

# SCOTTISH MEN OF LETTERS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

## CHAPTER XI

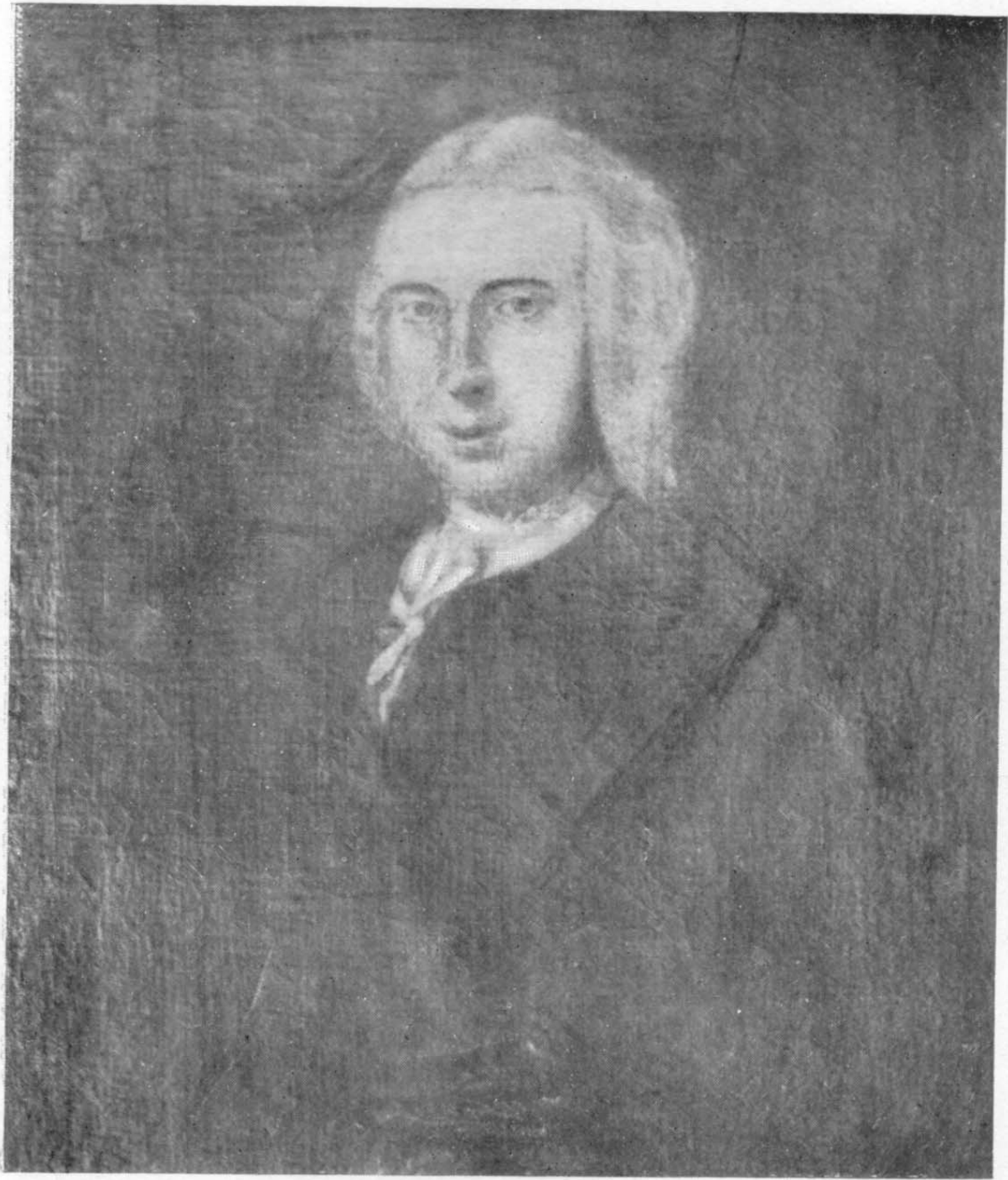
### SCOTTISH MEN OF LETTERS IN ENGLAND

#### PART TWO: TOBIAS SMOLLETT

It was in 1738 - the year that Thomson's *Agamemnon* was played to brilliant audiences in Covent Garden - that Tobias Smollett, aged eighteen, started from Glasgow to London - his baggage consisting of a little clothing, a few surgical instruments, some letters of introduction, and the manuscript of a play. The roads were bad, conveyances were few, his funds were small; so, partly on foot, partly by waggon, partly on carriers' pack-horses, he may be supposed, like Roderick Random, to have made his way to the great Metropolis in search of fame and a livelihood, like so many of his countrymen. The year before Garrick and Samuel Johnson had also arrived, on the same errand, travelling "ride-and-tie" from Lichfield, with vague hopes in their breasts and the manuscript of a tragedy in the ex-schoolmaster's pocket.

Smollett was born in March 1721 at Dalquhurn, an old farmhouse in the vale of Leven, near Dumbarton. It had been given up by Sir James Smollett of Bonhill to his unprofitable son Archibald, who married young, never could make a living, and died leaving a wife and family dependent on his parent, the irascible old judge. When he departed this life the needy household was settled in a small farm two miles off, where the industrious widow earned enough to support her children. After Tobias had been taught and flogged at Dumbarton by that admirable Latinist and flagellator Mr. John Love - who had in the past been prosecuted by his minister for brewing on a Sunday, [Chalmers's *Life of Ruddiman*, p. 136.] and in the future was known by his virulent pamphleteering against the redoubtable Ruddiman - the boy was sent to Glasgow to become apprentice to Mr. John Gordon, surgeon and apothecary.

Few anecdotes are told of a man's boyhood till he becomes famous, and then, unluckily, it is too late to remember, and there is only time to invent. One story, however, in this case is veracious, though not very important. [Moore's *Life of Smollett*, p.



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From the Portrait in the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow.

