

CHAPTER 1: CHILDHOOD (1919 - 1928) © H H Thomson Estate 2014

Beware of displaying that diamond called the truth. Its many facets flash brilliantly in varying lights and are seen from diverse angles. Some acute; some obtuse; some false. Personal reflections on one's past are as valid as any are likely to be-1.

FACET ONE

The first memory of the big wide world was thus, as I recall.



III. 1: Hugh Haldane Thomson

This is a big house where I live. There are other people and they are very big too. One of them has a round piece of glass grasped in one eye. He also has a white ring round his neck, just under his chin and he always smells of smoke. He is my father.



III. 2: The Rt Rev. George Thomas Thomson

None of the others are as clear as he is. Except for the one in a white apron who comes in and out and puts food on a very white table. She is very kind. But above all there is 'Duthac'. He is a special black dog and he runs about with me and plays. I love Duthac. But when he makes the carpet wet he is sent out to his kennel which is outside at the back of the house under a very high tree which waves about in high winds like a magic wand. Sometimes the wind howls when it is blowing very hard and the rain comes in squalls which rush at the window panes as if they were trying to get in. Outside in the dark, the night is noisy with sharp cracks of thunder and bright with flashes of fiery bright lightning. I remember once there was a very big storm.

I wasn't frightened. But I knew that Duthac was out in his kennel and that he would be shivering. When no-one was looking I crept out into the dark night and pushed my way into the kennel with him. So that he would feel better. When I was safe inside I slid the door of the kennel tight shut. It was quite a big kennel and we were both quite small really. The noise of the storm outside grew worse and worse and it was soon late at night. Even although it was pitch black we were lovely and warm and cosy inside the kennel. After a little I tried to open the door but it was stuck. So I curled up with my friend and we went to sleep. That was where they found us in the end. What a fuss they made - that was not the only time they made a fuss.

Another time was when I threw away my red ball. Right over the high garden wall. Somebody gave it to me as a present. So it was mine. It must have been a birthday not a Christmas present, because the grass on the front lawn was quite brown and also it was dry and dusty in the garden shed. I am sure of that because that was where I went on my own to hide. I ran away for ever. I wasn't going to come back. So everybody would be sorry. I had thrown away my red ball. I hadn't wanted to do that. Not really. Not even in order to be good and kind.

That was the trouble. I knew I was supposed to be good and kind because the other little boy didn't have a ball or anything else: because his mother was poor. We were all standing in the garden and it was a sunny day. The little boy and his mother stood in front of us and just stared at the ground.

'Why don't you be good and kind and give your ball to this little boy? You have other things to play with and he has nothing at all!'

That was what my father said.

That other old man was there too. I knew him as Grandfather. I called him Granfa. He didn't say anything. He had a white ring round his neck just like my father's one. Anyway that was the moment when I decided to throw away my ball. Over the wall which surrounded the vegetable garden. Then no-one could have it. Then, when I thought there was nobody looking, I ran away.

At least I didn't run away exactly. Instead I found my way to the garden shed at the foot of the garden, by a secret roundabout route². It was one of my favourite places for hiding. I liked the little stacks of empty clay flower pots and the balls of twine; the forks, the hoes and the spades and other garden tools and things; especially the barrow which had a sliding piece at the front which my father could take out when he wanted to tip out the rubbish into the midden. Usually it stuck. There were onions hanging from the rafters and a big sack of potatoes with the top rolled down all round so that the cook could easily pick some out for lunch. The sack was under a tiny window through which I could look out on the roadway, which was sort of down a bank, below. Best of all there was my secret hiding place in the far corner of the shed. That was behind an old door which leant against the far end wall. There were some empty potato sacks lying on the floor behind it. They were dirty and musty but I could squeeze in and sort of lie on them like a bed. That's what I did. I must have fallen asleep.

Next thing I heard voices calling my name... 'Haldane, *Haldane*... Where are you?' Over and over again. I peeped out of the shed. I thought that my father and Granfa must be playing hide and seek. They were searching here and there amongst the raspberry and the gooseberry bushes. Even between the rows of potatoes and cabbages and the flower beds near the back of the house. So I withdrew into the shed again and hid behind my old door. I was quiet as a mouse, but I expected them to find me in the end. Very soon

they did look into the shed. They didn't see me. But it was only hide and seek so I wasn't frightened. I stayed where I was.



Ill. 3: Manse Street today with St Andrew's Church at the end and its former glebe to the left (from the internet)

Later on I heard voices and heavy footsteps out on the road. When I peeped out of my little window I saw my father talking to a very big man. He looked very important and he had on a special big hat with shiny pieces in different places and he wasn't smiling. I knew he must be the policeman because I had seen him in the town when I went trotting along with Dad and Duthac to collect the newspaper. Now I was frightened. I didn't know what to do because I knew he might be angry with me because I had thrown away my red ball. I wasn't good and kind. That was the trouble.

I crept back into the house and hid behind the big chair in the room called the study. It really was a big chair. My father always sat in it. It had big sort of ears on it and often Dad's head was hidden behind them and all you saw was clouds of smoke coming from his pipe and only his elbows stuck out over the arm rests. Suddenly the maid came into the room. She always wore an apron so that I knew who she was. She cried out loud... 'Oh. There you are!' and burst into tears and hugged me so that I almost couldn't breathe. So that was alright. I don't know where my mother was. But that often happened.

My mother was always sick. I knew that because I was taught to pray to God every night to make her better. Prayers are always at bedtime. Kneeling on the rug, on the floor beside my bed. The bit about, 'please God make me good and kind' followed by 'God bless...' followed by everybody you could think of, in turn. There was always someone there to help me remember in case I left someone out. Prayers always finished up with, 'Please God make Mummy better'. I really thought He would. Maybe not tomorrow. Any time would do.

Once I was bouncing on the double bed before going to my own little room and I fell bang, crack and hit my head on the hot water bottle. The hot water bottle was shaped like a loaf of white bread without a crust but with a shiny brown knob on the top which the maid unscrewed to pour in the hot water from the kettle. The knob had quite a sharp edge and so I cut my head. It leaked a lot of blood. I yelled and yelled. Someone put brown stuff called 'eyedeen' on the cut 'to make it all better'. Instead it stung like a wasp. It was a long time before I stopped yelling. That night the fairies put a three penny piece called a 'ticky', under my pillow. I found it there in the morning when I woke up. But only after someone had told me about fairies and where to look for it.

I always had my own little lamp to see me to bed. It was called a pixie lamp. Made of brass; small and heavy on the bottom with a special little shade which was milky so that you could not see the flame burning on the wick, which was a pity really. At first I wasn't allowed to carry my pixie lamp in case I dropped it and set the house on fire. It was always turned out after the last person had said 'good night'. Then, if there were no clouds I would always watch for the stars through my bedroom window. Sometimes when I woke up in the morning the window was covered in glistening star tracks put there by someone

called Jack Frost. Somehow I never did see him doing it. It didn't matter how hard I tried to stay awake and catch him at it.

One morning when I woke up the window was all blocked with snow. It soon melted and I was able to see outside. Everything was covered in white. When I went outside I left foot marks wherever I went. So did Duthac. He was still quite small and he almost got stuck where the snow was deep. I soon pulled him out. We both got very wet and had to be dried out in front of the kitchen fire. When it was cold I wore a knitted white muffler with red tassels on its ends - it kept unwinding, falling off and getting left behind. It was rather a nuisance but I didn't mind. My red Tam o' Shanter (Tammy for short) was knitted too and matched the scarf. It was white with a red 'toorie-oorie' (tassel) on it³. I liked it very much.



III. 4: Haldane with his father at Tain⁴ in 1921, aged two

I sometimes go for long walks. Mostly with Dad and Dookie - that's a short name for Duthac, which means the little black one. Best of all I liked the walks with Granfa when he had a hole in his pocket. When we were safely away from the house on the country road, he would suddenly stop and look down at me with a look of surprise.

'Now then Haldane. I wonder if I have a hole in my pocket? Perhaps you should walk along behind me in case something falls out on to the road. What d'you think?'

I always agreed and he would walk off in front of me. To begin with it would be a box of matches, or his pipe or his folding-up penknife. Each time I would catch up with him shouting, 'Granfa! Granfa! You've dropped something. Look... here it is!' Then I would hand him the lost thing. He would look surprised and say 'Goodness, gracious... How ever did that happen? I must have a big hole in my pocket, mustn't I? Perhaps you had better watch out carefully in case I lose some money!'

Off we would go again. Sure enough, we hadn't gone very far when there was a little tinkling sound, a twinkle of sunlight shining on silver, and a tiny three penny piece appeared in the middle of the road.

'Well, I never!', Granfa exclaimed. 'That is a ticky for sure. I think you had better keep it. Don't put it in your pocket though. Hold it in your hand until we get home again. Just in case you have a hole in your pocket too.'

This happened several times that I remember. Each time I took my ticky home, clutching it tightly in my hand, I was always told by Dad to put it in a little red tin which looked just like the pillar box in the town where I posted letters if somebody picked me up and held me high enough to push the letters in. The tin box had writing on it and they called it my Post Office Savings Bank and kept in a drawer which I couldn't open.

It was fun going walks with Granfa but he wasn't always there, only sometimes. For instance one summer day when I sat down by mistake in a little ditch which ran along the bottom of the front garden. I had on a new pair of trousers and now my bottom was all wet. So I sat down on the lawn in front of the house. I edged myself along on the grass so that I could rub the trousers dry and then no-one would notice. I soon discovered that they were watching me, the grown-ups that is. They were laughing because I looked funny. Particularly with a green bottom. So I laughed too while someone helped me change my trousers.

The first other person I can remember was 'Fraser'. She was really Miss Fraser and I had to go along with Dad and call on her quite often because she had been very kind. We had stayed with her when I was first brought to Tain when I was very, very tiny. We stayed with Fraser in what was called a boarding house. She



III. 5: The young Ena and Haldane

told me that there was someone else at that time who was very special and looked after me and loved me very much. She was called Ena but I didn't remember her. She wasn't at this house called the Manse, at the time Dookie was there when we used to go for walks.

We went away three times. Once to a place which I called Boat of Garden because that is what the name sounded like. That is the time when I also remember seeing a train for the first time. We were standing on a bridge and the train was coming from behind us and suddenly, WHOOSH!, up came a cloud of smoke, right in front of our faces as we stood looking over the wall of the bridge. It was very exciting, but we

couldn't see it again because there was not another train coming that way for a long time and we had to go home.

Another time we went to a farm. There were lots of animals, cows, horses and sheep as well as chickens and ducks and turkeys. There were people too, called Budge, who had a boy called Jocky⁵. He was bigger than me and he had red hair. They had a donkey and they put me in a sort of basket seat high up on the donkey's back and strapped me in. Something went wrong and the next thing I was hanging upside down under the donkey. It didn't kick me or anything and I don't believe I cried. Everybody else laughed because it was funny. I didn't like Jocky Budge after that. We never went there again, although what I liked most was the smell of the animals - especially the cows and the horses.



Ill. 6: One of Haldane's farm pictures

The third time we went away was much the best. Never before had I slept somewhere else that I remembered. All sorts of things were loaded on a horse and cart - a long sort of cart with four wheels and sides that came off if you wanted them to. There were chairs and tables; bedding and mattresses; trunks and suitcases; buckets and mops and open boxes of kitchen things like pots and pans; food like potatoes and onions, cabbages and carrots and even two chickens. On top of all this went the maid and the Man who was driving the horse. Most important there was the cat in a box and Duthac tied on with his lead so that he couldn't jump off and run away. I didn't mind being parted from my friend because they told me I would find him later on when we followed in a cab and were driven to Nigg. We did find him and he was



Ill. 7: Location of Tain, with Nigg⁶ to the south on the small peninsula south of Tain on the north side of the Cromarty Firth: the Nigg ferry crossed to Cromarty on Black Isle opposite. All were set in spectacular Highland scenery.

so pleased to see me again. On the cab journey I sat up on the driving seat beside the Man. Part of the way he let me hold the reins, but I wasn't allowed to crack the whip or anything because I was too small. But I still felt important sitting up there.

That was the afternoon that we arrived at Blackspring Cottage for the first time ever. Dad played his bagpipes. Dookie and I ran off together and explored the golf course and chased rabbits. On other days we went down to the sea and played on the sand or in the 'bents' (coarse grass) along the shore. I made sand castles, although somebody usually helped me, and searched for seaweed and pretty shells. Dookie scuttled about in circles in the water at the edge of the sea, then raced around in circles on the sand. Quite often he was in trouble because he came too close to us and shook himself so that we were covered in wet spray.

What a lovely time we had. It was my first summer holiday. My mother was there too. She sat in a deck chair most of the time. Out of doors in the shade of a giant wild rose bush which grew up the side of the cottage. I knew she was my mother because she always said she would love to come and play with me, but she never did. Somehow, I don't think she could. That was it.



Ill. 8: With mother, father and Duthac⁷ at Black Spring holiday cottage, August 1923

This was the first time I remembered Dad playing his bagpipes, outside the cottage, keeping time with his foot tapping on the ground. When he was inside the cottage he only played his chanter, or perhaps his violin which he called his fiddle. He didn't play golf at all because he had so much work to do. Work meant that he was forever reading books and writing on sheets and sheets of paper. When it was mealtime I would call him, or somebody would, and if he replied he said in a faraway voice...

'Yes, of course... Just coming.' Five minutes later someone would call out again.

'Come along George, the food is getting cold!'

'Alright. Just coming... Why didn't someone call me? I'm writing a sermon.'

He was always like that even long after we left Tain.



Ill. 9: Playing the bagpipes at Blackspring Cottage

Blackspring cottage at Nigg was not all that far from the Manse in Tain, six miles perhaps? On that first occasion in 1923, Haldane from Tain in Ross Shire and Mary from Orpington in Kent⁸ met for the first time -but to this day neither of them remembers that occasion, nor ever will. He was four and she was one and travelling on her father shoulders when they first met. That's what they told the two of us many, many years later when I was once again holidaying at Blackspring Cottage at Nigg in 1938, now aged 19.



FACET TWO

The following year when I was five we moved away to another country parish and home became a different Manse. I don't remember the journey. I suppose we must have gone by train. What I do recall is sitting in a horse drawn cab on the way from a railway station to the new Manse. The cab smelt all funny inside; of leather and polish and sweaty horses. You could look out of the window and watch the wheels going round and listen to the gritty sounds made by their iron rims as they turned on the metalled

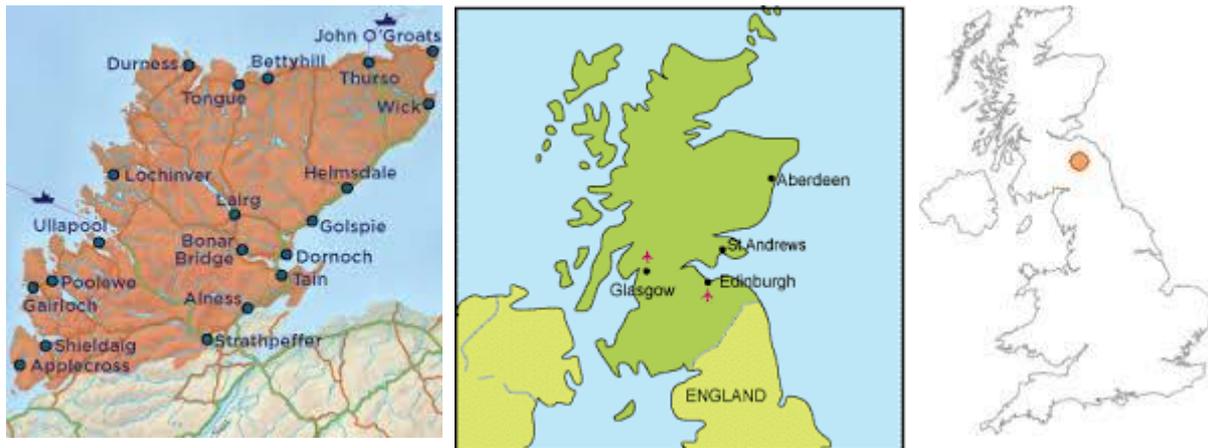


Ill. 10: St Boswell's Church (left) and Manse (right)

roadway. All the while there was the clip...clap, clip...clap of the horse's hooves making music for the journey. Sometimes the driver cracked his whip and shouted out to the horse. The harness jiggled and slapped all the time. I wasn't allowed to sit up with this driver which was a pity.

The new place was called St. Boswells. They said it was on the Borders, but still in Scotland. From my new bedroom window I could see the village of St. Boswells which was quite near. There beyond the village the three Eildon Hills stood gently on the horizon, all in a line. They were a long way off, or so it seemed to

me. There were no houses next to us, except for Benrigg where Miss Pringle lived. The huge house stood in its own grounds with a high wall around it. Twice I went there alone for tea. Miss Pringle was a very old lady but she was very kind and allowed me to come into the grounds in the autumn to pick up the best chestnuts which always fell behind the wall inside her grounds. Other than Benrigg there was only the glebe, the church and the graveyard and woods immediately around the Manse. But there were lots of trees and birds of all kinds including game birds so I didn't mind when for most of the time there were no people around to talk to.



Ill. 11: St Boswell's was on the Borders with England, not far from Edinburgh: Aberdeen followed next

By now I had learnt why a collar was put on a dog. Dookie was a fully grown black Labrador so he had to wear one. It had a shiny plate on it which said 'DUTHAC - The Manse' so people would know where to take him if ever he was lost. That wouldn't happen, I was sure, because we would always go for walks together and play at hunting games. Dookie and I soon began exploring. At the beginning there was always somewhere new. First we discovered the garden in the front and round one side of the house whose front was covered in dark green ivy which hid lots of sparrows' nests. There was a lawn in the front and a huge fir tree like the one in the garden at Tain. It used to talk to me particularly at night - just in whispers, if it was summer time, but with a roaring hoarse voice if there was a winter storm. Then the windows would rattle every now and then as if they were trying to answer back.

The drive which led up to the front of the house was covered in deep gravel and there were flowering bushes all along one side called "roddies". They were good for hiding in; sometimes you could surprise a rabbit there or find a thrush or a blackbird's nest. The mother bird would just sit. Ever so still. Never a move, pretending she couldn't be seen. So I pretended too and crept away as quietly as I could. It was always Dookie who upset everything; rushing about swishing his tail because he was having such fun. He was quite big now because he was over two years old when we came to St Boswells. Dad said he was very well bred and that was his trouble but I didn't care because for me he was just my best playmate who was black curly haired and warm hearted. You could tell when he was happy because he could hang his tongue out of the side of his mouth and smile. Often when he barked he was laughing. We went exploring more and more as the years went by.

There wasn't only the garden round the house to explore - where there were flower beds and roses and shrubs - there was the big walled vegetable garden with its own garden shed, where all the tools were kept, in one corner. It never became a special place like the one in Tain because we found other much better hiding places. There were apple trees with their branches spread out along the inside of the walls.

I soon discovered that they were mostly 'cookers' and so sour they weren't worth pinching. Still even if they made your face screw up so you had to spit out the half chewed mouthful, you still had to throw away the pulp and core. That way nobody would find bits and pieces of apple or know that you had been there at all.

The Manse itself was huge and rambling. It had lots of rooms. Especially attics right at the top of the house. They were occupied by Lizzie the cook and the housemaid. I was allowed my very own bedroom on the middle floor. It had a fire-place which normally didn't have a fire burning there because that was too dangerous for a little boy. Instead, in winter, I would have my own hot water bottle, a rubber one which was wobbly and dark brick red. It had a woollen or a flannel coat on so that it would not burn me if it was too hot to begin with. Even so, the starched sheets were bitterly cold when you slid into bed in the winter - even if you rubbed your legs up and down as if you were running. As well as putting your head under the bedclothes and puffing your breath at the same time. One very wintry Christmas when there was snow on the ground, I was allowed a fire in my room as a special Christmas treat so that I could watch the fire fairies dancing up the chimney until I fell asleep.

I spoke to the fairies in whispers and they crackled and flickered in reply. As they danced so the firelight cast pretty echoes on my bedroom walls and reflected dainty shadows through coloured paper streamers put up round the room. One of these unfolded paper chains dipped along the line of the mantelpiece, pinned on to it at either end with tacks. I happened to notice a piece of wood, just a large splinter really, sticking out of the fire at the bottom of the grate. I got out of bed and when I pulled the splinter out of the grate, it was smoking and slightly glowing red, but I didn't think that it was really burning. So just to try I let the hot end touch the streamer in front of the mantelpiece - at the bottom, where it dipped. I was truly shocked when the streamer started smouldering and terrified when it parted in the middle and the two ends fell away and burst into flames, one at each end of the mantelpiece. I yelled out for someone to come quickly and fortunately they did. There was a horrid smell of nasty catchy smoke but they beat out the remainder of the flames and in the end I went back to bed. The maid swept up the ashes in the morning, but I was never again allowed to have a fire in my bedroom. No wonder.

Besides the drawing room which we never seemed to use unless there were guests or visitors, there was Dad's study where there were hundreds of books and clouds of tobacco smoke. Then there was the dining room down some steps. I started to learn how to set the table for lunch, but I didn't do it very often because I forgot. My special job, after lunch, was to take the brass crumb tray and brush up the crumbs off the table cloth with a very special brush which was curved like a sickle. The brush had lovely soft whitish bristles which didn't hurt the tablecloth which was made of white starched linen with a faint pattern on it. They told me that the best tablecloth had 'come down' from White Grannie.

This Manse at St. Boswells where we lived was really like the edge of the world. If you went out of the kitchen door past the larder there were lots of other out-buildings shaped like the letter 'L'. Most important was the laundry which had a huge tub with a fire under it for boiling the sheets and pillow cases; the mangle was in there too - a big one with hard white rollers that squeezed so tightly that the maid could hardly wind the handle even when she used both hands. Alongside the wooden tub she kept a short wooden pole which was all furry at the ends as a result of being constantly dipped in boiling water. She used to prod and stir and lift and turn over the sheets until they were clean through and through and

ready for the mangle. In the winter it used to get lovely and warm and steamy in the laundry. You couldn't see across the room sometimes but it didn't matter because it was better than being outside in the frosty air.

