

MISS JEAN ELLIOT.

1727—1805.

I N another nook of the pastoral Lowlands, where the Cheviots are the softer sentinels beginning to rise on the horizon, Minto House, the seat of the chief of the Elliots, has long looked down on "bonnie Teviotdale." Behind the house are two heathery hills, which may have remained much the same as they were a hundred years ago; but the nearest of the beautiful glens, which are now included in the pleasure-grounds, presented at that time no carefully-studied landscape gardening. Romantic as they are now, under the combined forces of art and nature, they were still more romantic in their original wildness of wood and water. The Minto craigs, at present shrouded in masses of wood, were at that time only clothed with broom and long grass.

Among other pleasant pictures of former days, there is a graphic picture of old Minto drawn by the present Countess of Minto :*—

“But the Minto of those days was not the Minto of these. The sheet of water, which now reflects laburnums and rhododendrons in sight of the windows, was then a narrow burn running under banks shaggy with thorns. Where the flower-garden is now, there stood a dismal little church in a corner, dark with yews, and dreary with unkept graves. The manse, surrounded by a few untidy cottages, overlooked the little glen, and was near enough to the house for the minister to see the family as they sat at dinner in the round room on the ground-floor, known as ‘the big room’ by uncles and aunts, and as the schoolroom by the children of to-day. The rocks may have been finer than when no wood hung like drapery on their sides, but from the old castle one must have looked down on muirs and heaths, where now lie the woods of the Lamblairs, or the green slopes and corn-fields which smile in pleasant Teviotdale.”

* “Memoir of the Right Honourable Hugh Elliot.”

“The green hills are possibly the only feature in the place which remain unchanged, though the village which clusters at their feet is new.” On sunny days there were “bright stretches of whins and heather, which have disappeared now.”

In 1727, Jean, the second daughter of Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto, was born at Minto House. She was one of a family of sons and daughters; and, while the younger Gilbert was yet at home, before John went to sea, and Andrew to America, “the big room” must have been a blithe rendezvous of brothers and sisters—all the blither for those of them who were too reserved to take kindly to strangers.

The Elliots of Minto, like the Cockburns, gave great lawyers to the bar, and, like the Dalrymples and the Murrays, they lent statesmen to the Houses of Parliament. The Elliots, too, like the Lindsays, had a strong hereditary literary bent. Sir Gilbert, Jean’s father, along with Duncan Forbes of Culloden, was at the expense of publishing, in a small folio tract, what he believed to be the ancient ballad of Hardyknute,

which had been recovered from bits of paper on which clews of thread had been wound. These had been found by the research and the pains of Lady Wardlaw of Pitreavie, when she had leisure to make and follow out the discovery (that is, the invention) as young Elizabeth Halket, of Pitfer-rane.

Another Sir Gilbert, the Lord Justice's son, and the brother of Jean, was the author of a pastoral song in the style of Shenstone which was much admired in its time. It begins—

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

and might have awakened the echoes of the Leasowes. So high was his reputation for judgment and taste, as well as for the purity of his English, that both Home's *Douglas* and Robertson's "Charles the Fifth" were submitted to him in MS. for his opinion and corrections. Dr. Somerville, when Sir Gilbert's parish minister (occupying that manse whose tenant could see the Minto family as they sat at dinner), was introduced at the house to

David Hume and Mrs. Montagu, Dr. Gregory and Lord Kaimés.

Jean Elliot was well educated, and it has been remembered that she was fond of French literature, while she lived long enough to express a characteristic detestation of the license and the riot of revolutionary France. There is no lingering testimony to her beauty in the family traditions ; but the slight particulars of her personal appearance which are handed down are in admirable accordance with what little traits are preserved of her character and disposition. She had "a sensible face, and a slender, well-shaped figure." It is also said that she was nice in all that related to cleanliness and neatness (a distinction in her day); and that, with the delicate moderation and maidenly shyness which belonged to her, she was scrupulous, even in advanced life, in accommodating her dress to the changes of fashion, so as not to be conspicuously peculiar, like many other old ladies. A family miniature represents her, in advanced years apparently, a little delicate old woman in close cap, ruffle, and ample

snowy neckerchief. She has the large nose and mouth which belong to an expressive rather than a beautiful face; but the mouth is kindly in its sagacity. Her eyebrows are well arched, and her eyes look lively under her sober head-dress.