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111.] It was a winter morning, the streets were thick with snow, and Tobias and his fellow-apprentices were engaged in a fight. Mr. Gordon, the little round chirurgeon, entered his shop and severely rebuked one of his assistants for neglecting his duties. The limp excuse was given that while making up a prescription - a fellow had hit him with a ball, and he set forth in pursuit of him. "A likely story!" commented his master. "I wonder how long I should stand here before it would enter the head of any mortal to fling a ball at me," and as the doctor loftily reared his paunchy little person, a well-directed snowball hit him full in the face. This came from Toby, who had heard the dialogue behind the door. In spite of all his pranks, he was a favourite, and years after Dr. Gordon, when he became a physician of city renown, proud of having had the great novelist as his pupil, would say, as he gave a rap to his snuff-box: "Gie me my ain bubbly-nosed callant wi' a stane in his pooch!" [Moore's *Life of Smollett*, p. 112.] Tobias had a pen as forcible as his hand; he would indite verses when he should have prepared cataplasms, and made satires instead of boluses. Certainly there were many quaint aspects of society around him which appealed to any one with a sense of humour. The city, with a population of 17,000, was emerging from obscurity, merchants were beginning to make fortunes from rum and tobacco, and they had a full sense of self-importance as they strutted in the streets. "Can you tell me the nearest way to a town in your country called Glasgow?" inquired Francis Osbaldistone of Andrew Fairservice, his servant. "A *toon* ca'ed Glesca!" repeated Andrew with a scornful sniff at such pitiful ignorance. "Glesca is a *ceety*, man!" It was indeed a city as pious as it was prosperous - no town had more fervid preachers, fuller kirks, more holy Sabbaths - and if the merchants could drink, they would, as they took their "meridian," doff their three-cornered hats and preface it with a grace. These were the days when the motto of the city was "May Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the Word" - leaving it for commercial bailies in another and more secular century to dock it of the sentiment "the preaching of the Word" - considering that a means of "flourishing" far inferior to cotton, shipping, soft goods, and hardware.

It was in 1738 that Smollett, tired of this abode of commerce, set forth, filled with literary ambition, having in his pocket a treasured tragedy on James I. of Scotland, which the reading of Boece's *History* had inspired when he should have been pounding his pestle and compounding his drugs. Smollett's relations, in equipping him for his journey, were sparing of their money, but as regards letters of introduction Tobias asserts, without a spark of gratitude, "their liberality was prodigious." [Moore's *Life of Smollett*, p. 116.] Where the youth stayed, or where he lived at

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first in London, is not known, but he sought sanguinely an immediate literary fame. He submitted his play, as a matter of course, to Mr. George Lyttelton - afterwards Lord Lyttelton - the great patron of letters, who had befriended Mallet and Thomson, and was to be waited upon by many another Scotsman - Home and Mickle unsuccessfully among the number. One feels compassion for this estimable man, who had an arduous reputation as a man of taste and influence to maintain. Enormous were the numbers of manuscripts submitted to him by authors in all states of obscurity and poverty and literary decrepitude. Young poets and dramatists cursed him if he did not commend their pieces, and booksellers and managers cursed him if they did not succeed. In this case he gave the apprentice-apothecary-dramatist only polite evasion, and the heart of Tobias waxed wroth within him.

As literary prospects were dim, it must have been with a heavy heart that he took the post of surgeon's mate on board the *Cumberland* man-of-war - which was sailing under Sir Challoner Ogle to reinforce Admiral Vernon in the West Indies. Never was the naval service more coarse, more brutal than at that period. Manned by the scum of the people - gaol-birds, smugglers, insolvent debtors, rascals of all shades, scoundrels of all degrees - the ships were commanded by officers whose habits and language admirably suited their crews; living in dirty cabins with canvas partitions, sleeping in squalid hammocks, and fed on coarse food set down on wooden platters on an old sail that served for a table-cloth. The lot of a surgeon and his mate was still worse in that service - bad fare and bad pay and bad language. What Smollett's impressions of sea life were we may learn from *Roderick Random*; what impressions he had of naval warfare we know from his vivid description of the incapable attack on Carthage.

The sea life lasted about three years, and then he resided for some time in Jamaica, where he met Miss Anne Lascelles, the planter's daughter, who became his wife.

In 1744 the ex-surgeon's mate, at a time when Scots physicians swarmed in London [Such as Clephane, Pitcairn, Macaulay, Smellie, the great accoucheur, Dickson, Armstrong, Gusthart, the two Fordyces, the Hunters, and many more.] bravely set up as a doctor in Downing Street, putting his brass plate on the door of a house where Dr. Douglas, a countryman, had had his shop and his practice. Patients being few, visits were frequent to the clubs of good Scotsmen, who met to partake of frugal suppers and punch. It was in 1746 that Dr. Carlyle of Inveresk met him and struck up a lifelong friendship [Carlyle's *Autobiography*, p. 190.] at the Golden Ball in Cockspur Street. The news of Culloden had just arrived; the town was in a wild state of jubilation, and mobs were swaying

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about in drunken triumph over the defeat of the Scots rebels, as the two Scotsmen made their way through the streets - Smollett fuming at seeing John Bull in an insolent mood. His disgust at the severity of the Government and the brutality of the "Butcher" Cumberland forthwith moved him to write his "Tears of Scotland." One evening, while friends were busy at cards in a tavern, they listened to the fierce invective of his verses, and on one of the company suggesting that some were sure to give offence in great quarters, the author, to whom opposition was the surest incentive, took his pen and at a side-table wrote another stanza more defiant than all the rest. [Chambers's *Life of Smollett*, p. 45.]

Smollett had a genius for giving as well as for taking offence - and his two satires, *Advice* and *Reproof*, which he published in 1746 and 1747, were excellent specimens of his talents in that direction. If he had desired to alienate friends, to offend patrons, to increase enemies, he could not have succeeded better, for he castigates equally ministers and gamblers, actors and usurers, poets and scoundrels. It was the same through all his splenetic career. He never could control his temper or his pen. He attacked Lord Lyttelton, and patrons saw him no more; he offended patients, and they no longer knocked at his door; he ridiculed Garrick, and Drury Lane stage was shut to his plays; he quarrelled with the old harlequin Rich, the manager of Covent Garden, for whom he had written a masque to music by Handel, which the composer afterwards adapted to Dryden's St. Cecilia's Ode, swearing, it is reported, "Dat Scot is ein tam fool; I could have made his vork immortal."

