

Mary Shepherd and the Causal Relation



The 3rd Earl of Rosebery with his family outside of Barnbogle Castle. Painted by Alexander Nasmyth in 1788. Mary Primrose is second from the right.

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Author's note:

This manuscript was written a dozen years ago and then set aside. In February 2014, the text was lightly edited to eliminate some typos and to improve readability. There is no new research here, but the material may be of use to historians and others interested in early modern women philosophers.

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Preface

Lady Mary Shepherd (1777-1847) was born Mary Primrose, on 31 December 1777. The daughter of an Earl, she grew up on an estate near Edinburgh during the Scottish Enlightenment.

Mary Shepherd's life and work were shaped in important ways by the philosophical and political controversies that arose in connection with David Hume and his philosophy. In particular, she was strongly motivated to refute the 'erroneous notions' of cause and effect advanced by Hume and his followers, which she viewed as leading to scepticism and atheism:

When she undertook a public refutation of these erroneous notions of cause and effect, it must be remembered it was at a time when they were most rampant and widely spread over the northern parts of Britain in particular. Every young man who came from the Universities of Scotland, attempted to show off his subtlety and academic lore, by denying there was any real causation in the world; all was mere imagination, and a piece of gross vulgar credulity [Blakey, 1850, p. 43].

Mary Shepherd published two major philosophical works, *An Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect* (1824) and *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe* (1827). In her analysis, Shepherd appealed to both reason and experience to defend knowledge of causality and external existence. First, she critiqued the 'erroneous notions' of cause and effect promoted by Hume and his followers. Next, she developed a theoretical alternative to their notions of cause and effect. Finally, she appealed to the causal relation to defend knowledge of external existence. The 'secret principle' of her work, Shepherd says, rests in a combination of three key points — our knowledge of causes, our knowledge of the efficiency of causes and the nature of visual representation [Blakey, 1879, p. 161].

Shepherd was clearly a remarkable woman, and was recognized as such by her contemporaries. Robert Blakey, who wrote about her in his *Memoirs*, said that,

She was, without exception, the most eloquent female talker I ever met with. Her lengthened sentences, uttered with great distinction, were quite stunning, and filled one with amazement at the subtlety of her mind [Blakey, 1879, p. 159].

Even more extraordinary, however, than Shepherd's powers of analysis and elocution, was her engagement of the philosophical issues and community of her day. Blakey writes,

Her ladyship threw herself into the general controversy, determined to do her utmost to check these illogical and dangerous opinions [Blakey, 1879, p. 160].

Shepherd's work, though neglected for many years, was better known during her lifetime. William Whewell is said to have used one of her treatises as a textbook at Cambridge. Toward the end of her life, as her health began to decline, Shepherd reflected on the significance of her contribution, singling out her first treatise, *An Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect*, as having made a 'decided impression' on the Edinburgh school:

I conceive there can be little doubt but that the Essay on "Cause and Effect" made a decided impression on the Edinburgh School. When I first married, about thirty years ago, every ambitious student piqued himself on maintaining there was no such thing as Cause and Effect. It was one of that school — but one wiser and better informed — that, on reading my Essay, was startled by the discovery, he was pleased to say, I had made, as to the reality and attributes of Causation. But through indisposition, I am scarcely able to discuss this greatest of all subjects which can occupy the spirit of man. [Blakey, 1879, p. 161]

Mary Shepherd and the Causal Relation is a work in two parts:

Part One gives context to the life and work of Lady Mary Shepherd — weaving together the stories of her ancestors, her own stories and the wider social, historical and philosophical context. The aim is to evoke a world from which to mark the emergence of Mary Shepherd, Scotland's first female philosopher.

Part Two explores Shepherd's philosophy and expands on the social and historical context set out in Part One. As the threads of Shepherd's narrative are woven together, it becomes apparent that Shepherd applies standards of reason and evidence in all matters — whether personal, political or philosophical. It also becomes apparent that Shepherd's philosophical response to Hume and his followers is in many respects forward looking, and that Shepherd contributed in important ways to the development of British thought after Hume. In the end, there is both coherence and significance to a remarkable life and philosophy built upon Enlightenment ideals.

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Part One

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Chapter 1

God and the King: The Primrose Ancestry

Whether or not we embrace our heritage, it often defines us. This was no less true two hundred years ago than it is today. It was especially true for Mary Primrose, whose life and work were, in important ways, shaped by her family and social circumstances. Born into the Scottish aristocracy in 1777, Mary Primrose went on, remarkably, to become Scotland's first female philosopher. In 1824 and 1827, by then known under her married name of Lady Mary Shepherd, she published two major philosophical works: one on the relation of cause and effect and the other on our perception of the external universe.¹

By the time of Mary Primrose's birth, the Primrose family, like other newly titled Scottish families, was preoccupied with maintaining and increasing its social standing. To that end, the acquisition of a family estate — including heirlooms, fine furnishings, deeds of title and the like — was of great importance. In 1788, Mary's father, Neil Primrose, 3rd Earl of Rosebery, saw to it that his family's aristocratic provenance was preserved in a majestic family portrait. The Nasmyth portrait draws the eye to two essential elements: the Primrose family and the family estate. Set on the grounds of Dalmeny, near Edinburgh, the viewer's attention is first drawn to Neil Primrose, who stands hand-in-hand with his young heir, Archibald Primrose, and then to the family home itself, a medieval castle named Barnbogle. Less prominently featured is the ten

1. See [Shepherd, 1824] and [Shepherd, 1827] in the Bibliography.

year old Mary Primrose, who looks toward her father and brother. The others include: Neil's wife, Mary (nee Vincent); his eldest daughter, Charlotte; his youngest daughter, Arabella; and the baby of the family, Francis. There is a minor blemish in the portrait where the short-lived Hester Amelia, originally shown in her carriage, was painted out.

At the time of the Nasmyth portrait, Barnbogle was, by Scottish standards, a relatively new acquisition.² Indeed, the castle had been in the hands of the Primrose family for over a century, and yet Barnbogle was still referred to by some as 'the home of the Mowbrays'. As Holton writes, 'Until the 19C, the [Primrose] family continued to live in Barnbogle Castle, the home of the Mowbrays, situated on the shores of the Forth' [Holton, 1980, p. 5].³ As it turns out, both the medieval castle and the Mowbray family were tied to local legend. The Mowbray family, rumored to have shipped contraband directly into the castle cellars, was evidently a colorful lot, and when Sir Robert Mowbray lost the estate in 1620, 'through debts and other misfortunes', his demise touched the hearts of many. By one eighteenth century account, a representative of the Mowbray family was 'still in the parish, but reduced to the condition of a common servant' [Robertson, 1799, vol. I, p. 239]. In the end, whatever the circumstances of the Mowbray family's demise, their loss would be the Primrose family's gain.⁴

The Nasmyth portrait is but one of the many Primrose family portraits that would have been familiar to Mary Primrose in her youth. Among the other family portraits that would surely have been featured prominently would have been portraits of ancestors such as the 1st Earl of Rosebery, Archibald Primrose. This Primrose became 'Laird of Barnbogle' in 1662, and was integral to the family's rise to prominence.

2. Title to Barnbogle was purchased in 1662 by Archibald Primrose, Mary's great-great grandfather.

3. In the Nasmyth portrait, Neil Primrose points across the drum sands towards Hound Point — perhaps alluding to an earlier Mowbray history. The original owner of Barnbogle, Sir Roger Mowbray, was killed on Crusade. According to local legend, the ghost of Sir Roger Mowbray's dog haunts Hound Point.

4. James Scott's article on Dalmeny repeats the story [Scott, 1845, vol. II].

Other family portraits would doubtless have been missing or less prominently displayed: It is unlikely, for example, that a portrait of the Neil's father, the 2nd Earl — a reckless 'black sheep' who lost a great deal of the family fortune — would have graced the front hall of Barnbogle. Nor is it likely that a portrait of Neil's sister, Dorothea Primrose — who successfully sued the estate for the right to her inheritance — would have been hanging prominently alongside the other family portraits.⁵

Though the young Mary Primrose's aristocratic circumstances and Scottish heritage favoured some access to education, the details of her family history and social context are needed to make sense of her intellectual predilections. Accordingly, to begin to set the context for Mary Shepherd's life and work, it is worthwhile to consider how the family rose to prominence in the first place. This, it turns out, is a story of loyalty to God and King.

Prior to the acquisition of Barnbogle and the earldom, the first Primrose to rise to prominence under the Stuarts was Gilbert Primrose M.D., principal surgeon to King James VI. This Gilbert Primrose wrote several medical texts. He seems, however, to have achieved less prominence than his sons, Gilbert Primrose D.D., who became one of His Majesty's Chaplains in Ordinary, and James Primrose, who became Clerk of the Privy Council.

Gilbert Primrose D.D., a church minister remembered for his loyalty to the ecclesiastic policies of King James VI, initially gained notoriety as a result of some difficulties with the French church. In 1603, the Huguenots had him transferred to Bordeaux on suspicion of harbouring connections with the 'cult of images'. Later, in 1623, the Jesuits had him banished from France altogether. For, Primrose had argued — against the Archbishop of Bordeaux's defence of monastic succession — that many High Priests, Bishops and Popes had been 'Idolaters, Hereticks and Socerers' [Primrose, 1617, Bk. I, Ch. VII, p. 37]. Ultimately, Primrose gained the protection of King James VI, and upon his return to Britain, became 'a great favourite'.

James Primrose was the other son with high connections. This James Primrose, Mary Primrose's great-great-great grandfather, became Clerk

5. Dorothea Primrose appears to have sued her family and won a settlement in 1761. She married Sir Adam Inglis of Cramond in 1766 and died without issue at Bath in 1783.

of the Privy Council. Through his tenure as Clerk, James Primrose obtained, in 1616, exclusive rights to publish a catechism on high prerogative entitled *God and the King*. The text teaches the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings — the doctrine that the King has absolute authority over his subjects. *God and the King* was made mandatory at all educational levels. And, for those who could not read, there was an instructive portrait of the King on the book's frontispiece: There, King James VI is shown showered by rays of the sun. The sun itself has the word 'God' inscribed upon it, and between the sun [God] and the King is the further inscription 'By me Kings Raigne'. Hence, the picture shows a direct and authoritative link from God to the King. The oath of allegiance within, the text implies, will help to preserve order by extinguishing 'the AEgyptian darkness of Popery' [James, 1616, pp. 14–15].

The privileges associated with publication rights to *God and the King* were considerable, and the Primrose family's support of the Stuart monarchy brought lasting good fortune. Even so, support for the Stuart monarchy was not without its challenges. King James VI's approach to uniting state and religion, which included an ecclesiastic policy styled 'Armenian moderatism', was unpopular in Scotland. The policy — which promoted a moderate and united Protestantism — downplayed religious differences and dropped the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. It was disliked by many Protestants, including Scotland's Presbyterian leader, Andrew Melville, who saw the approach as a threat to Presbyterianism [Mullan, 1986, pp. 167– 168].⁶ And yet, despite growing opposition, Stuart efforts to weaken Presbyterianism continued. Following his accession, Charles I introduced various Episcopal Acts and founded the See of Edinburgh. In 1637, he further introduced the Scottish *Book of Common Prayer* — a singularly unpopular tome that was quickly dubbed 'Romisch superstition'. Following these latter moves, many Scots harbouring negative attitudes towards the Stuarts became decidedly hostile. Thus, rather than achieving a moderate form of Protestantism, Stuart ecclesiastic policy had fostered religious and civic opposition.

6. 'Armenian moderatism' was named after Dutch professor, Jacob Arminius. The confrontational Melville, an outspoken critic of both the King and Armenian moderatism, was imprisoned in London Tower in 1607. Gilbert Primrose D.D. was among those who appealed to the King's generosity for Melville's release.

By the mid-seventeenth century, religious and political opposition had become deeply entrenched in Scotland. In 1638, a Scottish National Covenant was declared. Its signatories resolved ‘constantly to adhere unto and defend’ Presbyterianism. A few years later, in 1643, a commission comprised of representatives from Scotland’s General Assembly, a Westminster Assembly of Divines and Commissioners from the English Parliament, met, against the King’s will, to discuss the divisive issues [Earl of Middleton, 1661]. The general will underlying the assembly seems to have been one of reclaiming Scotland’s civic and religious freedoms — in opposition to sentiments such as those expressed in the ecclesiastic policies of the Stuarts and *God and the King*.

In the midst of the turmoil, the longstanding service of the Primrose family continued to be a paying proposition. In 1641, we find Archibald Primrose, great-great grandfather to Mary Primrose, succeeding his father as Clerk of the Privy Council. And when opposition to the Stuarts reached a peak and the demands of royal service grew even greater, Archibald Primrose rose to the challenge, following the Marquis of Montrose into battle in support of the king. Accordingly, when Charles I was overthrown, Archibald Primrose, along with the other royalists, was taken prisoner at Philiphaugh. Spared his life by the Marquis of Argyll, Primrose’s loyalty to the Stuarts would once again prove to be a winning cause: In 1651, Charles II awarded Archibald Primrose a knighthood.⁷

Following the restoration, documents such as *God and the King* were replaced by an official legal constitution. This constitution set out the rights and responsibilities of the monarch and his subjects. The new constitutional document, *The Lawes and Actes* of 1661, was published by none other than the Clerk of the Privy Council, Sir Archibald Primrose. Extracted from records of Parliament, the new constitution came close, in places, to restating the doctrine of Divine Right. The publication appears to have helped to seal the happy fate of the Primrose family. In

7. If popular recollection on Sir Archibald’s character and deportment reflect any measure of truth, then consider: ‘Throughout the changes of that troublesome period, he maintained so high a character for integrity and wisdom, as to have exercised immense influence over the destinies of his country, whose welfare he had deeply at heart’. In addition, Primrose is said to have possessed ‘a great measure of sagacity and prudence, with expedients always ready for every difficulty’. [Scott, 1845, pp. 97–98] [Parish details – see also Robertson]

1662, Sir Archibald Primrose was able to firmly establish the succession of the family by purchasing a seat, in the form of title to Barnbogle.

