University, had once held a chair at Utrecht, and his great ambition was to revive at Aberdeen the art of Latin disputation. Blackie was one of the few men who responded to his efforts. He did not learn much theology from him—nobody ever did for the good reason that Dr. Brown had never been able to learn much himself—but

he did learn the art of thinking and speaking in moderately classical Latin, and the process cleared and cheered him wonderfully. Still Mr. Blackie, senior, was not satisfied. John continued to be too religious and moody for his father's taste, and so the desperate course was taken of sending him to Germany "to have his jacket widened", as it was expressed. In April 1829 he sailed from Leith in the Hamburg packet with two companions, sons of the minister of Old Machar, *en route* for Göttingen.

There is to this day, with all its freedom of communication and breaking down of old barriers, something pathetic about the plight of the young Scotsman who makes his first adventure to the Continent or even across the Border. He is as raw and defenceless as a crab without its carapace. All his life he has lived in a community that may fairly be described as the hermit kingdom of Western Europe, and *mutatis mutandis*, he has all the virtues and limitations of a Tibetan—that is to say, he is an intelligent—at times extremely intelligent—kindly soul who has been brought up in the belief that religion and civilisation, properly understood, are bounded by his own surly coasts and the river Tweed. He has a profound respect for his national institutions, which are peculiar without being in the least original. They consist for the most part of a jurisprudence in which the Civil Law and French feudalism hold an uneasy converse with certain

elements of the common law of England, a church that is the perfection of Presbyterianism but has lost all appreciable contact with Geneva or Holland, and a manner of speaking English which is with difficulty intelligible to the average English ear by reason of its pure vowels and clear articulation. The discovery that these worthy institutions are not valued by the world at large as he values them is disconcerting and painful in the extreme, and the young Scot's first reaction to it is that the world at large must be wrong. This is particularly so in the matter of religion. Strictly speaking, the Scottish people have very little religious capacity—witness the fact that they have produced no religious literature of any repute—but they are (or were until recently) convinced that the whole of Christianity consists in certain religious observances, of which "Sabbath" observance is by far the most important. The rigours of the Scottish Sabbath have lately been somewhat mitigated, but within the memory of men not far advanced in middle life they were formidable indeed. All secular amusements other than eating and sleeping, which were freely indulged in, were not merely forbidden; they were unthinkable. The child who absent-mindedly hummed a "profane" tune sent a thrill of genuine horror through the nursery, and even the occasional singing of the National Anthem in church produced an uncomfortable feeling. The writing of letters was

winked at in liberal families, always provided that they were not business letters and were posted after dark. To read a novel was scandalous, while to open a newspaper (except for the purpose of referring to church notices) was the abomination of desolation. For the purpose of going to or from church, but not otherwise, it was lawful for the laity (though not expedient) to ride in a Sunday tramcar. For a minister, however, who must testify to the Church's disapproval of Sunday tramways, a cab was a religious necessity.

Such being the Sabbath rôle of life in the 'eighties and 'nineties, one can imagine its austerity in 1829, and John Blackie's consequent discomfort at finding that Sunday at Göttingen was not at all like the Lord's Day at Aberdeen. People in general did not go to church much, but they went to the opera a good deal, and in that regard students and professors, even professors of theology, were the worst sinners. Against that there was the quelling fact that these professors and students represented a plane of knowledge that the simple Scot had never even imagined. To him the teaching of the German universities was a revelation as full of thunderings and bright light as that which befell Paul on the Damascus road, and hardly less bewildering. Here was learning as large as life, if not larger. Compared with Saalfeld and Ottfried Müller Principal Brown was a shrunken and misshapen

pigmy, and even Christopher North was no giant. And when, after a semester at Göttingen Blackie went to Berlin and heard Schleiermacher, Neander and Boeckh, the conquest of his native innocence was complete. Even his Sabbatarianism, which hitherto he had continued to wear with a dour defiance, was well-nigh stripped from him by a casual remark of Neander's that the Scottish notion of Sunday observance was " etwas jüdisch, nicht wahr ? " This occurred in the course of a civil conversation at one of the professor's Sunday evening receptions which Blackie, after some consideration, considered he might lawfully attend. Seldom has so trite a remark excited so much commotion in the hearer. It was the decisive moment of his life. For the first time, as he himself records, he realised that Scottish theology and Christianity were not convertible terms, and the discovery gave him a sudden distaste for the ministry. A joyous *Wanderjahre* in Italy, which followed the German year, served only to confirm his change of mind. He returned to Aberdeen in high spirits, proclaiming that nothing would induce him to become a minister, and that his mission in life would be to reform the teaching of the humanities in the Scottish universities according to the best German models. And this, under Providence, whose ways are incalculable, he did after a fashion achieve.

