

CHAPTER X

1843

LIFE IN KINTYRE—EARLY INTEREST IN ECONOMIC QUESTIONS—VISIT TO MULL—LECTURES AT EDINBURGH—VISIT TO TRENTHAM

ON my return to England, I spent some weeks in London, and during the season of 1843 I was a frequent guest at Stafford House, where I was always received with the greatest kindness by the Duchess of Sutherland, who had, indeed, corresponded with me ever since I had met her and her daughter, Lady Elizabeth, at Taymouth the previous year. The enthusiasm of the Duchess in every great cause, and the responsiveness of her emotions to any generous aspiration added to the charm of her manner, and the words 'high nature amorous of good' are those which always occur to me when I recall her brilliant personality. The society which the Duchess gathered round her included a large and miscellaneous contingent from the ranks of literature, of science, and especially the rising section of philanthropists in politics, of which Lord Ashley, afterwards Lord Shaftesbury, was the most remarkable and the most intimate representative. Lord Ashley was a tall man, with a well-marked and powerful face, but with a strong cast of care and melancholy in the expression. He was then in the height of his noble struggle on behalf of factory legislation for women and children.

I was much attracted by the Duke of Sutherland, whom I now met for the first time, and who was then an elderly man with grey hair, and not in

very strong health; but the great amiability and refinement of his character was apparent in his face and in the dignified courtesy of his manner. Never was there a more perfect specimen of what the French call 'très grand seigneur.' The infinite charm of that old-fashioned manner has almost disappeared from among us. I see it yet occasionally, but always and only among the older men of my acquaintance.

After some weeks in town, finding that life in London made reading rather difficult, I turned my steps northward, to spend the summer and autumn in Kintyre and at Inveraray. Without abandoning miscellaneous reading, I followed the wise advice of my tutor, Howson, to give special attention to modern history and philosophy. The famous and charming dissertation by Dugald Stewart interested me immensely, as did the works of Sir William Hamilton. I soon found that I had a great liking for metaphysics, and had great natural delight in abstract thought. I have ever since pursued it with unabated interest, and have found the training it affords of immense value in reasoning of every kind. It is true indeed, in my opinion, that the various schools of philosophy which have appeared in the world have done little or nothing to solve the ultimate problems with which they deal. But, at least to a large extent, they have exposed each other's fallacies; and as the assumptions on which all opinion and all common reasoning rest are really more or less of a purely metaphysical nature, there has been a result of the greatest service. Philosophy, therefore, is a study which pays well, if, indeed, we take care not to become the mere disciples of any one master, and keep our eyes wide open to the weaknesses or failures of every system. Absence from colleges and Universities was undoubtedly a safeguard against the power of mere fashionable schools of thought. Independent and solitary study, with abundant time for reflection, and no 'exam.' to pass, undoubtedly facilitated and encouraged a cautious and a wide eclecticism.

But, above all, my love of Nature, in which difficult and far-reaching problems are perpetually suggested, together with those early habits of attentive observation and of close reasoning on the explanation of even familiar facts, which had been the effect of my father's silent teaching—these influences combined to keep my metaphysics in the place of an invaluable servant, and to prevent them from becoming a dangerous master. The Scottish school of philosophy had the honourable reputation of teaching the philosophy of common-sense, and there is nothing like Nature—including, of course, under that great name our own human nature—and a constant living with its mysterious facts, for inspiring us with a wholesome contempt for the verbal fallacies and deceptive formulæ which are common in all metaphysical systems.

One of my reasons for delighting in the district of Kintyre was the richness of its natural scenery, in aspects which were fresh to me. Its oceanic bird fauna was a perpetual source of pleasure, and in particular the familiar terms on which one entered there into one of the most curious and conspicuous examples of the laws governing the power of flight. In the upper reaches of the Firth of Clyde I do not recollect having ever seen a gannet or solan-goose. But all round the shores of Kintyre there were hundreds of those splendid birds, exhibiting their wonderful performances at all hours of the day. There are many methods of catching fish practised by aquatic birds. Most of those that really live on fish dive for their prey and pursue it under water. The solitary heron waits patiently till unwary fish approach within striking distance, or he stalks them stealthily in the shallows. But the gannet has a mode of fishing which is absolutely its own. It flaps slowly over the sea, and when it sees, in the clear green, a fish within a certain distance of the surface, it stops its way, and throws the axis of its body into the perpendicular; allowing its whole weight to act, it plunges into the sea from such a height, and with such force,

