

# SCOTLAND IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

UNION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

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adultery or desertion. Divorces increased in this period, probably another consequence of growing female economic opportunity and diminishing church censure. But from fewer than twenty per decade around 1700 rising to a hundred by 1800, the numbers remained negligible. The same courts also dealt with regular disputes over legitimacy and with the proving of people's final testaments. Two of the most famous and protracted civil actions of the century specifically concerned inheritance and both were only finally settled not in Edinburgh but on appeal to the House of Lords: the vindication of Elizabeth, daughter of the 18th Earl of Sutherland, as Countess and eventually 1st Duchess in her own right; and the celebrated 'Douglas Cause' in which Archibald, son of the 1st Duke of Douglas's sister, eventually defeated three rival claimants to his uncle's estates. These causes célèbres also attracted rapt contemporary attention through growing newspaper coverage of proceedings.

Local sheriff courts and the Court of Session dealt with innumerable other questions. One of their more difficult duties was to adjudicate when individuals were alleged to be suffering from the mental weaknesses that contemporaries usually described as either 'idiocy' (imbecility) or 'furosis' (mania). Cases of 'tutors' and 'curators' (guardians) being assigned on these grounds trebled in Scotland between 1720 and 1790, perhaps as changing notions of acceptable behaviour, and views about how to deal with aberrations from it, took hold. Other legal matters were very much less intimate, and resulted in robust series of court judgments of wide-ranging application. A notably flexible view of joint-stock companies – which south of the Border were restricted to six partners – evolved in post-Union Scotland. The courts consistently defended the legality of the paper money issued by Scottish banks, despite frequent English objections. At the end of the century they refused to impose the Combination Acts on Scottish workers (Westminster legislation which outlawed employees' collective organisations). They also continued to intervene in some of the more sensitive aspects of economic activity, including the annual fixing of grain prices, known as 'fiars' prices', by juries in each sheriffdom. Scotland's civil courts to some extent adapted themselves to changing circumstances; but at the same time they often sought to preserve the nation's distinctive values and practices. It does not therefore seem unreasonable to conclude that the Scots law, at least in its civil department, may have been the social institution that responded most successfully to the extraordinary challenges posed by eighteenth-century developments.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Ideas

Throughout Britain, Europe and North America by the 1780s, a truism had won wide acceptance. This was that Scotland, home to many of the acknowledged leaders in science, philosophy, scholarship and the arts, possessed an intellectual life of extraordinary brilliance. Praise showered down from admiring contemporaries. 'I can stand at the Market Cross of Edinburgh and take fifty men of genius and learning by the hand', gushed one English physician who came to the city in 1771. Carlo Denina, an Italian scholar, even suggested that the Scots had begun to rival the ancients, bringing 'to maturity, in the cold regions of the north, what had heretofore been foolishly supposed incapable of taking root but in the warmer climes of ASIA MINOR, GREECE, and ITALY'. Voltaire, the most famous author in France and perhaps in all Europe, hailed an important recent shift in the world's cultural geography: 'It is from Scotland', he pronounced, 'that we receive rules of taste in all the arts.' For Thomas Jefferson, founding father of the American republic, it seemed obvious that 'no place in the world can pretend to a competition with Edinburgh'.

The Scots were not slow to take up the refrain. 'Jupiter' Carlyle boasted in 1760 that 'Never has the genius of the Scotch shone with greater lustre than now.' Ten years later the novelist Tobias Smollett, long resident in London, could describe his native capital, without a trace of irony, as a 'hotbed of genius'. Even the normally unflappable Hume was taken aback:

Really it is admirable how many Men of Genius this Country produces at present. Is it not strange that, at a time when we have lost our Princes, our Parliaments, our independent Government, even the Presence of our chief Nobility, are unhappy, in our Accent & Pronunciation, speak a very corrupt Dialect of the Tongue which we make use of; is it not strange,

I say, that in these Circumstances we should really be the People most distinguished for Literature in Europe?

Astonishment at the Scottish Enlightenment – particularly since it had emerged, to Hume's evident puzzlement, only *after* the Treaty of Union – has been only partially moderated by the passage of more than two hundred and fifty years.

Most remarkable must be the fact that so many of those involved were friends, relations, colleagues and acquaintances, moving in the same narrowly defined social circles. The Select Society of Edinburgh, active in the decade after its foundation in 1754 by the younger Allan Ramsay, one of Britain's finest portrait artists, boasted a membership with whose distinction few organisations, in any other country or period, could compete. It included men who were even then helping found political economy and sociology (Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson). It also embraced two of Europe's best-selling historians (Hume and Robertson), its greatest living philosopher (Hume once more) and some of its most eminent practising scientists (including Alexander Monro and William Cullen). To have any hope of explaining such a dense concentration of ability and energy, and also of understanding why several individual Scots were catapulted to international celebrity, we must begin by reviewing the peculiar social and cultural conditions in which this situation emerged.

### Scottish society and polite culture

The unique institutional circumstances of the eighteenth century were critical both to the emergence of the Scottish Enlightenment and to the form that it took. For while their parliament was abolished in 1707, the Scots, as we have already seen, long retained the other cornerstones of their independent nationhood. In the first place, the presbyterian church had been re-energised in 1690: its subsequent exemption from the assimilationist provisions of the treaty preserved a key source of the country's distinctiveness, even as Westminster legislation helped foster within it a tolerant and cultivated clergy. Crucial too was the fact that the Union specifically preserved Scotland's separate legal system and legal profession. Indeed the status and influence of the lawyers within Scottish society waxed rather than waned in the decades after 1707. Given this, it should not be surprising that a battery of sharp legal minds based in Edinburgh – such as the judges Henry Home (invariably known by his courtesy title Lord Kames), James Burnett (Lord Monboddo) and Sir David Dalrymple (Lord Hailes), and learned professors like John Erskine and David Hume (the philosopher's nephew) at Edinburgh

– should have made the history, philosophy and sociology of law one of the country's peculiar intellectual specialisms.

Scotland's eighteenth-century universities also remained very different from their two somnolent English rivals. Specialist professional teaching gradually introduced after 1707, brought a steady stream of gifted scholars and pedagogues into the academic cloisters. At the same time new ideas triumphed, with revised curricula incorporating the latest English and Continental teachings in cosmology, mathematics, moral philosophy, law and medicine. The Scottish universities therefore not only survived the Union. They actually continued confidently into a golden age of unprecedented energy and achievement. Indeed, from the perspective of educated contemporaries, the relative importance of the universities, like that of the church and the law, as effective guarantors of Scotland's continuing national distinctiveness may have been significantly greater in 1750 than when the Scots Parliament itself had still been in existence.

Nor did the abolition of the parliament kill off the Scots' taste for public debate. This was perhaps one of the reasons why clubs and societies proliferated so rapidly in the decades after 1707. The Select Society, the Philosophical Society and the Cape Club in Edinburgh, the Political Economy Society and the Literary Society in Glasgow, and later the Literary and Antiquarian Society in Perth, were typical of the species. The Select debated many abiding issues of principle, including the problems of gender relations ('whether can a marriage be happy when the wife is of an understanding superior to that of the husband') and the desirability of field sports ('whether is hunting an exercise proper for persons of liberal Education'). Edinburgh's Poker Club – so-called by Ferguson because it would 'stir things up' – spent many years as a vehicle through which clergymen like Carlyle and politicians like Dempster pursued their desultory campaign for a Scottish militia. The Aberdeen Philosophical Society, haunt of the town's academic philosophers (hence 'The Wise Club'), also frequently aired topical concerns: in 1761 their debates included 'What are the Natural Consequences of high national Debt & whether upon the whole it be a benefite to a Nation or not' and 'Whether the determination by unanimity or a majority in Juries is most equitable'.

As Cockburn later recalled, Scots were inducted early into this vigorous culture of discussion and argument. Students at Edinburgh in the 1790s enjoyed the Academical Society, where 'more essays [were] read, and more speeches delivered, by ambitious lads, in that little shabby place, than in all Scotland'; but there was also the Speculative Society, where Cockburn himself acquired his 'first notions of composition and debate, and that delightful feeling of free doubting and independent discussion, so necessary for the expansion and manliness of young minds'. An earlier student generation,

avid members of the Newtonian Society, had equally boasted in the 1760s of 'the Advantages as well as Pleasures which may arise from a more close Application to the Study of Natural Philosophy'. Nevertheless, despite the manifest para-parliamentary pretensions of some and the intriguing quasi-academic role of others, these societies had an even more vital function for their enthusiastic participants: above all, they were believed to promote 'politeness', a word that resonated profoundly in the vocabulary of British contemporaries.

To understand the eighteenth century's intense preoccupation with politeness is not merely to explain the vast range of social institutions that emerged in Scotland – or, for that matter, in London, the provincial English towns, most European cities, and as far afield as colonial North America and Bengal. Even more importantly, it brings us closer to understanding why debating political philosophy, or discussing poetry or the laws of gravitation, possessed a significance that today they have largely lost. For there had emerged a conviction that organised social interaction of this kind, which encouraged the free exchange of information and opinion, represented an unparalleled opportunity to spread moral insight and mutual understanding. This touching faith in the miraculous mechanism of intelligent conversation, shared by most educated eighteenth-century people, was closely linked to the influence and authority achieved among contemporaries by *The Spectator* (1711–12). Joseph Addison's collaborative venture with Sir Richard Steele. And the stunning success of this famous publication reveals much about why the Scots in particular pursued politeness with such optimism and devotion.

Issued as a daily magazine, *The Spectator* purported to be the journal of a fictitious gentlemen's club meeting in a London coffee-house. It offered thoughtful observations upon everyday topics, Addison promising, not entirely tongue-in-cheek, to enrich his readers' own discourse: 'I will daily instil into them', he boasted in an early volume, 'such sound and wholesome Sentiments, as shall have a good Effect on their Conversation for the ensuing twelve Hours.' Yet the aim was not to stimulate idle gossip or mere title-tattle. Better-informed and more judicious conversation entailed a deeper understanding of the human condition in all its complexity. Addison even claimed that his magazine, and the discussions it provoked, would help bring 'Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables and in Coffee-Houses': in other words, intelligent dialogic nurtured through structured social interaction would help spread throughout society a rational approach to human nature and morality.