His initial prospects were not bright—in fact

anyone less fitted by nature and attainments to make an academic figure could hardly have existed between Maidenkirk and John o' Groat's. It is true that he returned from the Continent with a very decent measure of what may be termed accomplishments. Ottfried Müller and Boeckh, Schleiermacher, Neander and Strauss had given him such general notions of culture as an extremely ignorant but intelligent foreign student might pick up in a couple of semesters. In Italy he had enjoyed the friendship and fatherly guidance of Bunsen. Starting with a good store of scholastic Latin, just a little Greek and no modern language, he had within two years learned to speak, write and think in German and Italian, liberalised his Latin and advanced his Greek. He had also acquired a working knowledge of Romaic and of English as it is generally spoken. The expediency of the latter accomplishment would probably not have occurred to him had not a fellow-student asked him to give a few lessons in English in return for some assistance with Goethe and Schiller. Blackie, ever conscientious, made a diligent study of phonetics according to Walker's Dictionary,[1] and for the rest of his life he prided himself on the correctitude of his English speech.

[1] Walker's Dictionary (3rd edition) included "Rules to be observed by the Natives of Scotland for attaining a Just Pronunciation of English", contributed by John Murdoch, Burns's schoolmaster and tutor. Murdoch had the distinction of instructing Burns in the elements of French and Talleyrand in the elements of English.

All this was good enough in its way, but hardly enough to constitute a title to a university chair, even if its limited value had not been discounted by glaring demerits. Blackie had studied at four universities with credit but without special distinction: he had not even a degree. He had considerable learning, garnished with a certain amount of fantastic pedantry, but he was no scholar, if by the term scholar we understand one who can so organise his learning that it becomes something more than the mere aggregate of all he knows. For teaching he had no capacity whatever. In themselves these defects would have been of little account. The Scottish universities were full of men who could neither learn nor teach; but they were grave men who rode cannily, whose orthodoxy and devotion to the Tory party were above suspicion, and who could hold their tongues. But Blackie was a noisy, garrulous, guffawing, opinionative fellow, uncouth in dress, eccentric in demeanour—

> He'll flourish bludgeons and wear tartan breeks,
> A monstrous stock and lang hair ower the cheeks—

a latitudinarian, a Radical and, worst of all, a man who could never be made to understand the difference between thinking a thing and saying it.

Yet the improbable happened; nor had Blackie very long to wait for it. Seven years after his return from the Continent he had a chair. In the interval he had been admitted to the Scots

Bar and had practised as an advocate—that is to say, he had frequented Parliament House daily and had held two briefs in the course of five years. These Edinburgh days, however, were not unprofitable. He zealously continued his Greek studies. His knowledge of German and his facile pen found him in bread and cheese and even toddy for social occasions. While still reading law as a student he had undertaken a translation of Part I. of *Faust*. (Part II. he held in no esteem.) When it appeared Carlyle and G. H. Lewes spoke well of it, but it could not please anybody more than it pleased Blackie himself. "It has been my first and chief endeavour", he wrote in the preface, "to seize, if possible, the very soul and living power of the German rather than to give a careful and anxious transcription of every individual line or minute expression." This is Blackie to perfection in its flamboyant assurance and fine contempt for exactitude as a slave virtue. All his life he loved attempting magnificent things in a slapdash way and, whatever others might think, he was seldom dissatisfied with the result. Such simple enthusiasms are apt to be infectious. On the strength of the favourable reception of *Faust* he became a regular contributor to *Blackwood* and the *Foreign Quarterly Review*. For some years he confined himself to German subjects, but in 1838, feeling that he now knew enough Greek to be going on with, he wrote an article on

Müller's *Eumenides* in which, with much flourishing of the bludgeon, he proclaimed his faith in German classical scholarship and his undying contempt for the English variety. In the following year, having begun a translation of Aeschylus, he gave the world, through the medium of the *Foreign Quarterly*, his views on " Greek Rhythms and Metres ", a subject which he was peculiarly unfitted to discuss profitably; for though the most inveterate jingler and rhyme-slinger that ever lived he had a poor ear and was incapable of writing a musical line of verse. But the article was fresh, provocative and, in its way, erudite, and it appeared at a moment which gained it more attention than it might otherwise have received. Only a few weeks before the date of publication the author had been appointed to the newly established chair of Humanity at Marischal College, Aberdeen.

