RECOLLECTIONS OF A SCOTTISH NOVELIST

CHAPTER I

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE

A GROUP of very little children, all dressed up and starched out, were being shepherded along the corridor of an English country house, to be ushered into the dining-room with dessert, according to the fashion of a bygone period—when one of them, the youngest, called a halt outside the door, and lifting up her face to the solemn butler in charge, demanded of him to blow her nose for her.

This is my earliest recollection; for the suppliant was myself, and I was but three years of age. The country house was Park Place, near Henley-on-Thames, the residence of my grandparents, Mr and Mrs Fuller-Maitland, where my mother was born, and from which she was married in 1834.

My mother was one of a large family, twelve in all, of whom there are at the present time many descendants in various parts of England; but she alone crossed the Border for a husband, and the story of her wedding the son of a Highland chief is rather dramatic, and, as all concerned are long since dead, may fearlessly be told.

The Fuller-Maitlands led a very secluded life, in accord-

ance with the taste of my grandmother, who was of Puritan descent, possessed of ultra-strict ideas and an innate and piously cultivated abhorrence of society. Her health was not good ; perhaps it was that,—but at anyrate the fact remains that she hardly ever went anywhere, and left my grandfather to enjoy by himself and in his own way the pleasures of fashionable life.

When, however, he desired to return hospitality by invitations, it was another matter. Occasionally indeed he was permitted, grudgingly permitted, to do so ; but if there were no very good report of the people in question —and this was not infrequently the case—the "No" was adamant.

No : such worldlings could not and should not be made welcome within the guarded precincts of Park Place ; and upon a certain occasion it was conjectured by the family that a battle-royal had taken place, for a terrific ringing of bells and hurrying of servants ensued, and orders were sent to the stables for the master's own travelling carriage to be prepared to start on a journey next day. My eldest unmarried aunt (who afterwards became Mrs Herschell, stepmother of the late Lord Herschell), her sister Fanny, some years her junior, and their brother William were ordered to have their trunks packed in readiness to attend their father. My mother, the said Fanny, thought that they did not even know where they were going, but dutifully accepted whatever was in store, and set out for Scotland—she, all unwittingly, to meet her fate.

And what a place to meet it was Rossdhu, on the "bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond"! Thither our little party of travellers wended their way, since a distant connection with the Colquhouns of Luss warranted an offer of a visit while exploring the beauties of the neighbourhood ; and the Sir James and Lady Colquhoun of that day were

friendly, sociable people, always ready to open their doors. Perhaps they were even more glad to do so than usual on the present occasion, since all their three sons were at home, and here were two pretty and well-endowed young ladies—*et voilà tout.*

Of the eldest son (who was to end his life so tragically by being drowned in his own beloved loch many years afterwards) I shall say no more here, for obviously there was nothing between him and either of the Misses Maitland ; but there was John, a dashing young cavalry officer, with blue eyes and curling hair, and he and Fanny—oh ! it was the old, old story over again.

They climbed the purple heights of the mighty Ben ; they sailed over the blue loch, and landed at the various wooded islets ; they whispered to each other the romantic legends of the countryside—(how romantic, how enchanting it must all have seemed to the young girl from the south, especially to one brought up as Fanny had been !) ; and in this case the course of true love certainly did run smooth, for the engagement which speedily followed was hailed with acclamation by both families, and the following January—why not sooner, I cannot tell—but on the 28th of January 1834 the gallant young Scotsman arrived at the Red Lion, Henley—an inn known far and wide now, by reason of the famed Regatta—where he put up for the night, and the next day was married to Miss Frances Sara Fuller-Maitland at the little church of Remenham, a mile or two away.

I do not know to what was due the fact that on his marriage my father, whose regiment was the 4th Dragoon Guards, retired from the service. It seems strange that he should have done so, in the fulness of health and strength, and when only twenty-seven years of age ; but one may be permitted to fancy that the influence of his future mother-in-law was thrown into the scale. She certainly made *some*

terms with the bridegroom, one of which had a considerable —and delightful—bearing upon my own early life, and that of my brothers and sisters; for it was to the effect that every year as long as she were alive, this dear daughter and her husband should pay her a visit at Park Place; and I may add that the promise then given was loyally kept, though it often entailed some effort to keep it, and the old lady lived for thirty years to exact it.

