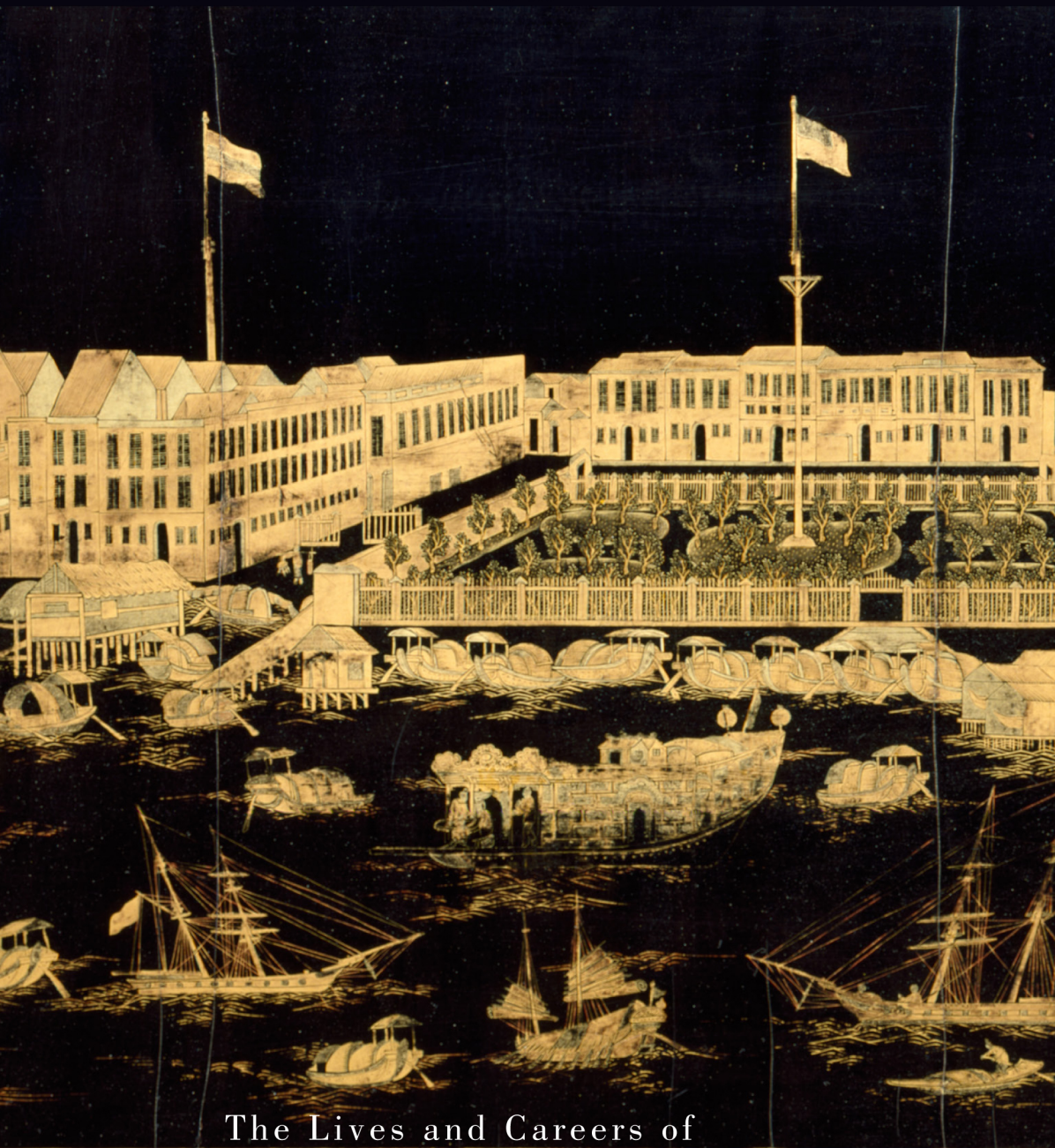


OPIUM *and* EMPIRE



The Lives and Careers of
William Jardine and James Matheson

RICHARD J. GRACE

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For Sadie and Bud – my mother who taught me to love history and my father who taught me how to tell a story well.

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FOREWORD

My aim is to tell the story of two lives that were interwoven by their partnership in commerce and by their influence on British government in the early Victorian period. Along the way, I intend to demonstrate that these two men, William Jardine and James Matheson, serve as test cases corroborating the Cain-Hopkins thesis of “gentlemanly capitalism” in the growth of the Victorian empire.

Others have told the story of the expansion of the empire in South Asia and East Asia more deliberately than I intend to do in this book, which is more concerned with the two lives in the foreground than with the fullness of the imperial narrative that surrounds them. To give the reader some depth of context for their lives and activities, it has been necessary to provide detailed information about the settings and circumstances in which they operated (such as British trade with India and East Asia, the Canton System, the origins of the first Opium War, and the conditions of life in the Hebrides). All that is essential background for a reader new to this arena of history, but it is not my central purpose. Nor have I been principally concerned with retelling the history of Jardine, Matheson and Company, whose lifespan extends to this day and goes far beyond the temporal boundaries of the combined biographies. The history of that firm has been done ably by other writers in several instances.

What I propose to offer the reader is a microcosm of the imperial experience, the account of a collaboration of two entrepreneurs in British trade in East Asia in the 1820s and 1830s, and their lives preceding and following the commercial and political drama at Canton in which they played such prominent roles. It is a study of empire writ small – informal empire, in which these agents of history are not

Hegelian world-historical figures, though their impact on the events of their time was extraordinary. Rather, my book is history on a human scale which tells of the personalities, trials, challenges, mistakes, disappointments, and achievements of two Scots whose epic journey took them from post-Jacobite “North Britain” to the coast of China and eventually returned them to a much-changed Britain, decades after they had risked their futures on the tenuous commerce of the Celestial Empire.

Jardine and Matheson have often been recognized as giant figures on the scene at Macao and Canton and Hong Kong; but until this volume no one has offered a full-length biography of either man, let alone both of them. In numerous instances they have been caricatured by writers who mention them briefly, depicting them as one-dimensional villains whose opium commerce was “ruthless” and whose imperial drive was “war-mongering.” Such cardboard figures fail to represent with any adequacy the complex, multifaceted personal and business histories of Jardine and Matheson. This study attempts to explore the depth of each man, his complicated and sometimes inconsistent internal workings, and his successes and failures. It seeks to represent the two men as human beings, fallible like the rest of us, more influential than most of us, and, like all of us, ultimately accountable to our contemporaries, to history, and to God.

Since this study is essentially biography, rather than business history, the method of exposition employed here is primarily narrative. However, the narrative slows down in chapters seven and eight to allow the reader to examine at close range the partners’ business practices, their ideas of free trade, their political behaviour in relation to the Chinese and British governments, and their standards of business ethics.

The Scotland in which they were born was a land that was exporting many of its energetic young men because of its political subordination after the Union of 1707 and because of its enforced cultural change after the last Jacobite rising. Born in the late eighteenth century, they emerged from Scottish schools in the early nineteenth century determined to pursue careers in the East Indian trade. They returned home wealthy men, owing in large part to their involvement with the traffic in opium between sources in India and markets on the coast of China. The trade was illegal in China, but Jardine and Matheson were very talented at inventing ways to skirt the prohibition. During their commercial years, opium was not an internationally regulated substance, and it was

readily available legally from many sources in Britain. But opium hardly tells the full story of their lives.

I have endeavored diligently to present these men as three-dimensional figures whose private lives were to some degree buried with them in Scotland at Lochmaben and Lairg. Much of the challenge confronting me has been to exhume those private lives and to reveal more about them than would be possible in a strategically distanced thesis about the informal empire built upon trade in East Asia. Jardine and Matheson left us volumes of personal correspondence about their commerce, but they also left us a trail of clues as to their inner selves, their letters speaking to us indirectly but clearly. My research into their story has involved detective work that was often frustrating, as in the case of the estate records for Lewis, Matheson's island in the Hebrides, which were consumed by fire at the Stornoway town hall in 1918. Piecing together the threads of their private lives – from site visits, local histories, regional newspapers, genealogies, gravesites, and stray references in unlikely sources, with good luck and bad luck mixed in – has been the most daunting dimension of this project.

When the threads are woven together, they constitute a remarkably colourful story which challenges the reader to assess the impact of these two figures on their times, just as it has challenged me. Taken together, their two lives tell us a great deal about the type of tough-minded men who expanded the global markets of Victorian Britain and played major roles in changing the course of modern history in East Asia.

For the sake of consistency, I have generally retained the spellings that Jardine and Matheson's correspondence employed, rather than substituting more modern usage. Hence, for example, Canton does not become Guangzhou, nor is Peking replaced by Beijing.

The people who helped this book see the light of day are legion. The administration of Providence College, Rhode Island, granted me sabbatical leaves which enabled me to conduct the research and to do the writing of this book. I am deeply indebted to my colleagues at Providence, whose encouragement and criticism improved the manuscript immeasurably. In that regard I am especially grateful to Mario DiNunzio, Brian Barbour, Hugh Lena, and Peter Johnson. Tony Hopkins and Tom Devine offered me their sound critical advice on sections of the text and I am grateful for their kindness and encouragement. I am also indebted to Matheson and Company for granting me permission to examine the

Jardine Matheson Archive at Cambridge University Library, and to their honorary archivist, the late Alan Reid, who was very kind and helpful during the early stage of my research.

