round the houses they found that greedy suppliers were offering a
watered-down product and it was to circumvent them that the
hydrometer was invented. The urine collectors carried pocket
hydrometers. When the supply of West Highland lichen gave out,
Macintosh went to see Gustavus Adolphus IV of Sweden and
started a prosperous trade importing Swedish lichens. As a result of
this enquiry into what things are made of (that is, their chemistry),
there were developments in calico printing, waterproofing, and tar.
Cochrane wrote a book about chemistry and agriculture (1795). In
1780 the industrial revolution's iron contributed to the agrarian
revolution when James Small yoked two horses to his Carron-
made iron plough. Previously two horses and four oxen were
needed to draw a wooden plough.

In 1913 when he published his book, Cadell wrote that it was
again 'high time for every patriotic Scot to wake up and consider
how best to put an end to this reaction, and resume such beneficent
schemes as our enterprising ancestors started long ago'. The peaty
water had surged back, as it were, into Blairdrummond Moss.
There is a comparison between the Scotland of the 1780s and the
1980s. When life is getting on not too badly, we accept. It is when
things are getting desperate that we question. Material poverty
pushed our forefathers into asking basic questions about the con-
stitution of matter. Cultural poverty is driving us into asking basic
questions about the constitution of our society. A livelier school
and university system would show the young that the old struc-
tures have broken down and would give them the knowledge
which would help them to come up with new initiatives to produce
a community which had both stability and freedom. Education is
for action. In an emergency similar to ours (the need to rebuild
their society from the foundation), just when Kames was setting
about the clearing of the Blairdrummond Moss, the American colo-
nists were sending to Britain for books on political enquiry that
would help them to answer *their* questions. Fawn M. Brodie, in her
biography of Thomas Jefferson, wrote, 'The Scottish Lord Kames
became, along with Locke, his master and guide to the theory of
natural rights.' I wish I knew enough about Kames and Locke to
judge what contribution their Old World ideas made to the Decla-
ration of Independence of the New.

CHAPTER FIVE

Glasgow and Galloway

'The Only Countryside We've Got'
title of film about wasteland in Glasgow

When the traveller leaves behind the castle-topped clutter of grey
buildings that is Stirling and makes for Glasgow, he is confused
with a welter of appearances that won't fit into a pattern. There are
television antennae on farmhouse chimneys, sun and shadow on
the Ochils, bundles of newspapers awaiting readers or the
shredding process, scattered litter, kilted schoolboys from fee-
paying schools trying to resuscitate a highland tradition, a pit bing,
a factory for making kitchen stoves. Then, nearer Glasgow, cooling
towers, a liquefied petroleum gas plant, a deserted, small school,
and the accumulated untidiness of an industrial area. A generation
ago everybody used to redd up when they were expecting visitors; it
was churlish not to give them a welcome. Glasgow has lost heart in
the effort to make a derelict landscape look presentable or to
bother about how her visitors feel. It's like picking your steps
through rubbish to reach your host's front door. When we entered
the tunnel beyond Cowlairs, a group of lively children, who had
been watching the diesel dials and calling out the speeds from the
windows just behind the driver's cabin, suddenly saw the yellow
and green and red lights of the tunnel and gazed with wonder and
one of them said, 'Isn't that braw!' The farther end of the tunnel
was illuminated with what looked like an altar at the end of a long,
dim cathedral-nave, the focus of attention. I was as puzzled and
mystified as they were and waited for the uncovering of the mys-
tery. What had seemed a lit altar turned out to be a maze of rails
illuminated by the daylight at the end of the tunnel.

'Economic forces' (we are told) created the Glasgow desert – the
grey, highrise flats, the lower tenements of red and brown brick,

the streets of blackened sandstone, an abandon of weeds in open spaces, crowded streets that the yellow and green buses traverse on the way out of the city, advertisements for smoking and for giving up smoking. It's an ungainly builders'-yard. They do bits and pieces of tidying, of make-do-and-mend, flattening Bridgeton and the Gorbals, responding to the immediate pressure. 'Accommodation for the homeless!' barks the economic force threateningly and they run up megalithic boxes for megalopolis. 'Speed up traffic!' and they erect nightmarish overways on stilts. They certainly help us to get through the city quickly. We once timed it. From the airport in the extreme of the city, past Ibrox football ground, shipbuilding cranes, the Clyde (a narrower river than I expected, narrower than the Tay at Perth), on to the highway and then to the Stirling road, east of the city; twenty minutes. From these elevated roads Glasgow at midnight looks like a child's electric railway on a massive scale, dotted with dangerously slim skyscrapers and myriads of pin-point lights and throbbing with busy-ness. The Scottish villages where people cling to the tradition of sleeping when it is dark belong to a different civilization. It is glamorous at night. During the day it is plain ugly. What hope have we of mitigating the savagery of greed, or the suction of dividends into some insatiable belly? Something ruthless and non-human has taken over, implacable, inexorable. The foreign traveller might have looked for some surviving enclave, like Monte Cassino in the dark ages, that would still be nurturing the humane values, tempering the wind to the fleeced sheep. What about Glasgow University? Would that be part of its function? I believe not. However reluctantly, the university opts out.

I walked round the university late at night. From Gilmorehill there is a panorama of lights, some densely crammed together, some sparsely spread out, over the city. The dry leaves of a sycamore rustled faintly. It was quiet up there beside the university buildings where James Watt devised his modification of the Newcomen engine. The university is an impressive, slightly oppressive building. Like the education it delivers, it is intended to have a daily, subliminal influence, and the students can hardly escape the cumulative effect that the builders intended. The suppliers of education are intelligent, sensitive, hospitable. More

than newspaper editors they give the impression that they are determined to see themselves in the role of free seekers after the truth, fearless communicators. But a shadow hangs over them. At the end of the day most of them are not on our side. What they communicate is ultimately their masters' voice. They are the insiders. We are out there on our own.

In Glasgow you see human aspiration at its most poignant. We seek a group, a comm-unity, in which we can lose our querulous egoism, to which we can give ourselves without qualification. It could be our country. But the minority in power rejects us, alienates us, and we look elsewhere for those sheltering wings. In Glasgow they give whole-hearted allegiance to a football team, Rangers, or Celtic. The Elizabethan Sir Philip Sidney said that poetry claps wings to solid nature. That's what football does in Glasgow. When Celtic have scored a goal the massed green-and-white-barred scarves flutter horizontally with the little quick movements of insects' wings and a population takes off into a throbbing, joyous flight.

The Glaswegians are warm people, friendly, outgoing. A visitor can sense friendliness in the accent. Unlike many people in Aberdeen who try to ape the English accent, the Glaswegians feel confident and relaxed in their use of the local speech, perhaps because there are so many of them. They are unaware of any need to modify their vowels and trim their consonants, and incomers seek to defer to this homely pronunciation. Incomers, black people, Scottish lowlanders gravitating to the capital, Highland refugees from feudal landlordism, Irish Catholics quickly make an amalgam conforming to the Glasgow formula. In a discussion at a football match a skilful television programme showed how a Rangers-supporting Pakistani and a Celtic-supporting Italian had accommodated themselves to the speech and mores of the city. It is a place of condensed humanity making common cause of the restrictions under which they live.

In this moonscape jungle, people go crackers, children commit communal murder and seek refuge in heroin. Those who have run amok are imprisoned in a sullen keep called Barlinnie. The open space outwith its walls, as extensive as the space round a Johannesburg compound for black miners which allows room for armed

tanks to manoeuvre, deepens the feeling of menace. Wells's novel, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, describes an encounter with sub-men who are inaccessible to the human quality that we call pity, and are therefore capable of any cruelty. Shakespeare too was frightened at the fragility of the defence of humanity against their own committing of frightful deeds. He wrote of the stopping up of the access and passage to remorse and to the 'compunctious visitings' of our natural tenderness. He imagined wraith-like figures, 'sightless substances', that wait on nature's mischief and in crises assume control of human beings. Glasgow has pushed its luck too far in hoping that in a crisis it can depend on the intercession of human kindness. There are awful murders and awful walling-up of murderers.

We are brought up to believe that a dungeon like Barlinnie is a natural part of the landscape like a bridge or a farm steading. The unspoken menace that surrounds Barlinnie is deepened, not alleviated, by the to-and-fro in the vestibule and the front office, the busy-ness of the staff, the voices on the telephone, the presentation of passes, the conversation of warders going off duty. It is an effort to maintain the pretence that this is just another association of human beings going about their normal business. Barlinnie was built in 1880–6. Inside there is a large rectangular area and, on each floor, an open corridor all the way round from which warders can look down into this well. The secondary school in which I taught in Fife was built to the same plan and about the same time. Teachers and warders had an uninterrupted view of central hall and corridors, an essential requirement of a house of correction.

In both schools and prisons there are compassionate teacher-warders who are permitted to modify the regimen. In Barlinnie a Special Unit was set up, an oasis in a desert of hostility. I was invited for a midday meal there. I didn't know if people round the table were social workers or murderers. I discovered that both groups were there, indistinguishable from one another. There was relaxed discussion, more basic and purposeful than several university discussions in which I had taken part. One murderer told me that what was wrong in the Fife school where I worked was that there was 'no discipline'. Over the coffee a prison warder sat back, throwing in a word only occasionally, like a university lecturer encouraging his students to argue things out for themselves. Later he told me that

he had been seconded for half a year to Oxford University's department of criminology.

'You'll learn a lot from them,' I said.

'They'll learn a lot from me,' he countered.

He had left school at the earliest leaving date and hammered out of his experience some new ideas on the function of a prison. His self-confidence gives grounds for hope in Scotland's future.

A prisoner took me to see his cell and those of his friends. There were pictures, record-players, radios, easy chairs, shelves of books. They were like hotel bedrooms but particularized by the tenant's choice of ornament or furnishing. Elsewhere there were craft rooms and work in progress. It was like a Benedictine monastery. An extensive mural they had made expressed savage criticism of the social system and the people who manipulate it (or maybe also are manipulated by it).

On another occasion the Special Unit put on an exhibition of prisoner art. In paint and clay there were the figures of other prisoners, representations of anger and domination and sex, and pictures of chaffinches that came in from the sky through the bars and stayed a little in the precinct and went back to the sky again. With the help and local advice of Glasgow youngsters, the association called the Third Eye put on a film protesting against a proposal to make a motorway through derelict land in the city. The film was called 'The Only Countryside We've Got' and showed, in the midst of the ugly city, broom in flower, teazles, ransoms (good for cooking), horse radish, hogweed, butterbur, comfrey, foxgloves, a tortoiseshell butterfly, a mouse's nest under discarded polystyrene, and a beautiful shot of a derelict motorcar in the snow.

