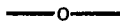


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THE CATNACH PRESS.



IN addition to the full title of our work—"The History of the Catnach Press"—the two Catnachs—John and James—father and son, we deem it necessary to incidentally introduce into our pages some notice of Alnwick, an ancient borough, market-town and parish of Northumberland, also a few passing remarks on the life and doings of Mr. William Davison, who, in conjunction with the elder Catnach as a business partner and subsequent successor, employed Thomas Bewick—an English artist, who imparted the first impulse to the art of wood-engraving—for many of their publications.

Of the early life of John Catnach, (*Kat-nak*), the father, we have little information. He was born in 1769, at Burntisland, a royal burgh and parish of Fifeshire, Scotland, where his father was possessed of some powder-mills. The family afterwards removed to Edinburgh, when their son John was bound apprentice to his uncle, Sandy Robinson, the printer. After having duly served out his indentures, he worked for some short time in Edinburgh, as a journeyman, then started in a small business of his own in Berwick-upon-Tweed, where he married

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Mary Hutchinson, who was a native of Dundee, a seaport-town in Scotland. While at Berwick a son and heir, John, was born. In 1790 they removed their business to Alnwick, and during their residence there seven children were born to them and from the Register of Baptisms in St. Michael's Church we glean that four of them were baptised at one time, viz., September 24, 1797, and there described as "of John Catnach, printer, and Mary his wife : Dissenter." [?] John Catnach had been brought up in the Roman Catholic faith, and his wife as a Presbyterian. The following is taken *verbatim* from the Parish Register :—

Sep^r. 24, 1797.

Margaret, Daug^r. of John Catnach, printer, and Mary his Wife. Born Dec^r. 26th, 1790. Dissenter.

James, son of John Catnach, printer, and Mary his Wife. Born August 18th, 1792. Dissenter.

Mary, Daug^r. of John Catnach, printer, and Mary his Wife. Born February 26th, 1794. Dissenter.

Nancy, Daug^r. of John Catnach, printer, and Mary his Wife. Born Sep^r. 2nd. 1795. Dissenter.

May 23, 1798.

Elizabeth Catnach. Born March 21, 1797, 4th Daughter of John Catnach, printer, native of Burnt Island, Shire of Fife, by his wife Mary Hutchinson, Native of Dundee, Angus Shire, Scotland.

Dec^r. 14, 1798.

Isabella Catnach. Born Nov^r 2, 1798. 5th Daughter of Jno. Catnach, Stationer, Nat. of Scotland, by his wife, Mary Hutchinson, Nat. of Dundee, Angus Shire, Scotland.

March 28, 1800.

Jane Catnach, 6th Daughter of John Catnach, printer, Native of Edinburgh (*sic*) by his wife Mary Hutchinson, Native of Dundee, Scotland.

To the above we have to add that there were two sons—John, born to John and Mary Catnach. John I. who was born at Berwick-upon-Tweed, died August 27, 1794, aged 5 years and 7 months, and we find him duly recorded in the Register of Deaths. John II., whose name appears at the end of the inscription on a tombstone in Alnwick churchyard, and of which further mention will be made in another portion of our work, died, presumably unbaptized, March 5, 1803, aged 4 months.

John Catnach was not long a resident in the borough of Alnwick before he became acquainted with many of the principal tradesmen in the place. Naturally he was of a free-and-easy disposition, and, like many of his kinsmen on the Borders, was particularly fond of the social glass. The latter practice he allowed to grow upon him in such a way that it ultimately interfered very much with his business prospects, and finally hastened his death.

The shop that he commenced business in, was situated in Narrowgate-street, and adjoining the old Half-Moon hostelry. In gaining access to the place one had to ascend a flight of steps. Whilst in this shop he secured a fair amount of patronage, and the specimens of printing that emanated from his press are of such a character as to testify to his qualifications and abilities in the trade which he adopted as his calling. He possessed a fond regard for the traditions and customs which for centuries had been so closely associated with the Border country.