In 1747 he set up house, having married Miss Lascelles of Jamaica - the pretty, black-eyed, dark-complexioned creole - probably a year or two before. His wife's income of £300 kept poverty from the door and gave him time to write. The fruit of his leisure appeared in January 1748 in two small volumes, which were issued anonymously from the shop of Osborne, in Gray's Inn Lane - the bookseller whom Samuel Johnson had knocked down with a folio for insolence. In a letter to his friend Carlyle of Inveresk, Smollett says: "The whole was begun and finished in the compass of eight months. During which time several intervals happened of two, three, and four weeks, wherein I did not set pen to paper." [Unpublished Letter to Dr. Carlyle of Inveresk, 7th June 1748.] At a bound the obscure surgeon rose from obscurity to fame, and ranked with the first writers of the day.

Curiosity was excited then, and conjecture has been active since, as to how much was part of his autobiography. Guesses have been busy fixing prototypes to his characters, and half-a-dozen barbers competed for the honour of having been the

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original Strap, his faithful attendant. Many a chin they shaved and wig they trimmed for customers who came to hear from their voluble lips the story of their imaginary acquaintance with the great novelist. A letter may set some of these guesses to rest - death has long ago put these pretended Straps to silence. In acknowledging the congratulations of his friend Carlyle he wrote: "In the midst of my satisfaction, however, I am not a little mortified to find the characters strangely misapplied to particular men whom I never had the least intention to ridicule, - by which means I have suffered very much in my moral capacity. Some persons, to whom I have been extremely obliged, being weak enough to take umbrage at many passages in the work on the supposition that I myself am the hero of the book, and they of consequence concerned in the history. I take the opportunity of declaring to you, in all the sincerity of the most unreserved friendship, that no person living is aimed at in all the first part of the book, that is, while the scene is laid in Scotland; and that (the account of the expedition to Carthage excepted) the whole is not so much a representation of my life as of that of many other needy Scotch surgeons whom I have known either personally or by report. The character of Strap (who I find is a favourite among the ladies) is partly taken from life, but the circumstances of his attachment are entirely feigned." [Unpublished Letter to Carlyle. Probably John Lewis, the bookbinder, who often sat at his Sunday dinners, may have suggested some traits of Strap (Nichols' *Lit. Anecdotes*, iii, 469). In a letter he speaks of "John Lewis, alias Strap."]

The modern novel was then being created. A few years before, in 1740, Mr. Samuel Richardson, in his *Pamela*, had presented the fine moral lesson that prudence in preserving virtue is the best way to win heaven and a husband of fortune. Two years after, Henry Fielding had in *Joseph Andrews* admirably mocked Squire Booby and his wife, to the disgust of the little printer, and presented to the world with inimitable humour inimitable characters. *Roderick Random* was written in a new vein. It followed the manner of *Gil Blas* - being the novel of adventure, though with a coarse colouring which Le Sage loved not.

The purpose of the book was, according to the author, to represent his hero as an "orphan of modest merit struggling with difficulties caused by his own want of experience, as well as from the selfishness, envy, malice, and base indifference of mankind." It must be owned that it is difficult to discover either the "modesty" or the "merit" of this interesting orphan - a selfish libertine without the generosity of a Tom Jones, who at least is a good-hearted animal. It is the incidents of broad humour, the grotesque figures crowding the pages, which fill our memories; above all, the delicious Strap and Lieutenant Thomas Bowling. Adventures follow in

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riotous profusion, and bustling scenes in town and in country, in the tavern, on the road, come in quick succession, where there is admirable farce rather than comedy, peopled with characters, who are delightful caricatures rather than portraits.

After a visit to Paris with his young friend John Moore, who became afterwards partner to his old master, Dr. Gordon, in Glasgow, *Peregrine Pickle* appeared in 1751. ["London, printed for the author and sold by D. Wilson, at Plato's Head, near to Round Court in the Strand, 1751."] *Peregrine* is even more coarse in his tastes, his ways, and his frolics than Roderick - a youth to whose hanging we would go as gladly as Mr. James Boswell ever went to see an execution on Tyburn Tree. But the comic scenes in Paris, the dinner "after the manner of the ancients," the characters that came in rich variety - Commodore Trunnion, Hatchway, and Tom Pipes, with minor figures - knaves, bullies, and "originals" - drawn with sardonic humour - all make it keenly amusing in spite of changes of time and of taste.

The success of *Peregrine Pickle* was increased by its containing the scandalous "Memoirs of a Lady of Quality" foisted into the middle of the novel. It is the autobiography of Frances Hawes - a lady of very bad "quality" indeed, who was at that day notorious for her intrigues and her beauty. In 1737, Lord Vane, her second husband - for she had been married to her first spouse when very young - advertised for his eloped wife, "aged twenty-two, tall, well shaped, with light brown hair, fair complexioned, her dress a red damask sacque." This dame of errant loves and mutable connections had furnished the materials, and it is said the money as well, to have her chronicles inserted in Smollett's book. An old minister in Scotland used to tell how, when he was a divinity student, he became tutor, on the recommendation of Principal Robertson, to a boy named Hawes, who lived with his mother in Bath, and how, as he walked along the streets one day, he overheard some person whispering as she passed, "That is lady Vane." All at once it flashed across him who his employer "Mrs. Hawes" was - to whose house he had been surprised few ladies came. With prudishness or prudence he resigned his post, and told her the reason. She flushed, but said nothing. When they parted, however, as the coach was coming up, she put a ring on the young man's finger and whispered, "Had those wan cheeks been twenty years younger your Scotch pride might have been vanquished." [Chambers's *Smollett*, p. 59.] These memoirs were enough to gain a *succès de scandale* for a book. Yet they are purer than Smollett's own work - which, though coarse enough as it stands, was worse in the first edition, which he was persuaded to purge for future issues. The strange thing is that Smollett, a gentleman in mind, manners, and morals, should seem unconscious that his "heroes" are

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rascals, with not one touch of chivalry in their being, hardly one fine trait in their nature - fellows who mistake amorousness for love and horseplay for humour. Fielding's heroes are not chivalrous, are not high-toned, but they are at least "gentlemen of the period." Yet in spite of all their exaggerations in incident and portraiture, Smollett's pages picture the age - a gambling, drinking, duelling, rollicking age. Smollett could not in his novels refrain from carping at any who had incurred his displeasure. He ridicules them all with intense bitterness. In *Roderick Random* he satirises Garrick as Marmozet and Lord Lyttelton as Sheerwit, and again in *Peregrine Pickle* as Gosling Scrag, Esq. Rich, the manager at Covent Garden, Fielding and Akenside - who had displeased him by running down the Scots when he met him at Paris - are pilloried. In *Count Fathom*, in 1752, which contains vigorous and powerful scenes, Smollett professed to depict a cynical, heartless scoundrel; and he succeeded. He did not, however, "succeed in interesting the world in a character who had not one redeeming feature.

