CHAPTER III

1816–28

ARDENCAPLE

As I am here entering on the horizon in which my own life began, and from which much of its colouring has been derived, I must say something of the physical and moral landscapes which were the surroundings of my childhood and youth. In many parts of Scotland the dividing line between the Celtic Highlands and the Lowlands is well marked. The range of the Grampians generally presents a sudden mountain frontier rising over a comparatively level country, or over lower hills of quite another aspect. This frontier is more or less distinct all the way from Stirling to Inverness. But nowhere is this great natural geographical division more striking than on the estuary of the Firth of Clyde, from a point just opposite to the roadstead and town of Greenock. Looking from that point all round the north-western and western horizon, the typical Highland hills fall steeply to the water's edge, forming an amphitheatre of mountain outline against the sky. Although nowhere within sight attaining any very great elevation, they have a striking effect from the general ruggedness of their surfaces and the broken character of their tops. There are higher mountains than any of them in some parts of what is called the Low Country—as, for example, in the county of Dumfries. But the general aspect is wholly different. The barrier of the Celtic Highlands betrays at once to the eye of a geologist the presence of the ancient metamorphic or crystalline rocks; and the frontage they

present to the Firth of Clyde is the frontage of a range which extends without any interruption to the north-north-west from that line to the borders of Caithness and Sutherland. All along that great distance a line could be drawn passing over the hills in front of Greenock, and terminating at Ben Alisky in Caithness, or at Cape Wrath in Sutherland, and would never cross any plain, or even any broad valley. It would cross only a continuous series of steep ridges, and of narrow glens—some of them occupied by arms of the sea, others by narrow strips of cultivated land. It results from these conditions of physical geography that those who live on the slopes which fall into the Firth of Clyde have two very different kinds of natural beauty to enjoy. Below them and in front of them they have, not a river which, if of navigable size, is always muddy, but a wide yet sheltered inlet of the ocean, with its tides, its seaweeds, and its margins of boulder or of rock; whilst behind them, and just over a ridge very near above them, they may step into some of the wildest and loneliest Highland glens.

Such exactly was the position of my father's property of Ardencaple. It looked down on one of the busiest of the Lowland scenes—the roadstead of Greenock, full of life and movement, breathing of 'ships, colonies, and commerce.' Yet immediately behind, over the crest of its own hill, there lay the deep and steep Glen-fruin, in which one of the very last and bloodiest of clan-fights took place, so late as the year 1603. A few steps—hardly a hundred yards—over the summit of the ridge towards the north, take us as completely out of sight of the Lowlands as if we were in another country. Very steep green mountain-sides, purely pastoral, shut out all the sights and sounds of human life, and echo nothing but the bleating of sheep and the cry of a startled grouse. The estate of Ardencaple stretched along the winding shores of the Firth of Clyde for about a mile. Immediately opposite the eastern gate, the Firth is four miles wide—a space, neverthe-

less, across which in certain states of the atmosphere the noise of hammers comes with great distinctness from the shipbuilding yards of Greenock. But westward the shore of Ardencaple soon passes behind the sheltering promontory of Rosneath, which narrows the waters to half a mile, and leaves a lovely margin to the narrow entrance of the long arm of the sea called the Gareloch. The boundaries of the estate run straight up to the top of the nearest crest, where, however, it narrows very much, having a moor of fine old heather not above 300 yards broad.

One special feature of the whole estuary of the Clyde was conspicuous at Ardencaple. That feature is an 'old coast-line' which marks a higher level at which the sea used to stand, and must have stood for ages, about from 30 to 60 feet above the present level of the sea. This old coast-line is marked by a steep bank, sometimes rocky, with caves eaten out by the waves, or with projecting ledges undercut by passing sheets of ice. The distance at which this bank stands back from the present line of shore depends, of course, on the contours of the land. When those contours are steep, the distance is often very small; where they are gentle and gradual, there may be large and nearly level fields separating the old from the present coast-line. In the Middle Ages all sudden declivities were more or less valuable for the purposes of defence, and fortified houses were often built upon the top of this line of steeps.