But the success of the Special Unit isn't followed through. It's as if an exile from the Hebrides had sown daffodils in the Gorbals or like an industrial firm which feels that its prestige and public esteem require it to set up a research lab and thereafter refuses to take the risk of putting into large-scale production the results of its successful experiments. A Chicago professor said that the USA sets up showplace schools incorporating the latest ideas in pedagogics, thus disarming its critics, but restricts educational initiative to the showplaces. It's a recognized defence mechanism of an established order. Psychologists and criminologists and philosophers study

Barlinnie but the Scottish prison system is not thereby much modified. The inaccessible, unidentifiable people who make the final decisions about what goes in Scotland don't set much store on the findings of philosophers and psychologists. They don't let academic studies influence their interpretation of reality. Glasgow University's culture is in a different world from the principles on which Barlinnie is run. This dissociation is another evidence of alienation in our society. And so is the convention that it's OK to shout your head off if you're talking about merciless, violent criminals or the 'meaningless, senseless vandalism' of juvenile delinquents; but you must modify your language and tone if you're talking about the people who created or permitted the Glasgow desert, and control our society. They must be dealt with tenderly. The convention on civilized debate comes into operation. Glasgow and Scotland need a more sympathetic study alike of the hard men in the prison cells and the hard men who decree a punitive system of society. I've seen in chief constables and judges and government scientists and air vice marshals and other of society's warders a steely coldness that induces a slight shiver, as if they were frightened of their repressed compassion.

Glasgow is the product of a society that doesn't know where it is going, whose God has led it up a blind alley. Continuing his journey south to Dumfries, the visitor would find evidence of a sum that hadn't worked out properly or that left an untidy remainder. Old prams have been dumped on the railway banks. A sewer vents into the sea. There is a massive power station at the edge of the sea at Hunterston. Coal pits heal over, the earth's skin growing again after having been gashed. There are pipes, black earth, factory refuse. Industrial Man has been bull-dozing his way through the landscape. Earth and rubbish have been heaped into a large container called 'Tidysite'. On the main roads there are lorries transporting calcium hydroxide, nylon salt, sulphur trioxide, caustic soda, timber and frozen vegetables.

The country round New Cumnock and Sanquhar is a dull, dreich landscape of reeds and bogland and few trees, of glaur and discomfort. Grey cement additions have been made to the backs of older buildings, white smoke comes from two power stations and black smoke from another tall lum. The dining-car of a railway train is a

comfortable place from which to get an overall picture of the terrain, rumpled, planed, ridged, pathed, the concavities due to undermining, the dumps, humps and howes, and the face of the countryside altering with the play of the sunlight upon it. An unobtrusive message on a table-mat says that the first public diningcar was on trains between King's Cross and Leeds in 1879, when the food was cooked on a coal stove. I wonder what the visiting social anthropologist from New Guinea makes of the news. Maybe he scores up a credit to British Rail for telling their customers about British social history when they might have made a pound or two out of advertising Beelzebub's beer. Maybe the BR educator was on to something more significant than he realized. There is a longing, almost a yearning, in all of us to enter into the experience of the earlier occupiers of these buffet car seats and we seize on these fugitive pieces of evidence about the passengers supping soup that was heated on a coal fire in the galley a hundred years ago. It's the same unspecific longing as makes a Glasgow father ask, 'Where will we go today?' as he gets the car out of the garage on a Sunday morning, and the family decide between the claims of a National Trust castle like Culzean near Ayr or the home of Bonnie Annie Laurie or the traces of Devorguilla and the Red Comyn and Bruce and Burns and Barrie in the red sandstone town of Dumfries, and the opportunity to admire the Victorian sweep of a fine parabola of rails and platforms at its railway station. We seek to make some sort of sense out of our landscape and its configurations, and the story of the people who tenanted it before us and we are frustrated when the clues don't add up to an explanation.

Beyond Dumfries, in Galloway, the clues do hang together. It is a land of well-found farms, well-maintained dykes round the fields, prosperous beech-trees, fine tall oaks and sycamores and ash-trees, bright green grass and black cattle in the Ur valley and, beyond the river, woods of spruces and larches. It's a humpy, green countryside of twisty roads and white farmhouses. It has a character and identity of its own, as individual as its 'doon-hamer' speech. There is a softer air and lusher pastures than in Aberdeenshire and a different architecture. But there are parts of Galloway where you might be in the north-east, Deeside or Donside or Strathspey, woodlands, lochs and water lilies, rounded hills, heathlands and bog myrtle and

crags, the ubiquitous sound of water, standing stones on top of a hill. And, like Aberdeenshire, Galloway has prosaic areas. Newton Stewart is a featureless town in spite of the fine River Cree. It has been tidied up and painted, and flowers have been planted, but it has no sparkle. People have been preserving their drystone dykes, modernizing their houses, reafforesting bare hills, warding off the nuclear scientists and trying to resuscitate an old meal mill. In Galloway the Scottish nationalists are active, confronting the other parties with probing questions, carefully prepared.

In a Galloway valley there are scattered sculptures that visitors leave their cars to stroll across to look at. What does the visitor get out of looking at them? The social anthropologist from the Third World could reasonably expect an answer. Part of the answer is that all right-thinking people are supposed to have a place in their lives for art just as television companies are supposed to have a religious slot. In an open landscape on a hillock between two or three trees there is a figure of Mary, pregnant, being told about the son she would bear. There was dignity and kindness and calm about the group, an oasis of peace in a troubled world. Handel used the Hallelujah Chorus in the *Messiah* (he said) to express the otherwise unutterable feelings he had of the power and majesty of 'the great God himself'. But Epstein's purpose was less easily comprehensible.

CHAPTER SIX

The Borders

> With a tale he cometh unto you, with a tale that keepeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner.
> EVERYMAN

The region called the Scottish Borders is a magic land. East of Dumfries the thoroughfare from Glasgow to Carlisle is astir with the busy-ness of the eighties. Lorries transport farm equipment, office furniture and fitted kitchens and liquid sulphur and pipes. The cross-section of a lorry-load of pipes is like a honeycomb. Pipes are as much a necessity for survival in our decade as baskets were in an earlier century. Change transforms the valley. The railway is electrified to Glasgow. The need for wood has covered the smooth face of the hillside with a ten-days' growth of fir stubble-beard. The old narrow road is redundant and looks rejected; slowly the natural world will reclaim it, will grass and weed it over, and it will become one with yesterday's seven thousand years, until an archaeologist rediscovers it and announces, 'There was a main thoroughfare here once.' A solitary sign expresses a human refusal to be bulldozed by what is called the pressure of events. It says, 'Free range eggs'. Farther east, away from the leaching effect of the main valley into England, the resistance to change is stronger. The traveller is entering one of the most amazing regions in Europe. It's the land between Edinburgh and the Cheviots, the counties of Selkirk, Roxburgh, Peebles and Berwick.

I lived for six years in this countryside and loved it. It has the spell of a woman who is not all that good-looking but has a fey quality that attracts and holds her admirers. Alexander Gray, poet from the Braes of Angus and academic economist, wrote about the unlikely qualities of his girl that caught and held captive his fancy. A friend

of mine from Lochinver in Sutherland visited the region and never left it. His Highland brothers couldn't understand this new-plighted troth. The region has no Highland sublimity of scenery, and most of the towns and villages have little grace of architecture. So where does the attraction lie?

The region has a unity of place; it is a kingdom on its own, inducing a tough local patriotism in its subjects. We lived on the Melrose Road outside Galashiels, looking across to Galafoot and the Tweed at Abbotsford. Near our house was a plaque in a wall recording that here Walter Scott, ill on his journey home from Italy, 'sprang up with a cry of delight' on seeing the Eildons. The inscription gave a special poignancy to his generalized poem on patriotism.

> Breathes there the man with soul so dead
> Who never to himself hath said,
> 'This is my own, my native land'?

A Galashiels woman told me that, returning from a day in Edinburgh, she felt safe when the train, having climbed up the watershed to Fala, began the descent into the valley of Gala Water. It's an atavistic feeling of being in your own territory again that the Border reivers and moss-troopers felt when, after a cattle-stealing sally, they had won clear of danger and felt bielded by their own Border hills. You don't venture outside the well-kent territory unless you have to, and then you get back as quickly as possible. 'A day out o Hawick is a day lost.' When James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, was trying to make writing pay for his farming, Scott planned to help him, explaining that, to gain patronage, he would have to go to London to attend the coronation of George IV. But Hogg refused because, if he went, he would miss St Boswells Fair.

Belatedly we are discovering that Hogg chose the better part. If Scotland is to become healthy, to become whole, we should listen to him rather than Scott, because he got his priorities right. The Scott gospel that individual advantage is paramount has eroded communities outwith the Borders, crumbled their cohesion. When Melrose or Gala or Jed or Langholm or Selkirk or Hawick or any other Border club supplies a man for Scotland's rugby team, it's usually a man from Melrose or Gala or . . . , an amateur (a lover of

the game), and not, as in soccer, a footloose mercenary unrelated to the community.

Just as Border wool is reinforced with long fibres that give it continuity, the local awareness of community includes those who lived in these towns long ago. The annual Border festivals keep their memories fresh. There were St Ronan and James IV and David I, moss-troopers and Cistercian monks, Thomas the Rhymer and St Cuthbert, King Arthur and Merlin, Agricola and his legion, Covenanter conventicles, all the abbeys, Mary Queen of Scots, Montrose, Walter Scott. Their ceremonies crystallize round local figures, usually on horseback, Cornets, Standard-bearers, Callants, Braw Lads, Beltane Queens. Some of the ceremonies are recent, others have a long history. The Selkirk Common Riding, they maintain, has been celebrated annually for six hundred years.

My wife and I rose early one June morning to go to the Selkirk Common Riding, six miles away. At seven the rain had stopped but the sky behind the hills was grey and uncertain. Two hundred people on horse crossed the Ettrick at a walking pace, the standard-bearer leading on a white horse. All the time that the long line crossed, singly or in twos or threes, there was the sound of hooves on the stones of the river bed, muffled by the two-feet depth of water. The scene hasn't changed much in several hundred years – sky, hills, river, and people on horseback. You could imagine, said my wife, that you were watching a band of moss-troopers setting out on a raid.