Primrose family allegiances grew somewhat complicated in the late seventeenth century — the time of Britain's so-called 'Glorious Revolution'. King Charles II's son and successor, King James II, appeared to insist on both Catholicism and Divine Right, and his will was seen as provokingly contrary to the ideals of post-Commonwealth Britain. What the British now wanted was not authoritarian rule, but good government — namely, government that would respect the principle of compromise between Parliament and monarchy. A crisis shortly ensued, and even those with royalist sympathies began to lose confidence in the Stuarts. There grew a conviction that a thoroughly Protestant succession would be needed to ensure good civil government in Britain. Blind allegiance to the Stuarts became impossible, and those among Britain's most powerful began to look elsewhere for a line of monarchs to succeed the Stuarts. In doing so, they turned their attention to Hanover, where a direct Stuart descendant, Mary, was married to the Protestant, William of Orange.

So it was that families such as the Primroses switched loyalties from the Stuarts to the Hanovers. At one point, Archibald Primrose, son of the Archibald Primrose who first became 'Laird of Barnbogle', found himself in trouble with King James II. He succeeded in removing himself from difficulty by 'declaring Popish' before the Privy Council in 1688, but afterwards left to serve as Gentleman of the Bedchamber to Prince George. Perhaps like other Scottish statesmen of the day, he consoled himself with the thought that the art of the politician turns on the ability to find rational compromise between opposing tendencies. And, in retrospect, the only rational compromise at that point in time would have been to convert to Hanoverian loyalties.⁸

8. Given the existing controversies and power struggles between supporters of the Commonwealth and royalists, *The Lawes and Actes* may have sounded like too much of a reinstatement of the doctrine of Divine Right — a doctrine that by this time had been rejected many times over by the people of Britain. In retrospect, it is easy to see that the Stuart's days were numbered.

Upon his return to Scotland, Archibald Primrose, now a firm supporter of William of Orange, was entrusted with the important task of reporting information about supporters of James II and his descendants, the 'Jacobites', to the new government. Apparently, this fealty to the new Hanoverian cause was richly rewarded. For, Mary Primrose's great-grandfather, Archibald Primrose, was soon created Viscount (1700) and then Earl (1703). One of the patents of creation refers explicitly to the services of Sir Archibald Primrose to King Charles I and II, and also to 'the good behaviour of his son' [Cokayne, 1984]. Ultimately, Archibald Primrose became one of the Commissioners of the 1707 *Act of Union* between England and Scotland.

Scotland's troubles did not end with the Hanoverian succession. Just as the new regime was beginning to take hold, a growing Jacobite movement advanced the Stuart claim to the throne. The Glorious Revolution had redefined the nature of the political union between Scotland and England, and given the magnitude of the changes, there was widespread discontent. Political and religious divisions increased and the political climate grew very uncertain. Many Scottish nobles refused

In one Act, the 'Act Rescinding and Annulling the pretended Parliaments, in the years, 1640, 1641, &c.', we find a statement mourning the demise of Divine Right: 'Yet, such has been the madness and delusion of these times, that even Religion itself, which holds the Right of Kings to be Sacred and Inviolable, hath been pretended unto, for warrand of all these injurious Violations and Incrachments, so publickly done and owned, upon and against, His Majesties just Power, Authority and Government.' [Earl of Middleton, 1661, Act XV, p. 38]. In another Act, the 'Act for taking the Oath of Allegiance, and asserting the Royal Prerogative', we find a new and improved Oath of Allegiance, complete with echoes of *God and the King*:

For testification of my faithful obedience to my most gracious and redoubted Sovereign, Charles, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c. Affirm, testifie and declare, by this my Solemn Oath, That I acknowledge my said Sovereigne only Supreme Governour of this kingdom, over all Persons and in all Causes; And that no Foreign Prince, Power or State or Person Civil or Ecclesiastick, hath an Jurisdiction, Power or Superiority over the same; And therefore I do utterly renounce and foresake all Forreign Power, Jurisdications and Authorities; and shall at my utmost power, defend, assist and maintain His Majesties Jurisdiction foresaid, against all deadly, and shall never decline His majesties Power and Jurisdiction, as I shall answer to God [Earl of Middleton, 1661, Act XI, p. 18].

to swear allegiance to William and Mary. The country grew more divided than ever, and conditions were ripe for revolution. By 1745, Highland Jacobites and non-juring Episcopalians had united against the newly emerging power structure.

Though much of the Jacobite unrest was confined to the Scottish Highlands, Edinburgh itself fell briefly under threat of Jacobite invasion. Curiously, it was Edinburgh's professors who rose to defend the town — an event that became legendary in the popular imagination and drew positive attention to the professoriate.⁹ Even so, as fear of civil unrest grew, so too did a general fear of ideological change — especially change perceived to be detrimental to civil and religious order. And, sure enough, ideological change was on the rise, particularly in the universities. In Edinburgh, the threat culminated in the ideas of the philosopher, David Hume, whose abstract philosophy appeared to some to pose an unwelcome challenge to both God and King. What Hume had in fact done was to develop the implications of the empiricist ideas of John Locke — the intellectual hero of the Glorious Revolution. Yet, in doing so, Hume seemed to have shown that empiricist ideas led to scepticism. Indeed, Hume's treatises ultimately challenged the rational and scriptural foundations for belief in the existence of God. Denounced by his peers, Hume was denied the Chair of Moral Philosophy in 1744-45 and publicly charged with atheism.

The political and intellectual controversy that unfolded in the wake of the Hume affair was insubstantial. In particular, very little attention was paid to Hume's doctrine of causality or to its links to scepticism and atheism — topics that would become central to the work of later critics, including Mary Shepherd. In 1744-45, the bare accusation of atheism presented for most of Edinburgh's establishment an open-and-shut case against Hume's candidature. For, though there was some support for freedom of conscience in eighteenth century Edinburgh, the bounds of tolerance could not be made to stretch to a perceived case of atheism, which was what most of Edinburgh's leaders were prepared to charge against Hume.¹⁰ There was no need then, to seriously vet the philosophical and theological charges against Hume in a public debate. The charge of atheism was beyond smoothing over, and the political instability of the day meant that all parties would be especially cautious in the face of religious and political controversy.¹¹

9. The early death of the mathematician, Colin Maclaurin, was attributed to his heroic efforts to defend Edinburgh. See [Sher, 1985].

10. The struggle over Hume's candidature has been directly tied to a power struggle between competing Whig factions in Edinburgh. See 'The "affair" at Edinburgh and the "project" at Glasgow; the politics of Hume's attempts to become a professor' [Emerson, 1994]. Emerson writes,

The first thing one must understand about Scottish university appointments in the eighteenth century is that they were politicized, and that the politicians concerned with them were intent upon controlling every office of profit and honour in the kingdom. The more one controlled, the greater one's prestige, power and ability to manage affairs in ways useful to oneself and one's associates or masters in London. The privilege of managing Scottish affairs for the ministry in London had been sought since c. 1714 by two competing Scottish factions — the Squadrone and the Argathelians. Both were Whiggish in outlook, but their territorial bases and leaders were very different [Emerson, 1994, p. 1].

Despite the political nature of Scottish university appointments, it is unlikely that Hume's failure to secure a university position can be convincingly attributed to a political power struggle. Hume himself had friends in both Whig camps. But it is likely that neither of the Whig parties would have been willing to give the appearance of sponsoring an 'infidel', and perhaps, fostering social and religious unrest. Hume's trials and tribulations can easily be explained in a simpler and more general way in connection with the exaggerated fears of civil disorder and Jacobite unrest. The real problem facing the various ruling families was how to prevent subversion of their holds over Church, Town Council and College — the very institutions through which they exerted power. Hence, the two competing camps, the Squadrone and the Argathelians, would have shared many similar interests and concerns as candidate ruling parties: in particular, both parties needed to find church and university leaders who could articulate their vision and bring together what had become a fractured nation. Hume, who had become both controversial and a liability, was not one such candidate. In the final analysis, the struggle over Hume's appointment was buried under layers of history and politics, so that neither the tenets of Hume's philosophy nor his accomplishments received much of a hearing. Given the pressing concerns of the day, a cry in support of a presumed atheist such as Hume would have been, to put it mildly, untimely. At some level, it must have been apparent to all sides, as well as to Hume, that the dangerous philosophy of 'heresy, deism, scepticism and atheism' would have to be quashed [Emerson, 1994, p. 10]. [Note that the phrase 'heresy, deism, scepticism and atheism' is due to university principal, William Wishart.]

11. Given their personal and political affiliations, some of Hume's Primrose-family contemporaries might well have been among his silent supporters: James Primrose, the 2nd Earl, was married to Mary Campbell, sister of the 4th Duke of Argyll — the ruling family that had backed Hume's candidacy [See Complete Peerage under Argyll]. However, an important factor clouds the matter: The 2nd Earl, the one who lost much of the family fortune, also ran off with the maid, thereby abandoning his wife, Mary Campbell. Neil Primrose, Mary Primrose's father, would have taken at least some interest in the Hume episode; for he ended up in the 1746 course on moral philosophy taught by the successful candidate, William Cleghorn [Primrose, 1803–1868, vol. 28]. As for Lady Mary Shepherd, she was a friend of a descendant of the House of Argyll, Lord John Campbell, who became Baron and Lord Chancellor of England [Brandreth, 1888, p. 42]. Thus, the Primrose and Campbell families had long-standing connections.

Chapter 2

A Childhood in Dalmeny

Mary Primrose spent her childhood on the family estate, Dalmeny, near Edinburgh. Born on 31 December 1777 at Barnbougale Castle, little is known about the young Mary Primrose. One of the few personal remarks to have survived about her is that she loved her birthplace, Barnbougale Castle [Brandreth, 1888, p. 30]. Built in the thirteenth century, the castle is framed on one side by the Firth of Forth and on the other by the woodland parks of Dalmeny. The Primrose family connections and the storied past of the castle would doubtless account for Mary Primrose's emotional ties. However, legend aside, the realities of living in a medieval castle were far from rosy. In comparison with the many fine manorial homes in the area, the castle was said to be small, cold, and damp. But for its 'fanciful situation within the sea mark, and for its embrazures presenting a strong front to the sea', the edifice was 'in no way remarkable' [Robertson, 1799, p. 239]. On another account, 'The 3rd earl decided to have a new residence built slightly inland, the story being that one day he had just risen after dinner and was soaked by a large wave' [Holton, 1980, p. 5].¹

Whatever inconveniences castle life may have afforded, Mary Primrose, like many of her generation, seems to have enjoyed an idyllic childhood. At least, the remaining clues that can be pieced together would suggest as much. The enchantment of Barnbougale and the natural

1. In the end, Neil Primrose could not bring himself to rebuild. A new dwelling, Dalmeny House, was eventually built in 1814–1817 under the direction of Mary's brother, Archibald Primrose, the 4th Earl of Rosebery.

beauty of its rural setting must have offset the limitations of the five century old dwelling. The 'charming park of Barnbogle, as one eighteenth century observer remarked, is 'characterised for its bold waving surface, composed of the finest heights and lawns, and also for the variety, elegance, and fancy, of the rides within its circuit' [Robertson, 1799, p. 229]. Indeed, its prospect was said to extend 'as far as the eye can reach', and the scenery was described as 'among the finest in Europe' [Robertson, 1799, p. 229]. Barnbogle was, in fact, a local landmark.

The Primrose family had several homes, and Mary Primrose and her siblings initially divided their days between London, Norfolk, and Edinburgh.² But, as the young family grew in number, Barnbogle took hold as the primary residence.³ Indeed, to the eighteenth century aristocrat, the country held many attractions, and children in wealthy families were often brought up in the fresh country air. Country living was viewed as formative: the country was 'the place from which the nation's leaders must spring and the untainted paradise which must sustain them' [Christie, 2000, p. 2]. And, the countryside in Dalmeny was perfectly suited to the ideal of country living. One of several coastal parishes near Edinburgh, the view from the rising banks of the Forth encompassed 'numerous towns, villages, seats, [and] woody hills' [Robertson, 1799, p. 229].

In addition to physical beauty, Dalmeny, along with the nearby parishes of Cramond and Queensferry, counted dozens of fine homes. Over the years, these had been either owned or rented by some of Scotland's most prominent families — including Dundas, Erskine, Napier, Law, Stewart, Hamilton, Cockburn, Cleghorn, Blair, Campbell, Wilkie, Inglis, Chalmers, Bonar, Caird, Brewster, Jeffrey, and Pillans.³ The legal profession was particularly well represented, and over the decades, local notables included Henry Erskine, Hugh Blair, Henry Cockburn and

2. Mary Primrose spent most of her formative years at Barnbogle, with annual visits to Bixley Hall, Norfolk, and occasional visits to Holland House in London. The period in which Neil Primrose rented Holland House (then considered on the outskirts of London) was shortly following that in which the proprietor, Lord Kensington, had been forced to sell his own freehold. As with Sir Robert Mowbray of Barnbogle, Lord Kensington and his descendants were 'barred and extinguished' from any further claim to the property and title.

3. By the mid-nineteenth century, the area was home to a dynamic intellectual and religious community. See [Fraser, 1904; Grant, 1884].

Francis Jeffrey. There were also prominent clergy, scholars, inventors, statesmen, professors, and university administrators. The accomplishments of the various individuals with connections to the area are too many and varied to describe in passing, and it suffices to say that the area attracted many of Edinburgh's gentry. They studied, worked and entertained in their country manors and town residences, commuting on the 'Great North Road' from Edinburgh, described as 'one of the pleasantest and most frequented in Scotland' [Wood, 1799, p. 225].⁴

The distinguished local community must have presented a stimulating and rich environment for a country childhood. Music, drama and reading were important aspects of country life, and several of the country homes in the area might easily have served as a court to shelter artists, writers, musicians and actors. Like other children living in manorial country homes, Mary Primrose would have enjoyed these forms of cultural enrichment, as well as some of the special freedoms associated with country living. Children living in country manors 'had greater opportunities than many others to express their feelings and energy, in wild games which could take place in the fine landscapes and shrubberies their families owned' [Christie, 2000, p. 131]. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the Primrose children did in fact enjoy such a carefree and unspoiled childhood. Consider that only a strong sense of freedom and adventure could have led to the contemplation of the following mischief: On one occasion, as Mary Primrose tattled, 'Lady Charlotte had declared her intention of driving a four-in-hand phaeton dressed in a drab coat with seven capes and a long whip' [Brandreth, 1888, p. 28]. Moreover, it was not beyond the pale for the Primrose girls to steal away to the local manse to engage Mr. Archibald Bonar, Minister of Cramond, in 'theological scéances' [Brandreth, 1888, p. 28].⁵ This level of independence would have been unusual for Scottish girls of the period; however, the freer standards associated with country living and the social standing of the Primrose family would have mitigated the stricter rules appropriate for city living.