So it was with the old castle of the Clan Macaulay. One large field nearly 200 yards broad stood between the castle and the sea. On both sides—to east and west—the same line of bank was covered with old trees, the home of an immense rookery. On the top of the bank there was another nearly level plateau of arable fields stretching to the foot of the mountain slope. On that slope there was a fine old wood, principally of oak, but with groups of beech, Scots fir, ash, and some other kinds of trees. Two

small but rapid and clear streams—locally called burns—came, one from each side of the estate, and, winding through little ravines, united in an outlet towards its western boundary. Above the wood there was a very large field of somewhat wild and rough pasture, much invaded, however, by a perfect forest of very old and almost arboreal bushes of whin or gorse, whose sheets of golden bloom shone in spring above the late and reluctant budding of the oaks. From every part of this field there was a splendid view of the whole estuary of the Clyde, from a point near Dumbarton Castle on the east to the Argyllshire mountains on the west, and embracing the peaks of Arran far away on the southern horizon. The beautiful promontory of Rosneath lay at the spectator's feet, with its fine woods and lawns, and its little sheltered bays, and its stately Italian portico of lofty red sandstone columns. Above that large expanse of wild pasture my father planted a large area with larch and spruce fir, which in my earliest memory had already attained a size so considerable that, from below, the hill seemed covered with wood. Above that wood, again, lay the moor, on which it was always possible to get a few brace of grouse, and from which the view was still more extensive to the east, and looked into the valley which is occupied by the waters of Loch Lomond, although the lake itself was not visible, owing to some woods and intervening eminences.

The old Castle of Ardencaple had been built on the crest of the old coast-line, at a point where it was very steep and formed a projecting curve, so that the walls could have the benefit of a natural defence on two sides. On the third side, towards the level plateau, there were doubtless outworks of defence, which had been levelled when times of security had come, and of which no signs remained on a smooth grass lawn from a period long before my father's acquisition of the estate. The lower part of the walls was of immense thickness, dating, it is said, from the thirteenth century. On the top of these walls a modern house had

been built, of the usual old Scottish-French architecture, which was universal in Scotland during the eighteenth century, and of which the finer specimens are amongst the most beautiful examples of architecture in the country. This, however, Ardencaple was not. It had never been large or imposing, and the more modern parts were simple and unadorned. But the southern front, facing the sea, was picturesque, and included some variety of wall, of towers, and of turrets. The accommodation was limited, but a pleasant library looked inland over the lawn and to the wooded hill; there was a long, narrow drawing-room, a comfortable dining-room, and a long, narrow passage—almost another room. The Castle was surrounded by trees on all sides but one, the trees growing from the bottom of the old sea-bank, and the tops of their branches being little above the level of the roof. Above the narrow drawing-room my father had made a charming workshop, fitted up with all sorts of lathes for turning, and nests of drawers for the appropriate tools, with a store, not far off, of elephant tusks and of rare and beautiful ornamental woods, such as could be combined with work in ivory and in metals. Large dormer-windows let in abundant light and dominated the Firth of Clyde.

As almost the whole estate was in my father's own hands—only one small farm being let to a tenant—it was large and varied enough to give him plenty of occupation, without being so large as to engross his time. It was, indeed, perfect as a haven of rest from the troubles of life—situated in a beautiful country, with only a very few country neighbours, and otherwise a seclusion as complete as he might wish to make it.

But I must now turn to that other of the two sources of human life, from which it has been observed men often derive not a few of the most determining elements of their nature. Motherhood is quite as powerful as fatherhood in the transmission of character, and not unfrequently it is more powerful. If there be in the influence of parentage any advantage from variety

and the absence of even the slightest consanguinity, the union of my parents must, so far as this goes, have had a happy influence on their children. Within the limits of a common country, they came from the most opposite directions of the compass, representing even such varieties of race as can still be traced in our community of origins so fortunately mixed. Whether the name Campbell be of Celtic or of Norman origin has been vehemently disputed, but there can be no doubt that the lineage of my family had a large Celtic element—an element so recently strengthened and renewed from the Irish stock of my beautiful grandmother, Elizabeth Gunning. Old historic families on the Continent have been, both physically and politically, weakened by superstitious usages adverse to the union of class with class. But this, fortunately, has never been the curse of society in the British Isles. The oldest stocks have been constantly renewed and reinforced by fresh blood from families unknown to fame, and flavoured, very often, by as much of racial difference in origin as can be said to be distinguishable in our great amalgam.