Jean Elliot, from her youth, was remarkable for her discrimination, discretion, and self-control. One story tells that while yet a girl her father employed her to read his law papers, and with fatherly pride set store upon her comments. Another account relates that when Jean was a young woman of nineteen, in the year of the '45, a party of Jacobites came to Minto House in order to arrest that influential and dangerous Whig, Sir Gilbert. He had not received warning in time to convey himself farther than the Craigs, with their wide view and ruined watch-tower—one of the Scotch castles which bear the odd, incomprehensible name of Fat Lips. There he lay lurking among the broom and the fragments of rock, which had served as a refuge for nobler game than conies before then. Down at the house, in the commotion

and excitement of the trying moment, Jean either put herself forward to receive and entertain the unwelcome company, or else she was thrust into this difficult position by the other women, for she was neither house-dame nor eldest daughter. But she did it so well, with such simple courtesy and composure, that the enemy retired, under the impression that Sir Gilbert could not be within reach when the young lady, his daughter, was able to behave with perfect calmness and propriety.

Like her nieces in the next generation, Jean, as a girl, must have danced to the music of the bagpipes. She is certain also to have attended the Kelso races, which formed the gala of the year to Roxburgh, the Merse, the Forest, and Tweeddale. "The Northumberland and the Delavals from the south side" here at last met "the Buccleuchs, Douglasses, Kers, and Elliots," from the north side of the Border, in peace; many of the men being accustomed to spend the three nights "dancing on tables and climbing up walls." In her youth Jean Elliot must often have sat or strolled upon the Nut-

bank, Ruberslaw, the Dunion, rambled down the Deneholm Dene, and climbed among the Minto craigs to Fat Lips Castle. Lighter moments these than those when her father, the grave Lord Justice, made it his refuge. And as both the castles of Fat Lips—that on Tinto as well as that on Minto—had their peculiar usage, that when visited by ladies and gentlemen in company, each gentleman was entitled to salute one lady on passing beneath the gateway, we may believe that Jean did not always escape this penalty—or privilege.

Jean grew up a quiet, reserved woman. She had no disposition to show her wit, and no taste for display. She had few temptations to swerve from a strict avoidance of exaggeration and extravagance in word or action. Though she was a greater aristocrat than Alison Cockburn, *noblesse oblige* took with her a nobler form than the necessity to shine. Deep down beneath this aristocratic element, and beneath all her constitutional reserve, was a sympathetic heart beating fervently in tune with the joys and the sorrows of humanity—sacred by reason of their com-

monness. To those who carefully study character, such a type is not so puzzling as it may seem at first. Still waters run deep; and it is where the channels are so contracted as to be hidden altogether that the concentration takes place which causes the waters to burst forth and carry all before them. It was the delicate, retiring daughter of a country clergyman who wrote the most genuinely passionate novel of her generation.

As the narrative runs, it was in 1756, the year when Lord Chatham, as William Pitt, first took office—the year when Admiral Byng was executed, and Frederick the Great and Maria Theresa entered on the Seven Years' War—that Miss Jean Elliot, “riding home after nightfall” in the family coach with her brother, Mr. Gilbert, had a certain conversation with him on the battle of Flodden, which had been so fatal to the men of the Forest, that the much later battle of Philiphaugh—fought actually within the Forest's bounds—had been comparatively forgotten.

The men of the town of Selkirk who an-

swered the call to Flodden were a hundred in number. The martial eye of King James was so delighted with these stalwart burghers that, previous to the battle, he knighted the town clerk, who led his fellow-townsmen. The burghers of Selkirk are still in possession of a banner—a veritable English banner of green silk, with armorial bearings—which was taken from a doughty English captain by a Selkirk man named Fletcher, and brought home, although not in triumph, by its captor. Surviving the fatal battle, as well as the scouring of the country by the English afterwards, this Fletcher presented his trophy to his own corporation of weavers, and in their keeping it has remained, flourishing periodically in the Selkirk ceremony of “the Riding of the Common.” A sadder memorial of Flodden is said to exist in the arms of the county town of this portion of the Forest. The representation of a woman and child, to be seen there, is supposed to refer to a legend that the corpse of a woman, wife to one of the hundred, was found, with a living child at her breast, lying by

the Ladywood Edge, when the remnant of the expedition returned, stricken and sorrowful, from the lost battle.