4. The entry 'Parish of Cramond' is extracted from an unpublished manuscript by John Wood entitled 'The Topography of Cramond Parish'. Cf. [Wood, 1794]. It is about seven miles from Dalmeny to Edinburgh.

5. It is unclear whether Mary, Charlotte, or both girls frequented the

While country living had its freedoms, it also had its formalities and traditions. Religious observance, for example, was nearly universal. The church and parish history at Dalmeny had long been one of Episcopalian and Presbyterian rivalry, and this rivalry appears to have persisted throughout the eighteenth century.⁶ Neil Primrose was probably among the so-called 'Faithful Remnant' of Episcopalians who, having been turned out of St. Giles Cathedral, met in secret over a shop in Carubber's Close, and later, in Charlotte Chapel on Register Street. Buried in the Rosebery aisle at Dalmeny Church, Neil Primrose's funeral service was held at the Episcopalian Charlotte Chapel, under the direction Daniel Sandford, Bishop of Edinburgh. Whatever the particulars, it is clear that various religious divisions prevailed in Dalmeny. By the late eighteenth century, there were 143 seceders in the parish, including one clergyman.⁷

local manse. As a member of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and Treasurer of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Mr. Bonar was linked to a controversy surrounding the election of John Leslie to the Chair of Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh. The theological scéances with Mr. Bonar may well have had something to do with the Leslie controversy. However, given that Bonar and others in the area were involved in the movement that led to the Disruption of the Established Church of Scotland, the discussions may well have had to do with religion and freedom of conscience. In any case, the illicit visits demonstrate the strong sense of independence on the part of the Primrose children.

6. [Holton, 1980, p. 5] The grounds for religious division in Scotland were manifold— an important one being that Presbyterianism rejected both the ecclesiastic authority of the monarch and the Papal authority of Rome. Presbyterianism transferred authority directly into the hands of the presbyters themselves, and abolished the Bishopric — an element of democracy popular with many Scots, though problematic for the ruling classes. Indeed, politically, the Presbyteries had played an important role in weakening traditional lines of power in Scotland. The fact that Scotland's Episcopal tradition remained tied to the Church of Rome on matters such as apostolic succession and Papal authority was sufficient to drive a wedge between the Episcopal and Anglican Churches, and this division worked to the advantage of Presbyterianism.

7. This number represents about one in six parishioners. Robertson lists two clergymen in Dalmeny; one Established and one Seceder. Thomas Robertson represents the Establish Church of Scotland. [Robertson, 1799, p. 241]

The sermons preached in the Dalmeny area during Mary Primrose's youth were probably quite stimulating and rich; both Dalmeny and nearby Cramond had highly educated ministers. And, for those times when the mind did seek an escape from the sermon, there was plenty to fill the eye and the imagination. Dalmeny church dates from about 1160, and, like Cramond and other local churches, has a rich history.⁸ Architectural details include an elaborately carved entrance door, 'with fabulous animals, figures and grotesque head, probably taken from the Bestiary, the product of credulous medieval imagination' [Chalmers, 1904]. The arches of the apse, chancel, and nave are decorated with Norman chevron carving, and mason's marks cut into floor slabs date the church to its medieval origins.⁹ Indeed, traditions of worship at the site extend from Celtic to Catholic to Episcopalian and Presbyterian.

8. The terms 'Barnbogle' and 'Dalmeny' derive from the Celtic 'Bar na-buai-gall', which means 'the point of the victory of strangers' and 'Dumanie', which means either 'black heath' or 'fort of the monks'. See [Scott, 1845, p. 96] and [Robertson, 1799, p. 227]. 'About a mile to the west of Barnbogle Castle, on top of a high sea bank, is an ancient cairn, called by the country people the Earl Cairny, of a circular shape, 500 feet in circumference, and 24 high in the middle'. The cairn was probably raised as a sepulchral monument in the Celtic burial tradition [Robertson, 1799, p. 238]. The town of Cramond, which is very near to Barnbogle, was built around the remains of an early Roman fort. Dalmeny Church itself was built for Gospatric by masons from the Dunfermline Abbey. According to one source, there was a monastery of the order of the Holy Trinity at Dalmeny in 1297 [Scott, 1845, p. 101]. The church is ancient and beautiful, and described as 'a small but elegant fabric of Saxon architecture' and as 'one of the finest specimens of that style in Scotland' [Macgregor, 1857, p. 358].

9. The churchyard holds reminders of an earlier Celtic tradition, and, 'At the door of the church there is a stone-coffin of large dimensions, cut from a single block, and covered both on the lid and sides with hieroglyphics which cannot now be deciphered' [Scott, 1845, p. 102]. To this it is added that, 'Coffins of similar material, but of much simpler and ruder construction, have been found in other parts of the parish, one of which is still to be seen with its end projecting from the bank'.

By the late eighteenth century, the Episcopalian patronage of Mary's father, Neil Primrose, would likely have introduced tensions for local Presbyterians — the same kinds of tensions and conflicts reflected quite generally in the history of Scotland itself. As 'Laird of Barnbogle', Neil Primrose was legally required to provide funding for the Presbyterian parish, and by the *Patronage Act* of 1712, was entitled to appoint parish ministers. In 1775, Neil Primrose invited Reverend Thomas Robertson to take up the charge of Dalmeny. The appointment was, by Robertson's own admission, controversial.¹⁰

Whether Mary Primrose, baptised at Barnbogle Castle on January 8, 1778, was ever dipped into the parish baptismal basin — inscribed 'Dalmeny Kirk 1778' — we can only guess. The Primrose family, however, did attend services at both Cramond and Dalmeny.¹¹ As a girl, Mary Primrose also became familiar with the conventions of Anglican worship through her sojourns in London. On one visit, she wandered into an Anglican Church, and found her religious experience suddenly expanded beyond the familiar limits:

10. The Primrose family was on intimate terms with at least one Presbyterian dissenter, James Pillans, who became a 'tutor or 'Dominie' to the Primrose girls. In view of the history of religious conflict in Scotland, the Primrose family's diverse religious affiliations are probably significant. They would have suggested sympathy and sensitivity toward problems arising from religious divisions, and a willingness to treat religion as separable — to some extent at least — from educational and political matters.

11. [Scott, 1845, pp. 101–102] The Dalmeny church has been dated as far back as the tenth or eleventh centuries, based on its resemblance to the church of Narcoide, which was built before the time of William the Conqueror. One description is as follows: It is a very elegant small fabric, all of cut stone, 84 feet long and 25 feet broad, except at the east end, where it contracts into a semicircle. The pediments of the principal doors and windows are richly carved, resting on single columns with Gothic capitals, and round the upper part of the building there is an embossment of carved faces, all dissimilar and of grotesque appearance. But the chief beauty of the church is in the interior, which has a striking effect on entering from the west, especially from the upper part of the gallery. The body of the church is divided into three parts by two semicircular arches, that over the chancel being so much smaller than the other as to render the perspective peculiarly pleasing. They are both richly ornamented with successive tiers of mouldings of a zigzag or starry shape.

Once — it was a Sunday — my mother heard the church bells and went as the sound led her. The bells stopped, and she heard the organ peal out. In the Scotch Church at Dalmeny there was no organ. She went in, and there sat through the service in wondering delight at the beauty of the music and the prayers of the liturgy. She got back safe to the inn, but missed her dinner. However, no scolding came, and her father seems to have sympathised in a kind of silent way. [Brandreth, 1888, p. 34]

Whatever the controversies and uncertainties around public worship, there is much to suggest that Mary Primrose's childhood in Dalmeny was relatively peaceful and pleasant. Edinburgh society was enjoying a period of artistic and intellectual flourishing. As such, the spirit of the times was, for the most part, positive and open-minded. As daughter to the 'Laird of Barnbogle', Mary Primrose enjoyed many advantages. She received a fine education — much better than was generally accessible to children of her generation. She did not likely attend the local parish school, which, despite the small size of the parish, had about 50 to 70 students per year. The subjects taught there were typical, including English and writing, Arithmetic, Latin and French.¹²

Whatever the reasons, — whether due to church patronage or to the popularity of local teachers — the Dalmeny school developed a good reputation. The Reverend Thomas Robertson, himself a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, remarked that, 'The purity of the air has, among other considerations, occasioned a great number of gentlemens sons to be sent as boarders to the parish school here' [Robertson, 1799, p. 230]. There were numerous girls in attendance at Dalmeny as well; the school log for 1792 shows that about one third of Dalmeny's students were girls.¹³

12. See [Wood, 1794, p. 221] and [Robertson, 1799, p. 235]. Scotland's Presbyterian ministers promoted the parish schools, which served as a means for parishioners to learn the Bible and helped to consolidate the influence of the Established Church. In addition, there were two private schools in the area, and, all told, about 200 children attended the local schools.

13. [Parish of Dalmeny, 1792-1817] The school log for 1792 lists 27 boys and 17 girls.

Whether the Dalmeny statistic is representative of the educational opportunities generally available to eighteenth century Scottish girls is difficult to say.¹⁴ Indeed, it is hard to estimate the extent of the education available to girls in the parish school system. But, in any event, as Mary Primrose's daughter reports, 'my mother was brought up chiefly at Barnbogle (though sometimes in London at Holland House), on the old fashioned Scotch plan with a Dominie — one Mr. Pillans' [Brandreth, 1888, pp. 25–26]. Thus, Mary Primrose was among a fortunate minority of Scottish girls to receive formal instruction from a 'Dominie' or tutor, and there is reason to think that the Primrose girls received excellent training at home.

Mary Primrose and her sisters were doubly fortunate. Not only did they have a tutor, their tutor, James Pillans, was an exceptional educator.¹⁵ Though the practice of engaging tutors to educate children of both sexes was commonplace among the well-to-do, the nature and extent of the Primrose girls' education, and the employment of a separate tutor for the girls, was somewhat unusual.¹⁶ Another unusual aspect of girl's education was the decision to employ as tutor a man of strong Presbyterian convictions. This, and other evidence concerning the Primrose family, points to an open-minded and liberal educational

14. On some accounts, the education of Scottish girls was quite limited, and upper class girls might split a typical day between activities such as sewing shirts, reading scriptures, writing letters, taking walks, and the occasional game or amusement. However, one has to wonder whether such accounts are entirely accurate. In addition to the Dalmeny statistic, one well-known Edinburgh teacher, James Mundell, lists 94 girls among his pupils between 1735 and 1761. [Plant, 1952, pp. 13–18]

15. [Brandreth, 1888, p. 26] In principle, the reference could be to the printer James Pillans (b. 1745) or to his father, Presbyterian dissenter, James Pillans (b. 1722). The former started his printing business in 1794. The latter was a contemporary of Neil Primrose (b. 1729). Brandreth's recollections of Pillans suggest that the James Pillans who tutored the girls was the elderly father of the printer. A grandson, also James Pillans, was a contemporary of Mary Primrose and her siblings. This Pillans became a pioneer in the field of educational reform.

16. According to Brandreth, [1888, p. 116], the boys' tutor was a man named Stockdale. Stockdale was 'a tall, rather stately looking man, with a large face, pink and white like a healthy child's, and in his later days, a shock head of white hair.' Stockdale, who accompanied Archibald and Francis to Cambridge, remained a personal friend of the family in later years.

environment.¹⁷

Apart from these exceptions, much about the educational pattern in the Primrose household was typical for its day. Hence, 'The education of children, at least during their early years, often took place within the country house itself.' Moreover, we can expect that Pillans, a religious man, was possessed of the sort of character thought to engender good values, because 'Tutors and governors were required in the early years of the eighteenth century to be virtuous above other qualities' [Christie, 2000, p. 114]. Indeed, though there are few descriptions of the elder Pillans, his religious and moral convictions are evident from the ones that do remain. To wit, the Primrose girls described their tutor as a 'descendant of the old Covenanters' who had himself 'seen "Old Mortality" cleaning the inscriptions on their gravestones' [Brandreth, 1888, p. 26].¹⁸ In any event, however curious the circumstances, the Primrose girls appear to have been subject to a rigorous and effective educational programme by their ageing tutor.

Pillans may have been given to a little ranting about 'Old Mortality', but it was evidently in a spirit of egalitarianism and intellectual curiosity that he tutored the Primrose girls. At the time, Pillans was probably between the ages of sixty-five and eighty, and the girls appear to have regarded him with a mixture of fondness and humor [Brandreth, 1888, p. 26]. Arabella Primrose, the youngest daughter, is said to have had little interest in scholarship, and to have taken up nothing 'but a sort of jocose kindly feeling towards the old tutor himself — laughing at him gently' [Brandreth, 1888, p. 27]. Such frivolousness does not appear to have been characteristic of Mary or Charlotte, and with these interested pupils Pillans took his role as educator to heart, engaging their imaginations with wonderful stories of adventure and discovery: 'There was one account, that none would believe but my mother, of the first steamboat on an American river. Many years afterwards, a small steamboat was tried on the Thames, and then "seeing was believing"' [Brandreth, 1888, p. 26].

17. Given the authoritarian and paternal emphasis predominant in Scottish households, one would have expected stern discipline. However, one gets the sense that the discipline in the Primrose household was softened by the love of learning and liberal views on education and religion.

18. Another writer describes Mary Primrose's first tutor as 'a scholastic person, who believed in the inextension of the mind' [Fearn, 1828, p. 632].

