

# SCOTTISH MEN OF LETTERS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

## CHAPTER XII

### WOMEN OF LETTERS

**LADY WARDLAW - LADY GRISELL BAILLIE - MRS. COCKBURN -  
MISS JEAN ELLIOT - LADY ANNE BARNARD - LADY NAIRNE**

IN the eighteenth century Scotswomen did not indeed take that position in literature which the more ambitious and public-minded members of their sex assumed in England. There was no learned Mrs. Carter to translate Epictetus, no blue-stocking Mrs. Montagu to write an Essay on Shakespeare, no versatile Hannah More, no didactic Mrs. Chapone. But if they wrote little - only a lyric - it had not the proverbial fate of "an old song." It lived on the lips and lingered in the ears of the people, when the works of more formidable and learned women stood forgotten on the shelves. It is remarkable how many and how good the songs were which came from ladies who were unpractised in literary art; who perhaps wrote one lyric, and ever after held their peace; who were too careless to achieve fame, or too modest to seek it, and kept their names unknown from the world. The first of these writers was Lady Wardlaw of Pitreavie. In 1719 there was printed on fine folio sheets, at the cost of Duncan Forbes of Culloden and Sir Gilbert Elliot, the Lord Justice Clerk, a fragment of a ballad, *Hardyknute*, which had come into their hands. This they accepted as a piece of poetry of great antiquity. There was indeed a fine heroic ring of the olden times in the words beginning:

Stately stept he east the wa',  
And stately stept he west;  
Full seventy years he now had seen,  
With scarce seven years of rest.

Wider fame it won when it was included in 1724 in Allan Ramsay's *Evergreen; Scots poems wrote by the Ingenious before 1600*. How had this piece of antiquity come suddenly to light? Sir John Bruce of Kinross, on sending a copy to Lord Binning, informed him that he had "found the manuscript a few weeks ago in

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a vault at Dunfermline. It was written on vellum in a fair Gothic character, but so much defaced by time as you'll find that the tenth part is not legible." [Ramsay's *Works* (Life by Chalmers), I. xxvi.; Wilson's *Reminiscences of Old Edinburgh*, ii. 64.] This story deceived the very elect of the antiquaries. Then came another report that Lady Wardlaw, sister-in-law of this accomplice in deception, had found the fragmentary poem written on shreds of paper employed for the bottom of weaving clues. Finally, this lady acknowledged that she herself was the author, and confirmed her last statement by producing the two stanzas which now conclude the fragment. [This ballad set David Laing and Robert Chambers on a fool's errand to discover in her the author of most of the finest and oldest Scots ballads from "Sir Patrick Spens" downwards (Chambers's *Romantic Ballads of Scotland*).]

The truth was out at last, but only made public in 1765 by Dr. Percy in his *Reliques*. Of that clever woman unfortunately little has been discovered. We know that Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Charles Halket of Pitferran, was born in 1677, that she married in 1696 Sir Henry Wardlaw of Pitreavie, and died in 1727. Her descendants related of her that "she was a woman of elegant accomplishments, wrote other poems, practised drawing and cutting paper with scissors," and that she "had much wit and humour, with great sweetness of temper." A meagre little record of a life worth knowing. Her ballad was written at a time when a keen interest had awakened in Scotland for old songs, and a taste for writing new ones had begun among "ingenious gentlemen." In 1719 Lady Wardlaw was a woman over forty, and she must often have mingled in that gay society in Edinburgh when the lofty rooms in dingy closes resounded with Scots songs set to old tunes with the accompaniment of viol da gamba and virginal. She must have attended musical gatherings, such as in Parliament Close, where lived Lady Murray, daughter of Lady Grisell Baillie, charming the company when she sang Lord Yester's "Tweedside," with the dismal refrain of the mournful lover:

Therefore I maun wander abroad  
And lay my banes far frae Tweedside.

As this doleful ditty fell from her lips we are told the audience all fell a-sobbing. [Chambers's *Scottish Songs*, I. lix.; Wilson's *Reminiscences*, ii. p. 65.] Evidently there was a vein of simple emotion in those dames beneath their brocaded stomachers, and in those men attired in periwigs and laced coats - costumes which we associate only with the artificial. The ballad is certainly a clever piece of mechanism - a good imitation of the sentiment and phrase-turns of old times. Yet it is stiff and prolix (one wonders where the "fragment" could ever have ended), lacking the fine simplicity and surprises of feeling that come upon us in genuine ballads. After all, "a fine morsel of heroic poetry," we may doubtfully own with Dr. Percy. [Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English*

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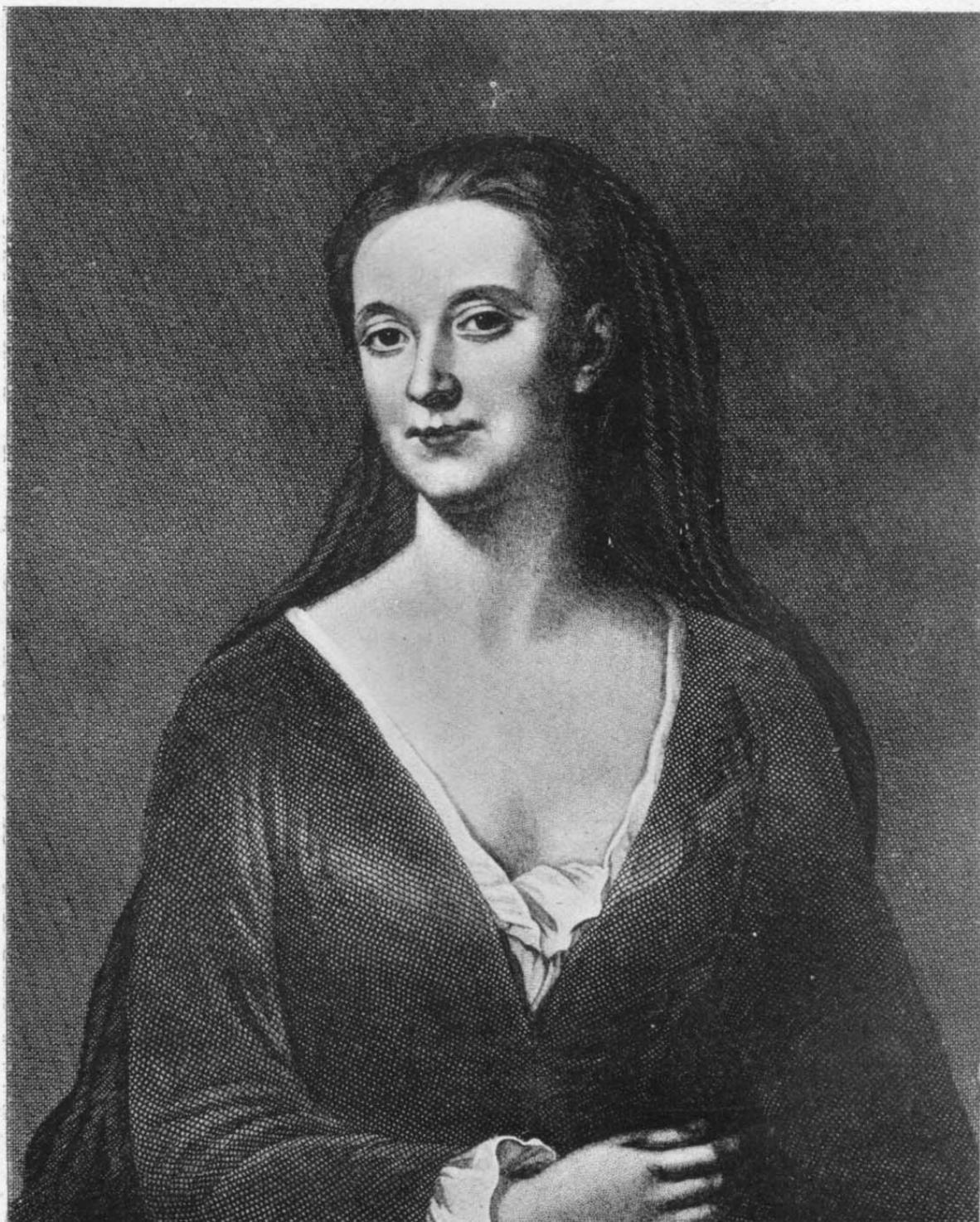
*Poetry*, 1857, ii. 101.] “This,” Sir Walter Scott has said, “was the first poem I ever learned, the last I shall ever forget.”