Though also familiar across contemporary Europe, this hugely seductive manifesto was aimed with particular success at early eighteenth-century

British people increasingly conscious of their own changing economic, social and political circumstances. Addison's message certainly struck a chord in Scotland in those early disorientating years immediately after the Union. As John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, a keen-eyed Perthshire landowner, later explained, it had been more than anything else 'the appearance of *Tattlers*, *Spectators*, and *Guardians* in the reign of Queen Anne' that had helped transform the hitherto rough-edged Scot into a 'polite scholar'. As early as 1711 an imitative Scottish *Tattler* had emerged, ostensibly the creation of 'Donald MacStaff of the North'. For the rest of the century regular reprints of *The Spectator* were also issued, including ultimately several score editions in Edinburgh itself and at least a dozen in Glasgow.

Further evidence of early Scottish fascination with Addison's vision exists in the Easy Club, founded in Edinburgh in May 1712 by the poet Allan Ramsay and his friends. These young men resolved 'to Retire from all other Business and Company and Meet in a Society By Themselves in order that by a Mutual improvement in Conversation they may become more adapted for fellowship with the politer part of mankind'. Some subsequent fawning towards Addison in a letter that they despatched to London ('the 1st thing that induced us to join a Society was ye Readings of your Spectators') merely underlined how far Scotland's own dawning age of polite culture, based on the pursuit of individual and collective improvement through well-informed social interaction, was wrapped up in the determined mimicry of modish English culture.

But politeness, as retailed most beguilingly by *The Spectator*, was very far from being just a fashionable pretension. For, not only in England but increasingly also in Scotland, contemporaries were tiring of the narrow-minded bigotry and factional animosity which had so scarred Britain's affairs during the previous century of civil war and revolution. To increasing numbers of the respectable, the educated and the ambitious in the upper and middle ranks of society after the turn of the eighteenth century, polite culture promised what Addison explicitly called the 'wearing out of Ignorance, Passion, and Prejudice'. It would suppress those irrational and immoderate impulses which would otherwise, as *The Spectator* warned, 'naturally conduce to inflame Hatreds, and make Enmities irreconcilable'. Fostering toleration and mutual understanding between people, politeness would actually help establish a new kind of society – peaceful, prosperous and pleasant.

The extraordinary variety of Scottish clubs and societies in the eighteenth century, or for that matter of assembly-rooms, masonic lodges (there were more than 320 by 1799), subscription libraries and other meeting places and voluntary associations of all kinds, had no single cause. Rising wealth and an expanding middle class provided greater scope for recreation: the

consumption of leisure, whether in spa towns like Moffat, the many new theatres — such as Edinburgh's Taylor's Hall, Concert Hall and Theatre Royal — or even in the innumerable taverns, oyster cellars and coffee-shops (like the one in which, fittingly, *The Spectator's* fictional club supposedly convened) made sociability an important reality as well as an earnest aspiration. Urbanisation, concentrating people in close proximity, similarly created unprecedented opportunities for interaction: Edinburgh's mid-eighteenth-century environment, cranning tens of thousands of citizens of all classes into a warren of tenements, wynds and closes, was merely the extreme example of unavoidable social intimacy.

Nor should the historian underestimate the eternal temptations of pleasure. Surviving accounts of institutions such as the Cape Club and the Aberdeen Philosophical Society leave little room for doubt that good company, especially when lubricated by claret and further enlivened by a hearty supper, made attendance extremely enjoyable for those partaking. Yet Addison's claims for the sheer transformatively virtuous of organised sociability, constantly echoed and emphatically endorsed by innumerable contemporaries, were also crucial. The pursuit of politeness provided an almost unanswerable moral case for exactly this sort of social engagement. And in promising to create a new and better kind of society, it had a very special allure for educated Scots in particular in the difficult years after 1707. After all, to people already beset by anxieties about their own country's backwardness and underdevelopment, the appeal of polite culture — a route to improvement that was agreeable, effective and, above all, quintessentially modern — may well have been almost irresistible.

Post-Union Scots found the problems and disputes of literature, philosophy and science an especially rich source of conversational material as well as the perfect excuse for organised debate and argument. This was true not only among the 'literati' (the collective name given to Edinburgh's leading academics and authors). It was also true for an ever-widening community of eighteenth-century Scottish students, lawyers, clergymen, merchants, lairds, noblemen and, in some cases, women, for whom intellectual discussion became an integral part of their social experience. Indeed, it says much about the ubiquity of such concerns that, when Alexander Hume Campbell, opposition MP for Berwickshire, had a chance encounter in Westminster Hall in 1747 with the 3rd Duke of Argyll, a fellow-countryman with whom he enjoyed a distinctly awkward political relationship, their discussion gravitated by tacit agreement towards the one important thing that united them: a confirmed interest in mathematics and the perusal of unusual scientific texts. In order to re-capture the contemporary culture which made such extraordinary personal exchanges feasible, and to see how the obsessive discussion of certain questions in particular came to represent the country's

distinctive contribution to the Enlightenment, it is necessary to explore in detail the disparate fields in which the leading Scottish participants worked

### 'Nature and nature's laws'

Natural philosophy (to use the standard eighteenth-century designation for scientific inquiries) occupied a central place in the Scottish Enlightenment. Partly this was because, in Scotland's physically small and close-knit intellectual community, it was inevitable that moralists and historians should rub shoulders with geologists and chemists. But it was also a result of a contemporary intellectual context in which many of the later distinctions between the human and the natural sciences were not yet fully formed. It was still widely assumed that the investigation of animal physiology, heat energy or the earth's original formation, inquiries which in any case were not so advanced as to be incomprehensible to the non-specialist, were logically inseparable from the study of linguistic development, political behaviour or the Emperor Charles V's place in European history. It was also taken for granted that all departments of knowledge were related because they were ultimately concerned with a single natural world — God's Creation, as virtually everyone still believed — of which mankind was at once an integral and by far the most ingenious part.

The unchallenged cultural centrality of science goes a long way towards explaining why even the Duke of Argyll was both able and willing to present himself on occasion as a serious student of geometry. Yet it was nonetheless on major original contributions to scientific inquiry, discovery and popularisation that Scotland's reputation mainly came to rest. One early contributor was Sir Robert Moray, soldier and servant of Charles II, eminent freemason and founder-member of the Royal Society in London in the 1660s. Important too was the natural historian and antiquarian Sir Robert Sibbald, who was appointed first professor of medicine at Edinburgh in 1685 and founded the city's Physic Garden for medicinal botany. Several members of the Gregory family also made disproportionate early contributions in the decades before 1700. James Gregory, professor of mathematics at St Andrews and Edinburgh in the 1660s, had interests in trigonometry and the theory of calculus. His nephew David, who lived until 1708, was professor of mathematics at both Edinburgh and Oxford, and noteworthy for his part in introducing Newton's startling recent discoveries into the university curriculum.

This pattern of closely related individuals playing the major roles was to be a distinctive feature of the Scottish Enlightenment, both in science and

in other areas. Nowhere is its significance seen more clearly than in the long-running dominance of the Monro family. Three successive generations held the chair of anatomy at Edinburgh – and, as was then often the case, retained legal ownership of the subject's teaching collection – between 1719 and 1846. Each professor, confusingly, was christened Alexander (and so, in the humanistic culture of the time, they were known as *primus*, *secundus* and *tertius*). *Primus* and *secundus* promoted public inoculation against smallpox. *Secundus* popularised vaccination following Jenner's discovery of the technique in 1798, while also finding time to conduct pioneering work on the brain and nervous system. Both father and son helped develop the reputation of Edinburgh's new Faculty of Medicine, established in 1726, and tried to improve Scotland's scientific infrastructure: the first was involved in chartering Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary while the second assisted in the translation of the existing Philosophical Society into the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1783. By this time a steady stream of foreign, and particularly American, medical students had been attracted to Edinburgh, not just by the Monros but by other key professors like the distinguished physiologist Robert Whytt.

It was, however, Newton's theories about light, motion and gravity, previously disseminated by David Gregory and Gershom Carmichael, that stimulated the outstanding scientific mind of the early Scottish Enlightenment. Colin Maclaurin was a child prodigy. A minister's son from Argyllshire, he entered the University of Glasgow at eleven, becoming professor at Marischal College at nineteen, Fellow of the Royal Society at twenty-two and professor at Edinburgh at twenty-eight. He was an influential teacher to the next generation of students and an important researcher in his own right, especially on tidal flows. But he also showed himself a lucid interpreter of Newton's achievements for the increasingly enthusiastic lay audience for scientific knowledge. Maclaurin's *Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Discoveries* (1748) was typical of many texts at this time which helped contemporaries come to terms with the far-reaching implications of the new natural philosophy.

The key feature of Maclaurin's popularisation of Newton was that it convincingly reinforced the conventional assumption that religious devotion and the systematic study of nature were complementary – a comforting view not fatally undermined until after Darwin's work more than a hundred years later. Maclaurin agreed that 'A strong curiosity has promoted men in all times to study nature; every useful art has some connection with this science; and the unexhausted beauty and variety of things makes it ever agreeable, new and surprising.' Yet he was also at great pains to reassert the classic Argument to Design which saw in the awe-inspiring complexity of nature, as brilliantly laid bare by Newton, categorical assurance of God's existence and benevolence:

... natural philosophy is subservient to purposes of a higher kind, and is chiefly to be valued as it lays a sure foundation for natural religion and moral philosophy; by leading us, in a satisfactory manner, to the knowledge of the Author and Governor of the universe. To study nature is to search into his workmanship: every new discovery opens to us a new part of his scheme.

Published only after his lamentably early death following his involvement in the defence of Edinburgh against the Jacobites in 1745, Maclaurin's text thus securely located the age's dominant system of natural philosophy in a Christian framework. It also eulogised Newton's famous method, insisting on being prepared to 'consult nature herself, to attend carefully to her manifest operations, and to extort her secrets from her by well chosen and repeated experiments'. The ability of empirical studies to shed new light on God's purposes was best seen, according to Maclaurin, in the study of those most visible yet mysterious products of Creation, the planets and the stars. Such expectations triggered the practical scientific activities of so many other educated contemporaries, whether humble rural clergymen like George Ridpath, practising telescopic in the Berwickshire countryside, or great potentates like James Douglas, 14th Earl of Morton: a Whig representative peer and grand master of England's grand masonic lodge, Morton was also a thoroughly competent astronomer and from 1764, as President of the Royal Society, effectively the leader of institutionalised British science.