Pillans seems to have approached the task of tutoring with tact and commitment. He emphasised the basics, but encouraged the girls to pursue subjects to which they were naturally drawn. 'Mr. Pillans taught the girls Latin, for the basis of language, Geography, Mathematics, History, and besides, a vast deal of thinking upon the elements of Truth as to things in general.' Out of it all each pupil 'took up the portion which fell in with her own mind's natural working' [Brandreth, 1888, p. 26]: Charlotte, the eldest daughter, excelled in Latin and Mathematics, and was often called upon to help with estate accounting. Mary, the middle daughter, took an interest in philosophy.

Though most of the particulars of her education are lost, we can safely gauge that Mary Primrose's youthful interest in intellectual matters was further encouraged by a culture of letters that existed among the five Primrose siblings: For, 'the five young people managed to live a very sociable brother and sister life together, with a good deal of love for books, talk, country roaming...[and] used to write each other long letters like essays, and reply punctually' [Brandreth, 1888, pp. 31-32]. This practice may have been encouraged in part for the sake of the two younger Primrose boys, although it seems that it was Mary who ended up the family scholar.¹⁹

19. It is thought that James Mill was employed as a tutor in the area sometime between 1790 and 1802. One account states that Mill 'had a tutorship in the family of a Scottish nobleman in East Lothian'. Another account suggests that Mill 'had been a corrector for the press in Edinburgh'. Alexander Bain reports that the name of the nobleman is not given but notes that the narrative is repeated in two places. One story is that Mill 'gave offence to the heads of the family by drinking the health at the table of one of the junior female members of the house' and subsequently 'gave up his situation, and determined to trust to his pen and his own exertions'. A slightly different version has it that Mill 'threw up the appointment suddenly, owing to an affront given to him at a dinner party'. Specifically, Mill's pride was offended when he was 'motioned to leave the dinner table with the ladies'. It is interesting to note in connection with these accounts that the Pillans family was involved in both tutoring and printing. Perhaps the James Mill story has something to do with the Pillans and the Primrose families. In any case, Lady Mary Shepherd certainly knew James Mill in adulthood. See [Bain, 1882, pp. 27-29].

In addition to formal instruction and literary aspirations, the Primrose children had access to many books in the family library. An 1820 catalogue of the Primrose family library lists about 1000 volumes, a considerable number for any private library of the period. It seems to have been a difficult job to pry the young Mary loose from some of these books. On one journey from Scotland to London, Mary accompanied her father in his carriage, ‘...and by degrees took out of one pocket a volume of Milton, and out of the other Pope’s translation of the *Odyssey*. After a time he took hold of her chin, and turning her head said in a kind of melting voice, ‘Child, thee needn’t keep at books whilst we’re travelling — does your mother put such strict orders on you?’ [Brandreth, 1888, p. 33]. If such comments are a fair indication, Mary Primrose took her education even more seriously than was expected of her. Indeed, in adulthood, she reflects upon her youthful efforts in a letter to Charles Babbage, recollecting the early origins of her analytic bent and interest in higher learning:

...I can truly say that from a very early age, I have examined my thought, as to its manner of reasoning in numbers; and from time to time have applied such notices to other reasonings, either for amusement or improvement; — indeed chiefly in order to chastise the vague, illusory, illogical method of reasoning admitted with every part of discourse, whether gay, or serious, & into each department of literature however important its object [Shepherd, 1825b].

As this and other passages show, Mary Primrose and her sisters were encouraged to learn subjects required for higher education. This, along with the high quality of their educational instruction, must have played a significant role in shaping the direction of their lives. For her part, Mary Primrose evidently applied herself to higher education in an unexpectedly devoted manner, at a time when there was no official support for, or endorsement of, higher education in women.

Another significant factor contributing to the emergence of Scotland’s first female philosopher is the general emphasis on Scottish philosophy

and culture in Mary Primrose's milieu. The pursuit of philosophy was very much 'au courant' in Edinburgh by this time — so much so, in fact, that both the medical and the arts students at the Edinburgh College complained of a bias in the curriculum in favour metaphysics [Rendall, 1978, pp. 206–236]. Indeed, local literary societies, such as the Royal Society of Edinburgh, were opened to members of the business community and the class of literary gentlemen. When the Royal Society of Edinburgh met for the first time under the terms of its royal charter, on June 23, 1783, its membership was drawn from the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, but provisions were immediately made to extend the membership to members of the legal community and the gentry. The society unanimously resolved, 'That the Lords of Council and Session, the Barons of the exchequer for Scotland, and a select number of other gentlemen, should be invited to a participation of the Society's labours' [Royal Society of Edinburgh, 1788, p. 10].

A further consideration to keep in mind when considering the education of Mary Primrose is that the emergence of a culture of letters within aristocratic circles was not strictly confined to the male sex. Pioneers of educational reform such as Hannah More had promoted liberal philosophies of education, and Britain had witnessed the emergence of a radical group of liberated, educated women known as the Bluestockings. These ambitious women had prevailed in the first half of the eighteenth century, and were called 'blue-stockings' because they shunned all form of ornamental attire and entertainment in favour of simple dress and serious-minded soirees.²⁰ The Bluestockings took what was then considered a radical approach, although they did not aspire to scholarship in the same way as Mary Primrose. In spite of sometimes negative appraisal, the Bluestockings made an impact, and it was thanks in part to their efforts that liberal views on education grew increasingly popular. While employed in Edinburgh as a tutor from 1798 to 1803, the Reverend Sidney Smith noted that the predilection for metaphysics in Edinburgh's fashionable circles had extended so far as to include women. As Sydney Smith remarked, 'They are so imbued with metaphysics

20. [Johnson, 1926] The most famous Bluestocking was Scotland's own Lady Mary Montague Wortley. A 'Miss Primrose' is mentioned in a letter from Mrs. Carter to Mrs. Vesey dated from Spa on July 26, 1763 [Johnson, 1926, p. 269]. The reference could be to Neil Primrose's sister Dorothea.

that they even make love metaphysically. I overheard a young lady of my acquaintance, at a dance in Edinburgh, exclaim, in a sudden pause of the music, 'What you say, my Lord, is true of love in the abstract, but — "here the fiddlers began fiddling furiously, and the rest was lost."' [Bell, 1980, p. 20]. By 1804, when Sydney Smith had moved to London, scores of women were in attendance at his public lectures on moral philosophy. According to one observer, Sydney Smith 'cultivated the good opinion of the fair sex by warmly complimenting them on their natural talents and by urging them to devote themselves to substantial literary studies' [Bell, 1980, pp. 55–56].

It is also worth pointing out that Mary Primrose's family enjoyed unusually sophisticated intellectual and political connections — not only in Edinburgh, but also in London. In London, the family rented Holland House when the children were young. Holland House had recently passed into the hands of Charles James Fox, the prominent Whig leader who became a vocal opponent of the conservative policies of King George III. In later years, Holland House would gain notoriety as a social hub for the Whig party.

Despite Mary Primrose's privileged and protected circumstances, it is well to remember that educational opportunities for girls and women in eighteenth century Scotland varied considerably. Limitations were frequently imposed on subjects crucial to higher learning.²¹ In Edinburgh, the question of the extent to which women should be allowed to participate in university education, scholarly lending libraries and literary societies became a subject of occasional dispute. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that a significant number of women began to apply themselves to literary studies in earnest and to fight for the right to gain regular admission to the universities and to receive degrees. So, despite the tendency toward modest educational reform, Mary Primrose's scholarly interests and the level of intellectual development that she attained were both precocious and rare in the late

21. [Christie, 2000, p. 116] Mary Fairfax Somerville, is said to have studied mathematics at night, hiding her activities from her disapproving father. Mary Somerville went on to make important contributions in mathematics and science, and was a friend of Mary Shepherd in adulthood.

eighteenth century Scotland.²²

22. See [Bell, 1980]. In Edinburgh, James Pillans, grandson of the Primrose tutor, was among the leaders in the educational reform movement. This James Pillans became Professor of Humanities at the University of Edinburgh, and devoted his career to the philosophy of education. The majority of his publishing efforts addressed the subject of educational reform, and he made frequent trips to visit rural parishes, both in Scotland and abroad, for the purpose of assessing the state of the education system. In the 1830s, Pillans played an important role in giving advice to Parliament. As Alexander Grant wrote of Pillans, 'Outside the University he did much good by promoting educational reform in Scotland. He was one of the first to advocate Governmental inspection of schools and the institution of Normal Seminaries.' See [Grant, 1884, vol. 2, p. 322] and [Pillans, 1856].

Chapter 3

Hume and the Limits of Moderation

The second half of the eighteenth century was a comparatively peaceful time in Scotland. After decades of strife, the roars of religious and political controversy had, for the most part, subsided into tired rumbles. In Edinburgh, it was the golden age of the Scottish Enlightenment — a time in which Edinburgh's moderate professors and men of letters played leading roles in shaping the ideologies of the church, government and university. And yet, despite the comparative stability of the times, the religious and political controversy had not entirely died out. In 1755, a full ten years after the episode in which Hume was denied the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland felt the need to unanimously articulate a 'warning against the infidel principles of Mr Hume' [Inglis, 1806, 89n].¹ Later, in 1798, as the turn of the century approached, controversies about freedom of speech began to arise in some of Edinburgh's informal literary societies. And finally, in the early nineteenth century, around 1805, controversies around Hume, scepticism and atheism arose once again in connection with a Chair at Edinburgh University.

1. Inglis writes that 'All parties in the Church, it should be remembered, concurred unanimously in the warning against the infidel principles of Mr Hume, which was given by the General Assembly 1755.'

This time the candidacy was John Leslie's rather than Hume's, and the topics of discussion ranged from to atheism and scepticism to cause and effect and experimental reasoning. The entire scandal was cooked up out of a single footnote reference to Hume in a scientific text on the nature and propagation of heat:

Mr Hume is the first, as far as I know, who has treated of causation in a truly philosophic manner. His Essay on Necessary Connexion seems a model of clear and accurate reasoning. But it was only wanted to dispel the cloud of mystery which has so long darkened that important subject. The unsophisticated sentiments of mankind are in perfect unison with the deductions of logic, and imply nothing more at bottom, in the relation of cause and effect, than a constant and invariable sequence. [Leslie, 1804: pp.521-2]

As it turns out, it was these local controversies, and especially the Leslie affair, that would shape Mary Primrose's philosophical interests in the period between the ages of 17 and 27.

The ongoing controversies in Edinburgh were, in part, elicited by the growth of a form of moderatism that had embraced aspects of Hume's philosophy. Indeed, in a strange way, both Hume and his 'dangerous philosophy' had gradually become part of the very fabric of Edinburgh society. Some of Edinburgh's most prominent members were on intimate terms with Hume until his death in 1776, and through these channels, there grew to be ongoing support for Hume and his work. This support took the shape of a humanistic appeal for tolerance — an appeal that survived in Edinburgh long after the academic scandal surrounding Hume had blown over.

Edinburgh's moderates presented what would today be considered a liberal stance — one based on compromise between opposing interests. Under William Robertson's administrative leadership as Principal of Edinburgh College and Head of the affiliated presbytery, the town grew increasingly independent, secular, and tolerant. Robertson was, in fact, one of Hume's supporters — and the acknowledged leader of the influential generation of moderates. This group of so-called 'moderates' — William Robertson, John Home, Hugh Blair, Adam Ferguson, Alexander Carlyle and others — devoted themselves to the promulgation of enlightenment ideals such as freedom of conscience. They supported, for example, Hume's right to free philosophical expression. At the same time, they rejected the claim that Hume's doctrine led to atheistic conclusions and upheld the values of the Presbyterian-Whig

establishment. Hence, the moderates 'esteemed a rational, polite form of Presbyterianism that would bridge the gap between John Knox and David Hume, between fanaticism and infidelity, between tradition and modernity' [Sher, 1985, p. 324]. The strategy was unique, if somewhat opportunistic. And through the moderates, the larger social issues around both Hume's philosophy and his failed candidature remained alive in Edinburgh.

It was not just the moderate party's enlightened vision that held appeal; the party's leader, William Robertson, was a skilled mediator with strong personal charisma. In the years following the Hume controversy, Robertson arranged things at the university so that most of the newly established Chairs were in the sciences — a domain not generally thought to require theological advice.² In consequence, the clergy's *avisamentum* — widely regarded as a political instrument used for excluding or including candidates — was infrequently exercised. Nor did Robertson insist on the formal Confession of Faith, the oath of allegiance to the Presbyterian Church traditionally required of incoming candidates. Robertson's resistance to the Confession of Faith was not universally appreciated: 'This test was constantly evaded in the University of Edinburgh, and notably so from the commencement of Robertson's Principalship, but it still existed as part of the law of the country' [Grant, 1884, vol. 1, pp. 86–87]. Despite these and other complaints, the moderates continued to hold sway in Edinburgh.³

Clearly, Robertson knew how to handle controversy: In addition to downplaying the Confession of Faith and the *avisamentum*, he encouraged off-campus forums for contentious subjects of debate and discussion. Numerous literary and intellectual societies sprang into existence in Edinburgh, including, among others, the Select Society, the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh (later the Royal Society of Edinburgh) and the Pantheon Society. With the leadership of local intellectuals such as Hume, Carlyle, Ferguson, Smith and others, these

2. [Sher, 1985, p. 309] With regard to the *avisamentum*, Robertson's practice seems to have been to shift people around within the university to prevent its exercise. Humanities positions were filled internally, so that new vacancies would be in the sciences. Eleven of the thirteen chairs created at University of Edinburgh between 1762 and 1859 were scientific or technical chairs, including chairs in areas such as astronomy, agriculture, technology and medicine.

3. There was civil unrest and an attack on Robertson in Edinburgh's 'No Popery' affair of 1770's.

literary societies were much in demand. As Hume wrote to Allan Ramsey, founder of the Select Society: 'Young and old, noble and ignoble, witty and dull, all the world are ambitious of a place amongst us...' [Greig, 1969, pp. 219–221].⁴ And, as the literary societies were independent of the university, campus affairs and society debates could unfold separately and smoothly. In sum, Robertson succeeded in drawing lines between institutional norms and civil freedoms in a way that appealed to the better judgement of a majority of his contemporaries. Accordingly, Robertson and his circle of moderates exerted a benign influence, and promoted a form of tolerance in the community that was consistent with popular norms.