Railways were rare in those days; and if steamboats were in use, they were of such a nature that only on one occasion did my parents venture on the experiment of going by sea from Leith to London. Their experience was such that they never went again.

I will not, however, anticipate. Before starting on their long posting-journey north, the newly wedded couple went for their honeymoon tour—think of it, brides and bridegrooms of to-day who fly to the uttermost parts of the earth —this very young and very well-off pair contented themselves with a wedding-trip round the Isle of Wight! To be honest, neither of them ever cared, then or thereafter, for foreign travel; and it is quite likely that they enjoyed the sunny Under-cliff, the rushing waters in Black Gang Chine, and sunsets reflected by the coloured rocks of Alum Bay, as much as future generations have enjoyed Alpine heights, Venetian gondolas, or starry nights on the Nile,—while as their after-life was full of variety and interest as regarded the picturesque scenes of Nature, they had nothing to regret in the way of having lost an opportunity. A little set of sand-pictures—we all know the kind, we who can now look back across the lapse of half a century—I possess as relics of this little, happy, humble wedding-tour.

I have also been told that the bride travelled in a large, wide bonnet, with a drooping feather laid across, and a short, round silk dress. She was very pretty, and no doubt looked

it in the first flush of youth and happiness, despite the early Victorian quaintness, not to say ugliness, of her attire. Of my father's appearance I have also heard it said that he looked well in everything, and that his sisters-in-law vied with each other in embroidering waistcoats for him. He was married in one of white satin, embroidered by my mother in dark and pale-coloured heather—and a very lovely piece of work it was—or, I might say, "is," for it is now in the possession of his eldest grandson.

Off set the young pair at last for the "North Countree," travelling in their own carriage, with posthorses; and their first home was Arrochar House, at the head of Loch Long, which my grandfather, Sir James Colquhoun, handed over to them, expecting that they would settle down and live always there.

Little he knew. My father was a sportsman and a naturalist—*his* father was neither. They had not, I fancy, an idea in common, though there was always perfect good-will between them; but, as for being tethered to one spot, when there was all the length and breadth of Caledonia stern and wild to choose from, when eagles were to be found in Glencoe, and seals in the Sound of Mull, and ptarmigan here, and capercailzie there?—John Colquhoun shook his head and cocked his eye. He was going to fish as well as to shoot, and he was going to write *The Moor and The Loch*; he very soon knew the rugged outline of The Cobbler from Arrochar doorstep too well, and commenced what was termed later by a friend his "Residential tour of Scotland."

In the course of a long life, for he lived to be eighty-one, very few people could have covered a greater variety of sporting-ground, shot over more moors, or fished more rivers, in his native land, than did my very fortunate father, who was able to begin so early, and to devote himself so exclusively, to his favourite pastime.

Not that it engrossed him to the neglect of duties and responsibilities. Let this be distinctly understood. My mother was profoundly religious, my father was not "profoundly" anything—it was not in his simple nature to be so; but he was conscientious and high-principled, even before being united to one who fostered and developed all that had been early inculcated in a Christian home. In after years he took up more than one good work, and with one in particular his name will ever be associated by those who recall the Grassmarket in the Old Town of Edinburgh as it was in the last century. Of that more anon.

We will return to our young couple in their heyday. A son was born, and by the desire—perhaps we might hint "command"—of the Colquhoun grandparents, was given the name of "James," and none other. They had an eye to the future. Who could say if this were not a "Sir James" in embryo?—and at any rate it was well to be provided against such a contingency. A venerable relation, the Countess of Caithness, gave a christening robe of Honiton lace, and held the infant on the solemn occasion; but, as it was received into the Church of Scotland, there were no godfathers. In rapid succession more children followed; in fact, for some years it was a case of the "hardy annual," and as a move had to be made to Edinburgh for each occasion, a desire arose on the part of the young parents to have either there or in the neighbourhood a house of their own to winter in, even though the "Residential tour" of Highland homes had begun with the renting of Leny House near Callander, and farewell for the present had been paid to Arrochar.

This move, and the suspicion of a slight to their own lands conveyed by it, had already given rise to soreness on the parts of Sir James and Lady Colquhoun; and my mother, in telling us once about it, added that when a further

extravagance had to be confessed, in the purchase of a house at Portobello, although it was made with her own money (and turned out to be an excellent investment), her heart was in her mouth. The deed was done, however, and Lady Colquhoun was the last person to make herself unpleasant to no purpose. She was the first visitor to the new abode, and took a keen interest in all its arrangements.