The summer festival of Galashiels is of more recent origin. A group of Gala folk, energetically supported by the doyen of the Scottish directors of education, W. D. Ritchie, set up their own programme of riding the marches and celebrating their history. Down near the rugby ground at Netherdale a raidstone marks the place where Cromwell's soldiers got a bellyache eating sour plums. Resting on a Sunday, they were annihilated by the local men, and 'Sour plums in Galashiels' was later adopted as the motto of the town, and was commemorated in the song. The will-o'-the-wisp of heraldry leads its followers in inconsequential directions. The coat of arms of Galashiels showed a fox looking up at inaccessible plums on a plum-tree. The caption might have read 'Sour plums', or, as we might more likely have said, 'Sour grapes'. But the La Fontaine

fable had nothing to do with the Comwell story. The raidstone's origin is equally humorous. A pupil of mine saw it being set up.

But none of that takes away from the genuine enthusiasm with which the people of Galashiels enter into the annual celebration of their history. They commemorate the part that Ettrick Forest played in the union of James IV and his English bride. They ford the Tweed at Galafoot and are received at Scott's house at Abbotsford, thus lightly impressing on the young riders that ancient churchmen used that same ford to get across the Tweed. I don't know why the Borderers are closer to their origins than the rest of us Scots are. In that region I have been aware of the presence of the past more acutely over the whole region than elsewhere. John Buchan, who had Border roots, was sensitive to such mysteries and used phrases like 'the blanket of the dark' and 'the gap in the curtain' to suggest a tenuous border between the past and present. Border? Was there something in living in such a sensitive region that heightened awareness? I've listened to a packed gathering in a cinema in Galashiels on a June evening raising their voices in Burns's words to Haydn's music:

> But Yarrow braes nor Ettrick shaws
> Can match the lads o Gala Water,
> Braw, braw lads.

Nothing much in the words except their local habitation, but a community was soaring above an earthbound life, buoyed up by infinite longings, losing itself in a surge of generosity and happiness. At times like these we see, albeit through a glass, darkly, the potential of our country and its people. This is how we might be living much of our time and not only in brief escapes into music or poetry or fantasy or whisky. We are like gliders searching for thermals to give us a lift. The massed people of Galashiels, singing from their hearts, express a longing for a reintegration of life, a longing to live permanently on the sunny uplands.

There is a concern for music in the Borders. Ruskin told about a local man, who, as he lay dying, realized that maybe he was the only one who still knew the notes of the old tune of 'Sour plums in Galashiels' and he sent for somebody skilled in musical notation to write it down from his playing. Ruskin said, 'Is not this strange that

a man, setting out on his heavenly journey should be concerned to see that the tune '*Sour plums in Galashiels* should not cease from the earth?'

Maybe the ancient minstrelsy and the modern festivals spring from the same roots, the desire to make sense of our earthly sojourn. Throughout Scotland, teachers read the ballads to their pupils and tell them that they are a vital part of our Scottish literary tradition. But usually they are a classroom chore, an exercise in literary appreciation. They are fossils that have been preserved. The mother of James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, rebuked Walter Scott about his ballad collecting and publishing. 'They were made for singin an no for readin; but ye hae broken the charm an noo they'll niver be sung mair.' Tamlane gained a place in literature and folklore, and the ancient belief that the fairies paid their dues to hell at Carterhaugh on Hallowe'en was reduced to a quaint fancy. The Scottish schools sapped the ballads further because they didn't make it credible to the young that their forefathers and foremothers could have believed these things and sung about them with feeling. The beliefs and songs were a natural growth, living things, the yearning of a community of shepherds and weavers to read their experience aright, their fumbling imaginative efforts to find a satisfying explanation of the antic natural phenomena, the ferlies, that were their daily and nightly experience. The ballads reveal the speculations they were lured into in their search for meaning.

One spring evening when the moon was flitting in and out of clouds, I walked down the road from Selkirk on the south side of the Ettrick and crossed the river. That's Tamlane country. Near the road was the very place, the farm of Carterhaugh, still holding on to its magic name. I was ready to be magicked into acceptance. The setting was right. The lights of Selkirk, the capital of the fairy kingdom, were shining in the distance. Round about were green-brown softly-outlined hills. Barred strato-cumulus clouds half hid the sky and a blue-yellow moon floated behind the cloud-curtain, shining on the water when I crossed the Ettrick bridge. The soft sound of the water was clear in the evening air. Behind the walled garden a light was on in the farmhouse of Carterhaugh. Telephone wires and poles, a tractor working late, an aeroplane humming overhead were

minor intrusions that the setting was able to contain. It was not difficult to feel that a shepherd friend of James Hogg, travelling from an outbye hirsel to Selkirk on a moonlit evening, would come under the witchery of the scene.

It's difficult for a Border child to know where fantasy ends and perceived truth begins. At a high point of the road between Melrose and St Boswells there is a stone commemorating Thomas of Ercildoune (Earlston), the Rhymer. With all the hard realism of Roman letters cut into stone it declares that here Thomas met the Queen of the Fairies and began Scottish literature. What is a trusting youngster to make of that? Thomas Hardy's Wessex countrymen believed that at twelve o'clock on Christmas Eve the cattle sank down to their knees, and Hardy, a sceptic, said that if a childhood friend invited him to go to the lonely barton they used to know and see the oxen kneel, he would go with him, 'hoping it might be so'. We would find a much fuller response from the young if we took them fuller into our confidence, differentiating clearly between the things we know to be true and the things we know to be wishful fantasy and the things about which we make inspired (or uninspired) guesses.

The story of the Romans and their camp beside the triple Eildons, Trimontium, is fairly clear-cut. Glimpses of the reality of their sojourn in the Borders are offered by Edinburgh's National Museum of Antiquities. From Trimontium, archaeologists have dug up chariot wheels, a cavalry helmet made of brass, a wooden bucket, pieces of leather tents, horses' bits, blacksmiths' tools. There's a cooking pot with the words 'Turma Crispi Nigri' (Black Crispy's Squad) indented clumsily upon it, maybe by the cook. Botanists working from pollen grains, archaeologists, historians and other detectives working over the clues dug up at the camp site, have come up with a picture of the Tweed valley when Agricola and the Ninth Legion were there. The heath-covered flanks of the Eildons came down into peat and hag; there were patches of swamp; roads were paths, higher up, twisting round boggy ground to the villages or through deep woods; there were oak, alder, pine, hazel, birch, mountain ash, more trees than now and therefore more mist, a humid atmosphere; in the Tweed there were frequent alternations of rushing water and stagnant willow or rush pools.

There were big and little insects, harsh-sounding birds that caught the fish in the river, beaver, wolf, wild boar, Caledonian bear, reindeer, elk, giant ox. Transport was by packhorse, waggon, and boats on the river.

The description of Agricola, written by his son-in-law, Tacitus, can be translated as 'He was a man lacking in force,' or equally as 'He was never aggressive.' He had lived through Nero's reign and probably had seen Nero in his amethyst toga parading through a room filled with the scent of violets and verbenas. Agricola's Rome was a city of violent contrasts, a city of narrow streets and tumbledown houses and foul-smelling alleys; and of Goering-like extravagance and luxury. The Pretorian Guard in yellow uniforms and red girdles and big earrings rode on their Numidian horses. Hindoos, Arabs and Ethiopian giants paraded the streets. In the gardens were peacocks, flamingoes, swans, ostriches, gazelles, antelopes. A crescendo of musical instruments echoed and drowned out the confusion in men's minds. The populace thought the Christians were cowardly when, confronting the specially-famished Hibernian wolfhounds bounding into the arena, they knelt down in prayer. Men with scourges drove the gladiators on, and their coffins lay ready. The Greeks set up an altar to Pity, but that was something that didn't come into Nero's scale of reckoning.

That reality gives us a loom on which to weave our imaginings of what it was like to be a legionary in the Borders when Agricola was there. The great Julius Caesar was as far from them as the Duke of Wellington is from us. A legionary might have had a grandfather who was one of Pilate's centurions and had spoken with Jesus of Nazareth. Some of his older friends might have been massacred in Boudicca's uprising against Rome and he would have recounted the story in the same tones as Boers speaking of Zulus, or Yankees speaking of Indians. 'A good Injun is a dead Injun.' Vesuvius, and the destruction of Pompeii, would be fresh in their memories.

That is the furniture of the minds of Roman soldiers serving in the border outposts. We can imagine the conversation over the evening meal as they supped their soup and looked down through the trees on the Tweed. They would be shooting a line about sexual triumphs over local girls. In the irreverent military folklore would be a story of a Balearic slinger who had yawned in the face of great Julius

when he was fully launched into one of his pep-talks, or somebody would exhibit a Palestinian relic, a piece of the coat of a Palestinian construction-worker for which the crucifixion party had diced. I think Agricola would have talked easily to Black Crispy's squad round their cooking pot on an evening. I invited to Galashiels Academy, to talk to the pupils, General Christison who in retirement was growing fruit-trees near Melrose and I found him a character like Agricola. He spoke modestly about his experiences in the First World War and about his encounters with Lawrence of Arabia. I can imagine a legionary venturing a question about the forthcoming expedition against the Caledonians. 'Sir, why do we have to bring this proud people to their knees?' His reply would have been a model of compromise, the compromise of a sensitive man steeped in tradition. In justification he might have quoted poets who magnified Rome's task in the world, bringing civilization to the barbarians. It is still the function of some literary notables to validate the policy of the government. But deep in his heart he knew (as Tacitus said) that he would be creating a desert and calling it peace.

His heart wasn't in it, or at least he had reservations. That's something that history-teachers, like politicians, play down. We owe it to the young to admit to our doubts. I have always found the young tolerant when we didn't pretend to omniscience. They would fully understand the experience of Eadwine of Northumberland who in the seventh century extended his rule to the Forth and gave his name to the city which guarded that northern frontier, Eadwine's Burgh. He married his sister to the king of Kent and with her from Canterbury came one of Augustine's Christian propagandists. The Northumbrian Elders, cradled in the worship of Thor and Odin, called a meeting to consider the propaganda. One of them said:

> So seems the life of man, O King, as a sparrow's flight through the hall when you are sitting at meat in winter-tide, with the warm fire lighted on the hearth, but the icy rainstorm without. The sparrow flies in at one door and tarries for a moment in the light and heat of the hearth-fire, and then flying forth from the other, vanishes into the wintry darkness whence it came. So tarries for a moment the life of man in our sight, but what is before it, what after it, we know not. If this new teaching tells us aught certainly of these things, let us follow it.