Then there were the other outhouses. An outside larder with flagstone shelves for storing things like apples or onions or a sack of potatoes; eggs pickled in water glass for cooking, kept for eating in the winter if the hens were no longer laying. There was a disused stable for one horse or pony and next door a coach house for keeping the Minister's 'trap'. They must have been for long ago because we had neither horse, nor pony, nor trap. Dad used a bicycle or walked on his two feet, which he called 'shanks pony'. In those days only rich people, some farmers, doctors and 'vets' owned cars. I knew all this because our village doctor was forever visiting my mother at the Manse.

He was called Dr Edwin Clarke and he lived in a house called by its own name at the edge of the village just before the village hall. His surgery was in part of the house and it always smelled of chloroform, iodine and disinfectant. He had a car. It was blue, had a round shiny nose in front, a 'dicky' at the back and was called Morris Cowley. All around the countryside he was known as 'auld stoor and stanes'. That was because most of the roads were pretty rough and as he went tearing past on call, he threw up a cloud of dust and stones. Mind you, he was a grown up but I didn't think that he was all that old. He never gave me a ride in his car. Whenever I asked him if he would he always gave the same reply...

'Young man, I am far too busy minding the sick and the infirm to start giving joyrides to the young and healthy'.

So that was that.

I didn't mind when Uncle Stocks came to stay with us. But I should begin by saying that Arthur H. Stocks was not a real uncle. He was a very old friend of my father. Before the Great War, it was explained, they had been at University together. What confused me was that they said they had been in the same year at the 'House', which I thought was rather funny at the time. Be that as it may, the fact is that Uncle Stocks who was an Englishman came to stay with us for several weeks at the Manse. When he did he always arrived in his own car, driving himself. He only came twice - and only when we were at St Boswells. On both occasions he arrived in a car called a Bentley. It was green and had shiny brass headlights; the engine roared with a deep powerful voice and the brake handle was outside the driver's door. I thought it was very beautiful and when I asked him if I could go out with him he said...

'Of course you can. Just the two of us! Then we can go jolly fast and nobody will be there to spoil our fun!'

Thus Uncle Stocks became my first living hero. I wondered if he might know about God, but I never did ask. Racing along in the Bentley he turned down the windscreen over the bonnet and left just the two little glass ones, curved like half moons. I didn't have goggles, which was a pity, but instead I pushed my face close up to my little curved screen in order to keep the wind out of my eyes. It was thrilling. We roared along at more than fifty miles an hour. When we returned to the Manse the radiator was too hot to touch at first and the smell of hot engine oil was very exciting. There were lots of dead bees and insects stuck in the radiator honeycomb.

Uncle Stocks often talked about Africa where he worked. He said all the people who lived there had black skins. I didn't really believe this. Up to then, I had heard about people called missionaries in Africa but I had never seen anyone who was black. Except for the man who delivered coal and he didn't count because he was only dirty black. When he had a bath he was white again. Uncle Stocks explained that his job was being a DO or District Officer and then becoming a DC or District Commissioner⁹ in a country called Sierra Leone in West Africa. A District Commissioner sounded a pretty important sort of person. To travel there and back he had to embark on a big ship which sailed between Liverpool or Southampton and the capital of Sierra Leone called Freetown. His stories about black people, some of them boys about my age, were fascinating. The boys he spoke about seemed to me to be very lucky... they had dugout canoes of their own called 'bum boats', and paddled out into Freetown bay and came alongside the big ships anchored off shore. Then if you were on the ship you could throw a penny or a ticky, or even a six penny bit into the water somewhere near them. Even before the coins hit the water the boys dived over the side of the canoe to catch hold of them before they sank too deep to be seen under the water. When they came up to the surface again the coin would be held between their teeth until they had squirmed back into their canoes and dropped them safely in the bottom for later on. At the same time they would look up at the donor high above and say 'Tank you, sah!' Then ask for another coin to be thrown over the side. Uncle Stocks said that I must remember that the water was always warm in the Freetown harbour and just right for swimming. The trouble was that there could be sharks in the sea and there were crocodiles in the rivers and mosquitoes everywhere. But I didn't really listen to the last bit. I was sure that one day I would go to Africa to see for myself.

Uncle Stocks used to spend lots of time talking to Mum while Dad was busy working in his study. I think that he liked her because he was sorry for her. But he never took her out in the new Bentley. After his second visit he never came to see us again. I did wish I had asked him if he prayed to God to make Christian better. Christian Isobel were my mother's names.



FACET THREE

The stage where I began to think that prayers don't work, or at least that mine didn't, came early in life. I could see that for myself. Dad and Granfa, not to mention my uncle John Hunter, all wore God collars almost every day of their grown up lives. I was able to ask them on several occasions why my constant almost ritual prayer, 'Please make Mummy better' never got any response, since she just went on being ill, I knew not of what. Not one of them, or so it seemed to me at the time, were of any help at all. It was always...

'The ways of the Almighty are beyond our ken... we must in our humility be patient.' Or,

'God in his wisdom will decree the fleeting passage of our time on this earth - for each and every one of us'. Or,

'We must have faith in His everlasting mercy and pray to Him for guidance and understanding in our times of doubt, for He will hear our prayers.' Or,

‘We must remember that God in his divine wisdom giveth all things in heaven and on earth.’

I took special note of, but made no comment on that last one. Instead I went and asked Lizzie the cook the same question. She could see and understand, on my level, that I was in no way satisfied with the answers to my prayers. But she did at least try to answer them instead of dodging about with words I couldn’t understand. Yet in the end, when I thought about it, she still gave much the same sort of reply.

‘Aye... Well you see... The guid Lord is aye awfy busy wi’ all oor prayers. We canna expect Him to give an answer right away. Just bide a wee. Aye, that’s it, just bide a wee.’ A long pause... a deep sigh. ‘I have nae doot that He Himself will ken fine what He has in mind.’



III. 12: With parents and paternal grandparents, including ‘white grannie’

On the whole her carefully chosen words appealed to me if only because they gave God an excuse for his tardiness. I had already begun to think that He badly needed one. Now I redoubled my nightly pleas and not only as I knelt by my bedside. But also in church at least twice every Sunday at both morning and evening services. Sunday school and reading bits out of the Bible. My one was small and leather bound with floppy edges to the covers. Granfa had presented it to me, suitably inscribed, on my sixth birthday. Besides all these solemn rites there were Church outings and picnics on the haugh or meadows alongside the river Tweed. There we had three legged, sack, egg and spoon and blindfold races, but I wasn’t allowed to go in for any that I was likely to win or even get a place... ‘It would not do for the Meenister’s son to win a prize’. So that left the most important thing of all open for me to conquer unimpeded. I was eight years old when I first left St Boswells. By then I had learned to read, like one possessed.

Dad of course wanted me to begin by learning Latin and Greek, because he said it was important to ‘have a good grounding at an early age’... whatever that meant. He did not want me to read for interest’s sake or for fun, because ‘that could come later’. This provided a rare occasion on which my mother came into the picture because she thought otherwise.

At first she read to me from the *Red Fairy Book*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Struwwelpeter*, *Winnie the Pooh* (et al) while I followed closely. By the time I got to *The Swiss Family Robinson* I read it by myself with help to understand difficult words. But it was Dad who taught me how to use Dictionaries. Almost without putting me off. I read because I loved reading and I was interested in what I read. Besides I didn’t have to learn the stories as if they were lessons. Easily my favourite was the *Swiss Family Robinson*. I kept wishing that I had brothers and sisters and a mother who was well and could do things. I was terribly sorry

that she couldn't and I was gradually becoming used to the idea that she never would. She did try. She showed me how to collect and save patterned silver paper (particularly off chocolates) by pressing them for ages in heavy books. Soon they were smooth and silky and beautiful. Wild flowers too - but they had first to be pressed in blotting paper until they were dried out. She taught me about poetry and wrote long poems herself. But that was not so interesting.

Meanwhile I was beginning my search for an island of my own. My island would be far beyond the village and the glebe in a place called somewhere else... where I would be free. This was before my reading covered *Erewhon*, *Coral Island*, *Shangrila* or *Gulliver's Travels* to name a few. To begin with I discovered a promised land called Mainhill which would suffice almost for a child's lifetime.



FACET FOUR

The first occasion I went to Mainhill was momentous. The congregation had gradually made its way out of the church after the morning service. The parishioners were standing about in restless groups talking their heads off, many of them angling for an opportunity to have a word with 'the Meenister', that is to say, with my Dad. Meanwhile, being a harvest festival service, all the big wigs, the important people, like Earl Haig from Beamerside, Sir Henry Fairfax Lucy from 'the Estate' and Miss Pringle from Benrigg had made their way to their cars and headed home for Sunday lunch. The next thing I knew I was being asked by my mother who must have made one of her rare appearances at church, if I would like to go with two ladies to have lunch at their farm. They were called Miss Mary and Miss Madge Thomson. They were obviously sisters and quite old grownups. At least as old as Dad. Clearly there were other Thomsons. Not aunts or relatives or anything like that. I didn't mind. I said, "Yes please", and walked away with them to the churchyard gate.

'Well, Haldane,' said the older one, 'We are rather old fashioned, I'm afraid. We still come to church in a horse drawn cab. I hope you won't mind?'

'That's alright' Pause. 'May I sit up front with the driver, please?'

I was learning quickly. Childless spinster ladies, whatever their age, are inclined to give in quite easily to the earnest wishes of little boys with apparently good manners. So, away we went clip-clopping through the edge of the village past the cricket ground and the neighbouring hunt kennels, then hard right under the railway line. I felt very proud of myself sitting up there looking around the countryside. I didn't hold the reins that first time. I just sat there lofty like a prince as we bowled along the dusty metalled road past the village 'green' and cricket ground; turn right under the railway bridge and right again at a small row of cottages. Along an even dustier single track private road which ran close by a farmstead over a burn and finally up a short gravelled drive to a big house nearly at the top of the hill.

Mainhill. It would take many visits over the years to learn all about Mainhill¹⁰. To become familiar with every downstairs room in the house. From the drawing room, the preserve of the two sisters preserved solely for entertaining visitors to the big living room-cum-dining room, where brothers and sisters alike gathered for mealtimes and which the menfolk called the parlour. Further afield to the huge old fashioned kitchen with its double 'range' for cooking. The larder and the dairy with its dishes of cream, baskets of

eggs, butter churns and all the paraphernalia that went with them. Above there was the sewing room usually referred to as the back parlour which was hidden away at the end of a long passage at the back of the ground floor, looking out in the direction of the mill pond. This was the sole preserve of the two sisters. Their private place where they could withdraw and yet be about the business of household duties while at the same time well clear of their three bachelor brothers. They all enjoyed their separate seclusion in the smoke-laden atmosphere of the front parlour. Only at main meal times, prepared and cooked by the sisters and brought in by the maid, did the whole family gather in the big front room.

On my first visit to Mainhill I was introduced to the drawing room but went across the hall passage to have lunch in the front parlour. On that memorable first occasion all of this new experience, this new scenario, appealed to me enormously, took me over completely. For umpteen years after that first sighting the voyage of discovery would continue amidst this farming family encapsulated within its conservative Edwardian lifestyle. It would surely become the favorite of all my favorite homes from home. Here was true escape from all the worries of my nagging family world where life below the surface was neither simple, peaceful or uncomplicated. Unlike Mainhill. Here I could occupy myself the livelong day, without getting in the way; without fear or favour. On that first visit I only sensed these thoughts remotely in some secret undeveloped compartment of my mind.

The drawing room was a very bright and, to my young manse orientated mind, very ornate room. It looked out through a bay window across two beds of flourishing roses. Further below, over the vegetable garden and the burn. Further still beyond the row of cottages, unfolded many fields and wooded slopes, as far as the eye could see.

Inside the room the carpet was of a light colour, little decorated save round the borders and at the very centre. The sofa couch and the very correct drawing room chairs had loose covers of flower patterned chintzes. Crocheted antimacassars were laid precisely over their backs. In one corner was an upright piano and next to it a tall glass fronted cabinet displaying all manner of silver snuff boxes, napkin rings and oddly shaped spoons; amongst them stood mute carved ivory figures and exotic sea shells, reminders of strange and far off places. On every available level surface - small occasional tables, piano top and mantelpiece - were divers other ornaments... japanned boxes, miniature figures in china, as well as silver framed photographs rather faded in aspect peopled by women in long stuffy dresses and men in dull suits and choking winged collars. There were pictures on the walls - oils and watercolours - depicting idyllic rural scenes such as meadows with abundant wild flowers; cattle, horses and farmyard scenes; one of the hunt in full cry and the fox in sight. Over the fireplace in a place of honour hung a framed sampler with the words 'The Lord is my Shepherd' in the centre and surrounded by a necklace of entwined summer flowers. On the shelf in front of the bay window was a solitaire board with a splendid parade of glass marbles displaying every colour of the rainbow.

In front of the fireplace, protected when not in use by a polished brass fire guard, stood a folded mahogany cake stand. On several subsequent visits I would find it standing erect. Without fail the top shelf was reserved for a plate of cucumber and/or tomato sandwiches. The second level would display a plate of golden shortbread and the third and bottom level a plate loaded with slices of Selkirk bannock, each one buried in a thick layer of rich unsalted farm butter. In addition placed alongside the tea tray with its silver teapot and milk jug, best china sugar bowl and slops basin, there would stand a rich fruit

cake or 'black bun' flanked by a sliver handled cake knife. In winter there would huddle beside the bright coal fire, a separate hollowed dish with a tureen lid on top. This was guaranteed to house a cluster of gently oozing, homemade, hot buttered scones.

Here, then, was the luxurious sanctum to which the two sisters could withdraw entertain their respectable friends and visitors who had not perchance arrived directly from a cow shed, a hayloft or a flour mill with muck on their footwear and the aura of sweat in their vicinity. The only other member of the family who was ever invited to come into this den of civilisation was the eldest brother - and that rarely because he would be required to be shaved, cleaned and dressed up in his best market day suit before being permitted across the threshold. Nonetheless I soon discovered that this eldest brother was everywhere the unquestioned head of the family. Outside the limits of the drawing room, that is. His name was James, but he was always known and spoken of as 'The Maister'. If you are puzzled, just remove the 'i' and reveal his true status... The Master. The master of all he surveyed, of the house, of the farmland. In fact, in word and in deed. Which brings me to the front parlour, across the passage and into quite another world.

Here was the sacrosanct domain of the menfolk. Here they foregathered amidst the general fug of male companionship. A visible haze of pipe and cigarette tobacco smoke was an essential ingredient of its ambience. The long wide room may well have been aired for an hour every morning by the maid when the brothers were out on the farm but otherwise the bay windows were unlikely to be opened except in the height of summer. There was a wide deep fireplace in the middle of the far wall as you entered the room which was dominated by a long mahogany dining table, a carver's chair with arm rests at one end laterally supported by two dining chairs on each flank. Parallel to it and against the wall opposite the fire was a massive sideboard which contained drawers full of all manner of cutlery and china plateware. On its polished top surface, when not in use, stood all the attendant paraphernalia of a well appointed table. Giant ashets or serving plates with subtle hollows at each end for isolating gravy from the joint; bone handled carving knives and forks with flip up hand guards lay alongside sharpening 'steels'. There were powerful nutcrackers (brought into play only at Christmas time); two large three piece silver cruet stands, including vinegar and oil bottles; the mustard pot was a separate and dominant masterpiece complete with sturdy curved handled silver spoon. Finally there were miniature hurdles upon which to rest the implements when the Maister sat down, his carving duties fulfilled.

To the right of the fireplace stood the Maister's deep leather armchair. On the left was youngest brother Tom's less important seat. He was the one in charge of keeping the fire well stoked in winter time. This he did, but never competently judging by the frequent biting comments of the Maister, who was in any event seldom known to stoop to the luxury of words of praise. In another lesser armchair, which was backed into the bay window, sat George. He was the quietest brother of the three. Less brusque, more gentle and conciliatory in relation to his sisters. At least he seemed to appreciate their constant if well concealed longing for some elements of refinement within the ambience of a constricted and rugged farmhouse. Where on the whole there was little room for elaborate and tasteful decor or such social niceties as tone of voice, speech or appearance. Daily life was too arduous by far.

On that first visit to Mainhill I knew next to nothing of all this and suspected less. We sat round the long white linen-covered dining table for Sunday lunch, which meant that everyone was wearing Sunday best.

An extra chair was pulled in to the dining table, on the men's side. I was silenced to a great degree by the very presence of all these middle aged grownups. The menfolk proceeded to tease me. It was suggested amid laughter that I would never grow up big enough to be a farmer if I didn't start now by eating lots and lots of farm food. There followed huge helpings of roast chicken, roast potatoes, boiled potatoes, cauliflower, broad beans in white sauce and of course bread sauce and sage stuffing; the gravy was thick and plentiful and there was a basket of fresh cut home-made white bread for mopping up. This main dish had of course been preceded by a plate of mutton broth well fortified with carrots onions peas and barley. After the main dish followed an apple-crowned suet dumpling, toppled out of a huge basin and served with double cream and as much brown sugar as you cared to add. I tucked in nobly. Right then all I wanted was to grow up and be a farmer.

That huge meal behind us, the men (it was Sunday remember) retired to their chairs and took a look at the 'papers' before dozing off. None of which in any way meant that we, the Misses Thomson and I could not sit down to afternoon tea in the drawing room... at four thirty. Sharp. We did that in a modest manner, setting about the sandwiches, the bannock, the shortbread and the rich cake... in that order. There was no heading straight for the fruitcake. First you had to qualify. Otherwise it was bad manners. I knew that already from home training.

Finally before it became 'too late' I was sent home in the cab which was summoned specially for me. On my way rattling along the country roads I must have been thinking that, perhaps sometimes, God got it right after all. I had better keep in touch. I prayed very seriously that night - kneeling properly beside the bed and not under the clothes where it was warmer - beginning... 'Thank you God, for a lovely day and... most of all, God... bless Mainhill!'

It followed that these Sunday outings to Mainhill became more frequent as the rest of life went on around me. They ceased to be a treat. They were a critical feature of my very existence. It was many years before I grasped the underlying truth that I was the only child who ever did visit Mainhill, other than by chance. I too became a part of their lives, just as I was the Misses Thomsons' treat and part of *their* lives. As I was of the brothers - in a different way. More of a roaming pet puppy visiting the parlour rather than a useful working member on the farm.

I never took all this on board until much later when I had long since left St Boswells, many years behind me. Not in fact until the Mainhill Thomsons family began to move on, one by one, to the extended graveyard next to the ruins of an abandoned kirk and across from the same old manse, now a private residence.

The strange thing was that in the early days I never once missed Dookie when I was away living my other life at Mainhill. Just as well since there was nothing he enjoyed more than chasing sheep. Not that we weren't delighted to see each other again when I returned home to the Manse. Besides at Mainhill there was Danny, a liver and white spaniel, who slept in a large kennel outside the dairy at Mainhill but was allowed into the parlour during the day. He was supposed to have been trained as a gun dog. Gentle brother George explained to me that he was never likely to be any good as a gun dog because, the women in the family, his sisters Mary and Madge, spoiled the animal all the time and treated him like a pet. In addition Tom insisted that he was equally useless as a guard dog... 'He'll bark at his own shadow but lick the boots of a stranger!' was the way Tom put it. For my part I found him no help when I was hunting for

hen's eggs. All Danny did was frighten the hens off their nests. That put them off laying, or so said the dairy maid. The end result was that I was allowed to play with him as much as I wanted, just so long as I didn't bring him anywhere near the animals or into the farm steading.

Hunting for eggs was the first useful thing that I learnt to do on the farm. I became very good at it because, small and agile, I could crawl into all sorts of secret places where the hens used to try and hide their nests. In the the hay loft and the straw barn; in the horse stables and the cow sheds. Even in the big cattle byre where all the non milkers were herded. I wasn't allowed to go in amongst the cattle 'when they were in', because I would get 'ower much muck and glaur on ma bits'. Too much dung and mud on my boots which I would bring into the house having failed, as the menfolk never did, to remove the most of it on the cast iron scrapers outside either the front or back doors of the farm house. Anyway part of the learning curve included the inescapable truth that hens were unlikely to lay their eggs anywhere in the



Ill. 13: Two of the many birds' egg pictures in Haldane's collection taken later as an enthusiastic bird-watcher

byre, an arena constantly churned up by the trampling hooves of constantly defecating animals who shoved and jostled for position at feeding troughs set out at regular intervals. There was always the granary as a last resort but as the doors were normally 'on the sneck' to keep the hens from raiding the grain bins there was seldom a layer that found its way in there.

I also tended to include the feed store as a part of my search area not so much in the hope of finding a stray nest as to raid the bags of winter cattle feed which had locust beans in the mix. The beans were lovely and sweet if not so delicious as the rich black cattle treacle, called molasses by some people, but plain 'traicle' by the cattleman and he should know. To extract a good taster of this treacle without wasting it and leaving traces all over the granary floor it was convenient to slice a big 'swede' (turnip) in the turnip slicer. Then you could use one slice as a plate and hold it under the spigot of the treacle barrel in order to catch a blob or two for licking off at leisure. The trouble was it was very sticky and smears would find their way onto my jersey, never mind my face. But the sisters were never cross with me. Miss T might justifiably utter a single 'Tut, Tut' but Madge would clean me up in no time and wash my jersey too if there was time for it to dry.

The creepiest place on the whole farm was the wheelhouse. Just off the granary was this great big dank chamber where little daylight entered and a giant water wheel loomed vastly overhead. Its mighty frame seemingly just hovering there, as if listening to the trickle of water running idly down the sluice on its way to joining the burn which ran below the farmstead. Only once when I was there did the scene alter dramatically and the wheelhouse became a living moving thundering enterprise.

'Well, it'll aye be the threshin' the day! Awa doon and gie them a haun.'

But Tom, who could drop into the vernacular when he felt inclined, was not altogether serious. It was Jessie the dairy maid who gave me her hand and took me down to see what was going on. She was given clear instructions beforehand by Miss T which Jessie interpreted as ‘Ye mun hud on tae ma hand a’ the while...’, because she informed me, at the time of the threshing the granary was ‘fer oor fu’ o’ stoor an’ nae place for a bairn, forbye’.

All this excitement arose from the fact that Dad had to go away for a few days at the end of the summer in order to try and become a professor instead of being only a Minister. The sisters heard about this one Sunday after church had come out and asked Dad if I could be allowed to come and live at Mainhill for those few days while he was away in a place called Aberdeen.