Lady Wardlaw remains but a dim, far-off figure - a vague reminiscence of “skill in paper-cutting,” “sweetness of temper,” and ladylike mendacity - scarcely visible through the haze of nearly two hundred years. Fortunately, however, there were others of her gentle craft of song-writing whom we know more intimately - interesting not merely for their own individualities, but because their lives give us light on old Scottish characters and manners in the past.

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At the dancing assemblies held in Bell’s Close, Edinburgh, any time about the “thirties,” when Lady Panmure presided over the prim and stately balls, there was sometimes to be seen an old lady guarding as chaperon a bevy of young ladies, blyth and winsome. On her still handsome face were the marks of small-pox, which were not unusual on the highest-born dames and damsels; but these were overlooked in the marks of goodness and sweetness in the venerable lined countenance.

What a life of romance had this good Lady Grisell Baillie passed through - with what strange memories her vigorous old mind was stored! There was her childhood in Redbraes, the old, four-storeyed mansion in the Merse [Warrenden’s *Marchmont and the Homes*, p. 53.] where she had been born in 1665, with its flat balustraded roof and three quaint slated turrets, the long, low-ceiled dining-room, from whose walls looked down out of black frames dour faces of ancestors of the House of Polwarth, and comely features of their wives. Then came the persecuting days, when her father, a Whig and Presbyterian, hid in the family vault at Polwarth Kirk, shivering in cold and darkness amid ancestral bones, relieving his solitude by repeating Buchanan’s Psalms. In the dark, Grisell, to elude the enemy, would stealthily, like a hare, pass to the place of concealment, a mile away, to feed the fugitive, who partook voraciously of sheep’s head, from the family broth, which she had concealed in her lap. Then came the escape to Utrecht, when Sir Patrick lived under the name of “Dr. Wallace,” and the family of twelve children resided in the little home, on means so narrow that they had perhaps only a doit to give as charity for the poor, when the well-known bell was heard ringing in the street, intimating that the collectors were coming. If remittances were late they pawned their silver. “Dr. Wallace” taught his children English and Dutch and Latin; and in



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From the Engraving by G. J. Stodart of the Original Painting at Mellerstain.

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the evening members of banished Scots families would come and join the merry dancing - refreshed by modest "alabaster beer" - while the host (afterwards as Lord Marchmont to be Lord Chancellor of Scotland) accompanied the dancers with lively tunes on his flute. Mistress Grisell Home was then a handsome girl with light chestnut hair, and a fair complexion that looked charming beneath the high-crowned Dutch hat and hood. So thought especially the young exile, George Baillie of Jerviswood - whose father had been executed at the Edinburgh Cross - who, with his friend Patrick Home, was serving in the Prince of Orange's Guards. It was a frugal, but a pleasant life. The family were poor, but they were merry. There were more jokes to excuse the meagre fare than guilders to buy it. There were morning visits to market by Grisell, the prop of the household, after having counted anxiously to see if there was enough to spend and to spare; there was the chaffering at the stalls in perfect humour and most imperfect Dutch; there were the clothes to mend, the house to keep with a specklessness which the most exacting *vrow* could not surpass. At last the exile ended with the landing of William of Orange in England, and the family returned to the old, sorely-desolated Scots home. They exchanged readily the excruciating cleanliness of Holland for the dirt of Scotland, with its ragged people, its filthy huts, its slatternly servant lasses, its emaciated cattle, its bogs, and the bleak moorland landscape of the Merse. All this was so different from the rich green meadows, with the sleek cattle, the spotless dwellings, and the well-clad Dutch folk. Only a few miles off, George Baillie, now restored to his estate, was living at Mellerstain - that youth whose face and manners had a gravity which dated from his father's death.

In 1692 Grisell Home married the laird of Jerviswood. Their love had been formed in Utrecht, and their union lasted for eight-and-forty years, which knew no shadow except its close. For her to miss him from her sight was dreary; he never went out but she went to the window to watch the retreating figure on horseback, till he was out of sight. So the daughter describes her parents' perfect love in one of the prettiest pictures of old Scottish life. [*Memoirs of the Lives and Characters of George Baillie of Jerviswood and of Lady Grisell Baillie*, by Lady Murray of Stanhope, 1824.]

In the new home at Mellerstain were the quiet mingling of dignity and homeliness, the simple traits of a long bygone aristocratic life of Scotland - the lady intent on her accounts, her household stores, her "jeelies" to make, her linen to spin. There would come to the stout Presbyterian's door poor "outed" Episcopal ministers seeking charity, whom Baillie treated with a courtesy his servants were unwilling to show. But life was not all spent in the Merse, for Baillie became a

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member of Parliament after the Union; he in time rose to be Lord of the Treasury, and much of the time was spent in London, whence the Baillies wrote home to the children of their “balls and masquerades, and parties by water, and music, and such-like.” The home-comings - with their trunks to unpack, containing marvellous gifts from the great city - were household delights. Then there were the home parties, when in reel and minuet they danced their best, and Lord Marchmont, having driven over from Redbraes, though too old and gouty to trip it himself, would beat time with his foot, in full accord with his fourteen children and grand-children. This was the best type of Presbyterian households. All were pious, all were sedate, yet all could be merry. George Baillie, with his rigorous fasts every Wednesday, and his constant devotions beginning at daybreak, might injure his health, yet withal his gravity was softened by love of music, and by sympathy with mirth; and as for Lady Grisell - was ever Scots dame more sweet and wise than she?

Once did Lady Grisell and her husband return to the old scenes of the exile in Holland. They took their children to see the places of which they had so often spoken on winter nights by the fireside; they went to the house where Lord Marchmont, as “Dr. Wallace,” had lived. But the churlish owner, on a pretext, so deliciously Dutch, that they would dirty the spotless floors with their feet, would not give admittance to the dear old rooms - no, though they offered to take off their shoes. So with mortification, tempered by a sense of humour, the little party walked away.

During the winters not spent in London, the Mellerstain family would go to Edinburgh. Lady Grisell, though getting old in years, with heart perennially young, at five o’clock would set forth in her sedan-chair, accompanied by young folk, to the Assemblies, where they were welcomed as became their rank and quality, when they ascended the dirty cork-screw staircase. At last, in 1738, George Baillie died - his death the first sorrow he caused his wife during their long companionship. Eight years after Lady Grisell also died, in London, directing her children to the black purse in the cabinet in which was found money enough to convey her body to Mellerstain - there to be laid in the vault beside her husband.

It is true that in the temple of literature this charming dame of the olden time only occupies the tiniest niche; but her little contribution to Scottish song has survived while weightier works have perished. In her girlhood at Utrecht, in her womanhood at Mellerstain, she loved to write in her room “reflections” and verses - often broken stanzas, only few lines which came in the passing mood. But amongst these was one song which gives her a small but lasting place in Scottish

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minstrelsy. It strikes a familiar chord, it is homely; but there is a touch of pathos in it which gives it life, especially in the recurring burden of the words, which have fallen from many lips in later generations, to express their own emotions, and at times came bitterly from the lips of Robert Burns\*:

Werena my heart licht I wad dee.

\*[When a friend asked Burns to cross the street at Dumfries and join a party of ladies and gentlemen, with whom he had lost caste, "Nay, my young friend, that is all over now," he rejoined, and he quoted Lady Grisell's verses:

His bonnet stood aye fu' round on his brow,  
His auld ane look'd better than ony ane's new;  
And now he lets 't wear ony gait it will hing  
And casts himsel' down upon the corn-bing.

Oh! were we young now as we ance had been,  
We would hae been gallopin' down on yon green,  
And buskin' it ower the lily-white lea;  
And werena my heart licht I wad dee.

Chambers's *Life and Works*, iv. 18.]

High-born ladies of those days did not keep aloof from the common affairs of the common people; they spoke the broad Scots tongue themselves, and the work of byre and barn, the woings of servants and ploughmen, were of lively interest to them in their parlour and drawing-room, and did not seem themes unworthy of their verse. This we find in the fragmentary verses of Lady Grisell:

The ewe buchtin's bonnie, baith e'enig and morn,  
When our blithe shepherds play on the bag, reed, and horn;  
While we're milking, they're lilting baith pleasant and clear,  
But my heart's like to break when I think on my dear.

The scenes of the ewe-milking in Lady Grisell's verse and in Miss Jean Elliot's "Flowers of the Forest" are reminiscent of an aspect of rural life which has long ago vanished. Up to the end of the century it was still the practice of the farmers of Ettrick forest to milk ewes for seven or eight weeks after the lambs were weaned. [About 2 quarts of milk were given by a score of ewes. If out of a flock of 50 score of ewes 36 score were milked every morning and evening, the farm got 70 quarts to make into cheese. Latterly it became usual for the farmers to let the milking of the ewes at 1½d. a week or 1s. for the season (Craig-Brown's *Selkirkshire*, i. 408).] In the evening were hundreds of ewes all gathered, and the voices of the peasantry would be heard "lilting" while the men "buchted" (folded) the sheep, and the women sat on their "leglans" milking. Those were days when the women as they worked sang songs which their grandmothers had sung before them, and when men

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as they ploughed whistled ancient tunes - so different from to-day, when old songs have died out, and whistling is heard no more in the fields.