When the printing press was first introduced into Alnwick is not exactly known ; but that it was considerably before the time of Catnach is certain. John Vint, the bookseller and author of the “Burradon Ghost,” for several years used a press for printing purposes in the town, and Thomas Lindsay carried on a similar business at a still earlier period.

John Catnach had a great relish for printing such works as would admit of expensive embellishments, which, at the time he commenced business, were exceedingly rare. The taste he displayed in the execution of his work will be best exemplified in examining some of the printed editions of the standard works which emanated from his press ; and in no instance is this more characteristically set forth than in those finely printed books which are so beautifully illustrated by the masterly hand of Thomas Bewick and his accomplished and talented pupil, Luke Clennell. Notably among which are :—

1.—“The Beauties of Natural History. Selected from Buffon’s History of Quadrupeds, &c. Alnwick : J. Catnach, [n. d.] *Circa* 1790, 12mo., pp. 92. With 67 cuts by Bewick.”—Another edition. Published and Sold by the Booksellers. By Wilson and Spence, York, and J. Catnach, printer, Alnwick. (Price 1s. 6d. sewed, or 2s. half-bound.) [n. d.] *Circa* 1795.

The embellishments of “The Beauties of Natural History” form an unique and valuable collection. They are very small and were done at an exceedingly low price, yet every bird and animal is exquisitely brought out in the minutest detail ; whilst many of the illustrations which served as “tail pieces” are gems of art.

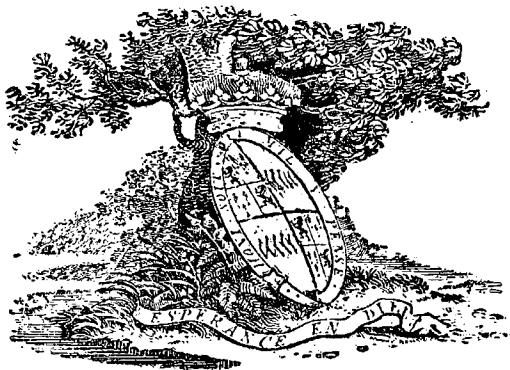
2.—“Poems by Percival Stockdale. With cuts by Thomas Bewick. Alnwick : printed by J. Catnach. 1800.”

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3.—“The Hermit of Warkworth. A Northumberland Ballad. In three Fits. By Dr. Thos. Percy, Bishop of Dromore. With Designs by Mr. Craig; and Engraved on Wood by Mr. Bewick. Alnwick: Printed and Sold by J. Catnach. Sold by Lackington, Allen, and Co., London; Constable and Co., Edinburgh; and Hodgson, Newcastle. 1806.” The Arms of the Duke of Northumberland precedes the Dedication, thus:—



TO HER GRACE
 FRANCES JULIA,
 DUCHESS OF NORTHUMBERLAND,
This Edition of
 THE HERMIT OF WARKWORTH,
 Is respectfully Inscribed
 By Her Grace's Obliged and Humble Servant,

J. CATNACH.

ALNWICK, *October*, 1805.

4.—“A Second Edition; of which a few copies were printed on extra thick paper, royal 8vo., to match with some of his other