Dad made no objections just so long as I undertook to ‘behave like a good boy’. (I don’t recall that my mother was living at home at the time. She had probably been sidetracked to Peebles [her childhood home]). Indeed he had agreed so quickly that I had no wish to provide any opportunity for him to change his mind. With angelic fervour I gave my promise to be good, on the spot. Secretly I thought that Dad might well be suffering from the effects of a bad bump on the head... having heard Dr Clarke say the previous day that he, Dad, should really ‘ca’ canny’ for a few days after his fall because he had a ‘slight concussion’. I was unsure what that meant. But what I did know was that Dr Clarke had been summoned for a good reason. A few nights before Dad had been out cross country running on a quiet country road and had been knocked down by a man on a bicycle. It was pitch dark at the time and an accident at that. Dad maintained all along that it was as much his fault as that of the cyclist. He just liked to keep in training as ‘he had been a Hare and Hound’ in his time. It did puzzle me as to how anyone could be both at the same time. Anyway the important thing was that it was harvest time and Dad was off to Aberdeen for a few days so that he could try to become a professor. So I was sent off to stay at Mainhill.



FACET FIVE

This was the first occasion on which I stayed overnight at Mainhill. I was taken upstairs by Miss T who showed me what was to be become known as Haldane’s bedroom on the first landing. Through the little lace curtained window I could look out across a grassy knowe (knoll) towards the farmstead which was always referred to by the menfolk as ‘the steading’. It was quite a grand room and was mostly used by Uncle Dan when he came down from Edinburgh. Later on I would meet him.

The following morning it was all so exciting! Walking across the knowe with Jessie I could see the dust billowing out of the granary where the carter was working at the top level of the building, forking the sheaves of corn from his horse-drawn cart into a blank opening. As he did so we could hear, almost feel, the great subterranean rumbling of the threshing machinery in the building down below him. When we finally walked back and round and down the slope in order to enter the granary from yard level, which was below the mill. Inside we watched myriad grains of corn cascading down narrow wooden chutes which were polished and slippery by years of use. There were great leather belts slapping round various pairs of wheels one of which was always bigger than the next. Up above us, through dusty gloom we could see and

hear the clanking, shuddering mass of the threshing machinery. At the foot of two adjacent chutes stood Tom. Covered in a thin film of dust he was hooking bags on to frames at the outlet points, so that there was always one at the foot of a spewing stream of grain. As the first bag was filling to the brim he would pull on a big lever thus closing that chute and switching the flow to the other, where an empty sack was already waiting. Meanwhile he would jockey the full sack across the floor to the platform weighing scales. There if he had time before the next bag was full, he would check the weight enter it on a label, then swiftly sew up the mouth of the sack with a big needle and a length of binder twine, label and all. If not, he would let the bags accumulate around the scales until he had 'a spell'... perhaps because they had turned the water of the mill wheel for a short time, for one reason or another.

Gosh it was exciting! I did want to help but Jessie wouldn't let go of my hand. Just then Tom looked across and saw us. 'Awa' wi' ye laddie', he shouted out above the din, 'ye've nae need here!' That was rather disappointing but we made up for it by finding a peeping place from which we could watch the water roaring into the wheelhouse shooting and splashing in cascades into the slatted buckets on the wheel itself, forcing it to turn round and round and thus motivate the huge driving shaft which shuddered and protested in its housings. Looking back into the granary we could watch the belt driven wheels turning the various stages. High up in the loft at the back of the building, sheaves of corn, the binding twine swiftly cut away, were being constantly fanned into the throat of the thresher. Fresh supplies of sheaves loaded from the stacks at the edge of the harvest fields kept arriving in heavily burdened carts heightened with ribbed sides and drawn by stamping, eye rolling Clydesdale horses, urged on by cries of encouragement from their carters who were almost trotting by their heads in order to help sustain their momentum.

By now I realised that everyone was involved. I had already seen Uncle Tom taking care of bagging the freshly separated grain into sacks. You could hear him shout an occasional instruction or bellow for someone to fetch more sacks. Another muffled voice else would call for sheaves to be fed in faster... or slower; more speed on the drive... or less. This was the Maister who was everywhere and in overall control, keeping an eye on the whole enterprise. Even topping up the supply of grease on wheel and shaft bearings. All the while the air was full of dust and corn husks or chaff.

When Jessie and I came out into the open again I immediately recognised the cattleman and the ploughman - everybody helps at the threshing - who were carting away the straw to the straw barn, making sure that winter bedding for the horses and cattle was made safe while the weather was still good. Only too soon we had to hurry back to the farmhouse. It was the middle of the morning and by midday it would be time to carry the food and drink down to the steading for the hungry harvest hands. Jessie would be more than busy lending her strong arms.



III. 14: Contemporary ploughing scene – a photo in Haldane's childhood collection

Up at the house there were scenes of feverish activity. The sisters, I always called Mary, 'Miss T' and her younger sister by her name, Miss Madge, were in charge of proceedings. But for the harvest dinner times they were assisted not only by Jessie and the housemaid but also by several of the women folk up for the day from the cottages, who rushed in and out fetching and carrying, doing whatever was required from peeling tatties to preparing and carrying loads of comestibles down to the steading. There were one gallon milk cans, some with milk, some waiting to be filled with tea; loaves of bread and white scones, still warm from the outdoor bread oven built on to the end of the laundry wall. There was a large chopping board two layers deep in thick slices of ham. Stuffed and tied into intestine skins were sausages and freshly cooked black 'puddins' made from pigs liver and innards, oatmeal and chopped onions. The colour came from pig's blood caught in bowls while Uncle Tom was supervising the sticking of a pig outside the cattle byre two days before. There were white sausages as well, called 'mealie jimmies', made largely of oatmeal and chopped onions and seasoned with sage, sitting beside bowls of unshelled hard boiled eggs.

At one point I saw the sisters being assisted in the cutting up and buttering of thick slices (hunks) of freshly baked white bread, stacking them on large ashets which stood alongside smaller dinner plates almost hidden beneath slabs of soft ripe yellow cheese. There was a large glass bowl of pickled onions, another with fresh onions skinned and cut in half; another with coarse ridged tomatoes. There were piles of fresh oatcakes already buttered and next to them combs of golden honey still in waxy combs which oozed gently on to the plate and had already had begun to attract the attention of stray wasps and bees. There was a square wicker basket with rounded handle so full of eating apples that it couldn't hold any more. To one side like disdained foreign intruders stood a huge ball jar full of sugar and a large sprinkling can full of salt - these last items plus tea leaves constituting the sole 'imported' ingredients. They were not produce of the home farm!

All these foodstuffs and more besides had to be transported from the house across the knowe and down to the farmstead a quarter of a mile away - and they were. The milk and tea cans travelled in pairs swinging gently at the end of Jessie the dairy maid's chubby arms. Much of the remainder on hurdles, one sturdy woman at the front and one at the rear. It still took several journeys. In the farmstead yard in the shadow of the blank stable wall now stood wooden trestles set in a line of twos with a couple of doors and other boards set upon them to make tables of a sort. There wasn't much in the way of individual plates or eating implements apart from china pint pots for holding tea. Everything edible was cut more or less to size and so travelled easily by hand to mouth. In any case, if he needed it every harvest hand would have his own folding cutty knife ready in his pocket.

When the Maister gave the word then George would close the main sluice gate from the millpond which was situated a quarter of a mile on the rise beyond the farm house. Then the mill wheel, starved of water, slowed down complaining to a shuddering dripping halt. The thresher wheels and belts ceased turning and silence returned to an accustomed level of all the usual sounds. Nothing more than the odd chicken clucking; lowing cattle, a horse stamping and shaking his harness or swishing at the flies with his tail; pigeons murmuring to each other in the 'doocot' above the barn; pigs grunting in the background of their styes. From every corner of the buildings gathered the menfolk shaking out dust, corn husks and chaff from every fold in their clothing; 'ringing' their noses to free blocked channels from suffocating snot. I noticed that even the brothers didn't pause to use a handkerchief to clear their noses when they

were out of doors. The horses, let loose from their harnesses, slaked their thirst at the water trough and had a nose bag tied on if they wanted it.

There were a dozen men or more, young and old, gathered round the trestle tables. They didn't talk a lot at first. They just ate vigorously and drank down great drafts of tea. I was not allowed to join them, much to my disgust, but instead was dispatched to the farmhouse to have my lunch. The same fare to be sure, but sitting up at table in the parlour in a proper manner along with Miss T and Miss Madge. Apparently, I overheard, the language of the menfolk left much to be desired and was not for my tender ears. 'Besides their eating habits are coarse and not to be copied'. Miss T could be very firm when she so wished - like a schoolteacher.

Another favourite pastime at Mainhill was to walk across the fields to the railway embankment and pick wild strawberries, but only if there was someone with me. This was a drawback because it wasn't often that there was anybody on the busy farm who had nothing better to do than 'mind the bairn while he picks wild fruit'. The railway track went right down one side of Mainhill and was one of the farm boundaries. The milkmaid told me that the railway ran from Newtown St. Boswells to Kelso and that if I crossed it they, whoever they were, would put me in prison for trespassing. Yet I noticed that when we did go together we picked strawberries on both sides of the embankment and no one came to arrest us. The wild strawberries were small and sweet and quite hard to find amongst the grass and wildflowers. Sometimes when I was out in the open a train would chuff past by and I could wave to the driver. Usually if he wasn't too busy he might wave back. I always longed to be able to climb into the engine cab and talk to him, but of course that never happened. So I just watched his train until the guard's van finally disappeared round the very last bend - either towards Newtown St. Boswells or Kelso in the other direction.

There were many other farm discoveries to be made. For instance the small flock of sheep grazing out in a far field were the concern of Uncle Tom. Whenever I had the chance I would walk out there with him and watch him tend his flock. Once I followed him, some way behind, chasing after his long stalking gait, seeing him in the near distance at the far end of the sheep field. I almost shouted first but instead stayed silent and carefully shut the open gate into the field - which he had left open... 'Never leave any gate open on a farm', they had often told me at home; even Granfa taught me that and he was a farmer's son. Only then did I run on to catch up with him, busy with his sheep.

'Did you shut that gate?' said Tom as I came running up towards him.

'Yes, of course, Uncle Tom!' I waited in vain for praise.

'Huh!... and how was it when you found it?'

'Well...' - daring much - 'You must have left it open... 'cos...' but I got no farther.

'Learn laddie, learn. On a farm you always leave awthing the way you find it - unless you yerself left it some way you should'nae have done. I was gaun tae finish by driving thae 'yows' tae the bottom field. That's how I left the gate open for ready! And mind I don't have a dog to help me.' His language was getting broader all the time so I knew he was angry. But suddenly he broke out again.

'Well then? Don't you just stand there laddie... Away with you and get yon gate opened and ready for me and the sheep!'

It made me so happy to be friends again. I scampered off down the field and pushed the gate wide open; that was not easy because it was not only heavy but sagging at the outside end. Soon after Uncle Tom came through with the twenty or so sheep, which was all they kept at Mainhill. Then he shut the gate himself. Danny the spaniel was not allowed to help with the sheep... 'That gormless tyke couldna get hisself through an open gate, never mind the sheep' was the general parlour assessment of Danny as a sheep dog. One day I discovered why they still kept Danny in the house at all, despite his reputation. No good as either gun dog or sheep dog or guard dog, he was certainly nobody's pet. But the fact remained he was a present from another Thomson brother, called Andrew always referred to as Dan. He was never a farmer, but lived in Edinburgh where I was born. He was secretly regarded as 'a bit of a 'toff'' by the Mainhill folk.

The first time I met Andrew Thomson was one Christmas time near the end of our spell at St. Boswells Manse. By then I had developed a pretty clear understanding in my own mind as regards all the Mainhill members of the Thomson family. James may have been the eldest and forever 'Maister' and addressed as such, but first and foremost in my reckoning was Mary Thomson who I called Miss T. Then there was Madge, Miss Madge to me. She was the younger sister forever a fleeting shadow moving silently, almost timidly, against the background of linen cupboards, kitchen and dairy, back parlour and dining table. Next in line were brother George and youngest of the family, Tom, who both enjoyed the 'uncle' prefix and were easily my favourites. That was until Dan appeared on the scene.

He was Uncle Dan from the first day he stepped very grandly out of the cab which brought him to Mainhill from the railway station at Newtown St. Boswells. I was there to meet him. Judging solely by appearances he was clearly a town man. In fact he had spent his entire working life in Edinburgh and was now the Manager of Dymock & Howden, a very superior India merchant and general provisions store in George Street - almost right opposite McGeorge's the best butcher in the city. In years to come I would discover his secret lair in a crowded office at the back of the store. There he sat in total command of all about him amidst a gorgeous atmosphere scented with freshly ground coffee, tea and spices intermingled with the fragrant whiff of his own very special cigars.

It was Christmas time and so Uncle Dan had brought every possible kind of present that you could imagine for his brothers and sisters - whisky, port, red and white wines, cigars and pipe tobacco for the men. Chocolates, Turkish delight, 'black bun', coffee and premier tea for his sisters. All these presents and much else besides were packed in two large shiny wickerwork hampers which were big enough to be used as laundry baskets. On top of their lids were iron rods which slid along through two loops and kept the lids shut down in position. Once Miss T and Madge had finished unpacking the hampers the top of the sideboard was loaded with all manner of Christmas fare.

There were packets of desert figs, dusted with castor sugar and hand packed in sandalwood boxes; soft sticky OK dates in long oval boxes decorated on the outside with lurid pictures of palm trees and smiling black faces. (There was one special date for me; still on its stalk and running the whole way down the centre of the top layer of dates). There were mixed nuts in profusion. Brazil nuts with terribly hard shells which had to be split open with nutcrackers; pistachios, walnuts, almonds, cashew and monkey nuts with big fat muscatel raisins mixed in amongst them. There were even crackers. When it came to Christmas dinner time all the household, even the Maister, pulled at least one and put on a paper hat.

All the other gifts for the Christmas table such as meat, potatoes, vegetables, bread, butter, preserves, all came from the home farm by way of the dairy, the larder and the kitchen. In particular the huge turkey, which everyone referred to by its proper title... the 'bubbly jock', as if he was a guest at the table and not the main dish. Uncle Tom was the provider of the mass of vegetables and potatoes which he preferred to bring up from the walled kitchen garden in his own time, as and when they were ready. Surpluses were expected to be either dried or preserved in bottles, jars or buckets according to their individual needs. That was women's work. Nothing must be wasted. At Christmas time fresh vegetables were largely a question of spinach, kale and sprouts.

When visiting Mainhill Uncle Dan as the oldest member of the family sat in what was normally recognised as the Maister's chair. The Maister moved across to Tom's chair on the other side of the fireplace. Tom turned round a dining chair and sat awkwardly, in the way of everyone else. Whenever he had anything to say Uncle Dan spoke solemnly and everyone listened without interrupting. He had carefully groomed silvery white hair and matching moustache which framed a pale skinned face lit up by rosy cheeks. He was as precise in manner as he was in appearance. I never saw him wear anything other than a tailored suit, a white shirt and a collar stiff with starch. A full knotted single colour tie was supported by a matching silk handkerchief peeping out of his breast pocket. His shoes, always black, were highly polished. I would find later on that at his power base at Dymock and Howden in Edinburgh he invariably wore in addition grey spats and a rose in his buttonhole. He seldom ventured forth at Mainhill -certainly no further afield than the rose beds at the front of the house. Certainly not to the farmstead. That was the Maister's territory.

Just the same it was the Maister who sat at the head of the richly provided Christmas table, his table. There, solely in deference to the wishes of Miss T, he mumbled a very brief grace before picking up his ivory handled carving knife from the miniature silver hurdles on either side of the enormous ashet. Swish... swish, swish... swish, weaving the murderous knife to and fro on the steel, he put a final edge on it. Then a two pronged fork in his left hand he held down the huge bird and set about carving and jointing it with calculating dexterity. With a large spoon he gouged out a dollop of stuffing and passed each helping, on one of the best dinner plates, to Miss T who sat at his right hand. She was immediately responsible for dispensing roast and boiled potatoes. Everyone helped themselves to vegetables as they were passed round the table. They then stretched out to help themselves to the extras. Gravy from an enormous silver gravy boat, bread sauce, blaeberry jelly, ground pepper and mustard, and of course a slice of hot gammon which had, without ceremony been carved up by George, at the sideboard. George also poured the wine. I wasn't allowed any. Not even a sip.

That didn't stop me eating what was, for my size and weight, a huge amount of delicious food, including a morsel of plum pudding ceremonially set on fire by the Maister before it was served. A modicum of sherry laden trifle deep in whipped cream came last for me, but I simply couldn't manage the Roquefort and Gorgonzola cheeses which followed that. All the men did... and the drop of malt whisky that came after them. There were no paper streamers hanging anywhere but there was a Christmas tree. Tom dug it up somewhere on the farm and put it in a tub in the bay window of front parlour. Miss T lit a number of little candles which were clamped to its branches. What a happy Christmas day!



FACET SIX

It must not seem that all my life worth living at St. Boswells was spent at Mainhill. Not so. There were other people to see and other places to visit. There were walks with Dad and Dookie into the village and along the haugh by the river Tweed. I was never allowed to go anywhere near the river alone. Not even with my dog. That was in case I fell in and was swept away to tumble head over heels down a salmon weir. It was on the banks of the Tweed that my other grandfather came into his element. As a salmon fisherman. In order to avoid confusion I had better first explain about the different grandfathers and grandmothers so that they don't become mixed up.

Grandfather Martin, who came up to Tain to stay with us and who had holes in his pockets was always known as Granfa. He was a Minister of the Church of Scotland and he was my mother's father. Grannie Martin on the other hand was always known in the family as Brown Grannie - because she had brown hair. They were quite old and lived in Peebles at the old manse which wasn't very far from the Hydro and looked over a big front garden and across the road at to the county cricket ground which was almost opposite. The railway line ran past the bottom of their back garden.

Grandfather and Grandmother Thomson were Dad's parents. Grandfather we called Grumpy, because quite often he was cross and tetchy and anyway it sounded quite like Granpa. Grandmother Thomson was called White Grannie, quite simply because her hair was white instead of brown like the other grannie. Grumpy was a civil engineer who had started working when they were building the Forth Bridge at the time he was a civil engineering student at Edinburgh University. They lived at 55 Morningside Park in Edinburgh.

Grumpy it was who showed me how to tie a fly and cast it out far over the water to catch a salmon. It took ages for him to catch anything. Besides I could not have a turn because I was too small to manage such a big rod. That didn't matter because I was perfectly happy playing about at the river's edge, pretending to be on my treasure island. I passed the time searching for round pebbles or watching the water wagtails or perhaps a sentinel heron. Sometimes, if I could find them, I caught minnows and sticklebacks in a tiny butterfly net and popping them in a jar with a tied on string handle. Dad was also allowed to fish the Fairfax Lucy stretch of water because he was the Minister of the Manse. He was always in his study in a cloud of smoke. In any case, during the appropriate season, someone from the estate, usually a gamekeeper, would call round at our kitchen door to deliver a salmon all wrapped up in a wickerwork container with its head and tail sticking out, one at each end. Sometimes there would be a brace of pheasants or partridges or rabbits - even a hare. Then Lizzie would make a special rich soup, strong, thick and dark brown with shredded pieces of hare meat in it. Everything came 'with Sir Henry's compliments'.

I liked the gamekeeper. Lizzie labelled him as "nae thing but coorse". True he was a rough looking man and bad tempered but he knew all about birds. I used to walk back with him across the glebe and sometimes on to the estate itself. He taught me to recognise the various finches and tits; how tell the difference between rooks, carrion crows and jackdaws or a jay from a magpie. I never forgot when the gamekeeper explained about birds.

As for Dad going fishing for salmon... well, of course he never did. He didn't know a lot about birds either apart from the lark, the robin, the blackbird and the thrush, which he preferred to call a throstle. The

only thing that took him away for fun was playing golf. And perhaps running alone like a hare and hound. He was for ever in his study, secluded in a cloud of tobacco smoke. It was forever, 'Don't bother your father... He's working', or 'You go and play, my son... I have work to do', or 'We'll see about fishing for salmon. Some other day, perhaps.' But of course 'we' never did.

Thus skulking in the grey outer margins of my thoughts was the shadow of unwelcome truth. My father preferred his study to any location in what was to him the outside world. Shut away alone, steeped in tobacco smoke and surrounded by his library of precious books, he was detached from the arena of perpetually conflicting interests and nagging worldly dictates. There in his study safely detached from the petty considerations of everyday family life he could confine himself, uninterrupted, to deep thoughts and ideas which, to my limited childish perception, no one else tried to explain. Not even God.

At some stage I was told by proud Granfa that Dad was deeply concerned about systematic theology when he went to Aberdeen University. Christian Dogmatics when he moved on to Edinburgh ten years after that. Christian dogma and systematic theology were to a small boy simply difficult grownups' words¹¹. Little more than that. And surely nothing to do with God I concluded, since my mother never got any better. Granfa had once told me that everyone prayed to God to make my mother better. All right. Then why was Dr Clarke forever calling round at the manse, ending up every time with long grown-up talks with Dad? In the study, with the door shut. In between she was forever 'going off somewhere (on her own) for a complete change' or 'coming back from a nursing home' or going away for a while to see a different, very important doctor in Edinburgh'. During these times Dad had to 'get on with his work'. None of which interfered with Dookie and I going out hunting for rabbits or seeking adventures.

Occasionally Dad would go and play a round of golf, which he always referred to as 'eighteen holes'. At first it was much too far for me to walk the whole way round but from the age of five I did have my own sawn off mid-iron. So I used to bang a ball about in the glebe until I inevitably lost it. It was all rough and no fairways. But in no time I could strike the ball a long way, for my size. Once I even hit one right into the churchyard which stretched around two sides of the church itself. That was naughty.