Portobello, a small seaside resort about three miles out of Edinburgh, was, at the time I write of, a very different spot from the Portobello of to-day. It may have been a suburb, but it was a suburb innocent of omnibuses and tramways; it had no sea-wall, no band, no trippers; the cavalry regiment quartered for the time being at Piershill Barracks, midway between it and the ancient city under whose wing it nestled, did indeed use the long stretch of sand for manœuvres, and delighted the natives thereby—but this was almost the only excitement of the place.

It was old-fashioned, peaceful, absolutely quiet. It suited my father from one point of view, my mother from another. Both desired to be let alone, after a summer of visitors and entertaining on her part, of hardy exercise and varied sport on his,—and they saw the very house they fancied in a small crescent in which it held the proud position of "The big hoose."

All the others were semi-detached, with nice little gardens before and behind; but "The big hoose" stood on its own feet, with a carriage sweep in front, and two large iron gates, one at each end. *N.B.*—Later, my father let the house for a year to the future Duke of Beaufort, then Marquis of Worcester, whose regiment was quartered at Piershill; and an aged crone who was in the habit of coming up to receive a dole every now and then, thus described what she saw: "There was a poothered[1] heid at the tae gate, an' a poothered heid

[1] Powdered.

at the tither gate, an' savin' your presence, a poothered heid at the door! Me? I jist gaed awa"; and she did not return till the "poothered heids" had vanished, when the poor, bent, old figure of Henny Rose reappeared as if by magic, and came as regularly as before.

To return. I may perhaps be forgiven for lingering over a description of my birthplace, as No. 11 Brighton Crescent proved to be, though not for some four or five years after it came into my parents' possession.

It was a delightful house of its kind; plain and solid, with two wings. The windows ran in a straight line from end to end; the door was precisely in the middle; there was nothing of the *villa* about it.

It was indeed unfortunate that the front rooms faced the north, and that the blue Firth, for whose sake this might have been forgiven, although so near, was hidden from view; but there were other rooms, spacious, sunny rooms at the back, which caught the first beams of the morning sun, and overlooked a pleasant, shady garden, to which a flight of steps, running down from a small balcony, gave access.

Anyone who knew my mother might be sure that among these choice apartments were the nurseries and, later, the school-room. She thought much of such matters. I recollect her saying once with emphasis: "How *can* one expect children to be happy in a dark room?" Perhaps other youthful matrons may take the hint.

The walls of the house were very thick: of grey stone, as were most of the Portobello houses; and however small and squat they might be—and some were very small and squat—they always looked as if they had endless powers of endurance, and might also be snug and comfortable within. A childish fancy of mine was to pick out a tiny building and think it would be just the place to hide in, if all the world

were in pursuit. No one would ever think of looking into such a little, small house!

My parents were singularly lucky in their purchase, rash though they were thought, and thought themselves; for they had "rushed in where angels feared to tread," and bought a domain which had somehow got *blocked* for no conceivable reason,—and had furthermore bought it as it stood, furnished, and stocked with glass and china. The furniture turned out to be of the best—in the drawing-room it was of rosewood; and the massive sofas, tables, chairs, even the unconsidered trifles, of which there were many, were upholstered in pale green satin-damask, which formed an exquisite contrast to the polished shine of the dark wood. Formal the room might be, but it was stately; it was wonderful for a place like little Portobello.

And then the china, the china was a still greater "find." It proved to be Crown Derby of the best period; Worcester with a glaze that made collectors stare; and Lowestoft. And these were the ordinary breakfast, tea, and dinner sets, put down in the house-agent's list as "Table China"!

Their value apparently was unsuspected by seller and buyer alike; for, though strangers often noticed and admired, my mother, who liked to see pretty things about her, never dreamed of their being too good for daily use; and in later years we were all so well accustomed to see our dinner-table gleaming in crimson and gold like the cohorts of the Assyrian, that it was only after I had left the paternal roof, and when I was much in contact with people who pursued the supremely fascinating study of the moment, that I discovered and finally established the real status of the cups and platters so lightly esteemed, so familiarly treated.

They were nevertheless still used, and continued to be so while my parents lived. Now they are in glass cases. I like the old way best.