The Duc de Simon, somewhere in his *Memoirs*, speaks of the effect on manners wrought by the introduction of hanging-bells, about the beginning of the eighteenth century. Before that day it was necessary for ladies to have within call their domestics, always near them to attend to their wants. High dames had their waiting-maids, and others their humbler servants beside them, which begot a closeness and familiarity of intercourse between them. Illustrations of that old familiarity we can see in the parts played and words spoken by servants in the plays of Molière and others of his time. In Scotland hanging-bells were long unknown - a hand-bell on the table, a stamp of the foot on the floor, or a call, would summon from behind the door the servants who were always at hand. But apart from the use or want of bells, the simple, plain fashions of the country - when mistress and daughters and maids would sit together with their rocks or distaffs and spinning-wheels - fostered a peculiar friendliness between rich and poor. That is why we find in the songs of ladies of high degree the broad Scots dialect, the intimate acquaintance with rustic life, its poverty, its courtings and weddings, which would be impossible in our days of social aloofness. [It is curious to find among high ranks the same customs as those of the peasantry. In 1749 Lady Minto writes an account of the marriage of the Duke of Athole to Jean Drummond. The night before the wedding the bride's feet are washed, and after the marriage there followed the cutting of the garters and other ceremonies. There was no honeymoon. "After the supper they went to bed." The bride's trousseau consisted of "white-flowered manto," short satin sack, a night-gown, and a pair of stays (*Family of Minto*, p. 333).]

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In the stately yet simple throngs that met in Bell's Wynd, in which Lady Grisell Baillie was a picturesque figure, there was usually to be seen another whose claims to literary memory and fame also depend on one song. This was Mistress Alison Rutherford, daughter of the laird of Fairnlie. In 1730 she is numbered among the belles that graced the floor of that gay but dingy room - with her rich auburn hair, her brilliant complexion, her pronounced aquiline nose. [*L'Eloge d'Ecosse et des dames Ecossaises*, par Mr. Freebairn, Edin. 1732.]

She had been born in 1712 in the old house, half mansion, half peel tower, now gauntly standing in ruins, with quaint turrets, walls four feet thick, rooms with open fireplaces, and ingle-nooks, the lower chambers dark as cells. From its



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After the Miniature by Anne Forbes.

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windows were seen glancing the waters of the Tweed, and the heights of Yarrow. [Craig-Brown's *Selkirkshire*, i. 553.] As a girl she was renowned as one of the fairest in that Assembly where beauty was so common, and she was the toast of beaux in the taverns. She had her loves - the fondest being for John Aikman, son of William Aikman, the artist. Why this did not end in marriage is not known; but when only nineteen she married Patrick Cockburn of Ormiston, an advocate, and they lived in the household of his father, the Lord Justice Clerk - an old Presbyterian of the deepest dye, who condemned cards, plays, and dancing as ungodly. [Tytler and Watson's *Songstresses of Scotland*, i. 175.] In deference to this austere householder, the sprightly girl eschewed worldly diversions, though none had loved dancing more or had danced better in that familiar room, to which every week she saw from her window the sedan-chairs bear their bright freights, and young men in their satin coats and powdered wigs with clinking swords hurrying along.

Bred a Whig, and married into a Whiggish family, when the Rebellion broke out her sympathies were not with Prince Charlie. Brimful of humour, her fancy took the mirthful view of things. The Prince had issued his royal proclamation, and Mrs. Cockburn wrote her smart parody thereon beginning:

Have you any laws to mend,  
Or have you any grievance?  
I'm a hero to my trade,  
And truly a most leal prince.

Would you have war, would you have peace?  
Would you be free from taxes?  
Come chapping to my father's door,  
You need not fear of access.

With this dangerous squib in her pocket, she was stopped one day as she was driving from Ravelston, by the Highland guard at the West Port, and she would have been searched had not the arms on the coach been recognised as belonging to a family who were Jacobite beyond suspicion.

When the old Judge died, she escaped from restraint, but the income was small, and on £150 a year, even in those simple days, one would not live luxuriously. Four years spent in rooms at Hamilton Palace [Mrs. Cockburn's *Letters*, edit. by Craig-Brown, p. 3.] kept her still longer out of gaiety. There Patrick Cockburn with £200 a year ("rooms and coals included") acted as Commissioner to the spendthrift Duke of Hamilton, who, after squandering and gambling abroad, married one night the

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beautiful Elizabeth Gunning - a bed-curtain ring serving as pledge of fidelity, and £20 in his pocket as an imperfect pledge of wealth. When Mrs. Cockburn, with her husband, who was ungratefully treated by his graceless Grace, went to live at Musselburgh in poor circumstances, she would appear in Edinburgh at the balls and "consorts," and be welcomed in the flats to which up dark stairs rustled ladies in their bell-hoops, beaux in the silken coats, weighty judges not without joviality, and blue-coated divines not too unconvivial. The clever lady was an inveterate correspondent; carriers in their carts, and cadgers in their creels, bore many a bright letter from her to far-away houses. On gilt-edged paper, in cramped "hand of writ," went forth the city news of deaths and marriages and births, actual or prospective. Humour and piety jostle each other in these copious epistles with delightfully unconscious incongruity, as was the manner of that age - high-flown sentiment and gossip about the doings of "Molly," or "Babby," or "Suffy"; recipes to "Lady Bal" for making out of bones "everlasting white" for painting on satin gauze - advice religious and medical, how to prepare for eternity before going to die, and how to take castor oil in wine before going to bed. [*Lives of the Lindsays*, ii. 318.] This was all extremely cheap, at nine-pence for postage. In 1753 Mr. Cockburn - "her friend and lover for thirty-two years" - died, and left her a widow with a small income and one son who died in the prime of life.

She never, however, lost her liveliness, her insatiable love of mischief, mockery, and match-making. There was a vast amount of enjoyment in Edinburgh society - which was the quintessence of national life - with its close intimacies, its fine friendships, its constant visiting from flat to flat of the High Street. It was a cheery life the lady lived - welcomed at country homes like Balcarres by "Lady Bal" and Lady Anne Lindsay, and at her old home at Fairnalie, where her brother lived with his ugly and good-natured Dutch wife. At the gatherings at her little parlour, Mrs. Cockburn was to be seen attired in her striped silk saque, with her auburn hair turned back and covered with cap or lace hood, bound beneath her chin - thus clad she was portrayed by Miss Anne Forbes, whose picture certainly does not flatter her friend.

In 1764 was first printed her song, "The Flowers of the Forest," in a collection called the "Lark." It was said to have been written by her in girlhood, in her turreted room at Fairnalie. This we may well doubt, for it was surely no girl of eighteen who composed the mournful lay. Tradition [*Mrs. Cockburn's Letters*, p. 113; Stenhouse's *Illust. of Scot. Lyric Poetry*, p. 65.] - which is a lying jade, never so matter-of-fact as when it is telling a matter-of-lie - gives this story its origin: a gentleman, passing

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through a glen in the neighbourhood, one day heard a shepherd playing on a flute an air which took his fancy, and asked Alison Rutherford to fit appropriate verses to the tune. It was that of the "Flowers of the Forest," a lament over those who had fallen on Flodden Field. Like many another song, its original words had been lost, leaving little more than the air behind it. Some lines lingered still on peasant ears of which Miss Jean Elliot of Minto could only remember [Sir W. Scott's *Familiar Letters*, ii. 354.] -

I ride single on saddle,  
For the flowers of the forest are a' wede awa'.

According to Sir Walter Scott, the ballad was meant to bewail the pecuniary ruin in a commercial crisis of seven Border lairds; but of such a local catastrophe it is happily not too suggestive. Whatever its origin and date may be it made her fame, and in a thousand homes of Scotland, from flute and spinnet and violin, came forth the olden air, and from voices of Scots ladies in full-throated pathos came forth the familiar words:

I've seen the smiling  
Of fortune's beguiling,  
I've felt its favours and found its decay;  
Sweet was its blessing,  
Kind its caressing,  
But now 'tis fled - fled far away.