The church, the fulcrum of our lives on earth, was quite small, I suppose. Nothing like as big as the one at Tain or Peebles. Churchgoers went in past the vestry which was a pokey little room with a table, two chairs and some clothes hooks on the wall on which to hang the Minister's robes. Dad would put on his robes and then the beadle, who had been standing outside ready, would usher him into the body of the church. Then he would stand respectfully to one side while the Minister climbed the few steps up to the pulpit, which was in the centre of one side of the church. Once Dad had shut the bar behind him at the top of the steps, he would bow his head and say a short private prayer before looking up. From this high up position he could look down on all the congregation. Then screwing his monocle into his right eye he would look all around him. Lizzie the cook said that was because he wanted to watch out for the ones that fell asleep and later make them put more money in the collection bag on the following Sunday. I didn't believe that. Because when anyone was putting money into the red plush velvet bag, offered by one of the elders or passed along by a neighbouring worshipper, you couldn't see how much he or she dropped in - if anything. It was a secret. Lizzie had an answer for that. 'Maybes there's some fowk dinny bother tae let go... and maybes there's others with nae thing in their haund at the start off!'

Besides all that, sitting as I was in the manse pew right under and to one side of the pulpit, I couldn't see very much. I was surrounded by the high wooden sides of the pew which dully reflected the passage of the years. The to-ing and fro-ing of countless long gone worshippers with glove covered hands and cloth covered limbs constantly adding to the patina. The 'big pews', those for Earl Haig of Beamerside, the Fairfax Lucys and the folk from Benrigg were family stalls with seats on three sides, rather than long pews with a shelf in front. Those were reserved for the ordinary people in the congregation. Mainhill had a long pew. Only the sisters came to church.

There were special clinging smells associated with the church. Mostly of wood and dust mixed with polish and sometimes the hint of perfume from the loaded vases of flowers on the communion table. Overall the atmosphere was musty and airless, clinging invisible to unrecorded memories of the past. The beams in the roof trusses were clasped by metal straps to hold them firm. You could feel the vibrations trembling throughout the whole 'kirk' when the organist, Mr Gilchrist, boomed forth the voluntaries and the hymns of praise. The choir, about eight persons if they were all there, were seated behind the organist who played with his back to them and so to the pulpit on the opposite side of the church. The choir were all grown ups but I observed that the organist was able to see the back of their heads in his rear view mirror. Mostly he was watching to see what Dad was doing, whether reaching the pulpit or leaving at the end of the service. In this way he always knew when to start playing.

Frequently, especially when there was a long sermon, I would pass the time by counting window panes; the number of struts in the roof trusses or the number of cobwebs (there were not many) out of reach of the volunteer church cleaners. Best of all was examining the Songs of Praise board upon which the beadle, advised in advance by my Dad, had fitted into its grooves and in consecutive order all the numbers of the hymns and psalms for the day. It was great fun playing with the numbers. Seeing if there were more than two of any one digit and if so which one was lucky or unlucky? Adding up the separate digits to see if they came to a lucky number total, three for example. One Sunday, in search of diversion, I opened the front fly leaf of one of the bibles on the shelf in front of me and there I found inscribed the name of Christian Isobel Martin. Thus I discovered for the first time that this was my mother's full name before she became my mother. I had heard some references to Christian without knowing that that was her name. Not a blessing or something to do with Jesus Christ or prayers.

There was quite a variety of blessings. Sometimes they were added after the Bible lessons had been read during the church service. Like... 'May God add his blessing to this reading of his holy word'. Sometimes they were called 'saying grace' and were said before meals. It was almost impossible in any house I lived in during my childhood to start eating your meal until 'grace' had been said. It didn't matter how hungry you were or whether the food was getting cold, you still had to stand behind your chair and wait until somebody, usually Dad, standing at the head of the table said 'a few words'. Only then could you sit down at the table. No-one else could say it for him except Granfa if he was there and he used to say a very long one. He always seemed to take ages to finish.

Everyone had to be present when the moment came but frequently it was usually Dad himself who was last to appear. Having been lost in his study. 'I didn't hear any gong', was invariably his excuse. Then, one way or another, it was the Lord who was thanked 'for what we are about to receive' or, 'for the food which is set before us'. I often thought it wasn't fair he didn't give Lizzie some credit. Occasionally,

particularly Granfa, said grace in Latin which nobody else at the table could understand except for Dad. No doubt it was much the same message.

All the time during grace you were supposed to keep your eyes shut. No peeping until the 'Amen'. I discovered early on that it didn't make any difference whether you peeped or not. At Mainhill for instance Miss T always had to remind the Maister to say grace but that was probably only on Sundays. Then the Maister would mutter 'Thanks to God, Amen' and picked up his soup spoon as he sat down. No one except the sisters shut their eyes. I know that because I peeped. On weekdays, working days that is, there was no spoken grace but the sisters would bow their heads and whisper something before they sat down. But on the whole it was safe to say that wherever you were, there was always an 'Amen' to finish off. That gave the signal for sitting down and starting to eat, mindful always of the standard admonitions, called 'table manners'.

Don't drink with your mouth full'; 'Don't speak with your mouth full'. 'Don't leave scraps or pieces of fat on the side of your plate. Please remember that there are multitudes of poor people in the world who would be glad of such good food'. 'Always leave your knife and fork together in the middle of your plate when you have finished eating'. 'Remember... you tip your soup plate towards and your pudding plate away when using the proper spoon to tidy up the last of the soup or the juice'. 'Never lean your knife on the side of your plate and scoop up food with your fork as if it was a spoon', and so on and so on. Table manners was what White Grannie called them when she was lecturing me. That happened at almost every meal I ever had at 55 Morningside Park in Edinburgh where she lived, and I had many over the childhood years. Besides I don't really recall any one else taking care of that aspect of my upbringing.

Morning prayers were similar to blessings in most respects, varying only in style from place to place. At Granfa's manse in Peebles for instance, the household, including the servants, gathered in the dining room after breakfast. That meant that everybody in the house including any visitors plus the cook and the housemaid, even if they weren't 'living in'. The dining room chairs were pushed back to the walls all round the room. Then Granfa would launch into what always seemed to me to be an interminable prayer which covered every thing and every body in general terms. Finally he would wind up with a benediction which frequently mentioned 'the grace of God which passeth all understanding'. Mine included, to be sure.

At Morningside Park on the other hand I was pretty sure that there were only morning prayers when, if and because Dad was staying there at the time. Anyway wherever he was, Morningside Park or at home in the Manse, events followed the same pattern as at Granfa's. Except that Dad never prayed nearly so long. Indeed I would come to a conclusion over the years that his prayers tended to be brief, formal, detached and above all impersonal. The ritual was thus completed with dispatch rather than with meaning or thoughtfulness. But then to my critical mind so were his services in church which I found boring once we got to the sermons, which I am sure were way above the heads of most of the congregation, most of the time. Although perhaps that was what they expected. More than once one of his old parishioners was overheard remarking to the effect that 'Aye the Meenister was in grand fettle the day. Nae doot'. There the speaker would rest his case without further reference to either the text for or the content of the sermon.

On top of everything else there were two services to attend every Sunday. Prior to the morning service there was Sunday school for the young, who were generally older than me. At the evening service the congregation, like as not, would not number half a dozen. I began to wonder why we had to have the same old stories served up all the time. There was any number of interesting books to be found at home. Except that I wasn't permitted to read them. Not on Sundays anyway. Only the Bible. Frankly, although I didn't identify it at the time, I was bored. But never when cousins Kirsteen and Archie came to stay.



FACET SEVEN

Kirsteen was three years older than me and everybody called her Kay or Kay-Kay. Archie was always Archie (never Archibald) and he was much smaller than me and three years younger. Their father was my mother Christian's elder brother called Uncle Hugh Martin. He was a Balliol man and headmaster of a very important boy's school called Dollar Academy. When I was very young I always thought of Uncle Hugh as being very fierce. Even when he smiled but especially when he laughed. But I loved Aunt Jess. She was beautiful and truly kind and loving. She spoke beautifully too. I always thought it was because she was English, but in the end it turned out that she was a Monroe from Sutherland. Her version of the eternal mantra was 'You must be sweet and kind.' Not just 'good and kind'.



Ill. 15: Group family photograph probably with the Martin children: Grumpy is centre back. Other names on the back of the photo are 'Catherine, Dora Johnston (space) 3L'

Family visits to St Boswells started because every summer Uncle Hugh and Aunt Jess liked to 'get away for a month to Germany'. That was only possible if they could dump their kids somewhere for the duration of their holiday. Where better than the Manse, St Boswells? I thought that was a marvellous idea. Not so marvellous when I first heard that as part of the deal I was to be sent to live with them in Dollar in term time so that I could go to Miss Bremner's... the preparatory school for Dollar Academy. I wasn't so sure

about that. Meanwhile the main consideration was that Kay and Archie came to stay at St Boswells for a month of their long summer holidays, delivered and collected by Aunt Jess only sometimes accompanied by Uncle Hugh. For four whole weeks we did everything together even though Archie was a bit of hanger on at times, because he was so young. Best of all were ginger snaps and the wigwam.

During my second last summer in St Boswells, some time before Kay and Archie arrived some men turned up with axes and two handed saws with which they felled and finally uprooted the huge pine tree in the front garden. Once it was felled they disappeared only to return months later in the summer in order to dig a long deep pit. Then with one man in the pit and one at ground level above him, they pushed and pulled with a two man saw which had wicked sharp teeth. It went *zzzz...zzztt, zzzz...zzztt*, for days on end until all the big logs were sliced into planks. Finally they loaded the planks on a special long cart drawn by two horses and took them away. The lawn was covered in ugly scars and there was sawdust and chips all over the place. However in the end they filled in the pit and tidied up the lawn. Most important of all they had stacked the off cut pine branches in a cluster much like a round based tripod in the corner of the garden. All that we three had to do was force an entrance into to the centre, break off sticking out twigs and small branches and such like. In no time we had made a space where we could all squeeze inside what we now called our wigwam. There wasn't a great deal of room and the pine needles were very tickly and sometimes even hurt when they found their way under your clothes. It was better inside the wigwam when Archie was not there. Kay and I used to bribe him to stay away by promising him an extra ginger snap. Provided we could get hold of one.

Ginger snaps were special. A treat. They were introduced by Aunt Jess and were kept in a tin on the mantelpiece in the 'kids' bedroom. But only grownups were allowed to open the tin. This meant that we had to rely on Lizzie the cook or Dad's youngest sister, Ena, for poaching extras. Lizzie was no good because, she was as she put it, 'fer oor feart o' the Meenister' to take such a responsibility. So it was up to Ena who came down from Edinburgh to keep house when Uncle Hugh and Aunt Jess had left for Germany and the Martin young were staying at the Manse. My Aunt Ena was a super person and had



Ill. 16: Aunt Ena in later years with her pet terrier

already played her part in bringing me up. She told me that the first time she saw me in 1919 I was a tiny sickly baby. She was only twelve and had been sent up to Tain by White Grannie to look after me when I was only a few months old. Now, aged eighteen or nineteen, she had been sent down to help Lizzie run the household. It was considered in grown up circles that Lizzie and the housemaid could hardly be expected to look after three of us on their own. My mother was away somewhere and of course Dad was bound to be busy working most of the time. In his study. Aunt Ena was quite strict but she did open the ginger snap box for elevenses and sometimes for extra treats. But only if one of us had a mishap, a cut knee or finger for instance which had to have stinging iodine put on it. On such an occasion all three of us would have to have one. Otherwise it wasn't fair.

We all loved aunt Ena but not just because of the ginger snaps. She used to take us shopping in the village where we also came to meet the McConchie girls which was fun for her too because they were about her age. Their father was the 'vet'. That made him very important in hunting country and he smelled of chloroform and disinfectants just like Dr Clarke. He always maintained that until recently he had been much better off without a car. His pony and trap didn't make a noise or a nasty smell and frighten the animals when he was travelling around the countryside visiting farms and the Kennels to take care of them.

The Kennels were at the central point of the life and economy of the village. They were the home of the foxhounds which belonged to the Buccleugh Hunt. They were situated beyond the cricket ground at the far end of the village green. On one side of the ground leading away from the Duke of Buccleugh Arms towards the kennels was a low wall which in turn had a series of long benches up against it. Planks bolted down on concrete blocks so that spectators could watch the cricket going on the middle. Half way along this line up stood the pavilion, a small wooden hut. Immediately alongside it a scoreboard which consisted of a notice board at eye level with three rows of three projecting nails on which to hang metal number plates. The top row displayed the total score to date of the batting side. The second showed the wickets down and the third the score of the last man out. Quite separate on the front face of the pavilion you could read off the other side's total, if they had already batted.

On Saturday afternoons when there was a home match against some other village team, Jock Summers, the Duke of Buccleugh's huntsman who looked after all the foxhounds, sat in his own appointed place alongside the pavilion. He kept everyone within hearing informed about everything that was known about everyone concerned with the hunt. I wasn't supposed to speak to him because he was reputed to be 'rather coarse and inclined to smell of drink'. This veto even included listening to what he had to say. I thought that was rather a pity because he attracted many listeners and he was obviously important. After all I had seen him on more than one occasion dressed up in his red coat and spotless white riding breeches sitting astride a great horse out in front of his pack of hounds baying and yelping at his heels and all very excited about chasing foxes all over the county. He was the only huntsman I ever saw.

Once the entire hunt - baying hounds, resplendent huntsman, black coated and breeched riders in scattered pursuit - streamed across the glebe in a helter skelter of pounding hooves, panting animals and shouting humans urged on by the tooting of the huntsman's horn and the sheer vigour of their own frenetic momentum. I had seen the fox two minutes before, but I didn't tell anyone. I hoped he would escape. I had seen him slink cunningly through the churchyard, into the edge of the woods and away

towards the river Tweed. Not even Jock Summers would dare to lead the whole hunt through and amongst the graves where 'the dead were laid to rest'. Lizzie thought that would be a terrible thing to do. It would disturb the souls of the dead. We discussed the subject like this.

'If they dogs and horses went through the graveyard then aw they spooks wid be oot in the night for sure, tae frighten guid folk like werselves.'

'But what are spooks, Lizzie?'

'Well now,' she paused looking around her with some concern, 'spooks are nane other than the ghaisties of a' the deed fowk in the graveyard. They aye come oot and sit on the stanes when the moon is fu'. But if Jock Summers was to go gallivantin' over the hallowed ground they'd be oot every night in the week!' I could see Lizzie shuddering at the thought of such a fearful occurrence.

'But have you ever seen a spook, Lizzie?', I pressed her.

'Oh! Ah never have! An' there's nae good of you lookin', for ye'll nae see them. Just mind that there aye there. Me, ah ken fine!'

Sure enough on her half days, returning from the village after dark, the moon didn't have to be full either, we would hear Lizzie galloping up the road and into the bottom end of the gravel drive towards the back door and the safety of the Manse. She would charge in through the back door as if it wasn't there, lean against the back of it, puffing and exclaiming. 'The spooks are oot the night. Nae doot whitever!' I asked Dad why Lizzie didn't pray to God to keep her safe. All he would say was something like, 'Well you see, it isn't quite as simple as that, old son. Imagination can also be a wonderful inspiration'. He left it at that. Which left me no other alternative than to find out for myself.

One frosty winter's night, the moon shining brightly in heaven up above, I walked confidently and as quietly as possible across the gravel drive and the front garden, through the private gate into the churchyard. I wanted to see for myself. There was a brilliant full moon which shone and picked out each and every gravestone without fear or favour from amongst the shadows that they cast. The trees were gaunt and bare and spread the tracery of their shadows across the margins of this silent scene. Nothing moved. I was not at all frightened and of course I didn't see a single spook. It was so still and quiet that I could hear a dog barking in the village. Then, very suddenly, behind me, very close there sounded a piercing, mournful 'Whoo.. whooo!' In an instant of panic I was back through the gate rushing through the garden and across the drive to the front door, like a scuttering rabbit disturbed by a gun shot. Oh, yes. I knew perfectly well it was only an owl. Yet somehow I wasn't completely sure. Nor was I going to hang around in order to be sure.

I never told Lizzie. She would have been certain sure. She would have exclaimed without prompting, 'Maybe whiles, y'll no can see the spooks, but they're there. Ye can aye hear them skirling!'

The truth was that our Lizzie didn't understand about the rural countryside, animals, birds or night sounds. Things like that. She was a 'city lassie' born and brought up in Leith which was part of Edinburgh. White Grannie had 'found' her on Dad's behalf and so she came down to St Boswells soon after we arrived from Tain. There were few enough lassies in the country who had been in service, especially experienced cooks, so Lizzie was the ideal answer. Later on I knew exactly where she lived in Leith. Once, to see me out of the way for one reason or the other, she was allowed to take me up to Edinburgh on the train and

deliver me to Morningside Park where I would stay with Grumpy and White Grannie. And of course Ena who still lived at home. Lizzie always spoke of her home city as Auld Reekie, which means Old Smoky. In this particular occasion, for a treat and, I rather thought, unbeknownst to White Grannie who would certainly not have approved, she took me see her own home which was in a tenement at the bottom of Leith walk. That wasn't all that far from Waverley station where we arrived in the train, even if it was in the opposite direction to Morningside Park.

The rooms seemed to me to be very small and we sat in the tiny kitchen for the short time we were there. I was very good because her unmarried brother also lived there and he was a huge man. He was not only huge but he was a 'Bobby', a policeman and very grand and proper. I was very impressed. Ever after that brief visit and if I was naughty or wouldn't do what I was told, Lizzie would cry out 'Behave yersell, laddie, or we'll have the poliss after ye!' This was the ominous alternative to, 'Hud yer wheesht, or I'll skelp yer bum!' Which of course she never did. If only because "its nae ma place to clout the Meenister's bairn!"

So there it was. Lizzie was very kind really and she never did one or the other. Call the police or give me a spanking. If I had a cut on my finger or a boil, she was the one who would get out the first aid box and take care of everything. The yellow stuff called Aquaflavin (something like that), pink lint and green oiled silk. Finally a white bandage which she would wind on and in the end split down the middle and tie a neat knotted to keep it in place. (Just like she tied up the top of the suet pudding bowls). When she put a hot poultice on a boil it was jolly sore. Also a sure way of winning an extra ginger snap from whichever family member was available.

Again. she would often let me come into her (HER) kitchen and let me watch while she was cooking. Scraping the pan after she had been making Green's Chocolate Shape was a favourite. Lizzie often left a little extra on the bottom of the pan to make it a special treat. On the other hand I was never allowed to be untidy in her kitchen where everything had to be spick and span and in its proper place. The copper jam boilers, for example, were always bright and shining. The kitchen table was forever being scrubbed (by the maid) who was forever bent over double 'redding up the range' with brush, cloth and black lead polish. That was so that the bottoms of the cooking pots didn't get dirty when Lizzie put them on to cook the lunch. The maid was always kept busy from morning to night. If ever she seemed to have a minute free Lizzie was likely to yell at her. Something like...

'Come away wi' you then, ye lazy besom. Fetch oot the silver and polish it if y've nae thing better tae do!"

Sometimes Lizzie would let me into the laundry on Monday washing days to watch her and the maid stir the washing with a big pole, turn the handle of the wringer or even both of them together if necessary heave round the handle of the big mangle. All of which tasks were beyond me at my size and weight. I must have been rather a nuisance really. Not even able to fold sheets or hang wet clothes on the line out at the back of the house. Particularly useless when rainy washing days called for a treble barred pulley to be hauled up by sheer strength and made fast at ceiling height in the kitchen. I was much too small and my arms were not strong enough.

Later on the same day I would watch the ironing being done, mostly by the housemaid, be it all closely supervised by Lizzie, particularly when it came to reloading the heavy iron from the fire in her kitchen

range. It was always Lizzie herself, one hand encased in a thick ironing glove, who lifted the portcullis shutter at the back of the heavy iron, filled its belly with red hot coal cinders from the kitchen fire then passed it back to the maid ready for another session at the ironing table. The metal handle was gripped in a quilted pad, a quick pass and a sizzle over some old candle stumps held in an upturned tin lid, followed by a rapid polishing movement on a pad of old blanket laid out on a side table would ensure that the bottom of the iron was cleansed and polished. Ready to attack the next item of laundry. All this sequence was designed to ensure a fine finish, particularly on linen table cloths, pillow cases and sheets. Of course all of these were suitably starched and as far as the table cloths were concerned ended up almost as stiff as boards. Meanwhile the big iron was augmented by several flat irons which were heated directly on the range.

Naturally I wasn't ever allowed to touch any of the irons. Big or small, hot or cold. The kitchen table was of course converted into the ironing table by the addition of an under blanket. On top was laid an old bed sheet, marked by the pale brown scars left by the passage over the years of hot irons tried out for heat, before being applied to precious linen surfaces. Each item to be ironed was first dampened with flakes of water deftly scooped from a well placed bowl by an apparently careless left hand. She would also spit on the iron and judge its temperature by the quality of the sizzle before pressing it down on the next piece.

Somehow Lizzie, throughout all this heavy work and even if she had perspiration running down her face and puffing like steam engine, always managed to be cooking the next meal. Into the bargain she made me feel I was a help to her. That was very kind because even at the time I knew perfectly well that I was no such thing. So when she did have cause to yell at me to get out of the way I knew she was right and did what I was told. Immediately.

One day however, Lizzie did 'go a bit too far', as I overheard my parents say afterwards. What happened was that I kept having sore throats. Finally Dr Clarke came to see me and on this visit I was a patient as well as Mum. He said that the best thing was for me to have my tonsils out. So it was agreed that he would come on an appointed day together with his colleague from a neighbouring practice, who would give chloroform or ether or something so that I wouldn't feel anything while he was taking out my tonsils. A few days after the operation I would feel much better and never have any more sore throats for ever after... which sounded lovely. However a day or two before the appointed operation I must have been particularly aggravating because Lizzie turned on me angrily and bawled out...

'Ye thrawn we deil - ye maun behave yersel'. They doctors are comin' tae cut your throat the morn's morn!'

Naturally I rushed off bellowing with anguish and in search of comfort and reassurance. This is one occasion I can recall the presence of my mother. Two ginger snaps and a soggy wet handkerchief later I was much reassured by an encircling arm and a soothing voice which explained that Lizzie hadn't really meant what she had said. I had misunderstood her. I also learnt that a housemaid was paid thirty bob a month and all found while Lizzie, with her experience received three pounds ten shillings a month and all found. I wasn't really sure what 'all found' meant or how much money we were talking about - but it seemed a lot.