A wild triangle of marsh land fringed with willows was the centre round which Brighton Crescent circled, and was frequently the resort of birds of passage, as well as others. This was what happened one morning not long after my parents had taken up their abode in their "own house." Enter Duncan, a youthful manservant, with an air of excitement—not having yet attained the correct impassivity of the thoroughly trained butler.

"Oh, sir, if you please, sir, will you look out of the window?"

Look out of the window? His master, who was eating his breakfast, looked at him instead. What on earth did the creature mean?

But the creature stood its ground. "Would you please to look out of the window, sir?" Then despairingly, as his words seemed to produce no effect, "Mistress Aitken told me to say it, sir." (Aitken was the children's nurse, of whom more, much more, anon.)

"Humph!" My father still hesitated, reluctant to leave his porridge and scones—but Duncan was almost weeping by this time. "They'll be gone, they'll be gone;—and Mistress Aitken *said* I was to tell you,—and they'll not stay, though they're there still," taking a glance out himself.

"Well, I saw I had got to give in," related my father, who often told the tale with zest, "and there, what d'ye think? On a branch of the green daphne at our right-hand gate, there was a perfect cluster of exquisite little Bohemian Waxings, birds I had never seen before! I was off to the gun-room like a streak of lightning, and by a lucky right-and-left secured three specimens for my museum —where I identified them for what they were. That woman, she had had the wit to notice them"—he would himself grow excited over the recollection; "not one in a hundred would have seen anything different from our own goldfinches,

at any rate ; and but for her and Duncan, I should have lost my chance." More than once, in the future, he was indebted to this humble observer of Nature for information of a similar kind, and always acknowledged it with gratitude.

The museum alluded to, was in its infancy at the time the little waxings were included in it. I do not know, but I think they were the only foreigners ever given the *entrée*, for it was, with that possible exception, composed entirely of British creatures—either bird, beast, or fish, contributed by my father himself or by one of his four sons. The whole interesting little collection is now at Rossdhu.

From Portobello my father had many a wild, delightful day's sport round the Bass Rock, going thither from North Berwick ; but I expect I am anticipating, for he certainly made the short journey to the latter point by train, and when that line was opened I either have forgotten or never knew. But I was very, very small when he first began to come back from North Berwick, smelling of the sea, and dangling for our admiration nice, soft, fluffy things, some of whose plumage we were allowed to keep for ourselves, if, on second thoughts, they were not considered worthy of being sent to Sanderson, the bird-stuffer.

Does anyone who reads this remember still Sanderson's little downstairs shop in George Street ? My father rarely let a week pass without visiting it.

Among the denizens of the Bass Rock were solan geese, puffins—yclept "Tommynories" in the dialect of the countryside—and other kinds of sea-fowl too numerous to mention. Naturalist as well as sportsman, my father would dilate on them to my mother, who all her life took a keen delight in his prowess (though but for the museum she might have deprecated slaughter of the innocents) ; and had her health at the time permitted, I feel sure she would herself have braved the jumbling waters round the storm-

beat Bass, for her eyes used to kindle at descriptions of it. Her poetic imagination cast a halo over exploits by sea and land, and well fitted her to be the right hand and literary helper of the author of *The Moor and the Loch.*

How far this book had progressed before I was born, I cannot tell; it could be easily ascertained, but I prefer to give here only my own impressions, either acquired from the lips of others, or from personal observation,—so that all I can say is that one of my very earliest memories, following hard upon the blowing of the nose incident, is of passing an open door in the Portobello house, and seeing within, a sunny room, a blazing fire, my father seated at a table littered with papers, and my mother reclining on a sofa, but sufficiently propped up to enable her to write upon the sheet of foolscap in her hand. "Come awa'; your papaw and mamaw's busy," exhorted the nurse, hustling us past; but I hung back a minute. My mother had paused to mend her pen (she always used a quill, and pointed it with a penknife), and something slipped off her lap, and, oh joy! she hailed me in to pick it up. I lingered, hoping something else would fall, but it did not, and I had to go—to go out in a cold, March wind, along a bleak, sandy shore, and drink the water of a certain yellow little stream, whose mineral properties were supposed to be beneficial! It seemed to me then—it seemed even after I had got over the horrid taste of the horrid water, and was all in a glow from running with my hoop—that grown-up people had the best of it on mornings like those.