When Mr. Gilbert Elliot and his sister held that memorable conversation, she was a thoughtful woman, past the period of youth when the heart is engrossed by its own hopes and fears—its own sweetness and bitterness. She was twenty-eight years of age.

Speech had sunk into silence, Gilbert, man-like, had chosen to relieve the sober philanthropy and antiquarianism, the romantic dreariness, as one may say, of the topic, by giving it a sudden practical turn. He laid a wager of a pair of gloves or a set of ribbons that his sister Jean could not write a ballad on Flodden.

Now Mr. Gilbert was a song-writer himself, and a song-writer of no "small graith;" and his sister Jean, although she might demur at admitting, even to her own brother, that she was a writer, was a sympathetic woman and a genius.

Yielding to the influence of the moment, Jean accepted the challenge. Leaning back in her corner, with all the most mournful stories of

the country-side for her inspiration, and two lines of an old ballad, which had often rung in her ears and trembled on her lips, for a foundation, she planned and constructed the rude framework of her "Flowers of the Forest." Afterwards the song was duly and correctly written down.

Having thus fulfilled the terms and won the wager, Jean Elliot went on the even tenor of her way, and took no further trouble in the matter, beyond doing her best to keep her family and friends silent, as she was herself, on the subject of her authorship.

The example of Lady Wardlaw of Pitreavie, who, with that ingenious tale of hers regarding the clews of thread, had imposed on two great lawyers, might serve as a model of secrecy. But, with an instinctively loyal and grateful recognition of what she had been able to do, Jean Elliot did not think of suppressing her work or limiting its circulation. As an old ballad recovered and revived, the song speedily got into print, and spread far and near like a flash of lightning.

In 1760 there was more to think of and to be proud of in the estimation of the family at Minto than the singing of a song, old or new.

While the heir, Mr. Gilbert, ambitious and industrious, was making a figure in the House of Commons, Captain John greatly distinguished himself by the capture of "the pigmy fleet" of M. Thurot. In command of three privateers, Thurot had made previous descents on the coasts of Scotland and England, and burnt two English ships. Captain Elliot came up with him in the Channel, and, with half the number of the Frenchman's crew, boarded the French vessel. In the fight which followed, Thurot was killed. The three privateers were taken, and towed by their captor to the Isle of Man.

Even Horace Walpole, more given to chronicle scandal than to credit excess of merit in any line, takes note not only of the gallantry, but of the modesty of John Elliot.

One of the French cannon thus taken was brought to Minto. The old Lord Justice received and preserved a letter from his bailiff, in which the servant expresses the pride of

every man and woman of the clan that had been wont to spring up in ready response to the old stirring challenge—

“My name is little Jock Elliot,
An’ wha daur meddle with me ?”

in the fact of the Lord Justice’s having two such promising sons. And the name of a third might have been added. Andrew Elliot had crossed the Atlantic, had made a fortune, and was preparing to settle on a fine place near New York whilst it was still the capital of an English colony. He married twice there (his second wife having been an old flame of George Washington’s), and had several daughters born to him. In the general rejoicings at Minto, when bonfires surely blazed on the Dunion and Ruberslaw, and Thurot’s cannon, planted on such a smooth green site as that of Mount Teviot, fired a volley in honour of John Elliot, it seemed a very simple and natural arrangement that one of the happy sisters of the hero, sharing in full her brother’s modesty, should slip out of sight in her individual achievement.