that it remains long out of sight, from the depth to which it has descended below the surface. Foam is dashed up by the concussion, and the noise of the blow can be heard sometimes, on a calm day, a long way off. We are all apt to be very stupid in not seeing the curious problems involved in the familiar phenomena of Nature. It had not then occurred to me to wonder how any animal frame, more especially the usually delicate frame of a bird, could withstand without injury the constant repetition of such shocks all day long in the procuring of food; nor did it occur to me that this particular bird must be somehow specially adapted for and defended in the operation. I had only noted other peculiarities, which were great. I had noted that, although a very heavy bird, it had very narrow wings—only compensated for by their great length. I had noted that the gannet never attempts to hover, like the kestrel or the kingfisher or the humming-bird; that it never soars, as gulls do, and never interrupts the flapping of its wings, except when strong head-winds enable it to rest a little on their opposing, but also supporting, currents, or when it skims sideways on shelves or planes of air.

All this I had seen. But the plunging act, with all that it involved, had not awakened any intelligent curiosity in my mind, till, in speaking of the bird to a local doctor who was attending my father, a Dr. Macnab, he asked me if I had ever seen the wonderful apparatus in the gannet which enables it to strike the sea with such violence, and yet with safety. I told him I had neither seen nor heard of it. It was then agreed that we should procure a gannet, and that he would act as demonstrator in the dissection. The result delighted and amazed me. Dr. Macnab showed me the special apparatus provided for the gannet—first in an elaborate system of large air-cells in the skin, which were full of air and constituted a most perfect buffer to take off the shock of impact; and secondly, more

ingenious still, in the skin being attached to the body by highly elastic and finely elongated threads or filaments, so that when the blow comes, the whole body of the bird, with all its internal organs, is protected by a slipping integument which gives way all round under the pressure, and yields before it, leaving the nucleus of the trunk in perfect peace.

It was during this visit to Kintyre that my attention was first drawn to the science of political economy—not, fortunately for me, by reading any books upon it, but by noticing and becoming familiar with a history and with actual transactions, of which it is the business of any economic theory to take account. Just as in the fundamental conceptions suggested by biological science my convictions had been rooted more and more in contact with the facts of Nature, so in those connected with political economy my ideas were educated in the transactions of life. It has been a misfortune that none of the professional writers on political economy have had any practical knowledge of the management of landed property. Even the best of them, such as Adam Smith, continually betray ignorance by the most preposterous theoretical propositions. The Argyll estates in Kintyre were, more than most others at that time, an object-lesson in all that concerns the origin of ownership in the soil, the conditions essential to the advance of agriculture, and the laws governing successive occupancy.

Our ancestor the Marquis, as leader of the Covenanted party, was of course favourable to that political party, and gave a hospitable welcome to those who were persecuted by his enemies in the Low Country. The blue hills of Kintyre and the blue hills of Ayrshire were visible from the opposite coasts. Many farmers migrated to that western refuge which beckoned them across the sea. There they were settled on the vacant lands. Then the system of leases was introduced, and definite bargains made for definite periods of time. Then, next again, the owner began to

encourage and reward reclamation by further agreements as to a sharing of outlay on definite conditions in respect to a sharing of the return. During my uncle's time, thirty years, the estate was under trust. It was the practice under which all the tenants had entered, that at the end of this stipulated term of lease the farm would be advertised, and competition would be invited. But it was also the practice, equally well understood, that an industrious tenant would be preferred to all outside bidders if he came even fairly near the estimated value. Under this system the country rapidly advanced, and its agriculture developed by leaps and bounds. Still, in the early forties, when I used to live in Kintyre, the old-fashioned thatched houses and barns and byres were universal, and my father began for the first time to build slated and commodious houses for the tenants, at the beginning of almost all new leases.

The Argyll estates are widely spread over a county which has a great variety of aspects and of agricultural adaptabilities. Before returning to Inveraray, preparatory to my second journey to the Continent, I was anxious to visit an estate in the Isle of Mull on which there was some excellent fishing. It consisted entirely of high mountain land, chiefly, indeed, of one great range of volcanic rock, with steep narrow glens, and rising to one fine summit, above 3,000 feet high. To get to Mull from the southern end of the peninsula of Kintyre, I drove with Howson some sixty miles to Oban. On our way we went by a road which no one sees now, since swift steamers take all tourists by sea to the same destination. But the road was a new one to me, and full of interest and beauty. In passing by a bridge over a small stream, deeply and darkly dyed by peat, I saw to my surprise and delight the sudden flash of an intense blue-green light shine out from the alder-bushes which lined the bank, and glide up the bed of the stream, in brilliant contrast with the rich brown water, which it illuminated for a moment as it

passed. 'A kingfisher!' I shouted to Howson, with an excitement and surprise which he did not quite understand. But it was the first kingfisher I had ever seen in Scotland. The transports of a naturalist on seeing a new or a rare species are always unintelligible to the heathen world.