My father was certainly in many indefinable characteristics a Highlander, modified by both Irish and English blood. My mother was a Miss Joan Glassell—as certainly of a thoroughly Lowland stock, which, however, had never attained to eminence. Several of the family went to the American colonies and settled in Virginia, where their descendants abound at the present day. Her father was a certain John Glassell, who in the eighteenth century bought the small landed estate of Longniddry, in East Lothian, which yielded an income of upwards of £1,500 a year—representing at the date of his purchase a sum of at least double the amount. His wife—my maternal grandmother—was a Miss Brown of Coulston, whose sister married the ninth Earl of Dalhousie, and through whom the great Marquis of Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India, was my cousin.

Both my mother's parents died whilst she was yet a child—leaving her the heiress of the Longniddry estate, and very much alone in the world. Her guardians sent her to Edinburgh to be educated under the care of Mrs. Grant of Laggan, at that time a well-known, if not even a celebrated, woman. Her 'Letters from the Mountains' had acquired for her a very considerable literary reputation, and the story of her life has been, even in recent years, told in an interesting memoir published in America. Among the young women with whose instruction she was charged, my mother soon took a high place, as distinguished by the vivacity of her mind and by her charms of conversation. Mrs. Grant spoke and wrote of her to friends in terms which made them anxious to secure her acquaintance. Amongst Mrs. Grant's oldest friends were the Smiths of Jordanhill, a family connected with the commerce of Glasgow, by whom an estate to the west of that city had been purchased a good many years before. This was the link by which my father and mother were first brought together.

In the last year of my grandfather's life, early in 1806, when he was living at the old Castle of Rosneath, it took fire, and the greater part of it was destroyed. But a portion of the building was saved. It stood on the top of a very steep bank rising above a little bay of the sea, and close to the point which may be considered as the opening of the Gareloch. As my uncle very foolishly began to build a new Italian palazzo about a hundred yards further inland from the shore, and as the great expenditure he lavished on this house, at a time when everything was very costly, soon plunged him into embarrassment, the remains of the old castle were roughly fitted up as a temporary residence, and were finally let to anyone who wanted a place in one of the loveliest spots in Scotland, with peculiar charms of quietness and cheerfulness, together with great seclusion. As Mr. Smith of Jordanhill had taken to yachting, the

place exactly suited him, and he became its tenant in 1812. The two castles of Ardencaple and Rosneath were exactly opposite each other, and only separated by a narrow strait which could be crossed in a rowing-boat in little more than ten minutes; my father and Mr. Smith were thus very near neighbours, and an intimate and an attached friendship was soon established between them.

Miss Glassell was a favourite guest with Mr. Smith and his wife, a woman whom I cannot mention without saying that her beautiful and spiritual countenance is one of the most treasured memories of my early life. My father was not insensible to the attractions which seem to have arrested the attention and secured the affections of all who came within access to them. These attractions did not depend on feature or on form. My mother was not a beautiful woman in any definable sense. I have a fine picture of her by a Glasgow artist of the name of Milliship, who died young, but whose art would have assuredly raised him, if he had lived, to great distinction. My mother's features were small. But the great characteristic of her face was her eyes—eyes of a fine clear violet blue—large, tender, full of an earnest and inquiring gaze. She was highly intellectual, fond of poetry, lively and specially enthusiastic in her admirations. On seeing the famous tragedienne, Miss O'Niel, performing the part of Juliet, my mother was so carried away by her emotions that she at once bought a diamond ring, and sent it anonymously to the object of her enthusiasm. Miss O'Niel, concluding or suspecting that it came from a man, never wore it until she discovered the real donor, and then wore it for the rest of her long life as Lady Beecher, in loving memory of her young friend. I have this anecdote from Lady Beecher herself, in the course of an inherited friendship with that lady, which ended only with her death at a very advanced age. I have no means of giving a closer description of my mother's character and disposition

than a few such anecdotes as this, with the important exception, however, of a large number of her own letters.