I thank the Syndics of Cambridge University Library for allowing me access to the resources of the Manuscript Room. I also received invaluable assistance from Godfrey Waller, the library's superintendent of manuscripts, and from Margaret Pamplin, whose extensive knowledge of the Jardine Matheson Archive provided me with important direction and well-rooted insights in the initial stage of this project. I must also thank the masters and fellows of St Edmund's College, Cambridge, for granting me a visiting fellowship on two occasions and for extending to me the hospitality and friendship of that community. Sir Richard Laws, Paul Luzio, Father Michael Robson, OFM Conv, and Bruce Elsmore were particularly kind and generous.

There are many people in Scotland – too numerous to mention by name – who welcomed me into their homes at Inverness, Lairg, Stornoway, and Lochmaben and offered valuable advice. I must also acknowledge all the kind librarians at Stornoway, Dumfries, Inverness, and Edinburgh for their knowledgeable assistance.

Kyla Madden, senior editor at McGill-Queen's University Press, has been the guardian angel of this project. I am so very grateful to her for her interest in the manuscript, for her encouragement through the various stages of revision, and for her regularly sound and patient counsel in bringing this project to fruition. I need also to acknowledge the painstaking assistance of Curtis Fahey as copy editor. His keen eye for clarifications of the text and improvements to elements of style and citation have made this a much better book.

Most of all, I am everlastingly grateful to my family for their love, support, and endurance during the long years of research and writing which produced this book. William Jardine and James Matheson became virtual lodgers at our home, and I have to confess that I dragged the family to remote locations in Scotland where the children must have wondered what on earth Dad was up to. Marianne crossed the Minch with me to serve as amanuensis on a research expedition to Lewis; Ben became sufficiently fond of his grandmother's homeland to return in later years to study at Glasgow; and Elizabeth as a wee child learned that historical research could mean feeding apples to a horse at Jardine's childhood home. My wife, Madeleine, has been a saint. She has

sustained me with good advice about the narrative, abundant patience when I was hanging out with Jardine and Matheson, and unwavering encouragement that the whole endeavour was worthwhile. Without them, dear reader, you would not be reading this book.

Richard J. Grace
July 2014

A NOTE FOR THE PAPERBACK EDITION

Thomas Weeding was an early business associate of William Jardine and later became the principal London banker handling Jardine's long-distance financial business from China. When *Opium and Empire* was first published, John Goold, a reader in Tasmania, Australia, contacted me regarding Weeding and the ship *Sarah*, which was jointly owned by Weeding, Jardine, and a Bombay merchant named Framjee Cowasjee. Goold, who is a relative of Weeding at a distance of many generations, has done extensive research into Weeding, his connections with Jardine, and their joint venture with the *Sarah*. On the strength of his recommendations I am offering the following corrections and clarifications for the paperback edition of this book.

Page 35: Thomas Weeding was never a member of the East India Company staff at Canton. His first acquaintance with Jardine may have occurred in 1802 while the vessels on which they served were being prepared to sail from England with an EIC fleet bound for India and China. It was customary for officers of a fleet's ships to meet before sailing and such gatherings probably extended to surgeons and mates.

Page 71: The *Bombay Calendar* lists William Jardine's arrival at Bombay on 13 April 1819, aboard the *Partridge* (rather than the *Bombay Merchant*, which arrived later in the year). The surety required by the EIC for Jardine's "free merchant's indentures," permitting Weeding to send Jardine to India as his agent (£2,000), was posted by Weeding and his father-in-law, James McCallum.

Pages 72, 79: There were actually three vessels named *Sarah* sailing to and from Bombay during the years Jardine first became engaged in the Eastern trade as a private merchant at Bombay. Information provided by Mr Goold establishes the fact that the *Sarah* owned by Weeding,

Jardine, and Cowasjee was not engaged in the country trade (private trade between India and China not conducted under EIC auspices) and that this vessel sailed between London and Bombay for its first seven voyages (1819–27). Accordingly, Jardine could not have been serving as supercargo aboard the ship between Bombay and Canton, nor was he travelling back and forth between London and Bombay.

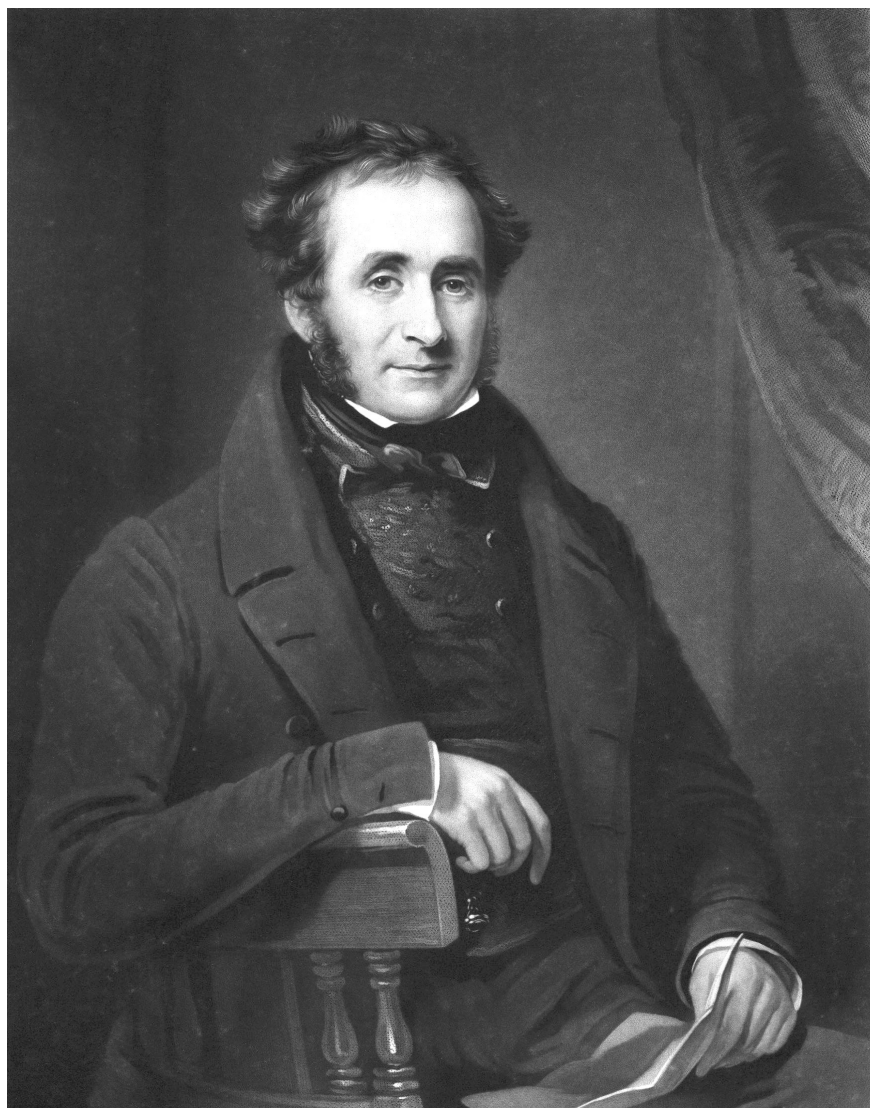
Page 370n75: When Jardine sold his share in the *Sarah* in 1827, Weeding became the majority shareholder and Cowasjee retained his one-third interest in the vessel, which continued sailing from London to Eastern ports until 1843.