He soon gave up his practice, which was very small, in spite of his engaging manner, his dignified, handsome presence, for he could as little as his friend Dr. Armstrong conceal his contempt for potions which he knew were vile, and for patients whom he thought were fools. As he testily said to an invalid lady: "If you have time to play at being ill, I have no leisure to play at curing you." Nor did his professional success increase when, having got a doctor's degree from Aberdeen for a small fee, he transferred his household and his services to Bath. In this town of fashion he found, however, a splendid field for his satiric observation of life - among a fluttering crowd of beaux and belles, of gamesters, hypochondriacs, and quacks, of youngsters who wished "to see life," and oldsters who came to defer death. Here was the centre of attraction for any one without a character or a constitution; for invalids who wished to recruit their shattered health and *roués* who wished to recruit their shattered fortune; for dyspeptics who came to pick up an appetite and adventurers who came to pick up an heiress. With his characteristic perversity Smollett published an *Essay on the External Use of Water*, in which he sneered at the miraculous effects of this English pool of Bethesda; showing that he thought its patients were simpletons and its physicians were charlatans. This was not the way to make a fortune or acquire a practice, and wisely he returned to London and devoted his pen to writing books instead of prescriptions.

In 1752 we see him settled at Monmouth House in Chelsea, a curious old Elizabethan mansion with some historical memories hovering about it. Here he entertained with lavish hospitality, and at his table were found London men of



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letters, Goldsmith, Sterne, Johnson, as well as Scotsmen who were winning fame and fortune. The guests sauntered after dinner in the garden behind the house, charmed with the talk so bright, and stories so admirably told by their host. On Sundays he showed hospitality to a motley crew of literary hangers-on, whose empty stomachs he regaled with beef, pudding, and potatoes, punch and ale. These were unfortunate brothers of the quill, out at elbows and out at toes, who distributed reputations, though they never had one of their own. There were the strange guests, whom he afterwards described with little exaggeration in *Humphrey Clinker* [*Humphrey Clinker* (Roscoe's edit.), p. 144.] - the tutor expelled for atheism, who wrote staunchly for orthodoxy, whose labours in refuting Bolingbroke's infidelity were interrupted by a prosecution for blasphemy in an ale-house on the Lord's day; the Scotsman who gave lectures on English pronunciation; the writer on agriculture who had never seen a wheat field; the debtor who, when detained in King's Bench Prison, compiled his *Travels in Europe and Part of Asia*. Over these curiosities of Grub Street he would preside, while they gobbled and gabbled, smiling and keeping order as he sat at the head of his table. When Dr. Carlyle and Principal Robertson, in 1758, met him at Forrest's Coffee-House, they found him with a lot of his myrmidons, who had come to have their tasks of translating and reviewing assigned to them. When they were dismissed, Smollett joined the supper with two oddities whom he kept to amuse the company, while he himself delighted his friends with his charming manners and his excellent talk - much to the surprise of Robertson, who, now meeting him for the first time, instead of a well-bred, dignified gentleman, expected him to be a roystering, coarse fellow like his *Roderick Random*. [Carlyle's *Autobiography*, p. 340.]

On Sunday nights he was often to be seen at the laborious Dr. John Campbell's rooms, where Samuel Johnson used to go till he was driven off by his dread of being mistaken for one of the "swarm of Cawmell's" who crowded the learned Scotsman's house. [*The Bee*, iii. 3.] This prolific author was the gentleman of whom Dr. Johnson spoke, who, though he never entered a church, never passed one without taking off his hat - "which showed his excellent principles," said the moralist. In fact, he had hardly time to enter a church, for he was compiling books enough to fill a library, as a gentleman discovered to his cost, when having unguardedly told the doctor he should like to have a complete set of his works, he found next day a cart-load at his door, with a bill for £70. Many friends had Smollett in the Scots colony in London - physicians, authors, lawyers, and prosperous booksellers and printers like Andrew Millar and William Strahan, who knew the

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best terms to make. He would meet Dr. Armstrong at “Don Saltero’s” at Chelsea, and utter his disgust “at a land where felicity is held to consist in stupefying port and overgrown buttocks of beef, where genius is lost and taste extinguished.” [So he writes in an unpublished letter to Carlyle, March 1, 1754.]

But his pen was busy, leaving little time to see friends, for the income from the Jamaica estate had sadly dwindled. He had to labour, with the aid of the omniscient Dr. Campbell, at a huge compilation of “*Universal History*, projected by a band of booksellers,” for which his hacks supplied raw material; to make a *Compendium of Voyages* in many volumes, with the assistance of his myrmidons; to translate *Gil Blas*; and to struggle, with the aid of a Spanish dictionary, a grammar, and Jervas’s English version, at a translation of *Don Quixote* - besides preparing for the press Smellie’s work on midwifery and completing a History of the German Empire. [So he writes in an unpublished letter to Carlyle, March 1, 1754.]

It was after a period of hard struggle and constant drudgery that he made a journey to Scotland in 1755. He had left it a stripling of eighteen, he returned at thirty-four, a man who was famous as an author, hardened by experience with the world. We may picture him as he was painted by Verelst in 1756 - in full physician’s costume, a stone-coloured, full-mounted coat, with hanging sleeves, a green satin waist-coat trimmed with gold lace, a tie-wig, long ruffles, a sword; a handsome face, with nothing in his open, urbane countenance to indicate those moods of melancholy and impatience which made his life miserable to himself and to others. Such was he when he arrived in Scotland. His sister was married to Mr. Alexander Telfer, a prosperous man, who had bought the small estate of Scotstown, in Peeblesshire, and old Mrs. Smollett lived with them. One day a gentleman was announced, and Mrs. Telfer, who at once recognised her long unseen brother, introduced the gentleman - tall, handsome, and grave - to her mother, who was seated in the parlour, as a stranger from the Indies. He tried to preserve his countenance, but at last relaxing into a smile, in an instant the old lady recognised her son’s face. Flinging herself into his arms, she cried, “My son! I have found you at last!” “If you had continued to glower,” she afterwards told him, “you might have imposed upon me for a while longer, but your roguish smile betrayed you at once.” [Chambers’s *Life of Smollett*; Moore’s *Smollett*, p. 136.] This was a pleasant interlude in a hard life, and after being introduced by Carlyle to Blair, William Wilkie, Crosbie, and Robertson, and other literary friends in Edinburgh, he went to Glasgow, now rising in wealth, revisiting the scenes of his childhood in Dumbartonshire, his old haunts, and old friends - among them good Dr. Gordon, now a thriving physician and

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prominent citizen, and Dr. John Moore, partner to his old master. Leaving behind him pleasant impressions of grace and charm of humour, Smollett returned to his galley-slave labours and his hacks at Chelsea, to his debts and his duns.