Blackie's appointment was denounced at the time as a Whig job, and so it was. The member of Parliament for Aberdeen, Mr. Bannerman, was a great friend of the Blackie family, and a man of some address and interest. He persuaded the Government to establish and endow a chair of Humanity at Marischal College " with me to recommend a man the place 'ud just about fit ". His recommendation of Mr. John Stuart Blackie, advocate, was duly accepted. It was a great stroke of fortune, and there was nothing for Blackie to do but to thank God for His good gift

and to proceed to enjoy it. Nothing, that is, that would have occurred to anyone not afflicted with that predilection for the unseasonable that in Scotland is known as "principle". With Her Majesty's commission in his hands, Blackie suddenly bethought himself of a horrid obstacle to his installation, viz. the Westminster Confession of Faith, which in those days of university tests every professor-elect was required to subscribe. Could the pupil of Neander and Schleiermacher conscientiously sign such a thing, and if so, on what conditions? It was a hard question, and Blackie's answer, with its droll mingling of innocence and guile, was the worst possible. He appeared before the Presbytery of Aberdeen and signed the gruesome document. Then, when the clerk was proceeding to make out the usual certificate, he requested that it should be put on record that he had signed the Confession "not as my private confession of faith, nor as a churchman learned in theology, but in my public professorial capacity and in reference to University offices and duties merely". The reverend court were not in the least impressed. "We have nothing to do with any gentleman's mental reservations", was their reply.

Now it never annoyed Blackie to be laughed at—in fact he liked it; nor did he mind being contradicted, for he had a plentiful supply, if not of retorts courteous, at least of quips valiant, not to speak of lies direct, and he could flourish his

bludgeon. What he could not stand was a snub. He went out from the Presbytery with their precious certificate in his pocket and wrath in his heart. That same evening he sent his declaration to the two leading Aberdeen newspapers with a covering letter in which he said what he thought about the Presbytery of Aberdeen, and which in his heat he forgot to mark "not for publication". The sequel was an uproar in which all parties lost their heads. The Presbytery, raging furiously together, cited Mr. Blackie to "compear" before them and apologise; whereat Mr. Blackie said very civilly that whatever emperors might do, there would be no Canossa for John Stuart Blackie, and he would compear before the Devil first; whereat the Presbytery declared Mr. Blackie's certificate of subscription null and void and ordered him to give it up; whereat Mr. Blackie (acting on legal advice) said he would do nothing of the sort; whereat the Senatus of Marischal College, rejoicing that the Whig intruder would now be sent about his business, postponed Mr. Blackie's installation *sine die*; whereat Mr. Blackie haled the Senatus before the Court of Session; whereat the Senatus said it was all the Presbytery's fault; whereat the Presbytery craved to be sisted as defenders;[1] whereat Lord Cunninghame kicked the Presbytery out of court on the ground that their statutory duty to witness subscriptions was

[1] Applied to the Court to be joined as defendants.

purely ministerial; whereat Mr. Blackie's joy was tempered by the reflection that since his appointment two years had elapsed during which he had not received a penny of stipend, and that the Court had shown its appreciation of his stand for principle by calling his scruples impertinent and deprived him of his costs for causing unnecessary trouble. Still victory is victory, and to the end of his days Blackie was convinced that the abolition of the University tests in 1853 was in large measure due to his action in 1839.