The short visit I now paid to Mull was accompanied with some amusing incidents, and left some permanent impressions. I had circumnavigated the island in visiting Tiree and Iona with my father, several years before, and I had been struck by the fine precipices of basaltic rock which are presented by its southern coast. But, from the sea, all the northern and western shores have little that is striking. I now found, however, that in the centre of the island, and at the northern foot of its loftiest mountain, Ben More, there is some scenery of great and very peculiar beauty. I found, too, to my satisfaction, that a large part of this scenery belonged to our family estate, notwithstanding the great sales which had been made by my extravagant uncle. As, however, there was no house available for me at the moment on our own lands, I was very hospitably entertained by two neighbouring proprietors. One of these was a gentleman of the name of Macquarrie, whose estate marched with the Argyll property along the banks of a beautiful lake, and one bank of a charming little river, between the lake and the sea. The lake, Loch Baa, was in those days an angler's paradise. Sea-trout of silver whiteness rose almost at every cast, and with a light fly-rod gave quite ideal sport. After a happy day I had a pleasant dinner. Even the remotest homes of Highland gentlemen may belong to those whose names are known in the farthest dominions of the Crown. Macquarrie's father had been Governor of New South Wales, and the Macquarrie River recalls his rule. My host himself had been Colonel of the Scots Greys, and was popular in that famous regiment.

The afternoon of the following day was one which

I have remembered ever since with infinite pleasure, The shores of Loch Baa are bordered by steep mountains, a great part of the lower slopes being clothed with old natural wood of birch, alder, and hazel. I was instructed to follow a rough, stony bridle-track, which traversed the wood till it emerged upon the open moor at a point close to the march between the Glenforsa and the Argyll estates. At this point I was to await the result of a drive from the lower end of the lake. The deer, I was told, were likely to come out of the wood below me. Choosing a knoll which commanded a clear view all round, I sat down and waited. The situation was magnificent. About 300 feet below, I looked down on the shining waters of the lake, over the tops of feathery birch. On the opposite side of the lake, Ben More rose in steep and rocky slopes to a long, craggy summit, 3,168 feet high, with precipices along which the light clouds of a fine September day were passing on and off. Immediately in front, the supporting masses of mountain were cleft by a long deep glen of a peculiar structure. At the farther end it was blocked by a steep ridge, rising into a pyramidal peak of bare rock, which had wasted under atmospheric action into a great cone of shingle, through which the lines of a horizontal bedding were distinctly indicated here and there. The sides of the glen were exceedingly steep, though not, except at one place, actually precipitous. The lines of little torrents marked the curvature with such curious regularity and distinctness, that one might imagine one's self looking at the framework of some gigantic ship in progress of construction upon the stocks. Some large patches and many smaller clumps of natural birch-wood marked and variegated the sweeping surfaces, and near the end of the glen, where it opened on the lake, there were masses of the same wild foliage, with interspaces of luxuriant bracken. The stream, which lay hidden in its own deep cutting in the floor of the glen, had been carrying down sand

and gravel sufficiently long to produce a large and wide delta, which spread out like a fan into the bed of the lake, and was covered with fine pasture, amid masses of tufted fern. To my left, another far wider glen opened on the head of the loch, walled in by a complete amphitheatre of hills, all equally steep, but all clothed with fine green grass to the very tops.

It was a magnificent and very peculiar landscape in mountain scenery, and, as the beaters were to begin at a point about two miles off, I had time to enjoy all the emotions which were natural to me at that time and in such a place. In a condition of health unusually good for me, and in high spirits, that long wait on the solitary mountain-side, with not a creature near me, and not a human habitation except one shepherd's cottage in sight, with atmospheric effects all round me which seemed to symbolize at once the joy and the awfulness of life, caused me to fall into delightful reveries. They were full of a vague sense and anticipation of happy years to come, during which that lake, those woods, and those noble mountain peaks and ridges, were to be a peaceful retreat from the contests and unrestfulness of political life. I will not say that I had any actual presentiment, for I recollect well feeling, too, our ignorance of the future, and the precariousness of building castles in the air.