The Smiths of Jordanhill invited my mother to accompany them on a visit to Rome, and for some time afterwards she kept up a more or less continuous correspondence with my father, before their mutual attraction had come to an engagement. Her letters are full of the most lively and varied interest in Nature and in Art, and show great power of expression, and an enthusiastic and poetic temperament. In this she differed wholly from my father. I never heard him quote or refer to a line of poetry, except three celebrated lines from 'Hamlet' which embody in words of characteristic power and beauty a precept of practical wisdom in the affairs of life, of which my father had only too great occasion to observe the truth. These lines are indeed a curious example of the power of genius to lift into the region of true poetry even maxims of the merest worldly wisdom, by expressing them in the stately march of noble and imaginative words. Often have I heard my father repeat those lines:

> 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
> For lending loseth oft thyself and friend,
> And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.'

But neither in his letters nor in his conversation did he indicate any enjoyment of poetry. His correspondence with my mother was affectionate, sensible, and often humorous, but exhibiting none of that 'exaggerated sensibility' which Dr. Robertson had attributed to him during his sorrow in 1803. Knowing as I do that his nature was very tender, I have no doubt that he was one of those many men who are much in the habit of suppressing their own deeper emotions, partly from natural reserve, partly from a fear lest they should become excessive, and partly from having no great facility of language. Not

unfrequently in later years I saw by a silent but expressive movement of his hands that he was thinking of his own Dead. But I never heard him speak of them. My mother's letters show, perhaps, a much more highly emotional disposition, perhaps a wider range of interests, and certainly a much greater facility and copiousness of expression.

In 1820 my father was married to Miss Glassell, and they then settled down in their country-house at Ardencaple, where, after my father's resignation of his seat in Parliament in 1822, they lived exclusively.

Their first child, my elder brother, was born in 1821. I was born two years later, on the 30th April, 1823. A daughter was born in 1825.* Another daughter was born in 1827, but my mother never recovered well from this last confinement. The child died first, and then she followed, dying in 1828. It will be seen, then, that I was only five years old when I lost my mother. I retain of her only a very few scattered recollections—some of them, indeed, of great vividness, but leaning on nothing except the fathomless mysteries of memory. Those recollections are only, as it were, solitary islands in the waters of forgetfulness, leaving me to know of her only so much as I have gathered from others and her own very characteristic letters. For better access to the best medical advice, my father removed her from Ardencaple to a villa on the Clyde, close to Glasgow. I was temporarily disposed of by being sent across the water, and over a low ridge of hills, to a farm-house called Portkill, on the southern side of the Rosneath promontory. It was situated immediately opposite to the town of Gourock, then a very quiet place, but now chiefly remarkable for the busy railway-station which is the terminus in this direction of all the lines to the South Country and to London.

The house of Portkill was then the residence of

* Emma, married Sir John McNeill, G.C.B.

Mr. Lorne Campbell, who, besides being the tenant of the largest farm on the Rosneath estate, was manager or factor over the whole of it for my uncle George, sixth Duke of Argyll. His was an hereditary office, for his father had occupied the same position before him, and had been a typical representative of a class of man which was a remnant of the feudal ages. Great estates were then generally erected into 'baronies'—that is to say, districts with a regular system of rural government, in which the tenantry of various classes took part, under a president or chairman who represented the proprietor, and was called generally the Baillie. The assemblies held under this system had a large authority in regulating all local matters, and generally adopted in their regulations all the forms and language of statutory enactments, beginning with the words 'It is statute and ordained.' With the abolition of the old heritable jurisdictions and with the speedy introduction of regular courts of law, these baronial courts soon completely disappeared. But the old titles connected with them survived for a time, and the representatives of the owners of great baronial estates continued to be called Baillies. Old Baillie Campbell—father of the first host by whom I was entertained as a child in 1828—had been a splendid representative of the olden time. He and my grandfather were contemporaries, and Baillie Campbell entertained for his chief and for his friend an attachment which was almost like the love of woman. When a messenger came from Inveraray to tell him, in 1806, that his old master had been struck down by a paralytic attack which left no hope of life, old Baillie Campbell was at dinner. He read the letter—laid it down on the table—said no other words than these, 'Then, it is time for me to go, too'—rose and went to bed, which he never left.