Such was the rough music that preluded the rollicking comedy of academic life that Blackie played for the next half-century. He delivered an inaugural lecture full of *Aufklärung* and uplift, which the Aberdonians found so entertaining that, when in the following January—on the sacred anniversary of Burns's birth—he discoursed to a popular audience on "The Principles of Poetry and the Fine Arts", the occasion was a great success. The little man was elated. "There's for you," he wrote to his betrothed, Eliza Wyld. "Platonism preached to the granite ears of Aberdeen, and with applause!" There was but one flaw in the performance—he had read the lecture, and that vexed him. "I will not be satisfied now till I become a great public speaker. . . . My intention is to free myself altogether from the bondage of the paper, and get to preach real poetry and eloquence. . . . A bold cast for an erect soul, looking not down on

slavish paper ! . . . Let me bellow my pedagogic thunders grandly ! " And bellow them grandly he did for the rest of his life, according to his own noisy notion of grandeur. Never again did he clip the wings of his spoken words by committing them first to paper. Never again was his heart troubled by considerations of relevance or restraint in anything he said. His tongue wagged, his spirit soared, his students raised the devil's own row, the vulgar mob cheered, and Blackie was supremely happy. There was, no doubt, a method in his madness. He knew—and if he did not know beforehand his students soon opened his eyes—that he was no teacher in the ordinary sense of the term, for the devout disciple of Carlyle and future encomiast of Prussian *Machtpolitik* lacked the capacity for mastership which is the teacher's first quality. The Scottish student is by nature turbulent, but he is kept within bounds by his belief in the Olympian character of the professor's rostrum. Now Blackie loved the Olympian character—none more so—but, child-like, he could never sustain it very long. He fidgeted in his lofty seat and was for ever making undignified descents to the common level, enjoying the divine thunderings but loathing the detachment that gives them their value in the ears of mortal men. A vain man—and Blackie was vain as a peacock—who also has a craving for familiarity generally falls into the contempt that Blackie just managed to

escape. One degree less of essential lovableness, of perfect innocency, of ardent idealism would have made the difference. But as it was his frailties served him uncommonly well. His classroom was a bear-garden, but even a bear-garden may be cultivated. Blackie made it one of his means of propaganda. His students, unruly as they were under his instruction, went out into the world and talked about him as a notable character who was worth watching. He developed his popular lectures, and if his platform antics made the public laugh, that was all to the good so long as they kept asking for more. He pamphleteered at prodigious length about university reform, and to prove that he was a person to be taken seriously he finished his translation of Aeschylus and sold up his household furniture to pay for its publication.

In these various ways the Professor of Humanity at Marischal College acquired a certain fame, so that when, at the end of 1851, he entered as a candidate for the chair of Greek at Edinburgh, his friends were able with some plausibility to represent him as a scholar and a man of genius. The Town Council of Edinburgh, who were the patrons of the chair, were quite prepared to believe this even to the extent of forgiving Blackie for omitting to prepay the postage on his application (testimonials from Ritschl and Brandes enclosed), which shows how superior were these worthy men to small

prejudices. Blackie overdid it, however. Instead of allowing his antic disposition to get what glamour it might from the distance between Edinburgh and Aberdeen, he must needs arrive in Edinburgh in full panoply of bludgeon, breeks and bad manners to conduct a personal canvass of the patrons. And before his distracted friends could hustle him back to Aberdeen he had mortally offended most of his potential supporters. To repair the mischief was a heartbreaking task. The old scandal of the Confession of Faith was raked up, and it was further reported that Blackie was an habitual Sabbath-breaker and contemner of religious ordinances. The Town Council took a serious view of such matters, as Agassiz found a few years later. That distinguished man applied for the chair of Natural History. The first councillor he canvassed listened to his story and put one question. "Are ye a jined member o' ony recognised releegious body?" Agassiz retired. Blackie was more fortunate. A conscientious bailie went to Aberdeen to make inquiries on the spot about the candidate's Sabbath Day doings. He brought back a favourable report, and after a notable contest the casting vote of Lord Provost Duncan McLaren, M.P., gave Blackie the chair. On what grounds of reason or predilection the council made their final choice it passes the wit of man to say. Blackie's most serious rivals were an Englishman and an Irishman—Sir William Smith and Pro-