RJG

October 2015



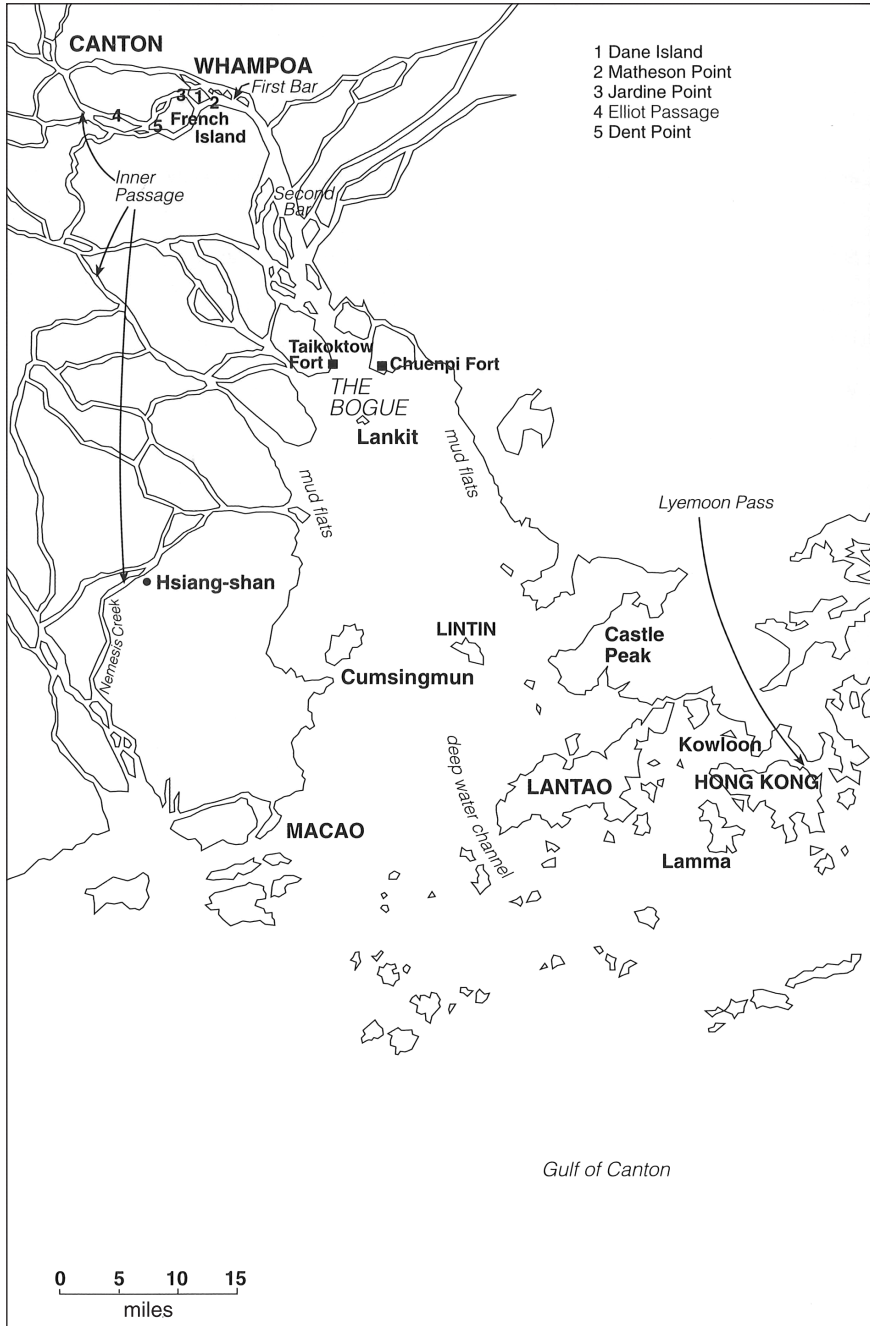
William Jardine, by George Chinnery. (© National Portrait Gallery, London.
Asset reference number: D36485)



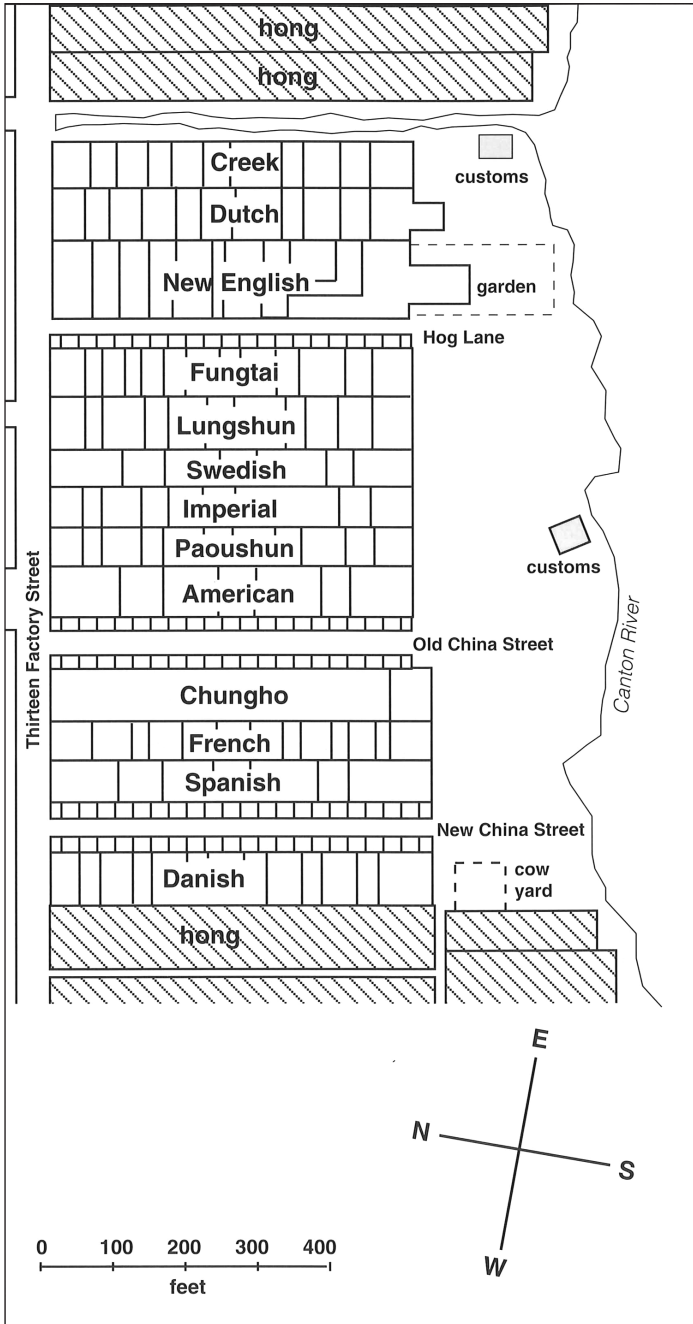
Sir Nicholas James Sutherland Matheson, by James Lonsdale. (© National Portrait Gallery, London. Asset reference number: D38310)



(Courtesy of d-maps and Michael Gallucci)



The Pearl River estuary (Courtesy of Mystic Seaport)



The Canton waterfront (Courtesy of Mystic Seaport)

OPIUM AND EMPIRE

PRELUDE

THE SCOTLAND OF THEIR BIRTH

The cannons were long silent when William Jardine and James Matheson were born in the final decades of the eighteenth century. Yet, for them as for many contemporary young Scots, events in a Highland field many years before their births influenced the direction of their lives and led them to seek their fortunes far away from the graves of the clansmen who died on that field.

It was on a sleet-swept wasteland known as Drumossie Moor, near Culloden House, that the Jacobite army of Prince Charles Edward Stuart confronted impending disaster at noon on 16 April 1746. The field, a short distance from Inverness, had been selected by the Jacobite quartermaster, an Irishman named John O'Sullivan, whose choice of this lumpy terrain for battle was hardly suitable for the Highlanders' most effective tactic – a direct charge at the enemy line. O'Sullivan, who was trying to make the best of a bad situation, actually favoured retreat, for he thought that the Jacobite army's one chance of victory had disappeared with their exhausting march on the previous night.¹

A few hundred yards to the northeast, the English and Lowland troops commanded by William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland and son of King George II, enjoyed great superiority of numbers in foot soldiers, cavalry, and artillery. The handful of Jacobite cannons began firing at about one o'clock, and within an hour the battle was decided. What John Prebble has called "the long brawl of Scottish history," which had been going on for centuries, reached its bitter climax in the dismemberment of the Jacobite army.²

Encouraged by manifold Scottish resentments against the 1707 union with England, the Jacobite rebellion sought the restoration of Stuart

rule in Great Britain. Proclaimed in July 1745 in the name of the Old Pretender, James (III) Stuart, the military campaign had enjoyed a meteoric success in its early months, when England's military commanders were primarily concerned with the war against France. The rebels reached Derby, just one hundred and thirty miles from London, by early December; but the stark prospect of trying to hold the British capital with a force of only five thousand compelled Prince Charles to turn his army back toward Scotland in a prolonged retreat. They enjoyed some notable military success in January, but by 16 April the Jacobite forces were exhausted, desperately underfed, and without funds. The prince, in a foul mood that day, insisted that the battle be fought there and then; he took command of the troops and appointed O'Sullivan deputy commander.³

When the centre and right sectors of the Jacobite line charged across the moor, their courage was doomed by murderous fire from the English artillery. The Highlanders' usual tactic was to fire their muskets once, then toss them aside and dash straight at the enemy with swords drawn, hoping to catch the enemy reloading their muskets. Fifteen hundred men from eight clan regiments hurled themselves forward "in a wave of unleashed kilted fury."⁴ In response, Cumberland's artillerymen changed from round-shot to grapeshot (lead balls and canisters of nails), to shower the advancing Jacobites with the small bits of metal while the government infantry maintained a steady fire. Although some of the clansmen did break through the left side of Cumberland's line, the Jacobite ranks fell into disorder on the boggy terrain that was obscured with smoke.⁵ Charles was driven from the field by fire aimed close to him, and by that time the rout was irreversible. Remnants of his army reassembled at Ruthven in Badenoch, but Charles sent them a message to disperse for the sake of their own safety.⁶

What ensued was such savagery by the government forces that Cumberland came to be permanently known in the Highlands as "The Butcher." The Hanoverian cavalry pursued the retreating left side of the rebels' line along the road to Inverness, shooting the Jacobites as they rounded them up, and making an inferno of a barn in which about thirty had taken refuge. On the battle moor, blood-drenched tartans filled the field, as wounded Jacobites were bayoneted or shot by the victorious army and left unattended for two days. Even before Culloden, the standards for treatment of war prisoners were collapsing

in Scotland. One recent assessment of the battle's aftermath asserts that the government forces may well have been moved by anger as they went about killing the defeated rebels, "but the men who killed at Culloden did so deliberately, and not in a blind rage."⁷ Men, women, and children who had no direct role in the battle were taken captive and killed or sent off to jails and prison hulks. Knowing that a substantial number of enemy troops had regrouped at Ruthven, Cumberland determined to destroy the fighting spirit of the Jacobites once and for all. His initial impulse was to have all the clansmen transported to the colonies, but he ultimately resorted to a scorched-earth strategy of terrorizing the Highlands.⁸

The Jacobite army suffered 1,500 deaths, as compared to 50 dead and 259 wounded among the government troops. Although Prince Charles evaded capture and eventually escaped to France five months after the battle, three Scottish peers were beheaded, 120 common men were hanged, perhaps close to 700 persons died in prison, and nearly a thousand were transported in bondage to the American colonies.