Around this time I started receiving pocket money. One penny a week payable on Saturdays. It wasn't much good to me because I had to put it straight into my Post Office Savings Bank. The same one that I

had owned in Tain. A red tin can shaped like a pillar box with a slot big enough to accept every coin of the realm, including pennies. Not big enough to slide them out again, however much you shook the box. Indeed I usually stood by like a good boy while Dad put my Saturday penny straight into the box for me. In order to save me the trouble, I suppose. This only made me more determined to find some way of extracting the coins out again. But without success - until Kay had a good wheeze.

What you did was take a kitchen knife with a very well worn blade made thin by constant sharpening. Insert this burglar's tool in the slot, upend the box, balance one coin on the blade and slide it out into the open where it really belonged. The subsequent search for success was protracted. We found that it was no good angling for anything other than a ticky or a six pence. The copper coins were too thick to manoeuvre. Not only were there few of these but separating them out, while still inside the box was evidence of good luck rather than good fishing. Very rarely did we succeed in catching a silver coin on the blade, juggle it into position inside the tin and then slide it out on to the floor.



FACET EIGHT

On several occasions it became clear to me that the value of a penny must be next to nothing. One sunny day Dad, Dookie and I were walking back from the village on the road which would pass by Benrigg when who should we meet coming towards us but a tramp. At least he certainly looked like one to me. I had been warned often enough by Lizzie to watch out for tramps and gypsies. They were both to be avoided at all costs. No contact to be made. This man must be a tramp because he was dirty and unshaven. His clothes were ragged and his shoes were obviously full of holes and useless for keeping out the wet. One leg seemed to be hurting because he limped. As he came nearer I could see that he looked hopeless and sad. So I wasn't surprised when we stopped to speak to him because I was aware by now that it was part of a Minister's work to fulfil God's will by helping Him care for the poor and the needy. So when Dad stood there for ages in the middle of the road talking away to this tramp I chased after Dookie who was nearby, heavily involved at the roadside attempting in vain to catch a butterfly. Tired of waiting I eventually returned to find that Dad was saying goodbye while at the same time giving the man a one pound note. Just like the ones he gave to Lizzie and the maid on the last day of each month. The tramp muttered "God bless you, Sir!" and shuffled off along the road in the direction from which we had come. I was quite astonished. It was Dad's business to bless other people in God's name. Not the other way round.

'Does that man work for us Dad?' I asked, thinking of the pound note.

'No' was all he said. A pause, 'Not exactly. But he was prepared to die for his country. He was an old soldier from the Royal Scots. A comrade who fought in the Great War'.

My solution was simple and straightforward. "Then why doesn't he go and see Earl Haig at Beamerside. He was a general. Perhaps he could help him?"

No reply. We walked on in silence. I held on to his hand. Dookie was busy hunting rabbits in the hedgerows. I tried again.

“Why was the War called Great, Dad?” I pressed his hand for a reply.

He didn't reply to that question either. Perhaps he was thinking about his sermon for Sunday. Perhaps he thought about these comrades in the study. I knew he sometimes wore a red poppy, not a real one out of the garden but one which he explained was made by old soldiers who had been wounded. He would pin one in his buttonhole for about a week and play sad music on his bagpipes. But he never explained a thing. ‘Remembering, my son, just remembering’ was all he ever said to me.

Never again, never, would Dad speak to me about the Great War, or about comrades or generals or anything else to do with it. At the beginning of WW2 he did express his disappointment when I joined the Royal Artillery and not a Scottish foot Battalion. But that was ritual sentiment showing through his mask. To this day I look across our sitting room at a silver mug perched on top of the bookcase. A trophy which he received for winning a reunion golf competition. It is engraved - 8TH ROYAL SCOTS 1936.

One other lesson I learned following on from that memorable encounter with the tramp was that having no money made people sad. Having some made all the difference. That's why I went along with believing in tooth fairies. Long after I knew for certain that it was somebody real who put the ‘thrupenny bit’ under my pillow in place of the tooth wrapped in tissue paper. While I was supposed to be sound asleep.

One thing was for sure. No fairy came to put something under my pillow after my operation. This was a pretty big affair. The curtains were all taken down in my bedroom. The kitchen table had been brought up and placed right next to the window so that the doctors could see down my throat and find my tonsils, with the help of a torch, of course. Fortunately it was a bright sunny day anyway. The table had an ironing blanket on it with a clean white sheet on top of that. Over the doorway into the bedroom hung another blanket which had been soaked in disinfectant. In the corner of the bedroom next to my proper bed was another table. That was for instruments as well as a washbasin, towel and soap and a ewer full of clean water so that the doctors could wash their hands.

When Dr Clarke arrived he was very jolly, shook hands with everyone including me and introduced Dr Dalglish who I didn't really know at all. I was wearing my pyjamas and a dressing gown. Finally he said...

‘Right then let's have a look at the operating theatre, shall we?’ So we all trooped up to my bedroom.

I took off my dressing gown and pyjama top and climbed up on to the table by myself. They covered most of me in a white sheet and Dr Clarke told me to breathe deeply and asked me to count up to ten... very slowly... after him. Of course I could. I could have counted up to twenty really.

‘Well done!’ he said. Now let's do that again only this time Dr Dalglish will put a mask over your face to make it more difficult... Ready now?’

So we began all over again. I think I remembered one... one, two... two, three... three, four... four, five... but then everything became far away... far, far away... and muzzy... very muzz...

When I opened my eyes again I found that I was still lying on back, but on my proper bed, gazing up at the ceiling. My mouth felt all stretched and full of nasty spittle and my throat was jolly sore. My mother was sitting close by my bedside looking very pale. She always did look pale, really. She had such lovely eyes but they were seldom without tears in them, which made them shiny in the wrong sort of way. She was

frail to look at and most of the time when she wasn't confined to bed, she wore funny hats, called cloche hats and coloured frocks or dresses. Most of the time I thought that she was very beautiful really... more like someone from a fairy story in the *Red Fairy Book* which she had sometimes read to me. She looked very like someone living all alone in a gloomy castle which she could never leave because no one could ever find the key to open the fortress doors and let down the drawbridge so that she could be free once more.

'Are you awake, Haldane?' she asked me softly.

I didn't reply straight away because I wasn't sure myself. Then Lizzie poked her head round the door, 'How's the bairn, then?' she inquired. I knew somehow that I wasn't expected to reply so that was fine. I looked around the bedroom and was comforted to find it was all ordinary again. My bed was in its proper place, the kitchen table had disappeared and there was no sign of any doctors. My throat was aching more and more and swallowing was very difficult, but there wasn't much sign of blood anywhere. The next morning Dr Clarke came to see how the 'little man' was faring. Very soon I was able to get up again and eat proper food. Not just chicken soup with no 'thickers', milk sops and Bird's custard, which I rather liked anyway.

Once I was back to eating my porridge at breakfast, which I normally did every morning, Lizzie grunted out loud. 'Humph... He's well enough, the' now!' Lizzie made proper porridge like they had at Mainhill. Cooked with salt and served with a light scattering of dry oatmeal on top. Lizzie always referred to porridge as 'them'. 'Ye'll no grow up strong if you dinny eat them up', she was forever saying. Beside you sat a bowl of milk and on the way you dipped each spoonful of porridge into it. But of course at Mainhill you had single cream in your bowl, not milk. I had my own special porridge spoon, made from cow's horn with a silver thistle at the end of the handle and a silver band round its middle with my initials, HHT engraved on it in funny letters, to show it was mine. I still have it.

The only other time I was sick at St Boswells I had German measles which they said was infectious. I had to stay in quarantine for three weeks and not play with other children or meet people. Kay and Archie weren't staying with us at the time so that was fine. On top of that I made Dookie be in quarantine with me, because I didn't think he could catch measles. Any way how could you ever find his spots, if he did catch it? All the fuss meant was that we played and hunted and looked for adventures around the Manse, the garden and the glebe instead of going further afield.



FACET NINE

We did go away from St Boswells sometimes. Mostly to Edinburgh or Peebles and always by train. Edinburgh was best of all, because there were two long cab rides in one day. The first one from the Manse to the station at Newtown St Boswells. Usually we just stood waiting on the platform until the train came in. Once when we were early and wanted to kill time Dad and I walked along to the slaughter house which was quite near to the station yard. I saw a pig being 'stuck'. That wasn't much fun and the pig squealed terribly loudly until it was dead. The noise was worse than Dookie yowling his head off whenever Dad was playing the bagpipes.

The train always arrived on the same line which passed the farm at Mainhill and I sometimes wondered if the engine driver had waved to one of the Thomsons as he went puffing past. But I never had a chance to ask him. I was too shy anyway. We climbed into our compartment without wasting time and slammed the door behind us. You could hear the other doors slamming shut further up the train until at last the guard blew his whistle, waved his green flag and off we went. There were all sorts of things to do especially if we didn't have to share the compartment with other people. There was no corridor in the carriage because this was only a local train but I could start by helping to put the luggage on the rack. I had to stand on the seat to do that. Then I would go round making sure all the blinds were working. If you pulled them right down and let go suddenly they would go up to the top again in a flash, zzzii...iiPPP! Simply watching for under and over bridges was good fun and so was looking out for the next station. Then you could listen again to the banging of carriage doors and watch the passengers getting on and off the train. They brought on all manner of luggage including animals and bicycles which were carried in the guard's van. Unfortunately I wasn't allowed to have the window open except when we were in a station.

While we were travelling I had to leave the lifting and lowering strap on the door window buttoned on its brass button fixed just below the window sill. This meant that I couldn't let the window down and stick my head out into the wind which whistled by as the train flew along the track. That was because I might get sparks from the engine into my eyes and then be blind for the rest of my life. The sparks were hot because they came flying back down the train, hidden in the belching smoke from the funnel on the engine which, in this short train, was never very far in front of our carriage. Worse still I could lose my head, chopped right off, as the train whistled and disappeared with a prolonged woofff... into a tunnel. Finally we would chuff slowly past the Salisbury Crags and a big hill called Arthur's Seat and so into the huge central station at Waverley in the centre of the city. Then our second ride in a horse drawn cab began on the very same day.

Although in the open air, Waverley station was well below street level and the beginning of the journey was very hard work for the horses, because the cab rank was at the bottom of a steep hill leading up and on towards the main street in Edinburgh, called Princes Street. In fact, especially in winter when it was frosty and there was salt and sand scattered on the steep slope, there were always extra horses standing by. Every cabbie had one harnessed in front of his own one to help his friend pull the heavily loaded cab up the first part of the hill. There were lots of smelly motor taxis as well, but we never took a taxi. That was because Grumpy said that taxis were making it terribly difficult for the poor cabbies to earn a living because even although they charged less it took them much longer to reach their destination. So off we bowled trotting along Princes Street and up the Lothian Road, bearing right at the Toll Cross, past the Kings Theatre through Bruntsfield and over the Church Hill where we turned right into Morningside Place. A short distance along the Place then left into Morningside Park. There at No. 55 lived the Thomson grandparents, Grumpy and White Grannie.

It was a 'joined house' with strange people living next door on either side. Close to on each side of the adjoining walls. Which was rather creepy after living in manses and on farms. More than anything else I liked to wander round the bottom two floors of No. 55 looking at the pictures which were hanging everywhere. Not just on the walls of the sitting room, the drawing room and dining room but also in the hall and alongside the staircase so that you could look at them as you walked up and down. Some of them were watercolours, some were black and white drawings but the majority were oil paintings which

portrayed everything from country scenes to naval battles with any number of portraits in between. The latter were mainly ancestors who were long since dead, but they did include Uncle Haldane, from whom I took my name after he was killed at Gallipoli. In the drawing room on the first floor, apart from those on the walls there was a number of oil paintings fitted into a folding screen which was opened up in summer time in order to hide the drawing room fireplace.

The drawing room was also the music room with an upright piano and a box-like music stool which contained piles of sheet music. Long, long before I was born and when they were all young people, all the aunts and uncles in the Thomson family played a musical instrument of some sort or another or sang or did both. Uncle Haldane played the viola before he was killed at this place called Gallipoli. He was the only one I never met but I carried on the name in his memory, or that is what his mother, White Grannie, told me.

Perhaps the most exciting room was the dining room which looked out on the back garden which was the main garden really because there was none to speak of at the front of the house. So in the back garden there was a lawn, flower beds, a rockery and Grumpy's small greenhouse which was specially heated so that his plants would not die in the cold winter nights. Through a door in the back wall of the garden was 'the lane' which ran along behind all the back gardens. This provided a passage way so that the 'scaffie' (refuse collector), the tradesman, knife grinders, coal man, fisher lassies and anybody else could get to the kitchen door at the back of the house. None of these people were allowed to ring the front door bell. That was only for the like of doctors, lawyers, Ministers, friends and relatives. On the front gate of most houses in the Park, including No. 55, was screwed a notice which said, 'NO hawkers; NO traders; NO circulars.'

I liked best to watch the fisher lassie, more often a wifie than a lassie, when she came through the back garden to dump her heavy basket at the kitchen door at the back of the house. Stooping as she walked forwards, she carried the basket high up on her shoulders. It was half suspended from a broad leather strap which stretched from its top sides and looped round and across her forehead. To help transfer some of the strain away from her neck, she would grasp the strap on either side somewhere near her ears and pull forwards. When she reached the door she would give a cunning twist of her body, clear the strap away from her head and dump the basket on the ground with a gasp of relief. As she recovered her breath she knocked on the door, then unflapped the sacking cover on the top of her load and brought out her board and her razor sharp gutting knife. 'Well now Missus. What's it tae be?'

The fish on display was always truly fresh. Cod, herring, plaice, mackerel perhaps. Not very many of each but all slippery and fresh off the trawler at Leith early that same morning, then portered up to Morningside on the forward driver's platform of the first tram car she could get on. White Grannie who was a regular customer, had usually indicated the previous week what she would be wanting and so could quickly make her choice. Quick as lightning the fisher lassie had the fish skinned and filleted or just plain gutted according to instruction. After she had finished Grannie would give her a bowl of hot water to clean up and a kitchen towel to dry her hands. Besides she would always find a cup of tea standing ready when it came time to collect her money. Especially in the winter when it was cold and frosty and her hands looked raw and red. I think she sometimes complained about having chilblains.

It was in the dining room at No. 55 that I had my best times on my own with Grumpy. As long as it was before my bed time that tended to be in the evening when he arrived back from his office where he was a civil engineer. Firstly he would take off his hat and coat in the porch, then hoist me in the air and give me a big hug. His cheeks were very stubbly like a scrubbing brush and he smelled of tobacco smoke and whisky, even before he had the chance to pour himself a glass in the front parlour. When his supper was ready he was called through to the dining room by Ena or the maid. I would go with him, although the rest of us, including me, would have finished our meal earlier in the evening. As long as I kept quiet and didn't ask questions I was allowed to sit opposite him while he ate up all his meal. Except for biscuits and cheese. The cheese was kept on a dish made of patterned china, pale brown and white in colour with a special lid on it. The lid which was high at one end then sloped down to the other one and had a handle on top. Underneath when Grumpy lifted it up was hidden a large wedge of smelly white brownish cheese riddled with dark blue green veins which Grumpy liked to break down into smaller lumps and plaster on to light brown bubble covered water biscuit smeared in butter. It was called Gorgonzola cheese. When he had finished his biscuit and cheese he would fold up his napkin, put it in its ring and pour himself a glass of port wine.

'Now my boy. Let us have a close look at the mites, shall we?'

From his waistcoat pocket, on the other side from his gold fob watch, out popped a set of three tiny magnifying glasses which opened out like a fan so that you could choose as strong a one as you wanted. This was a ceremony, he explained, and should be taken seriously. Not because cheese mites were dangerous but because they added to the flavour of the cheese when they were squashed onto a biscuit. Only once did I ever find any even with the strongest glass. They were so minute that I could not understand why they should demand a special ceremony or make the cheese taste better. But it was fun looking for them. Perhaps Grumpy was just playing another game. He liked to tease... in a jokey, not an unkind way.

For instance on every Christmas and birthday I could remember at St. Boswells he always gave or sent me from Edinburgh a gold sovereign or half sovereign. Five shillings was the most I ever received from anybody else either for a Christmas or a birthday present. But don't forget Grumpy and I had our birthdays on the same date in May. Sooner or later when Grumpy saw me he would be sure to say, 'Now look after these gold coins. Remember that they are better than pound notes and what's more, every one you get may be the last one you will ever see!' But the funny thing was that Dad didn't put them in my red Post Office tin with my pocket money and other cash presents. Instead, not bothered by Scotsman articles on the subject of the gold standard, he put my precious gold coins in what he called a proper Post Office Saving Bank Account which 'would earn interest'. I even had a little book with my name on it showing how much of my money the Post Office was looking after. It was only when I was much older and could understand these things that I realised that I owned pounds which were no longer and never had been sovereigns as far as the Post Office was concerned. It was a trick all the time. Grumpy had been quite right in his forecast.

Aunt Ena was always at No. 55 whenever we stayed. She still lived at home. Every morning, before I came downstairs, she bicycled off to school and so I didn't see her during the day - she had lunch at school. St. Trinians was the name of the school and she was a prefect and played in goal for the first eleven lacrosse team. (Later she had a trial to play for Scotland as 'goalie', so she must have been a courageous spirit

even at that young age!). She was my favourite amongst all the aunts. Dad once said that as far as his generation was concerned, Ena was 'an afterthought' whatever that meant, but I believed that she knew everything that mattered. She was the one who first told me the closely guarded family secret. How my mother had become ill after I was born. How she, aged twelve years old, had been sent up from Edinburgh to look after me at Tain when I was only a few months old. Her answer came as a great disappointment to me. I asked her why Mum was ill. What was she ill with and why did she never get better? She said that it must be a serious illness because the doctors everywhere were still trying to find out what was wrong with her so that they could make her better. Even so, although she didn't say anything about saying her own prayers to God asking him to help, she still had me say mine when it was her turn to put me to tuck me in at bedtime. All she said was that saying prayers was 'a good habit to have and most people seemed to do it. Besides it doesn't do any harm'.

Naturally we would also visit Peebles in order to see the Martin grandparents. Granfa Martin was the Minister there and his youngest son Tom worked as a doctor in the town. Uncle Tom was still quite young and his wife Aunt Agnes was very jolly but they didn't have any children to play with. But Uncle Tom did have a Morgan motor car with only three wheels and a spare strapped on the back of the car. As we bowled along the wind blew through your hair and laughed in your face. I loved that sensation. You could let the wind blow into your mouth and make your lips go all blubbery. Brown Grannie said the Morgan was plain dangerous and that Tom would turn it over sooner or later because it only had three wheels. Uncle Tom said that was nonsense and besides he was very clever. He was the first person to help me put on earphones and listen to BBC on the wireless. It was called the Children's Hour and they had aunts and uncles who belonged to everyone and told stories and talked about interesting things. Uncle Tom said wireless was quite simple really. There was a coil of copper wire connected up somehow to a crystal which you tickled with another piece of wire until you could hear voices or music which had been picked up on an aerial stretching between two trees in the garden. I didn't understand then how it really worked and did not expect I ever would. I still don't.

I saw Uncle Tom several times, before suddenly one day, back at St Boswells I was told that he had died. He had had a brain tumour. We went to the funeral service in Peebles and Aunt Agnes was dressed in black and all the family was there, except Mum.

Another important event at Peebles was going to watch cricket at the cricket ground which was almost right opposite the manse. There were rows of bench seats right in front of the pavilion, next to where the players went in and out. All the batsmen who were out or waiting to go in were sitting in the row behind us. I kept looking round to admire them. They were very grown up and dressed all in white, clapping from time to time and chatting amongst themselves. I felt shy because they were much too important and grown up for me to speak to. Presently I heard one moving along to sit right behind so that he bumped into my back. "Sorry man!" said a deep voice. I turned round to explain that it didn't matter at all, to be polite. Imagine my astonishment when I saw that this man was black as Dad's ebony walking stick. Really black. Not just dirty black like the coalman's face. All of a sudden he laughed out loud showing a mouthful of shining white teeth which he must have brushed at least twice a day, like I did. For the first time I could see that Uncle Stocks might be telling the truth about Freetown and Africa where he had said

everyone was black. So I smiled back happily at this black man dressed in white. I was still too shy to say anything.

Back home at St Boswells life went on as usual. I often walked into the village with Dookie and Dad, who had very long legs. He walked very quickly and with great long strides and always carrying a walking stick. Half the time he seemed to forget that I was there, trotting happily along in his wake. I would fall behind if I felt like it. Perhaps to admire a 'yella yite', blow a dandelion clock or help Dookie follow an interesting trail in the hedgerow. I could always run after Dad and catch him up when I was ready. As we reached the village hall on the main road that ran through the village he would turn round and exclaim something like... 'Oh! There you are'. Take my hand from now on'. He sounded surprised to find that I was there at all. As if he had forgotten that we had set out together from the Manse not many minutes before. Perhaps it was because he was so brainy that he was writing a sermon in his head. More than once I overheard grownups comment to the effect that 'you cannot always understand what the Meenister's talking about... but he's a grand preacher!'

He was six foot tall and seldom wore a hat. His hair was black but very thin on top of his head. He always had a monocle for seeing close to, but if he wasn't wearing it in his eye it hung down his front on a black silk ribbon. He told me once that he was partially blind in only one eye and that was why he only needed a single eye glass. His clothes, except when he wore his 'blue' blazer, were mostly respectable dark coloured suits worn with a dog collar... which I must never call a God collar. That seemed silly to me since it was obvious that only Ministers, men of God, were allowed to wear them. The only times he didn't wear his dog collar was when he was on the golf course or playing his bagpipes.

My dog Dookie, whose real name was Duthac, pronounced Doo-ack in the Gaelic and meaning 'the black one', was a rough coated Newfoundland or Labrador, or something. Dad said he was well bred but he certainly either hated or loved to hear the bagpipes. I am not sure which. Whichever it was he always went mad the moment that Dad started to tune up. Ever since he was quite a small puppy in Tain he took to sitting back on his haunches looking up anxiously at the piper, when he saw him preparing to play. Then, shutting his eyes, he would throw back his head and yowl... and YOWL as if he was in awful agony. Dad would pay no attention of course and carried on skirling away to his heart's content. When he did stop playing, Dookie stopped yowling too, rose up on his feet and wagged his tail as if to say, 'Well that will be enough of that!' Dad always maintained that the dog joined in because he enjoyed the sound of the pipes. The problem lay in the fact that he was yowling in a different key and I simply failed to appreciate his harmonic contribution. I wondered about that.