fessor Macdonell—both of whom could have given him many points in scholarship, but it would be unfair to ascribe his success to the fact that he was a Scotsman. Nor was he a compromise, for no body of men outside of Bedlam would have chosen Blackie by way of a compromise appointment. It was one of those things that simply happen and which, if they are to be interpreted at all, can be interpreted only in terms of emotion. One can hardly imagine any body of Englishmen electing a man like Blackie to anything, much less to the dignity of a professorship: their ingrained sense of discipline and respect for public conventions would secure them against doing anything so interesting and indefensible. In Scotland, however, the tradition of discipline is a recent growth, and to this day it is always difficult to get a Scotsman to understand why things that "are not done" ought not to be done. He makes a great parade of his respectability and takes a genuine pride in it, just as a savage takes a genuine pride in his store clothes; but there is always the secret hankering for the loin-cloth and feathers, and sometimes it has its way. So, one may imagine, it was with the God-fearing burgesses of Edinburgh when Blackie appeared among them. They heard the old wild music; they were repelled; they were fascinated; they struggled; they succumbed.

In the event they had no need to be ashamed. Victorian Edinburgh was a grim town. The

industrial revolution had struck a mortal blow at the intellectual and artistic life that had made the last quarter of the eighteenth and first quarter of the nineteenth century the golden age of Edinburgh. And like the men of letters the Scottish gentry, who had hitherto been content with Edinburgh as their metropolis, now acknowledged the supremacy of London. The evangelical revival wrought its glowing will upon those that remained—churchmen who made the grey welkin ring with their brawling, lawyers, doctors, second-rate Government officials, bankers, shopkeepers and a foul mass of slum dwellers who could boast that they were just as parasitic as their betters. Mr. Turveydrop, masquerading in Sabbatarian black and a Geneva gown, and Mrs. Grundy governed the city. It was John Stuart Blackie's function, by the grace of God and the unwisdom of the Town Council, to act as a spiritual tribune against that melancholy consulate, and knowing it he bore himself accordingly. "When I walk along Princes Street", he once remarked, "I go with a kingly air, my head erect, my chest expanded, my hair flowing, my plaid flying, my stick swinging. Do you know what makes me do that? Well, I'll tell you—just *con-ceit*." The person at whom this half-brick of paradox was flung was probably too much stunned to realise that it was not a confession but an admonition to imitate one who respected his own feelings because he was a man made in God's

image and a king in that he would allow none the right to tell him how to behave. He was fond of discoursing *ad libitum* in this strain, and no doubt did a lot of good thereby in a community where people went through life apologising to Heaven for being a little lower than the angels. That his glorification of the individual might have sinister implications never troubled him: his Germanism never included a liking for Hegel or a knowledge of Nietzsche. If the point had been taken he would have retorted that John Stuart Blackie was a free activity specially created by God and not a schoolman's syllogism invented by the Devil. And he would have been right, for, as a dour Divinity student grudgingly observed of him, "Blackie is neither orthodox, heterodox nor any ither dox: he's juist himsel." All the same, his "philosophy", as he was pleased to call it, could make the kindliest of men grovel before Bismarck, rant sentimental nonsense in praise of war, and utter a volume of *War Songs from the German*, dedicated to Carlyle, who cordially acknowledged the compliment and supposed that, "if one could sing, they would be very musical and heart-inspiring".

The election to the Greek Chair at Edinburgh is the last thing in Blackie's life that can be called an event. The long remainder of his years consisted merely of amusing incidents and a reputation. He was always busy, of course, for a

reputation like Blackie's needs to be kept going, and that means hard work. He published without ceasing—pamphlets, books and articles on university reform, Greek, politics, morals, Scottish nationality and anything else on which he thought the public mind required edification, and a vast amount of doggerel rhyme, sentimental, religious, patriotic and facetious. He toured the Highlands and most of Europe, was frequently in London and met everybody he could there. He lectured. He sang. He even danced as King David did. Details would be tedious, but a few characteristic dates may be mentioned. In 1861 he visited Eversley and "helped Kingsley to drain a bottle of burgundy". In 1863, while spending a holiday in Skye, he learned that Gaelic was an Aryan tongue—a discovery that filled him with such enthusiasm that after nearly twenty years' agitation he succeeded in establishing a Celtic Chair at Edinburgh. In 1864 he lectured at the Royal Institution on the laws of Sparta (so bellicosely that an indignant Quaker protested and left the hall) and met Herbert Spencer, whom he found "logical without being angular—a very loveable sort of man". He also breakfasted with Gladstone at Carlton House Terrace, where he quarrelled with a Cambridge Don about the pronunciation of Greek and afterwards felt a little guilty about it, though he was sure he was "not impertinent, only decidedly and distinctly explosive". In