The battle was fought not very distant from the town where James Matheson would be born (about forty-five miles), and reports of it reverberated through Clan Sutherland in the surrounding countryside. The news took a bit longer to reach the town where William Jardine would be raised, about a hundred and seventy miles to the south. The victory was completed by Parliamentary legislation aimed at destroying the Highland culture which had nurtured the rebellion. In the aftermath of an earlier Jacobite rising, in 1715, Parliament had passed a Disarming Act, intended to strip the clans of their capacity for independent military action. Fines were established for those convicted of possessing arms. But clansmen evaded the law by handing in old weapons and hiding their best arms. Now, in 1747, the Disarming Act was renewed and extended.

Parliament's design was to accomplish by legislation what Cumberland's brutality could not: the destruction of the ancient Gaelic culture of the Scottish Highlands. The wearing of kilts, tartans, and plaids was forbidden, as was the playing of the great Highland pipes and the speaking of Gaelic. Conviction for a second offence was punishable by transportation to any of the colonies for seven years. The mountain clans had only their tartans and their kilts, and they had no funds for purchase of replacement wardrobes. Therefore, in their desperation they

resorted to vats in which they dyed their tartans black and brown, before sewing the kilt fabric up the middle, the result being ridiculous-looking breeches.⁹

The clan chieftains were stripped of their traditional authority, and the whole structure of barons' courts and clan councils that had long constituted the foundation of Scottish law was dismantled. The lands of rebel chieftains were forfeited, whereas the unattainted chiefs began to treat the clan's land as their own. Parental concern for members of the clan waned as crofters were cleared from their farms in order to facilitate leasing the glens and braes for raising sheep. Where clansmen had kept their crofts, the new people were often sheep farmers from the Lowlands or England.¹⁰

Scotland came to be routinely designated as "North Britain" as the eighteenth century wore on, and the formerly independent kingdom took on many appearances of being a compliant province of England's empire. With more sons surviving into adulthood by the late eighteenth century, the Scottish landed classes needed to find socially acceptable employment for their non-inheriting young men. London became the destination of some career-seeking Scots, but English suspicions of crypto-Jacobitism lingered for years after the 1745 rebellion was put down.¹¹ At Westminster, meanwhile, Scottish peers and MPs did not generally focus their primary attention on concerns of their Scottish constituents. Nonetheless, by the early 1760s, when Lord Bute had become the first Scottish-born prime minister since the Union of 1707, signs of Scotophobia were evident in London, where the press ran cartoon caricatures of Scots that depicted them as greedy opportunists, enriching themselves on English resources.¹²

Among the ideas put forward for the suppression of the Highland clans and their culture was a proposal to raise regiments of government troops among the clansmen. This was initially rejected as risky. However, with the onset of the Seven Years' War in 1756, both the Duke of Cumberland and William Pitt recommended the scheme of raising Highland regiments. Implicit in the proposal was the possibility that potential Jacobites might be killed in combat with the French.¹³ The project bore abundant military rewards: over the next half-century, twenty-seven line regiments and nineteen battalions of fencibles. One remnant of the old clan structure served the Crown handsomely: the levies by which chiefs and their "tacksmen" – principal tenants – persuaded or

forced young crofters to agree to service in the king's forces. The expenditure of these Scottish troops in wars against the rebellious American colonies or against France has prompted John Prebble to write with undisguised bitterness that "the last tragedy of the clans may not be the slaughter of Culloden, but the purchase and wasteful expenditure of their courage by the southern peoples who had at last conquered them."¹⁴ While Scots constituted 15 per cent of the British population at the end of the century, the number of Scots who had volunteered for military service represented 36 per cent of the volunteer soldiery in 1797.¹⁵

By 1782, the Disarming Act was a dusty relic of "the '45" and the prohibition of wearing the kilt was removed. But few Highlanders resumed the old clan dress, apart from those serving in the government regiments. The clans were dying, and the role of the kilt became in many instances an affectation for some of the clan chiefs – now turned city gentlemen. In 1784 the lands that had been forfeited because of Jacobite associations were restored to their former owners upon payment of moderate sums of money. In the changing rural economy of the Highlands, the chiefs now came to act as landlords demanding rent of their tacksmen. In turn, the tacksmen, whose prior obligation had been the military organization of the clan, either emigrated or began to exact rent from their subtenants.

William Jardine and James Matheson were born in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, when the passions of the Jacobite rebellion were being relocated from the battlefield to the poetry of Robert Burns and the nostalgic remembrances of those who still drank to "the king across the water." By that time, a general European romanticization of the Highland Scots had emerged, as sympathy for their endangered culture was combined with a characteristically Romantic vision of the Highlanders as being in some ways akin to the "noble savages" whom the Romantics admired.¹⁶ It was a transitional Scotland, not securely rooted in its prior traditions and somewhat ambivalent about its future. For Matheson's region in the north, changes in the life of the agricultural population were more dramatic than was the case with Jardine's neighbourhood of farms near the English border.

For several generations, extending from the last Jacobite rebellion into the second half of the nineteenth century, the Highlands experienced an agricultural revolution which coupled the destruction of the old clan

culture with the displacement of its people. Known as the “Highland Clearances,” the population changes often meant forced eviction of clan families and the introduction of sheep farming in place of subsistence agriculture.¹⁷

The earliest substantial clearances occurred in the 1770s and 1780s. Some peasants left of their own accord, recognizing the gulf between their welfare and the economic interests of the landlords; others were forcibly evicted. Some people left the Highlands to work in the newly emerging industrial areas of Lowland Scotland; many emigrated to America; some stayed in northern Scotland and moved to the coast to gather kelp. By the turn of the century, Highland society was composed of landowners, sheep farmers, and small tenant farmers trying to survive.¹⁸

Paralleling the uncomfortable transformation of the Highlands, the expansion of the Lowland industrial and agricultural economy in the late eighteenth century was a story of great promise realized with the help of English money. Glasgow was at the heart of the thriving textile trade, with banking and shipping resources to support the new industrial vitality, while Edinburgh was reshaping itself into a beautiful modern city, based on James Craig’s 1767 plan for the New Town, a grid design of streets, with squares and crescents and gardens, constructed to the north of the old medieval town dominated by the castle.

In this new Edinburgh, the Scottish Enlightenment would establish its main camp. Voltaire regarded the city as an intellectual centre that was the equal of Paris, London, and Vienna, and Thomas Jefferson declared that in the realm of science “no place in the world can pretend to competition with Edinburgh.”¹⁹ A special coherence marked the intellectual society of the Scottish Enlightenment, which enjoyed a climate that did not generate expectations that intellectuals stand apart from the church (David Hume excepted) or quarrel with the government. Nor was there any need to posit hostility between revealed religion and natural science or natural philosophy. While there was much vitality in Scottish literature, painting, and architecture, the driving forces of the Scottish Enlightenment were to be found in the fields of science and philosophy, and those fields had special influence on the professions of medicine and law.²⁰

In both Glasgow and Edinburgh, medical faculties had a long history, with qualification being normally established by years of apprenticeship to a practitioner coupled with some measure of academic instruction.

However, contemporary with the scientific elements of the Scottish Enlightenment, the medical faculty and facilities at Edinburgh, with encouragement by the town council, developed formal university instruction more quickly than the school at Glasgow. In the second half of the eighteenth century, medical studies at Edinburgh attracted large numbers of students.²¹

In many respects, Edinburgh was a magnet for young men from the distinctly changing regions of Scotland. From the Lowland area east of Dumfries, where new concepts of agriculture were taking hold, William Jardine was drawn to the medical school at Edinburgh, and from the unsettled agricultural region of the northern Highlands James Matheson was attracted to Edinburgh for university studies and thence to London for the beginnings of his career in commerce.

There were firm limits to social mobility in Scotland, in spite of the transitional character of the national experience in the late eighteenth century. The most influential and financially rewarding professions, such as the law, were in effect reserved for aspirants from socially established families. Moreover, boys whose education began in village schools, as did that of William Jardine, usually arrived at the universities too late to break into the mainstream of intellectual life as professors or scientists.²² Thus, it happened that, in the latter part of the century, many young men took their education in Scottish academies and universities but set their ambitions on careers outside Scotland. Among the opportunities away from home, the India trade was a major lure for venturesome young men from all over Scotland, including Jardine and Matheson.

The man who exercised the most influence in Scottish politics in the 1770s and 1780s was a lawyer named Henry Dundas, sometimes called "Henry the ninth" because of the powerful political lineage from which he came. A close associate of William Pitt the Younger, Dundas held a seat in Parliament for a quarter of a century and, over the last three decades of the eighteenth century, gained the positions of lord advocate for Scotland, privy councillor, treasurer of the navy, keeper of the signet of Scotland, home secretary, and secretary of state for war in the cabinet of William Pitt. His place on the Board of Control, which oversaw the policies of the East India Company (EIC), provided the opportunity for him to tie together his patronage in Scottish affairs and his interests in the various channels of the Eastern trade.

