## CHAPTER I.

Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who,

for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there

he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed

one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect, by

contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any

unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs changed naturally

into pity and contempt as he turned over the almost endless creations

of the last century; and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he

could read his own history with an interest which never failed. This

was the page at which the favourite volume always opened:

“ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH HALL.

“Walter Elliot, born March 1, 1760, married, July 15, 1784, Elizabeth,

daughter of James Stevenson, Esq. of South Park, in the county of

Gloucester, by which lady (who died 1800) he has issue Elizabeth, born

June 1, 1785; Anne, born August 9, 1787; a still-born son, November 5,

1789; Mary, born November 20, 1791.”

Precisely such had the paragraph originally stood from the printer’s

hands; but Sir Walter had improved it by adding, for the information of

himself and his family, these words, after the date of Mary’s

birth—“Married, December 16, 1810, Charles, son and heir of Charles

Musgrove, Esq. of Uppercross, in the county of Somerset,” and by

inserting most accurately the day of the month on which he had lost his

wife.

Then followed the history and rise of the ancient and respectable

family, in the usual terms; how it had been first settled in Cheshire;

how mentioned in Dugdale, serving the office of high sheriff,

representing a borough in three successive parliaments, exertions of

loyalty, and dignity of baronet, in the first year of Charles II, with

all the Marys and Elizabeths they had married; forming altogether two

handsome duodecimo pages, and concluding with the arms and

motto:—“Principal seat, Kellynch Hall, in the county of Somerset,” and

Sir Walter’s handwriting again in this finale:—

“Heir presumptive, William Walter Elliot, Esq., great grandson of the

second Sir Walter.”

Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot’s character;

vanity of person and of situation. He had been remarkably handsome in

his youth; and, at fifty-four, was still a very fine man. Few women

could think more of their personal appearance than he did, nor could

the valet of any new made lord be more delighted with the place he held

in society. He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to

the blessing of a baronetcy; and the Sir Walter Elliot, who united

these gifts, was the constant object of his warmest respect and

devotion.

His good looks and his rank had one fair claim on his attachment; since

to them he must have owed a wife of very superior character to any

thing deserved by his own. Lady Elliot had been an excellent woman,

sensible and amiable; whose judgement and conduct, if they might be

pardoned the youthful infatuation which made her Lady Elliot, had never

required indulgence afterwards. She had humoured, or softened, or

concealed his failings, and promoted his real respectability for

seventeen years; and though not the very happiest being in the world

herself, had found enough in her duties, her friends, and her children,

to attach her to life, and make it no matter of indifference to her

when she was called on to quit them. Three girls, the two eldest

sixteen and fourteen, was an awful legacy for a mother to bequeath, an

awful charge rather, to confide to the authority and guidance of a

conceited, silly father. She had, however, one very intimate friend, a

sensible, deserving woman, who had been brought, by strong attachment

to herself, to settle close by her, in the village of Kellynch; and on

her kindness and advice, Lady Elliot mainly relied for the best help

and maintenance of the good principles and instruction which she had

been anxiously giving her daughters.

This friend, and Sir Walter, did not marry, whatever might have been

anticipated on that head by their acquaintance. Thirteen years had

passed away since Lady Elliot’s death, and they were still near

neighbours and intimate friends, and one remained a widower, the other

a widow.

That Lady Russell, of steady age and character, and extremely well

provided for, should have no thought of a second marriage, needs no

apology to the public, which is rather apt to be unreasonably

discontented when a woman *does* marry again, than when she does *not*;

but Sir Walter’s continuing in singleness requires explanation. Be it

known then, that Sir Walter, like a good father, (having met with one

or two private disappointments in very unreasonable applications),

prided himself on remaining single for his dear daughters’ sake. For

one daughter, his eldest, he would really have given up any thing,

which he had not been very much tempted to do. Elizabeth had succeeded,

at sixteen, to all that was possible, of her mother’s rights and

consequence; and being very handsome, and very like himself, her

influence had always been great, and they had gone on together most

happily. His two other children were of very inferior value. Mary had

acquired a little artificial importance, by becoming Mrs Charles

Musgrove; but Anne, with an elegance of mind and sweetness of

character, which must have placed her high with any people of real

understanding, was nobody with either father or sister; her word had no

weight, her convenience was always to give way—she was only Anne.

To Lady Russell, indeed, she was a most dear and highly valued

god-daughter, favourite, and friend. Lady Russell loved them all; but

it was only in Anne that she could fancy the mother to revive again.