It was in 1756 that a new and arduous venture was undertaken - no less than a *History of England from the Death of Julius Caesar to the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle*, 1748. The novelist had no rival to fear, for Hume had as yet only treated of the reign of James I. and Charles I., and the productions of Rapin, Echard, Oldmixon, and other chroniclers counted for nothing as literature. He had never studied history, never accumulated materials, never made research; but he could at least write vigorously and deftly, being a master of his craft. By December 1757 the work appeared in four volumes quarto. Here, indeed, was celerity, if there was no profundity. He had taken only fourteen months to "one thousand eight hundred and three years," as he carefully states in his title-page - not one month to a century, and yet he blandly boasts that he had consulted no fewer than 300 volumes. Prodigious! He expected the world respectfully to bow before the erudition of an historian who had referred to about twenty volumes for each hundred years. David Hume sneered at the "great run" of this facile, pleasant narrative. What would his feelings have been had he foreseen that his own *History* and that part of his rival's which carried it on to 1762 should go down to posterity hand-in-hand, to be known as "Hume and Smollett"! By the whole work the booksellers made huge profits, the publishers increased their fortunes, but the author remained poor, though in course of time there trickled into his purse £2000, or £120 for each octavo volume.

When working for bread night and day, keeping to his house over his desk weary and ill, one glimpse of sunshine comes to him. At last he saw one of his plays produced on the stage. His luckless *Regicide*, which Lyttelton would not look at, therefore winning his contempt; which Garrick would not accept, therefore receiving his spleen; which friends read and returned in judicious silence, he had published at his own expense, after the success of *Roderick Random*, with a preface which contained a vicious commination on all his offenders. In 1757 David Garrick, the good-hearted, placable man, produced *The Reprisals, or the Tars of Old England*, a farce which for generations was received with perennial applause - for John Bull never grew tired of any ridicule of the French, and always roared at the scene of an English buttock of beef on the shoulders of four meagre Frenchmen. The irritable and impecunious author was touched by the manager's kindly reducing the usual charge for the benefit night of £80 to £60 - for £20 was much to the hard-wrought man. In those days it was considered possible to pay all the

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expenses at Drury lane for a night - including the cost of prompters, porters, and performers - with that modest sum. It must be remembered that the earnings of Garrick, the greatest actor of the age, were £16 a week. Mrs. Yates, Peg Woffington, Mrs. Cibber, Quin were each paid £10 a week, and many a fine actor who would be making a fortune in our day was pleased with ten shillings a night. [*Notes and Queries*, June 1885.] Smollett's theatrical success was a brief interlude in the endless toil. There was the poor man, translating, with the aid of his threadbare hacks, Voltaire in twenty-six volumes, editing the "*Critical Review*, by a society of gentlemen"; which had been started by Hamilton, the Scots bookseller, who, having taken part in the hanging of Captain Porteous in Edinburgh, had come south to escape being hanged himself. The wretched editor was constantly in hot water. His unsupervised hacks were hacking at Scotsmen whom he wished to praise; and at Englishmen who, in their wrath, in venomous squibs and pamphlets, enraged him by calling him "Toby," or "Smallwit," or "Smallhead," in exquisite humour. [*Moore's Life of Smollett*.] "My life," moaned the poor man in his despair, "is sheer drudgery; my pen is at work from nine o'clock in the morning till one and two in the morning. I might as well be in Grub Street." In spite of his labours to make money he was worried by debts and bullied by duns.

A worse mischance befell him from this extremely "Critical Review," in a prosecution for an article in which he had pilloried Admiral Knowles as "an admiral without conduct, an officer without resolution, an engineer without knowledge, and a man without veracity." Naturally the admiral, after his blundering attack on Rochefort in 1757, did not care to be served up in neat but injurious antitheses, and the trial at the King's Bench Court resulted in a fine of £100 and three months' imprisonment in King's Bench Prison. He had already had troubles at that Court, having been heavily fined for flogging a rascally fellow-countryman. Smollett was now able to witness scenes with his own eyes which he only described from hearsay in *Peregrine Pickle*, in that retreat which had sheltered innumerable authors, who in their poverty could write anything except a cheque - some because they had libelled a statesman, others because they had defrauded their landlady. There were threadbare authors imprisoned for libel, receiving visits from booksellers, concocting another abusive pamphlet; spendthrifts, in damaged lace ruffles and wine-stained coats, with wigs awry, arranging an accommodation with Jews of villainous visage; wan wives and haggard children, who had grown familiar with those dingy bounds, knowing little of the free life that surged outside the high walls, while inside its precincts the taprooms resounded from morning till

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night with drinking and merriment, obscene talk and song. While in this shady residence friends came to see him. Garrick came merrily in to see the splenetic Scot, forgetting old scores. John Wilkes appeared, talking well on everything and speaking ill of everybody; literary hacks arrived to get directions for reviews and compilations. One day bustled in honest John Newberry, bookseller in St. Paul's Churchyard - the kindly purveyor for children of the books they loved, and the agent for the James's Powders, the drugs they loathed; the rescuer of Oliver Goldsmith from the clutches of Ralph Griffiths and his harridan wife. [Knight's *Shadows of the Old Booksellers*, p. 233. With fine business instinct he puffed the powders in *Goody Two Shoes*, which Goldsmith wrote for him. We are told that the heroine's father "died miserably" because he was "seized with a fever in a place where Dr. James's powders were not to be found."] We know him in the *Vicar of Wakefield* as the "good-natured, pimple-faced man who was always in a hurry." John Newberry had come to ask Smollett to edit his new *British Magazine*. Smollett undertook this new task, and soon side by side ran Goldsmith's delightful Essays and his own dreary imitation of *Don Quixote - Sir Launcelot Greaves* - which he wrote to beguile his leisure in prison. This was the first novel that appeared in serial form.