In the aftermath of the loss of much of Britain's North American empire, some of Parliament's attention was focused on the development of

its Eastern empire. Eighteenth-century India had been the venue of wild profiteering by officials of the EIC, some of whom were Scots who returned to Britain as wealthy “nabobs.” The Board of Control had been created by the India Act of 1784 to superintend the government and revenues of British territories in the East Indies. In 1793 the salaried office of president of the Board of Control was created for Henry Dundas, who gave much encouragement to the export of Scotsmen to India. A few years after the Dundas era, Sir Walter Scott would refer to the Board of Control as “the corn chest for Scotland.”²³

During the early stages of war against revolutionary France, while president of the Board of Control and simultaneously secretary of state for war, Dundas was able to convince the directors of the EIC to convert ten of their great ocean-going ships to service in the Royal Navy as sixty-four-gun warships, and to raise three hundred men to serve on each of those vessels. In due course, the Company was reimbursed quite substantially for its wartime services.²⁴ By the 1790s, Dundas was the most powerful Scottish politician at the national level since the Act of Union 1707, and he was able to provide Scots with an impressive measure of official patronage within Britain and in the empire. Although Dundas lost his cabinet position when Pitt’s government fell from office in 1801, he was raised to the peerage in 1802, as Viscount Melville.

In that same year, William Jardine entered the service of the Company as a ship’s surgeon’s mate. If Dundas was not directly involved in preparing the way for Jardine’s appointment, the umbrella of patronage influence that he had been exercising with the EIC surely would have worked to Jardine’s advantage. In fact, Scottish influence within the EIC had been growing over the course of the eighteenth century, and that expansion of Scottish influence at East India House, the Company’s headquarters on Leadenhall Street in London, meant that younger relatives and sons of Scottish families with connections were regularly being brought into the Company’s service.²⁵ Even among the Scottish gentry and some peers’ families, the traditional prejudice against mercantile careers was set aside. T.M. Devine’s study of the Scottish diaspora reveals that, as the empire became more British and less English in the eighteenth century, the transformation was dramatically manifested in the bureaucracies of the Company, where the number of Scots seeking career opportunities had the effect of sparking some of the Scotophobia of the years after mid-century.²⁶ In the period from 1777 to 1813, Scots accounted for 28 per cent of the men who were first appointed to

command of East India ships, and this development was made possible in part by former commanders who, upon becoming shipowners, gave preference to Scots when ships' officers were appointed.²⁷

For those who did not secure appointments to the Honourable Company, there were possibilities of obtaining permission from the EIC to engage in the "country trade" – that is, private trade among the Company's settlements along the coast of Southeast Asia and eastward to Canton. At the time, Dundas was being pressed by various parties to establish reliable access to the Indian products which were necessary to the conduct of trade with China. In response, as part of his economic strategy, he promoted the country trade, which enabled persons in the Company's service to invest their private resources as "free merchants" in enterprises outside the Company's monopoly.²⁸ With the British appetite for Chinese tea being encouraged by the younger Pitt's policy of reducing the import duty on that product, and with Company officials prohibited from engaging in private trade, the free merchants established – under licence from the Company – "houses of agency" in the various EIC settlements and handled diverse business ventures involving the capital of investors at some remote distance.²⁹

Within this network of free merchants stretching from Bombay and Calcutta to Bencoolen and Canton, the proportion of Scots was fairly high, owing in part to the links of kinship among the Scots in the Company and among the free merchants in the country trade. To a considerable degree, the Scottish agency houses in India and elsewhere were family concerns, bearing the names of Mackintosh, Fairlie, Fergusson, Reid, Mackillop, and such.³⁰

Hence the Eastern trade opened up one major road of opportunity for young Scots in a century which had seen the destruction of the ancient Scottish kingdom and the death of the Stuart claims to lead that kingdom. A half-century after the debacle at Culloden, and less than a generation after the loss of the Thirteen Colonies in North America, the Highland clearances were in progress. For many young Scots, emigration to Canada or other colonies was a route of escape; for others there was suffering on the old clan lands and little expectation of a better life. Some young men gambled on survival in the ranks of the Highland regiments, while others sought their opportunities in the shires of southern Scotland in modernized agriculture, or linen, or iron, or shipbuilding. For the adventurous and ambitious, the EIC and the private trade of the free merchants held the allure of sirens of

fortune. Of those who did go out to the East, many never returned to Scotland, some returned with a few shillings, and a few came home, after many years in the East, with spectacular wealth and with family business empires to be perpetuated.

William Jardine and James Matheson left their homeland as soon as they could, neither being attracted by a life of farming in the Lowlands or the Highlands. To these young men on the make, the transitional Scotland of their youth offered less promise than the possibilities of careers connected in one way or another with the Eastern trade. They did not aspire to the status of landed gentry in Scotland; nor did they set themselves career goals in the manufacturing sector of Scotland's economy. As ambitious young participants in the British diaspora, they were destined to become "gentlemanly capitalists," a term that P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins use to describe the individuals who supplied the dynamic force in the expansion of the Victorian empire.³¹ Yet neither of these young Scots could foresee that career track as they took their separate ways eastward early in the nineteenth century.

ORIGINS

Eight years after the 1776 publication of Adam Smith's formidable theory of self-interest and natural economic liberty, William Jardine was born near Dumfries, fifty miles south of Glasgow where for a time Smith had held the position of professor of moral philosophy. While Smith may have had in mind a different model of self-interest from that which took shape in the career of William Jardine, his ideas of economic liberty, free from mercantilist advantages and chartered monopolies, came to be a kind of economic gospel to Jardine and his partner, James Matheson. Those economic beliefs would take Jardine halfway around the world from his origins in the southwest region of Scotland.

In the years of William's youth, that region was experiencing a phenomenon called the "Lowland Clearances," a term invented by historians to describe the consolidation of farms in southern Scotland. Parallel with the evictions of crofters in the Highlands, a transformation of tenant farming was occurring in the Lowlands, but the conditions of the change varied from region to region and estate to estate. The changes involved conversion to large pastoral farming and a consolidation of agrarian capitalism. Apparently, the Jardine family's farm survived the transition intact, at a time when the "Lowland Clearances" were threatening the livelihood of many small farmers and destroying that of many subtenant farmers. In general, the phenomenon produced few of the classic symptoms of peasant alienation. In contrast to the severe psychological dislocations associated with episodes of collective resistance to the Highland Clearances, the reactions of southern rural Scots tended to be less violent and more nostalgic, in keeping with the regard for old traditions of simple peasant life which was embodied in the verses of Robert Burns, himself a farm boy from nearby southwest Scotland.¹

The Jardine family maintained a small farm called Broadholm, at Applegarth, a hamlet on the outskirts of Lochmaben, in Dumfriesshire. Situated on the flat plain adjoining a branch of the River Annan, the land today appears as a desirable piece of farm property. William Jardine was born at Broadholm on 24 February 1784 to Elizabeth (Johnstone) and Andrew Jardine. He was the sixth of seven children born of their marriage. Their wedding, which had taken place on 23 August 1772, was recorded as “irregular,” for which they were officially rebuked by Kirk authorities. Precisely what the irregularity was remains unknown, but both Andrew and Elizabeth were older than the usual age of marriage at that time.² They were both then around thirty years old, and Elizabeth (who was to outlive her husband by thirty-two years) was forty-three when she gave her own name to the last of her children, in 1786. William’s eldest sibling, Robert, was born at the Castlemains in 1773; all of the remaining children, four girls and two boys, were born at Broadholm.

Lochmaben is one of the three towns that claim to be the birthplace of Robert the Bruce in the thirteenth century. The ruins of Bruce’s castle constituted the most dramatic part of the local landscape during William Jardine’s youth. Since local farmers used the castle ruin as a quarry for stone for their farmhouses, it is quite possible that the Jardine farmhouse shared that pillage with its neighbours.

Along the banks of the River Annan the fertile farmland was held by tenant farmers according to a peculiar form of land tenure known as the “udal,” by which the right to occupy the land was granted without written documents. The lord of the barony of Lochmaben was the Viscount of Stormont, to whom Jardine’s father and his neighbours paid a modest annual rent. Substantial quantities of flax were grown along the river, since the land was so suitable for it; and many of the farm women, likely including William’s mother and sisters, produced their own linen and took in foreign flax for spinning. The town produced about sixty thousand yards of flax annually, most of which was sold in England.

Young William would have fished for salmon in the river, and would have helped the family raise its swine. The border with England was a relatively short distance from the Jardine home, and the Jardines, like everyone else in town, would have bought swine that were born in England, bred them on their farms, and sold them back to the English market. It was a ready money commodity, bringing a significant amount

of cash into the towns of southern Scotland.³ He would also have cut peat for his family's fuel, but, as the mosses wore out at the end of the eighteenth century, it became necessary to import coal about thirty miles, from England, at considerable expense.

The population of Lochmaben numbered 1,395 at mid-century; of those, about thirty persons lived on the charity provided by the parish, but that was a pittance drawn solely from the church collection. The parish minister, the Reverend Andrew Jaffrey, reported that there was some competition among the locally resident poor and the itinerant poor for the available charity: "Those that are able are allowed to beg from door to door; and many strollers and idle vagrants are suffered to travel in the country, with which it is greatly oppressed, and by this means the poor of the parish are robbed of that charity which properly belongs to them."⁴ These factors of town life no doubt helped to shape the disposition of William Jardine toward considerations of personal economics. His own hard work on the farm, plus the images of itinerant beggars, have to be factored into his later articulations of contempt for idlers.

