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J. A. Lovat-Fraser
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CHAPTER I

OVER a hundred and thirty years ago a party of diners sat round a table in a brilliantly lighted apartment in London. The tall candles burnt in their sconces, illuminating the glittering crystal and abundant decanters of the eighteenth century. At the head of the table sat the host, the leonine Lord Thurlow, with his growling voice and his bushy black eyebrows. The conversation fell upon Lord Bute, who some time before had retired from public office. One of the guests remarked that a Life of Lord Bute was going to be written. The surly host dismissed the information with the ill-natured comment, "the life of a fly would be as interesting."

In spite of Lord Thurlow's dictum, the career of John Stuart, Earl of Bute, is one of great interest, and full of instruction. He was the first Scotsman who attained the position of Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain. He was the chief adviser of George the Third from his accession till April, 1763. During that time he brought upon himself an amount of hatred and detestation rarely equalled in English history. While in office he was probably the most unpopular minister that ever served an English monarch. He was *le parvenu montagnard*, the upstart Highlander, as a contemporary pamphlet called him, who was regarded as bringing from Scotland all the evil traditions

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of the Stuart race. When he retired, he was still the object of unscrupulous abuse and unfounded slander. For long years after his fall, he was pictured as the evil genius of the sovereign, ever whispering traitorous counsels in his ear, and prompting him to every kind of unconstitutional proceeding. He was made the scapegoat for the blunders of ministers who were in reality his bitterest opponents. It was his fate to

“Live to be the show and gaze o’ the time,
Painted upon a pole; and underwrit,
‘Here you may see the tyrant.’”

Bute was the representative of one of the noble Scottish families who trace their descent to the royal house of Scotland. He was descended from Sir John Stewart, who was the natural son of King Robert the Second, and who was appointed Sheriff of Bute in 1385 by his father. The chief seat of the family was the little Island of Bute in the Firth of Clyde. Here, under the heather-clad mountains of Argyllshire, the ancestors of the future Prime Minister had dwelt for generations. Rothesay, the little burgh town on the north side of the island, was an old home of the royal house. King Robert the Third had died in the castle, which still stands in ruins in the centre of the town, and the eldest son of each Scottish monarch bore the title of Duke of Rothesay. In modern days Rothesay is a cluster of common-place streets and villas, the dumping ground on to which grimy Glasgow and the industrial centres of the West of Scotland pour their crowds of excursionists during the summer holidays. In Bute’s time the island was still a secluded spot outside the sphere of Lowland influence. It was frequented by few travellers, and inhabited by a scanty population, who

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spoke Gaelic. Bute himself was regarded as a Highlander, and, as already mentioned, a contemporary satirical history described him as “Le Montagnard Parvenu, or the New Highland Adventurer in England.”

The subject of this book was born on 25th May 1713, and was the son of James, second Earl of Bute, by Anne Campbell, the daughter of Archibald, first Duke of Argyll. He was born, not in Bute, but in the Parliament Square of Edinburgh, a spot saturated with the most inspiring traditions of Scottish history, and consecrated to national feeling by a statue of King Charles the Second. Within a stone's throw of his birthplace stood the halls where the Parliament of Scotland had met before the Union, and where the burning eloquence of Fletcher and Belhaven had been echoed by enthusiastic applause. The custom of sending boys of the Scottish aristocracy to English schools had already commenced, and Bute went to Eton for his education. In 1736, when twenty-three years of age, he married Mary, the daughter of the famous and eccentric Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, by Edward Wortley Montagu of Wortley in Yorkshire. Lady Mary was strongly opposed to the union, but the bride went her own way, and wedded the man she loved.

The marriage proved a happy one. Lord Chesterfield says, in his *Character* of Bute, that he made a run-away love-match, but notwithstanding lived very happily with his wife. Twelve years afterwards Lady Mary, the mother of Lady Bute, wrote to her husband: “What I think extraordinary is my daughter's continuing so many years agreeable to Lord Bute; Mr Mackenzie telling me, the last time I saw him, that his brother frequently said among his companions, that he was as

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much in love with his wife as before he married her." Lady Mary quite forgot in later years, as other mothers have done in similar circumstances, that she had violently opposed her daughter's marriage. "You give Lord Bute," she wrote, in 1742, to her husband, "the character I always believed belonged to him from the first of our acquaintance, and the opinion I had of his honesty (which is the most essential quality) made me so easily consent to the match." Lady Bute seems to have been a woman of great prudence and tact, and, even when her husband's fortunes were at the highest, was always wise and discreet. It is a high tribute to her that she was a favourite of the notorious and then aged Sarah Jennings, Duchess of Marlborough, and was one of the few persons with whom the Duchess never quarrelled.