Chemistry, always the most practical of studies and therefore very easy to reconcile with the faith in scientific empiricism preached by Maclaurin and the Gregorys, was another characteristic Scottish specialism. Not least this was also because the discipline had potentially profitable applications. Scotland was experiencing rapid economic growth, and inquiries into certain properties of compounds, such as into methods of enhancing soil fertility or improving bleaching, dyeing and fixing for the linen industry, related closely to agricultural and manufacturing developments. Yet applied research went hand-in-hand with pure academic science, the heroic quest for reliable natural knowledge. In chemistry this was led by William Cullen, first at Glasgow and then from 1756 at Edinburgh, and crowned by his younger colleague, Joseph Black, the French-born son of an Ulster Scot, who held the same two chairs of chemistry (receiving the more prestigious Edinburgh position in 1766). Black himself was a genial and gentle soul: a vegetarian, he eventually expired without disturbing the bowl of milk in his lap. But his lasting fame rests – apart, that is, from his walk-on part in encouraging the young Glasgow technician James Watt in his legendary experiments with steam condensers – on pioneering scientific investigations. These resulted in the isolation of carbon dioxide. Black also explained the capacity of ice to

absorb heat without exhibiting any initial rise in its own temperature, a phenomenon known as 'latent heat' which he showed was the result of the energy transferred in the transition from a solid to a liquid state.

Similar habits of mind, of detailed practical investigation combined with awareness of a much wider intellectual framework, can be seen in the work of Black's younger friend James Hutton. Hutton began studying medicine and chemistry at Edinburgh, subsequently managing to extract sal ammoniac from soot. He then worked professionally in estate management and agricultural improvement. Yet Hutton eventually became an obsessive student of the landscape and, as a result, emerged as the effective founder of modern geology. Again the immediate inspiration was provided by unexplained phenomena: in this case apparently inexplicable fossil deposits, such as the remains of dead sea creatures found on hill tops. Hutton was also transfixed by the evidence of folding, classically observed at Siccar Point near St Abb's Head in Berwickshire. There, in a formation hinging strongly at a complex history of stratification, he discovered horizontal Devonian sandstones overlying vertical Silurian slates and grits. Hutton pondered deeply what these disparate phenomena implied about the combined formative potential of ice, water and vulcanism. In the process he developed an extensive critique of the rival contemporary schools of thought on the genesis of rock, each of which insisted that either volcanic or maritime forces were primarily responsible.

Hutton eventually concluded, as he announced to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in an audacious paper in 1785, that 'the greater part of our land, if not the whole, [has] been produced by operations natural to this globe'. The surface of the earth, he argued, is actually in a constant state of flux. It is locked into unending processes of rock formation and denudation powered by a full range of natural forces, including erosion, sedimentary deposit and uplift. Hutton, though a Deist, remained deferential towards the Argument to Design, suggesting that from future studies of geological dynamism 'an argument may be established for [the] wisdom and benevolence to be perceived in nature'. The philosophy of nature, 'rationally deduced from natural events' as Hutton insisted it must be, would again shed new light on the divine purpose, providing startling additional insights into the motives and intelligence of a Creator who had hitherto been known to mankind from biblical revelation alone. Yet with the immense later influence of Hutton's discoveries, geology had in fact moved decisively towards a mechanical and evolutionary and away from a metaphysical and scriptural explanation of the earth's history. Further employment of the same empirical procedures – though predecessors like Maclaurin could scarcely have imagined it – would eventually overwhelm the claims of Genesis to explain the natural world.

## The limits of knowing

The first significant Scottish contribution to mental philosophy – and, significantly, yet another influential attempt to provide a convincing empirical alternative to metaphysics – came from Francis Hutcheson, in some ways the intellectual founding father of Scotland's Enlightenment. Like Black, he was an Ulster Scot. Having studied at Glasgow under Carmichael, Hutcheson spent many years in Dublin philosophical circles before returning in 1729 to succeed his old teacher as professor of moral philosophy. Even so, regarding him at least partly as a Scottish thinker has merits. First, it highlights his impact upon generations of educated Scots: when John Witherspoon satirised the Moderates in the 1750s, it was entirely natural for him to identify 'the late immortal Mr H———n' as the party's intellectual patron saint. Second, it directs attention to the way in which Hutcheson set the agenda for subsequent Scottish thinkers. To his successors he showed that a worthwhile modern philosophy needed to offer an epistemology, or theory of knowledge, plausibly explaining – against numerous sophisticated counter-arguments – the nature and extent of men's understanding of the world around them. Scottish philosophy after Hutcheson would also seek to confirm the social and communitarian instincts of mankind, demonstrating that individuals could be trusted to act benevolently because they possessed, at least in his initial formulation of this influential doctrine, a 'moral sense'.

In his Glasgow lectures, delivered in English, and in two seminal texts, the *Enquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) and *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* (1728), Hutcheson developed an account of human morality which did not rely on metaphysical abstractions. It also confronted directly the challenges posed by recent scepticism. His immediate targets were two English works. One, Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), voiced the famous opinion that human existence was naturally 'nasty, brutish, and short', advancing an essentially egotistical theory of morality and interpreting all behaviour in terms of mere self-preservation: this grim deduction had unsurprisingly worried most orthodox opinion for more than seventy years. Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1712) was a more recent but not much less disturbing intervention. It argued that people were indeed egotistical by nature. But it added that, supposedly like bees in a hive, this otherwise ignoble instinct actually resulted in the advancement of the wider community. In short, Mandeville, writing amid the burgeoning commercial wealth of Queen Anne's reign, had hit upon the convenient but extremely disturbing notion that the gratification of our innate selfishness is unintentionally productive of social benefit and, especially, of our collective material enrichment.

Hutcheson wished to rescue philosophy from these dangerous claims, and, above all, from Mandeville's provocative allegation that 'the moral Virtues are the political Offspring, which Flattery begot upon Pride, i.e. that they are all a Chimera, an idle Fancy, a mere Trick'. This he managed in part by drawing upon the work of Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury. A cultivated English Whig nobleman, Shaftesbury had insisted that our capacity for moral judgement runs closely parallel with what seems the undeniably instinctive human capacity for the appreciation of beauty. If this equation of our ethical with our aesthetic judgement were merited (and, as we shall see, many contemporaries believed that it was), then an account of an innate human moral sense could be developed which would add immeasurably to Hutcheson's fundamental claim that benevolence is natural: that, as he triumphantly put it, 'the Moral Virtues have their Foundation in the Nature of Things'.

Hutcheson's commitment to the reality of Lord Shaftesbury's moral sense was a considerable boon in the wider endeavour to instil reverence for both theology and morality (though his willingness to employ secular philosophy in the defence of Christianity led Witherspoon to mock the apparent belief in 'the divinity of L. S. —'). Yet like a growing number of his Scottish contemporaries — such as Andrew Baxter, a much-underrated non-academic philosophical author from Whittinghame in Berwickshire, who wrote in support of both Newton and Maclaurin — Hutcheson's researches were also inspired in methodological terms by the empiricism influentially advanced by John Locke, another late seventeenth-century English scholar. Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) counselled a commitment to inquiries based exclusively upon known facts and experience. It thus appeared to offer techniques by which mental philosophy could begin at last to emulate the physical sciences, where, particularly to Newton's growing number of admirers, experimental data seemed capable of unlocking the secrets of nature. This empiricism, in which observation and experiment are the only reliable guides, shaped Hutcheson's own works, which he loaded with appeals to the apparently incontrovertible evidence of his own and his readers' everyday experiences. But, crucially, his philosophy also went further and embraced Locke's key technical deduction. This was an epistemology in which the human mind is held to have direct contact not with the external world itself but only with mental phenomena such as perceptions and sensations. The ultimate results of accepting this conclusion were, however, surprising, as the century's greatest original mind, Hume, soon showed.

Hume as a philosopher was in the Scottish Enlightenment but never entirely of it. He was centrally involved in Edinburgh's intellectual life as socialite, essayist and historian. Yet his devastating originality as a thinker

largely transcended his time, the mirifical attacks on a whole host of comforting assumptions proving too much for his non-plussed contemporaries either to understand or to bear. Hume's work nevertheless represents the very foundation of modern philosophy. It is useful, as well as customary, to cite Kant's claim that the Scot's troubling work had provoked his own lifetime of speculative labour. For Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), while falling 'still-born from the press', as the disappointed young thinker famously lamented, marked a revolution in the study of the mind, taking his successors to the brink of what would now be called psychology. Fusing Locke's empirical method with Hutcheson's theory of ideas, but pushing both in a direction which neither had remotely foreseen, Hume arrived at a scepticism about the real basis of our knowledge. Brilliantly innovative and also powerfully compelling, no other thinker, from his horrified contemporaries to the present day, has entirely managed to refute his arguments.

For Hume, the 'association of ideas' — the peculiar way in which the mind integrates separate mental phenomena into a seamless web — was indeed demonstrable on empirical principles. But once this was accepted as the foundation of epistemology, as Locke and Hutcheson had urged, he showed that several other much less palatable conclusions ought also to be conceded. First, the mind is forever denied direct contact with the external world. Trading only in what Hume called 'impressions and ideas', it can have no independent knowledge of the existence of anything beyond its own confines. Second, any relationships which arise between those perceptions, and especially the ways in which they build into complex ideas, are not determined by the actual structure of the external world. They are formed only by habits of mind — mere operations, sorting processes integral to our own mental apparatus which reveal nothing about the reality of the world outside. Third, Hume argued that certain crucial and apparently intuitive forms of knowledge, such as the connection between cause and effect, are similarly no more than products of the mind's habit of associating specific ideas, otherwise 'entirely loose and separate', in particular ways. As he therefore reasoned, 'The falling of a pebble may, for ought we know, extinguish the Sun, or the wish of man control the planets in their orbits.' The result was a comprehensive undermining of virtually all claims to certain knowledge about the world around us, even of apparently the most elementary kind.

Elsewhere in the *Treatise*, and particularly in the more successful reworkings published as the *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and the *Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1752), as well as in the more focused and provocative *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1777), which appeared posthumously, Hume fleshed out the consequences of these sceptical arguments for both moral and religious knowledge. Hutcheson's moral sense, inevitably,



was abandoned to its fate. In its place stood an inclination towards certain kinds of behaviour founded neither in reason nor in a benevolent sense but in mere appetite and passion. For Hume, moral conduct is the outcome of a hunger for love and approval. Virtue, in his own words, is not a fixed quality but only 'whatever mental action or quality gives to the spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation': in short, it is a social construct and not a divinely ordained constant. Equally, religious knowledge – not just traditional Christian revelation but even, and perhaps especially, the comforting Deism or natural religion to which many contemporaries subscribed – can have no reliable basis either in logic or in experience. Hume privately acknowledged the difficulty of attempting to live by such uncompromising sceptical principles. Yet he nevertheless accepted the need to flesh out their many further implications.