The moderate stance was not, however, universally welcome. Over time, divisions deepened. The split went two ways; to the left and to the right.

By the time that Mary Primrose had reached the age of majority, the influence of Robertson and his group of moderates on the incoming generation of men of letters had begun to wane. Many of the social and literary clubs of the older generation of moderates were coming to be perceived as either folding or beyond the point revival. As Walter Scott remarked, the old guard resembled ghosts 'sitting on their midnight tombs' occupied with 'deeds they have done and witnessed while in the body' [Sher, 1985, p. 322]. By way of contrast, the incoming generation of literati had grown into vibrant and diverse group that included not only clergy and professors, but also a substantial number of secularly-minded lawyers, men of letters, and merchants. They were, by-and-large, students of William Robertson and his successor, Dugald Stewart. With few exceptions, they had thoroughly imbibed the liberal, enlightenment ideals. Their professors had encouraged them to pursue scholarly interests and to keep apace of new developments in their areas of interest. The cumulative effect of their education and milieu was an appetite for civil and intellectual freedoms exceeding that of their predecessors. Thus, as the older generation of moderates gave way to the younger, the complexion of the city became increasingly secular and liberal. This more radical generation of moderates, having an awareness of both practical and theoretical issues around freedom, was quick to rise to the defence of personal and civil liberty.

But the increasingly liberal tendencies of this new generation of moderates would not go unchecked. Conservative members of

4. David Hume to Allan Ramsey, April or May 1755.

Edinburgh society tended to favor tighter social controls and restrictions than the moderate leaders. And by the late eighteenth century, emerging issues were contributing to a heightening of the existing, underlying tensions between liberal and conservative elements in Edinburgh society. The first of these issues related to civil unrest in Continental Europe. And as civil unrest grew on the Continent, so too did social tensions in Edinburgh. Britain was now looking to events across the Channel with horror. Already witnessed were the overthrow of the French monarchy and nobility and the beginning of Robespierre's 'reign of terror'. With growing fear to their advantage, conservative elements began to point the finger at 'dangerous ideologies'⁵, warning that the same unrest and infidelity witnessed on the Continent could easily take hold closer to home. Thus, the conservative rhetoric urged caution in the face of dangerous ideology, returning to the age-old practice of issuing warnings against the pernicious influence of free speech on civil society.

Fortunately, the underlying antagonisms between liberal and conservative elements in late eighteenth century Edinburgh rarely escalated into civil disturbances and, occasional rumblings about civil unrest aside, the second half of the eighteenth century was a period of relative stability and prosperity for Edinburgh's upper classes. This notwithstanding, the newly emerging divisions were effecting subtle changes to the underlying social fabric. And though Robertson and his followers continued to hold sway in the turn of the century Edinburgh, the commitment of Edinburgh's moderates would not be enough to put a stop to a rising tide of fear and conservative backlash. For, in addition to the spectacle of Continental unrest, there was a growing awareness that local events were also at play. In particular, the economic situation in

5. Edinburghers were warned of German illuminati who had 'conspired to overturn the religion and government of their country, and who were to prepare their way by seizing on the Universities, and excluding Clergymen from the places of trust and influence which they occupied in those seats of learning...' [Playfair, 1806, p. 57]. By way of comparison, Edinburgh's moderates, with their modest appeal for tolerance of Hume and his philosophy must have seemed fairly benign. It also bears noting that the German philosopher Kant's recognition of the importance of Locke and Hume would have (at least to some) highlighted the importance of the empiricist contribution to Enlightenment philosophy.

Scotland was fast deteriorating, largely as a result of rapid changes connected with land reforms and the developing Industrial Revolution. By the late eighteenth century, the circumstances of the wealthy landed families — with carriages, servants, and luxuries — would have stood in stark contrast to the conditions of the working poor. As Scottish landowners moved to consolidate their estates, the already considerable gap between landowner and tenant increased, and even a meagre existence was out of reach for many of those who had previously worked the land.⁶

Yet, even as the poor struggled to find adequate food and shelter, Edinburgh's rich enjoyed luxurious surroundings and indulged in refined and literary tastes. By the late eighteenth century, Edinburgh's high society was awash with literary soirées, held at the homes of local socialites such as Mrs. Fletcher and Mrs. Apreece. At these gatherings, Edinburgh's elite would have enjoyed conversation and dancing, perhaps a toast or two, and a few culinary delicacies. The Primrose family is likely to have shared in the extravagant parties and excitement of Edinburgh's fashionable circles. There, they would have met up with luminaries of all political stripes, including Walter Scott, John Allen, Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham, John Playfair, Thomas Brown and James Pillans [Fyfe, 1942, pp. 318–319]. Included in the group were the new and younger generation of literati and aristocrats — liberal Whigs who would go on to form the *Edinburgh Review*, in its day touted as the most important critical and literary journal in Europe.

Although it is impossible to say with certainty whether Mary Primrose and her siblings attended many Edinburgh soirées, it seems likely that they attended at least a few. For, Mary Primrose was acquainted with many of the same individuals in adulthood, and entertained them in her own home in London. It should be noted,

6. As local economies changed, parishes shrank in size. The population of Dalmeny dwindled from 1300 in 1750 to 900 in 1790 and then 765 in 1801. Dalmeny's Reverend Thomas Robertson speculated that 'depopulation appears to have been occasioned solely by one large district having been turned from tillage into pasture. This tract may consist perhaps of 1500 acres, upon which formerly, it is said, were fifteen or sixteen farmers; at present, and for some time past, there has not been one' [Robertson, 1799, p. 232]. In Dalmeny, the local farmers had long lived from hand to mouth, with half of their wages paid in oatmeal, a small house and garden, the carriage of coal, and some food at the harvest. 'The people's diet was rather plain, consisting of oat-meal porridge, oat-cakes, pease-bannocks,

however, that Mary's father, Neil Primrose, was a frugal man, and that this may well have limited the family's participation. By all accounts, the family had suffered serious financial loss due to the mismanagement of Neil's father, James Primrose. Having rebuilt the family fortune, Neil Primrose probably had a good sense of the value of money — although he may have carried his frugality to extremes. It is reported that the 3rd Earl refused his wife the pleasure of an afternoon society of ladies. He is also said to have allowed Barnbogle and Holland House to deteriorate under his care. The family circumstances may have placed modest limitations on the social life of the children; however, they were certainly well off by local standards, and Neil Primrose's eccentricities would have been more of an embarrassment than an impediment.

Thus it was that, despite decades of increasingly liberal moderatism and a growing cultural sophistication, different attitudes began to emerge toward social unrest and economic change in turn-of-the-century Edinburgh, and this fuelled a return to bitter animosities and controversies. To illustrate, texts such as Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* — a critique Britain's monarchy and government — were decried on the grounds that they posed a significant threat to the status quo. In his text, Paine had given voice to the injustices in the circumstances of the lower classes. With little concern for the hardships of the poor and a deep and abiding concern for self-preservation, the conservative and privileged elements in Edinburgh society reacted with fury to Paine's publication. A good indication of this can be found in an anonymous letter published in 1792. Against Paine, it is argued that, 'For an itinerant political quack to pretend to more sound sense and judgement than all the inhabitants of the British isles put together, and to dictate his own fanciful form of government to them, is in the highest degree assuming' [Highlander, 1792, pp. 3–4]. The author goes on to insist that, a good citizen would petition Parliament rather than rouse a mob: For, 'A man who endeavours to rouse a mob, is of all men the most dangerous to society; — he must either have interested views, be mad, or infamously wicked' [Highlander, 1792, p. 19].⁷ The author's anger betrays a deep underlying fear of civil unrest.

barley broth, vegetables, potatoes, butter-milk and water while some were beginning to eat wheaten bread and drink small-beer. Very little meat was eaten and for luxuries there was tea and whisky' [Holton, 1980].

7. An important complication arises for the Shepherds in relation to a similar, but more dramatic event involving the publication of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. See Chapter 5.

In the face of such public challenges, Edinburgh's moderatism began to lose momentum. Professor of Moral Philosophy, Dugald Stewart, retreated to a defensive position, endeavoring to show 'that a zeal for liberty could be combined with a philosophically and religiously safe stance' [Jacyna, 1994, p. 65]. As Stewart explains, there was, at this point in time, a need to limit political liberty, in light of the 'reckless boldness of the uncompromising freethinker' and the dangers of civil unrest,

The danger with which I conceived the youth of this country to be threatened by that inundation of sceptical or rather atheistical publications which were then imported from the Continent, was immensely increased by the enthusiasm which, at the dawn of the French Revolution, was naturally excited in young and generous minds. A supposed connection between an enlightened zeal for Political Liberty and the reckless boldness of the uncompromising free-thinker, operated powerfully with the vain and the ignorant in favour of the publications alluded to [Stewart, 1855, pp. 111-112].⁸

Thus it was that the moderate 'old guard', after what might be considered a rather conservative fashion, began to advocate for a restricted form of liberalism in 1790's Edinburgh. The younger generation of moderates, however, was not entirely intimidated, with many firmly insisting on the right to free speech. One local controversy that erupted involved the Select Society — a debating society for law students.⁹ The events around this controversy began to unfold in 1798. The topic of the controversy itself related to a proposal to debate the ascendancy of Russia in Europe's balance of power. This topic, it was charged, involved 'attacks on Christianity' and was 'connected with revolutionary principles'. As one commentator remarked, 'The Society, like everything else in the country, was affected by the white heat of political passion generated by the French Revolution' [Cockburn, 1845, p. 11].

8. Through the influence of Stewart and others, there grew to be a large contingent of liberal lawyers and politicians in Edinburgh, many of whom would later form part of the Whig opposition in Parliament.

9. Given the Primrose family's ties to the local legal community, it is almost certain that Mary Primrose would have known about and followed this local controversy.

The specific issue that conservative members of the society raised in objecting to the topic was that its discussion would contravene a 1794 resolution against debating subjects relating to political questions of the day [Cockburn, 1845, pp. 33–38].¹⁰ In the short term, the young moderates won out, for they succeeded in rescinding the restrictive motion, arguing that it undermined ‘freedom of debate’ [Cockburn, 1845, p. 36]. However, a newly introduced motion soon gave rise to a new controversy, and religious questions were now dragged into the matter. To this, the young moderates objected that, ‘Since it [the new resolution] was enacted, not a single question has ever been appointed, or an essay delivered, the discussion of which led either directly or by the most remote allusion to arguments or topics of a theological description.’ [Cockburn, 1845, p. 37]. Yet, in the end, the young moderates were defeated by the conservative contingent. The new motion was repealed and ‘a positive law substituted in its place against all religious and political discussions’ [Cockburn, 1845, p. 37]. Thus, the incoming generation of moderates were, for the time being, reduced to ‘the necessity of deploring those misconceptions which we have done everything in our power to obviate and correct’ [Cockburn, 1845, p. 37].

Mary Primrose became very interested in the religious, philosophical, and political controversies around her. Indeed, it was in a context of socio-political and economic anxieties reaching full-pitch and the moderate literati gradually losing sway that Mary Primrose turned to the development of her own views on the leading debates of her day. Between the ages of 17 and 27, Mary Primrose’s inquisitiveness led her to write numerous manuscripts ‘full of metaphysical disquisitions, exposing errors in the reasoning of Hume’s atheistical treatises, and the unitarian doctrine of the then new philosopher, Priestley’ [Brandreth, 1888, pp. 28–29].

Without access to Mary Primrose’s early ‘metaphysical disquisitions’, it would be impossible to do more than guess at the specific criticisms they contained. It seems clear, however, that Mary Primrose’s youthful essays addressed philosophical issues around religion. Hence, in her early writings, Mary Primrose could well have written about Hume’s

10. According to Francis Jeffrey, a specific question proposed for debate instigated the controversy: namely, ‘Have the States of Europe any reason to dread the increasing ascendancy of Russia in the balance of power?’

empiricist critique of the causal relation; though she may instead have addressed the less foundational and more directly atheistic arguments, for example, in works such as Hume's *Essay on Miracles* and *Natural History of Religion*. These treatises were considered to be even more shocking and amoral than Hume's books on metaphysics and epistemology. For example, in the former work, Hume claimed that it was more probable that the witness to a miracle was deceived than that the natural order was violated by a miraculous event. In the latter, Hume gave an historical analysis of the origins and development of religion and religious beliefs that made a mockery of religious credulity. Hume pronounced religion irrational and recommended that religious beliefs unable to withstand scrutiny be eliminated. In addition, Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* considered and rejected the popular design hypothesis. The most that an appeal to nature can possibly tell us, Hume says, is 'That the causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence'.

Joseph Priestley's works would also have been shocking to many, not only because Priestley shared many of Hume's views on religion, but also because he touched on sacred doctrines of Christian dogma and ritual. In the 1780's, Priestley published his *The History of the Corruptions of Christianity and History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ*. There he argued that the doctrine of the Trinity was not in fact a tenet of the primitive church and that worship should proceed without elaborate ceremony or dogma.¹¹

Mary Primrose's youthful essays against atheism, whatever they may have contained, are probably lost to us now. Although it is impossible to know the specific points taken up against Hume and Priestley in these early 'metaphysical disquisitions', it seems likely, given the tenor of her mature work, that she set out to defend theism. It is easier to place her mature writings. For, as Shepherd herself indicates, her 1824 essay on causation was motivated by the Edinburgh controversy relating to the election of John Leslie to the Mathematical Chair at the University of Edinburgh [Church of Scotland, 1805]. The events in question took place in 1805-06, and the themes of the controversy grew out of the earlier Edinburgh controversies.

11. Priestley's view posed a challenge to traditional religion and to the requirement of conformity to the Anglican Church of England. Given that Priestley's works criticized doctrines such as the Virgin Birth, it became commonplace to regard Priestley as an atheist.