It is deplorable to think of this brilliant writer reduced to hateful labours, which wore out strength and health and temper. Never was a man less fitted for politics and controversy than this sensitive, morbidly irritable genius. Yet in 1762 he was editing a paper called the *Briton*, which was begun on the day that Bute became Premier, defending the administration of his lordship, which was the object of universal rancour. Thereupon John Wilkes started his paper ironically called the *North Briton* in opposition, with incessant gibes at beggarly Scotsmen and their verminous country; having in this the assistance of that swashbuckler poet Charles Churchill, whose literary bludgeon fell on any pate that stood in his way, whose huge brawny figure sitting in the front of the pit made frightened actors forget their lines. Smollett and Dr. Armstrong were stung to fury against their former friend and companion over many a bottle. While the *Briton* sold in its tens - only two hundred copies a week among Buteites - the *North Briton* sold in its hundreds, for it had wit and venom and insolence, and the people on its side. It is not to be wondered at that in six months Smollett, writhing at every assault, saw his paper expire, and while he was left irritated at its death, his rival danced over its grave. This was an age of "polite literature" and of insolent pamphlets, and no man was fit for controversy unless he had the thickest of skins, impenetrable to the stings of literary hornets. But here was a man whose skin was of the thinnest. His own pen was bitter against foes real or imaginary, but every gibe on himself was as gall and wormwood.

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Amid all this worry and vexation a little glimpse we get at the home life at Chelsea, with his good, patient wife Nancy and beloved daughter Elizabeth. "Many a time," wrote he pathetically to his friend, "do I stop my task and betake myself to a game at romps with Betty, while my wife looks on smiling, and longing in her heart to join in the sport; then back to the cursed round of duty." But such bright scenes were soon to close; his only child died of consumption at the age of fifteen, and the man's heart was crushed with sorrow at home, while he was tortured by insults out of doors. "Traded by malice, persecuted by faction, abandoned by false patrons, and overwhelmed by a sense of domestic calamity which it was not in the power of fortune to repair" [*Travels through France, etc.* Letter i.] - it is thus the poor man describes his condition, a condition to which ailments and debts added misery. For relief and rest he and his wife repaired to the Continent. Before he left England his *History* had been completed down to 1762, and in his Survey of Literature and Art he made handsome amends, with the courtesy of a gentleman, for all he had bitterly written against his contemporaries. He speaks of Lyttelton no longer as a "little great man," but speaks of his "taste, his polished manners, and his tender feelings"; he panegyrises Garrick; praises Akenside and Fielding; and not forgetting his countrymen, commends the plays of Home and the epic of William Wilkie.

A weary man may travel, but unfortunately he cannot leave his nature behind him: it follows as his persistent travelling companion to spoil his every pleasure. Smollett and his wife, two young girls committed to their charge, and a faithful old man-servant set forth. See the worn-out man of letters at Montpellier - the resort of invalids from all countries and of quacks from all provinces - writing half in sardonic humour, half in deadly earnest to a great physician of the place, a letter in Latin, describing his *systema maxime irritabile*, [*Travels through France and Italy*, Letter xi.] and all the symptoms of his ill-health. He tells of his cough, accompanied with fever and difficulty in breathing; how a slight increase of coldness or dampness in the air, or putting on unused garments, or the least over-exercise in riding or shaking in a vehicle produce new ills. He details that he has the nervous system highly irritable, his fibres relaxed by a sedentary life, by the body bending over reading and writing, and his suffering from scorbutic affection neglected. He explains that "last spring a terrible misfortune brought a dreadful mental agony, leaving the patient convulsed in mind and body"; and "how after leaving his country, grief, anxiety, indignation, and savage recollection followed him." In return for this heartrending catalogue of ailments, the physician enclosed a futile prescription and a considerable bill. Naturally, with such a morbid bodily and mental constitution,

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Smollett looked on everything with a jaundiced eye. Though there was sunshine in the southern sky, it could not dispel the darkness within. Everything disgusted him - the land and the scenery, the hotels with their large charges and their innumerable fleas, the people with their dirt and their diet. Once or twice he was on the point of knocking a landlord down; and mobs besieged his door because of his violent temper. Sterne, in his *Sentimental Journey*, describes his meeting the distressful author. "I popped upon Smelfungus at Turin, and a sad tale of sorrowful adventures he had to tell. He had been flayed alive and bedevilled, and used worse than St. Bartholomew at every stage he had come to. 'I'll tell it to the world!' cried Smelfungus. 'You had better tell it,' said I, 'to your physician.'" Alas! he had already done so, but blue pills do not exorcise blue devils. In his *Travels through France and Italy*, published in 1765 - which are very amusing, and brimful of shrewd observation of the scholar and physician - he tells to the world his experiences, as viewed by a weary, jaded mind, never pleased by nature or art or man. He has been laughed at for comparing the Alps to "frosted sugar," the Pantheon at Rome to a huge cockpit, and for seeing neither skill nor beauty in the Venus de Medici. [*Travels*, Letters xxi., xxxi. It is to be remembered, in excuse for his giving egotistical and morbid details of his troubles and grievances, that the *Travels* were originally letters to private friends. In his pages he shrewdly indicates San Remo and Nice as fit to be health resorts.] But there is enough scholarly criticism and appreciation of art; enough acute and careful observation of places and people, to condone such whims as these.