The Argument to Design was subjected to particularly effective attack, all the more shattering because it was so central to the mental furniture of contemporaries like Maclaurin and Kames. Hume pointed out that we have had no wider experience of the processes involved in manufacturing universes. Nor can we know how well or badly our own particular universe might compare with others. As a result, we cannot reasonably infer anything at all about how or by whom it was constructed, much less offer judgements about the relative skill (or, Hume wickedly suggested, even the basic competence) of any supposed Creator. Added to the outlandish claims made in other writings which were often published only after his death, such as the daring essays on suicide ('prudence and courage should engage us to rid ourselves at once of existence when it becomes a burden') and on the immortality of the soul ('What a daring theory is that! How lightly, not to say how rashly, entertained!'), these provocative arguments provide good grounds for accepting Hume's reputation as one of history's most subversive, challenging and inventive philosophical thinkers, much misunderstood and often feared by his contemporary Scots.

Chief among Hume's appalled countrymen were the Aberdonian trinity, Thomas Reid, George Campbell and James Beattie, the last a better poet than philosopher, for all Sir Joshua Reynolds's then-famous portrayal of the author of the *Essay on Truth* (1770) as the triumphant victor in the war against infidel scepticism. The geographical location of this strong native reaction to the Edinburgh-based philosophy of Hume is significant. Aberdeen has produced many of Scotland's most conservative minds. It nurtured many lukewarm adherents to the Reformation, numerous unwilling subscribers to the Covenants, and more recently, as we have seen, a disproportionate number of Jacobites. Beattie's famous poem *The Minister* (1771–74), lauded by contemporaries for its conventional rusticity and blameless commonplaces in support of 'beauty, virtue, truth, and love, and melody',

can be interpreted as merely the most enduring product of this Aberdonian philosophical assault on Edinburgh's slippery metropolitan 'artifice' – even though it was in fact the work of a man who was himself an habitué of the Scottish capital's social institutions and a favourite drinking companion of Henry Dundas.

Reid, a relation of the scientific Gregorys, was much the greater philosopher. Accordingly he was meticulous in his unpicking of what he considered Hume's elaborate web of deceit. The circumspect Reid even sent his pre-publication proofs for correction by Hume, an action which, like Campbell's fondness for Hume as a man, says something about the relative cordiality possible within Scotland's incestuous intellectual community. The gesture was, however, underwritten by a justified confidence. Partly as a result of the failure of Hume's backers to finesse the complex patronage system determining university appointments, but also because of the obvious threat posed to tender young minds by his unrepentant heresies, the doubter failed to secure posts at Edinburgh in 1745 and later at Glasgow. By contrast, Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), published in the year he moved from Aberdeen to fill Glasgow's chair of moral philosophy, became a standard university textbook in nineteenth-century Britain, France, Germany and America. His reputation was further burnished by the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785) and the *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* (1788). It would in fact remain secure so long as Hume's corrosive scepticism was deemed a threat within an education system designed primarily to inculcate moral propriety and religious belief through the teaching of philosophy.

Reid's peculiar contribution was that, unlike some, he fully recognised the strength of Hume's position. This led him to develop an unusually bold critique, rejecting the epistemologies not only of both Locke and Hutcheson but of other key modern thinkers like Descartes and Berkeley. Indeed, as he explained, he had eventually realised that the 'sceptical system . . . leans with its whole weight upon a hypothesis, which is ancient indeed, and hath been very generally received by philosophers, but of which I could find no solid proof'. Reid argued that the mind does after all have direct contact with external realities, just as most people presume. In other words, one of the chief tenets of British empiricism, the claim that 'we do not really perceive things that are external, but only certain images and pictures of them imprinted upon the mind, which are called impressions and ideas', was erroneous. Reid then wisely proceeded not so much with a frontal attack as with a mixture of terminological hair-splitting and loaded appeals to everyday occurrences. He claimed disingenuously to give 'great attention to the operations of my own mind and . . . what I conceive every man, who gives the same attention, will feel and perceive'. This accessible and

agreeable 'common sense' Scottish riposte to Scottish scepticism, rather than Hume's difficult and disturbing thesis itself, formed the cornerstone of the curriculum in the coming generations.

By 1800, men like Dugald Stewart, Reid's greatest pupil, embodied all that had come to seem most valuable and enriching in Scotland's philosophical tradition, confidently commencing his lectures at Edinburgh in the early 1780s with 'some elegant general illustrations of the excellencies of science & the superiority acquir'd by the philosopher by means of its study . . .'. Reflecting warmly on his own undergraduate days, Cockburn would later accord Stewart one of the most fulsome tributes to a teacher ever uttered: 'To me his lectures were like the opening of the heavens. I felt into a higher world. . . . They changed my whole nature.' Intellectual transformation of this sort was, of course, the very purpose of Scottish philosophy as it grew from obscurity to international pre-eminence. Initiated by Hutcheson, it was refined by Reid and popularised above all by Stewart in his lectures and in his seminal articles for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (the latter another typical product of Scottish commitment to breadth of knowledge, founded in Edinburgh in 1768 by a group including William Smellie, polymathic printer and former Newtonian Society member). Learning how to think and to discourse rationally had by this time become the overriding preoccupation of educated Scots and their teachers. It can also justly be regarded as one of the principal foundations of the Scottish Enlightenment.

### 'From savage to Scotchman'

The contribution of Scottish thought to the formation of the modern social sciences is widely recognised. Notwithstanding the competing claims of Hume in the essays and of the Jacobite scholar Sir James Stewart in his *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* (1767), Adam Smith is usually seen as the founder of political economy; his associate Adam Ferguson has readily been assigned a roughly similar status in relation to sociology or social anthropology. Indeed, when added to Hume's audacious advances into the realms of psychology, and taken together with William Robertson's innovative historical works, it is sometimes assumed that there are grounds for seeing the Scottish Enlightenment as an intellectual revolution – a dramatic shift in European thought when a whole range of inquiries and academic disciplines were re-cast virtually overnight into a recognisably modern form. Yet this interpretation distorts what was really happening. As important, it does a great disservice to what men like Smith, Ferguson and Robertson were

actually seeking to achieve, and how they conceived their own activities. It is, for example, exceptionally unlikely that Ferguson or Kames would remotely have understood, much less been comfortable with, the abstract theorisation and, particularly, the refusal to make moral judgements about human behaviour which have come to characterise so much of modern sociology.

This gulf between eighteenth-century conceptions and subsequent intellectual developments is most emphatically seen in the case of Smith, one of Scotland's most famous and most misunderstood sons. Born in Kirkcaldy in 1723, he was educated there and at Glasgow under Hutcheson, before heading to Oxford to complete his studies. Like his near-contemporary Gibbon, he found the intolerance of the English dons unpalatable, and, as he would later relish pointing out, clinching evidence for the belief (partly reflecting the Scottish practice of supplementing salaries with fees) that professors should be paid according to the number of students their lectures could attract. On his return he lectured on rhetoric in Edinburgh, before being called back to the professorship of logic and metaphysics at Glasgow in 1751. The next year, leaving the vacancy for which Hume's name was canvassed, he moved sideways to fill Hutcheson's old chair in which he was in turn succeeded by Reid. He later spent many years in Kirkcaldy, before accepting from Dundas an Edinburgh customs commissionership. This position allowed him to maintain his close friendships with the leading literati, and particularly with Black and Hutton (his eventual executors). Yet it was in his Glasgow period – where he was also involved in both the Literary and the Political Economy Society – that Smith had first developed the comprehensive educational curriculum which underlay his intellectual achievements. This included some early elements of his economic thought. Crucially, however, it also situated them within a course in moral philosophy, jurisprudence and rhetoric. Student dictations of these lectures, which were long believed lost, were rediscovered in 1896 and subsequently published in a modern edition. These findings have simply confirmed much of what his first great published work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), always hinted about Smith's unfolding ideas.

Smith clearly envisaged a wide-ranging syllabus designed to provide a proper education in what he subsequently described as 'the science of a legislator': that is, he wished to disseminate the knowledge and techniques necessary to govern a rapidly commercialising modern society. Despite his later notoriety as a supposedly shameless proponent of selfish acquisitiveness, the *Moral Sentiments* reveals Smith as the admiring disciple of Hutcheson, at least in so far as the work, while denying the moral sense, paints man as essentially guided in his social concerns by a principle of 'sympathy' (a concept also found in Hume, who used it somewhat differently). A natural

fellow-feeling, a deeply rooted desire to love and be loved, this leads one's every social action to be carried out with a view to winning the welcome approval of a hypothetical observer of one's own creation, whom Smith dubbed 'the impartial spectator'. By this means Smith provided not only a cogent explanation of human behaviour but, crucially, a theory of morality which, in swapping a crude instinct to inward-looking selfishness for a much more sophisticated mechanism of self-interest in social relations, to some extent split the difference between Mandeville and Hutcheson.

This profound concern for social and moral conduct needs to be understood as part of Smith's conception of a comprehensive modern philosophical curriculum. The *Lectures on Jurisprudence* illuminate several elements of this wider vision, emphasising such matters as political organisation, the origins of government and, critically for the future (since it was what Smith's Marxist successors profitably extracted from his writings), the significance of property in social advancement and organisation. But the *Inquiry into the Origins and Nature of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) remains by far Smith's best-known contribution and too often the work by which, in splendid isolation, he has been judged. Conceived as part of the same educational programme as the *Moral Sentiments*, it stands not least in the grand tradition of European natural law. In it Smith seeks to throw unprecedented historical light upon the motivational and material processes by which eighteenth-century Britons (and particularly the Scots) were enriching themselves, the better to identify for active statesmen, like his admirer and correspondent Dundas, the specific roles which they too might be required to take.

Sadly, it has proved difficult for later critics accurately to distinguish what Smith favoured from what he was merely attempting to explain. His treatment of the de-humanising consequences of the division of labour is in fact as effective a moral critique of the emerging patterns of industrial organisation as could be imagined. It was, moreover, astonishingly prescient, penned in the early 1770s and before production-line organisation had properly emerged in Britain's factories:

The man whose whole life is spent performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention. . . . The torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life.