His son, Lorne Campbell, was a man of the same type, deeply attached to the Argyll family, and a general favourite of all its members. He was then

unmarried, and lived with an old mother, widow of the Baillie, to whom that dignitary had been married, when he was past eighty years of age, at the express wish, and almost the express orders, of my grandfather, who told him that so good a man ought not to die without descendants.

Although the house of Portkill was within about two miles of the home of my infancy at Ardencaple, it was nevertheless totally different in its position and surroundings. It commanded at close quarters the roadstead of Greenock, the whole lower course of the Clyde as far up the river as Dumbarton Castle, the opening of the lower estuary down to Bute, and the steep declivities of the Argyllshire mountains above Dunoon. With a southern exposure—few trees to hide the prospects on either side—and a gentle slope to the waters of the Firth, it was an absolutely new scene to me, and I look back on the short time I spent there in the fifth year of my age as the first awakening of that consciousness of time and of events in which the work of memory can alone begin. The mechanism of this great faculty is inscrutable to us. But the instinctive interpretations of human speech are probably the best, as they are the only indications of the nearest analogies by which that mechanism can be best explained.

When we speak of new scenes as making a great impression, we employ a familiar image taken from the effect produced on soft substances by the physical pressure of a seal, or by the contact of some other external substance exercising an impressing force, and leaving a mould or cast of itself on a clay, or on a wax, or some other recipient and yielding surface. Those likenesses and parallelisms between the properties of matter and mind are puzzling, and in some aspects they may seem not agreeable subjects of contemplation. That receptivity to impressions which in matter is due to softness of consistency is in mind due to that which we call attention. But attention

is one of the greatest mental conceptions that we can possibly entertain. Novelty in outward things rouses attention, and under the vivid interest of new scenes the mind takes impressions which are deep and lasting. Childish experience is often one of the best fields for observation in regard to these phenomena. Of the home of my infancy, with its unvarying routine of life, I retain nothing but the most scattered and shadowy recollections. Whereas of my life at Portkill, which lasted only a few weeks, I remember with an indelible distinctness a whole series of the most minute details. The old lady of the house, widow of the Baillie, and mother of my host, made a great pet of me, and I still see her figure—especially when it approached the door of a certain press, which I had learned to know was well filled with jam-pots. Then there was the new experience of being allowed sometimes to mount in one of the farm-carts, and to be driven with joltings which, however severe, were indescribably delightful. Nor were there wanting, even at that early age, some of the innate pleasures of disobedience—the eating of the fruit of some 'forbidden tree.' I was told I was not to go into the kitchen. Of course, into the kitchen I did go just as often as an opportunity offered. And the opportunities were many, because—*Facilis est descensus Averni*—it was accessible from the floor on which we lived. And in that kitchen I saw for the first and the last time the preparations for the breakfast of the ploughmen and hands of the farm. There was a truly 'lordly dish' of oatmeal porridge—an immense bowl almost as large as a foot-bath, full of a glorious mass of steaming stuff, so solid in its consistency that a mast would have stood upright if it had been well planted there. Spoons and mugs of horn were another wonder and delight—now banished from even the humblest homes by the cheapness of metallurgy, which has supplanted these, and other long survivals of the ages of stone and of bone and of horn.

One morning I remember there was a great excitement. Behind the house there was a walled garden, which, however, was protected on one side by a not very formidable fence. The smell of delicious vegetables had led one of the wild roebucks which abounded in the woods to approach the fence, and with one flying leap he cleared it—as, indeed, it was easy for him to do with those thin, fine legs and springy muscles which are so specially fitted for such work. In the morning he was discovered half hid among the beans and peas, and busy with a repast as delicious to him as it was destructive of much careful gardening. A gun was procured, and, as its discharge would be very close to the house, I recollect being taken out and perched by my nurse on the top of a railing some little distance off. I recollect, as if it were yesterday, the moments—it seemed the many minutes—of suspense, and then the report, which sounded to me as if it came from some violent blow upon a sounding-board. The dead roedeer rather excited my horror; and although I have myself shot many since, I have never quite got over the dislike of seeing the death of those loveliest of all the kinds of deer.