Bute, like Cromwell, did not become famous till middle age, and it is unnecessary to linger over his early life. He was elected a Scottish representative peer in 1737, but was not re-elected to the Parliament of 1741, and twenty years passed before he again appeared in the House of Lords. Although he ultimately acquired a large fortune by his wife, his early married life was hampered by poverty. Poverty dogged the footsteps of most of the Scots nobility, and Bute but shared the common lot of his class. He was compelled to spend the first nine years after his marriage in an economical retirement in the Island of Bute. In the early part of 1746 he appears to have been in some financial embarrassment owing to the falling of stocks, the general scarcity consequent on the war, and a terrible murrain that had then made havoc among the cattle. About this time he left Scotland, and came to Twickenham, on the banks of the Thames. In March, 1746, Edward

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Wortley Montagu wrote to his wife, Lady Mary, that Bute had "for the next year taken the house which was Mr Stone's for £45 a year, which you will think extremely cheap. She (Lady Bute) tells me they design to lay down their coach, and that Scotch estates bring little to London." Bute was a man of culture, and a student, and in the seclusion of his Scottish home had found congenial occupation in the study of mathematics, mechanics and botany. He continued his eccentric pursuits in his new domicile, and the future Prime Minister might have been seen looking for specimens among the fields and hedges on the banks of the Thames.

About 1747 the quiet life of Bute was broken by an important event. He made the acquaintance of Frederick, Prince of Wales, an occurrence which laid the foundation of his fortunes. Mrs Boscawen, widow of the celebrated Admiral Boscawen, told Sir Nathaniel Wraxall that the introduction was quite accidental. Bute visited the Egham races, and, not having a carriage of his own, drove to the course in the chariot of the apothecary who attended his family. Prince Frederick, who then resided at Cliefden, happened to be present at the races, and, the weather proving rainy, it was proposed to have a game of cards in a tent that had been erected for his accommodation. A difficulty occurred about finding persons of sufficient rank to play with the Prince, until somebody suggested that Lord Bute, whose rank as an Earl entitled him to form one of the party, had been seen on the course. Bute was introduced to the Prince, and joined in the game. After it was over, it was discovered that the apothecary had gone, and in the difficulty, the Prince insisted that Bute should accompany him to Cliefden, and pass the night there. Bute complied,

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and thereby laid the foundation of his friendship with the Prince, and of his future eminence.

Bute soon became a constant *habitué* of the Royal circle at Cliefden and Worcester House. Frederick, who was affable and good-tempered, but weak and frivolous, was fond of private theatricals. Bute had acted in Young's *Revenge* at Queensberry House, where the Duchess of Queensberry had organised amateur performances. He had also filled the part of "Castalio" in Otway's *Orphan* so well that Frederick had asked that it might be performed before him. Bute was invited to join in the amateur performances at the Royal entertainments and, it is said, frequently played the part of "Lothario." He was a handsome man, and his enemies said that, like Sim Tappertit in *Barnaby Rudge*, he particularly admired the symmetry of his own legs, and liked to display them on the amateur stage. His intimacy with the Prince brought him and his wife out of the retirement in which they had hitherto lived, and ambitions, hitherto dormant, made themselves felt. They began to play a more prominent part in the great world. "Lord Bute and my daughter's conduct," wrote Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, "may be owing to the advice of the Duke of Argyll. It was a maxim of Sir R. Walpole's that whoever expected advancement should appear much in public. He used to say, whoever neglected the world, would be neglected by it, though I believe more families have been ruined than raised by that method." In September, 1750, Bute received official standing by being appointed Lord of the Bedchamber to Prince Frederick.

In 1751 Prince Frederick died. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu anticipated that this event would have a bad

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effect on the fortunes of her son-in-law, and gave vent to fears, which were not, however, justified. "I suppose," she wrote, "Prince George will have a household fixed, and methinks his father's servants should have preference. However that is, the disappointment must still be very great to Lord Bute. I do not doubt his hopes were very high. *Nescia mens hominum fati sortisque futurae*. As I have a good opinion of his honesty, I think it is a national misfortune that he has lost the prospect of having a share in the confidence of a king." Bute, however, continued his friendship with the Princess. He was constantly at her house, and was consulted by her in all her concerns. The world, always ready to be uncharitable, asserted that an immoral connexion united the two; an allegation which in later days became an article of faith with Bute's enemies. Shelburne hints that Bute first formed an illicit connexion with Lady Howe, who was Lady of the Bedchamber, and afterwards threw her over for the Princess. "I believe it's certain," says Shelburne, "that Lady Howe at last forgave him. Though old and ugly, she conceived she had a right to his constancy, and was not disposed to yield it very willingly to her mistress."