There is something very pathetic about this man, weary and worn before old age had come, morbid and irritable, when life might yet be bright, tortured by ulcers, by rheumatism, "by coma vigil," or insomnia. Once again, in 1766, he visited Scotland, and took his wife to see his Scotch kindred. [Moore's *Smollett*, p. 174.] The former visit had been happy, and left bright memories behind; this was one of gloom and disappointment, and left sadness in its train. His emaciated form, his wan, smileless face betokened the invalid. Mrs. Telfer was now a widow, living with her son and mother in a flat in St. John Street, off the Canongate. When Smollett and his wife left the London coach at the White Horse Inn, a few paces brought them to the house. His friends long remembered him as a tall, handsome man dressed in black, and Mrs. Tobias as a pretty, dark-complexioned woman. They were duly welcomed, and Nancy, with her handsome, dark, rather faded face, was scrutinised sharply, with her English manners and speech, by these two dames, who, like their neighbours, thought her "a fine lady, but a silly woman." In the room would sit old Mrs. Smollett, knitting her stockings and speaking broad Scots, which

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was unintelligible to her fine daughter-in-law; and Mrs. Telfer, with high nose and stern expression, working at her wheel and her napery, racy in speech, frugal in ways, eager for a game at cards if there was any money to be won. "Come awa', bailie, and tak' a trick at the cairds," said Mrs. Telfer, as a worthy magistrate and tallow-chandler came in one night. "Troth, madam, I hae nae siller." "Then let us play for a pund o'can'le," urged the importunate widow. [Chambers's *Traditions of Edinburgh*, i. 271; *Life of Smollett*, p. 127.] Clearly this was no congenial home for the town-bred man of letters and his well-bred wife from London. Smollett told his mother that he was ill - that he was dying. "We'll no be very lang parted onie way," the old lady is said to have rejoined with remorseless frankness. "If you gang first I'll be close on your heels. If I lead the way you'll no be far ahint me, I'm thinking." Such was the cheerful talk to beguile the weary man's cares. There followed a visit to Glasgow, where he saw his old friend Dr. John Moore, the kindest of old comrades, a man of wit and learning, with his good-humoured eyes peering out behind his shaggy eyebrows. Years after he was to earn fame by his clever novel *Zeluco* and some volumes of amusing *Travels*. There is no doubt, however, that Dr. Moore's best work was his son the hero of Corunna. While he stayed with his friends, seeing the town with its many changes, Smollett gazed and conversed without heart and brightness; he felt the visit was a failure to himself and his friends, and after he left he wrote to his friend to apologise to his kind hostess for his querulousness under her roof, bidding her know "she had only seen the wrong side of the tapestry." [Moore's *Smollett*, p. 178.] "I am convinced," he pitifully said, "my brain was in some degree affected, for I had a coma vigil upon me from April to November without intermission." Yet the kindly attentions, the presence of old faces soothed him; the Scottish scenes to which his heart turned cheered him. A stranger to his native land, he was still a Scot at heart, and his affection speaks out in his verses in "Leven Water," the "Tears of Scotland," and his "Ode to Independence."

After a winter in Bath, with the old savagery he worked off some of his bile by writing the *Adventures of an Atom*, which appeared in 1767 - a political allegory which imitates not very successfully the styles of Rabelais and Swift by turns, satirising men of all sorts, statesmen of all sides, with impartial bitterness - Pitt and Bute, Shelburne and Wilkes. All old scores are paid off in full. Lord Mansfield had been Chief Justice at his trial at the King's Bench, therefore, under the form of "Muraclami," he is gibbeted as "having a heart which is a mere membraneous sac or hollow viscus, cold and callous, the abode of sneaking malice, servile flattery, gripping avarice, and treacherous deceit." To understand who are



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meant by the strange names in the book requires a key; yet what is the use of a key for a door no one wishes to open?

In vain had friends tried to find for Smollett a humble consulship abroad, where he might get rest for body and mind. Lord Bute took no trouble for the worn-out man, who had served him to his own cost. Lord Shelburne, to whom David Hume appealed, had given away the post at his disposal. Smollett all his life had been too independent to win favour or to ask favours. So without help, and relying on the meagre income from the fragments of his wife's property and his own labours, he set forth abroad in 1770 - as he knew, "to perpetual exile." In a house which his dear friend Dr. John Armstrong had found for him in the little village of Monte Novo, on a slope of the mountain overhanging the sea, near Leghorn, Smollett and his faithful Nancy took up their abode - with lovely scenery to refresh the jaded eye, with warm sunshine to thaw his heart. Now he worked with new vigour at *Humphrey Clinker*, the old scenes at Bath, at Edinburgh and Glasgow and the roadside inns coming back to him with memories and fancies full of richest humour. There live for ever Matthew Bramble the testy, the immortal scarecrow pedant Lesmahagow, the formidable spinster Mistress Tabitha, and Winifred Jenkins with her delicious malapropisms, while the pictures of life and people in Bath and Edinburgh, and at every stage of the road form the most humorous itinerary ever composed.

The Italian sky seemed to have shone with good effect on poor Smollett, chasing for a while the clouds away, for the humour in his last book is not that of the acrid satirist, but of the kindly observer of the world moved to genial laughter. Truly has it been said his life was like music - "sweetest at its close." The close came quickly, for his strength was gone, and life was ebbing fast away. "I am already so dry and emaciated that I might pass for an Egyptian mummy, without any other preparation than some pitch and painted linen," [Chambers's *Life of Smollett*, p. 195.] he wrote to his friend John Hunter, the anatomist, with sad drollery. It was on 16th September 1771 that he died, worn out by worry and disease, by toil and the aches of poverty. "All is well," were his last words to his devoted wife, for whom his love never grew less warm, to whom his temper was always soothed to softness, while he was angry with the world. When on his death-bed he held in his feeble hands the volumes of his novel, fresh from the press, but he did not live to hear the chorus of praise that greeted his last and finest work.

Impetuous, impatient, splenetic, hot-passioned, with a sarcastic tongue, a corrosive pen, a temper which grew morbid through worry and work and ill-health,

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he was yet the most kindly and generous of souls, and the keenest of friends. As Hume said of him, "he was like a cocoa-nut, the outside was the worst." He was even more angry at wrongs done to others than to himself, indignant at anything mean or base. With dignity of nature as well as of manners, he would curry favour with no man and bow before no patron.

Fate in its irony played cruelly with this man of genius. Had he lived one year longer he would have inherited the ancestral property, with its rental of £1000, on his elder brother's death; but now it passed to his sister - that saving, money-making widow, who enjoyed her fortune and founded her bleach-fields at the village of Renton, and left her brother's widow in penury. Good neighbours at Leghorn were kind to Mrs. Smollett, ladies in Bath gave her presents, Scots ladies helped her, and in the Theatre Royal at Edinburgh a performance of *Venice Preserved* produced £360 for the widow of Scotland's great novelist. [Chambers's *Life of Smollett*, p. 201.] Two years after his death appeared a small brochure containing his vigorous "Ode to Independence," speaking out the proud, manly spirit which had kept him poor during his life, and left his wife in poverty when he died.