I've seen the morning  
With gold the hills adorning,  
And loud tempest storming before the mid-day.  
I've seen Tweed's sillar streams,  
Glittering in the sunny beams,  
Grow drumly and dark as they row'd on their way;

The strain is somewhat artificial; it lacks the simplicity of the fine old Scots lyrics; but it has its own beauty. Nimble with her pen, clever in her verses, it is on the one song Mrs. Cockburn's reputation lasts; and, strictly speaking, she cannot claim the title of a "woman of letters" except from her copious correspondence.

This woman had the kindest of souls - "the friend of all young folk, the confidant of all love-sick hearts." [*Lives of the Lindsays*, ii. 312.] There were merry dancings in the tiny sitting-room of her flat in Blair Street near the Castle, led by

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Captain Bob Dalgleish, the king of the ball, with Jock This or Tom That with Peggy and Babby - for all familiarly were called by their Christian names in homely fashion. On these nights the furniture was piled up high in the lobby, and the fiddler in the cupboard played and panted over strathspeys, or Lord Kellie's last minuet. [Tytler's and Watson's *Songstressses*, i. 110.]

To the end she remained the same. Friends die and she mourns to-day; some wedding is in prospect and she is gay as a venerable lark to-morrow. In her black chair she sits with her favourite tabby on her lap, reading insatiably every romance, however amazing for length of sentences and height of sentiment and depth of passion, which gratified our ancestors. She amuses herself after the mild fashions of her time. She cuts figures out of paper, she writes "sentiments" to be given at supper-tables, and "characters" in prose and verse to be recited, when the guests were intended to guess who, under the names of "Delia" and "Strephon," were described. One such "sentiment" of Mrs. Cockburn's was a dismal distich, enough to cast a company into hopeless gloom. [Sir Walter Scott mistakenly thought these lines were meant for his father. - Chambers's *Scot. Songs*, p. 1xii.; *Mrs. Cockburn's Letters* (edit. Craig-Brown). On "character" writing see *Lives of Lindsays*, ii. 322.]

To the friend of affliction, the soul of affliction,  
Who may hear the last trump without fear of detection.

When old age came on her with its attendant infirmities, she became too frail to go to parties or weddings, or to cheerful funerals, for the lofty stairs fatigued her. She had her own little supper parties, when one or two were summoned to simple fare. "Four nothings on four plates of delf," as she quotes from Stella. In those days before larger incomes and bigger rents had broken in on the simple fashions of the age, when city ministers had stipends of £130 and judges lived on salaries of £500, entertainments were frugal. As Henry Mackenzie relates: "Tea was the meal of ceremony, and a supper of a very moderate number was that of a more intimate society" up the turnpike stairs. In this simple style Mrs. Cockburn could entertain on her own small income. At tea were to be met David Hume and Lord Monboddo, John Home and Adam Ferguson, Robertson and young Henry Mackenzie, who made himself useful by handing cups of tea and napkins for the ladies' laps. Among the ladies were old Lady Balcarres, with her haughty yet kindly face, and Sophy Johnston, clad in a man's greatcoat, with dark wrinkled face and hard pursed mouth, and two big feet planted well out - ejaculating "surely that's great nonsense," at anything spoken not to her mind. It was a miniature salon, with Scots tongues,

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broad, voluble, and homely. In her high black chair the hostess sat, with her Queen Elizabeth nose, her auburn hair, unsilvered by age, and untarnished by “nasty powder,” surmounted by lace hood her snuff-box in hand and repartees and whimsies adroit on her lips. She hears the town news of Mrs. Siddons’s wonderful performance at the theatre, [*Songstresses of Scotland*, i. 180; *Mrs. Cockburn’s Letters*, p. 113.] of the excitement of society all agog about the ploughman poet “who receives adulation with native dignity”; young Walter Scott comes to hear her old tales when she is too old to go to see her friend Mrs. Scott in George Square. Very old she becomes, but she can joke over her ailments. “I hardly know I existed last week except by the exertion of coughing and blowing my nose.” On 22nd November 1794 she died at the age of eighty-two, with old friends round her bed. In her, Edinburgh lost one of its pleasantest relics of the past and society one of its most characteristic figures.

## MISS JEAN ELLIOT

With more reserve and more aristocratic exclusiveness Miss Jean Elliot, author of another famous “set” of the “Flowers of the Forest,” lived in Edinburgh. A tall, slender, erect figure, attired in close cap, ruffles, and snowy broad handkerchief over her bosom, always dressed in the most correct fashion of the day. There was an expression of hauteur in her prominent nose, there was a shrewd force in her plain, sensible face. At Minto, near Hawick, her life had begun in 1727, in the clumsy old mansion near the turf-roofed kirk, with the kirkyard covered with the long grass concealing graves and tombstones, with their conventional artless art of cherub faces blowing last trumps, with cheeks in perilous state of distention, which was the rural mason’s ideal of seraphic beauty, and cross-bones and weavers’ shuttles to represent the brevity of life. The Manse with its thatched roof overlooking the mansion was so near that the minister could watch - if he hid himself from detection - the great family in the big round room in which Sir Gilbert, the Lord Justice Clerk, presided over a circle of hungry but silent offspring. It was in the ’45 that the rebels came to the house, and the judge ignominiously ran and hid himself among the Minto crags, while his daughter Jean entertained them pleasantly; the senator coming from his undignified ambush as he heard the horses ride off. [*Life and Letters of Sir G. Elliot*, i. 22.]

One of the family, Gilbert, inheriting a literary taste from his father, who, with Forbes of Culloden, had published *Hardyknute* in 1719, had shown with other



JEAN ELLIOT

After a Miniature.

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gentlemen of the time, a turn for polite letters; he could shape verses well, one song being a pastoral which was long a favourite in Scotland, played and sung to many a harpsichord and flute:

My sheep I neglected, I broke my sheep hook,  
And all the gay haunts of my youth I forsook.

One day, records tradition, which is usually very inaccurate, Jean Elliot was riding in the family coach with her brother Gilbert. They spoke of the battle of Flodden whose memories clung to their country-side - for that historic tragedy had burned itself on the national mind. Her brother wagered her a pair of gloves or set of ribbons that she could not compose a ballad on Flodden Field. She was then about thirty, and had shown no turn for ballad-making, but she accepted the challenge. One or two lines only remained of the ancient ballad on the battle, though the famous air lingered on the ears of the people bereft of its words. Jean Elliot wrote her version, and her brother when he read it saw that he had lost his wager, and Scotland had gained a ballad which would never die. Copied out by family pens, recopied by those who saw or heard it, it went on its way to popularity. Gradually it found its way into every drawing-room, and was played at every concert, though who the writer was no one could tell. With stately reserve or maidenly modesty Miss Jean Elliot kept her secret, and her family gave no sign, and never did she exert her lyrical genius in any such effort again. Hopeless uncertainty exists as to the dates and priority of the rival sets of the "Flowers of the Forest"; yet her song must have been written after that of Mrs. Cockburn, if it be true, as Dr. Somerville told Sir Walter Scott, that the song was written while he was staying at Minto House, for it was in 1767 he became minister of the parish, and lived with the Elliots as tutor. [Scott's *Familiar Letters*, ii. 354; Somerville's *Memoirs*, p. 120; *Mrs. Cockburn's Letters*, ed. by Craig-Brown, p. 113. Stenhouse gives 1755 as the date of its publication, but does not say where it appeared (*Illust. of Scot. Lyric Poetry*, p. 66).] A far finer work than its rival, Jean Elliot's ballad reaches near to perfection.

When old Lord Minto, the judge, died, and his son Gilbert reigned in his stead at Minto, Lady Elliot came to Edinburgh to reside in Brown Square, only five minutes' walk from the High Street, yet considered then most genteelly remote from the noise and vulgar familiarity of the town, and occupied by most "respectable persons," Henry Mackenzie, the "Man of Feeling," Lord Advocate Dundas, Islay Campbell, the Lord President, and Tytler of Woodhouselee, and Lord Justice Clerk Miller. [Chambers's *Traditions of Edinburgh*, i. 40; ii. 50.] Clearly that elegant square, built in

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1764 - which has now vanished - was a fitting quarter for any people of such social pretensions as the Elliots. The high-bred Lady Elliot Murray - Miss Jean's sister-in-law - looked down on the deplorably provincial ways of the city, though condescendingly she owned that "there are many worthy, agreeable, well-principled persons, if you get over the language, manners, and address which are at first striking." "It is the misses that are the most rotten part of the society," was her emphatic opinion. [Tyler and Watson's *Songstresses of Scotland*, i. 214.] Thus in an exclusive set these ladies spent their days.