Thirteen centuries later we are still groping and credulous. What we can tell the young is this. When the Christian sings, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' he doesn't really know. Anyway, not in the sense in which we habitually use the word *know*. He is longing, like the Northumbrians, for a certainty that is not yet available. The Northumbrian Elder advised, 'If this new teaching tells aught certainly of these things, let us follow it.' The human race is only now growing out of its childhood, doing without the props of fairy stories, trying to piece together, as through a glass, darkly, the evidence available to it. It is to the advantage of the young to understand how the propaganda for some doctrines came to influence people. In the year 627, the thoughts and feelings of the Northumbrians were finely balanced, and when that happens, it doesn't need much to tilt the balance. People don't like to remain long in the limbo of indecision. Two arguments persuaded the Elders to switch their votes away from Thor and Odin, the Norse gods, in favour of the new god. One argument was that the new god could tell them with certainty what happened before they were born and what will happen to them after they die. The other argument came from a disillusioned priest of the Norse gods. He said that all his assiduous worship of the Norse gods hadn't brought him as much favour and fortune as had been given to others who had not been so fervent in their worship. These arguments prevailed and the Northumbrians were converted to Christianity.

Edwine's successor, Oswald, called in the propagandists of Iona Christianity. Boisil went to Tweed and Cuthbert to the log-shanties of Melrose. What conversations did Cuthbert have, a local man speaking with the Border burr, with the farm-workers he met trudging along the boggy tracks? He knew that they had become Christians because, for whatever self-regarding or altruistic reasons, the local thane had thrown in his lot with the Northumbrian King. When we were in the RAF in South Africa in 1942, a friend of mine asked a black lorrydriver, 'If your child were ill, would you call in the white doctor or the witch doctor?' The black man replied, 'I'd

call in them both.' Like him, Cuthbert's Borders were between two worlds, bemused by warring gods.

And then by warring propagandists of the same god. Was it from Canterbury or Iona that the words of eternal life, the living water, issued? There are few teachers in Scotland who pay their teenage pupils the compliment of presenting this issue to them straight, and asking for their comments. There is a convention that the majority of people (seventh century peasants or twentieth century pupils or black lorrydrivers) are incapable of understanding these things, but no class I've ever taught would have failed to be interested in the propaganda war between Canterbury and Iona. Canterbury propagandists introduced relics of saints. A commission was set up to adjudicate between the competing gospellers, but a celestial joker might have drawn up the agenda for the conference of wise men that was going to make the decision. It concentrated on two subjects on which Canterbury and Iona disagreed, the date of Easter, and monks' hair styles. (Violent controversy on pupils' hair styles still exercises the minds of Scotland's educational priesthood.) The chairman asked who held the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Both sides agreed that it was Peter. Columba had no key. The chairman gave his casting vote to the Peter party on the grounds that if he reached heaven and the porter turned his back on him, there would be none to open.

Border pupils are puzzled by this report. How could grown men, even in the seventh century, be so naive? But no teacher confirms in them such an obvious assumption. The aura of Cuthbert's tutor, the Venerable Bede, veiled Northumbria, and no teacher is expected to encourage twentieth century pupils to ask irreverent questions of such a venerable body of early churchmen. In so far as they think about it at all, the pupils assume that the Synod of Whitby ecclesiastics were experts, endowed with some higher wisdom, outwith their ken, and they relinquish their questions. And that is the intention of the educational exercise.

The reluctance of many of the young to go along with the official line on history and culture is ascribed to dullness of intellect. A brighter child (say the men from the ministry) would be more enthusiastic about the whole canon. That is unwise of governments. The scepticism of the young is an asset and if the

propagators of culture were wiser they would follow up the unspoken questions. The homely truth is usually more appealling to the young than the laundered, starched dogma. In the Melrose Abbey museum the guide was extolling the blue and pink glazes of the Roman pottery. 'It's amazing how they achieved that variation of shades on the same plate,' he said.

'Oh no it isn't,' interrupted one of the visitors who turned out to be a Doulton potter. 'The Romans didn't try to produce these effects. Insufficient oxidation. That's the reason for these colours. They had used up all the oxygen inside their kiln before the whole plate had been changed to an even colour.'

We were left with the impression not of master potters but of intelligent fumblers who would discuss their fiascos and try to do better next time. Farther along in the museum there was windswept foliage carved in stone, and the head of a grinning, toothless monk. In the nave of the abbey are capitals on which monks had cut pictures of brussels sprouts and curly kail, and high up, what was doubtless meant to be the face of an angel but it is the face of a bonny, Border lassie, smiling. The mason made a good job even of the strings of the lute she is playing because they are still there, delicately carved in stone. On what is left of the tiled floor of the dormitories there are intersecting circles and optical illusions created in tiles. That's not the picture of the monks that the history books give. They lead us to imagine a life given over to prayer and copying out manuscripts with ne'er a thought of brussels sprouts or braw lasses. The school history teacher, especially in the Borders where the veil between the past and the present is thin, should try to satisfy our children's longing to see and feel and smell and taste how it was long ago, to sit with Cuthbert's converts in their log huts where the water seeped in through the roof and cold draughts made the cat creep nearer the fire.

But finally these youngsters are realists. After all the clues about Border life in the past have been examined, they ask 'What do they all add up to? What is this Earth lark about? How do you suggest we should be spending our brief time here?' The conclusion reached by the mediaeval monks is not very encouraging. In the flaking red sandstone of Dryburgh Abbey I read the words, 'Homo est bulla', Man is a bubble. That's not a proposition that commended itself to

the Border kings. Eadwine and George IV, like their present-day equivalents, were more concerned in the effect of pomp and circumstance in establishing their rule, than in the pursuit of truth. In his *Short History*, J. R. Green wrote, 'A royal standard of purple and gold floated before Eadwine as he rode through the villages; a feather-tuft attached to a spear, the Roman tufa, preceded him as he walked through the streets.' Like a Greek chorus, commenting on the antics performed on the royal stage, the monks inscribed these words on Melrose Abbey.

> The earth goeth on the earth glistring like gold.
> The earth goes to the earth sooner than it wold.
> The earth builds on the earth castles and towers.
> The earth says to the earth, 'All shall be ours.'

By the year 1500 new questions about both temporal and eternal things, given impetus by Huss and Leonardo and Columbus, were kindling the imagination of some of the Scots, and particularly of King James IV. (He was killed at Flodden, three miles south of the Border, in 1513.) G. M. Thomson's *Short History of Scotland* (one of the more imaginative of Scottish histories) sketches an appealing profile of James.

> Like his time, he stood between two ages; two sets of ideas warred within him and in the end destroyed him. On the one hand, he was the man of the new era, eager, curious, restless, unable to receive an ambassador because he was making gunpowder, endowing the thaumaturgical and aeronautical adventures of an Italian alchemist, encouraging the establishment of a printing works, sending prospectors to look for coal in Kintyre, pensioning poets, building a navy, encouraging trade and fisheries. He spoke five languages, and he loved to loiter in the arsenal where his smiths were forging cannon, in the shipyards where his new navy was being constructed, in the counting-houses of the Leith merchants. He was ambitious to play a part in the politics of Christendom such as no other Scottish king had ever done, and, in fact, he made Scotland a European power which foreign potentates were compelled to heed.

> In his many-sidedness and in that touch of megalomania he had, James was the true Renaissance prince, forceful, thrusting, inquisitive, secular. But that is only half the man.
>
> The other half is pure Middle Ages. He was stricken with an intense remorse for the part he took in the fatal revolt against his father and, in expiation, wore a belt of iron to which a few ounces were added every year. He was liable to fits of an almost pathological depression when he would make lonely pilgrimages to lonely shrines, when he would wear the habit of a friar . . . and give himself up to thoughts of leading a crusade, for which purpose the republic of Venice actually offered to make him general of its armies. In conjunction with his humane and tolerant dealing with the Lollards must be taken his punctilious observance of the rites and festivals of the Church. He was superstitious, a prey to astrologers and necromancers . . .

Fifty-three years after James was killed at Flodden, his impulsive grand-daughter, Mary Queen of Scots, dressed unsuitably in Paris clothes, rode with her lady-in-waiting, Mary Fleming, from Jedburgh to visit her lover, Bothwell, at Hermitage. In the loneliness of the hill-recesses, 'across Swinnie Moor into the dale of Rule Water towards Windburgh Hill where the fairies were often heard piping and holding their revels at night', Mary rode, her black horse's hoofs squelching into the soaking mosses. A child of her time, she probably believed that a water kelpie haunted the black loch where the Slitrig rises. In uncertain October weather she saw for herself the sudden hollows in the hills, the 'beef-tubs', where her cattle-thieving subjects hid their stolen beasts. She came to Hermitage and I daresay bedded down with Bothwell under the deerskins of his rough bed. And then set out again, in bad weather, for Jedburgh. In a historical novel Agnes Mitchell recreates the chill induced in the warm human spirit by these grey solitudes. 'The mighty heads of Cauldcleuch and Greatmoor Hill reared themselves up like thunder against the white towering clouds.' Mary was sodden with rain and misery and when she got to Jedburgh they had to lift her from the saddle. She lay ill and nearly died. Later she wished to God that she had died at Jedburgh.

On an autumn day four hundred years later I followed Mary's tracks eighteen miles over the hills from Hermitage to Jedburgh. I longed to commune with this wayward, imperious character, tall, sensuous, intelligent, speaking a fluent Scots with a French accent, impetuously seeking to live her life in her own way at the very moment when the Kirk was putting up the shutters on human nature. In this elemental land, where little has changed, I would at least see Scotland as she saw it. Peering through the fog of the centuries, I saw her clattering out of the courtyard of Hermitage and taking a last look back. A gibbet arm extended from the south wall and on the east wall there is a slight projection of the wall housing a hole through which reivers could be hauled up by a rope in a dire emergency. When she broke away from fond day-dreams of James Hepburn's embraces, she looked on hills whose outlines are as smooth as a horse's back, cinnamon-coloured bracken, fawn rushes, dark-brown heather, and probably alders and ash-trees along the burnside. (Excavation at Trimontium has shown that alders and ash-trees were common in Roxburgh even in Roman times.) The passage of the centuries is shown only in more fields cultivated, bigger cattle and sheep, vehicles moving without apparent motive power on a broad highway. Two vans, one marked *Liddesdale Egg Grading Station* and the other *Royal Mail*, would have given Mary something to think about. So would my thermos flask of coffee. She could have been doing with a hot drink on that miserable cross-country ride. But the biggest surprise would have been the feeling of ample security. Sheep wandering unguarded on the hills and a country house whose windows were a couple of feet from the ground would have appeared even to her daring spirit as signs of reckless folly. At Hermitage the windows are fifty feet above the ground.