Old Sir Gilbert, Jean’s father, died not long

afterwards. His daughter-in-law has preserved some of the circumstances of his death by quoting the lines which her husband had written on the melancholy occasion, as being curiously applicable to the details of his own death, some twelve or fourteen years later :—

“ His mind refined and strong, no sense impaired,
Nor feeling of humanity, nor taste
Of social life, so e'en his latest hour
In sweet domestic cheerfulness was passed ;
Sublimely calm his ripened spirit fled,
His family surrounding and his friends ;
A wife and daughter closed his eyes ; on them
Was turned his latest gaze ; and o'er his grave—
Their father's grave—his sons the green turf spread ”

When young Sir Gilbert (leaving “ the affairs of the State ”) ruled in his turn at Minto, Jean went with her mother and family to Edinburgh. She lived for a number of years, leading the same quiet home life as she had led at Minto. She was no queen of society, and was far outshone in social qualities by Alison Cockburn. But her power made its impression in her own circle. Regarding the two ladies of the Forest in the light of authoresses, indeed, posterity has

somewhat reversed the judgment of their own contemporaries.

The Edinburgh to which Jean Elliot went had already lost much of its old feudal romance, but it was still very different from the Edinburgh of to-day. The North Bridge was just built; the South Bridge was not begun. The district including Crichton Street, where Mrs. Cockburn latterly lived, and George's Square, where Sir Walter Scott was born, was still lying in fields and orchards. The Mound was not begun. Two stage-coaches ran to Leith every hour, and one to London once a month. Lord Kaimes and Dr. Robertson represented the resident literati. No such thing as an umbrella had been seen in the streets. Vegetables were brought chiefly from Musselburgh by women who carried them in *creels* on their backs. In a dearth of fruit for dessert at the dinner-tables of the principal men in Edinburgh, an English traveller remarked that dishes of small raw turnips—called "neeps" by the natives—were eaten with avidity. Two o'clock was the universal dinner-hour, and tradesmen often

shut their shops from one till two. Gentlemen were in the habit of visiting ladies in their drawing-rooms to enjoy their society, and drink "dishes" of tea, in the afternoons. There was one dancing assembly-room, where minuets and country dances were danced in a succession of sets before the Lady Directress. The company met at five o'clock; the dancing began at six and ended at eleven by public orders, which were never transgressed. In the old theatre, which was decorated with painted heads of the poets and with Runciman's landscapes, Mr. Digges, the lessee, was his own great tragedian and comedian alike, being equally great in *Cato* and *Sir John Brute*.

Miss Jean's brother and his family made their head-quarters in London or near it. They did not settle long anywhere, and lived little at Minto. Lady Elliot Murray, brilliant, demonstrative, and vehement as she shows herself in the pages of her descendant, could have had little sympathy with her sister-in-law. Those of her children who were least like their mother, and were least her favourites in the beginning,

came nearest to their aunt Jean. Calm, grave Gilbert and unaffected Eleanor must have been Miss Jean's pets, and not the mother's idols, the impulsive diplomatist Hugh, and the dissatisfied beauty Isabella.

In 1766 the two boys, the elder nephews, returned from Paris, where they had resided with their tutor, Mr. Liston, and under the protection of David Hume, who comes out in these letters as a friendly, travelled old bachelor. The young Elliots were this year domiciled in Edinburgh, renewing their studies, preserving their Parisian perfection in fencing and dancing, and dining on a Sunday with their grandmother and aunts. If any one was likely to feel secret leniency towards steady Gilbert in that slightest of scrapes, when he was tempted by a young lady to take to Thomson's "Seasons" instead of to Roman history, was it not his aunt Jean?

In 1772, Lady Elliot Murray, who had been at Minto in the autumn for the Kelso races, visited the Dowager Lady Elliot in Edinburgh. In one of her letters "of thirteen pages long" she thus

characteristically comments on a portion of the society:—

“The misses are, I am afraid, the most rotten part of the society. Envy and jealousy of their rivals have, I fear, a possession in their minds, especially the old part of the young ladies, who grow perfect beldames in that small society; but upon the whole,” she adds, with a little relenting, “there are many worthy, agreeable, well-principled people, *if you get over the language, manners, and address, which are at first striking.*”

This opinion from a Forfar and Fife heiress is in itself decidedly striking. In opposition to Lady Elliot Murray’s verdict, we have had proof, in Mrs. Cockburn’s letters, that the set of women—Mrs. Chalmers, Tib Hall, Jenny Duff, Violy Pringle, not to speak of the eccentric Suff Johnstone—in which Mrs. Cockburn mingled at this very date, were clever and kind-hearted. We have also an impartial witness in an English traveller who, writing from Edinburgh in 1777, praises the superior conversational powers of the women, and dwells on the pleasant effect

produced on a stranger by their easy, cordial address, and their manner of saying, in the earlier stages of acquaintance, "My dear sir," and "My good friend."