1866 he published a translation of Homer which has merits but is not read. In 1867 he met Browning, "an active, soldier-like, direct man, a contrast to the meditative ponderosity of Tennyson". In 1871 he went to Berlin to witness and take part in the German triumph, wrote a sonnet on Bismarck and sent it to the subject, who omitted to acknowledge receipt of same. In 1872 he collogued with Cardinal Manning and dabbled in spiritualism, for which he was severely rebuked by Carlyle. In 1874 he heard Bradlaugh and liked him so much that he wrote him a long letter hoping "that in the Socratic way I may do him some good", in which he was disappointed, though Bradlaugh was very civil. In the same year he gave the first of the lectures on Scottish song, with vocal illustrations by himself, which continued to be a popular entertainment for many years. In 1880 he espoused the cause of the Highland crofters with an honest zeal that excused a multitude of indiscretions. In May 1882, lecturing at Oxford, he used the Master of Balliol's surname to illustrate his views on Greek accentuation, which so hurt the little panjandrum's dignity that he walked out. Three months later, being well over three score and ten, he resigned his professorship and devoted the thirteen years of life that remained to him to the maintenance of his character as a Scottish national institution. In 1885 he burst into the vestry of Lyndhurst Road

Church, Hampstead, one Sunday, and kissed Dr. Horton on both cheeks in token of his appreciation of that gentleman's pulpit gifts. In 1888 he was able to record "a very warm friendly time with Browning, who loves me like a brother", and a party at Lord Rosebery's town house where, at the express request of Mrs. Gladstone, he obliged the company with "The Bonnie House o' Airlie" so as to stop the G.O.M. from discoursing on French novels and Popery —"both unlovely subjects". A day or two later he admired in the afternoon a "most wonderful thunder-roll of piano force from a Polish girl named Natalie Janotha" that he heard at Mary Anderson's, and in the evening Wilson Barrett's performance in *Ben-my-chree*, as to which we have Sir Hall Caine's word for it that the translator of Aeschylus "wept like a little child".

Blackie's appearance was not so much distinguished as distinctive, and he was always at pains to make it more so by freakish experiments in dress. The tartan breeks of his earlier days have been mentioned, and there was also for a short time a singular wig that aroused the mirth of the Edinburgh students. The outdoor costume he finally adopted, and wore for more than thirty years, consisted of a black sombrero, a plaid draped Highland fashion over his frock-coat, and a stout and rustic walking-stick—a combination no doubt intended to suggest the

garb of old Gaul, the fire of old Rome and the *Wissenschaftlichkeit* of Göttingen in the 'thirties. But whatever the intention, it was exceedingly becoming to a lively old man with beautiful features and feathery white hair. Indoors he still wore his sombrero to shield his eyes while working, but exchanged his frock-coat and plaid for a brown dressing-gown trimmed with red. In this guise he received his friends, who, if they did not mind exhortations, puns, guffaws, jingles, kisses, punches in the ribs and slaps on the back, enjoyed themselves wonderfully. In any case, Mrs. Blackie would be there to relieve the situation. Eliza Wyld—who had insisted upon marrying her queer cousin in 1842, not exactly *malgré lui* but rather to his surprise—was her husband's antitype, being tall, elegant in all her ways, tactful, sparing of words and a confirmed hypochondriac. She ruled him strictly and bore him no children, both of which afflictions he suffered cheerfully. After all, it was something to be the husband of one of the Wyld girls of Gilston—"the five finest female figures in Fife", as he liked to call them. As a brother-in-law and as an uncle he was greatly beloved, and he made the most affectionate, the most *galant* of husbands.

This excellent man, who loved all mankind except the Pope and Oxford and Cambridge Dons, died on March 2, 1895, in his eighty-sixth year. All his life he had been a bit of a mounte-

bank, and in his old age he nearly became a bore. But when he was borne to his grave in the Dean Cemetery all Scotland mourned, and well it might, for he had deserved well of his country. His specific enthusiasms—university reform, Scottish nationalism and so forth—were of little account. His real service was to provide his generation of Scotsmen with what William James calls the " moral holiday ". Poor souls, they needed it.