In the Borders more than anywhere else in the world I've had this sense of the nearness and continuity of the past. At a fort on Hadrian's wall a quarter of a circle's circumference has been traced in the stone floor by a heavy door which had dropped on its hinges. I expected to hear a decurion rap out a question, 'Haven't you got those hinges repaired yet?' It was only yesterday that the Romans and the reivers and the monks were here, as large as life. Home they've gone and ta'en their wages, and now we've stepped into

their shoes. The nearness of the past makes us long to snuggle up to it closer still, to commune with the previous tenants and ask them what wisdom they distilled from the welter of their experience which, filtered down through the centuries, we could benefit from. The trouble is, we Scots are sentimentalist, suckers for romance. When reality is too much for us, and it often was, particularly in the century after Mary Stuart, we hark back to the sustaining romance, the charismatic hero or heroine, the whisky bottle or the heroin jab. Potions, opiates, charms, spells have never been far from us as we sought to see life in a mellower light. We do genuinely long to know the truth about our past, how it was then; but we subsidize minstrels who tell us what we want to hear.

If we're going to help our young to benefit from our past we'll have to go into it much more deeply. What took us, in the century after Mary Stuart, that we sought felicity not in romance but in extremes of self-denial? In 1697 a Galashiels elder of the kirk was suspended from the eldership for playing football on Fastern's Even. To play on the eve of the Catholic feast of Lent was in some measure to countenance Catholicism. Three years later Robert Wilson (if it was the same Wilson) was 'loosed from the eldership' for having given ale to some people to drink in his house on the Fast-day at time of divine service. And almost a year later he was (perhaps finally) 'deposed from the eldership' for having 'played at the wheel of fortune in the public mercat'. The records of Sabbath-breaking include mending a sack, carrying grey cloth to Selkirk to sell at the fair, having a mill going beyond Saturday midnight. The man who mended the sack was given the alternatives of paying thirty shillings or sitting on the 'drucken stool' and being publicly rebuked. He immediately paid the fine. Thomas Messer and his wife, Janet Dobson, interrogated why they were walking in the fields at the time of divine service, answered that they were going to Boldside to see the said Janet's mother who was sick. Having promised to be better observers of the Sabbath day, they were dismissed.

The Asiatic visitor, studying our Scottish make-up, would ask why so many Scots uncritically subjected themselves to arrogant church-courts, and went sleep-walking through their lives, zombie-like obeying the commands of the kirk-controllers of Scotland. The answer is in the control of the media, which in those days in

Scotland meant the pulpits, and alternative opinion got short shrift. If you've been brought up to be humble, not to trust your own opinion, you are unlikely to stand up to massive pressure. The wonder was that so much independence survived. The Border records show that the kirks couldn't relax. 'Masters of families who sit up at night playing at cards to be admonished privately to desist.' 'Those who continue drinking after ten at night, or idly haunt taverns and ale-houses in daytime, tippling therein beyond the necessity of ordinary and reasonable refreshment, to be held as drunkards.'

Most people came to heel; and then gave their reluctant admiration to characters like Mary Stuart who didn't, elevating them in song to the quality of demi-gods and -goddesses. They wanted to believe that these heroes were larger than life in order to compensate for their own existence which was narrower than life. Walter Scott became one such Scottish folk-hero. His influence shaped and controlled us for centuries.

He was a generous, friendly man, 'readily recognisable from his limp, his ruddy complexion and his border accent', indomitable in spirit, hard-working, imaginative. At school I had been enchanted by *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman*. 'With a tale he cometh to you, with a tale that keepeth children from play and old men from the chimney-corner.' On him depended such knowledge as I had of the familiar details of historical life of Borderers, Highlanders, Covenanters and the citizens of Edinburgh. He had a journalist's nose for what makes a good story. In his introduction to Froissart he wrote, 'The simple fact that a great battle was won or lost makes little impression on our mind ... while our imagination and attention are alike excited by the detailed description of a much more trifling event ... This must ever be the case while we prefer a knowledge of mankind to a mere acquaintance with their duties.'

When we lived at Langlee and looked across the Tweed to Abbotsford and its sheltering belts of trees that he planted, I tried to come by just such a 'detailed description' of a ferlie in the annals of Scotland. What manner of man was he? *Annandale's Modern Cyclopedia* (1903) said that 'the desire of becoming an extensive landed proprietor, and of founding a family, was a passion which apparently glowed more warmly in his bosom than even the appetite for literary fame'. When his contemporary, the seventh Earl of

Elgin, was in Athens shipping the marbles to London (having been assured by a Turkish janissary living in the shadow of the Parthenon that Greek sculpture had been used to make an excellent marble cement for building walls) Scott was looting Melrose Abbey for building stones for Abbotsford. It would have been difficult for anybody from his early years steeped in tradition to step outside his community and turn a quizzical gaze upon it. At the age of twelve Scott went to Edinburgh University and studied Latin, Greek and Logic. It was part of the Scottish academic folklore that youngsters subjected to this treatment gained in an ill-defined benefit called culture. Scott's upbringing didn't encourage him to ask questions.

When I went to Galashiels Academy I took out of the library Lockhart's Life of Scott. Although it was an old book, the pages were still uncut. Nobody had read it through. Lockhart described Scott's anger at trade unionists who had come to Galashiels to interest local textile workers in joining a union. 'Damned agitators,' Scott called them. His contemporary, Mrs Grant of Rothiemurchus, was critical of Scott's zeal in the cheer-leading for George IV's visit to Edinburgh. In her *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, she said that 'Sir Walter Scott and the Town Council were overwhelming themselves with the preparations ... The whole country went mad.' Six years after Scott died, the Scottish chartists set out to change 'the thinking habits' of working folk, the sexual repression, the authoritarian spirit of conformity and vindictiveness, and to educate women at a time when the possessing classes frowned upon it. They organized mass meetings to protest against what they called 'the Coronation humbug'.

Mrs Grant wrote that the idea of the Highlands that we get from Scott's novel, *Waverley*, was 'utterly at variance with truth'. Of *Guy Mannering*, she commented 'The scenery Dumfries and Galloway, the dialect Forfar.' Scott went out little, she said, and when he did usually sat 'very silent, looking dull and listless, unless an occasional flash lighted up his countenance. In his own house he was another character, especially if he liked his guests ... He never had the reputation in Edinburgh he had elsewhere – was not the lion, I mean.'

But he did know the Borders and loved their smooth hills and twisting burns. He was number 24 in the list of the original 38

members of Selkirk Farmers' Club, founded in 1806. Their agenda indicates the climate of thought in which these enquiring Border farmers had their being. One night they debated the highest level at which wheat should be sown in Selkirkshire and the next night they exorcised a witch's spell by putting a horse-shoe in boiling milk. Scott shared this incongruity of outlook. Like James IV three centuries before him, he was torn between the spirit of the Renaissance and the spirit of the Mediaeval world. One day he was putting gas lighting into Abbotsford; another day he came out, 'white as a sheet', from the tiny cottage beside Manor Water where the Black Dwarf had pointed to his cat and said to Scott, 'Have you poo'er? *He* has poo'er.'

When a character like Scott becomes a national legend, his influence, like a wall, holds up traffic in ideas. The most we can hope for is to be like him. He is the glass of fashion and the mould of form. G. M. Thomson said that Scott was 'a rounder, sounder man' than Burns. He was probably unaware that he was propagating a political value and narrowing the range of qualities which we Scots ought to regard as estimable. (By implication he was saying that in some way or other Burns was 'unsound'. Was that because of politics or sex, or what?) Scott's influence is clearly seen in John Buchan, also a Borderer. Buchan repeatedly avowed his allegiance and in 1932, the centenary of Scott's death, brought out a book about him. Like Scott he was a Tory ('for the glamour of it', as a Highland writer put it), he had a hankering after the landed gentry and patronized ordinary folk. Both of them were students of history and writers of verse and well-paid writers of historical novels. Both of them were religious, both avoided women characters, both of them liked the outdoor life and were 'scenery' writers. It is a limiting package in which Buchan allowed himself to be trussed up.

Buchan had great gifts. He could be magic. There was sorcery in his uncanny gift of imbuing a line of Goethe or of a revivalist hymn with a spine-chilling significance in a spy story. *Greenmantle* and *Prester John* compelled my admiration when I was a child even more than *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman*. A Highland writer summarized his gifts:

> He was a magician in atmosphere. He sweeps us off our feet in the first page and carries us forward rapidly to the

> last, in a dream of adventure, high spirits, daring enterprise, heroic romance. And all this in a style limpid, rapid, easy. If there is a better writer of English than Buchan, I have yet to meet him . . . His feeling for place is always present – an English garden, a Scottish moor, the white peaks of the Drakensberg, the steaming African bush, the blue ice of the north . . . We at least are proud that Scotland, so often called dour and hard, bred Robert Louis Stevenson and John Buchan – two men who in a harsh world still spun the thin gold thread of poetry and romance, and with it drew us lightly into the youthful regions of out-door adventure – to generous triumph or more noble failure.

The Buchan story has often been repeated in the annals of Scotland. His upbringing and early experience marshalled him in the direction of advancement in England. He was brought up in a Presbyterian manse, second only in size to the 'big hoose' of the laird. The ministers were constantly tempted to seek liaison with the gentility. After Culloden some of the kirk minsters, following the example of the lairds, sought to assimilate to the English pattern, modelling their children's education on the lifestyle of the Church of England vicars. Like the manses, the vicarages were second only in size (as Jane Austen said) to the manor-houses but, unlike the ministers, the vicars were often themselves of the gentility. The university was the ladder by which the ambitious sons of Scottish ministers could ascend the ladder to the gentry's heaven. It wasn't enough to have a Glasgow University degree; you could go on from Glasgow to Oxford as an English aristocrat could go from Eton to Oxford, a nice usage which put Glasgow University in its place. Buchan made the grade, he received the accolade of acceptability and went on to the next stage of his career; he became one of 'Lord Milner's young men' in South Africa.

During the First World War a little more than a decade later another minister's son, John Reith, who was ascending by the army ladder, clattered into his father's kirk in Glasgow, resplendent in officer's uniform, his sword clanking noisily by his side in the hush that preceded the opening hymn.

In the veldt John Buchan felt himself strangely at home. The Boer upbringing was almost identical with his own Calvinist

upbringing. But the Boers were resisting the political and cultural colonization that Buchan was being railroaded into accepting. I imagined that for the rest of his life he was pulled both ways and he tried to reconcile the two forces. In *Greenmantle* he made the Afrikaner recruit to the Royal Flying Corps, Peter Pienaar, an admirer of John Buchan. Peter Pienaar was proving that he could square his new-found loyalties with the values of his Calvinist upbringing. The Earl of Montrose was one of Buchan's heroes. Montrose had Covenanter roots but ended up on the king's side. In *Witchwood* Buchan makes Montrose, travelling incognito through Covenanter territory, sound like a well-spoken SAS man in IRA territory in Northern Ireland. Buchan was trying to dispel his own doubts by throwing over them the mellow light of Montrose's romantic daring. But the doubts about the values he had sacrificed remained. In *Sick Heart River* he tried to expiate his faults by sending one of his characters into the bleakness of the Canadian Arctic to try and find redemption.