Miss Jean lived alone after her mother's death, mixing carefully in good society. She was not a favourite with young folk. Kirkpatrick Sharpe, in his usual satiric vein, when giving his boyish memories of the old spinster, describes her face, which he calls ugly, her big open mouth, her affectation of fine speaking. "I caint" for "I can't" she would say, and her tongue not too good-natured. He records the family terror when at tea-time Miss Elliot's sedan-chair would arrive at his aunt's door, and after a long, secret talk in the back drawing-room, she would jolt off again, leaving the aunt out of temper with everybody, accusing the young people of faults and sins - all which evil charges they laid down at the door of "The Flower," as they nicknamed the single-song lady. Did she really write that fine ballad, she who never wrote anything else, or showed gifts anywhere else? Sharpe's cousin, who knew her best, said, however, that Miss Elliot - "who never told lies" - had told her the song was her own invention. [Miss Home, afterwards wife of John Hunter, the great anatomist, wrote another set of verses on the "Flowers of the Forest." Her familiar song, "My mother bids me bind my hair," owes its vogue more to Haydn's tune than to her feeble verses (Wilson's *Reminiscences of Old Edinburgh*, i. 295).] The good lady's weeks were spent in stately calls, her Sabbaths were satisfactorily spent in listening to her favourite, Dr. John Erskine, in Greyfriars Kirk - a minister who had the double merits in the old maid's eyes of being both a man of God and a man of birth. She was an old woman of seventy-nine when she died in 1805. Her death made no gap in society as Mrs. Cockburn's had done. Literary fame she did not seek; she was too proud to have her name bandied about on every lip. Only by accident was it discovered who had written that superb ballad which to harp and harpsichord for many a day was sung in every house:

I've heard the lilting at our yowe's milking,  
Lasses a' lilting before the break o' day.  
But now they are moaning on ilka green loaning,  
The Flowers o' the Forest are a' wede awa!

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Balcarres, the country seat of the Earls of Lindsay, was a solid old-fashioned chateau - in the style of many Scots mansions of the middle of the eighteenth century, with its large and lumbering wings, its narrow stairs, its thick walls, its turrets, and, most characteristic of all, its poverty. Facing the sea on the Fifeshire coast, it looked straight across to the Bass Rock, and the salt air gave intenser sharpness to that east wind which blows with such venom over the flat land of Fife. The mansion was surrounded with thick woods, where by day rooks cawed, and by night owls hooted, adding a grimness to the house, which had a little top chamber accessible only by a ladder from outside, tenanted by a "brownie" and gaped at fearlessly by the children.

Within the mansion there was a curious household. The old lord was at the ripe old age of sixty, and even looked eighty, when he had won the hand, if not the affections, of the blooming, buxom daughter of Sir Robert Dalrymple. Extremely deaf, he had no outward attractions to charm her, having a big brigadier's wig, with its three tails hanging down his shoulders, his gouty foot encased in a huge shoe, "like a little boat with a cabin at the end of it," which his impatient knife had slashed to relieve his torments: a gaunt, grim figure, with a fantastic character, which was a mixture of Mr. Shandy, Uncle Toby, and Don Quixote. [*Lives of the Lindsays*, ii. pp. 233, 278.] A family of twelve blessed - or otherwise - this union, before he died at the age of seventy-eight. He was a chivalrous gentleman, from the curl of his wig to the points of his gouty toes; a student of old books and lover of long pedigrees in his library of folios and quartos; a farmer eager on draining and turnip-sowing; a Jacobite as far as a loyal soldier to George III. could be; a gallant old man as far as adoration of the fair sex could go, regarding woman-kind as the ideal of perfection, and investing each with virtues she did not own, and graces she never had. There was the old gentleman riding off to Elie on an unbroken horse on his dame's commission, for he was obsequious to her every whim, never meeting a carriage on the road without gallantly asking the ladies within if he could be of service to them, while his old wig fluttered in the breeze as he swept off his three-cornered hat. One pictures the worthy "original" capturing an old woman stealing his cherished turnips - then a rare product of the fields, - rating her hotly while she curtsied duly before his choleric lordship, and after the veteran had expended his vituperations, there came the calm, audacious request, "Eh, my lord, they're unco heavy; will ye no gie me a lift?" The incident closed with the noble lord hoisting the sack on the back of the nefarious woman, whose parting words, "Thank ye, my lord," rang with ironic sound as he strode reflectively home.



LADY ANNE BARNARD

After a Miniature.

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Very different from the poor and guileless peer was the countess - a relentless disciplinarian who sought to bring up a family of four sons and eight daughters, endowed with irrepressible spirits, on the old Scots system, administering noxious drugs to their throats and incessant castigations to sensitive parts of their young persons, with a precision perfected by practice - with a sense of duty as hard as her blows. Childhood's memories in that household consisted largely of whippings, "black holes," hungry stomachs, and punitive rhubarb doses. "Woman!" protested the sturdy treble of the Honourable John to his mother when under punishment - "woman! I told you I would do it. I'll do the same thing again to-morrow." The morrow came and with it the fault, and with the fault the penalty, namely, the loss of all his playthings. As the sun shone out warm and bright, "Ah!" he cried, "my mother cannot take that from me!" The good earl's heart was wrung by all this, and he would utter his protests: "Oddsfish! madam, you will break the spirits of my young troop. I will not have it so." One day a neighbouring laird riding to Balcarres met a procession, in single file, of the children, from the largest, who bore on his back the baby, to the smallest, who toddled in the rear. This was the house of Lindsay resolved to quit their "horrious" home, and escape maternal discipline. [Hare's *Story of my Life*, vol. iii.; *Lives of the Lindsays*, ii. 306.] They were discovered by Robin Gray, the shepherd, who ran and cried: "My lady, all the young gentlemen, and all the young ladies, and all the dogs are gone!" As attempted-suicides, for wishing to be rid of life, are put in prison, the better to reconcile them to existence, so the rebels, for seeking to quit their home, were subjected to graduated doses of rhubarb, to attach them the more kindly to it.

Yet, in spite of all this, and although they were poor and secluded from the world, "it was a creed of our family," says Lady Anne Lindsay, "that it was impossible anybody at Balcarres could wish to be anywhere else." There was a delightful freedom and simplicity of manners - young folk riding on the sow's back, or eating raw turnips in the fields when the tutor's back was turned; the girls wading in the stream in the Den, tucking up their yellow and silver frocks, which had been made out of strips cut from their mother's wedding dress, flounced with bits of old blue gauze.

There were as familiar inmates of the establishment Mr. Small, the tutor, oblivious, guileless, and pious, and Miss Henrietta Cumming, the governess, who claimed to have descended from the Red Comyn, and who meanwhile had descended from a very small and airy Edinburgh flat, where she had painted butterflies on gauze for a livelihood. As she had indignantly refused to fare with the

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waiting-maid, she made her way to the dining-table, and became the most necessary member of the family; which she insisted on serving without wages. Italian and French she could teach; letters she could write, which her friend Mrs. Cockburn could liken only to Rousseau's; she sang sweetly, talked cleverly, and as for needlework, none was so deft as she at designing ruffles and painting satin, or at pleasing his lordship with waistcoats painted with figures "of the bird kind," to adorn his lank person. She was insinuating to her ladyship, she could be severe with the offspring, this tiny creature - "the least little woman to be seen for nothing" [*Lives of the Lindsays*, ii. 312.] - who had the figure of a sylph and the temper of a tartar.

Visitors came to Balcarres for the usual Scots period - "the rest day, the dressed day, the pressed day" - and some remained for months or years. There was Sophia Johnston, the daughter of the coarse, drunken laird of Hilton, who had come to pay a little visit and remained for thirteen years. She had grown up, according to Hilton's hideous whim, without training, or education, or religion, only furtively learning to read and write from the butler. She was able to wrestle with stable-boys, to shoe a horse like a smith, to make wood-work like a joiner, and to swear like a trooper. There she was, the strange creature, working at her forge in her room at Balcarres, playing the fiddle, singing songs with a voice like a man's, dressed in a jockey coat, walking with masculine stride, speaking broad Scots in deepest bass, which would roll out a good round oath. The children listened with delicious awe as she sang:

Eh, quo' the Tod, it's braw bricht nicht,

The wind's i' the wast and the moon shines bricht. [*Lives of the Lindsays*, ii. 316.]

A sad "original" she was, with her lonely life, her faithless creed, her laughter, in which there was no mirth, her violent loves, and fierce hates - Miss Henny Cumming being her special aversion.

