

George Mackenzie, Fletcher wrote only in English not Scots, and did succeed in writing a vigorous style wonderfully free from Scottish peculiarities. His *Discourse of Government* appeared in 1698, his *Two Discourses concerning the Affairs of Scotland* in the same year. The *Discorso della Cose di Spagna* 1698 also was printed only in Italian. His *Speeches* in the Scottish Parliament are both eloquent and sincere, though his political ideals were perverse and unpractical. *An Account of a Conversation concerning a Right Regulation of Governments for the common Good of Mankind* 1703 is forcibly written, and contains much sound sense amidst its strong appeals in favour of Scottish independence. In this letter occurs the famous saying, so constantly quoted and so universally misinterpreted, about ballads. The conversation was supposed to be between the Earl of Cromarty, Sir Edward Seymour, Sir Christopher Musgrave, and Fletcher himself, and had nothing in the world to do with ballads such as 'Chevy Chase' or the Robin Hood series, but the unholy songs of the day, Tom Durfey's no doubt included; 'ballad' as used of romantic poems like the Border ballads is essentially a modern usage, the older custom always implying some kind of song. Fletcher's argument was on the utter inefficiency of all government regulations, according to Sir Christopher Musgrave, to put down the corruptions of London society in those days – the luxury of women, the number of prostitutes, and the debauchery of the poor of both sexes, who are daily tempted to all manner of lewdness by the infamous ballads sung in every corner of the streets. "One would think," said the Earl, "this last were of no great consequence." I said I knew a wise man so much of Sir Christopher's sentiment, that he believed if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation. And we find that most of the ancient legislators thought they could not well reform the manners of any city without the help of a lyric, and sometimes of a dramatic poet. But in this city [London] the dramatic poet no less than the ballad-maker has been almost wholly employed to corrupt the people, in which they have had most unspeakable and deplorable success.²

Enthusiastic admiration of the Greek and Roman republics led Fletcher to praise even slavery as maintained by them. He represents the condition of the slaves as happy and useful, and by way of contrast paints the state of the lowest class in Scotland in colours that 'even if they be somewhat too dark show how frightfully disorganised the country was at that period. In the *Second Discourse on the Affairs of Scotland* occurs this lurid picture:

There are at this day in Scotland (besides a great many poor families very meanly provided for by the church boxes, with others who, by living on bad food, fall into various diseases) two hundred thousand people begging from door to door. These are not only noway

advantageous, but a very grievous burden to so poor a country. And though the number of them be perhaps double to what it was formerly, by reason of this present great distress, yet in all times there have been about one hundred thousand of those vagabonds, who have lived without any regard or subjection either to the laws of the land, or even those of God and nature. . . . No magistrate could ever be informed or discover which way one in a hundred of these wretches died, or that ever they were baptized. Many murders have been discovered among them; and they are not only a most unspeakable oppression to poor tenants (who, if they give not bread, or some kind of provision, to perhaps forty such villains in one day, are sure to be insulted by them), but they rob many poor people who live in houses distant from any neighbourhood. In years of plenty many thousands of them meet together in the mountains, where they feast and riot for many days; and at country weddings, markets, burials, and the like public occasions, they are to be seen, both men and women, perpetually drunk, cursing, blaspheming, and fighting together. These are such outrageous disorders, that it were better for the nation they were sold to the galleys or West Indies than that they should continue any longer to be a burden and curse upon us.

But better than sending them to the plantations would be to keep them at home, utilising their services, and drilling them into a higher moral condition. The scheme of setting native vagabonds to work as serfs was not, as is commonly supposed, a novelty in Fletcher; it was fully recognised by a long series of Scottish laws from 1579 to 1661, and partially enforced too. Fletcher, however, went beyond the highest flight of Scots law in this department, and argued in favour of compelling all Scottish landlords to take white slaves in proportion to the size of their holdings. Fletcher's scheme may well have suggested a similar one to Defoe for London vagrants, expounded in *Everybody's Business*. Carlyle's views on the beneficence of the whip as a stimulus to honest industry at home and abroad have also points of affinity.

Fletcher's *Political Works* appeared, 'with a character of the author,' in 1732, and was reprinted in 1737, 1747, and later. There is a short and rather meagre Life by G. Omond (1897), which passes too lightly over many of Fletcher's most pregnant ideas and interesting characteristics. On Serfdom in Scotland, see the *Edinburgh Review* for January 1899.

William Cleland (1661?–89) showed less to advantage as a poet than as the heroic defender of Dunkeld in 1689, when the Cameronian regiment under his command stemmed and turned backward the rush of four thousand Highlanders flushed with the victory of Killiecrankie. The son of the Marquis of Douglas's gamekeeper, Cleland studied at St Andrews, became a zealous Covenantanter, fought at Drumclog and Bothwell Brig (where he was a captain), and as a refugee in Holland studied law at Utrecht, and helped to negotiate the Prince of Orange's expedition. He was the first lieutenant-colonel of the regiment raised after the Revolution from amongst the westland Cameronians (afterwards the 26th), and he fell, still under thirty years of age, in