From this morbid account, a study in abject depravity for anyone steeped in the rich traditions of Addisonian polite sociability and concerned with

the need to allow people to construct their own 'impartial spectator', stemmed Smith's insistence on the state's responsibility for the proper education of the general population. In his judgement this was essential if society were to counteract the baleful human side-effects of commercial change.

Smith's greatest achievement in the *Wealth of Nations*, exhibiting an attention to psychological detail befitting a former professor of moral philosophy, was to identify that a form of self-interest on the part of individuals was indeed what lay behind commercial growth. Following Mandeville's controversial lead, he rejected as mere wishful thinking the frequently heard platitude, implicit in Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, that a concern for the common good might somehow be behind those of our actions which confer material benefits upon others. As he quipped, with a characteristic sense of the absurdity of some of his opponents' claims:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our necessities but of their advantages.

Similarly his explanation for the moral and organisational mechanisms which had made possible the recent dramatic rise in wealth rested on a remarkable grasp of detail. His close examination of numerous examples, ranging from pin-factories to market traders, led him to the seminal insight that 'The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour and the greater part of the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which it is any where directed, or applied, seems to have been the effects of the division of labour.' This, more than anything else, was the technical foundation for all future analyses of the modern economy.

Adam Ferguson, Smith's friend and Black's cousin, shared the characteristic intellectual preoccupations of the eighteenth-century Scottish elite, only occasionally managing to look convincingly like the model of a modern social scientist. Born at Logierait in Perthshire in the same year as Smith, he studied at St Andrews before becoming chaplain to the recently founded 43rd Foot, the Black Watch, the British army's first permanent Highland regiment. Although untrue, legend maintains that the young minister was conspicuous at the battle of Fontenoy in 1745, emboldening his men with a passionate Gaelic sermon on heroism and loyalty before leading them personally into the French guns. Like his clerical friends Home and Robertson, and no doubt further encouraged by his early patron Lord Milton, he combined the duties of the presbyterian ministry with staunch attachment to the Hanoverian British state and was a natural leader of the Poker Club. Subsequently, however, with his intellectual interests quickening, he became

a private tutor. He then secured Edinburgh's vacant chair of natural philosophy (through blatant jobbery by Bute – Ferguson being no physicist and unable to deliver the lectures). It was only after his transfer to the much more congenial chair of moral philosophy, in which he was eventually succeeded in 1785 by Stewart, that he was able to cement his reputation as both an eloquent teacher and a daringly original thinker.

Nowhere more fluently than in the *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), Ferguson tried to teach his readers that a set of fundamentally natural processes, analogous in some ways to Hutton's geological forces, had shaped and re-shaped human society through history: 'Not only the individual advances from infancy to manhood', he asserted in a lucid and wide-ranging preamble, 'but the species itself from rudeness to civilization.' Ferguson's argument drew upon a bewildering variety of empirical data. Culled from the writings of explorers, missionaries and traders, as well as from the more familiar histories of the European nations, including especially Rome (of whose republican period he also published a great history in 1783), his evidence encompassed the tribespeople of South America and the great civilisations of India and China, as well as acute observations on modern Scottish and English society. The result was a rich comparative framework, quasi-anthropological both in its breadth of vision and in its tendency towards the naturalistic explanation of human beings and their social environment. It was this which allowed Ferguson to account plausibly for the development of many phenomena whose historical origins he was among the first to attempt to chart – including marriage, poetry, property laws and the arts.

This constant emphasis on psychological and environmental rather than supernatural causes, partly deriving from his admiration for the great French scholar Montesquieu, crystallised in Ferguson's memorable image of man as an inventive, thrusting and restless creature, driven ceaselessly to seek his own advancement and self-improvement in all places and ages:

He applies the same talents to a variety of purposes, and acts nearly the same part in very different scenes. He would be always improving on his subject, and he carries this intention where-ever he moves, through the streets of the populous city, or the wilds of the forest. While he appears equally fitted to every condition, he is upon this account unable to settle in any. At once obstinate and fickle, he complains of innovations, and is never satiated with novelty. He is perpetually busied in reformations, and is continually wedded to his errors.

In this way, Ferguson offered a seductively familiar impression of active and ambitious Enlightenment man, perfectly suited to the expansive and rapidly developing post-Union Scottish society in which he was writing. But it was

also, as things transpired, to be instrumental in succeeding generations in shaping European thinking about the essentially creative and progressive impulses of humankind.

The seminal importance of these historical concerns can hardly be over-estimated. The contribution of Smith and Ferguson to what later became fully fledged social science disciplines was nothing less than to attempt for the first time to trace the history of the economy and society. Their colleagues and contemporaries – for example, Kames with his fascinating *Historical Law Tracts* (1757), Sir John Dalrymple with *An Essay Towards a General History of Feudal Property* (1758) and Gilbert Stuart with the *Historical Dissertation Concerning the English Constitution* (1764) (which incidentally popularised the notion of seeking out the origins of English liberties among their ancient Germanic ancestors) – were doing the same thing only a little less ambitiously for contemporary legal and political systems. The application of historical perspective to fundamental human phenomena also inspired John Millar at Glasgow, Smith's former student, whose *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1771) and *Historical View of the English Constitution* (1787) explored the foundations of such things as social inequalities and the evolving structures of government, and William Alexander, a Scottish doctor whose *History of Women* (1779) essayed a pioneering study of changing gender relations down the centuries. On such evidence it does not seem to have been straining the point for Hume himself to describe his own era as 'the historical Age' and Scotland as 'the historical Nation'.

Hume's *History of England* (1754–62) was itself an engaging story, witty and ironic but also insightful, consummately stylish, and occasionally, to those who understood the elaborate sub-text, unashamedly provocative. That he outraged both Whig and Tory critics is, of course, testament to his matchless skill in the art of provoking responses. But it is also proof that his contemporaries could correctly decipher Hume's meaning, both in the *History* and in his numerous historically focused essays. Determined above all, like Addison, to teach his readers about the stabilising influence of polite conversation and the folly of believing the self-serving cant of party politicians of all kinds (which, in his sceptical view, promised only to increase instability and rancour), he set about slaughtering a whole herd of ideological sacred cows, historically baseless but rhetorically advantageous to Britain's competing political factions. The cruel tyranny for which Charles I had supposedly been justly punished in the Civil Wars was re-interpreted merely as a mixture of kingly misfortune and weakness; the alleged divine assistance and far-sighted wisdom which had made possible the 1688–89 Revolution against James VII and II was equally derided. Accident rather than design, misadventure rather than skill: these were to Hume the normal agencies of historical change, and the inflated claims of politicians to omnipotence and

of the age by founding the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1780. This ruffled feathers among the other Edinburgh institutions, not only with Buchan's insensitive style but, by claiming a role in scientific inquiry, with its apparent challenge to the supposed intellectual prerogatives of the university and Philosophical Society: Robertson even attempted unsuccessfully to block its application for a royal charter.

The study of the past was clearly the means by which increasing numbers reflected on Scotland's own experiences: to borrow the nineteenth-century aphorism of Walter Bagehot, the literati were concerned, above all, to discover how 'from being a savage, man became a Scotchman'. The explanation of economic development or social advancement, the deflating of pompous political rhetoric, the elimination of religious prejudice and the reconciliation of the Scots with the English and the Treaty of Union: these were urgent priorities which historical analysis usually addressed. But the Scots also achieved more than just ostentatious self-examination when, as historians, they produced some of the age's best-selling books. They had greatly increased the range of possibilities available to other scholars. They were among the first to show how to build a bridge between history and other, different kinds of study. They greatly advanced the scope for comparative history. They sketched the outlines of a natural history of society. And they began the serious investigation of other human phenomena, many previously lacking a history to call their own. In these respects, as in the field of geological science, the Scottish Enlightenment was without precedent — even if eighteenth-century scholars can have had no notion of where their inquiries were eventually to lead.

### Sense and sentiment

The Scottish Enlightenment was also fully reflected in creative endeavour. At all points from the age of Union to the dog days of the Napoleonic wars more than a century later, Scots approached poetry, drama, prose fiction and music as devotedly and as successfully as they approached their interests in science, philosophy and the study of the past. Indeed, in the baroque cantatas of the patrician aesthete and former Union commissioner Sir John Clerk of Penicuik (who had studied in Italy under Arcangelo Corelli), or the symphonies, overtures and sonatas of Thomas Erskine, 6th Earl of Kellie (himself a pupil of the elder Johann Stamitz of Mannheim), we hear very clearly how the Scots' aesthetic sensibilities were coming into even closer convergence with those of the great European cities. Yet it was in contributing to literature that they faced their greatest creative challenge. For Scottish

authors grappled continually with the problem of how far a people, employing a tongue very similar to the English with whom they now also shared a government, could be said to possess, and should also seek to retain, a distinctive cultural identity of their own. As the antiquarian Sir John Dalrymple put one of the opposing viewpoints at the end of the century, 'When a native of Scotland writes in English, he writes in fetters'. The different responses which emerged to this problem provide a useful way of thinking about the varied literature which eighteenth-century Scotland produced.

Around 1700 it might even have seemed that Scotland lacked a living literary tradition of its own. This was certainly a view widely shared by eighteenth-century Scottish commentators themselves, Dugald Stewart announcing to the world that the country had toiled through a 'long night of Gothic barbarism' and John Pinkerton claiming that his own century had proved itself 'as glorious for Scottish literature as the preceding had been adverse'. Such interpretations are not, however, endorsed by more recent scholarship, which confidently traces native literature back through the poems of Drummond of Hawthornden and the dramas of Sir William Alexander in the seventeenth century to the 'Castalian Band' patronised by James VI and the 'Makars' supported at the courts of his Stewart predecessors. Moreover, it is now clear that it was precisely this earlier tradition which gave real impetus to the eighteenth century's own literary revival. For in the years before and after the Treaty of Union, two scholars who shared a resentment of English indifference to Scottish letters and a professed desire to protect its core tradition from obliterate anglicisation took it upon themselves to publish celebratory editions of earlier Scottish poetry.