The episode itself concerned the suitability of John Leslie as candidate for the Chair of Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh. Because Leslie had endorsed Hume's views on causation in his scientific text, the controversy was directly and explicitly linked to Hume. But, unlike the case of David Hume, which was in many respects a back-room, black-and-white affair, the Leslie episode was played out in the public eye. The events and discussions arising in connection with the Leslie episode — particularly as concerned the philosophy of Hume — would profoundly influence the direction of Mary Primrose's philosophical writings, and focus her work on themes such as causality, atheism and scepticism.

What the Leslie affair brought to the foreground, in addition to the empiricist critique of causality, was that Hume's ideas had broad implications — implications that extended into many subjects, including science. If Hume had in fact offered a convincing case against traditional accounts of necessary connection, then the foundations of scientific inquiry, including the works of great scientists such as Bacon and Newton, must also be in question. For, what Hume appeared to have shown was that ideas of cause and effect were based on experiences of constant conjunction, and that the idea of a necessary connection between cause and effect was formed in the mind of the subject as a corollary to causal belief. As such, ideas of causal relation and necessary connection were based in mere habits of the mind. Moreover, given the subjective provenance of ideas of necessary connection, there would appear to be no reason to suppose that the external world is itself causally determined or that the future should resemble the past. To the scientific community, a community that had simply assumed that laws of nature refer to a causally determined and necessary order of things, Hume's critique called for a clearer and more careful philosophical account of scientific reasoning than had heretofore been given. Thus, the nature of scientific reasoning would have to be revisited. It was now beyond dispute that Hume's critique of causality extended beyond the moral and religious domains to include science.

The Leslie affair, and the conservative backlash in late eighteenth century Edinburgh, played an important role in shaping the social and philosophical context in which Mary Primrose and other Edinburgh philosophers of her day interpreted Hume and the empiricist philosophy. And, it was in this wider social and philosophical context that Leslie's brand of scientific experimentalism, which boldly endorsed Hume's view

of causality, came to be viewed as a dangerous, heterogeneous mixture of truth, falsehood, and speculative opinion.¹²

And so it was that, following the Leslie affair of 1805-06, it became clear — at least within the philosophical community — that the methodological foundations of science that had been taken for granted at the turn of the nineteenth century would have to be revisited. It is this cluster of themes around the doctrine of causality, experimental reasoning, scepticism and atheism that would become central to the life and work of Mary Primrose.

12. In an anonymous pamphlet entitled *A Summons to Wakening*, Leslie was likened to the Devil, and it was proposed that laws be introduced to limit the freedom of the press. It is worth remarking, by way of contrast, that Leslie received the Royal Society of London's Rumford medal for his 1804 *An Experimental Inquiry into the Nature and Propagation of Heat*.

Chapter 4

London, Marriage and Society

The Primrose family had long-standing London connections, and it is likely that the children met their future spouses in London, rather than Edinburgh. Mary's father, Neil Primrose, was Representative Peer for Scotland between 1768 and 1784, and it was probably during this period that the family rented Holland House. In 1796, the Earl of Rosebery appears in *Boyle's Court Guide* on Bruton Street, Berkeley Square, and, beginning in 1801, a Neil Primrose is listed at Park Lane. By the time the Primrose children had advanced to a marriageable age, the family may well have spent a considerable portion of the year in London.

The circumstances of marriage and the social connections of the Primrose children were like those of many other aristocratic families of the eighteenth century. Like others of his station, Neil Primrose would have been conscious of the importance of an advantageous marriage. Sexual indiscretion or time spent gambling away the family fortune could easily lead to trouble, and possibly threaten the family line. And, though it was important to marry well, it was often difficult to find a suitable match. Social conventions played an important role in determining how, when, and to whom a child would be married. Parents also tried to take a leading role in the decision. However, by the turn of the nineteenth century, strong-willed children were increasingly aspiring to 'love matches' and defying both social convention and their parents' ideals.

It turns out that conventional expectations regarding marriages of the period are in fact reasonably helpful in understanding the marriage pattern in the Primrose family. According to this pattern, elder sons, or sons who could expect to inherit a large chunk of a family's wealth, generally had the pick of the marriageable women. And, such was the case for Neil Primrose's eldest son, Archibald Primrose, who became the 4th Earl of Rosebery. Younger sons, however, especially sons who did

not expected to inherit a substantial fortune, were encouraged to take on a profession. The Primrose family's younger son, Francis Ward Primrose, inherited a family estate in Norfolk, but after developing a gambling problem, ended up in the civil service in Newfoundland, Canada.

Though the prospects of younger sons could be bleak, daughters of aristocrats faced especially difficult circumstances. The system of primogeniture meant that there were few heirs and thus few opportunities for aristocratic girls to retain their social status. At the turn of the nineteenth century, about one quarter of upper-class young women remained unmarried. In many cases, they were regarded as a burden on their families, and were obliged to take on roles such as governess or companion. Undoubtedly the preference for most daughters would have been to retain social standing through marriage, and with this in mind, daughters of aristocrats were encouraged to acquire the basic arithmetic and literacy skills required to manage an estate and to learn 'polite manners' [Christie, 2000, pp. 104–105]. Having too much education, however, was not generally seen as an advantage. Fortunately, Neil Primrose was able to provide a dowry of £20,000, and all three of his daughters were married off [Brandreth, 1888, p. 51]. Hence, the Primrose children, well-educated and well provided for, were ideally placed to make good matches. And London was just the place to find such a match.

Charlotte Primrose, the eldest Primrose daughter, was the one who had excelled in mathematics. She had been frequently called upon by her father to assist with estate management, a circumstance that would have helped to single her out for marriage into the peerage. Indeed, of the three Primrose girls, Charlotte's marriage would appear to have been the most socially advantageous; her husband, Kenneth Howard, stood in line to become Earl of Effingham. Yet, Charlotte's parents had not approved of the match: Kenneth Howard, so the story went, was 'a near relation of Lady Rosebery's and may become Earl of Effingham, but has at present only his pay as Col. in the Guards. Her Banns were muttered over in the Parish Church, and she walked out at the Hall door and met Col. Howard at the end of the street, whence they proceeded to the Altar of Hymen.'¹

1. See the Complete Peerage under Rosebery. To get a sense of the attitudes of the aristocracy of the day, note that Lady Jerningham is reported to have made this unkind remark on 27 May 1800 — Charlotte Primrose's wedding day.

In the end, Charlotte Primrose did become Countess of Effingham. However, she and her children struggled financially until Kenneth Howard succeeded to the Earldom in 1837.

Little is known of the lives of Dorothea Arabella Primrose and Francis Ward Primrose. Not long after Charlotte was married, Arabella married a Mr. William Hervey — said to have been painfully shy and awkward in company. Arabella died in 1825. The youngest son, Francis Ward, moved to Canada to escape gambling debts, where he was reputed to have become happily married.

Of the remaining Primrose marriages, the most notorious was that of Archibald Primrose. Married in 1808, Archibald was set to become the 4th Earl, and he did so in short order, in 1814. He married the beautiful Harriet Bouverie, daughter of Bartholomew Bouverie. The marriage ultimately ended in sadness, lawsuit, and divorce. Harriet was seduced by her newly bereaved brother-in-law, Sir Henry Mildmay. According to Henry Brougham (defence council for Mildmay — Harriet's seducer) a series of unfortunate and accidental circumstances led to the 'melancholy story' of a 'mutual, sincere, ardent, devouring passion' between Sir Henry Mildmay and Harriet Bouverie [Ford, 1995, p. 226]. The story went that Archibald Primrose, hopelessly in love with his wife, sent her away to keep company with his mother at Barnbogle. Mildmay soon followed, secretly joining the Countess in her bedroom after dinner. Caught in the act, Archibald Primrose is said to have shot Mildmay in the arm [Ford, 1995, p. 225].²

2. The damages won in the case were considerable. However, according to the Primrose family, Archibald Primrose and his close relatives remained sympathetic to the beautiful Harriet, who was seen as a victim of the lecherous Sir Henry Mildmay. Considerable blame for the outcome was laid on Archibald's in-laws, who withheld Harriet's letter of explanation and apology [Brandreth, 1888, pp. 18-20]. Years later, upon learning of the interference, Archibald Primrose was crushed, and avowed that, 'I love her now as I did the day we were married' [Brandreth, 1888, p. 19].

Mary Primrose was the last of Neil Primrose's daughters to marry. In 1808, she married a barrister by the name of Henry John Shepherd, after which she became known under her married name, Lady Mary Shepherd. Henry John Shepherd was the son of Sir Samuel Shepherd, a prominent member of the British legal profession based in London. Mary Primrose's marriage permanently shifted the center of her world from Edinburgh to London.

Lady Mary's marriage is something of a mystery. She was thirty years old when she married, and unlike most young women of her class and generation, she did not marry an older, well-established gentleman. Her husband, Henry John Shepherd, was six years her junior. In addition, Lady Mary was married by license, a practice that avoided the reading of Banns. She took her vows on 11 April 1808, bearing her eldest daughter, Mary Elizabeth, on her own birthday, 31 December, in 1808.³ Her second and third children, Henry Primrose and Maria Charlotte, were born several years later, in 1814 and 1815, respectively. Though we do not know the circumstances that led to the marriage, we do know that Mary Primrose, from this point onward, became known as a London society woman and, ultimately, the author of two major philosophical treatises. So, regardless of the initial circumstances — happy, sad, or indifferent — Mary Shepherd was freer in marriage than most woman of her day could boast.

Henry John Shepherd, Lady Mary's husband, was educated at Eton and Cambridge. He took up law at Lincoln's Inn and became a barrister on the Oxford circuit. From 1818–1820, he was MP for Shaftesbury. In the 1820s, he returned to Cambridge to take a graduate degree. Henry John wrote a Master's thesis, and later produced some dramatic works. In addition, he published, in 1825, a summary of the law concerning the election of Members of Parliament in Britain [Shepherd, 1825a; Shepherd, 1834; Shepherd, 1840]. His eldest daughter described him in affectionate terms, as a poetic and romantic individual, having a nature that 'united with deep tenderness of heart, and sympathy for his fellow creatures, a brilliant and attractive fancy and imagination' [Brandreth, 1888, pp. 25–26].

3. Mary Shepherd's first child, Mary Elizabeth, was born 37.5 weeks after her wedding, so there is an outside chance that Mary Primrose was already pregnant when she married. Lady Mary's marriage settlement details are located in a restricted portion of the family papers.

Henry John Shepherd may have been more inclined towards poetry than philosophy — for ‘he was full of apparent paradoxes, which from his friends always met with a kind of tender appreciation’ [Brandreth, 1888, pp. 25–26]. By way of contrast, Lady Mary had been tutored at home on the ‘old fashioned Scotch plan’ of Dominie Pillans. Of the two, it was she who appears to have had the more rigorous and analytical mind. The resulting combination in the marriage was slightly odd, but apparently, not unpleasant: ‘The difference of circumstances in their bringing up, combined with the similarity in simplicity of character, between my father and mother, made the peculiar natural flavour and refinement of the tone of conversation in their home’ [Brandreth, 1888, pp. 25–26].

All things considered, Lady Mary and the Shepherd family were very well placed in society. Sir Samuel was King’s Advocate between 1813 and 1819 and Lord Chief Baron of the Court of the Exchequer of Scotland from 1819 to 1830. The family circle attracted many eminent individuals, and the home of Lady Mary and Henry John Shepherd became a sort of intellectual and literary hub [Brandreth, 1888, pp. 41–42]. Through the couple’s connections in Edinburgh, London, Norfolk, Cambridge and Oxford, they became social acquaintances of some of the finest thinkers of their generation — many of whom were eminent scholars and scientists. This stimulating social milieu provided Lady Mary Shepherd with ample opportunities for intellectual stimulation.

Though her circle of social, scientific and literary friends was extensive, Lady Mary Shepherd’s inner circle supplies clues to her deeper philosophical affinities and beliefs.

The persons who, besides my father, most thoroughly entered into my mother’s mind, and followed where she led into great and wide depths of abstract enquiry, were Mr. David Ricardo the political economist, Mr. Pearson, Dr. Whately, Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Whewell, afterwards master of Trinity, and Mr. Cameron [Brandreth, 1888, p. 119].

Not only was Lady Mary Shepherd acquainted with a wide variety of literati, scientists and publishers, she also ran a salon of sorts. This salon brought together old and new friends in London’s Westminster district — friends that included some of London’s best and brightest, in terms of intellect and ingenuity. Lady Mary Shepherd was remembered, through her brother and her nephew, as a hostess of unusually sharp wit and logical ability:

I should like to hear more about the gifted Lady Mary Shepherd — and her ‘Salon,’ which my mother has often assured me was a very interesting and agreeable one. My father seems to have been often there, and Lady Mary’s humour seems to have been as well-known as her logical powers, and occasional causticity [Brandreth, 1888, p. 4].⁴

The list of friends and guests entertained at the dinner and after-dinner *soirées* in the Shepherds’ home is a partial one, and yet, it is of great assistance in reconstructing this aspect of Mary Shepherd’s life. It suggests friendships acquired in youth and extending throughout life — friendships that stretched from the early days of Holland House and Barnbough to an intellectual circle of scientists, publishers, and men of letters with links to the four major universities in Great Britain; Edinburgh, Cambridge, Oxford and London. Presumably, the Shepherds knew Lord Holland and his circle from their early days in London. And in Edinburgh, they would have known figures such as Dugald Stewart, Thomas Brown, Henry Cockburn, Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham and Macvey Napier. Lady Mary Shepherd was also acquainted with John Leslie, and doubtless, many of the public figures involved in the Leslie affair.⁵ Later, in her married life, Shepherd socialized with scientists and mathematicians such as Charles Babbage, William Whewell and Mary Somerville. Babbage, who was described as an ‘intimate friend’ of the family, appears to have shared virtually the same dinner society as the Shepherds’, including Henry Hart Milman, Lady Catherine Stepney, Mary Somerville and Sydney Smith (See [Bonar, 1887, p. 154–157] and [Hyman, 1982, p. 178]).