Nor was that peep of warmth and comfort and pleasant occupation a solitary one. The room was on the ground floor, with windows accessible from the garden balcony. We could all take a look as we passed in or out; and as we older grew, it came to us, let fall casually no doubt, that our parents were writing a book.

MISS F. S. FULLER-MAITLAND
afterwards MRS. COLQUHOUN

Advisedly, I say "our parents"—for no one would have been more ready to allow how much he owed to the critical and cultivated perceptions of his pen-woman than her husband.

Their plan of work was this. He, having previously collected his material—and I take this opportunity of asserting that every statement, every incident jotted down in the diary he kept for over forty years, may be relied on for absolute truth—read aloud from a pencil draft, noting and correcting as he went. If there were no fault to find, she, in her elegant, clear handwriting, which was as easy to read as print, wrote down from this dictation, and then it was her turn to read aloud. "We went over each page many times," this patient secretary told me in after years.

For herself, her solitary literary achievement was a remarkable one—remarkable in that it was not followed by others. She was asked, in common with others, if she would try her hand at finishing the hymn begun by Henry Kirke White, "Oft in danger, oft in woe"—or, as it originally stood, "Much in sorrow, oft in woe." My grandmother, Mrs Fuller-Maitland, an ardent hymnologist, wished to include this in a small volume she was preparing for private circulation.

At that time her daughter Fanny was only sixteen; but her three and a-half verses, which she produced, I believe, very quickly, are now in every English hymn-book, sometimes with their source acknowledged, sometimes not. The first six lines only are by Kirke White.

It seems strange that so promising a beginning should have had no sequel to speak of. A few pretty verses were indeed gathered up and published by Macmillan towards the close of my mother's life, but I cannot honestly ascribe to them any merit; nor did two quaint little tracts written for the fish-wives of Newhaven, penned during her residence

at Portobello, and inspired by the constant appearance of those stalwart vendors of their husbands' catches, contain anything particularly striking or original. The best part of them was the woodcut on the title-page of each, in which the picturesque costume then universally worn, is done full justice to.

Our fish was regularly brought to the door of the house in Brighton Crescent, by one of those Newhaven dames. She would dump her creel outside the kitchen door, which opened into the garden, (hence our view of the lovely vision), wipe her brow with a red cotton handkerchief, and thunder a knock.

"Aweel, Maggie, what hae ye for us the day?" would then be heard from inside; and Maggie's hand would go slipping about among fine flapping soles, whitings, and haddocks, till a selection was made.

A good dish of fish, often of mixed fish, fresh out of the water, could be had for a shilling in those days. Oysters were a shilling the "half-hunder." Think of it, gourmand! Half-a-hundred fine, delicately-flavoured Firth of Forth oysters, for a paltry shilling—and the bell-like tones of "Caller oo!" filling the outer air with melody, thrown into the bargain!

If my two Colquhoun uncles were coming to breakfast any day, fish was always provided, as sea-fish was an agreeable change from the trout, perch and "powan"[1] of Loch Lomond. Why they should have cared to walk down from Edinburgh, where they would be located at the time, to *breakfast*, instead of to some more reasonable meal, one wonders; but it may have been that the fashion set in London by Rogers, and his contemporary wits and poets, had permeated other kinds of society.

Anyhow, they came; when I was old enough to re-

[1] "Powan" is a kind of trout, only, I believe, found in that loch.

member, they had long got into the habit of coming every now and again ; and though my parents kept very early hours—from choice, for they were among those who, having nothing to do, had all day to do it in—there was no change made for the guests.

Who that knows a Scottish breakfast will not confess that it is hard to beat ? I can see my parents' breakfast-table yet : the many and varied dishes, hot and cold ; the dark and light jellies—(black currant and white currant—what has become of white currant jelly ?—one never sees it now) ; then such potato scones, barley scones, and scones that were just "scones" and nothing else, each kind nicely wrapped up in its snowy napkin, with the little peak that lifted and fell back, falling lower and lower as the pile within diminished ; the brown eggs that everyone prefers to white —and why ?—the butter, the sweet, old, yellow butter, framed in watercress. It does not seem strange, all things considered, that the two bachelors who appeared at half-past eight o'clock on the door-steps of their brother's house, found it worth their while to bring to the long, leisurely meal before them sharpened appetites and pleasantly tired limbs.