Buchan must have felt reassured by the post-Boer-War history of South Africa. Boer-War hero Jan Smuts took service with Oxford and Westminster and the British army, and like Buchan tried to graft his political-military-scholarly philosophy on to the gnarled rootstock of uncompromising Boer Calvinism. Deneys Reitz, the author of *Commando*, a magnanimous and honest man, went into exile in Madagascar after the Boer War but was ultimately persuaded by Smuts and his wife to make his peace with the British victors and take office with the pro-British South African government. Later the career of the soldier-scholar Col. Laurens van der Post followed the same direction. This theme is common to Scottish and Afrikaner history and perhaps to all subjugated minorities. Ambitious Caledonians who did exceptionally well in the Roman civil service and got a senior job in Pannonia or Egypt might aspire to marry into the Senate, assuming the in-idiom with the toga. Dr Johnson in the eighteenth century remarked on the number of Scots heading south lured by the noble prospects. People cut their losses and throw their lot in with the winning side. If you can't beat them, join them. Maybe these Scots just wanted more out of life than a cold climate, a disapproving god and rural and industrial poverty had to offer. Like the Children of Israel, they were pulled

both ways, by the fleshpots of Egypt and by an inner voice recalling them to a diet of locusts and wild honey in a craggy wilderness.

The rulers of Scotland (and maybe all rulers) don't present the choice to the young fairly. They try to make the young believe that there is only one choice that any right-thinking human being will make. The story of Scottish education shows that from the establishment of the Presbyterian Kirk and the publication of Knox's *Book of Discipline* in 1560, its purpose was to dominate the minds of the young, to make them feel that any alternative to Presbyterianism was unthinkable. Donald Campbell's play, *The Jesuit* (1976), suggested that in the newly Presbyterian Scotland of 1614 there were many converts who had their doubts and asked themselves if after all they had done the right thing in forsaking the Catholic faith. Maybe it was a closer-run thing than the Presbyterian winners led us to believe. Whichever side emerges on top tries to persuade the rest of us that there was never the slightest doubt about the outcome and the rightness, and therefore the continuing success, of their cause. Last century and this century, capitalism, a protégé of Calvinism, elbowed out its senior partner and now the emphasis is on making the young believe that any alternative to capitalism is unthinkable. But life (we should tell the young) isn't like that. It is much more tentative, insecure, open to enquiry, its axioms subject to reversal. The issues are not nearly as clear-cut as they are presented to be. It was Scotland's grievous loss that Buchan never had the choice (the fleshpots or the wild locusts and honey) evenly presented to him. I think he realized too late the nature of the values he had relinquished, borne away by the stream of consensus in which he was caught up. That consensus taught him to undervalue the majority of his fellow-countrymen, to write us off too easily. One day we'll win, but every apostasy postpones our deliverance.

When Buchan under-rated us, seeing us as largely of a piece, unremarkable, undifferentiated, he was forgetting our history, our cosmopolitan origins. One day in Galashiels Academy an art teacher, surveying his class of fifteen-year-old girls, tried to identify for me their racial characteristics. The pupils were busily engaged in mixing colours to reproduce on paper the pinks, greens and browns of the whinstone wall of the playground, unaware of our

scrutiny. He said, 'Take that first row. It starts with the gypsy type. Then there is the Nordic and after that the Irish colleen. I don't know about the next two; they're mixtures. But the girl beside them is as Spanish as a Goya picture and she came from Aberdeenshire. Beyond her is the Slav – those cheekbones. And the last one, her names makes her Irish and she's a Catholic, but she doesn't look Irish at all. She looks Jewish, doesn't she?' The study in ethnology was interrupted by a question. 'Please, sir, how do you get that funny, purply colour?' The teacher deftly mixed some paint and she said, 'Thank you. I would never have could dae that masel.' The Border idiom (in which the verb *can* is not a defective verb) and the Border lilt (the rising inflection at the end of the sentence). A visitor would have described her as a native Borderer, but both her parents came from Lombardy.

The Purveses and Elliotts and Scotts in the school register are intermingled with Polish names from the forties. And much of the foreign blood in Border veins is of earlier transfusion. The Roman troops at Trimontium were cosmopolitan. French masons took part in the buiding of Melrose, French courtiers accompanied Mary, prisoners of war from Napoleon's armies were employed to alter the course of the Tweed near Innerleithen. Children are conformists, desperately keen to belong, to be subsumed in the accepted pattern, to adapt to the climate of speech and attitudes and values. In one generation most of the offspring of these unions would have become patriotic Borderers, sharing in Walter Scott's pride of place, his love of the terrain. One of the constituent parts of love of country is children's love of the natural world. Most parents and schoolteachers are capricious and always chivvying them but there is an abiding consistency in nature, the same yesterday, today and forever. It wraps them round with a sense of security and peace.

The Borders had a sheep economy, as Aberdeenshire had a cattle economy. Maybe that's one of the reasons for the difference between the people of these regions; maybe the animals they tend make shepherds different from cattlemen. I suppose it is the young we'd have to ask if we wanted to know why the Scottish metrical psalm 'The Lord's my shepherd' has ringed the world and nobody sings (as far as I know) 'The Lord's my cowherd'. Perhaps the

Indians extend their veneration for cows to hymns and endearments. It is strange, the emotive ties that bind us to the animals on whom we depend. The Eskimos speak of God's little seal. Is it the warmth of the wool, the innocence and vulnerability of the sheep, our dependence on sheep, that has woven them into our everyday language? The Lamb of God, the sheep hear his voice, spinning a yarn, the warp and woof of life, heckling, all these word-usages speak of sheep-life inextricably bound into human life, of human beings who speak their thoughts in metaphors derived from sheep. 'Ma wee lamb,' says the mother to her baby. That's a coothie part of our history. Less comforting is the story of the sacrificial lamb.

Even a confident community like the Borders was unable to stop London closing down its railway. It was a major Scottish asset, this scenic route south from Edinburgh by Melrose and Hawick, Teviotdale and Liddesdale, past Newcastleton and Hermitage where the roads don't go, across the 'debatable land' to Carlisle. It was called the Waverley route. Where you can see its track it looks like another derelict Roman road, a line of communication withdrawn. It was for a century a unifying force, integrating the community. The decision to shut it down was initiated by experts ignorant of all save the economic consequences of their deeds and often even of these. The rape of the Waverley route is one more argument for taking power out of the hands of an élite and giving it to the people.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Capital

> Historians . . . conceive of cultures as chaotic and morally neutral swamps from which 'great men' carve out plantations.
>
> MARILYN FRENCH, *Beyond Power*

In describing Edinburgh I am mindful of the foreign visitor at my elbow, asking about its influence on Scotland. Edinburgh is a city of museums and gowns and institutions, a place of checks and balances that slow down Scottish life, coldly formal, east-windy, unfeeling. Its public buildings look like Greek temples. Its gaze is firmly fixed on ancient Athens and its aborted buildings on the Calton Hill were intended to earn for Edinburgh the title of the Athens of the North. Its lawyers, kirk ministers, dominies are preoccupied with precedents and ikons. The eighteenth-century buckles on the shoes of the Moderator of the Church of Scotland are a sign of where the kirk's thoughts lie. A liberal writer who had been critical of Scottish law-courts was blackballed by the lawyers when he sought to join a prestigious Edinburgh golf club. Edinburgh's Merchant Company schools, the rampaging dinosaurs of the Scottish educational desert, confirm the children in the ideas of their fathers, and the proletarian comprehensives have no alternative but to fall in and follow their leaders, deadening the creative imagination. The Enlightenment was not a beacon illuminating all Scottish life. It left much of Scotland unlit. Edinburgh's old town was as awful as Dickens's London but the intelligentsia, Scott and Jefferies and Cockburn, found no major questions with which to confront the indignity to which an élite subjected the majority of their fellow citizens. In finely symmetrical crescents of honey-coloured Inverleith stone, the elegant houses of the New Town were built to the specifications of apartheid, the patterns of

'Upstairs, Downstairs'. They were designed to build social division into Scottish society. Scotland's intellectuals, mounting the impressive front steps, allowed their attention to be directed away from the basement windows below-stairs behind which the ranked menials (scullerymaids, kitchenmaids, parlourmaids, tablemaids, lady's maids, housekeepers, cooks, footmen, valets, butlers) ettled to get an eyeful of daylight while they performed their appointed duties, cleaning the knives, washing the earth from the turnips, trimming the lamps, airing the clothes, sewing on emergency buttons, answering the imperious bells, dumbly accepting rebuke, waking the ladies and putting them to bed, servicing the gentry. How could intelligent people become so calloused that they accepted without demur a system of apartheid? For example, how could imaginative architects be persuaded to employ their talents on the design of beautiful buildings to house such separation?

We in remote, rural Aberdeenshire were foxed by Edinburgh's enlightenment. There is a figure of speech called synecdoche (e.g. 'All hands on deck') in which the part, to which the attention is directed, is taken to represent the whole. For many generations we had been brought up to reverence intellect. By an easy synecdoche we were accustomed to reverence those who were deemed to possess intellect. It took me a long time reluctantly to concede that I had been naïve. I had believed that the intellectuals were not of common clay. Ruefully, I realized that they are more vulnerable to praise and flattery and the temptations of titles and degrees, readier to be put on the waiting-list for honours, than I would have credited. At first it amazed me that these gifted Scots, scientists and theologians and academics, should have such a preponderance of common clay in their constitution. Nowadays I am more amazed that we Scots should have been taken in by them for so long. That is the basic, traditional error propagated by Scottish education and a Scottish upbringing. Only now is Scotland escaping from its educational folklore and learning the lesson, 'Put not your trust in the academics.'

A chapter on Edinburgh is the appropriate place in which to insert an outline of Scottish education, the wayward process which helped to shape us. A recent book on Scottish education and culture details the paradoxes of the Scottish character.

Forthright speech, and subservient conduct.
Aggressive masculinity, and maudlin sentimentality.
Contempt for, and envy of, most things English.
Moral righteousness, and guilt.
The democratic myth, and the corruption of power.

Jim Sillars of the Scottish National Party said that we Scots are like sheep, lying on our backs bleating. An editorial on the devolution plebiscite said that we Scots are 'feart'. How were these paradoxes and this fear produced? The story of what Scotland taught its children during the last fifteen hundred years helps to answer that question.