When Smollett died his old friend Dr. John Armstrong was still writing essays, travels, having few patients to occupy his time and exercise his temper. Son of the minister of Castleton in Roxburghshire, he had come to London to try his fortune as a physician and poet - for he wrote medical treatises as actively as he wrote verses. Setting up as a doctor, his success was slight, for he was outspoken and impatient; his success as poet was little till in 1744 appeared his didactic poem in blank verse, the *Art of Preserving Health*, which won him a reputation in which a previous nauseous piece, the *Economy of Love*, in 1735, was forgotten. The diction was admirable, some passages were powerful; but the hygienic reflections and metrical prescriptions for securing health make it dull reading to-day. His time of professional success was when he was physician to the forces in Germany. In many respects Armstrong resembled his friend Smollett - the same splenetic temper, the same hearty contempts for doctors and patients, the same fierce loyalty as a Scot, and wrath at southern maligners of his land, which made him also quarrel with John Wilkes, who abused his countrymen. The kindly man who was spluttering forth his rage at the "rascally world" could be the tender companion of Thomson on his death-bed, and the true friend of Smollett in his dying months, and the kindly brother Scot of those who met at the British Coffee-House. He died in 1779, at the age of seventy, muttering against the living and mourning over his dead

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comrades with a sarcastic wit and a warm heart. [Thomson, in a stanza of *Castle of Indolence*, depicts his friend in middle age with all his splenetic humour.]

Yet another Scotsman out of Scotland was to attain fame - William Falconer, the author of *The Shipwreck*. Near the Netherbow in Edinburgh, always in poverty, lived a poor barber, with a small business and a large family - two of whom were deaf and dumb. Friends gave the useless barber a little money to set up a grocer's shop, but his affairs were in chronic insolvency, and his children ran in rags about the Canongate. One of these ragged brats was William, who was born in 1732. When a boy he joined a merchant ship at Leith, and afterwards became servant to Archibald Campbell, a purser in the navy, who became known by his clever satires *The Sale of Authors* and *Lexiphanes*. By this master Falconer was taught to read Latin and to write English - the first fruit of his lessons being an ode, published when he was eighteen, on the death of the Prince of Wales, whom nobody lamented except in verse. It was in 1762 that he published *The Shipwreck*, on which his fame rests, for its vivid and powerful sea pictures, its unconventional freshness of style, which preserves alive a book whose lavish indulgence in nautical language makes it fatiguing to landsmen. After entering the Royal Navy as midshipman in the "Royal George," he became purser in the "Glory," and when the ship was laid up at Chatham, the captain's cabin was fitted up with a stove for the literary sailor, where he could write in peace. A slight-made man, weather-beaten and pock-marked, his manners are described as "blunt, forbidding, and awkward," [Falconer's *Shipwreck* (Memoir by Clark); Irving's *Life of Falconer*.] with rapid, incisive utterance, but withal a good comrade and a kindly friend. His pen was busy in verse and in pamphlets, attacking Chatham and Wilkes and Churchill, patriotically defending his august countryman Lord Bute from his relentless assailants. Young John Murray, the half-pay Lieutenant of Marines, being about to set up business, at the age of twenty-two, as a bookseller in Fleet Street, opposite St. Dunstan's Church - founding the great publishing house - he asked his friend Falconer to become a partner. Unluckily the poet declined the proposal, and shortly after publishing his *Universal Marine Dictionary*, which won money and success (for it became generally used in the navy), he was appointed purser in the "Aurora" frigate, which was taking out supervisors of the East India Company. The ship sailed in September 1769, and after touching at the Cape was never heard of more, having, it is supposed, foundered in the Mozambique Channel.

In 1768 another young Scotsman started off from Edinburgh to seek his literary fortune. Having walked to Newcastle, he took passage in a collier for the Thames - two tragedies and part of an epic forming the largest and least valuable

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part of his baggage. This was William Julius Meikle, who had been born in 1734 in the manse of Langholm, and, under the name of Mickle, was to gain fame as the translator of Camoen's *Lusiad*. As a boy he kept accounts in the brewery belonging to his widowed aunt, and at eighteen he became a partner. But he had a soul above malt, and while composing tragedies the business failed, and the young bankrupt brewer took his poems to London and left his creditors in Edinburgh. Of course his poems were submitted to Lord Lyttelton, and received a tepid praise, which stirred him to wrath. But in time by poems and pamphlets against freethinkers he made a livelihood; as corrector of the Clarendon Press he found occupation; and in 1771, when his first book of the *Lusiad* was published, he won a secure reputation. The first complete edition, published in 1775, was dedicated to the Duke of Buccleugh, who did not even acknowledge it - an insolent neglect for which Adam Smith was blamed. The rest of Mickle's career was prosperous, though his tragedy, *The Siege of Marseilles*, to his rage was rejected by Garrick. He made a pretty fortune as agent for distribution of naval prize money, and paid off his creditors; he was successful as political pamphleteer, and earned a considerable name as a poet - the finest of his pieces being "Cumnor Hall," which fascinated Sir Walter Scott. The plain, commonplace-looking man was to be found in literary circles in London, though he lived chiefly at his pleasant home at Wheatley, near Oxford. On the occasion that Boswell and he visited Goldsmith's lodgings, when they saw the squalid abode, with dirty walls all scrawled over with pictures of animals - for Oliver was busy compiling his *Natural History* - he must have congratulated himself on having the thrift of a Scotsman instead of the shiftlessness of an Irishman. He died in 1788.

While these Scotsmen died out, they left many of their countrymen busied but not distinguished in literature. In that pamphleteering age, when it was said by a great man in office that "one good writer was of more importance than twenty placemen in the House of Commons," [Moore's *Life of Smollett*, p. 189.] there were many eager Scots strugglers after fortune or bread; some with pens ready for any party, and arguments ready for any side; and Guthries and Gilbert Stuarts employed on travels and histories which, like their authors, have long been forgotten.