The first of these, James Watson, was an Edinburgh-based printer from Aberdeen. His three-volume *Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems* (1706–11) was one of the most important texts for the preservation of older poems ever to appear in Scotland, containing such key earlier productions as 'Christ's Kirk on the Green', the reputed work of King James V himself. It was also patriotically inspired, or so Watson claimed, by 'the frequency of Publishing Collections of Miscellaneous Poems in our Neighbouring Kingdoms and States'. Watson's colleague was Allan Ramsay, born at Leadhills near Edinburgh. Perhaps a covert Jacobite and certainly a substantial man of letters, his *The Evergreen* (1724) and five-volume *Tea-Table Miscellany* (1724–37) built on Watson's achievement. For Ramsay presented once again to modern Scots a collection of poems in their own distinctive vernacular. These works seemed to confirm the existence, as well as to assist the survival, of a serious literary tradition in Scotland. Yet none was quite what it seemed. Watson, and to a greater extent Ramsay, had interpreted their editorial duties liberally. The latter had modified the poems' language, reconciling them with the refined Augustan tastes of his public. Both editors

had also inserted a number of contemporary pieces (in Ramsay's case, some of his own), distorting and re-fashioning the national poetic tradition with pleasing compositions more appropriate to an age of politeness.

Contemporaries encountering what was long seen as Ramsay's masterpiece, *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725), may have believed that its Scots vernacular was what had attracted them. A play based on the country characters of a Lowland village, it offered a literary idealisation of Scotland's traditional rural life, couched in the tongue of its native people. Later readers, however, may notice different things. One is a tendency for Ramsay's supposedly unaffected rustic characters to drop into anglicised linguistic forms of a sort not usually found among Scotland's rural poor. Even more revealingly, *The Gentle Shepherd* portrays human interactions in which (unsurprisingly, given Ramsay's involvement in the Easy Club) the distinctive but artificial light of Addisonian sociability shines brightly through the enveloping bucolic haze. These tensions between rusticity and polite formality are even discernible in the opening salutations, one character hailing another with the distinctly un-vernacular exclamation 'This sunny Morning, Roger, hears my Blood, / And puts all Nature in a jovial Mood.' Like his and Watson's collections of Scots poetry, Ramsay's pastoral play, which ran to fully sixty-six editions before the end of the century, subverted the older literary forms even as it claimed to perpetuate them, artfully mingling archaisms with a more fashionable, increasingly polished style.

Ramsay's beguiling mixture of the old and the not-so-old was by no means the only option. Scottish authors also had available an alternative, which some assiduously followed: the open embracing of English literary fashion to the fullest extent. Of this tendency, quite the best-known contemporary example (though rather less well-regarded today) is James Thomson, a minister's son who left Roxburghshire for London when still young. In England he produced some of the most striking patriotic poetry of the age, including 'Rule, Britannia' (1740). He also produced the four-part pastoral cycle *The Seasons* (1726-30) - rapturously received, recited and subsequently to anthologise its way into the proto-Romantic consciousness. Another who placed at least four hundred miles between himself and his birthplace was Leven in Dunbartonshire. After a medical education at Glasgow and a short naval career which included active service in the West Indies, he sought journalistic fame and fortune in London. He also spent many years travelling in Europe. Yet real literary success came only from his efforts as a novelist.

Progressing through *Roderick Random* (1748) and *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), Smollett's career was crowned by his best-known work, published as he lay dying at Livorno in Italy. *Humphrey Clinker* (1771), an epistolary comedy, is in

effect Smollett's homage to the blossoming achievements of his native land. The main protagonist, Matthew Bramble, leads a coach-ful of idiosyncratic characters on a breathless tour of Great Britain. It is, however, the party's visit to Scotland, where Edinburgh is fondly described and the merits of the Borders, Glasgow, Fife, Inveraray and Ayrshire are all advertised, which lingers longest in the memory. The recently founded medical school in Edinburgh was already 'famous all over Europe'; Scotland's established church, 'so long reproached with fanaticism and canting, abounds at present with ministers celebrated for their learnings, and respectable for their moderation'; and there were 'many authors of the first distinction; such as the two Humes, Robertson, Smith, Wallace, Blair, Ferguson, Wilkie, &c. . . as agreeable in conversation as they are instructive and entertaining in their writings'.

A more penetrating but also less enduring encounter with Scotland's Enlightenment was achieved by Henry Mackenzie. Educated in Edinburgh for the law, he was eventually hailed by Scott as 'the Scottish Addison' and ended his days the undisputed grand old man of Caledonian literature. He produced two polite periodicals, *The Mirror* (1779) and *The Lounger* (1785-87) in Spectatorial vein. His most famous work, *The Man of Feeling* (1771), similarly appears at first glance to absorb itself merely in the emulation of fashionable southern literature. Written in correct if slightly stilted English, it charts the successive social encounters of Harley, the eponymous hero. But Mackenzie had identified the fictional narrative as a vehicle for exploring human relationships and, in particular, for laying bare the affective sympathies which, as his friend Smith's *Moral Sentiments* had shown, bind people together. Harley's adventures in fact test many of the literati's fondest beliefs about sociability and moral judgement. His exquisite altruism and sensitivity ('There are some feelings which perhaps are too tender to be suffered by the world', he simpers before expiring) were hugely attractive to its original audience, even if their saccharine intensity tends to repel the modern reader. *The Man of Feeling* not only provided its creator with a best-seller, a volume Burns described as 'a book I prize next to the Bible'. It also gave the late eighteenth century a psychological novel perfectly reflecting the deepening sentimentalism of the mature Enlightenment. In effect, Mackenzie's triumph signalled the beginning of the end of Addison's strictly restrained and self-controlled model of politeness with its innate suspicion of strong human feelings. *The Man of Feeling*, a distillation of rarefied emotions, appears in retrospect as a landmark on the road towards Romanticism.

Despite his success, Mackenzie was bested as an influential author by the most enigmatic man of letters to emerge in eighteenth-century Scotland: James Macpherson. From Ruthven in Inverness-shire, Macpherson's name will forever be associated with a series of purported translations from the

Gaelic poems of the ancient bard Ossian. Much of the attention, then and since, has focused on doubts about their authenticity. Party lines were rapidly drawn. Scottish cultural patriots, notably Blair, who extravagantly praised the poetry's 'tenderness and sublimity', defended the productions of the brash young scholar as an accurate rendition of a newly rediscovered Celtic epic about the hero Fingal. Incurable sceptics and amused English observers (in this affair David Hume privately, and Samuel Johnson publicly, were unlikely bedfellows) loudly questioned both Macpherson's credibility and his competence. Doubters were particularly encouraged by the fact that some of Macpherson's ancient protagonists seemed suspiciously polite and sentimental, and their rugged environment sublime to a fault – almost as if tailored to appeal to the tastes prescribed by fashionable luminaries like Addison, Kames and Burke. A committee of inquiry chaired by Mackenzie duly raised more questions than it provided answers. For what it is worth, and while Gaelic scholars remain divided, current opinion credits Macpherson with the compilation of a single poem out of numerous fragments of genuine oral tradition, greatly altered and padded out with his own inventions. It is not today usually regarded as a continuous and authentic historical narrative.

Yet the cavills about Macpherson's techniques are secondary to the main historical point, which is the extraordinary contemporary reaction his works provoked. Quite how the cultural heights of late eighteenth-century Europe were stormed by a minor Highland poet of questionable probity – 'what I hear of your morals disposes me to pay regard not to what you say but to what you shall prove', snarled Johnson amid the controversy – will never be fully understood. For Ossian directly inspired countless imitators, particularly as the Romantic movement coalesced. Men as different as Goethe and Mendelssohn idolised the heroic figures of his tales. The empress Josephine even had Girodet bedeck Napoleon's palace at Malmaison with grandiose murals depicting episodes from Fingal's story. This was also done, only a little less bizarrely, by the painter Alexander Runciman for Sir James Clerk (3rd Baronet and Sir John's heir) at Penicuik. Ossian even stimulated a long overdue re-assessment of Scotland's Gaelic heritage. Scholars like John Macpherson, minister of Sleat on the Isle of Skye, and John Buchanan, who claimed (with good reason) that the Gaels had been 'illiberally insulted by the intemperate rage of an unprovoked enemy', were confronted by others like the eccentric Pinkerton. The last, a cantankerous journalist, historian and pioneer of racist stereotyping, was obsessed with proving that the ancient Pictish inhabitants of Scotland were not of backward Celtic stock but a Gothic people like their English and German cousins.

It is a bitter irony, of course, that a world obsessed with Macpherson's pale imitations of antique Celtic literature, and with the precise racial

classification of the Gaels and Picts, should have been so blissfully ignorant of the fact that it also had in its presence some of the very finest exponents of a living Gaelic poetry. The great Donnchadh Ban Mac an t-Saor (Duncan Ban Macintyre) passed much of his life in quiet obscurity in Glen Orchy. His predecessor Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair (Alexander Macdonald), the searing Jacobite poet of Moidart, produced numerous masterpieces, memorably observing in one that 'The boar who's called King George, / son of the German sow, / his friendship and his love / is the raven's for the bone.' Such myopia, of course, was characteristic of the literati, simultaneously admirable in their intellectual breadth and frustratingly exclusive in their aesthetic preferences and ideological commitments. The relationship between eighteenth-century Scotland's two most original creative voices and the Enlightenment establishment was similarly unsatisfactory. For where Thomson took the high road to London and English literary celebrity, both of them, Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns, trod the more precarious low road through vernacular Scots expression.

In choosing to cast much of their work in Lowland Scots, and in developing literary careers which mingled remarkable inventiveness with deference to a wide repertoire of traditional songs and ballads, both poets set themselves apart, not only from the thoroughly British author of *Liberty*, not even just from the more equivocal creator of *The Gentle Shepherd*, but to a considerable extent from the literati and cultural arbiters of the day – men like Blair in Edinburgh, Watson in St Andrews and Alexander Gerard and his colleague Campbell in Aberdeen, university professors whose essentially anglocentric judgements of form and style could make or break fledgling Scottish literary careers. Fergusson, who studied at St Andrews before taking a clerkship in Edinburgh's commissary office, suffered from progressive mental disintegration before his tragic death in 1774 at the age of just twenty-four. But he had already shown an astonishing range, from satirically inventive Scots (notably the 'Elegy on the Death of Mr David Gregory, late Professor of Mathematics in the University of St Andrews') to formally correct English (Fergusson had, after all, been taught by William Wilkie, 'the Scottish Homer', whose *Epigoniaid* (1757) was itself then regarded as the epitome of modern classicism). Fergusson also managed in his brief career to turn his native Edinburgh into the subject of an earthy yet fanciful poetry, best seen in the famous pieces 'Auld Reekie' and 'The Daff Days'.