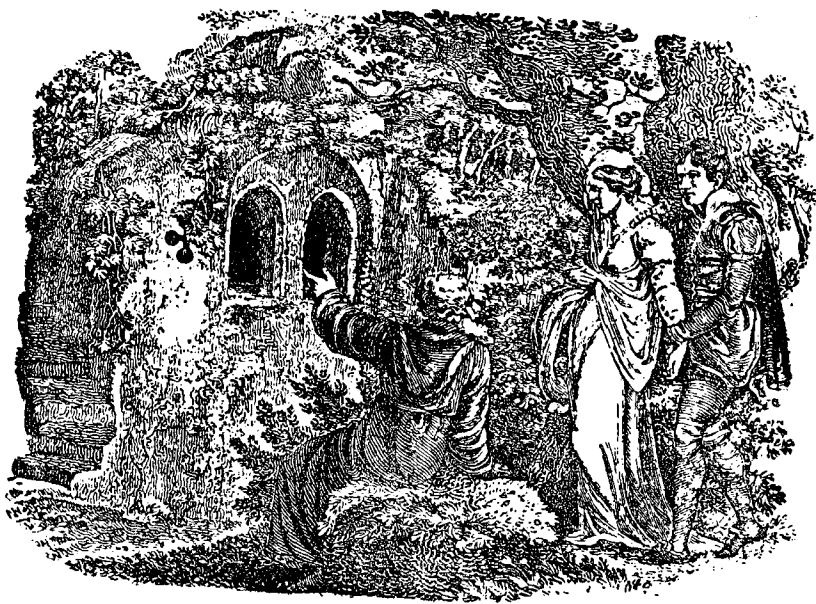
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THE HISTORY OF

works, illustrated by Bewick, pp. xiv., 182, with 13 cuts. At the end of the Poem are a Postscript, a Description of the Hermitage of Warkworth, Warkworth Castle, Alnwick Castle, Alnwick Abbey, and A Descriptive Ride in Hulne Park, Alnwick: Printed and Sold by J. Catnach. Sold by Wilson and Spence, York. 1807.

THE HERMIT OF WARKWORTH.



“And now, attended by their host,
The hermitage they view'd.”

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With hospitable haste he rose,
And wak'd his sleeping fire :
And snatching up a lighted brand,
Forth hied the reverend sire.

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THE HISTORY OF

He fought till more assistance came ;
The Scots were overthrown ;
Thus freed me, captive, from their bands,
To make me more his own.

The illustrations of “The Hermit of Warkworth” are, upon the whole, very creditable, and are well calculated to enhance the value of the book, but as works of art some few of them fall far short of many of Craig or Bewick’s other productions.

John Catnach also printed and published a series of Juvenile Works, as “The Royal Play Book : or, Children’s Friend. A Present for Little Masters and Misses.” “The Death and Burial of Cock Robin, &c. ADORNED with CUTS.—Which in many cases were the early productions of Thomas Bewick.—Alnwick : Sold Wholesale and Retail by J. Catnach, at his Toy-Book Manufactory.”



In the year 1807, John Catnach took an apprentice—a lad named Mark Smith, of whom more anon; a few months afterwards he entered into partnership with a Mr. William Davison, who was a native of Ponteland, in the county of Northumberland, but he duly served his apprenticeship as a chemist and druggist to Mr. Hind, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and for whom he ever cherished a fond regard. The union was not of long duration—certainly under two years—but it is very remarkable that two such men should have been brought together, for experience has shown that they were both morally and socially, the very opposite of each other.

During the partnership: Mr. Davison held his business of chemist, &c., in Bondgate-street; while the printing and publishing continued at Narrowgate-street, and among the works published by the firm of CATNACH and DAVISON we may record:—

“The Minstrel; or, The Progress of Genius. In Two Parts. With some other Poems. By James Beattie, LL.D. With sixteen Cuts from Designs by Mr. Thurston; and engraved on Wood by Mr. Clennel, Alnwick. Printed by Catnach and Davison. Sold by the Booksellers in England and Scotland. 1807. 12mo. and Royal 8vo., pp 142.”

“The Grave. A Poem. By Robert Blair. To which is added Gray’s Elegy. In a Country Church Yard. With Notes Moral and Explanatory. Alnwick: Printed by Catnach and Davison. Sold by the Booksellers in England, Scotland, and Ireland. 1808. 12mo., pp. xiv., 72. With a frontispiece and other cuts by Thomas Bewick.”

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THE HISTORY OF

*T. Bewick.*

THE GRAVE.

“Prone, on the lowly grave of the dear man
She drops; whilst busy meddling Memory,
In barbarous succession, musters up
The past endearments of their softer hours
Tenacious of its theme.”