The friendship between Bute and the Princess had one not unnatural result. George, the eldest son of the Princess and heir to the throne, was growing up, and Bute acquired a powerful influence over the young man. George was kept in seclusion, in order to preserve him, so his mother said, from the evil influences that surrounded him. It was asserted in after years, however, that the Princess and Bute, adopting the treatment accorded to the youthful Louis the Fourteenth by Anne of Austria and Cardinal Mazarin, deliberately kept him

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in a state of tutelage, that they might secure the power, when he should come to the throne. In 1756, when the Prince was eighteen years of age, the King decided to give him an establishment of his own. Bute was appointed Groom of the Stole and head of the Prince's household, but not without much wire-pulling and considerable difficulty. A full account of the negotiations which preceded the appointment are given in Von Ruville's splendid work on Chatham, and it is unnecessary to detail them here. George the Second was most unwilling to place Bute at the head of the Prince's establishment. He resented the influence which the Princess Dowager and Bute enjoyed with Prince George, and the Prince had himself to urge the appointment on the King. "Nothing," he wrote, "could make me happier or fill my mind with warmer gratitude than your Majesty's gracious consent in favour of a character, an early and long acquaintance with whom has naturally won my high esteem, and of whose devotion and zeal for your Majesty I am most firmly convinced."

When the King at length consented to the appointment of Bute, he did it grudgingly, and refused to admit him into the closet to receive the badge of his office. He gave it to the Duke of Grafton, who slipped the gold key into the Scottish nobleman's pocket, whispering to him not to resent the affront—a piece of advice which Bute prudently accepted. When Bute appeared to kiss hands, the King declined to vouchsafe him a single word, and he subsequently reproached Henry Fox for forcing on him the appointment of that "puppy" Bute as Groom of the Stole. The other appointments to the Prince's household were left to the Prime Minister, Newcastle, and it affords an interesting light on the prevailing

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methods of government that no less than ten individuals received office, who were members of one or other House of Parliament, in order that their votes might be secured for the administration. Lady Mary was naturally gratified at the elevation of her son-in-law, and wrote to her daughter, wishing her joy of her new situation. "Lord Bute," she wrote, "has attained it by a very uncommon road; I mean an acknowledged honour and probity. I have but one short instruction (pardon the word) to give on his account; that he will never forget the real interest of Prince and people cannot be divided, and are almost as closely united as that of soul and body." It was now fully recognised that Bute was a coming man, and the comparative merits of Newcastle, the actual Prime Minister, and Bute, who might possibly be Prime Minister in the future, were widely discussed. The witty Charles Townshend, who was related to both, flippantly dismissed the subject, "silly fellow for silly fellow, I think it is as well to be governed by my uncle, with a blue riband, as by my cousin, with a green one."

As a result of Bute's influence with the Princess Dowager, the education of Prince George was left in his hands. Bute was a Tory, and the Prince's education was conducted on Tory lines. The prevailing form of government at that time was oligarchical Whiggery. Since the accession of George the First in 1714 a few Whig families, by dint of corruption and borough influence, had secured all the power. The majority of the House of Commons were returned by the Whig nobles. The long exclusion of the Tories from office had tended to lessen the influence of the Crown. England, to use Disraeli's historic comparison, was governed on Venetian principles. The Whig magnificoes,

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who corresponded to the Venetian aristocrats, had reduced the King to the level of a Doge. The throne was “a mere pageant,” to use Lord Shelburne’s words. The King was allowed to do as he pleased within the limits of his Court, but he was never suffered to take part in the actual conduct of affairs. Public corruption was the chief instrument of government, and, as might have been expected, inefficiency and incompetence were the order of the day. Any fool may rule under a system of corruption. “A chambermaid,” said Bolingbroke, “may slip a banknote into a griping paw as well as the most subtle demon of hell.” No great ability was required for the post of Prime Minister when his chief duty was to supervise a system of bribery, and the Whigs were able to make their nominee, the Duke of Newcastle, virtually sovereign of England, although he was, as Disraeli justly described him, “the most incompetent of men.”

George was educated to regard the existing Whig *régime* with strong hostility. It was said that George Scott, the Prince’s sub-preceptor, was recommended by Bolingbroke. Andrew Stone, the sub-governor, who was a brother of Archbishop Stone, the Primate of Ireland, and a distinguished Oxford scholar, was accused of Jacobitism, and of drinking the health of “The King over the water.” He was charged with having given the Prince Archdeacon Echard’s translation of the *Revolutions d’Angleterre* by Père d’Orleans, a book written in defence of James the Second and his unconstitutional measures. Cresset, the Princess’s secretary and favourite, who was related to Eleanor d’Emiers or d’Olbreuse, the wife of George William, Duke of Zell, and grandmother of George the Second, was also accused of