I did not then know the full interest of the scene before me in a geological point of view, and was rather disposed to associate the grand buttressed masses of Ben More with the ideas of solidity and persistence which led the Psalmist to speak of the 'everlasting hills,' and even to make them the image of the Divine protection: 'As the hills stand around Jerusalem, so standeth the Lord round about His people.' Little did I then think that the great mountain mass in front of me, with an atmosphere of elevation about it far greater than that which envelops Mont Blanc, was a birth, comparatively speaking, of yesterday in geological time, and that

I should myself be the discoverer of fossil remains, not far away, which would determine the very recent period at which Ben More and all its subsidiary ranges were nothing but melted and boiling matter, seething underneath the surface of a world now vanished—a world of beautiful lands and forests and rivers, all of which have been utterly obliterated and overwhelmed. Of this I knew nothing then. On the other hand, I was alive to other lessons from the scene before me. It had beauties unknown in any of the loveliest landscapes which had lately attracted me in the South of Europe. One of these was its extraordinary verdure. Except where the surfaces broke into actual precipices or were bare rock, they were all covered with the richest vegetation of various kinds of grass. The lower slopes of Ben More, even the steepest, filled the eye with a dark and luscious green. It was not in vain that the winds from the Atlantic were attracted to its lofty crests, and poured out upon these their torrents of tepid rain. The immense compensations of a wet climate were impressed upon me as they had never been before. And these included, moreover, such masses and depths of shadow, and such richness of contrasted lights, as were impossible in the brilliant but somewhat garish monotony of the Mediterranean and of the Italian lakes.

Whilst drinking in all the beauty of this scene, and resting in the passive enjoyment of it, I became suddenly conscious of some movement in the air which could not be called a sound. There was nothing to be seen in the direction in which I had been told to look, but on turning round I saw that a fine stag had 'broken cover' at an unexpected place, and was passing on the face of the hill above me in that curious fast-trotting amble which is so characteristic of the species. Before I could get my rifle to bear upon him he had plunged into the deep little ravine which was the boundary of the two estates; but I saw that he must reappear on the other side, unless he took up the course of the

stream. Accordingly, in another moment he emerged from the brushwood cover which clothed the banks, and took a line straight ahead. The farther brow of the hill was so close that I saw he would be out of my sight in a few strides. I therefore fired just as he was going out of sight, and dropped him quite dead with a ball through his heart.

So ended one of the happiest days I had ever spent in my life. Of its happiness I fear I can give no definite account. The scenery had, no doubt, a good deal to do with it, since what we call Nature has always had a great effect upon me. But there was present to me that day an internal landscape—not of the present or of the past, but of the future—into which I gazed with the joy of great hopes, and aspirations more enchanting even than the beautiful combinations of water and woods and mountains which were beneath me, and around me, and above me. I knew my Wordsworth well in those days, and a few special passages came nearer than those of any other poet to express my intellectual condition :

‘ The power of hills was on thee,
As was witnessed in thine eye,
Then when old Helvellyn won thee
To confess their majesty.

But this expressed only an outward stimulus to veneration. Other lines of the same great poet, on the exaltation of sentiment and feeling due to the light and joy of skies and seas and hills, occurred to my mind, especially those on Tintern Abbey. But all poetry I knew fell short of expressing what I felt on that day of my delight—all—until, in later years, I read for the first time certain lines of him who soon became the sole master of my poetic fancy. Those lines occur in Tennyson’s lovely poem of ‘ The Gardener’s Daughter,’ which had been already published, though I did not know it. There is a landscape there, too. It is one, however, absolutely different from that which was the

framework of my imaginings in Mull. But this—to me new—poet must have held in his own heart and imagination a vision the close counterpart of all I felt, and he has expressed it in words of incomparable beauty :

‘ A crowd of hopes

That sought to sow themselves like wingèd seeds,
Born out of everything I heard and saw,
Fluttered about my senses and my soul ;
And vague desires, like fitful blasts of balm
To one that travels quickly, made the air
Of life delicious.’

Such moments of present and of anticipated joy do not occur often in human life. But when they do they are never to be forgotten.