James Scotland's *The History of Scottish Education* starts off with the statements that 'education is primarily training in literacy' and that therefore the landing of St Columba in 563 marks the beginning of 'effective Scottish education'. Although the author realized that education is 'the passing on of a social and cultural heritage', the whole of his history is devoted to book education and a strange, inconsequential tale it is, like a novel without a plot, going off erratically over the hills on tracks that lead nowhere. The Scottish people, the beneficiaries of this system, had little say in where they wanted to go. They were like passengers fogbound in an international airport, standing around in bourachies or singly, disconsolate, and at the disposal of the traffic controllers. It's like a tale told by an emotionally disturbed character who had lucid intervals. I tried to reduce it to some consecutive sense so that young Scots, whom I was addressing, should be aware of where we had been and how we might plot our farther course.

Columba taught ordinary people the alphabet for the first time in Scottish history. Some of his protégés learned to read and even to write. In the following centuries monks wrote manuscripts in Latin and Greek and Gaelic. As Christianity spread and dioceses were divided up for better administration into parishes, parish schools began, teaching singing and masses for the dead and grammar, but, by the time of Bruce and Bannockburn, the nobles had progressed only as far as signing documents with their initials. Paper replaced parchment and hornbooks were the vehicle of education. They were inscribed with capital and small letters, numerals, the Lord's

prayer and exorcisms, and, to protect the expensive paper, were covered by transparent horn as today's AA manuals are covered by cellophane. Latin, the necessary medium for learning and church services and law and diplomacy, was so dominant that it became a synonym for education. Latin was education. If you had Latin, you were regarded as educated; if you hadn't Latin, you weren't educated. The medium became the message. That mystical belief survived in Scotland to AD 1950 and thereafter began to fade.

In St Andrews University (founded 1411) the students studied logic, physics, metaphysics, ethics, philosophy and a book of Solomon. Its governing body said, 'Especially we forbid any female to enter our college except the common laundress, who shall be not less than fifty years old.' In 1451 the pope allowed a university to be founded in Glasgow 'that there the Catholic faith may be spread'. Aberdeen came in 1494. Two years later James IV introduced one of the first education acts in Europe. All barons and freeholders were to put their eldest sons to school from the age of eight or nine until they acquired 'perfect Latin', and thereafter for three or four years at arts and law, so that 'justice may universally reign through all the realm'. Even the most gifted of kings can't get round to asking questions about everything and has to base his legislation on the orthodoxy of the current experts. There is an appeal and a pathos in his stated belief that from a college education would flow justice through all the realm. These mediaeval universities were like secondary schools today and the principal dealt out corporal punishment to defaulters.

The student-children of the Reformation began their day by kneeling before statues of Christ, and studied Virgil and Cicero and had evening disputation and prayers. They could get the rod for lateness, running in the corridors, talking in class, lingering too long in the lavatory, using the common tongue instead of Latin, and, finally, 'mischief', a blanket term which was defined as 'conduct prejudicial to good order and scholastic discipline'. Nobody asked why these youngsters were less than enthusiastic about Horace, Cicero and Erasmus. Four hundred years after the Reformation, Scottish schools are still run on these principles. Children are to be moulded into the shape approved by those in power.

The dominies were doing what they considered best in the

interests of the children and of Scotland. In spite of his strange, Dr Paisley-like prejudices, John Knox was one of the outstanding characters in Scottish history. Nobody can emerge unscathed from the whippings endured by a galley-slave and we should forgive his angers when we consider his utter fearlessness, not a common commodity in twentieth-century Scotland, and the energy with which he sought to provide a school in every parish in the land. Within the limits of sixteenth-century ideas, he was searching for a better Scotland and so, I believe, was Mary Stuart who lived just up the High Street from him. They were both valuable people, the tolerant queen, experimental, venturesome, and the apostate priest, energetic and fearless. But for their loyalty to the voice of their upbringing and religion they could have brought about a better Scotland. But bleak, cruel theologies, or diabologies, have held the Scots in their grip down the centuries and neither John Knox nor Mary Stuart could surmount their prejudices to acknowledge their common humanity. If only one or other of them, escaping from their upbringing and clinging to the shadows of the street to avoid scandalizing Scotland, could have made a secret rendezvous in the house of the other for a private discussion in which, forsaking all indoctrination, they reached out for fellowship and an uninhibited revelation of what, in the depth of their being, they felt about their brief tenure of life and power and about how they could unite to suture their torn country. But neither could be free from the effect of the searing marks that their religious education had branded them with, any more than could Mary's grandfather, James IV.

It was not Knox's fault that progress in school-building was slow. The property-owners (the 'heritors') were reluctant to pay for schools. In Stirlingshire when they failed for repairs, money was taken from fornicators' fines. In Knox's Scotland the lairds didn't have to sit on the stool of repentance for fornication. That indignity was reserved for working-class and middle-class sinners. The dominies ate porridge and kail and cabbage and lived in houses where there were mice and rats and insects, their life's ambition to tutor a lad o pairts who would go straight from the parish school to the university to build on the sound Latin foundation he had received. If there was such a thing as the Scottish character, the dominies for three centuries after the Reformation provided some marks for its

identification. There was a psychiatric compulsiveness in their dour drive for perfection in the Latin language. A youngster in the Aberdeen Grammar School had used the phrase *humanum genus*. Melvin, the rector, corrected it to *genus humanum*. The boy quoted Sallust in defence of his own usage. The headmaster pardoned him but warned him in future to take Cicero and not Sallust for his guide.

In his Latin grammar, Melvin quoted the writings of Celsus, Priscian, Probus, Caesar, Charisius, Phocas, Cato, Pliny, Mela, Serenus and some of the ancient glossaries to indicate to fourteen-year-old Aberdonians that the gender of the word *pollen* was uncertain. Lord Cockburn, one of the torches of the Edinburgh Enlightenment, lamented that 'there was only one great classical school in Edinburgh, and this one placed under the Town Council, and lowered perhaps necessarily so as to suit the wants of a class of boys to more than two-thirds of whom classical accomplishment is foreseen to be useless'. He helped to set up Edinburgh Academy where young boys had three and a half hours of Latin and Greek daily. The headmaster was always an English clergyman and usually an Oxford graduate. Cockburn didn't enquire what enlightenment these favoured children got out of Thucydides, Aristophanes, Euripides, Homer and Horace. He was a total subscriber to the dominies' creed that Latin and Greek are good for children.

In 1833 the rule was relaxed and students in the medical faculty of the university could opt to take their academic examinations in their own tongue instead of Latin. Seven years later the last thesis in Latin was submitted – by a Jamaican.

The 1872 Education Act made school attendance compulsory for all children between the ages of five and thirteen, took control out of the hands of the church and charged the ratepayers for education (and parents for a contribution direct to the teachers). It was a creditable effort to let in some light on a singularly unenlightened culture but the religious obscurity persisted. Twelve-year-olds had to know the history of Judah from Hezekiah to the Captivity, the Acts of the Apostles, the doctrine of the Resurrection and parts of the Shorter Catechism. ('How do we escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin?')

All of this determined obscurity has been consistently played

down in Scottish history. I was brought up in the comforting belief that if somebody proved clearly how a motor engine or a medical treatment or a school curriculum could be improved, the improvement would automatically follow without obdurate resistance, broadening down from precedent to precedent. Scottish history shows that it is not so. We are not living on the sunny uplands of a rational society, founded on free discussion. The professional world is a much more dangerous, unpredictable world than I thought. Dark forces materialize out of the gloom, sabotaging change, diverting the stream of irrigation into the sand. Just as the Enlightenment never got to intellectual grips with Latin, so twentieth-century Scotland never got to grips with school education. A report called for sweeping changes in the presentation of history and a 1957 schoolbook, *A Scottish History for Today*, got so far round to the interests of the pupils that it reported that Queen Margaret fed nine orphans with the same spoon as she put in her own mouth and that a sixteenth-century English visitor to Edinburgh said that 'the cobwebs above his bed were so thick, they might have been blankets'. But that was as far as concessions to realism went. Much of the rest of the book was formal history, the abstract conceptions that pupils don't comprehend. In a bluebook on secondary education the Scottish Education Department said yes, we do need sweeping changes, and the second part of the book said that the best way to introduce these changes was by depending on the old usages. In Scottish religion and education and law, the theory is sometimes unexceptionable; the practice is something else. That is Scotland's main malady, the alienation between theory and practice.

The Scottish Education Department, or its masters, are not above trickery. In *Scottish Culture and Scottish Education 1800–1980*, Humes and Paterson (on whom there are fewer flies than on most chroniclers of Scottish education) reported on the background of the people appointed to committees producing reports on Scottish education in the mid-fifties. We all believed that they represented a cross-section of Scottish opinion. Not so, as Humes and Paterson discovered. They were largely of a type, the generally accepted stereotype of Scotsman (few women amongst them) believing in egalitarianism, respect for the intellect, abstract argument,

discipline, 'stretching' the pupils, and a mildly reformist nationalism. It was a compound of Scott, Barrie, Buchan, Bridie, Elliott, Johnston and Hetherington. (In 1960 Hetherington, principal of Glasgow University, said that student grants should be kept low so that incentive to academic excellence should not be weakened.) Most of those selected for these advisory committees had followed what one writer called 'the Kirriemuir career'. They were the characters that Barrie found admirable. Few of them came from Glasgow and few of the ills of industrialism were studied.

It came as a surprise to me that the stereotype of the typical Scot was a deliberate creation. This was how our rulers wanted us to think of ourselves. A *persona* is dangled before us for our admiration. The word derives from the mask worn by an actor in ancient Greece. Our voices and personalities will sound through these masks, suitably modified. This was the personality, the model of Scotsman, that I had to try and live up to, the prevailing Edinburgh orthodoxy to which I had to accommodate my view of what life on earth is about, the model of those who entered whole-heartedly into the prosecution of the Scottish purpose. The pressure to conform is everywhere to submit our private decisions to the ruling of the judges.

The history of Scottish education forces questions upon us. Did Columba have a consistent view of the character of the future Scottish nation that would be moulded by the education that he was initiating; or did he just think that it would be a good thing if more people could read and write? I think he hadn't given it much thought. Like religious priests, the very similar educational priests assume that their product is to be of inestimable advantage to the people in darkness to whom they are offering it. Missionaries cross the sea, and land in what they consider to be a backward community and set about proselytizing it. St Columba's mission to the Picts can be compared with the English mission that landed in Nigeria in AD 1840 to convert the Yoruba tribesmen. In 1970 the vice-chancellor of Lagos University looked back on the upbringing which had been replaced. Previously, youngsters had gone hunting, fishing, farming with their fathers, learned from their elders their people's history and traditions, participated in religious festivals of drama and art and dancing. After 1840 'the children learned

to read and write and to yearn for white-collar jobs'. Their role was to service the traders who arrived in the wake of the church missionaries. Latin became as potent a magic in Africa as it became in post-Columban Scotland all those centuries earlier.