We can see the family circle in the dining-room, old as 1652, with oak walls, fine stuccoed ceiling, with "bustoes" in relief, of King David, Hector, and Alexander. There sat the old brigadier, kindly to the children, courteous to guests, though invariably his choleric temper would rise in hot dispute with any one over the virtues of Queen Mary, or the iniquities of the Union, till his face grew purple and his expletive "Oddsfish" proved quite inadequate for the occasion, while tutor and governess and family kept silent. Miss Anne Keith was there often and long, the dearest friend and cousin of Lady Balcarres, the shrewdest of women, with the

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warmest of hearts; and Mrs. Cockburn came by ferry and coach, full of the last news from Edinburgh, of weddings possible, probable, and certain, telling of the newest freak of Lord Monboddo, or the last joke of Harry Erskine, and discussing shapes of satin cloaks or painted ruffles.

In the household, Lady Anne, the eldest daughter, was full of fun, and the foremost in every madcap whim, yet the right hand of her old father till he died when she was eighteen - helping him with his books, his memoirs, and his old manuscripts. The monotony of her existence in Balcarres was varied by visits to Edinburgh, though there were serious difficulties to consider in the impecunious household before a young woman was rigged out for Edinburgh balls, even though Miss Henny Cumming was so nimble at making new gowns out of old frocks. In the Capital Lady Anne was welcome with her bright face, her merry humour, and her songs, to which she made the old spinnets musically jingle. There were visits to the Dowager Lady Balcarres, who dwelt up precipitous stairs in the Lawnmarket, subsisting on a meagre jointure, out of which, by frugal living, she contrived to save money, in order to relieve the heavy wadsets on the estates of the Lindsays. She was to be met in the street, staff in hand, dressed in the perennial black silk gown, white apron, big black silk bonnet, far jutting over a countenance stern and resolute. No wonder all made way for her as she passed along the causeway. At night in her parlour, containing a bed all neatly hid by curtains, acquaintances assembled to their tea and scones and chat, while the slenderly-waged retainer, resting against the bed-post, would rouse himself at the call, "Bring the hot water, John," and in easy colloquy with her "leddyship" would hand the kettle to "mask the tea." [*Thrieplands of Fingask*, by Chambers, p. 58; *Lives of the Lindsays*, ii. 320.] Memorable, too, were the visits to old Lady Dalrymple - the other grandmother - most oblivious, most quaint of aristocratic souls, who would never leave her bedroom without having given health-restoring sniffs to three apples - each in turn - that stood on her toilet table. As she appeared for breakfast, with her mittens and her snuff-box in hand, Lady Anne knew for certain that she would stop on the seventeenth spot on the carpet, cough three times, come to the table, look in vain on the right hand for her key, send Anne to seek it in the bed-room, and invariably with punctual surprise discover it on the fingers of her left hand. Where, now, are originals, with their delightful oddities and characters, loved, laughed at, and respected, such as lived in the olden times?

There were also the Assemblies to go to, where Lady Anne would take her place in the "quality set," as became her rank, or in the "handsome set" at the minuet and reel, as became her face. At the many tea and supper parties, what

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delight it was to listen to Principal Robertson's common-sense in plain Scots, David Hume's simple fun, and the man-of-the-world talk of "Ambassador" Keith, Mistress Anne's brother, in the reunions at which many famous personages - legal, clerical, literary, fashionable, aristocratic - would meet and make the night brilliant in an atmosphere of snuff and good talk.

When she was eighteen years old, Lady Margaret, possessed of rare beauty, married Mr. Alexander Fordyce - a member of a family that produced several men who were notable, but unfortunately, in his case, only to be notorious. He had gone from Aberdeen as a clerk, and achieved success in London as a banker. He was able to buy the estate of Roehampton, and was able to lose an election at the cost of £16,000. This seemed a great "catch" for a poor damsel of high degree and low fortune, but soon it came to grief. Fordyce absconded, his bank collapsed, and his fellow-bankers were ruined, involving in the crash private banks in England and in Scotland, when on "Black Monday" news came of Fordyce's disappearance and defalcations. There suffered alike lairds and farmers in Ayrshire [Forbes's *Hist. of a Scottish Banking House*, p. 40.] and actors in London, whose savings were lost, and for whose behoof Mrs. Abington gave a benefit. Curiously enough, Miss Henrietta Cumming, the governess, married, and lived in purring felicity with this plausible banker's brother, Rev. Dr. James Fordyce - the most popular Presbyterian preacher in London, whose *Sermons for Young Women*, full of sense for a frivolous age, were the favourite Sunday reading prescribed as a moral tonic for young ladies after the routs and balls of London, Bath, and Tunbridge Wells.

When sister Margaret, beautiful and witty, had gone, and her brothers were scattered far and wide, Lady Anne remained at home. In the little chamber, reached by a long turnpike stair, with its small window facing the sea, she would relieve her solitude by writing verses and moral reflections on the backs of old letters. Often had she heard Sophia Johnston sing, in her Amazonian voice, an old song: "The bridegroom greets when the sun goes down." [Lives of the Lindsays, ii. 322.] The words were not decorous, but the melody took her fancy, and she tried to compose new words to fit the old air. She was then twenty years old, her sister Margaret's wedding had come and gone, and left her dreary, and to while away the time she set to the work of composition. After trying to perfect her verses, she called her little sister Elizabeth to the closet: "I have been writing a ballad, my dear; I am oppressing my heroine with misfortune. I have sent Jamie to sea, broken his father's arm, made her mother fall sick, and given her auld Robin Gray for a lover; but I wish to load her with a fifth sorrow in the four lines, poor thing! Help me, I pray."

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“Steal the cow, sister Annie,” suggested Elizabeth; and forthwith the cow was stolen, and the song “Auld Robin Gray” completed. She never showed the ballad except to her mother, who was delighted with it. It was copied out, but none outside the inner circle knew anything of its authorship, though “Suffy” Johnston guessed full shrewdly. Lady Anne, in her rich voice, sang the tale of rural woes in Fifeshire mansions and in Edinburgh flats, and through transcripts the ballad became universally popular, and passed for an ancient song. Antique ladies, with confident but erroneous memories, professed to have heard it often when they were young; it found its way into song-books; it was sung everywhere, and even heard by the camp-fires in the American campaign; it was made subject for a play, and a clergyman honoured it by claiming it as his own. Gradually the old melody was abandoned, and the air with which we are familiar, [The words were given by a friend of Lady Anne’s to Lieut. W. Leeves, 1st Foot Guards - afterwards Rector of Wrington - that he might compose an air for it. It is his tune which is now used (*Hare’s Story of my Life*, iii. 270.) composed by an English friend of Lady Anne’s, was sung in its stead.

Some years after, a sequel was written at her mother’s request - for she would say, “Annie, I wish you would tell me how that unlucky business of Jeanie and Jamie ended.” She remembered how the irascible old laird of Dalyell, on hearing it, had exclaimed, “O ! the auld rascal, I ken wha stealt the puir lassie’s coo. It was auld Robin himsel’.” And such a story she makes the sequel tell. Like most sequels it is a failure, in spite of graphic touches and some happy lines. The original had told all one wished to hear. Of this song she gave no copy even to her mother who, however, could remember it all from recital, and till nearly a hundred years of age the old lady loved to repeat it, proud at feeling that she alone knew the secret of its authorship.

The old life at Balcarres at last came to an end. The eldest brother - the new earl - married, and Lady Anne went to reside in London with her sister, Lady Margaret Fordyce, who was now a widow, famous for her beauty, her grace, and her wit, living in the most brilliant circles of town. There she stayed till, at the age of forty-three, she married Mr. Barnard, son of the literary Bishop of Limerick, aged twenty-eight, and accompanied him to the Cape of Good Hope, where he was secretary to the Governor, Lord Maccartney - an appointment worth £2000 a year, which his energetic wife had got from her old friend Henry Dundas. She had to exchange the society of wits and men of fashion, to give up routs, masquerades, and plays for the company of half-Dutch colonists, with uncouth manners and dialect. Good-humour she carried with her, with just a touch of the condescension of the

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high-bred daughter of an earl and wife of an official, at the balls of the castle, where she reigned as queen. To spend the time there were journeys among the hills, picnics where every discomfort was tempered with mirth, visits to obese Dutch *vrows*, whose notions of cleanliness had suffered a sea change from Holland, and additions to collect for her hardly less cleanly menagerie. All this she described in letters full of humour and cleverness. In 1802 came the Peace of Amiens - that peace of which Sir Philip Francis said "everybody was glad and nobody was proud" - and the Colony was restored to the Dutch. Mr. Barnard's occupation was gone, and he and Lady Anne returned to England.