Following her marriage, Mary Shepherd’s social world was largely — though not exclusively — drawn from society in London’s Westminster area. The Shepherds’ London friends had wide-ranging interests and views. Many of those in Lady Mary’s social circle shared a love of mathematics, science, and abstract analysis — subjects that played an important role in the emerging philosophy and science of the nineteenth century. They were subjects in which Lady Mary had a keen philosophical interest.

4. The nephew in question is Lord Dalmeny, the first son of Archibald Primrose, 4th Earl of Rosebery.

5. In a letter to Charles Babbage, Mary Shepherd mentions Leslie’s views on the Humbolt-Biot dispute over the location of the magnetic poles [Shepherd, 1832b, f.432]. As for Edinburgh’s philosophy

Many of the Shepherd's social ties stemmed from Henry John Shepherd's Eton and Cambridge days. Charles Babbage, Frederick Maule and Edward Ryan, for example, were probably acquaintances from Cambridge. Another important connection may have been the Cambridge Philosophical Society itself, which would have accounted for several of the Shepherds' dinner guests, including Reverend William Pearson. Pearson, along with Babbage, Herschel, and others, was a founding member of yet a third society, the Astronomical Society, an outgrowth of the Cambridge Philosophical Society.⁶

While the above connections to the Shepherds' may be easy to explain, the precise source of other social connections remains fairly mysterious. Included among their social group were individuals such as James Mill, Henry Hallam, David Ricardo, William Maule, and John Cam Hobhouse. This list suggests that the Shepherds were connected to both the philosophically inclined 'philosophical radicals' and the politically inclined 'Westminster radicals'. In the latter group were included mainly politicians, such as John Cam Hobhouse. The former group, broadly construed to include James Mill and David Ricardo, was comprised of political economists and self-proclaimed 'philosophical radicals' — individuals committed to identifying and theorizing about the root causes of social problems, causes such as unrepresentative government, inflation, excessive taxation, and so on.

The Shepherds were not uniquely aligned with the radicals. They also had other political connections. They had long-standing Whig connections through the Primrose side of the family and Tory connections through the Shepherd side of the family. Hence, Lady Mary and Henry John were associated with a diverse collection of individuals of all political stripes. Accordingly, it would be hard to trace the Shepherds' path through the changing political scene of early nineteenth century Britain with any degree of certainty. Consider, for example, that

professors, Mary Shepherd was evidently familiar with the works of both Stewart and Brown. Babbage, on the other hand, actually mentions visiting Dugald Stewart in Scotland. Though it is never easy to estimate the depth of the personal regard between historical figures, it is worth noting that Babbage had sons named Dugald and Herschel.

6. All mentioned here were members of the Analytical Society of Trinity College. Henry John Shepherd and Edward Ryan were close friends, Babbage and Ryan married sisters, and Ryan helped to oversee Babbage's affairs when he died. It appears then, that Henry John Shepherd's Eton, Cambridge, and Lincoln's Inn connections developed

among the many family friends were individuals notorious for having switched political sympathies in the earlier part of nineteenth century. Indeed, many of those who had expressed liberal, reformist, or radical ideals in the early days of the French Revolution later adopted more conservative views. This is arguably true of Thomas Erskine, James Mackintosh, Sydney Smith, John Murray, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth and others in the Shepherd's social set. Who could say with any degree of certainty then, whether the Shepherds' political views were steady or wavering during this same period? In any case, over the years, the Shepherds appear to have been equally comfortable with conservative reformers such as Lord Lyndhurst (Sir Samuel Shepherd's brother-in-law) and radical reformers such as John Cam Hobhouse.⁷

One reason for the apparent compatibility of the diverse acquaintances may be the importance that was attached to freedom of conscience and 'refinement of tone'. These intangible social goods, as much as any intellectual contributions or political reforms, seem to have been uniting creeds of the Shepherds' social set. Hence, the members of the coterie may have held different philosophical and political views, but they appear to have socialized without animosity.⁸

into important social ties for Mary Shepherd. William Maule, Edward Ryan, Thomas Talfourd, like Henry John Shepherd, became barristers on the Oxford circuit. Later, several of these friends achieved prominence through the British India Company.

7. Though initially sympathetic to the cause of the people, some of these individuals later openly denounced revolutionary and republican ideals. It seems probable that in staying the course of the reform movement, the Shepherds, like many, appear to have exercised diplomacy and emphasized moderation.

8. We see a fine example of this in the words penned by Ricardo to Malthus shortly before the former's sudden death in 1823. In his final letter to Malthus, Ricardo wrote on a subject of perennial dispute between them, but closes with this final gesture of good will: [Bonar, 1887, p. xviii]. Cf. [Malthus, 1824]. 'And now, my dear Malthus, I have done. Like other disputants, after much discussion, we each retain our own opinions. These discussions, however, never influence our friendship; I should not like you more than I do if you agreed in opinion with me [Bonar, 1887, p. 240]. In return, Malthus commented that 'I never loved anybody out of my own family so much'. (See [Bonar, 1887, n. 240].)

Another uniting interest of the Shepherd's group was very likely political and economic reform. A majority of the guests belonged to the Benthamite and radical circles. James Mill, a close friend and follower of Jeremy Bentham, was, at least for a time, one of those who formed part of Mary Shepherd's circle of intimates. David Ricardo, however, is the one given special mention as a close confidante of Mary Shepherd.⁹

Yet another noticeable feature of the Shepherd's social set is that many were considered to be eccentrics. In addition to Babbage, there was Richard Whately, the eccentric clerical figure who became a minor celebrity after the publication of his outrageous *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*. Equally notorious and unique was Sydney Smith, well known for his acerbic wit and entertaining antics, and as a favorite at Holland House. Another socially controversial acquaintance, at least for his drug addiction, was Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge's deep fascination for German philosophy and literature did much to re-awaken the British interest in German ideas, and especially Kant.¹⁰

It is well to remember then, that Mary Shepherd's social circle was quite diverse. She was an aristocrat by birth, but had close friends of much humbler origins. This is true of Mill, Ricardo, and Babbage, for example.¹¹ Thus, Shepherd was comfortable in the best of social circles, but by no means narrow in her social views or society. Because of her Whig family tradition, and her connections to radicals and 'turncoats', it is not an easy matter to decide her politics. What we can surmise, however, is that she was frequently engaged in abstract discussion, that she enjoyed a keen wit, and that she sought to secure a social and intellectual milieu that would provide stimulating conversation.

9. Bentham claimed to be the spiritual father of James Mill, and said Mill claimed to be the spiritual father of David Ricardo [Bonar, 1887, p. xi; Letter XXI, n. 55].

10. 'One day', Mary Shepherd's daughter writes, 'I went with my mother to see Mr. Coleridge (Samuel Taylor Coleridge) at Highgate'. His conversation, she recalls was 'almost a monologue of poetic philosophy on the things between God and man; but my mother, with great tact, occasionally asked a question which brought forth fresh and fresh streams' [Brandreth, 1888, p. 113].

11. Charles Babbage was of good family, but was considered to be

poor and eccentric. Babbage had 450 pounds a year, which would have been sufficient to get by. However, for a long while, he entertained every Saturday evening — according to reports, sometimes up to hundreds of people on a given evening. Most importantly, Babbage was singularly devoted to his Difference Engine and his Analytic Engine, and had two highly skilled mechanics working full time in his shop. At one point, he had to increase his salary offer to his principal mechanic many times over in order to keep him. When he asked his mother for financial advice, she replied to him that he was so far into it now, that he shouldn't stop pursuing his dreams. She recommended that he simply find a way to do with whatever he had left over!

Chapter 5

Causality and the Revolutionary Lens

In 1824, Lady Mary Shepherd anonymously published *An Essay on the Relation of Cause and Effect*. This work was part of a nineteenth century resurgence of interest in questions surrounding causality and science. Other recent publications, such as Thomas Brown's 1818 *Inquiry into the Relation of Cause and Effect* and Richard Whately's 1819 *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*, show that the discussion and debate surrounding causality and empiricism was far from extinguished. As before, the debate had both epistemological and social overtones.

One of the more significant contributions to the ongoing discussion of causality — at least in terms of the attention it received — was Thomas Brown's 1818 *Inquiry*. The book elaborates on and develops a doctrine of causality first published in Brown's 1805 *Observations on the Nature and Tendency of the Doctrine of Mr. Hume Concerning the Relation of Cause and Effect* [Brown, 1805]. Much of the doctrine of causality in Brown's later work appears fundamentally unchanged from the 1805 formulation. If there is a difference, it is probably just this: in 1818, Brown's definition of cause is more pointed with regard to causal necessity. In 1805, Brown says that a 'cause' is defined as 'an object followed by another, where, if the first object had not been, the second had not appeared, and which, existing again in similar circumstances, will always be followed by the second' [Brown, 1805, n. 2]. In 1818, Brown continues to place emphasis on antecedence and consequence, but now places greater emphasis on the idea of necessity, so that a

'cause' comes to be defined as 'that which immediately precedes any change, and which existing at any time in similar circumstances has always, *and will be always*, immediately followed by a similar change' [Brown, 1818, my italics].

The similarity between Brown's 1805 and 1818 texts suggests that Brown's intention in 1818 is largely to clarify and elaborate the original 1805 doctrine. But it would be a mistake to suppose that a refinement of his ideas on causality was the whole of Brown's later contribution. Brown's 1805 analysis hinged on the claim that belief in antecedence and consequence can arise only in connection with experience. As a result, Brown argued, there was no sense in which belief in causality could arise as a result of reasoning or as a derivation from an *a priori* axiom. By 1818, Brown is more concerned with distinguishing his own view from Hume's than in attacking rationalism. His doctrine of causality is now being serviced by a new, physiologically-grounded, philosophy of mind — a philosophy that, given the evidence of his University of Edinburgh lecture notes, had been under development since 1805. What the Brown of 1818 wants to lay stress on is that it is not a mere habitual transition from one idea to the next that produces belief in causal connection, but immediate sensation itself. Brown argues that some of the feelings that arise in us lead immediately, irresistibly and intuitively to the belief that there is an external world of causes producing effects in us. In such cases, we are compelled to form beliefs about causes. Moreover, contra Hume, these causal beliefs are based on more than mere subjectivity; for the foundation in intuition is, according to Brown, a *certain* foundation for knowledge of causality and necessary connection.

The key to Brown's 1818 analysis is his introduction of a sensation-based physiology and philosophy of mind. And, as a corollary to his 1818 analysis, Brown offers a sensationist explanation of belief in external existence. These beliefs, Brown argues, arise in connection with feelings of resistance associated with muscular contractions. When new feelings of resistance intrude on familiar muscular sensations, they make us aware of external objects. On Brown's reckoning, it is these feelings of resistance, rather than ideas of primary qualities such as figure and shape, that lead us to believe in the existence of independent, external causes. Unfortunately for Brown, his view, which ultimately appealed to a foundation in intuition and irresistible belief, was not seen as a viable, non-atheistic alternative to Hume.

Many of Brown's 1818 interpreters read him as repeating his 1805 doctrine of causality and as endorsing a form of scepticism and atheism. Thus, as with his earlier work, the reception of Brown's 1818 *Inquiry* was mixed. Several important figures gave negative reviews. Victor Cousin remarked in his *Remains de M. de Biran*, that Brown's theory is 'a fantastical one, and destructive of all true metaphysics'. John Herschel's comment in his *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* article on Astronomy is even more explicit. Herschel writes, 'the whole train of argument is vitiated by one enormous oversight; the omission, namely, of a distinct and immediate personal consciousness of causation, in his enumeration of that sequence of events, by which the volition of the mind is made to terminate in the motion of material objects' [Blakey, 1850, n. 31]. These, and other writers, as it turns out, were in fact echoing the sort of critical appraisal that Mary Shepherd had given in her 1824 work on cause and effect. Robert Blakey, in particular, identified the source of the problem in Brown's 'peculiar ideas' of cause and effect and their atheistic consequences. Specifically, the problem with Brown's theory is that,

The cause of a thing is only the immediate invariable antecedent in any sequence, while the immediate invariable consequent is the correlative effect. It is somewhat surprising that a doctrine of this kind should have met with so much encouragement in the northern part of the kingdom; fraught, as it evidently is, with the most absurd and dangerous consequences [Blakey, 1850, p. 30].

Brown's 1818 *Inquiry* may not have received universal critical acclaim in its day, but it did garner respect in some circles. Furthermore, it bears importantly on Lady Mary Shepherd's response to the empiricists and their philosophy. For Shepherd was first among those critics who saw Brown as promoting a philosophy that led to atheism and scepticism:

When she undertook a public refutation of these erroneous notions of cause and effect, it must be remembered it was at a time when they were most rampant, and widely spread over the northern parts of Britain in particular. Every young man who came from the Universities of Scotland, attempted to show off his subtlety and academic lore, by denying there was any real causation in the world; all was mere imagination, and a piece of gross vulgar credulity [Blakey, 1850, p. 43].

Brown's 1818 return to the doctrine of causality and his analysis of our knowledge of the external world help to explain and motivate Lady Mary Shepherd's 1824 and 1827 publications on the causal relation and external existence. For, Brown's 1818 publication served as a reminder that the fall-out from Hume's challenge to the doctrine of causality was far from over. On the one hand, there were the outstanding conceptual issues concerning causality and scientific knowledge. On the other hand, there were the related social and religious questions concerning civil unrest and the proper bounds of civil liberty.

Indeed, the themes of causality and social unrest were often combined, sometimes in all seriousness, and sometimes not. Mme de Staël's posthumously published work of 1818, entitled *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française*, had the working title, in 1816, of *Des Causes et des Effets de la Révolution Française* — the sort of title that suggests just such a connection of ideas [Smiles, 1891, p. 316].¹ Mme de Staël's working title was likely tongue-in-cheek, and so too was Richard Whately's 1819 contribution entitled *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte*.