After a time, the length of which I cannot recollect, the weary fight which my mother had long maintained was evidently drawing to its close. Wishing to see all her children before she left them, she sent for me, and the messenger was my pet cousin, Adelaide Campbell, the youngest of the many beautiful daughters of my aunt, Lady Charlotte Campbell, and one of the two to whom my mother was most attached. She had been for some time helping to nurse my mother in her illness. I perfectly recollect her arrival at Portkill to take me away to Clyde Villa. I recollect my arrival there, and being taken to see my mother along with my elder brother, who had not been separated as I had been. I dimly recollect her desiring us both to read the Scriptures every night and morning, but neither voice nor face can I recall. The fact

was, however, kept alive by the reminders of those whom she left in charge of us, and by two copies of the Bible given to us at the time, one of which—mine—was in a single volume, the other—my brother's—in two volumes. The difference attracted my attention, and remains, accordingly, in vivid memory. I recollect, farther, having been taken by my father to see her in her coffin and to kiss her cold brow. All else is gone—except the funeral. We all went in a steamer to the old church of Kilmun, the remains of a monastic establishment founded by the Argyll family in the fifteenth century, and which has ever since been our burying-place.

On this little journey by water, little more than twenty miles, another great novelty aroused all my attention, and remains, accordingly, deeply impressed on my memory. It is to be remembered that at that time steam navigation was only a few years old. The boats were very different from those we see now. In that which took us to Kilmun the engines worked in an open well, and the piston-rods rose high above, and fell deep below, the level of the decks. The passengers were only saved by a low bulwark from the danger of falling in. The first alarm gave way to wonder and curiosity—as, indeed, to this day I never see a great steam-engine at work without something approaching to emotion.

The burying-place at Kilmun is called a vault. But it does not at all correspond with that description. It is simply a part of the chancel of the old church, wholly above ground, and to which access was obtained by large folding-doors. Each side of the aisle was fitted up with a broad shelf of stone, on which the coffins were deposited and were fully exposed to view. My mother's coffin was laid near that of my grandfather, who had died in 1806. On this being done, the bearers retired, and shut behind them the folding-doors, leaving us all in a dim and gloomy light. I still recollect the panic which then seized

me, and the tall, deeply craped figure of my cousin, Adelaide Campbell, trying to pacify my terrors by assuring me that we were not to be there long. I recollect, too, my father kneeling on the slab beside my mother's coffin, and seeing that it was carefully adjusted with reference to the position of the other mouldering remains. But my panic was little abated till I saw the folding-doors reopened, and until we emerged into the light of day, with the sea at our feet and the mountains all around. A few days later we all left the fateful villa near Glasgow, and drove to our old home of Ardencaple.

Such were the occurrences and scenes by which my young life was first awakened to the light of memory and to the consciousness of time. Almost everything before then is a blank to me, whilst every subsequent year is more or less stored with recollections. Few of those occurrences were in themselves pleasurable. Most of them were very sad, whilst some were even terrifying to a child. They left, however, no permanent atmosphere of melancholy about my father. He busied himself in his estate, in his workshop occupations, and in his constant interest in the progress of mechanical science. For fifteen years he never left Ardencaple, except—if this can be called an exception—on short excursions into the neighbouring county of Argyll, in which he always retained his position as Colonel of the Militia. He had also, under the trust arrangements on his brother's estate, some personal responsibility for the management of the extensive woods at Inveraray. These occupations gave him annually something to do outside his own home. But with these short interruptions he lived entirely at home, rarely even going outside the boundaries of his small property, except on Sundays to the parish church of Row. For a couple of years after my mother's death his favourite niece kept house for him, and her care and affection afforded me all the knowledge I ever had of motherhood.

She was of a very lively and cheerful disposition, with a great love of sculpture, and her work in making busts and medallions in the fine blue clay of the Clyde 'till' was always a delight to me.

In 1830 my father married the widow of the medical man who had attended my mother in her last illness. She was one of the Cuninghames of Craigends, a family descended from the Earls of Glencairn, the last of whom is so touchingly addressed by Burns.*

My father's marriage made no difference in his habits. From my mother's death in 1828 till 1836—for eight years—he never left his quiet home, so that the whole of my boyhood till the age of thirteen was spent in the entirely rural and secluded life which I have described.

* 'Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn' (Robert Burns).