When we walked into the village to go shopping Dad would insist on Dookie being put on his lead as soon as we reached the main road at the village hall. Then we would start on the village rounds as he called our expedition. First we might call at Drummond's the saddler which was across the main street and set back from the roadway. Inside there were catching smells of leather sweat and dubbin. Like as not there would be a horse tethered to a rail outside the shop. Perhaps a riding horse waiting to be fitted with his new saddle; or a farm horse waiting for a new collar or a repaired harness to be fitted. Inside it was not so much dark as badly lit and there would sit 'auld Wullie Drummond', close up to the window and clad in his worn leather apron. He did all his sewing work right up near the window where he could see best what he

was doing. He could also keep an eye on who and what was carrying on in the street outside. He had at least one assistant helping him in the front shop and another somewhere at the rear of the premises. The interior was full of the sounds of hammering, tapping, clinking, burnishing and polishing, all of which provided a background chorus to much chatter and gossip about village affairs, the countryside and the folks at all levels who were part of them. Wullie could always tell you whose crops were just ruined by hail'; whose horse had thrown a shoe; who was turning out at the next hunt and who wasn't... because he didn't have a saddle to put on his beast. He would even know the likely whereabouts of the foxes and where last seen. 'Up in by the big hoose. Beamerside, ye ken. Jock will pit one up for them, nae doot; they dug o' his are aye in grand cry this while back!'

Then on up and across the street to Ballantines, the general merchants, where you could buy anything and everything you wanted in the way of household goods and foodstuffs. Plenty of people in the village did not favour Walter Ballantine. He was successful and had made money and those two things, well nigh mortal sins, I once heard someone say. Then on to the paper shop and the tobacconist where Dad picked up his Scotsman and his Morning Post. The latter he ordered specially, a relic of his Oxford days he called it. Then went on to look for an ounce of his pipe tobacco. Further on, on the same side of the street as Ballantynes was the home and surgery of Mr McConchie the local vet. He had two daughters. The younger one, who was about the same age as Aunt Ena, twelve years older than me that is, was my favourite. Once when for some reason or other, I was farmed out at the McConchies for a couple of days and nights she came up to my room to say good night and tickled my back with a very light touch of her fingers. That gave me a lovely, dreamy sensation, but she wouldn't do it again when I asked her to because she said I was far too young to be getting ideas. That was very puzzling because I didn't know what ideas I was supposed not to have and it did feel really nice. I never asked her to tickle my back again.

My school days could be said to have begun at St Boswells when I spent a single term in the kindergarten at the village school. It must have been a summer term because the Martins arrived soon after on their first summer holiday at the Manse. This first step in learning was memorable only in that I was already marked out as the 'Meenister's son' and therefore a little apart. Also because once I was almost caught by an irate Wullie the saddler as I was raiding the Drummond apple trees in the company of his son Charlie. He didn't manage to catch us in the event and I don't know remember hearing what happened to Charlie when he got home later that day. He was certainly threatened with a 'skelpit bum' because I heard the threat being issued at the time. Whether the threat was carried out or not, he went on to win his Scottish cap at standoff and turn out at Murrayfield after WWII!

Meanwhile somebody must have 'clyped' (told tales) to Dad, because he told me that as a consequence of this failed attempt to pinch apples I was forbidden a treat. A visit to the village fair escorted by Lizzie. I thought that was rotten because we hadn't succeeded in taking a single apple. Then he changed his mind at the last moment - either that or he simply forgot he had said anything at all. So when the big day came, a Saturday, Lizzie and I went to the fair anyway. There was a merry-go-round with rocking horses which bounded up and down as they circled madly on their tethered circle; there was a helter skelter where you climbed up the inside of a tower than came whizzing down in a spiral trough seated on a coir doormat to be caught at the bottom by two men who seemed to delight more in catching girls with their skirts in the air, than the boys. There were swing boats for two people facing each other and pulling on two ropes hanging down from above. You pulled in turn and the harder and longer you pulled the higher

the boat would swing in each direction. The trouble was that I was neither big enough nor strong enough to make the swing boat work properly and Lizzie refused to go on the helter skelter although she wouldn't say why. In the end we had several turns on the merry-go-round then spent our remaining pennies at the coconut shy and the penny rolling table which I liked best. If you landed your penny so that it settled inside a square without touching any of the lines, you could win as much as sixpence back. I noticed that most of the squares that were not blank had only 2d printed on them. Actually I never landed properly on any of the good squares, although I *nearly* did every time.

In the same year there was a big Agricultural Show at Kelso. More cars than we had seen in our lifetimes went roaring past, some with steaming radiators. They sped there and back along the metalled main road which leads from Kelso through the outskirts of our village, right on by the Kennels and the Duke of Buccleugh Arms towards Newtown St Boswells. All three of us had special notebooks in which we 'collected' car numbers. We sat in the hedgerow near the entrance to the Fairfax-Lucy estate scribbling away for hours on end. Archie couldn't really write well enough to keep up or even take part but Kay and I finished up with dozens of numbers pencilled in columns. I wonder what we did with them in the end.



FACET TEN

In the autumn of my last year year at St Boswells I was sent off to school at Dollar. Not to the Academy, but to the official kindergarten and preparatory school for entering the Academy when I was old enough. The Martin family and Uncle Hugh who was the headmaster of Dollar Academy lived at No.2 Academy Place which was opposite one of the boarding houses, MacNab House, only a short distance across the grounds from the main school buildings. Every day I used to walk across the grounds to one corner where Miss Bremner's classrooms stood. At least I no longer suffered the subconscious stigma of being the 'Meenister's son'. Instead I was only slightly suspect because the Headmaster in his isolated majesty was my uncle. I didn't care. I liked being at school with lots of other children, even if I wasn't happy at No.2.

Everything started badly because I wet my bed. I didn't mean to and I didn't usually know that I had, until I woke up in the middle of the night and found everything sopping wet. For the remainder of the night till dawn I bicycled with my legs to try and dry up the wetness on the sheet, particularly the bottom sheet. The trouble was even if you part succeeded you could never get rid of the smell or the stain that was left behind. Aunt Jess did her very best to keep the matter quiet but finally one day Uncle Hugh got to know of my misdemeanour and proceeded there and then to give me a spanking. At least he attempted to do so. The attempt was doomed to total failure, because as fast as he tried to spank me with one hand while keeping a grip of me with the other, I ran around him so that he either missed or didn't land a worthwhile blow on my elusive bottom. It was quite funny really. But Uncle Hugh didn't seem to think so. I could tell by the way he went on raging at me. Raging just like he did when, playing in the front garden, I kicked my football and smashed one pane of glass in an upstairs bedroom window. I thought that he might whack me again or at least try but instead he kept the football and locked it up in a cupboard so that I couldn't kick it any more.

From many vantage points in Dollar you could look up on the Ochill Hills. It was there in those very hills, affected no doubt by tales of Sherwood Forest, that I established my next secret cave and hideaway, It was approached by a twisting trail which included sections over hard rock underfoot and through long stretches of a fast flowing stream. Eventually the trail lead to a well concealed entrance through which, naturally, only I knew the manner of entry. It was lovely and dry inside with straw and dry heather for a floor covering. Right at the back of the cave, it was very deep. You could light a fire because the smoke leaked up through the rocky roof and into the open air some distance from the point of entry. As well as a pillow and two thick blankets (travelling rugs actually, which I found in the schoolhouse attic) I kept food stores there. Bars of chocolate, ginger snaps and dried apricots or prunes. I often spent several days and nights in my cave, being sure always to keep an eye out for search parties of which there were many but happily all were unsuccessful.

All this you will appreciate, was in the mind. But that didn't stop me reinventing and hoarding each and every detail without ever admitting it was only make believe. Unless I felt so inclined. The essential underlying objective was to invent a successful escape from current realities. I was also subconsciously continuing to develop an understanding of virtual invisibility, which would stand me in such good stead later in life on occasions when my both my freedom and my life were at stake. More of that later.

The happiest experience during my sojourn in Dollar, during term time only, was when we were allowed to go to 'the pictures'. Nobody we knew talked about 'the cinema', least of all 'a movie'. It was surprising that we were allowed to go at all. Uncle Hugh thoroughly disapproved of films as entertainment after it came to his notice that senior schoolboys had been seen smoking cigarettes in the darkness of the back row. This was also forbidden territory for girls, like Kay, who were growing up. Even if they weren't proper grownups. This I found rather puzzling although at least I had already discovered that girls were 'different' from boys in some ways. Nonetheless off we went one Saturday afternoon, only Kay and I accompanied by the maid who would escort us there and later on meet us outside the picture house to bring us safely back home.

We saw a film called *The Black Pirate* and the real name of the hero was Douglas Fairbanks. It was very exciting when he slashed his cutlass through the top of the mainsail and zipped down to the deck below leaving a long tear down the centre of the sail! All the time this was going on the piano player in the front of the hall was banging away madly at his upright piano, while the audience cheered and stamped in their excitement. For a long time after we saw that film I longed to be a hero or a pirate. Nobody else seemed to think that that was a good idea. Especially for a Minister's son. All the other visits I made to 'the pictures' occurred at St Boswells village hall.

A big and very ancient lorry used to come and station itself right outside the front of the hall. On show nights it would sit there with its engine churning all the while and steam hissing out of its radiator which had to be regularly refilled from a watering can by a man who seemed to have nothing else to do. It was Dad who later explained that this man was responsible for generating the electricity that would make the cinema projector work inside the hall, packed with people sitting on rows of chairs. Most of them seemed to know who Lizzie was.

One very funny film we saw was called *Holy Smoke*. All about fire engines and fires being put out until a train ran over the main hose pipe and cut off the water. The one I liked most was Rudolf Valentino in *The*

Sheikh. There were all manner of galloping horses and camels, fierce Arabs in flowing robes and a pretty woman who kept fainting. It must have been terribly hot I supposed. One man dropped his revolver in the sand just when he needed it most, which I thought a very silly thing to do. Much of the time the picture on the screen flickered as if there was snow falling against a window on a dark night. Once or twice the show stopped altogether because the man outside had failed to keep his engine going. Even during these pauses the piano player kept on thumping away. That didn't stop the audience stamping their feet and shouting until the film restarted.

In fact the only time Dad, not Lizzie, took me to the picture show was to see *The Sheikh* and that was only because as part of the War he had been in 'Mesopotamia' as an interpreter with someone called General Allenby. Now he rather wanted to see a bit of sandy desert again. Uncle Hugh once told me that Dad was terribly 'brainy' and could speak Arabic as well as knowing Latin and Greek and other languages. Being brainy was terribly important in our families, it seemed. The fact remains I don't believe I showed any signs of fulfilling this requirement during the one school year I was at Miss Bremner's preparatory school. All that mattered was that in the ensuing summer holidays of 1928 Kay and Archie came to stay at Bo'sells, as the local people called it, for the last time.

The wigwam came back into its own. We played Red Indians it is true but also found room for a new pastime called 'doctors and nurses'. Somehow I always seemed to end up being the patient. Probably because I was the only one who'd had tonsils out. Kay almost always seemed to be either the doctor or the nurse. Archie was quite simply, a nuisance. Aunt Jess often had to tell him that he must behave himself and not be 'rude and rough'. For ever after Archie, when he jolly well knew that he was being just that, used to stamp his foot and shout out in his own defence... "I am NOT being 'lud and luff'!" At the age of eight I didn't know that there was a word called lewd in the dictionary. But when Kay laughed out loud I joined in as if I did know.

Be that as it may, by the end of that final summer holiday I had been able to confirm my suspicions that boys and girls were different, to be sure.

It was during the early summer of that same year that Dad had had his concussion accident with the man on a bicycle and disappeared a few days after to try and become a professor. He went to Aberdeen which took ages by rail because he had to change trains at Edinburgh. It seemed that he had to write two 'papers' about religion and then be interviewed by the University Senate and tell them about God and the Church and especially about Theology. I didn't have any idea what all these subjects were about. It was even more puzzling when he returned to be told us all that he was on the short 'leet' and believed that he might in the end get the 'Chair' in Systematic Theology despite the fact that there was fierce competition. As it turned out he must have been the brainiest of them all because he did get the 'Chair' that he wanted. I wasn't worried because he promised that Dookie would go with us to Aberdeen. That was one promise he did keep. Also I was able to make one more trip to Mainhill, to stay and say goodbye, before we 'flitted'. I didn't yet appreciate that I would be saying goodbye to Lizzie who wouldn't be coming with us to Aberdeen.

Everyone at Mainhill, even the Maister, seemed to be a little sad but Miss T was the only one who actually said that they were all going to miss me very much, and that we must write letters to each other instead.

I didn't quite understand all this fuss because I didn't yet believe that I was going away for ever and that perhaps I wouldn't ever see Mainhill again. Anyway the dairy maid had promised to take me down to the milking in the cowshed for a last turn. So I agreed with everything that was said because I was on my best behaviour and being extra good and kind. It was comfortable and warm when we reached the cow shed especially when close up to a milking cow, which would stand there quietly, slowly chewing away, tummy rumbling, all the while looking dreamily at nothing and giving only an occasional flick of its tail. Everything had a wonderful, peaceful contented feeling.

The dairy maid was so clever. She would tuck her little stool 'close in by thay auld coos and fair caw the milk right oot o' them - nae bother!' It looked so simple when she was drawing down on two teats in turn, each one held lightly in her clasping fingers. The warm milk squirted into her galvanised iron pail... bzzt...bzzt, bzzt...bzzt, bzzt...bzzt almost non-stop, until either the bucket was full or the cow's udder was empty. I tried to copy her but it didn't work for me and the cow wasn't best pleased either. In no time at all she would empty a full pail into a five gallon churn which was standing by on a special trolley like a barrow. There she also kept a pint pannikin for doling out the milk for the farm hands' families when their children came along with their jugs to collect their ration. I wasn't allowed to play with these children but the dairymaid let me drink some of the lovely warm fresh milk straight from the cow as long as I didn't tell anyone 'up at the hoose'. That was because it had not yet been strained through Miss Madge's muslin cloth and she and Miss T both said I shouldn't ever drink milk unless it had been strained first. I promised I wouldn't tell anyone - which meant Miss T.

The main event to be fitted in at Mainhill during that last summer visit was undoubtedly the last day of the harvesting. The day I arrived the men were all out finishing off the last field of corn. Not only the menfolk and the farm hands but also the wives and bigger children from the cottages all of whom were armed with an assortment of stones, sticks, pitchforks and weapons of one kind or another. Shotguns were forbidden by the Maister. There were several dogs, including even Danny, which were held back at the edge of the field until the last moment, in case they frightened the horses drawing the reapers and binders. All the adults were picking up sheaves in pairs and stacking them, upstanding in stooks of six or



Ill. 17: Harvest scene – another farm photo in Haldane's childhood collection

eight. Just right to let the air blow through and dry them out ready for the threshing down at the steading. The sense of excitement was infectious. Everyone was keyed up waiting for the final passes by the reaper which would leave a field of stubble where corn had once stood. The thought on every mind was how many retreating rabbits would come out of the last cover and dash across the field, zigzagging towards the boundary hedges amidst a hail of missiles and lunging weapons in the hope of escape to another freedom. Perhaps even a hare? Or a partridge?

Suddenly pandemonium broke loose. Dogs, released at last, sped off in hot pursuit, barking and yelping with the excitement of the chase. People of all ages shouted and yelled to each other, darting hither and thither in anxious spurts intent on cutting off and killing at least one out of all the rabbits that emerged when there was still a cut or more to go. When any one rabbit was finally brought to ground, one way or another, it was deemed the property of the one who held it up for all to see and was now destined for his or her family cooking pot. By Mainhill custom everything that was caught in the harvest field went to the cottages and not a single rabbit to the 'big house'. It was ever thus because the Maister had long since ordained it so. This was a one-off opportunity and supplemented the weekly handouts of milk and oatmeal. Of course in addition each family had its own vegetable patch and could always get free manure at the appropriate times of year as well as potatoes and turnips from the home farm fields. Moreover mostly they had a rooster and a few hens laying eggs.

What seemed to me very odd was that tiny chicks came out of the eggs laid by hens, but only some of the hens which were broody and were called 'sitters' could sit in the eggs until they hatched and then they became mother hens. I asked Miss T about all this one day when she was tending the incubator in a small room at the back of the house where chicks were hatching... and yet there wasn't one 'sitter' to be seen! Unfortunately Miss T didn't seem to know the answers to my several questions. She said this was how things happened. In the manner that God ordained. The only time I was ever allowed near the cottages was on one occasion when Miss T went along to visit a sick wife and take her some extra milk butter and eggs, 'To help her get better', was what she said. Even then I didn't really go inside the cottage. From the outside, peeping in, it looked very bare and poorly lit and I had noticed long before that only the children who were going to school wore shoes. Even they went barefoot when they were at home in their cottage.

On my last day at Mainhill I went everywhere to say goodbye. To the places as well as the people. To the ducks on the millpond; to the pigeons, the geese grazing on the knowe and the bubbly jocks getting fat for next Christmas. To the horses in the stables and my favourite Rhode Island Reds which always seemed to lay speckled eggs which were kept for me to eat. Soft boiled with buttered scones. I didn't forget the cattle in the byre or the milkers in the cowshed or even Danny the useless dog. Of course there was the house and all its different rooms from the drawing room to the dairy. I was especially sad to say goodbye to the dairy, where reposed all the equipment for making butter. There were two churns. One an upright narrow gauge barrel with a plunger at the bottom of a pole which Miss Madge monotonously raised up and thrust down... raise up and thrust down... for ages and ages, until at least she could begin to feel the butter beginning to form. Miss Madge who was the expert in the dairy said that this particular churn was very useful for making small quantities of butter at short notice. On the other hand for making a few pounds of butter in one go, there was always the big barrel churn that stood in the middle of the floor on its own legs and which was operated by winding a handle like a laundry mangle.

On a scrubbed table alongside were an assortment of butter pats like squared ping pong bats with ridges on the surface to make the cakes of butter look pretty when you finished making them up. Of course you had to dip the wooden pats in water to keep them clean and cool so that they didn't get sticky with butter. Along one side of the dairy was a long shelf made of thick quarried slate. On this shelf lived four big round metal dishes which were filled with fresh milk from day to day. This milk was left to settle so that cream could rise to the top. Over several days it would become single and then double cream which was skimmed off and poured into cream jugs. It was scrumptious trailing a finger across the top of a tray

in order to pick up a dab of double cream and lick it clean, there and then. So long as you didn't take off too much the gash on the creamy surface healed up almost without a trace. Nobody could tell I'd been there, I don't think.

Finally the moment arrived for saying goodbyes to the five Thomson brothers and sisters who had been so very kind to me for several years. It was evening time when Dad came to collect me and every one of them was back at the house, ready for high tea. So there was a great deal of laughing and talking and milling about of grownups. I stood by myself and stroked Danny who wasn't best pleased to see Dookie held on a lead by Dad. I was suddenly beginning to feel sad myself. At last Dad picked up my little leather suitcase, my mother's battered leather attaché case with her initials C.I.M. stamped on the outside. It wasn't so far from Mainhill back to the Manse, perhaps a little more than a mile. As soon as we were clear of the farm Dookie was allowed off his lead. It was a lovely lead, crafted specially by Wullie Drummond, made of plaited leather with a clip at one end to snap on to his collar and a loop at the other to fit over your wrist. As usual I trotted alongside or just behind Dad, his mind in the clouds. I felt so sad and cried a little. Quietly so that Dad and Dookie wouldn't notice.

I had stopped sobbing by the time we arrived home. Dookie was just the same as he always was. Darting about in all directions chasing butterflies and sniffing for interesting smells. Stopping every now and then to make sure that I was still there, smiling at me with his pink tongue hanging out of the side of his mouth. What did he know or care about seeing Mainhill for the last time? I forgave him. I don't suppose he had ever been there before. He simply didn't understand.

Soon after that desperate day we moved out of the Manse at St Boswells. 'Goodbye wigwam! Goodbye Mainhill! Goodbye everything!' The furniture and household goods and all Dad's books were packed in boxes which were transported to Newtown by the carter who put them on a goods train to go to Aberdeen. Dad went off there too 'to have look at our next home'. On the way he dropped off Dookie and me at Morningside Park to stay with Grumpy, White Grannie and Aunt Ena; Mum went to stay with her parents in Peebles. Lizzie disappeared for good. She went back to looking after her brother the policeman in Leith. I never did discover Lizzie's last name. It might have been Henderson.



FACET ELEVEN

Thus far the view has been from the inside, looking in - very rarely peering out. Now is the time to re-examine childhood, but from the outside looking in. Distantly, down the years...

It was a nine year old boy, more of a 'wee laddie' than a 'bairn', who arrived in distant Aberdeen having left behind in St Boswells the ghost of a child who had attained a similar age. The dawn of important discovery had broken early upon an inquisitive mind. That truth was by its very nature an elusive target, seldom found at the end of some straight trajectory. Indeed while the search might be constant any conclusion was liable to blurred on the way by abrupt change of view, unsuspected bends, half circles or sudden loops in perception. Not that this was a clear-cut discovery. Rather it surfaced spasmodically as an unformulated suspicion that a given truth was at any chosen moment no more than a staging post enabling

further examination, further discussion of what seemed to be an apparently identical issue. Certainly not a point of final arrival where a captured item could be pinned down irrevocably on the specimen board of mind and memory. To be kept under glass and labelled for the imaginable future... 'Behold the truth'. What remained was a number of tenable viewpoints rather than one of absolute finality, since ultimate flashes of actuality could later in time appear total strangers to what had been foretold.

Those early childhood years exposed no structured effort to formulate a personal philosophical base. It was altogether too soon for that. Instead there flourished an early almost haphazard establishment of a memory bank loaded with material gathered by chance and such experience as was currently available. Moreover these items were stored unsorted and without conscious thought for future reference. Any answers given, comments offered and statements made to me were by and large suspect - and therefore unsatisfactory. Notwithstanding there was as yet no developed capability, or indeed any positive motivation to make detached and objective judgments, whether critical or not, on limited available inputs. All the significant authorities like my father, my grandparents, the Mainhill Thomsons, Lizzie the cook and such other grownups as impinged upon my limited horizons all played their differing parts in the formulation and development of my personal attitudes. Two factors were particularly significant.