Whately's *Historic Doubts* was a humorous contribution that identified an inherent weakness in the position of Hume and his followers. Highly entertaining and topical, the book was enormously popular. It posed a philosophical challenge to Hume's supporters, drawing on the 'universal scepticism' engendered by Hume to undermine the sceptic's own belief in the existence of Napoleon [Whately, 1837, p. iii].² To begin, Whately points out that most of the evidence concerning Napoleon comes from newspaper reports. These reports, he says, are treated as pieces of evidence about Napoleon and his existence. Traded around from one newspaper to the next, they eventually take on the form of appeals to the masses. This poses an evidential problem that is further complicated by the fact that we are not normally in a position to verify newspaper reports about Napoleon. Hence, we can't appeal to personal testimony in support of the newspaper claims.

1. The 1816 title is mentioned in a letter from Baron de Staël to John Murray discussing the possible publication of the work. The two were unable to reach a financial agreement, and Murray did not publish the work. It was published as [de Staël, 1818]. The English edition was published in 1818 by Baldwin, Cradock and Joy.

2. Whately writes,

Moreover, those who claim to have visited Napoleon, Whately notes, could well be deceived about the testimony of their own senses. After all, how do they know that the person that they have seen is Napoleon? Yet another important consideration that raises doubt about Napoleon, Whately notes, is the fact that various media reports palpably contradict one another on important points. Finally, it is well to keep in mind, says Whately, that the defenders of liberty and publishers could easily have conspired to fabricate the stories about Napoleon in support of their cause.

Having thus cast doubt on belief in the existence of Napoleon, Whately formulates a philosophical challenge:

Let those who pretend to philosophical freedom of inquiry, who scorn to rest their opinions on popular belief, and to shelter themselves under the example of the unthinking multitude, consider carefully each one for himself, what is the evidence proposed to himself in particular, for the existence of such a person as Napoleon Buonaparte [Whately, 1837, p. 29].³

But some sensible readers have complained of the difficulty of determining what they are to believe. Of the existence of Buonaparte, indeed, they remained fully convinced; nor, if it were left doubtful, would any important results ensue; but if they can give no satisfactory reason for their conviction, how can they know, it is asked, that they may not be mistaken as to other points of greater consequence, on which they are no less fully convinced, but on which all men are not agreed? [Whatley, 1837, p. iii]

3. Whately goes on to congratulate those who would persist in believing without good arguments on their 'easy faith', and to question how those who affirm the existence of Napoleon — when the evidence is blatantly contradictory — can nonetheless profess disbelief in miracles. In his *pièce de résistance*, he includes a mock Biblical extract starring Napoleon as God.

And when Napoleon saw that the kingdom was departed from him, he said unto the rulers which came against him, Let me, I pray you, give the kingdom unto my son: but they would not hearken unto him. Then he spake yet again, saying, Let me, I pray you, go and live in the island of Elba, which is over against Italy, nigh unto the coast of France; and ye shall give me an allowance for me and my household, and the lands of Elba also for my possession. So they made him ruler of Elba [Whately, 1837, p. 41–42].

After much amusement, Whately gets to his main point. He says, 'I do not pretend to decide positively that there is not, nor ever was, any such person; but merely to propose it as a *doubtful* point...' [Whately, 1837, p. 47]. In fact, Whatley's goal is to shift the burden of the doubt onto the sceptic — to challenge the sceptic to justify his common sense beliefs:

I call upon those therefore who profess themselves advocates of free inquiry — who disdain to be carried along with the stream of popular opinion, — and who will listen to no testimony that runs counter to experience — to follow up their own principles fairly and consistently. Let the same mode of argument be adopted in all cases alike; and then it can no longer be attributed to hostile prejudice, but to enlarged and philosophical views [Whately, 1837, p. 51].

Hume, of course, had admitted that he had no philosophical justification for his own credulity. Nevertheless, in his closing argument, Whately charges that Humeans who continue to believe in such mundane things as the existence of Napoleon — for instance, philosophers such as Brown — should either admit inconsistency or give up scepticism.

If after all that has been said, they cannot bring themselves to doubt of the existence of Napoleon Buonaparte, they must at least acknowledge that they do not apply to that question, the same plan of reasoning which they have made use of in others; and they are consequently bound in reason and in honesty to renounce it altogether [Whately, 1837, p. 53].

As we shall see, the divergent approaches of Brown and Whately serve as foils to the placement of Lady Mary Shepherd's contribution. For, not only does Mary Shepherd reject Brown's appeal to intuition — which she thinks of as leaving the door wide open to sceptical doubt — but she also seeks more by way of answer to Hume than the farcical appeal that Whately offers. For many, including for Mary Shepherd, the whole system of knowledge — religious and metaphysical — must be undergirded by a sure foundational in the causal relation.

It was not mere chance then that led to the renewed interest in Hume and causality one quarter century after the Leslie controversy and three quarters of a century after the Hume affair. Many of those who took an interest believed that scepticism concerning abstract notions such as causality served to undermine the civil order. As the first quarter of the nineteenth century unfolded, England's social problems began to mount. For Shepherd and others, the foundational issues around causality and the threats presented by atheism and scepticism loomed larger than ever. Moreover, Lady Mary Shepherd's own family came to be involved in social and political controversies, which meant that the issues now ran very close to the bone. Indeed, in the years directly preceding her 1824 publication on the subject of causation, Lady Mary Shepherd's life was filled with the same sort of controversy and persecution that had fuelled the Leslie affair in 1805.

In 1819, circumstances conspired to place Lady Mary Shepherd's near-relations at the center of what must have been a very unpleasant business, — namely, the prosecution of Richard Carlile for the publication of Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. Lady Mary's father-in-law, Sir Samuel Shepherd, was King's Advocate, or Attorney General, under the Regent, Prince George. At the time, the mood in England was quite revolutionary, much more so, in fact, than in the early days of the French Revolution. The Industrial Revolution had led to widespread job loss in Britain, and the combination of land enclosure, expensive wars, poor agricultural yields and taxes meant that many people in Britain were literally starving. To make matters worse, sinecures and offices connected with colonization were reserved for the rich, who began to achieve unprecedented levels of wealth. A group of so-called 'Luddites' took up the cause against industrialization, organizing an underground militia and leading mobs in the looting and burning of the homes and factories of the wealthy. Unwilling to yield concessions to the people, the terrified aristocracy sought comfort in escape, debauchery and commiseration. It is about this time that we find Lord Grey writing to Lord Holland that 'We shall see, if we live, a Jacobin Revolution more bloody than that of France' [Lean, 1970, p. 118]. Indeed, after decades of failed attempts at reform, the French Revolution had suggested a solution to the British, and by 1819, revolutionary aspirations appeared daily more threatening.

As the aristocracy grew hysterical with fear of widespread social unrest, many of those who had earlier avowed support for the French

grew silent or adopted a conservative rhetoric. The monarchy turned its back on liberalism in all its forms, and adopted a conservative stance. In an effort to prevent incendiary material from reaching the public, strict publication laws were introduced and enforced.⁴ Many journals responded by becoming increasingly conservative, out of fear of being charged with treasonable offenses. As the matter of publication bans became controversial, Richard Carlile defiantly published Paine's *Age of Reason*. Prince George insisted on a public shaming for this insubordination, including, eventually, imprisonment for both Carlile and his wife. The man who would do the honors in this prosecution was Lady Mary Shepherd's father-in-law, Sir Samuel Shepherd.

Whether Sir Samuel Shepherd enjoyed the task of prosecuting on behalf of the King is doubtful. Among the family's personal friends were included publishers, a full spectrum of Whigs, a select group of Tories and the Westminster radicals. Given their social ties, navigating between social and official lives would have been enough of a challenge; but as crown prosecutor, Sir Samuel Shepherd was also in peril for his own life.⁵ Indeed, Sir Samuel was severely criticized for his role in the trial. The counts filed against Carlile were manufactured by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and, as Carlile complained, 'the prosecuting parties' designed to 'give the information an air of importance' by 'acting in concert' [Unknown, 1819, n. iv]. The counts themselves related specifically to the text of Paine's *Age of Reason*, which, as publisher, Carlile was held responsible for. The counts were repetitive, and all related to

4. This was a year of great commercial distress, of riots, demonstrations, and uprisings ever increasing; with unflinching resistance on the part of the Government...In December, Parliament passed the famous Six Acts of Castlereagh, against sedition and libels [Bain, 1882, p. 188].

5. Once, after having obtained some convictions for treason, Sir Samuel had been waylaid by an angry mob at the door of Westminster Hall. When urged to follow a discreet route home, Sir Samuel objected with bravado. In the end, he was forced to flee in security [Brandreth, 1888, pp. 153-154]. His home residence was also targeted. Forewarned, Sir Samuel's wife had prepared a 'great quantity of good cold tea, well sweetened with brown sugar' and collected 'as much provision of plain substantial food as possible' including 'meat, bread, butter, cheese, milk' into the house. Having eaten the food, 'the mob trooped out at the front, several expressing their opinion that "Shepherd is a very good fellow after all"' [Brandreth, 1888, pp. 129-131].

the Old Testament.⁶

Sir Samuel Shepherd's name arose often in connection with the trial, and the following remark, made by one J. Mills during the Crown and Anchor's forum, 'Ought R.C. to be Censured?', implies that Sir Samuel's role in the trial was hypocritical:

Some will naturally be more sceptical than others, according to their means of forming a sound judgment; but of all men living, I should think an English Attorney-General the least likely to have very orthodox notions upon the subject of religion, if these notions are to be attained by translations of the Bible or attendance at church [Mills, 1819, p. 13].⁷

Whoever it was that spoke the 1819 words against the Attorney General seems to have been in a position to know that Sir Samuel did not hold orthodox views on religion.

It is apparent then, that by 1819, the British aristocracy lived in fear of Luddites and revolution, and that sympathy for 'the people's cause' was tempered by a spreading fear of social unrest. In 1819, turn-of-the-century bravado would have been unthinkable to members of Parliament — not to mention the Prince Regent. The official line grew to be quite the opposite of moderation; rather, the aim was to inspire fear of social activism and its consequences, and to indicate that a treasonous and irreligious tenor would not be tolerated.⁸ As one commentator bitterly remarked, Carlile goes to court 'with the whole weight of Government against him' [Jones, 1819, pp. 8–10]. Sir Samuel's own

6. Paine had claimed that the Old Testament was full of 'obscene stories', 'voluptuous debaucheries', 'cruel and torturous executions' and 'unrelenting vindictiveness'. The book was 'a history of wickedness that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind' [Unknown, 1819, p. 4]. It contained 'lies, wickedness and blasphemy' and so 'many absurdities and contradictions' that it was 'impossible to find in any story upon record, so many and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods' [Unknown, 1819, pp. 5–6].

7. The name on the pamphlet also appears as J. Mill. One has to wonder whether the speaker was James or John Stuart Mill. According to Bain [Bain, 1882, p. 435], John Stuart Mill first appeared in print on the subject of Carlile: 'John Mill's first appearance in print was to denounce the prosecution of him [Carlile] and his wife.'

8. Coss notes that,

thoughts were, 'I am not going to be afraid of an angry mob when I have done my duty' [Brandreth, 1888, p. 153]. Yet, in the midst of the year's events, in June 1819, he gave up his position as Attorney General. He also declined offers of Chief Justice and Home Secretary, and refused to act as the Prince Regent's attorney in the divorce of Queen Caroline.⁹ It was probably with considerable relief that Sir Samuel left London for Edinburgh, and took up the role of Lord Chief Baron of the Court of Exchequer for Scotland [Scott, 1890, vol. I, p. 51]. Presumably, Sir Samuel spent most of his time between 1819 and 1830 in Edinburgh.¹⁰

'The prosecutions of Richard Carlile and his wife and sister for publications hostile to Christianity, were then exciting much attention, and nowhere more than among the people I frequented. Freedom of discussion even in politics, much more in religion, was at that time far from being, even in theory, the conceded point which it at least seems to be now; and the holders of obnoxious opinions had to be always ready to argue and re-argue for the liberty of expressing them' [Coss, 1944, pp. 61–62].

9. The Prince Regent gently mocked Sir Samuel's sensitivities, saying, 'Shepherd, Shepherd, you are the honestest man in England, and the worst courtier in the world'. Note that this last remark was made when Sir Samuel refused, on principle, to oversee the King's divorce. But presumably the remark was general in scope. [Brandreth, 1888, p. 142]. It is interesting to note that one of Sir Samuel Shepherd's closest friends, Thomas Erskine, a fellow advocate and courtier, had successfully defended Paine from charges in connection with his *Rights of Man* in the 1790s. Erskine was one of the many liberals sympathetic to the French Revolution in the early days. In 1792, Thomas Erskine provided a sympathetic portrayal of the helplessness of the average citizen in the face of an absolute authoritarian, saying 'I can reason with the people of England, but I cannot fight against the thunder of authority' [Halevy, 1934, p. 200].

10. Sir Samuel Shepherd resided at 16 Coates Crescent. In his journal, Walter Scott remarks on 18 June 1830, that 'the good and very clever Lord Chief Baron is returned to his own country, with more regrets in Scotland than usually attend a stranger' [Scott, 1890, vol. II; p. 336].

Taken together, the circumstances of the day help to explain Lady Mary Shepherd's renewed interest in foundational issues around causality. In particular, assumptions linking the philosophical doubts about causality and the social order continued to give rise to new philosophical investigations. And, though the complexity of social ties and of the times makes it very difficult to say just where Lady Mary Shepherd stood in connection with issues raised by the trial of Richard Carlile, we do know that Mary Shepherd's social circle included Whigs and Tories of every stripe, including the philosophical and Westminster radicals.

But this only tells us that Lady Mary's society was decidedly mixed. At the same time, Blakey describes Shepherd in a way that leaves the question of her religious convictions unambiguous. As Blakey notes in his *A History of the Philosophy of Mind*, the view of causation espoused by Hume and Brown 'appeared to Lady Mary Shepherd to lead by an inevitable consequence to downright Atheism' [Blakey, 1850, vol. IV, p. 42]. And, insofar as social well-being also seemed to be threatened, there could be no contest — the scepticism and atheism stemming from doubts about our knowledge of causality would have to be answered. However, for Lady Mary Shepherd, the approach would not be to ridicule the debate or to stamp out free discussion; rather, it would be to throw the light of reason into the debate.

End of Part One

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