He was fortunate to live in a town with a legally established grammar school, which had been endowed in 1726 with a bequest of £200 from James Richardson of Reading, England. The interest from that sum was to pay the salary of a schoolmaster who would teach English, Latin, writing, and arithmetic, without fee, to ten poor students. Additional bequests by the same donor provided for a library, a house for the schoolmaster, and an additional school at Hightae, for the benefit of all the children in the "Four Towns" of Lochmaben.⁵ This, then, was the source of William Jardine's early education, a model of charity from a benefactor whom he would never know, and perhaps an example for his own philanthropy in China.

Among his siblings, his closest and longest attachments were to his sister Jean, ten years older than William, and his brother David, eight years his elder. When their father died in May 1793, at Broadholm, William was but nine years old; and compounding his grief over the loss of his father were the new burdens he had to shoulder on the farm, which would compete against any ambitions he might have for extending his education. When Andrew Jardine died, his widow, Elizabeth, was fifty years old and had three children yet shy of their teenage years. The oldest children, Robert and Jean, were twenty and nineteen, of marriageable age, and not certain to be around the farm for a predictably

long time. Those considerations meant that, when William had finished his basic course of Latin and English and writing and arithmetic with the Lochmaben schoolmaster, the family faced a crucial decision regarding his future. How was the son of a poor farmer's widow to pay the cost of his tuition at the next stage of his schooling? Apparently, he remained at home at Broadholm until he was sixteen, at which point he enrolled in studies at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. His brother David provided the monetary assistance necessary for his studies at Edinburgh, as William revealed much later in life: "The small sum due me from my mother's property I have always considered as belonging to my brother – he having supplied me with money when I had little or none of my own."⁶

Boys who attended the more advanced burgh schools could move on to university by their early teens. For the upper-class students, a solid early start could lead to a career in the legal professions, or to the type of scholarly development suitable for university teaching. However, the bright lad from a village school might obtain a scholarship to university in his later teens and proceed to ordination or prepare to be a schoolmaster. The other major option in Scotland was medicine, for Scotland was highly regarded for the level of instruction in medical science at its universities and colleges.

Edinburgh enjoyed a reputation as the centre of medical study in the English-speaking world, with its College of Physicians and its College of Surgeons, both antedating the establishment of the medical school at the University of Edinburgh. Moreover, the teaching hospital was the Royal Infirmary, held up as a model of clinical instruction. In a 1792 guide for prospective students, one professor asserted: "The Infirmary of Edinburgh is much superior to any similar institution in Britain for the purpose of medical education. The cases of patients are all regularly registered, and an account of their situations is given daily by the attending physicians."⁷ Competition for the Royal College had developed at the end of the century when an Extra-Mural School of medical studies, offering rival independent teaching facilities, emerged in a cluster of buildings around the College of Surgeons building.⁸

The number of students pursuing medicine in "Auld Reekie," as the Old Town of Edinburgh was called, had grown steadily through the course of the eighteenth century, and in the time of Jardine's attendance, during the years of warfare against revolutionary and Napoleonic France, the student population of Edinburgh had nearly doubled, to

a total of 420 registered students as of 1800.⁹ Career opportunities formed the basis for the popularity of medical study in Scotland, for there were few other professions offering such demand for their services. No doubt this type of opportunity helped draw the bright lad from Applegarth to Edinburgh.

Medical qualification was usually achieved by serving a number of years of apprenticeship to a practitioner; in addition, the corporations of physicians and surgeons offered instruction in anatomy, medical practice, obstetrics, and related areas. The professors who lectured in medical theory and practice at the university also treated patients at the teaching ward of the infirmary and delivered lectures on clinical procedures. Students had access to the teaching ward by virtue of a ticket of admission (tuition payment) allowing them to attend clinical lectures and to observe physicians and student surgical assistants (known as “dressers”) who had responsibilities for examining and dressing wounds and sores.

Surgeon’s apprentices like young William normally lived with their masters but had an ill-defined status in the household, somewhere between family member and servant. Typically, apprentices would receive their room and board, but no clothing, in the terms of indenture. Practising surgeons took on apprentices because they were a form of cheap labour and because of the fees paid by the apprentice for the indenture. Much of the drudgery in the surgeon’s practice could be assigned to the apprentice (sweeping out the shop, preparing medicines, cleaning bandages, preparing bills, and running errands). As competence was gained, the apprentice would assist his master in tending to patients, because many operations required two men to perform them. In return for this work, the surgeon was expected to teach the apprentice the skill of surgery.¹⁰ The name of the surgeon with whom Jardine apprenticed is not recorded.¹¹

Class fees were generally modest. As late as the second quarter of the nineteenth century, classes at the university level in Scotland generally did not cost more than three or four guineas. Admission tickets for the teaching ward cost medical students ten guineas per year in the late eighteenth century, but surgical apprentices paid a lesser fee than medical students. The range of expenses for a six-month academic season at Edinburgh in the early nineteenth century has been estimated at fourteen to twenty pounds for the students on a tight budget.¹² Ten pounds was about the least a student could skimp along on for the winter

session. William Jardine was much closer to that end of the scale than to the wealthy students who could afford a lively social life.

Different levels of apprenticeship involved indentures for five years, for those preparing to enter the guild of surgeons, or three years, for those simply seeking surgical training. From 1778 on, the Royal College issued two types of diplomas for students who had not served a regular apprenticeship for three years. One declared the candidate "sufficiently qualified to practice the arts of surgery and pharmacy." The other acknowledged that the student was "sufficiently qualified to act as a surgeon's mate in His Majesty's Service." The latter required class attendance for at least one year, and the former, known as a "full diploma," required two years of classes.¹³

Increasingly, toward the end of the eighteenth century, as liberal education became more important for surgeons, students spent the years between age fifteen and age eighteen learning mathematics, Latin, and natural philosophy (as well as medical subjects)¹⁴ rather than simply doing the work of indentured servants. Training simultaneously in medicine and surgery was pursued by a growing number of students by that time, and John Bell, who established his own school of medicine and surgery in 1790, maintained that every young man studying medicine or surgery should be acquainted with the usual types of traumatic problems, including wounds, fractures, and dislocations. Periodically, surgical and medical students would be notified of scheduled surgical procedures so that they might observe these operations in the teaching amphitheater at the Royal Infirmary.¹⁵

The daily bedside instruction in the teaching ward, when combined with the regularly scheduled lectures every two weeks, gave the students an overall experience combining practicum and medical theory. The fact that medical students and surgical apprentices studied side by side, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and even collegiality, meant that the ancient barriers separating them socially and professionally were beginning to break down.¹⁶ By the 1790s, surgical students were being educated in keeping with the model of a liberally educated gentleman, as was the case with medical students. Nevertheless, at the end of the eighteenth century, surgeons continued to be assigned a rank lower than physicians; theirs were the untidy, manual jobs among the healing professionals.¹⁷

The clinical lectures were organized primarily for the benefit of the medical students, and the patients admitted to the teaching ward were

there as medical cases. Nevertheless, William Jardine would have had ample opportunity to observe the full range of ailments treated in Edinburgh, thereby acquiring knowledge that would be very useful to him in his years of service on board East India Company vessels. Although the Royal Navy contracted for the treatment of sailors at the Royal Infirmary, there was no sailors' ward, since there would not have been a large naval squadron at Edinburgh. However, a soldiers' ward had existed since the time of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, because there was a sizeable military garrison at Edinburgh Castle. The regimental surgeon at the Castle supervised the treatment of the soldiers at the infirmary, but the physicians for the soldiers' ward consulted with the military surgeons when the nature of some soldiers' complaints required surgical attention. In these circumstances, Jardine would have observed the types of complaints common to military personnel. Those most common illnesses among men admitted to the ward were respiratory ailments and venereal diseases.

The spectrum of illnesses observed by students at the infirmary would also have included "fever," a catchall term for a broad variety of infectious diseases, "pectoral complaints" (often meaning respiratory infections), rheumatism, stomach complaints, diseases of the skin such as scurvy, and various forms of surgical infections. The two groups most susceptible to infectious diseases were female servants and seamen. While the skin lesions signalling scurvy were common among poor people admitted to the infirmary, owing to poor dietary habits, Jardine probably saw few cases of the disease among the seamen patients because the North Sea Squadron took only brief voyages and because of the regimen of citrus juice introduced by the Admiralty in 1795.¹⁸

After diagnosis, the forms of treatment offered at the infirmary ranged from simply defending people against the cold, to baths, dietetics, and various types of surgical intervention, such as bloodletting, leeching, blistering, electrical stimulation, and paracentesis (removal of fluid accumulations from the abdomen). But the most frequent articles of therapeutic treatment at the infirmary would have been drugs (both herbal and chemical). The categories of drugs administered included cathartics, emetics, diuretics, antacids, tonics, expectorants, and anodynes.