Fergusson was even capable of the most pungent occasional verse. None were more acerbic than the mocking lines directed to the professoriate of his Alma Mater who had fawned before the visiting Dr Johnson, England's outrageous Scotophobe: 'Mind ye what Sam, the lvin loun! / Has in his Dictionar laid down?' Burns, the 'Heaven-taught ploughman' (in *The Langer's eulogy*), reckoned Fergusson his great inspiration and paid for a touching

epitaph on his predecessor's tomb in Edinburgh's Canongate kirkyard. He himself had briefly flirted with Blair and literary Edinburgh, but found consolation (and, in truth, probably more sympathy) in bottle and bed, as well as in the production of incomparably boisterous, bawdy and passionate verse in the vernacular. No anthology of British literature is complete without at least one of Burns' compositions, perhaps 'O My Love's Like a Red, Red Rose' or 'Tam O'Shanter'. It is worth remembering, however, that it was his very refusal to absorb himself fully in the prevalent literary and intellectual modes of the Scottish Enlightenment which made possible these peculiar achievements.

The Scot who most successfully negotiated the conflicting pressures towards cultural assimilation on the one hand and distinctiveness on the other was also the dominant force in Scottish – and European – literature by the third decade of the next century. Sir Walter Scott was very much a product of late Enlightenment Edinburgh. The grandson of an Edinburgh professor, he was educated at the High School and then the university under Stewart, where, like Cockburn, he joined the Speculative Society. Both through a sickly childhood and later as sheriff-depute of Selkirkshire, Scott immersed himself in the historical ballads of his beloved ancestral Borders. Setting out to preserve them, he eventually published them to critical acclaim in the first years of the new century as *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802–3). This, however, was to be but the start of a glittering career. Scott subsequently produced the world's most significant early historical novels, beginning with *Waverley* (1814), a racy best-seller set during the 1745–46 rebellion which used a keen eye for period detail and a fascination with the interaction between individual personality and different social environments to consolidate, following Ossian, the nineteenth century's sentimental attachment to Scotland as a land of human heroism and natural beauty. Neither of these stupendous landmark works was published before 1800. Yet Scott's literary achievements rested centrally upon the distinctive intellectual heritage of the Scottish Enlightenment, with its rampant historical obsessions and deep interest in psychology.

### In the mind's eye

No expression of Scotland's post-Union dynamism is more impressively tangible than its achievements in the graphic arts and architecture. Underplayed in many accounts of the Scottish Enlightenment, the work of William Aikman, the younger Allan Ramsay, Alexander Runciman and Henry Raeburn, like the Scots' achievements in urban planning and

Georgian architecture, can only properly be understood as an integral part of the eighteenth-century cultural experience. For they serve as a further necessary reminder that the ideas and aspirations so elegantly expressed by the literati also had life beyond the written page. There were vital connections between the Enlightenment philosophy of mind and contemporary aesthetics. An urgent striving for a psychological understanding of the human condition, which in a different way was mirrored in the experimentation of Smollett and Mackenzie with characters' behaviour in various social settings, could hardly help but inform the tradition of Scottish portraiture which reached its apogee in Raeburn, the great immortaliser of those who illuminated late Enlightenment Edinburgh.

Other factors linked enlightened thought with contemporary Scottish art. Firstly, there was no effective separation between practitioners. Aikman, the century's first great painter, was a friend of the poets Ramsay and Thomson and the nephew of the cultivated antiquarian and harpsichordist Sir John Clerk of Penicuik. Ramsay junior, a fast friend of Hume, was also supported by both Forbes and the 2nd and 3rd Dukes of Argyll, whose formal portraits are among his finest works. Hutton was accompanied on expeditions by his friend the senior John Clerk of Eldin, Penicuik's son, whose illustrations for *The Theory of the Earth* (1796) gave visual expression to the geologist's theories: Clerk himself, not coincidentally, became one of Scotland's most respected landscape engravers as well as, curiously, a once-famous author on naval tactics. Raeburn, a member of the Cape Club along with Ferguson and Runciman, was also a friend of Reid and Stewart, both of whom sat for him. Other acquaintances painted by Raeburn included Hutton and Scott, as well as numerous Dundases. His *Sir John and Lady Clerk of Penicuik* (1792), a stunning combination of portraiture and landscape which sets the 4th Baronet (the earlier Sir John's grandson) with his wife against the backdrop of their Midlothian estate, also serves as a reminder of the intermingling of wealth and creativity in eighteenth-century Scotland brought about by the close ties of patronage and friendship.

A further point of contact between art and wider intellectual culture was more precisely philosophical, arising in the assumptions characteristic of the leading Scottish thinkers. As we have seen, most Scottish moralists and educators, following Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, believed that, in apprehending virtue, the human moral sense operates in a manner analogous to the mind's intuitive identification of beauty. This psychological intertwining of ethics and aesthetics obviously has profound implications, many of them actually explored by Scottish contemporaries. An early and influential contribution came in the *Treatise on Ancient Painting* (1740) by George Turnbull, a friend of the younger Ramsay and himself Reid's teacher at Marischal College. Turnbull claimed that the appreciation of art, like the study of



history and literature, inculcates politeness and refinement: 'the immediate Effect of good moral or historical Pictures upon the Mind', he claimed, 'is either directly virtuous, or at least exceedingly strengthening and assistant to Virtue'. Precisely because, as Turnbull echoed Hutcheson in concluding, 'We have . . . by nature a moral Sense', art was itself a valuable educational commodity, stimulating and succouring an acute and discriminating sensitivity to virtue and vice.

A final factor confirmed this synergy between art and philosophy which Turnbull had discerned. This was the Scottish Enlightenment's empirical preoccupation with human perception, and especially with the bewitching mechanism of sight. According to Hume (whose essays significantly also included ones on taste and the aesthetic senses), it is by this means that men receive the discrete and unconnected impressions of an external world which are then sorted and organised according to their own imaginations. Alternatively, on Reid's counter-argument, it is by the miracle of sight that they are provided with information about an external world which the mind is intuitively able to perceive in a way which is both reliable and accurate. A fascination with the subjective representation of an objective world, combined with a natural wish to keep profitably abreast of changing fashions in wider British art, consequently underlay much of the Scottish painting of this period.

Aikman's *Sir John Clerk of Penicuik* (c.1720) and *Sir Hew Dalrymple, Lord North Berwick* (1722), for example, sought an improved clarity and truthfulness of depiction. This aspiration had several roots but stemmed in part from a sympathy with the empiricism of Newton and Locke which Aikman shared with his contemporary Hutcheson. Ramsay, in turn, raised this attention to detail to new heights. His 1749 portrait of Argyll, his *Heav Dalrymple, Lord Drummore* (1754) and particularly his *Margaret Lindsay* (c.1757) each strove to capture something of the actuality of vision through meticulous brushwork. Raeburn, by contrast, was touched by the 'Common Sense' school of his friends Reid and Stewart. His broad and sweeping brush technique had an obvious affinity with their philosophical approach, seen to particular effect in mature works such as *Lord Newton* and *John Robison*. Here Raeburn's daringly approximate strokes resolve uncannily into an overall effect very similar to that achieved when our eyes perceive objects in real life.

On a much larger scale, this interest in human nature and particularly in perception, together with the inevitable affinities between the social elite and professional architects, produced an eighteenth-century revolution in the design of buildings and townscapes which similarly captured many of the key ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment. This was true both in the public and in the private realm and whether contemporaries were concerned

to erect magnificent but singular country-homes like Mavisbank and the frequently remodelled Hopetoun House or extensive and inter-linked developments like the progressive phases of Edinburgh's New Town. The last remains the most useful example of the relationship in enlightened Scotland between ideas and their physical realisation, with much to be gleaned about the intellectual agenda of those involved in manufacturing it. The aim of constructing an entirely new urban core for the Scottish capital on a green-field site was not only indicative of the vaulting ambition of the social and intellectual elites of mid-century Edinburgh (the genius of no people in the world is more devoted to architecture than that of the nobility and gentry of Scotland', claimed one commentator, William Guthrie, as the New Town finally began to rise). It was also testament to the extraordinary way in which Scotland's quickening post-Union commercial expansion and the accompanying Addisonian notions of polite society were able powerfully to reinforce one another in promoting an urban revolution.

In August 1752 the *Scots Magazine*, founded in 1739, printed the text of a proposal for the improvement of Edinburgh, previously endorsed by the Convention of Royal Burghs. No one could have guessed how dramatically the city's face would be changed in the space of just fifty years. The proposer, led by Lord Provost Drummond and the corporation, sketched out a visionary prospect of a modern capital city. Eyes seem in particular to have been beadyly fixed on London's recent growth. It was intended that the Scots should enjoy a similar economic and cultural renaissance: they would abandon the squalid medieval confines of the Old Town, fashioning instead an Enlightenment metropolis, 'a centre of trade and commerce, of learning and the arts, of politeness, and of refinement of every kind'. In other words, this was to be a thoroughly contemporary setting. The full gamut of professional business would be more efficiently transacted. Aristocrats and the rapidly expanding middle classes would be accommodated. A social milieu of intellectual and moral cultivation – the reign of politeness – would be inaugurated. Appropriately, when Drummond and his colleagues paraded through the city to lay the foundation stones, they did so in their full masonic regalia, visibly declaring the links between Edinburgh's progressive re-fashioning and the contemporary concerns of clubbable sociability which had helped stimulate it.

From 1767 onwards, the implementation of the neo-classical grid-iron layout devised by James Craig, the twenty-seven-year-old nephew of the poet Thomson, allowed the New Town's creators to pay further homage to key Enlightenment principles. The public authorities provided the essential infrastructure, such as the roads, pavements and sewerage, and stipulated a standard roof line. But the original scheme left it to the developers – sometimes aspiring occupants, sometimes enterprising builders – to erect private

properties along the thoroughfares. It thus combined intense civic pride with attractive opportunities for the expression of proprietorial individualism in a fashion which embodied some of the balances between liberty and order, between anarchic *laissez-faire* and intolerable dirigisme, which Smith and Hume in particular thought needed to be struck by a civilised commercial society.

Nor was the human interaction with the new urban quarter conceived in isolation from the intellectual vision that had recently enlightened the old. Purpose-built venues, notably the Assembly Rooms, provided an institutional framework within which a polite public might pursue beneficial social interaction. The civic self-assurance of late Enlightenment Edinburgh was also lent substance in several landmark constructions, such as the imposing neo-classical development of a new university building to the south of the Old Town, and Register House, to house Scotland's historic public records, the first building in the New Town. Similarly, the generously proportioned footpaths and two formal squares of the latter, named with deliberate Hanoverian loyalism (George Street, Charlotte Square, Hanover Street, Frederick Street, Princes Street and Queen Street), could not have been better designed to facilitate the respectable Addisonian taste for leisurely conversation and — as many Georgian engravings of the streetscapes confirm — for the enjoyment of sociable perambulation.