Firstly, by circumstance I found myself spending a great deal of my daily life in the company and presence of adults. Adults who were mainly involved in the perpetual discussion of subjects as likely to be academic and religious as practical and matters of every day fact. At any rate on most occasions I was a long way from being able to participate in debates which ranged far above my head. That did not mean that I was wholly oblivious to what was being said. Indeed there were more and more opportunities for me to enjoy the luxury of being a largely unnoticed listener.

An additional influence in my capacity for silent appraisal was that I had, from the age of five, become an avid reader of any book which came to hand, and they were always in good supply. Thus my vocabulary and my comprehension developed apace. From an early age I became, even if I did not commentate, a hoarder of untested information and extraneous trifles, which ranged from the mundane to the academic, from the commonplace to the unusual and from the trivial to the vitally important. This proved to be a chance advantage of my every day existence, an unremarked way of occupying rather than passing the time. Reading and listening a great deal. Discussing nothing important (other than with my dog). Not necessarily relating one expressed view to another. Not openly critical but with a conscious and growing awareness that adult behavioural attitudes were rife with discrepancy and riddled with inconsistency. Or so I presumed to think at the time. A perpetual listener, I became prone to inward looking reflection and the formulation of self-derived conclusions frequently reached out of proper context, untested with the authors of the viewpoint. Probably subjected by preference, if at all, to examination against the limited benchmarks of someone like Lizzie's simple and earthy tenets of human existence.

The second significant factor in my childhood was my mother's never-ending and mysterious illness. Mysterious to me certainly. That continuing drama of unspecified ill health taught me from an early age to differentiate between the 'would be', the 'could be', the 'might be' and the 'is not'. It was already becoming essentially obvious to me that in the end no amount of effort, will power, prayer, or medical skill necessarily changed anything for the better. Nothing surprising in that. I was not yet ready to recognise that I was on the way to becoming an early dropout from the ranks of the godly and the blindly

faithful. The trouble was that I came to identify these forward cohorts of the truth being largely those who wore 'dog collars'. From my hooded viewpoint most of the answers which I was receiving in reply to my questions about my mother's state of health and way of life were at best incomplete and at worst evasive. They continued to be so for many years to come. Ena finally gave me her unexpurgated version of the truth, including the manner of my mother's decease. By then Ena was seventy seven years of age and I was sixty five. My mother had been dead for almost forty years.

At so young an age no valid analysis of my situation was ever likely. Least of all by myself. I simply did not - could not have been expected to - have the grasp of the necessary aspects of human behaviour which might have helped me identify the sources and/or causes of my latent dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction was particularly nagging in all areas relating to religious faith and the need to follow the Christian way of life, which was being perpetually dictated by virtue of my daily environment and the close affinity of most of my elders and betters with the Protestant Church of Scotland. From the outset I was clearly unimpressed by the power of prayer since the only prayer that really mattered to me was not being addressed by God. Full stop. Rather it appeared that my prayers were being acknowledged by my mother's deteriorating health rather than by any signs of recovery. I almost felt at times that my faith would have been substantially enhanced if only I had reversed the focal content of my ardent message since nothing reinforces success like success. Blindness, I was always being told, was an essential part of the faith concept. On the threshold of becoming sighted it is hard to perceive the advantages of being sightless!

It was then hardly surprising that from an early age I nurtured seeds of doubt regarding repetitive and unfulfilled pronouncements by the 'God collars' on the subject of faith. The existence of God and the Son of God, who must remain unseen on earth throughout every human lifetime was from the outset puzzling if not immediately unacceptable. Constant exhortation to have faith by cultivating blindness, were not well understood by a young supplicant who had the temerity to believe that he could not be blind since he could already see for himself. In short there was insufficient clear evidence of Their heavenly existence, Their heavenly powers and Their eternal wisdom as promoted by Their most ardent exponents here on earth. The fact that these exponents were my close relatives, here on earth, made the case much stronger in my childish mind. Put quite simply, their cover stories on the whole subject of religion wouldn't, didn't, stand up to the daily realities of life on that part of the earth which surrounded me. But Heaven's above, I was still a long, long way from being ready to stockpile my arguments, far less to state them!

Instead I carried on perfectly happily with bedtime prayers, bible readings, Sunday school, routine church services, harvest festivals, Sunday school picnics and what have you with all the evident compliance and bland enthusiasm of the innocent faithful. No doubt that the good Lord made me outwardly if not truly thankful for what I received whether at the dining table or away from it. Meanwhile I found the constant telling of the Bible stories to be both repetitive and boring especially since there so many alternative reading experiences close at hand. I am confident that none of this inner thinking was apparent on the surface. I went along perfectly happily with the crowd, listening, reciting, praying and regurgitating the Bible stories. There was nothing original in that. Puzzled I might be, even suspicious, but not overtly critical.

Without really noticing the signs, I was also acquiring first hand understanding of that remarkable line which runs between the concepts and conditions of loneliness as opposed to being alone. From the earliest memorable age I spent a great proportion of time on my own, save for one notable exception, without in any way being conscious of any pangs of loneliness. Being alone became a norm. That is how it was. Besides, most of the lifelong day I had a splendid companion who seldom frustrated either my verbal proposals or my current activities, but was content to romp happily alongside me, barking approval and encouragement all the while. Be sure that we held long conversations in which I alone fulfilled the role of the feel-free interpreter of my companion's moods, however vociferous, however muted. Quite apart from my devoted companion Duthac, I was also at peace with the night with whose background darkness I had long since established a harmonious understanding. The night to whose sounds and lights and shades I had grown accustomed and continually identified as an integral background to being alone.

I truly loved the night. I enjoyed its many faces, changing with the seasons. I gloried in the presence of its majestic clouds, its moon and its stars. Personal experience had surely proved to me that there were no such things as ghosts - owls, yes, and many other creatures in the night who, once identified, were easily recognisable as friendly, not hostile, far less imaginary. From earliest memory the curtains in my bedroom, at my request, were never drawn at night. Thus I was well in tune with scurrying clouds, passing like dreams across a worried moonlit sky. With driving rain unseen save in torrents streaming down the outside surface of the window as if to challenge the comfort of my bedroom den within. I thrilled to the darkest nights and their brooding secret corners, their recognisable sounds and their enveloping blanket of overall silence. At no time did I note any sense of being observed by a benevolent unknown. There was more than enough satisfaction during the lifelong day and night to engage my active and my passive mind.

So it was, that frequently alone, I was seldom lonely. At the same time, without in any way being conscious of it, I was beginning to come to terms with my status as an 'only' child. Many years would pass before I recognised that being an 'only' brought hidden advantages as well as patent disadvantages. Nevertheless one result of spending so much time on my own was that I must have appeared unduly shy in behaviour. This a result of a growing inclination to prefer my own company to that of others, even when the latter was available. After all the ever present Duthac provided the pillar of dual existence by filling any imagined gaps in the quality of social communication. He was an uncomplicated extension of being alone without in any way representing an additional aspect of loneliness.

Thus viewpoints began to formulate and attitudes develop, but not so firmly that they could not be moulded, altered even reversed by a single new experience. The imprint of Mainhill, for example, was vivid, everlasting and not necessarily over. Yet at no time then or in the future did I ever seriously contemplate becoming a farmer. An engine driver, a Minister of the church (briefly), an explorer in Africa, an architect - but never a farmer.

The continuing problem of tracking down and identifying an acceptable form of God had only just begun but was continuous and not yet beyond resolution. My mother's persistent illness on the other hand would in good time find its own resolution. Nonetheless I was still too young by far to have grasped the ineluctable truth that nothing in this life lasts for ever. Not even life itself. I was not as yet intellectually primed to take on board, never mind accept such an inescapable philosophical concept. All this was remote; beyond the limited horizons of my childish comprehension.

Perversely, I continued to relish my obvious and frequent opportunities to enjoy being alone. People were of course important but no more important than a black retriever called Duthac. Places rather than people occupied a prime position in my perception of the world around me. Places proved to be different, interesting and sometimes even exciting. Above all there was always, it seemed, an abundant supply of new places to be discovered. All across my widening horizons both everywhere and all the time. The fragile threads leading to distant horizons were being spun without my realising it for a moment.

Against this background it was my father who emerges as the predominant figure albeit with a charming but casual grip on the realities of immediate everyday affairs which surrounded us. Frequently it almost seemed as if he was reluctant to relate to his family without persistent reminders. His total detachment must have been further compounded, although I did not appreciate that just yet, by the fact that his wife, my mother, was by no stretch of the imagination his constant companion and confidante. As often as not absent from the family home she must have become ... a distraction. Not a wife and mother figure. Someone totally preoccupied with being unwell.

In this situation, wherever the geographical location of the family home he withdrew to a smoke laden study. There, surrounded by wall after wall, floor to ceiling book shelves, braced by the weight of seemingly countless volumes. Here he was able to reach out and exercise his mind while leaving behind the petty issues of monotonous household life. He was only truly content when surrounded by his considerable library of literary and scholarly gems, couched in a variety of languages, and which covered their literature, their poetry, their dictionaries and above all their theologies and religious dogma. Alongside Homer's *Iliad* and the Greek classics, stood complete sets of the works of Scott, Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson and Shakespeare; the momentous tomes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a two volume edition of the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* as well as Greek/English and Latin/English dictionaries. On shelves of lesser height and depth were Arabic versions of the *Qur'an*, the works of John Knox, Calvin, German theologian Karl Barth - to name but a few. Here to one side of his study, sunk deep in the embrace of a vast enveloping chair, or else in the tilting bosun's chair at his beloved leather covered desk he was ideally placed to escape the petty, time-consuming demands of family life. Gradually, unsurprisingly, probably consciously in the interim, he continued to withdraw ever farther into the detached world of his mind.

In the beginning, certainly at St Boswells, this withdrawal was only evidenced in the form of absentmindedness rather than eccentricity. More of an amusing diversion than a defined characteristic. Not coming into meals until called a second or third time. Walking into the village with Haldane and entirely forgetting until the last moment that he was there at all. Finding the coalman with the sole intention of ordering a load but failing to do so having been sure to ask how his sick dog was getting on. He appeared to me to be forever lost in distant thoughts. In my perception he was mostly preparing sermons in his head. That was as far as I could go. Beyond that I could not conceive the concerns, the convolutions, the preoccupations of a brilliant academic mind sadly impeded - instead of complemented by - a sickly wife. Constant concern about an only son who, although often unseen and seldom heard, probably provided a greater distraction than he might otherwise have been. A small son whom he rightly recognised as needing a playmate of his own.

At this stage the shifting pegs of our ever-changing surroundings were only lightly tapped into the walls of my life and so went largely unrecognised for what they were. Markers along a path which had no clear-cut end in sight. Lightly established landmarks for hindsight reference, whether with joy, regret or indifference. I had started out, without being conscious of it, on the trail of growing up. Along paths which would depend very little on choice but a great deal on chance and opportunity thrown up by circumstance. I was beginning to gain experience in both the science and the art of living without being conscious of it. Establishing characteristics without being aware what they were. Some passing phases, some transient scenes would survive and of course might recur without my having to make any conscious effort to preserve or revive them. I had as yet developed no tenable social conscience. No fixed attitudes in regard to well established norms upheld in the society within which I moved. It was too soon to try and fathom the haemorrhaging souls of men of peace who had gone voluntarily to the fighting fields of France in World War I and returned as badly scarred mentally with wounds within as bodily. More damaged than those they had left behind marked only by a nameplate on a simple wooden cross. I had only begun to suspect that those who by freak of fortune, no more no less, appeared to have survived undamaged were not necessarily fortunate to have done so.

All around I could see systems which I accepted simply because they were there. It followed at my stage of development that because they were there... well, they were there to be accepted. This did not mean that any aspect of social convention could not be categorised out of hand, as 'not fair'. That was as far as I was likely to go. What did the 'all found' element mean which was added to the wages of servants and farm hands. Why did the latter live in such 'poor' cottages. Was it a matter of individual employer's whim or a 'treat' or an established right? It was much too soon for such considerations to even cross my mind - but nonetheless a first critical plank in life's platform was laid. I had begun to observe, if not to think. Nothing can be done about this or that, but just the same 'it isn't fair!'

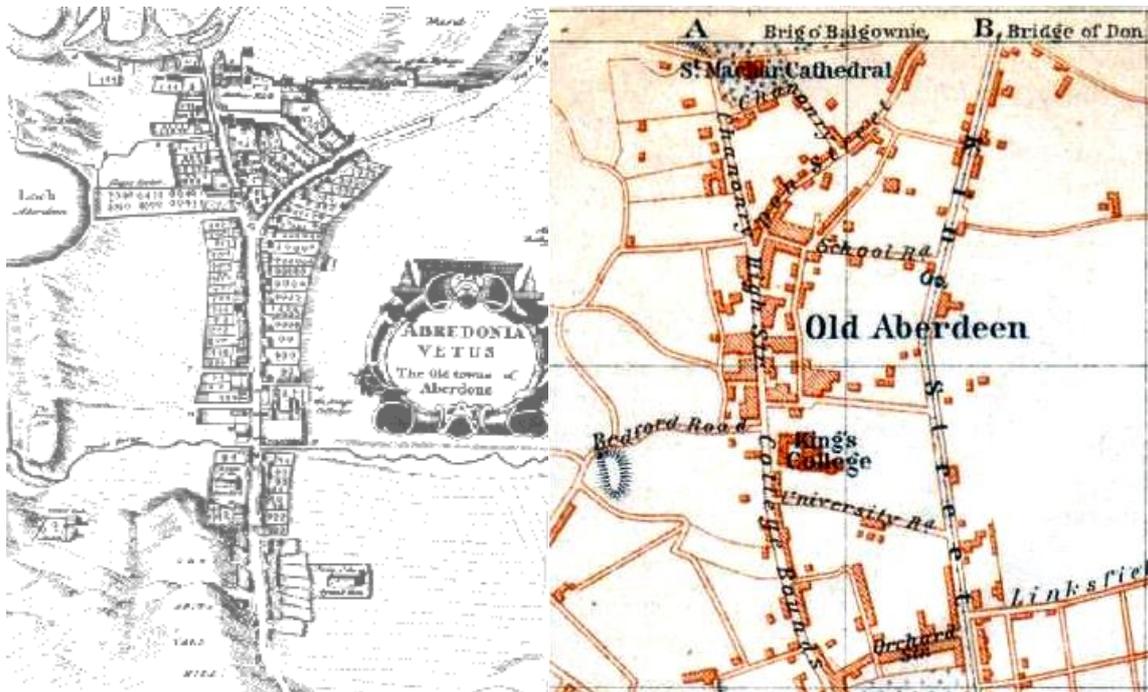
All in all I had to accept everything the way it was and was largely contented with what I found. I felt sad when I left St Boswells but I was more than excited about the prospect of going somewhere else - somewhere new, beside the sea, a granite city called Aberdeen. There I would at last become a proper schoolboy.



FACET TWELVE

I have no vivid recollection of the move north to Aberdeen. It must have been by train, both passengers and goods. Dad obviously went ahead on his own in the first instance, but on the way we were split up amongst the grandparents either in Peebles, my mother - or at 55 Morningside Park, me. Anyway weeks if not months passed before we were completely transplanted to Divinity, also known as Humanity Manse in old town of Aberdeen. I was once more surrounded by familiar furniture and paraphernalia, and two known people. In the first place we, which meant my father and I, lived in 'rooms' facing on to the town square in Old Aberdeen. The entrance to our transient abode could be found on the eastern side of the square, through an archway and along a passage protected by a wrought iron gate. Their situation was ideal for the newly appointed professor. In one direction, a quarter of a mile along the secluded

residential street called The Chanonry stood St. Machars Cathedral. At much the same distance in the other direction and at the bottom of the High Street stood out the crowned tower of King's College chapel one of whose sides faced on to the inner square of the beautiful Old Quadrangle of Aberdeen University.



Ill. 18: Old maps of the 'main drag' of the original Old Aberdeen looking over the circular harbor to the east (left), and (right) detail showing the siting of King's College, the Cathedral and bridges over the river

So long as we were living in what Dad called our 'digs', it didn't seem to me that he felt under any undue pressure to establish our new home. Apart, that is, from the nagging frustration of being unable to get at his personal library, which judging by the number of crates marked 'books' when we left St. Boswells, must have been quite considerable. As for Dookie, he was in clover. He was farmed out to the Dinwiddie family who lived at 14 The Chanonry.

By the time we arrived in Old Aberdeen in 1928 Melville Dinwiddie was a much respected younger Minister at St Machar's Cathedral. At the time of our first acquaintance there were two Dinwiddie children. Ian, fourteen months younger than me, and younger still his sister Mona. Most important, Ian had a tricycle. It was a sturdy model with a chain driven back axle and a sturdy transverse frame member upon which I could stand pillion, as it were, with my hands placed firmly on Ian's shoulders in order to steady myself. It was only after many expeditions and strenuous miles that the roles were reversed and I was allowed a turn on the pedals.



Ill. 19: Ian, from a tiny six-page album devoted to the Dinwiddies – he was a lifelong friend, into Africa days

Parental permission was granted to pedal off on our own to almost any part of the old town but only so long as there were navigable pavements and that we kept to them. No tri-cycling on the roadways. This parental constraint, to which we happily acceded, had its advantages, some obvious, others less so. In 1928 the High Street and principal road running off it were still carpeted in swathes of granite cobble stones. Sticking to the pavements meant that at the worst we posed a threat to pedestrians but not to ourselves. At least we did not represent a hazard to motorised traffic, and there still was some horse drawn traffic, the latter mainly coal carts and brewer's drays. A less apparent advantage of sticking to the pavements lay in the fact that we were automatically barred from those housing areas in the oldest part of the Old Town which did not aspire to pavements, even if on rare examples they boasted tar macadam or metalled road surfaces. Thus were eliminated Don Street and the like where were housed in mighty close proximity many families who had 'hoards of children with whom we would not wish to play'. This was a convenient adult euphemism which enabled the credit for wise choice to be neatly transferred from parent to child. In years that followed we would perceive this transferred parental judgement to be not only sound but well founded.

It must have been during school summer holidays that we finally moved into the vast spaces of Divinity Manse because Aunt Ena appeared to play a major part in the transition. Hardly were we settled in than her big brother decided that the best arrangement would be if she stayed on to keep house. So, not for the first time, she was shunted off by the family to take care of big brother and her nephew, his only son. Indeed she was now very much *in loco parentis* although at eighteen she had only just left school. It was Ena who invariably came up to my bedside to hear my prayers and bid the last 'goodnight'. My father would stay downstairs looking up from his desk and putting down his pipe to say his distracted goodnight. My mother was still away 'somewhere unspecified'. The new cook, called Bella, was the first of a succession of cook generals who would ultimately lead to our employing a housekeeper. She was no substitute for Lizzie either as a confidante or an ally. She was moreover very 'close'. That is, not forthcoming on any subject. Certainly not in regard to the professor's household or family affairs. The nearest she got to explaining my mother's absence was, 'Ah hear she's no' awfy weel'. And that was it as far as she was concerned.

The change from a country parish Minister's meagre stipend to a salaried professorial chair at an established university rent-free should have worked wonders for the family economy. For the first time my educational future was explained to me. I would go to some suitable preparatory school, when one could be found, thence to Fettes in Edinburgh and on to University - probably an Arts BA at Edinburgh followed by an MA at Oxford, preferably at Christ Church like my father and grandfather Thomson before me. All of which would, of course, be financed by my successful endeavours in scholarship and bursary competitions - like my father and grandfather before me! Now I became aware of what Uncle Stocks had meant about being at 'the House' with Dad! No emphasis was made at this point about my specialist area of studies but it was undoubtedly assumed that it must be 'classics' with a capital C. What else? Meanwhile until a suitable preparatory school was found I would attend the junior school at Aberdeen Grammar School, which was convenient if nothing else, but did count amongst its alumni such famous men as Lord Byron in addition to Dunn, Melvin and Keith who were remembered as great men of the British Empire.

While all this fell into place my father, who in an earlier brief incarnation been Assistant Lecturer in Greek at Glasgow University before the War, would 'start me off' with a grounding in Latin and the

interesting challenge of mastering the Greek alphabet, if nothing else. The 'teaching at home' phase of my school days took place over a short period at Divinity Manse. His teaching methods were geared to classes of adult undergraduates and thus, as far as Latin was concerned, it was with some impatience he would explain the declension of mensa, mensam, mensae on the one day and expect me to grapple with a passage of Virgil on the next. Despite his spasmodic application to the task in hand and taking into account that I was only nine years old at the time it was surprising that I was not forever put off showing any interest in Latin as a school subject. The study of ancient Greek however, other than being an occasional and uncertain source of reference in relation to the roots of English words, was for me never better than a chore.

Divinity, or Humanity Manse if you preferred, was very grand, as manses go. A huge Edwardian edifice three stories high, it was built in spacious grounds too extensive in my experience to be called a garden. But in the first place I was principally concerned with exploring my new home. It seemed huge and of all wonderful assets it boasted two miniature fairy story turrets worthy of a mediaeval castle - one accessible only by way of its own narrow walled flight of stone steps, just like the an entrance to a dungeon, but in reverse; upwards not downwards. Both consisted of a single round room with laid wooden floors and two single casement windows. I immediately wanted to claim one as my bedroom. Unfortunately that was ruled out because even if it had been possible to manoeuvre a bed into its limited space, no place would have been left available for other furniture or personal effects. That was very disappointing. Instead I found an attic looking out over the college grounds towards the sea far beyond. On a clear day I could see the shipping, especially trawlers, making towards and away from the breakwaters at the entrance to Aberdeen harbour.

Was it from this magnificent look-out post that I first observed the "Idaho" loaded with copra and stranded outside the harbour entrance, beached on the sands opposite the Corporation Baths? Or was that later on - because I do recall swimming out to the wreck with Shuttie when I was some years older.