Of the anodynes (described then as "medicines which ease pain and produce sleep"), the most important was opium, generally administered by drafts of liquid laudanum or paregoric elixir. Almost certainly it was during his two years at Edinburgh that William Jardine acquired his first

detailed knowledge of opium. The drug was employed for sedation and as an analgesic; it was used for arthritis relief, for controlling convulsions, to relax the bile duct when stones were detected, and for gout, hemorrhoids, diarrhea, fevers, and severe coughing. It was also administered topically, to decrease sensitivity to pain (such as toothache or chest pain), and it was available in the form of pills as an alternative to laudanum for internal administration. When taken internally, the effect of opium was to induce serenity and drowsiness; it would dilate blood vessels, retard the pulse, and reduce bowel activity. Opium was generally regarded as the ideal painkiller during the time of Jardine's surgical training, and hospital practitioners prescribed it with great frequency, since there was yet no clear understanding of its addictive qualities.¹⁹ The commerce by which dried exudate from the seed pods of the opium poppy (*papaver somniferum*) was obtained for medical use at Edinburgh could hardly have been a major point of interest or concern for William Jardine, at age sixteen, as he set about learning the skills of a surgeon.

With few resources of his own, but some important monetary assistance from his brother David, and with his maintenance as an apprentice to a practising surgeon, the young Jardine managed to obtain two years of surgical training in Scotland before setting his designs on a wider world. Like 20 per cent of the surgical students at Edinburgh, William spent two years in apprenticeship. He entered upon his studies in 1800 and obtained a "full diploma" from the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh on 2 March 1802. His diploma was more akin to a modern university degree than a traditional guild licence.²⁰

Usually, after their apprenticeships the surgical students did extensive travelling in England and perhaps abroad, to gain acquaintance with different surgical techniques and ideas, before returning to Edinburgh to take three qualifying examinations for admission to the Royal College of Surgeons. Jardine lacked the financial resources for such foreign study. Doubtless, the need to scrape by on a thin purse added forcefully to the conviction that he held throughout his life that thrift and industry were essential virtues. It was also the likely cause for his relatively short apprenticeship.

Although numerous young men of Jardine's generation left Edinburgh without a degree, quite a few returned after the end of the French wars to pursue additional qualifications.²¹ This was an option that would have been open to William Jardine, who by 1815 had sufficient resources to return to the university, had he been so inclined. But the

intervening years had changed the course of his ambitions so decisively that resumption of medical schooling was not on the chart for the next stage of his life.

Far to the north of Dumfries and Edinburgh, indeed close to the top of Scotland, Jardine's future partner was born in somewhat more privileged circumstances. The Mathesons had served the Hanoverian kings since the Jacobite rising of 1715, when John Matheson was chief of the Lairg Mathesons. Their property, West Shinness Lodge, lay on the northeast shore of Loch Shin seven miles outside the town of Lairg, Sutherlandshire. It was there, at Shinness, that James Matheson was born on 17 November 1796; so he was a dozen years younger than William Jardine.

His father, Donald Matheson (1744–1810), who was fifty years old when James was born, had served in the regiments which the Hanoverian governments had organized to take advantage of the military resources of the post-Jacobite Highlands. During the Seven Years' War (1756–63), Donald Matheson was appointed ensign of a fencible regiment raised by the Earl of Sutherland, and he served in that unit from 1759, when he was fifteen, until 1763. His military career resumed at the time of the American Revolution, when the earl raised another fencible regiment; he served as captain-lieutenant in that unit until the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

Donald Matheson had been just a little boy when his own father died. Eventually he inherited the property of his grandfather (in 1775), and that land, likely rented from the Earl of Sutherland, gave him the economic footing to marry and begin raising a family in 1783. Subsequently he acquired the role of tacksman for the earl; in that capacity he paid an annual sum to the lord and retained the rents which he collected from the earl's tenants, whose livelihood was from cattle. In the end-of-the-century parish account he is said to be one of the four proprietors of surrounding lands and is referred to as "Captain Mathison, wadsetter of Shinness."²² As a wadsetter, he held mortgages usually of lesser landholders within the parish. The farm at Shinness was wadsetted to Captain Matheson in 1779 by the Sutherland family, for a loan of £15,733 (Scots), which meant that he did have substantial resources. It took thirty years for the estate's proprietors to redeem the wadset, but the money was not paid until after his death, at which time it was received by his son Duncan. His annual rental of the farm cost £400

(Scots), but it would have risen substantially had he accepted the Sutherlands' proposal that the farm be augmented with neighbouring property to establish a large sheep farm. In 1808 he was sufficiently attracted to the idea that he gave notices to his own tenants that they would have to leave the property, and each family was paid £2 in "removals money," but the clearances did not take place at that time since the project was beyond his resources. The captain was still operating the Shinness farm when he died, in 1810, at age sixty-three.²³

Although one might assume that James Matheson began life with certain economic advantages, it is reported that his father was not adept at managing money and that he had significant debts. The other important thing to note here is that the Mathesons did not take part in the harsh clearances of the crofters from the lands around Lairg in the next decade, when the Duchess of Sutherland oversaw the removal of much of the farming population, who were replaced by sheep. The clearance of the Shinness tenants did not occur until 1819, by which time the farm had passed from Matheson hands.

The parish of Lairg was not a region of rich farmland. Apparently the land was unsuitable to raising crops, on account of the stretches of heath and the coarse grass that grew there. Consequently, the rents of the district were small. Nor was the climate more generous than the land, being customarily rainy and damp. The anonymous writer of the *Statistical Account of Lairg* for 1791 remarked impishly that "the inhabitants, having great abundance of peats, take care to keep a good fire without, and as often as they can get at spiritous liquors, they will kindle a fire within, nor do they apprehend more danger to their conditions for the one than from the other."²⁴

The young woman Donald married was Catherine MacKay, daughter of the minister of the parish of Lairg, the Reverend Thomas MacKay, a poor but saintly man. The MacKays were the dominant clan in the district. Captain Matheson and his bride made their residence in a substantial lodge at Shinness, near the loch, and in the course of their marriage Catherine bore eight children – three sons and five daughters – of whom James was the second son.²⁵ His roots were, therefore, in touch with both the Kirk and the clan system in the north, and while the clan system had been weakened, the Kirk had not. The religious dimension of his early life, in the Church of Scotland, was established both within the family and by his schooling at the academy in Inverness.

There was a schoolhouse at Shinness, but it is unlikely that James's education began there. He enjoyed a better opportunity for elementary education than William Jardine had known. The Inverness Royal Academy, established four years before his birth, offered five years of instruction for a fee schedule ranging from six shillings per term in the first year to eleven shillings and six pence in the fifth year. Young James was a student at the academy probably from July 1805 until June 1808, with the years divided into two terms. During the months of longer daylight (from early spring through mid autumn), the rigorous class schedule required the students to be in class from seven in the morning until six in the evening, with two breaks along the way. The daily sessions in the winter months were mercifully shorter, stretching from nine until four, with a two-hour break starting at noon. The subjects taught at the academy included English grammar, Gaelic, Latin, Greek, French, writing, arithmetic, bookkeeping, mathematics, geography, fortification, history (natural and civil), natural philosophy, chemistry, and astronomy. Music and dancing were taught at a separate school building under the same patronage.

At the academy, James's school day began and ended with prayers led by the rector, who also led the masters and scholars to church on Sunday morning and met with them again from five to six on Sunday for instruction in the principles of religion and morality. As one of the younger students, James was allowed playtime on Saturday afternoon, and in succeeding years he and the other older students could have playtime for all of Saturday. He and his schoolmates were expected to assist the school janitor, and they had to pay for the coal to heat their classrooms. Reports of the students' progress were made by the master to the academy's directors.²⁶ Presumably James received good reports, given his subsequent advancement to the Royal High School and thence to university. The transition from Inverness to Edinburgh came for James with the academic season of 1808–09, when he was enrolled in the fourth year class at the Royal High School, with George Irvine as his master.

Captain Donald Matheson died in 1810. Whether James returned from Edinburgh to attend his father's funeral is unrecorded. If he had, he would have witnessed, and perhaps taken part in, the farewell toast that was drunk to his father by the assembled Mathesons and MacKays and friends on 1 February 1810. The ledger for Shinness Lodge reveals that the captain's whisky smuggler, William MacDonald, supplied the

mourners with the funeral whisky (eleven pints) free of charge. At more than a-hundred-proof strong, the illegal whisky likely was a powerful solace to some of the mourners.²⁷

Family genealogy records indicate that Donald's wife, Catherine, died at a young age, but the actual date of her death seems to be undocumented. Therefore, it seems possible that, by the time of James's third year at the Royal High School, he was an orphan, albeit a well-educated one. James's brother Duncan inherited the Shinness farm after their father's death, but he had little interest in farming and instead attained the position of sheriff depute in Edinburgh. For that reason the farm passed into the care of Catherine's brother John MacKay, who had little success with it. Three years later the family sold the property.²⁸ Thus, by 1818, the ancestral home in which James had spent his childhood belonged to others, but by then he was not looking back toward Loch Shinness.