Edinburgh was thus transformed into the heavenly city of the enlightened intelligentsia and of the rest of the political, legal and mercantile elites: emblematically, David Hume and Sir Lawrence Dundas both moved early to the New Town, while Glasgow, Aberdeen, Perth and St Andrews each in their different ways tried to emulate the capital. The nobility and landed classes simultaneously imposed a related order upon the rural landscape. The planned villages characteristic of improved agriculture, such as Newcastleton and Lunninghame, and other examples like Inverary in Argyllshire (laid out by the 3rd Duke of Argyll from the 1740s), Fochabers in Moray (laid out after 1776 by the 4th Duke of Gordon) and Charlestown in Fife (established in the 1770s by the 5th Earl of Elgin), were intended to kindle commerce, while providing the domestic and social amenities a prosperous tenantry and industrious workforce would require. Grid-iron layouts, squares, ample thoroughfares and monumental public buildings were all ubiquitous. Rational and orderly yet also fundamentally utilitarian, such designs confirmed the subjection of both the surrounding countryside and the community to the firm but enterprising and benign proprietorship of which Enlightenment thought generally so wholeheartedly approved.

Equivalent symbolism was also found in a domestic setting, expressing the same familiar intellectual assumptions. For this was the great age of the Scottish country house. The roll-call of talented contributors begins with

Colen Campbell, who trained as a lawyer in Edinburgh. Through his *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1715), he was responsible for advancing neo-Palladianism throughout Britain. He not only designed Scottish properties like the home of Daniel Campbell of Shawfield, which was sacked by the Glaswegian rioters in 1725; he also worked on Houghton Hall in Norfolk, the residence of Walpole himself. His older associate, James Smith, who remodelled Dalkeith Palace for the Buccleuchs and built Drumlanrig for the 1st Duke of Queensberry, probably did more to develop neo-Palladianism in practice. Seeking to re-capture the austere purity of ancient Roman styles, and explicitly rejecting the overbearing grandeur and excessive formalism of the French and Italian Baroques, this distinctively British architectural movement was widely applauded by influential commentators like Addison, Shaftesbury and Lord Burlington.

Essentially reformist in its search for a simpler and more authentic neoclassicism, and chiming particularly well with Scotland's contemporary experiences of growing cultural self-confidence and urgent national re-definition in the wake of Union, this movement soon produced the greatest architectural dynasty in British history, founded by William Adam, a Kirkcaldy builder. In the mid-1720s he completed a landmark neo-Palladian property, Mavisbank near Loanhead, as a retreat for Sir John Clerk of Penicuik. As a versatile thinker in his own right, whose unpublished poem 'The Country Seat' (1725) explored the purpose of the modern proprietorial residence, Clerk was actively involved in the design (as his heir Sir James also helped design Penicuik House in due course). A staunch Whig Presbyterian, Adam was a favoured contractor with those in authority: Fort George in Inverness-shire, the gargantuan post-Culloden complex, was his most striking government project, the plans of Inverary town for the Argylls the largest private commission. But his residential works also contributed greatly to the mature realisation of the Palladian style in Scotland: a partly executed near-contemporary plan for the remodelling of Hopetoun House for Clerk's friend the 1st Earl of Hopetoun; Haddo House in Aberdeenshire, built in the 1730s for the 2nd Earl of Aberdeen; and particularly the exuberant Duff House in Banffshire, constructed before 1743 for one of Scotland's coming generation of parvenu proprietors, William Duff of Braco, subsequently 1st Earl of Fife, who ultimately refused to meet the full expenses, embroiling Adam in protracted and ruinous litigation.

The later Adams — John, James and above all his second son Robert — were able to benefit from the accelerating confidence and commercial success of Scotland's propertied elite (and, increasingly, from ambitious town councils such as Edinburgh's) as they sought to push neo-classicism further towards its conceptual limits. Hopetoun was an early and successful project for the partnership, a further remodelling for the 2nd Earl during the 1750s

which finally completed Scotland's grandest eighteenth-century aristocratic palace (fittingly for the post-Union age, it was the home of a family whose roots lay not in the warrior medieval nobility but among ferociously competent Scots lawyers). Robert was himself an Edinburgh graduate who subsequently designed the university's majestic new precinct on the South Bridge. He was a friend of Hume, Smith and the younger Ramsay, as well as, like Burns and Scott, an active freemason. He also became the intellectual driving force behind the 'Adam Revolution'. Using his experiences on the Grand Tour, from which emerged what is effectively his manifesto, *The Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalato* (1764), he added greatly to the innovative character of British neo-classicism, thereafter selling it successfully to English as much as to Scottish patrons.

Robert's architectural vision encompassed a range of residential features suited to the emphasis on politeness and sociability which characterised the mature Scottish Enlightenment. Differentiated and increasingly imaginative room designs were pursued to better serve distinct social functions. Airy but cleverly equipped libraries allowed clients to flaunt their intellectual interests — notably at Harewood House in Yorkshire. Carefully designed drawing-rooms and stunningly decorated dining-rooms, in which Adam co-ordinated work by famous associates such as Angelica Kauffmann and Thomas Chippendale, facilitated the sort of structured exchanges which modern people, their expectations moulded by Addisonian precepts, considered so necessary. Gosford House in East Lothian, built in the 1790s for the 7th Earl of Wemyss, was the consummation of an unparalleled career in country-house building, with its extensive social facilities and distinctive classical touches (notably a Venetian window echoing its designer's youthful visit to Split). Rivals like Robert Mylne, whose works included Pitlour House in Fife for the soldier Philip Skene in the 1770s, could scarcely compete with this winning combination of business acumen, strong connections, design ingenuity and deep awareness of the social and cultural environment in which his physical structures would be situated.

By the end of the century the Adams, still closely in touch with wider intellectual developments, were participating in the perceptible shift in late Enlightenment aesthetic preferences. A more imaginative way of thinking about national identity through a close appreciation of history had gradually emerged. In creative writing this was marked by the Ossian phenomenon and later by Scott's evocative balladry. But sentimentalised historicism as a cultural mode also produced two major architectural developments. First, it stimulated even more inventive gestures towards classical models, culminating eventually in the Greek Revival, replete with fluted Ionic and majestic Doric columns, which would make Edinburgh truly 'the Modern Athens' by the 1820s. Opposing the Grecian, though stemming from the

same tendency towards exaggerated historical referencing, was the increasing immersion in pseudo-medieval Gothicism, what Mark Twain subsequently derided as 'the Walter Scott Middle-Age sham civilization', supposedly the authentic re-creation of Scotland's own distinctive physical heritage.

Neither fashion should be dismissed as merely superficial. The Grecian, typified by properties such as Broomhall in Fife, built in the late 1790s by Thomas Harrison for the 7th Earl of Elgin (whose subsequent notoriety rests on his purchase of the Parthenon frieze), was closely related to the flowering of serious Greek historiography in Scotland at the hands of men like Walter Anderson, minister of Churnside in Berwickshire, and John Gillies, a private scholar and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, whose *History of Greece* (1786) earned him the coveted title of Historiographer Royal after Robertson's death. Such studies fuelled the burgeoning conceit that the intellectual achievements of Edinburgh and their political triumphs within Great Britain meant that the Scots were indeed entering their own glorious Athenian age: as Robert Mudie, an early nineteenth-century cynic, scoffed, it had seemed for a time that Dundas himself was 'the express image of Pericles'.

The Gothic, conversely, was the realisation in battlements and turrets of the growing fascination of scholars like Pinkerton and Stuart with Scotland's medieval history and putatively Germanic origins. Inveraray, begun in 1744 for the 3rd Duke of Argyll, turned out to be the first of many castellated modern residences. Others eventually included Douglas Castle in Lanarkshire, an Adam production for the 1st Duke of Douglas; Oxenfoord Castle in Midlothian, his project for the lawyer and historian Sir John Dalrymple; and the superbly situated Culzean Castle, a substantial Adam rebuilding for the 10th Earl of Cassillis. Eclectic in composition, and often skilfully mingling neo-classical with Gothic, they articulated the yearning for a distinctive national cultural identity, securely rooted in the historical past, which was so fundamental to the last phase of the Scottish Enlightenment.

There are, as Twain wryly observed, many ironies about this excessive fondness among Scotland's late eighteenth-century elite for manifest heritage, fashionably if implausibly rendered as an ivy-covered mock-baronial fastness or pristine Athenian portico. It came as, seventy years after the Union, an independent Scottish polity was finally passing out of living memory; as the elite's own culture was being transformed by connections with England and with the European Enlightenment; as the onset of full-blown industrialisation was altering the very fabric of Scottish society. Most interestingly, the Gothic and the Grecian, striving desperately to re-attach modern Scotland to recognisably medieval or ancient European antecedents, emerged just as the country's links with the non-European world were

attaining a scale and sophistication of which, before 1707, few could even have dreamed. Scotland's architectural vocabulary may have been becoming increasingly ersatz. Yet nothing at this time was more real or more immediate than the Scots' deep immersion in the cultures, societies and economies of North America and India. It is to that remarkable eighteenth-century experience of empire that we must now turn.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Empire

By the end of the century Scotland's place in the wider world had been transformed. Closely involved in Britain's commercial and military empire in North America and India, and in its post-1763 dominance over other European powers, the Scots were prominent as soldiers, traders, administrators, adventurers and settlers; they were doomed also to play a prominent role in the debacle of 1775–83 when the American empire disintegrated. At all times the Scots' relationship with imperialism was reciprocal. They helped make and mar the British empire (and significantly, from the time when Sir John Oldmixon published his *The British Empire in North America* the year after the Treaty of Union, it was rarely described merely as an English empire). Yet their politics, society and economy, their very identity and self-perceptions, were also affected by worldwide commerce and conquest. Nor was this all. The Scots' contribution to the empire after 1707 was truly distinctive, not least because their earlier experiences had been so very different from those of the English.

#### Migrants, mercenaries and the will to empire

Since the later middle ages, overseas knowledge had been relatively extensive in Scottish society. Ambitious individuals had been a constant export to France and Italy and, since the Reformation, to the Low Countries and Germany; many had returned home familiar with foreign lands. Others, by professional choice or deterred by the threat of religious persecution in Scotland, remained overseas, carving out successful careers as part of