In 1773 Jean Elliot's mother died. 1776-7-8 were years of trouble and change to her remaining kindred. Eleanor Elliot, the younger niece, married Mr. Eden. Gilbert, the future head of the house, married a lady of French Huguenot extraction, who, to the comical disgust of his mother, added to that disadvantage the absence of personal beauty. Lady Elliot Murray described a similar choice on the part of another eccentric victim as "a mad marriage to a frightful, long-nosed, awkward woman, *who has nevertheless douceur, virtue, and amiability to recommend her, and a love to him as strong as it is romantic;*" and she consistently bemoaned her son's "unnatural passion for an ugly woman." She had soon graver subjects of lamentation. Sir Gilbert Elliot caught cold, fell into a rapid decline, went abroad, and died in 1777. His youngest son, the "Alick" of the family letters, died in India in 1778; and in the same year

young Mrs. Eden was forced to leave her baby with her mother, and accompany her husband to America. She went out, in her uncle Captain John's ship, at the time that the discontent of the colonists was about to break out in the American war. A nation's independence was secured by it; but many a fine fortune was scattered to the winds, many a fine place was ruined, and among others Andrew Elliot's. Spent by her trials, by anxiety for Hugh's prosperity in foreign courts, and by disappointment in Isabella's wasted life, Lady Elliot Murray died in 1779. Her sister-in-law, Miss Jean, was then a maiden lady of fifty-one years of age.

But the good fortune of the Elliots of that generation had not deserted them. True-hearted Gilbert was the stay of the mother, who came to know him at last, as well as of his entire family; and the genuine goodness of his French wife, who conceived at first sight a strong attachment for her husband's country home of Minto, and who danced with equal goodwill at the Jedburgh ball and among the colliers of Lochgelly, overcame all hostility and

gained every heart. Mrs. Eden's husband also secured for her much happiness, at the same time that he won for himself the public honours which founded the barony of Auckland. Among the Edens the Christian name of Eleanor (the niece of the author of "The Flowers of the Forest"), no less than the literary bent of the Elliot family, may yet be found. Even Andrew Elliot flourished again in his daughters, the American nieces of Miss Jean, who married amidst the hearty congratulations of their kindred. The first (when New York was still held by the English) married Lord Cathcart; a second married Sir David Carnegie of Southesk (thus connecting the Elliots twice in that generation with the Balcarres Lindsays); and a third—the eldest — at a time when her waning attractions seemed to have filled her friends with a reasonable doubt of her "settling" at all, married her uncle John's gallant naval contemporary, Admiral Digby.

But successes which must have come more home to the spinster sisters in Edinburgh were

the fresh laurels gathered by their brave brother John. In 1778 he was a commodore, and second in command to Lord Howe. John Elliot distinguished himself in Rodney's victory off St. Vincent in 1780, and again in Admiral Kempenfelt's battle with the French fleet off Brest in 1781. In this latter action, John Elliot's ship, the *Edgar*, which was the leading ship in position, was shot at for half an hour by the *Triumphant*, a three-decker. At last the *Edgar* by a manœuvre avoided being raked by the *Triumphant*, receiving a broadside on its bows, while it poured a broadside in return, and disabled the *Triumphant*. The Elliots, like the Keppels, have an hereditary right to be sailors.