A few years went by and her husband died in 1808, and again she lived with her favourite sister, till after years of disappointment and of wasted love, which embittered a nature once divinely sweet, Lady Margaret married old Sir James Bland Burgess, and gained a brief space of happiness before she died. Lady Anne lived on in London, and her name often meets us in Madame d'Arblay's *Diary*, in society of the best and brightest. When she went to Paris, in drawing-rooms she heard people whispering, "*Voilà l'auteur du fameux roman de Robin Gray!*" as they looked at her, for the song had been translated. One evening she was being seen home from a party in Paris by a French nobleman, when suddenly her companion plumped down on his knees before her on the floor of the carriage. She was about to shriek out for help, when he shattered her vanity, as he dispelled her fears, by exclaiming, "*Taisez, madame! voilà le bon Dieu qui passe.*" [Hare's *Story of my Life*, iii. 326; Stenhouse's *Illustrations*, p. 230.] It was the Host being carried through the streets to which he devoutly knelt, and not to the lady.

Far away in Edinburgh, with the new century society was losing its old traits and quaint characters. Still, however, her mother, Lady Balcarres, was living in George Square with the cousin whom she called her "husband" - Mistress Anne Murray Keith, the little old lady, with lovely blue eyes and exquisite expression of kindness which robbed her high nose of its air of command, with her neat cap under which were curls of ivory whiteness ranged on her forehead. Mrs. Anne's exhaustless fund of stories brought the long past days to life again as a younger generation listened - stories which Walter Scott heard with delight and served up so often in his novels [Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. pp. 310, 315; *Lives of the Lindsays*, ii. 322.] that he could not conceal his authorship from her. "Can I no ken my ain groats among ither folks' kail?" she would shrewdly ask. [*Lives of the Lindsays*; Cockburn's *Memorials*, p. 60.] Pleasantly the old ladies dwelt together. Her venerable ladyship, whose austerity age had softened, was eager over her knitting, her cards, and her Scriptures. She returned to

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end her days at Balcarres, finding endless consolation in reading, with undimmed eye, the lives of Bible patriarchs, and looking to that future which was soon to her to be present; and, as she would say to her loved daughter, "then we shall all be young again, Annie." She died at the age of ninety-four. Meanwhile poor Sophy Johnston, old and haggard, lived miserly and grimly in her garret, to which every Sunday the grandchildren of her pets in Balcarres tremblingly came with a present for the forlorn old friend of their family - her skinny hands greedily held forth as her gruff voice growled out: "What hae ye brocht - what hae ye brocht?" [*Lives of the Lindsays*, ii. 360.]

It was only a year or two before her death that Lady Anne Barnard acknowledged the authorship of the famous song which gives her a place in literature. She said she had not owned it because she dreaded being known as a writer, lest those who did not write should feel shy of her - a reason which is not very satisfying. Certainly the reluctance of these good Scots ladies to be known as authors is in curious contrast to the eagerness with which literary ladies in England rushed into print, rejoiced in publicity, and forced themselves into notoriety. It was partly pride on the part of high-born dames lest their name should become too familiar on common lips. It was so with Miss Jean Elliot, Lady Louisa Stuart, and Lady Nairne - partly also owing to shyness and timidity, which made Miss Ferrier shrink from publicity as from criticism. In *The Pirate*, in 1828, Sir Walter Scott quoted lines from the second part of "Auld Robin Gray," as Lady Anne Lindsay's "beautiful ballad." The secret had come forth, and now she owned it. She was an old woman of seventy-five when she died in 1825, lovable and loved to the last, whose lyrical skill lives in her undying song, and whose vivid memories of her home at Balcarres enliven the pages of the *Lives of the Lindsays*.

## LADY NAIRNE

The House of Gask - the "auld house" of Lady Nairne's song - in the middle of the eighteenth century stood upon a hill in the Strath of Earn, a curious, rambling house, which owed its interest to its quaintness and the picturesqueness of its situation. There lived Laurence Oliphant, the laird, descendant of an old family as proud as it was ancient, a Jacobite of the Jacobites, who loved the Stuarts with all the adoration of his absurd old soul. To win his undying favour it was only



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After the Portrait by Sir J. Watson Gordon in 1815.

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necessary for a neighbour to present him with a relic of the Royal house - a garter, a brogue, or spurs worn by His Royal Highness. To look at - but for heaven's sake not to touch - the sacred memorials, a lock of Prince Charlie's red hair, his bonnet, his cockade or crucifix, was with him almost a religious service. With indignation he bundled off Mr. Cruikshank the chaplain's gown and books by carrier when he learned that he had, on the death of Prince Charles, begun to pray for George III.; for a "nominal" prayer - that is, one in which the Hanoverian usurper was mentioned by name - was an abomination. With what care had he and his wife conveyed to Florence the piece of seed-cake which the hands of Mrs. Forbes, the nonjuring bishop's wife, had prepared for His Majesty's delectation; and with what joy he reported that when his sacred Majesty took it in his hands, he opened a drawer and graciously said: "Here you see me deposit it, and no tooth shall go upon it but my own." There was something so sturdy, so honest, so loyal in his disloyalty that King George sent him his fine message, couched in phrases to conciliate his heart: "The Elector of Hanover presents compliments to the laird of Gask, and wishes to tell him how much the Elector respects the laird for the steadiness of his principles." [Oliphant's *Jacobite Lairds of Gask*, p. 368.]

When Lady Gask died her last words to the children gathered round her were: "See which will be the best bairn to papa." To that household came the governess whom the aunt provided, with this recommendation: "Mr. Oliphant joyns me in thinking there is no better sign than diffidence in what one knows nothing about, therefore has no doubt Mrs. Cramond (for you know I cannot call her Miss when a governess) will make herself usefull to ye children with a little practice in many things besides ye needle, particularly as to behaviour, principles of Religion and Loyalty, a good carriage and talking tolerable English which in ye countrie is necessarie that young folks may not appear clownish when presented to company." [Oliphant's *Jacobite Lairds of Gask*, p. 387.] From which it would appear that Lady Henrietta's own accomplishments did not entitle her to be too exacting in the qualifications of a governess, especially as the remuneration was to be twelve guineas for the first year and ten guineas "ever after." Mr. Marconchi, the foreign fiddler, walked over from Perth once a week to teach the art of dancing and the harpsichord to the family of two sons and four daughters.

Caroline - whose baptismal name veneration for Prince Charles had once more made popular in Jacobite circles - was born in 1766, the third of the family, and she grew up reserved and dignified into a tall beauty with dark eyes and hair, the toast of the country as the "Flower of Strathearn." At the county balls she

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danced with so fine a grace and skill, that the eyes of little Neil Gow, the prince of fiddlers, would gleam with delight as he watched her threading the gladsome windings of a strathspey. In 1792 the laird of Gask died - the soldier of the '45 who suffered long, though he was not long-suffering, from his aches and ails, which the abominable concoctions prescribed as sovereign cures by his friend the laird of Thriepland had helped to intensify. He was true to the end to the Stuart cause, and never forgot when proposing a toast to look at his handsome son Charles, and to say with significant accent: "The King - Charles." Never had he permitted any who read the newspapers to him to mention George III. and his queen, except as "K" and "Q." In such Jacobite associations his sons and daughters grew up.

It was at a tenantry dinner given by the new laird that Miss Caroline Oliphant heard sung "The Ploughman," a coarse song with a good Scots air. Vexed at finding such songs pleasing the people at their rustic meetings, and disgusted, as she passed through a country fair, to notice the broadsides and ballads which were greedily bought from barrows and pedlars' packs, she became filled with desire to make verses more wholesome, and not less attractive, to take their place on the people's lips. This she did in secrecy. It was the ancestral enthusiasm for the good old cause which then and afterwards quickened her fancy to write such songs as "Charlie is my darling," "Will you no come back again?" "A Hundred Pipers," - with their romantic sentiment and martial strain that make the pulse beat faster - songs produced when the Jacobite cause was dead as Queen Anne, and when no romance or song could stir it to life again. Who imagined there could come from that stately damsel, and afterwards so proud a dame, with whom humour could scarce venture to dwell, the lively "John Tod" and "Laird o' Cockpen," which generations should sing with never-failing glee; or the humble "Caller Herrin'," with its charming refrain caught from the sound of the chimes of St. Giles' in Edinburgh? Fond recollection of Gask she enshrined in the "Auld House," with its "auld laird, sae canty, kind, and crouse."

But in the "Land o' the Leal" the poet rose to her highest level, from the beginning "We're wearin' awa, John" to its close, in which the simplicity of true pathos moves with rare and tender touch.