On my return to Inveraray, I spent some two months in the usual home-life there, with a fair amount of time devoted to reading, both in English and in French. The charming book on Greece by Dr. (afterwards Bishop) Wordsworth gave me a great desire to see the capital of ancient literature and philosophy—the city of Athens; and it was finally arranged that I should go there by as direct a route as possible, and then return to Rome, where my father had determined to go also for the winter. Accordingly, late in October, I went to Edinburgh, where I joined my old friend the doctor, who, with Howson, was again to constitute my escort. In passing through Edinburgh, I had a curiosity to hear two celebrated men who were Professors in the University, and who, though in advanced age, were still lecturing. These were Professor Wilson, the famous ‘Christopher North,’ poet and essayist, and Sir William Hamilton, the metaphysician. Wilson’s reputation was not won in the fields of philosophy of any kind, least of all in that of morals. He was a poet, a rhapsodist, a brilliant essayist, a titanic man in conversation over wine, the life and soul of *Blackwood’s Magazine*,

which had once thrown terror and astonishment into the literary society of Edinburgh. I confess I knew him best as the author of one of the most beautiful sonnets in the English language, 'A cloud lay cradled near the setting sun.' In the Chair of Moral Philosophy he was singularly out of place. Still, he was a lion, and I wished to see and hear him. When the doctor and I entered the lecture-room it was nearly empty; I don't think there were a dozen students. We, unfortunately, sat down on the bench nearest the Professor's chair, and immediately in front of it. Presently Wilson came in with a rush. A more singular-looking being it is impossible to imagine. The head was enormous, like the busts of Jupiter. The hair was long, hanging in dishevelled masses upon the collar of his coat. A wild force was still seated in his expression. He sat down with a plump, and instantly began his lecture with these words, uttered with vehemence in a deep and still powerful voice, 'Gentlemen, ye must not get drunk.' The grotesqueness of this exordium on the elements of moral philosophy, coupled with the grotesqueness of the man, completely upset the doctor's gravity. His convulsive efforts to suppress his laughter in the very face of the Professor were irresistibly infectious, and we both spent an hour in great agony, for there was nothing in what followed to take off the first impression.

On the following day we went to hear and to see a very different man, and with a very different result. Sir William Hamilton had then suffered a slight paralytic stroke, and his gait on entering the class-room indicated some feebleness. But his countenance was a noble one—full of calmness, dignity, and intellect. His nose was slightly aquiline, his mouth had thin lips, and his eyes were dark and piercing.

Before my departure for my second winter abroad I paid a visit to my dear old friends Lord and Lady Wemyss, who, with their daughters Lady Jane and Lady Caroline Charteris, were at Gosford. From

Gosford I went to Trentham, having received a cordial invitation from the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland to visit them before I left England. I found Trentham very different to my idea of the 'stately homes of England,' built as it is in the style of an Italian villa, with a campanile clock-tower. The view from it is beautiful indeed, but with a kind of beauty new to me, except in so far as it reminded me of some of the features in the scenery near Rome or around Verona. The Duke's brother, Lord Francis Egerton, afterwards Earl of Ellesmere, arrived the same day as I did, full of a great political event. This was the announcement of the determination of the Government of Sir Robert Peel to institute a State prosecution against the great Irish agitator, Daniel O'Connell.

Lord Francis Egerton, who did not in the least resemble his brother the Duke, was a man who immediately arrested and attracted my attention. He was considerably above the middle height, with a stoop. His face was very handsome, with a broad, fine forehead, long dark hair, and eyes of the darkest hazel. There was a curious droop in the attitude of his head, as if he were habitually looking on the ground, and as if it required a slight effort to raise his eyes to the horizontal. He gave me the impression of being a shy man, and there was about him an air of pensive gravity which was peculiar, and to me very interesting. I found that we had at least one bond of sympathy between us, as Lord Francis was a strong supporter of the Government. The story of the events which had led to Lord Francis becoming the heir of the last Duke of Bridgewater touches curiously on the margin of my own family history. The Duke of Bridgewater had been a great admirer of my beautiful grandmother, Elizabeth Gunning, and became engaged to her when she was left a young widow by the death of the Duke of Hamilton. The engagement was broken off, and he felt this disappointment so much that he never married, but betook him-

self to pursuits which have made his name famous in the history of English enterprise. He became the father of inland navigation in Great Britain. Having large landed and mineral property near Manchester, he conceived the great design of connecting that city with the Mersey by a navigable canal. Through many years of difficulty, both engineering and financial, he pursued this design with untiring perseverance and at a great personal sacrifice. It ultimately became a triumphant success. Besides the increased value of his own minerals, the direct net revenue which was eventually realized amounted to between £80,000 and £100,000 a year. Dying without direct descendants, he left all his fortune to his nearest relation, the Marquis of Stafford, afterwards created the first Duke of Sutherland, with the provision that his estates should descend to the second son of the Marquis, who was to inherit under the name of Egerton. This was Lord Francis Egerton, of whom I have spoken, and with whom I was afterwards to be connected by marriage.