The lesson to be learned from the history of Scottish education is that the whole process needs to be looked at again. It is not a carefully thought out and consistent philosophy of life designed to give fulfilment to pupils and prosperity to the state. It lacks reverence for the young. The Scottish dominie quells his children. The Educational Institute of Scotland, participating in a book on world education, illustrated its contribution with a drawing of a Scottish classroom in which the whole class had their hands up in answer to a question. No drones or rebels in this hive of busy bees.

In theory the course of Scottish contemporary history is charted out of the advice given in many committee rooms in St Andrew's House, up the hill from the east end of Princes Street. Experts and administrators and provosts, in conclave in wood-pannelled rooms, have their coffee, and a lassie clears away the coffee cups and they settle down to a two- or three-hour session. The conduct of the meetings and the wording of the reports are in harmony with the brown furnishings. The Asiatic visitor could easily believe that he was seeing liberal democracy in action. But he would be mistaken. 'Consultation' means that the administrators select from the proffered advice what suits them or what they can't avoid adopting even by the most sophisticated delaying action. At one meeting in which I took part, one of the administrators' representatives, called euphemistically an 'assessor', confronted with a radical proposal from one of the members of the committee, said, 'Oh, they'd never accept that.' Once in St Andrew's House I heard a subversive say, 'You don't get pupils to develop awareness by feeding them information on a nature trail. This transmission of information doesn't produce the end that the education system assumed it would produce. Well, what will produce these ends? That is the question on which the whole vast university-and-school structure may shortly founder.' But the Scottish administrators have been taught by their English public schools to listen courteously and then to isolate the subversive, making him feel uncouth, and the discussion resumes its bland course. At another committee meeting, an exasperated

headmaster asked if, at their next meeting, he could introduce a pupil. Permission was readily given. At an appropriate juncture at the next meeting he was asked to bring in the pupil, whom he had left sitting outside the door. He brought him in and said, 'Mr Chairman, this is a pupil.' And while the committee prepared to follow a routine of question and answer, he took the pupil out of the meeting and resumed his seat.

The culture propagated by Edinburgh, on which the administrators were brought up, is equally remote from Scottish daily life. At a graduation ceremony, the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa for Magnus Magnusson, BA, Knight of the Icelandic Order of the Falcon, Rector of the University of Edinburgh, was proposed by the vice-chancellor of the university. Few recipients of the honour could have been so worthy. There were his tact and his gift of peace-making between students and senatus, his scholarship in Icelandic literature and Palestinian archaeology, his regular appearance on 'Good morning, Scotland' on BBC radio. And then came the ritual deference to classical literature. In one of his letters, Cicero said that, in a play popular in the Roman theatre at the time of Pompey the Great, Pompeius Magnus (the smarter members of the audience guessed what was coming), one line was so popular that it had to be thrice repeated. It said that it was to Great Pompey that the Romans owed their unhappiness. The vice-chancellor said that by a transposition of words they could make the line applicable to present-day Edinburgh. It was to Magnus that the university owed its happiness.

I had encountered the same classical phenomenon at the end of a week's conference at Oxford. The headmaster of one of the English public schools combined his vote of thanks to the chairman, whose name was Eden, with his farewells to those from all over the country who had participated in the conference, and he wrapped it all up in the approved manner by quoting the last five lines of *Paradise Lost*.

> Som natural fears they drop'd, but wip'd them soon;
> The World was all before them, where to choose
> Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide,
> They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
> Through EDEN took their solitarie way.

The stranger to western civilization would be intrigued at the way in which the high priests of education in Scotland and England bludgeon and distort a passage from their holy books into serving their purpose. Scriptural quotation is an essential component of ritual and ceremony.

Graduations at Edinburgh University were picturesque ceremonies. Wall space climbing up to the roof was filled with pictures of Greek or Roman figures sitting or standing on steps leading to classical buildings and engaged in intellectual discussion. The organist played *Il Penseroso*-like music on the pealing organ while the parents and their friends assembled. There were parents accustomed to the occasion and at ease, approvingly seeing their children tread successfully the paths they themselves trod a generation ago. There were other parents in their Sunday best, proud of their children who had made the grade into a socially approved status. Some of these latter parents were identical with a group in Germany described by Hermann Hesse – well-off, seeking to look down on the administrator (beamter) class who made less money than they did, but nevertheless proud that their children had made the entrée into that professional group.

The procession began, the entry of the priests. The Dean of the Faculty of Divinity said a prayer. The words were beautifully chosen and appropriate and rang true. Almost I was persuaded that this was not ritual but reality. The capping of the doctors of philosophy drew attention to the programme which listed the subjects of their research. They had completed theses on textual and hermeneutical aspects of Paul's use of the Old Testament in 1 and 2 Corinthians, on the Targum and Peshitta texts in the Book of Chronicles, on social concern in British preaching, on urbanization in Zambia, on the diseases of chickens and cattle and lambs and pigs, on the geology of the Tweed, friendship, job design, middle-class parents, paranormal abilities, African business managers in Kenya, ward sisters in hospitals, the meaning of work and leisure in the lives of players and gardeners. (But on that occasion no thesis on the effect of cultural theses on the lives of the people of Scotland.)

The other graduands were capped, received a word from the acting vice-chancellor and walked across to accept from a girl in a

beautiful summery hat the red cylinder containing their Latin-worded degree certificate. The acting vice-chancellor addressed the new graduates. The organ struck up, the procession re-formed and filed out. The sun shone beautifully. Cameras recorded the scene. Graduates posed against the monument in the gardens, or the hall, or the more distant Salisbury Crags, happily. Parents greeted unknown parents, sharing a success, wondering about a future. Then they drifted away to restaurants to mark the occasion, laughing with the waiter in Denzil's, ordering salmon or lamb, drinking toasts in sherry or Bordeaux or champagne.

It was an occasion and it was right that it should be presented with ceremonial and recorded in Scotland's annals. But it must abide our question. I enjoy the music, the ceremony, the black gowns, the gold braid, the hoods of red and green and the subdued gold. The acting vice-chancellor said it was a happy occasion which should not be dimmed by cataclysmic references. Was he saying that some doubts have crept into our hereditary esteem for our universities? We feel honoured to share in an occasion like this, beautifully staged, celebrated with the pageantry of a mediaeval guild. We are proud of those children of ours because they have been given the skills to heal and reconcile and blaze new trails and increase understanding, maybe even to bring democracy to Scotland. But we are uneasy. Whose side are the Scottish universities on?

Scottish culture in the twentieth century, however hard it tries to declare its independence, finally depends on the patronage of the powerful as Italian culture did on Medici Florence. Novelist William McIlvanney speaks from experience and the heart when he tells the story of a mining community in Ayrshire. He is angry about the apartheid to which working-class folk, his own family and their neighbours and friends, are relegated. The hero of the novel *Docherty* (published in 1975), almost inarticulate with anger, explodes, 'The bastards don't think we're folk! They think we're somethin' . . . less than that.' But McIlvanney's intention was lost on some of the reviewers. By assessing the book on a literary canon, 'a work of art', they isolated it from any political infection. They praised it appropriately. A beautifully wrought novel. His phrases hammer against you like a collier's pick. A human history is mined

with humour. It was as if an aspiring Scotsman had entered the book for a literary competition. Its influence was contained within the frontiers of belles-lettres. That suited the purpose of the patrons of the quality press.

The story of Scotland's history and law and art and literature and religion and politics is of restricted experiments. The initiators are liable to be pulled in at any time from their flirtation with libertarian ideas. Nevertheless there was much fertilization of ideas.

The ancient city of Edinburgh maintains a metropolitan air. There is a baronial dignity about these strongly-built high houses, the pink building in Lady Stair's Close and the turreted country-house between the Lawnmarket and the Waverley Station from where you can look across to the blaze of lights on Princes Street. They have endured slumdom and, dignified, have survived into better times. Imaginative architects have built into the new Grassmarket the lure of its lurid past, dating back to 1477 when James III gave it a charter as Edinburgh's marketplace, and to the Porteous riots, hangings, martyred Covenanters, Burke and Hare the body-snatchers. In the alleys there is a thriving trade in the furnishings and utensils of past centuries, jewellery and china, leather cases, spoons, brass lampstands, old clothes, grandfather clocks.

From a low-flying aeroplane the new town of Edinburgh is incredibly beautiful. Its crescents have the grace and symmetry of an aerial view of an ancient Greek theatre like Epidauros. From the ground, on a late winter afternoon every tuft and hook and feather of the sycamores and elms and birches is silhouetted clearly against the opalescent sky above the setting sun, and in that sky there is just a touch of pink like the inside of a mussel shell. In the east the full moon, rising, is like a Chinese lantern suspended against a pale blue sky. Over at the Forth a prodigal ellipse of orange lights traces out the form of the road bridge. The lights of Rosyth and other little towns receding along the estuary are like coloured pins denoting centres of habitation on a map.

In spite of its richness of history, its beauty, its Festival, Edinburgh is a failed capital. It has never managed to assimilate the disparate forces that struggle within it, into a homogeneous whole. It didn't really try, being intent on exhibiting the Upstairs image. Neither the Heart of Midlothian nor the Hibernian football

ground gives the impression that the city is as concerned about the comfort and entertainment of its citizens as it is about its Festival patrons. This is what happens in modern times to a city that is hung up on a heraldic view of its past and capitalizes on it by presenting to tourists a culture unrelated to the lives of most of its citizens. The culture propagated by Edinburgh is of a piece with the literature taught in Scottish schools. Football crowds are beyond the fringe. The Hearts ground at Tynecastle is like a proletarian enclave in a metropolis of classical architecture, and it has its own advantages. It has the intimacy of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, being enclosed on four sides by the grandstand, a block of tenements, a brewery wall and a school. Spectators have a sense of being nearer to the players than at Pittodrie in Aberdeen and people watch the game from the tenement windows.

Edinburgh's Craigmillar is a proletarian enclave well organized and supported, a prototype for communities beginning to take the direction of their lives out of the patronizing minority, and with an earthy realism. A community member complained about the dinner her daughter was offered at school. But she short-circuited the proper channels. She took the pudding and a spoon to the education office, insisted on seeing the director of education, and laid pudding and spoon on his desk with the injunction, 'Taste that!' The school dinners improved.