In those days and for several years she was engaged to her cousin, Charles Nairne; but they were both poor, the young man having remote prospects of promotion in the army. "Miss Car the pretty," as she was called by the people, was no longer the beauty at every county ball, the bloom of the "Flower of Strathearn" became somewhat faded as she matured into the staid, stately, handsome lady of

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forty. It was then, however, when her cousin, at the mature age of fifty, became a major, that the long engagement issued in a happy marriage, and life in Edinburgh in a frugal home called "Caroline Cottage." They were poor, that high-bred couple, and they were pronouncedly proud; they belonged to the exclusive aristocratic set which was dwindling away in that city as London became the resistless centre of attraction for all who had claims to rank or position. Sydney Smith's description of Edinburgh society as "a pack of cards without honours" was becoming true.

The new century had gone on its way some years when one day there called on Mr. Purdie, the music-seller, a lady giving the name of Mrs. Bogan of Bogan, who had already corresponded with him, transmitting songs in a feigned hand-writing. Mrs. Nairne appeared before the worthy tradesman in the guise of an old lady of a bygone generation - which after all was on her part no very great deception - and told him of songs she had got to publish. This was good news, because the *Scottish Minstrel* was being compiled by him; and accordingly with extraordinary mystery verses set to well-known airs by "Mrs. Bogan of Bogan" were produced. [*Songstresses of Scotland*, ii. 130.] For years the exquisite song, the "Land o' the Leal," had been familiar throughout the land; the pathos of Scots hearts seemed voiced by it as by no other song, and to the strains of "We're wearin' awa, John, To the Land o' the Leal," eyes had grown dim with tears. Mrs. Nairne had heard them praised and seen them bewept; and had noticed with a fret the words changed to "Wearin' awa, Jean," but she said nothing. With inexplicable reticence she even kept the secret of authorship from her own husband, spreading a newspaper over her manuscripts if he came into the room. This may have been caused by doubts as to her husband's powers of keeping a secret; but it was due also to that self-contained nature, that resolute reserve, which made her avoid with impatience the kiss which the bridegroom offered after the chaplain at Gask had married them.

In 1824 George IV. made his memorable visit to Scotland, when Sir Walter Scott worked himself up into grotesque enthusiasm in welcome of the not too respectable monarch. A memorial was prepared by Sir Walter praying His Majesty that the title forfeited by the Rebellion might be restored to Major Nairne. The petition was granted, and Major Nairne became a lord before he died in 1824.

In her later years Lady Nairne was involved in the atmosphere of pietism which began to prevail over Scotland, dating from the pious crusade of the Haldanes. Secular amusements - save painting - were no longer to her mind, the fashions of the world that pass away were no more to the taste of her who had in unregenerate days written the "Laird o' Cockpen." She had always been religious,

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though the humour would bubble over into fun in her songs. In later years the wave of evangelicalism went over her head, as it did over that of Susan Ferrier, who, it must with sadness be confessed, like Hannah More, degenerated as a writer as she became regenerated as a Christian. As years went on she returned to Gask, to which her nephew, the laird, had urged her to return. But it was not the "Auld House." That had been knocked down, and a more pretentious dwelling built in expectation of a fortune that never came. With the quaint old home departed associations with the olden time. In the new house, amidst her kith and kin, Baroness Nairne died, and with her the last of the band of Scots songstresses of the eighteenth century passed away. [Rogers's *Life and Poems of Lady Nairne*.]

Others there were who wrote with true lyric touch, not such high-born dames as those we have described, but some round whose memories the romance is of somewhat squalid kind. About 1771 Robert Burns heard sung in the streets the song, "There's nae luck aboot the house"; and this has been popularly ascribed to Jean Adams, who had died in the Glasgow poorhouse six years before. In girlhood she had been in service in a clergyman's manse as nurse and sewing-maid, and there pored over the manse library, its poetry and theology, to such purpose, that in a few years her verses were handed about among her friends and the society which got position and fortune from ships and fishing and sugar in the village of Greenock. To her intense joy she saw her poems collected and issued in a volume from the Saltmarket of Glasgow, with a list of subscribers, which included all the country gentry of the West. But the poems were of a ghastly type: on "Abel," on "The Method of Grace," on "Cleopatra," and the "Redemption." Now she set up as a teacher of girls, instructing her pupils about samplers, quilt frames, Bible lessons, and spelling-books, and indulged her scholars by singing to them her own verses or reading Shakespeare, over which the poor sewing mistress was so deeply affected, that when reading Othello she fell down in a faint at the feet of her amazed pupils. It was firmly believed she had walked all the way to London to see Mr. Richardson, the great author of *Pamela* - a domestic whose good fortunes Jean was not to follow. Meanwhile her fees were few, the forlorn volume of verse did not sell, and by advice of her publisher in the Saltmarket she shipped off to Boston by a Greenock vessel the unsold copies that were crowding the bookseller's cellar. But no money came back, and her savings were gone. So poor Jean was reduced to go about seeking for work, or money or clothing from the ladies and mothers of her

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late scholars, her heart bursting with shame at her ignoble resort to begging. It was the month of April 1765 that, ragged and hungry and sick, she travelled wearily to Glasgow, with sorrow in her despairing heart, and knocked at the poor-house door. She had an order signed by two bailies of Greenock, who evidently felt there was no other resource for her, and she was admitted as “a poor woman in distress,” “a stranger who had been wandering about.” Next day she died and was buried by the parish.

According to local belief she was author of the song, “There’s nae luck aboot the house,” which Burns lavishly pronounced “one of the most beautiful in the Scots or any other language.” Those who knew her had heard her sing this song as her own composition, and never doubted that the poor pauper woman had written it. On the other hand, in 1806, it was claimed for Mickle, the author of “Cumnor Hall,” by his friend and biographer, who among his papers had found two copies, with alterations, and Mrs. Mickle pronounced it to be her husband’s work. What a fine touch there is in the lines:

His very foot has music in’t,  
As he comes up the stairs;

and in the sense of bewildered joy at Colin’s return:

And will I see his face again,  
And will I hear him speak?\*

[\* Mickle’s *Poems* (Life by Sim), 1806; Stenhouse’s *Illust. of Lyric Poetry*, p. 48. On first being questioned as to the authorship, Mrs. Mickle, old and paralysed, answered with diffidence and hesitation, but on another occasion she confidently asserted that her husband had given it to her as his own composition. Dr. Beattie added the stanza with the words:

The present moment is our ain,  
The neist we never saw -

which convey a truth more obvious than striking.]

Some years after the luckless Jean Adams was dead, there was going about Ayrshire and the southern counties, accompanying a beggarly crew of tramps, the daughter of a Kilmarnock weaver, Jean Glover by name, a handsome, wild, thieving hussy, following her light-fingered and light-hearted husband, who frequented fairs and races, as player and mountebank. [Chambers’s *Life and Works of Burns*, 1852, iv. 291.] At quays and market-places was seen Jean in her tawdry finery and

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tinsel playing the tambourine and singing songs while her partner played his juggling feats and tricked the weaver lads, “the brawest woman that had ever been seen to step in leathern shoon.” [Stenhouse’s *Lyric Poetry of Scotland*.] She tramped by the weary dusty roads, or draggle-tailed trode the moorlands, and slept in the open on summer nights, or in sheds in evil weather, till she died on her wanderings through Ireland in 1801 at the age of forty-two. One song she left for folk to sing when her voice was silent - a song which she, in the glee of happy vagrancy, had composed:

Over the moor and among the heather  
Down among the blooming heather,  
By sea and sky ! she shall be mine,  
The bonnie lass among the heather.

This ditty, which Robert Burns took down from her singing, is no great thing truly, yet it is a fresh voice that sings out of the sordid vagabond soul.

It is to the keeper of a poor alehouse in Ayrshire, Isabel Pagan, the song, “Ca’ the yowes to the knowes,” to which Burns added some verses, has been ascribed. High-born ladies did not disdain to sing to harpsichord in the best company in Scotland verses due possibly to the ugly, deformed, ill-favoured, ill-tongued, drunken keeper of a shebeen near Muirkirk, in Ayrshire, where she sold smuggled whisky to customers, who laughed at her coarse jokes as they took their illicit mutchkin. [One is sceptical as to her authorship. The collection of her verses published in 1805 is chiefly doggerel; and it is strange that Burns, who first heard the song from a clergyman, should know nothing of the claims of a woman who lived in his own county (*Contemporaries of Burns*, 1840, p. 116).] The Muse kept more orderly company with clever Mrs. Grant in the Highland manse at Laggan, when she was writing her favourite “Where and O where is your Highland laddie gone”; and with another Mrs. Grant, at Carron on Spey, who wrote her brisk and spirited “Roy’s Wife of Aldivalloch” When Englishwomen were writing dramas and histories and treatises, their Scottish sisters were quietly writing songs.