Ill. 20: The High Street photographed in 1890 with the prominent tower of King's College and houses either side just visible (possibly Haldane's turret on the Divinity Manse is visible in the distance, on the horizon)

In the meantime one of the turrets, the one accessible from the entrance hall, became entirely mine, my private den where I was undisputed king. No-one else was allowed up there without my permission - except, at first, the maid sent up to sweep and dust the secret chamber. That intrusion was soon taken care of... once I had told her the room was haunted in the daytime. Besides the time had come to stop having a live-in housemaid and make do with a cook/general instead. After all, Aunt Ena was there to do the housekeeping and that included making beds and dusting everywhere - but not the heavy work like

laundry, washing and polishing floors or the like. These were done by a 'daily' who in the end only came in twice a week.

Opposite us was another university manse¹² which was occupied at the time by Professor Baird whom I only knew as having a singularly unattractive daughter of about my own age. No doubt she held the same view of the Thomson son living opposite her! More important was that our new abode was situated immediately adjacent to the King's College Chapel and University library in which Dr Simpson, learned and supreme, reigned as chief librarian. The latter would turn out to be a prime source for acquiring used postage stamps from every corner of an Empire of which the British were still justly unashamed. But the winds of change were blowing everywhere. Ena departed within a year to lead some of her own life and in the continuing absence (or presence) of an ailing mother who was not able to take over the reins, the household moved slowly and in fits and starts over the next ten years into a protracted era of 'housekeepers' who combined housekeeping with cooking. Carpet sweepers were the rage. The main laundry - sheets, pillow cases and tablecloths - was sent out and only 'the washing' remained in house.



FACET THIRTEEN

Growing up was now, in my introspective mind, becoming a happy, interesting and absorbing continuum. Nonetheless I was barely nine years old when major disaster, as I saw it, struck for the first time in my life. I never expected it to do so, but it did. On no particular morning one summer's day in 1927 I set off on my own with Dookie for a short 'walkie'. Out of the front garden, left along the front of King's College, left again along the road called College Bounds, past the old playing fields. [Aeons later I would lead the combined Hare and Hounds teams of Edinburgh and Aberdeen Universities towards the finishing line in this same playing field. Hotly pursued by the leading Aberdeen contender, one A W C Lobban I recall. He was the only Aberdeen man in the first six.]

Thus to King Street where ran the main tramway lines leading to distant Union Street and the city centre in one direction and the Bridge over the river Don in the other. The sun was kindly and warm as I alternatively danced and pranced and trotted along rather than walked in a seemly manner. The few clouds in the summer sky were white and fleeting. The trees were green with leafy shade. Birds sang. I am sure I was singing too, to myself and to any-one else who was passing by. I reached the corner of the main road with a view to turning left and left again and so back around the square to the High Street and safely home again. We often followed this route together. We were allowed to because it was perfectly safe. We did not have to cross any roads. Not even small ones. We were simply going around the block, as it were. In any case Dookie and I were always in close touch with one another. If he went too far ahead I would call out and he would stop and look back to see what my problem was. Erect, proud, black feathered tail waving, pointing; ears alert, tongue lolling out of the side of his mouth. He would look back impatiently at me. He was saying to me, 'What's the matter then? Come on slow coach!' The moment he was satisfied that I was catching up he would turn away and trot off once more.

Just this one morning he didn't pause and wait. Did I not call out loud enough? Or perhaps I did not call out soon enough? Was that it? Perhaps it was all my fault? The fact is that on this occasion when I called out

"Dookie, Dook! Come here!" he just looked back over his shoulder tossed his head knowingly and trotted on, bold as bold could be. Proud, proud of being the big black one, Duthac by name. Proud to be seen crossing the main road, King Street; right into the track of a tram car... which surely would stop before it hit him... surely? SURELY? All those ghastly sounds came crowding in at all at once. The strident CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! as the tram driver stamped urgently on his alarm pedal... the grating rattle of the tram's cowcatcher as it dropped with a shower of sparks on to the granite cobble stones between the tram rails. The yells of "Dookie! Dookie! Dookie!" bursting from my terror stricken throat were wasted on the summer air. Transcending everything the agonising shrieks of my shattered lifelong companion lying grasped and twisted by the cowcatcher under the tram itself. I ran forward recklessly, mindless tears streaming down my cheeks, right into the middle of the road to where the tram had stopped so rudely in its tracks. Not soon enough by far.

"Aye, 'am awfy sorry about yer pair wee dug. He ran oot there like he wis daft!' By this time the driver, who was talking and a passerby, a man, had fetched the injured Dookie out from underneath the front of the tram and laid him in the gutter where he whimpered and shrieked in turns and almost tried to bite me his pain was so great. And there was nothing I could do. Nothing. He was all broken. The driver had to go away with his tram because of the traffic. The strange man was kind. When he learned through my tears that I lived no distance away he sent me off home. 'Awa' hame wi' ye laddie and fetch your faither. Aye and tell him while he comes he mun bring a barra' wi' him'.

Thus, an agonising age later, a harrowed professor and his distraught sobbing son trundled back the now limp, silent yet still living body of my dearest friend to await the inevitable verdict of the vet. 'Nothing can be done to put him right, I'm afraid. We must put him out of pain'. So they did and I wasn't allowed to be there to hold his paw.

They didn't put *me* out of pain though. Nobody could have done that. The number of the tram was 104. I never forgot that number and over the school years whenever I saw it I wept silently inside me for my lost companion who was only eight, the same age as I was, when he died. We never did have another dog of our own. Never. In all the years I lived at home. I didn't want one anyway. I often thought about him when I was out in the country on my own. When I saw a rabbit in a field or on the golf course. Or at night if I was lonely or alone. Or any time when I wanted to talk to someone special, someone I loved, about something important that really mattered and which no one else could possibly understand. A large slice of life was cut off when Dookie died or so it seemed at the time. I wasn't yet old enough to realise that the end of one phase of life serves first and foremost as a marker for the next one that follows.

Dookie was buried in the garden at Divinity Manse. It was a big garden. His grave was beside a large chestnut tree at the drive entrance, but in no time I could scarcely remember exactly where it was. Besides it wasn't long before they cut down the chestnut tree. That happened because they were about to begin building the Elphinstone Hall which was to rise up behind the Manse and hide my distant view of the sea far away over the playing fields, the buildings on the other side of King Street, the public golf course and the 'bents' before and beyond the promenade. The "tarmac" promenade stretched the whole way from the estuary of the Don to the Corporation Swimming baths and Harry Gordon's Pavilion at the River Dee estuary and harbour end. Divinity Manse¹³ of course would have to go. Demolished. Soon Dad would be telling me that home was on the move again but to a much better, permanent home at No 5 The

Chanonry, a quiet little street leading up from the Old Aberdeen Town House along to St. Machars Cathedral. The Chanonry was university property and consisted almost entirely of University professorial residences.

We were destined to move into No.5 when it was ready, and not before. Meanwhile the University planners were ready to and set about tearing down Divinity Manse, not only to have better access to the building site but also to provide a better lawn-swept spectator view of the new edifice, the Elphinstone Hall. The new edifice was rising up in a position well back from and to one side of the ancient King's College Chapel. All that I could comprehend was the wanton destruction and removal from my world of my only turret; my personal castle in the sky. Sadly I must have already realised deep down that it probably represented my first and last refuge of that unique design. I would never again have a castle and be a knight in shining armour. In the many homes to follow I could and always did head for the attics, but turrets there were none.

Prior to the family's proposed translation to this new address in the Chanonry by way of various temporary abodes Aunt Ena, willy-nilly, and about twenty years of age, again reigned supreme for many months as hostess and housekeeper at Divinity Manse. Posted once again by the family to take care of her big brother and his son and heir, while the latter's sickly mother was 'getting better'. Ena's own career and personal ambitions, whatever they might have been at the time, were brusquely set aside by the family, my father included.

In those days, in the nineteen-twenties, careers for "womenfolk" were limited and very much a secondary consideration, particularly amongst the well-educated middle class. Whereas a university degree (preferably with Honours) was a *sine qua non* for the males in the family - even for second and third sons provided they were bright enough to win worthwhile bursaries. However it could be pointed out that Ena would, in the family's view at least, be spending her time sensibly as she would undoubtedly be gaining useful experience as a future bride-to-be, family considerations permitting, of course.

Meanwhile, living, unpaid but all found in her brother's house she was considered ideally situated to indulge in her painting and music. She painted in oils and in this field, I gathered much later, she was considered, according to Ena's own story, to be a competent but not a gifted artist. Certainly not in the same class as the sole but distant relative reputed to be a member of the Royal Scottish Academy and whom she claimed had enhanced the reputation of a previous generation. She also took lessons in the classical guitar with a lugubrious male instructor who wore horn-rimmed glasses and a black moustache and of whom I was extremely jealous in my childish way. Even my untrained ear could tell that Ena was no good at playing the beastly thing and never would be.

The moments and the scenes which I recall best are strangely mixed. It was Ena who taught me how to brush my teeth (up and down as well as sideways) and wash myself properly (everywhere) when I was having a bath. It was Ena who listened to my prayers. The same old routine every night ending up, '...and please, God, make Mummy better again'. By this time I was no longer sure what "better" meant or attached any significance to the word "again". I couldn't remember when she was well, ever. I asked Aunt Ena once if she said her prayers too. She replied 'Oh yes! Everyone has to say their prayers before they go to sleep'. But she didn't say anything about kneeling beside her bed or believing her prayers would come true or anything like that. I still did. Both kneel and believe.

So all along as one might expect I was adding to my store of do's and don'ts which helped make up the fabric of the daily round. They were grafted into the main weave not only by Ena, but by the Lizzies and Bellas in the past and present and by grandparents and sundry uncles and aunts in the course of family gatherings. And at school of course. Even Dad, on rare occasions, used to issue words of wisdom and advice, probably at some most unlikely moment. Over lunch and *à propos* of nothing in particular, 'Now always remember, my son, you must always stop, wherever you are, when a hearse is passing by and remove your hat'. True, because the majority was still horse drawn and the clip-clop of polished hooves and the toss of black plumed horses' heads were significant features, which still caught the ear and eye as the funeral procession passed slowly by (though I never wore a hat of any kind). Or Dad would pronounce (no matter where on the golf course and just before addressing his ball, and gazing into the distance), 'Never forget to dry your back properly when you've had a bath. Otherwise you will catch a chill.' No expression of doubt here. Not 'you might' or 'you could', but 'You will...'.

The run of the mill instruction came from many sources other than Dad and all boiled down to manners, with a capital M. Things like not speaking or drinking with your mouth full; not leaving food - especially fat - on the side of your plate. Waiting until you were asked if you would like a second helping. Lining up your knife and fork correctly when you'd finished and holding your knife properly, 'NOT like a fountain pen... Please!' And so on, all the other little nags that made up the stuff of good manners. There were in addition stringent requirements regarding outdoor etiquette. Walking on the outside of the pavement when accompanying a lady and raising your hat when you met one. Not eating in public or chucking away bits of paper or anything else in the street. When in the company of visiting grownups, not speaking until you were spoken to - and so on. In brief, MANNERS, plus minding your P's and Q's.

Advice on how to pay attention to all these strictures and behave correctly was being 'brought up' properly. Failure to do so correctly was a matter of the greatest importance. Indeed failure to toe the line led straight to the overriding unthinkable, unanswerable question. 'What will people think?' No further comment was thought necessary but that didn't stop me wondering. For instance you might ask yourself, 'Who are these people and what are their unspeakable thoughts?' The replies were left entirely to the imagination of the potential culprit, who would not be invited to comment in any event.

As for Divinity Manse itself - built in stone, not granite - I often looked back with a nostalgic sense of loss when I thought of my brief enjoyment of its interior bliss. Of the ancient oak chest and umbrella stand in the big entrance hall. The coat rack which I could not use because the pegs were too high for me to reach. No matter. On one flank beyond the washroom and WC, was my secret wooden door which creaked when you opened it and which lead by way of winding stone steps up to my turret stronghold. Everywhere in the house it seemed there were wooden floors and an all pervading smell of furniture and wax floor polishes. On the ground floor at other end of what seemed a long passage, past the morning room on one side and the dining room on the other, was Dad's holy of holies. His carpeted study, lined all round from wall to ceiling with shelf upon shelf crammed with books.

Looking back I understand that it was here that a reclusive occupant must have spent many a precious hour within its absorbing silence engrossed in a permanent haze of blue tobacco smoke. I remember that smoke as blue but surely it was grey? This was his sanctum and his sanctuary. Hallowed space walled in by

tiers of books, an oaken desk, a single leather covered easy chair, and pipe racks. A single picture squeezed grudgingly into the only possible place on one wall, a framed print of Albrecht Durer's *Praying*



III. 21: Dürer's Praying Hands (their possible personal significance for GTT is offered in Chapter 2)

Hands. Here was the reserved space where my academic father could withdraw in blessed solitude secretly detached from the world outside. But only once he was over its threshold into a truly private realm where brash everyday realities did not interrupt. Perhaps that is how Dad never seemed to openly complain about his family lot. He could always isolate himself high up on his academic cloud and think in peace... and ponder... and then lean forward and write.

Nonetheless, whatever time he might spend communing with his inner thoughts, we often did venture forth together. Even after Dookie was no longer there to prance and bark and laugh and welcome us on our way. We now no longer went for walks with the main purpose of exercising a dog but instead to collect the newspaper; to visit the Dinwiddies or Neville Davidson or Ian McAlister or some other friend - clerics every one. Even to play an occasional round of golf. The latter usually on a Saturday morning when there was no lecture to deliver and no preaching engagement on the following day. We would set off together by tram to the terminus at the Brig of Don and then on foot up past the Gordon Highlanders barracks to the clubhouse at Balgownie Golf Course which most people referred to as the Royal Aberdeen.



III. 22: Golfer photo from Haldane's collection – identity of player unknown

Well away from and at the back of the clubhouse behind the professional's shop I used to watch unengaged caddies gathered in little clusters round a mini 'pitch and putt' course of their own making. They hit old balls in and out of roughly defined holes gouged out of the rough hard ground in the area around the

professional's shop. There it was that all the caddies, old and young, played a cunning game of pitch and putt for bets of pennies or cigarettes. From anywhere upon the clubhouse site you could look back down the slope towards the barracks and watch a solitary rail car pulling out from its wooden lean-to 'station' which looked more like a bus shelter than anything else. The single coach with a built-in engine of some sort only travelled about three miles along its single line private track carrying players and their golf bags to Murcar public golf course which adjoined Balgownie but further up the coast. Murcar was not a championship course like Balgownie. You just happened to play alongside it on the turn at our ninth and tenth holes. I always wanted to have a round there but I never did.

In those days at only eight or nine years of age I was only allowed to play on the fairways at Balgownie. Not from the teeing grounds or on the greens. I also had the right play alone on the ladies' course whenever I so wished but it was only a short nine hole course. When I became a junior member at the age of ten and at the cost of half a guinea per annum, I was thereafter allowed to 'play properly', on the big course, with my father. I must have been all of twelve when I handed in my first scorecards and was given a handicap. I still wasn't allowed to play in competitions, which were restricted to full members - meaning grownups.

Needless to say, Ena, although she did play golf, never came to the golf course with us because she could only have become a temporary lady member. Permitted to play solely on the nine hole ladies' course and only because her brother was a full member. When she was in Edinburgh she played lacrosse and once had a trial for Scotland. What is more she played in goal which I thought was very brave from what I saw of the game.

Years later, in the nineteen-thirties I recall the revolutionary decision taken by the Club Committee which resulted in lady members being permitted to play on the 'big' course at Balgownie. Thursdays only, mind you. Still, a step in the right direction as seen at the time, although few would have admitted it. Dad didn't even think about it. Many years had passed before I could grasp the concept that, scarcely affected by the influence of the Great War and prolonged university education, his viewpoint in regard to women and their place in society was fundamentally unchanged from those of a patriarchal middle class Edwardian male who found himself head of a family.



So many of the themes of Haldane's childhood - the solitary childhood; the invalid mother, being farmed out to all kinds of mother substitutes and consequent build-up of a phenomenal self-sufficiency; dodging misplaced parental expectation; hidden seismic post-war mental impacts; contradictions between scholarly, religious and everyday life modes; constant changes of home address and servants; the irresistible urge to process one's life by putting it all down in writing - all were to repeat themselves almost in carbon-copy mode in the lives of his own children, though with new twists tempered by galloping technological and social change over ensuing decades. Already the chapter above shows to what extent the child is father of the man, and the next chapter looks retrospectively at Haldane's father's life in terms of the impact of World War I on him and the Thomson side of the family, but also considers briefly certain connected themes in Mary's parents' experience (later to be Haldane's In-laws).

- ¹ A variation on this thought is the Indian fable of several people in a dark room surrounding an elephant, asked to describe the nature of the beast. The one holding the trunk has a different idea from the one leaning against its vast stomach, and he in turn from those touching one of its tree-trunk-like legs, its ears or its tusks. The truth is a combination of all their accounts.
- ² *This is how the Manse and grounds are described in a present estate agent's notice: 'The Old Manse dates originally from the mid 17th century and has been extended in the 18th and 19th centuries. In keeping with the eras of the property it has many notable features including detailed cornicing and plasterwork. The property is "B" listed and is built of stone and harled under a slated roof. Entrance is via a gated driveway leading to extensive landscaped garden grounds.'*
- ³ A very faded and unreproducible photo in fact shows young toddler Haldane wearing this tam o'shanter.
- ⁴ *Some background history for the Tain Parish community is described thus in one internet entry I came across: 'At the Disruption of 1843, strong congregations of the Free Church were established in all the parishes of the presbytery of Tain. The union of the Free Church majority with the United Presbyterian Church in 1900 however saw the disappearance of a separate Free Church witness in at least two parishes including Tain, where the large congregation and its Minister entered the new United Free Church, taking the whole property of the congregation with them. (The other congregation which entered the Union in its entirety was Nigg.)'*
- ⁵ Again, there are some small photos in Haldane's album of Jocky that do not merit reproduction.
- ⁶ Wikipedia says of Nigg that it is 'a large relatively shallow sandy bay, consisting of mudflat, saltmarsh and wet grassland, located at the north east coast of the Cromarty Firth' (it is now an RSPB Reserve, its habitat perhaps already a factor in Haldane's early interest in bird-watching). 'Nigg Bay can be said to start at Balintraid pier - probably the oldest pier on the Cromarty Firth built by Thomas Telford in 1821.' It continues, 'The Nigg/Cromarty ferry route is often referred to as the 'The King's Ferry' - the route taken by King James IV of Scotland when on pilgrimage to the shrine of St Duthac at Tain, doing so at least 18 times in the years between 1493 to 1513'. It is still the only ferry service from the Black Isle, travelling between Cromarty and Nigg and crossing the entrance to the Cromarty Firth, one of the finest natural harbours in Europe, world-famous for its dolphin population.
- ⁷ As just referred to in the previous note, Duthac was, in fact, the patron saint of Tain, probably active there during the 8th to 9thC. The ruined chapel near the mouth of the river was said to have been built on the site of his birth. Duthac was officially accorded sainthood in 1419 and by the late Middle Ages his shrine had become one of the most important places of pilgrimage in Scotland. King James IV came here at least once a year throughout his reign to seek divine help in both his spiritual and political aims. Despite being the son of a Minister it appears Haldane was unaware his dog bore a saint's name!
- ⁸ In other words, they came from two extremes of Britain, north to south. Tain (or 'Baile Dubhthaichh/Duthac's Town) is on the northern block of Scotland and, because of the attraction of the Duthac monument and related church, the first 'Royal Burgh' endowed in 1066 by King Malcolm III (the Queen Mother's Castle May is a few miles away). With a long Neolithic and Pictish past already connecting it to Europe on Doggerland, by sea it was in later periods easily accessible both eastwards to France (Bonnie Prince Charlie landed here at one point and its harbour played a part in D-Day landing exercises) and northwards to Scandinavia (where of course the name Thomsen is as common as Smith is in Britain). Along with Wick, in the 17/18th centuries Tain even minted its own silver (coincidentally as I started to edit these paragraphs, a BBC Antiques Roadshow programme featured four Tain silver spoons and one Wick spoon from the Georgian period).
- ⁹ Again, the finger of Fate was already pointing to what Haldane's career-was-to-be following WWII.
- ¹⁰ When in 2014 I checked on Mainhill Farm, entries about it were from Edinburgh estate agents selling off its extensive fields, sadly now divided in two plots, separately from the main house.
- ¹¹ A quick check on the internet gives the following definition of these words: 'Dogmatic theology gets its name from the Greek and Latin word 'dogma' which, when referring to theology, simply means "a doctrine or body of doctrines formally and authoritatively affirmed". Basically, dogmatic theology refers to the official or "dogmatic" theology as recognized by an organized church body, such as the Roman Catholic Church, Dutch Reformed Church, etc . While the term is thought to have first appeared in 1659 in the title of a book by L. Reinhardt, it became more widely used following the Reformation and was used to designate the articles of faith that the church had officially formulated. A good example of dogmatic theology is the doctrinal statements or dogmas that were formulated by the early church councils who sought to resolve theological problems and to take a stand against heretical teaching. The creeds or dogmas that came out of the church councils were considered to be authoritative and binding on all Christians because the church officially affirmed them. One of the purposes of dogmatic theology is to enable a church body to formulate and communicate the doctrine that is considered essential to Christianity and which, if denied, would constitute heresy. Dogmatic theology is sometimes confused with systematic theology, with the two terms are at times used interchangeably.

However, there are subtle but important differences between the two. To understand the difference between systematic theology and dogmatic theology, it is important to notice that the term “dogma” emphasizes not only statements from Scripture, but also the ecclesiastical, authoritative affirmation of those statements. The fundamental difference between systematic theology and dogmatic theology is that systematic theology does not require official sanction or endorsement by a church or ecclesiastical body, while dogmatic theology is directly connected to a particular church body or denomination. Dogmatic theology normally discusses the same doctrines and often uses the same outline and structure as systematic theology, but does so from a particular theological stance, affiliated with a specific denomination or church.’ In other words GTT was concerned about formulating the tenets of the Church’s teaching, especially after his long stint in the Middle East, discussed in Chapter 2.

¹²This was known as ‘The Biblical Criticism Manse’, occupied by Andrew C. Baird (1919-1938), a lecturer who ‘took a special interest in the foreign students who came in considerable numbers to the University in the 20s and 30s’. (From 1892 Aberdeen had been the only University to throw open its doors quite freely to women, making no distinction and closing no classes to them.)

¹³ Information about the history of the Manse, gleaned (again) from the internet, tells us it was probably built in the 1800s and was a listed building.