Miss Jean occupied a house in Brown Square when death had left her a solitary householder. The circumstances of her position were very much like those which surrounded Mrs. Cockburn. But Miss Jean craved retirement and quietness, and eschewed the gayer scenes of Edinburgh. The *ridottos* which the Scotch clergy permitted, though they set their faces

against masquerades, were not patronised by her; nor the whimsical oyster cellars, where the leaders of fashion in the northern capital imitated the grand dames of Paris in pretending to the license of men—a comparatively innocent license in this instance, however adverse it might have been to feminine delicacy. Certain it is, however, that Miss Jean would take her drive with a friend in her coach, backwards and forwards, on Leith or Edinburgh sands. It is not improbable that the authors of both sets of “The Flowers of the Forest” went and heard the lectures on elocution which were delivered by Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s father, and which were attended by many of the first ladies and gentlemen in Edinburgh. Of a Sunday Miss Jean might sit, listening to the carefully-polished periods of Dr. Hugh Blair, in the High Kirk; or in old Greyfriars, trying to weigh the hard logic of Dr. Erskine. If Miss Jean sat in the latter kirk, then a noticeable little fellow formed, along with her, one of the congregation. In a seat crammed with eight or ten children at a time, besides father and

mother, was a little lame boy, who was yet to make Dr. Erskine preach, not to Guy Mannering and Councillor Pleydell alone, but to the civilised world. And when George Whitefield came down on his later visits to Scotland, after having broken with the seceders and come into favour with the established clergy, it is not at all unlikely that the representative of the Roxburgh Elliots, on the invitation of a Galloway Maxwell, Lady Glenorchy, was present at some of his marvellous preachings.

But through all varying scenes and fashions, the wise dislike to notoriety kept Jean Elliot safe from folly and censure. Discreet as she had been in the girl's open, flowing, big-flowered lutestring and gossamer "mob," in the '45, so was she in the old woman's tight "seeded" silk gown and close cap, in Brown Square in 1804; for she survived the moral and social earthquake of the French Revolution, the guillotining of the Bourbons, the going out of wigs and cocked-hats. She remained always on a well-bred, accommodating level with her generation. But there was a single departure from her practice.

She was the last woman in Edinburgh who, after the era of the fly, kept standing in her "lobby" a private sedan-chair, in which she was borne abroad by the last of the caddies when she wanted to take an airing or to make a call. Perhaps, at the last, she stood aghast at the enormous encroachments on old usages which had been compassed in her days.

Jean Elliot stole back in the end to the region of the Forest to see again its bracken, and hear once more its waters and the bleat of its sheep. She died either at Minto or at Mount Teviot, the house of her younger brother, Admiral Elliot (accounts differ), on the 29th of March, 1805, aged seventy-eight years.

"I've heard them lilting" was brought home, beyond mistake, to Jean Elliot's door, by Mr. Ramsay of Ochertyre, Sir Walter Scott, and Dr. Somerville. And now who dare praise that "Flowers of the Forest?" It is simply beyond praise. Suffice it to say that the song is supposed to be sung by young girls, who are almost too young to have entered into the piteously familiar misery, and who have grown

a little weary under its crushing, never-lifted load; or else by very old women, who have waxed into mere spectatresses of the struggle of life, viewing it with the impatience of the old, whose eyes will soon be closed and whose ears will soon be dulled to all natural gladness, who think life too short for prolonged mourning. It is needless to point out the succession of perfectly contrasted and incomparably tender rural pictures.

THE FLOWERS OF THE FOREST.

I've heard them liting at our yowe-milking,
Lasses a' liting before the dawn o' day;
But now they are moaning on ilka green loaning—
The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away.

At buchts, in the morning, nae blythe lads are scorning,
The lasses are lonely and dowie and wae;
Nae daffin', nae gabbin', but sighing and sabbing,
Ilk ane lifts her leglin, and hies her away.

In hairst, at the shearing, nae youths now are jeering,
The bandsters are lyart and runkled and gray ;
At fair or at preaching, nae wooing, nae fleeching,—
The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away.

At e'en, in the gloaming, nae swankies are roaming
'Bout stacks wi' the lasses at bogle to play ;
But ilk ane sits drearie, lamenting her dearie,—
The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away.

Dule and wae for the order sent our lads to the Border
The English, for ance, by guile wan the day ;
The Flowers of the Forest, that foucht aye the foremost,
The prime o' our land, are cauld in the clay.

We'll hear nae mair liltin' at the yowe-milkin',
Women and bairns are heartless and wae ;
Sighin' and moanin' on ilka green loanin'—
The Flowers of the Forest are a' wede away