The Edinburgh where this young lad was to reside for about five years was a city of many faces. It had to be exciting for a boy of twelve to have a certain measure of freedom in the old, medieval buildings and alleys and streets of the "Athens of the North." The principal road in the Old Town was the thoroughfare known as Canongate at its eastern end and then High Street, running uphill to Edinburgh Castle. Off High Street ran the wynds and closes that connected the streets and courts of the Old Town. In their excursions around the Old Town, Matheson and his schoolmates, scurrying through tunnelled entrances to the closes and thence on to the next wynd, would encounter water carriers, coal sellers, rummaging pigs, piemen with bells, barbers in transit, ragamuffin "caddies" (public messengers), and advocates in gowns. Under the dominating presence of the Castle atop the great mound, they would pass famous churches, the old Parliament House, the Royal Exchange, open-air markets selling fish and meat and all manner of things, the shops of watchmakers and jewellers, the booths of hosiers and hatters and drapers and glovers, and houses hallowed in the city's history.²⁹

Yet the picturesque town was also dirty and crowded, ridden with soot and peopled by numerous hard-drinking men and women. Moreover, it was, with all its sunless, narrow lanes and wynds, its open sewers, and its refuse-strewn courts, decidedly unhealthy. The quaint designation "Auld Reekie" was bestowed on the Old Town by the housewives of Fife, across the Firth of Forth, who could tell when it was dinnertime

in Edinburgh by the layer of smoke which sat upon the city from the forest of chimneys.³⁰

A world apart from Auld Reekie was the thriving New Town, on the northern side of North Loch (now Princes Street Gardens). The elegant regularity of the streets and squares of the New Town, offering comfortable residences to the upper classes of Edinburgh, had taken shape starting in 1767 according to a town plan prepared by the young architect James Craig. But the students of the high school and the university found their home amidst the convoluted twists and turns of the Old Town.

The Royal High School was located in a simple, barnlike building just below the eastern end of Cowgate which had been built in 1777.³¹ Class size was quite large (eighty or more), which forced the masters into pedagogical compromises. Nevertheless, the level of education at Edinburgh was regarded throughout Britain as being the best in the kingdom. The curriculum was heavily concentrated on mastery of Latin, with up to six hours a day being devoted to that subject, the lessons emphasizing grammar, translation, and prose. Mathematics and Greek were also in the program of studies. In addition, families generally supplemented the basic curriculum by engaging private tutors, who could be hired by the hour for instruction in French, German, geography, drawing, music, and engineering.³²

The boys were seated in class according to their level of attainment, with the “dunce” at the far end of the back bench in a place reserved for the dullard, and the ranks proceeding up to that of “dux,” the leading member of the class. By family report, young James was among a group of boys who competed for the position of head of the class.³³ Henry Cockburn, who entered the high school twenty years before James Matheson, remembered it as being notorious for the severity of its teachers and the riotousness of the students. In his unflattering recollection, the tone of the school was “vulgar and harsh,” and he claimed that in a later period some of the masters could have been sentenced to transportation as violent criminals for the extent to which they whipped their students.³⁴

Young Matheson would have dressed like all the other boys at the high school. The typical attire included a round black hat, a shirt fastened at the neck with a black ribbon, a double-breasted waistcoat and a single-breasted coat with tail, corduroy breeches tied at the knees by a

knot of brown cotton tape, worsted stockings (in winter), and clumsy shoes intended to be worn on either foot (necessitating that they be worn on alternate feet from day to day). The coat and waistcoat were always made of fabrics in glaring colours such as bright blue or grass green or scarlet.³⁵

Hence the boys of the high school were easily recognizable in the streets, and this may have helped to generate the “bickers” or street fights which pitted them against boys of the lower classes. The students seemed to take readily to this “rough mode of play,” which was without malice, according to Matheson’s contemporary, J.G. Lockhart. When one side charged against the other, which sought to hold its ground, stones and sticks and fisticuffs were the means of combat.³⁶ Was Matheson scuffling in the streets like the others? We know that he was an adventurer, and so we cannot easily imagine him at age twelve or thirteen simply standing on the sidelines of a free-for-all between his schoolmates and some robust and tough young fellows from the Grassmarket or the wynds of the Old Town.

In the academic season 1809–10 James advanced into the fifth-year class at the high school conducted by the rector, James Pillans, who invented the blackboard for use in that building to instruct his geography class with coloured chalks. Caesar, Livy, Virgil, Sallust, Terence, and Horace were among the ancients encountered by students in their Latin lessons. At the same time, young Matheson’s mind and imagination were turning to more exotic interests, as his library record reveals. Among the books he borrowed in the winter of that year were both volumes of *Captain Cook’s Voyages*.³⁷ Eighteen hundred years separated Matheson and Virgil, whereas only thirty years separated Matheson’s reading from the actual voyages and tragic death of Cook on a beach in Hawaii. Understandably, the accounts of the Royal Navy’s most famous explorer would have appealed to the thirteen-year-old, and such interest anticipated his own extensive travels in the South Seas before a decade would pass.

To begin college, as most people still referred to the University of Edinburgh, his travels were minimal; in fact, he was able to remain in the same neighbourhood south of Cowgate when he enrolled. At the time of his matriculation in the fall of 1810, the college was in a state of transition from the “ancient shabby place of small courts and dingy classrooms”³⁸ to the splendid new classical building for which the

foundation stone had been laid in 1789. The inability of the city to finance the project by itself meant reliance on royal patronage, but the huge costs of twenty-three years of warfare against France precluded any such support for the university until the defeat of Bonaparte in 1815.³⁹ The design for the new university structure was the work of Robert Adam as modified into its final state by William Playfair. Their handsome conception took material form in instalments through the first decades of the nineteenth century, and many students like James Matheson saw parts of the plan realized. By the time the whole project was completed in 1833, Matheson was conducting business with his partner at Canton.

It was normal for students to begin university studies in their early teens, with fourteen being the usual starting age. Matheson was a month shy of his fourteenth birthday when he matriculated in the Faculty of Arts in the fall of 1810. By the following November, his academic direction had changed; he was then matriculating in the Faculty of Medicine. However, like so many young men who undertook university studies in that era, he did not complete the course of studies for a degree.⁴⁰

To gain a degree in the Faculty of Arts, attendance through four academic sessions was required, but there were no standard written examinations. The curriculum included Latin, Greek, rhetoric, belles-lettres, history, logic, metaphysics, moral philosophy, and natural philosophy; but mathematics was slighted.⁴¹ Most students were content to take those courses in which they had an interest rather than those from which they expected to benefit, for the model of liberal education was more prominent than the pursuit of a degree. The standard fee for matriculation in both the arts and medicine courses was three guineas per course. As graduation became less important as a feature of the course of studies in the Arts Faculty, students did not subscribe to a fixed sequence of courses, and many tended to avoid unpopular professors.⁴²

In contrast to their counterparts at Oxford and Cambridge, students at Edinburgh did not wear gowns, nor did they live within the walls of the college. They attended lectures once or twice a day, often in large classes (seventy or more), in an atmosphere of better discipline than that of the High School. Critics of the quality of education at Edinburgh in the early nineteenth century pointed to the disparity in the situation "where world famous professors lectured to lads of thirteen and fourteen."⁴³ The Reverend Michael Russel complained in 1813 that the

philosophical lectures at Edinburgh were fit only for grown-up gentlemen, because “a very extensive and brilliant display of knowledge, so far from being useful to lads who have still to learn the rudiments of mental science, only dazzles and bewilders them.”⁴⁴

Students attending the university for professional development had more compelling reasons to remain enrolled for a diploma or certificate or degree than did the students following a liberal course of studies. In fact, those students seeking professional qualification were more numerous than the young men following the liberal arts.⁴⁵ Although Matheson moved after his first year from the Arts Faculty to Medicine, that did not lead him to extend his stay at the university beyond two years.⁴⁶

In Matheson’s time, “professional development” did not include the field of commerce, which would in time become his career. Aristocratic landowners, lairds who congregated in Edinburgh, and members of the gentry with extensive estates dominated Edinburgh society in those years, and their disposition toward people in trade was condescending. Henry Cockburn reported, concerning Edinburgh, “There was no class of the community so little thought of at this time as the mercantile ... They had no direct political power, no votes; and were far too subservient to be feared.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, there were some younger sons of the landowning class who went into trade. The eminent philosopher David Hume serves as an example, having gone off to Bristol as a young man to work in the office of a sugar merchant.

We have no clear evidence about James Matheson’s decision to leave the university halfway through his seventeenth year, but he may have already had in mind a career in commerce, after turning away from the liberal arts and from medicine. If that were the case, another academic season or two would probably not have advanced his practical ambition much further. He was not about to become a minister or theologian; nor was he about to enter the law; nor did medicine or surgery command his sustained interest. Neither was he directing his learning toward a life of scholarship in the teaching ranks. Perhaps the death of his parents played some part in his decision not to continue his formal education.

Whatever the reason may have been for the suspension of his studies, he did leave Edinburgh with an interest in ideas that would persist through his commercial career, and with skills in argumentation.

Certainly, the debating societies at Edinburgh – the most famous being the Speculative and the Academical – encouraged young men to be “keen doubters” and to be effective speakers, as they learned to “talk the sun down.”⁴⁸ He may have learned social graces such as dancing, in order to be at home in polite society, since that was considered an essential polish for people who would be involved in public life at some professional level.⁴⁹

One other bit of knowledge that he likely took with him from Edinburgh was an appreciation of the effects of opium as a narcotic. During his year in the Faculty of Medicine he studied chemistry,⁵⁰ and he may also have studied *materia medica* (the study of substances used in remedies), which was one of the standard courses for medical students. Like any other medical student, he would have been aware of the properties of the opium drug and the extent of its use as prescribed by professors of medicine and other practitioners.

James remained in Scotland for another six months or so, and sometime after his seventeenth birthday, probably early in 1814, he headed to London to enter the employ of a mercantile house.⁵¹ Thus, his business career began in a more direct way than that of William Jardine, who was still serving as a ship’s surgeon for the East India Company at the time when James Matheson took his classical education and his medical training into the financial and commercial precincts of the City.