

MONTROSE

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Montrose by Mowbray Morris

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MOWBRAY MORRIS

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M O N T R O S E

BY

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1909

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CHAPTER I

ANCESTRY AND EARLY YEARS

TRADITION still points to a building in the town of Montrose as the birthplace of James Graham, fifth Earl and first Marquis of the line,—a building also fondly cherished by the antiquary as the last to shelter the Old Chevalier on Scottish soil. Both traditions are of course disputed, and both are easy to dispute. The title of Montrose was taken, not from the town of that name but, from the estate of Old Montrose on the opposite side of the bay, which a Graham had acquired from Robert Bruce in exchange for the lands of Cardross in Dumbartonshire. The name is said to be of Gaelic origin, *All or Ald Moineros*, the Burn of the Mossy Point; but the prefix must have been understood in its Saxon significance at least as early as the twelfth century, for in a charter of that time the place is styled *Vetus Mowros*. The old castle has long since disappeared. The Covenanters naturally let slip no chance of despoiling the man they most feared and hated in Scotland; and of the three stately homes owned by the chief of the Grahams at the beginning of the seventeenth century—Kincardine in

Pertshire, Mugdock in Stirlingshire, and Old Montrose in Forfarshire—all went down in the storm of civil war. Montrose's parents seem to have resided at all three impartially, and at the last their son may have been born. If this were so, it is easy to understand how tradition, anxious for some visible memorial of a famous man in the town bearing his name, should have transferred the honour of his birth there across the few miles of water that separated it from the old home of his family. But in fact nothing is certainly known of the place or time of Montrose's birth, except that he was fourteen years old when his father died in 1626, and must consequently have been born some time in the year 1612.

The Grahams had long been conspicuous figures in Scottish history. In 1298 Sir John Graham, the chosen comrade of Wallace, had fallen, more fortunate than his friend, at the battle of Falkirk, in the churchyard of which town his tomb may still be seen. In 1304, at the capitulation which seemed for the moment to have closed the Scots' struggle for independence, Sir David, the first proprietor of Old Montrose, had been specially marked by the English king as a dangerous man. Through the wars of Bruce and his immediate successors the Grahams had stood stoutly by the national cause. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries they had three times intermarried with the royal blood of Scotland. A son of Sir William Graham and the Princess Mary, daughter of Robert the Third, was the first Primate of Scotland; and as a Graham of a later generation had held the see of Dunblane, the indifference expressed for bishops by their illustrious descendant should at least not have been hereditary. One of Sir William's grandsons,

Patrick, was raised to the peerage as Lord Graham in 1451, and in 1505 his grandson William was made Earl of Montrose by James the Fourth, only to fall a few years later by his sovereign's side at Flodden, where he commanded a division of the Scottish van. His grandson fell with equal glory at Pinkie, a field only less disastrous to his country than the field of Flodden. But the most conspicuous of the ancestors of the Great Marquis was his grandfather John, who held in succession the offices of Treasurer, Chancellor, and Viceroy of Scotland. He seems to have possessed his full share of the turbulent spirit which marked the Scottish aristocracy then and for long after an era of milder manners had dawned upon the South. When nearly fifty years old he was engaged in a memorable brawl on the High Street of Edinburgh between a party of his own men and the followers of Sir John Sandilands, by whom one of his clan had been murdered three years previously. In this affair Lord Graham fought by his father's side, and according to one account had been the first to begin the fray. But the general tenor of his life seems to have been unusually peaceful. He bore the part expected of a young Scottish nobleman in the State ceremonies and pageants of the time, and after his succession to the title performed such duties as his position imposed on him with credit if with no particular ability. But his tastes evidently led him rather to the life of a country gentleman than of a man of affairs, and after his wife's death he seems to have devoted himself almost entirely to the care of his children and his estates. His letters show him to have been an affectionate and indulgent father, and the precision of his accounts proves

him an exact but not illiberal manager. His stables were well stocked and well used, and, next to riding, archery and golf were his favourite pastimes. In these his son followed him. His skill at the targets and on the links is one of the few memorials of Montrose's youth that time has spared for us; the grace and dexterity of his horsemanship were famous even in an age and a country where all men and most women rode, and were first learned, as such accomplishments can only be learned, in boyhood, as he cantered on his white pony at his father's side over the fair heritage of his sires. But another of his father's tastes he did not share. The smell of tobacco is said to have been peculiarly disagreeable to him, and sums for tobacco and pipes are frequent in the old Earl's accounts.²

² Almost all that is known or can be conjectured of Montrose's youth is derived from the accounts of his father's household expenses and of his own at Glasgow and St. Andrews, which were discovered about forty years ago in the charter-chest at Kinross Castle. They have been abundantly and cleverly used by Mark Napier in the opening chapters of his *Memoirs of Montrose* (2 vols., Edin., 1856), the last and most complete of the many volumes published by him on his famous kinsman. In respect of the facts of Montrose's life, he may be considered to have exhausted all known sources of information; but outside the facts he must be read with caution. For this purpose there can be no better antidotes than Dr. Burton and Mr. Gardiner have supplied in their grave and judicial histories. The second volume of the latter's *History of the Great Civil War* is invaluable to all who would trace the intricate course of Montrose's Highland campaign. It is unnecessary to enumerate all the original authorities that may be consulted. Students of history are well aware of them, and others may be content to trust Dr. Burton and Mr. Gardiner, who have neglected no means of enabling readers to draw their own conclusions.

Montrose, it may be observed, did not disdain tobacco in all