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AUTOBIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER I.

MY ANCESTRY.

OUR history begins long before we are born. We represent the hereditary influences of our race, and our ancestors virtually live in us. The sentiment of ancestry seems to be inherent in human nature, especially in the more civilised races. At all events, we cannot help having a due regard for our forefathers. Our curiosity is stimulated by their immediate or indirect influence upon ourselves. It may be a generous enthusiasm, or, as some might say, a harmless vanity, to take pride in the honour of their name. The gifts of nature, however, are more valuable than those of fortune; and no line of ancestry, however honourable, can absolve us from the duty of diligent application and perseverance, or from the practice of the virtues of self-control and self-help.

Sir Bernard Burke, in his *Peerage and Baronetage*, gives a faithful account of the ancestors from whom I am lineally descended.¹ “The family of Naesmyth,” he says, “is one of remote antiquity in Tweeddale, and has possessed lands there since the 13th century.” They fought in the wars of Bruce and Baliol, which ended in the independence of Scotland.

¹ Sir B. Burke's *Peerage and Baronetage*. Ed. 1879. Pp. 885-6.

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The following is the family legend of the origin of the name of Naesmyth :—

In the troublous times which prevailed in Scotland before the union of the Crowns, the feuds between the King and the Barons were almost constant. In the reign of James III. the House of Douglas was the most prominent and ambitious. The Earl not only resisted his liege lord, but entered into a combination with the King of England, from whom he received a pension. He was declared a rebel, and his estates were confiscated. He determined to resist the royal power, and crossed the Border with his followers. He was met by the Earl of Angus, the Maxwells, the Johnstons, and the Scotts. In one of the engagements which ensued the Douglasses appeared to have gained the day, when an ancestor of the Naesmyths, who fought under the royal standard, took refuge in the smithy of a neighbouring village. The smith offered him protection, disguised him as a hammerman, with a leather apron in front, and asked him to lend a hand at his work.

While thus engaged a party of the Douglas partisans entered the smithy. They looked with suspicion on the disguised hammerman, who, in his agitation, struck a false blow with the sledge hammer, which broke the shaft in two. Upon this, one of the pursuers rushed at him, calling out, "Ye're *nae smyth!*" The stalwart hammerman turned upon his assailant, and, wrenching a dagger from him, speedily overpowered him. The smith himself, armed with a big hammer, effectually aided in overpowering and driving out the Douglas men. A party of the royal forces made their appearance, when Naesmyth rallied them, led them against the rebels, and converted what had been a temporary defeat into a victory. A grant of lands was bestowed upon him for his service. His armorial bearings consisted of a hand dexter with a dagger, between two broken hammer-shafts, and there they remain to this day. The motto was, *Non arte sed marte*,

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“Not by art but by war.” In my time I have reversed the motto (*Non Marte sed arte*); and instead of the broken hammer-shafts, I have adopted, not as my “arms” but as a device, the most potent form of mechanical art—the Steam Hammer.

Sir Michael Naesmyth, Chamberlain of the Archbishop of St. Andrews, obtained the lands of Posso and Glenarth in



ORIGIN OF THE NAME. BY JAMES NASMYTH.

1544, by right of his wife, Elizabeth, daughter and heiress of John Baird of Posso. The Bairds have ever been a loyal and gallant family. Sir Gilbert, father of John Baird, fell at Flodden in 1513, in defence of his king. The royal eyrie of Posso Crag is on the family estate; and the Lure worn by Queen Mary, and presented by her son James VI. to James Naesmyth, the Royal Falconer, is still preserved as a family heirloom.

During the intestine troubles in Scotland, in the reign of Mary, Sir Michael Naesmyth espoused the cause of the unfortunate Queen. He fought under her banner at Langside in 1568. He was banished, and his estates were seized by the Regent Moray. But after the restoration of peace, the Naesmyths regained their property. Sir Michael died at an advanced age.

He had many sons. The eldest, James, married Joana, daughter of William Veitch or Le Veitch of Dawick. By this marriage the lands of Dawick came into the family. He predeceased his father, and was succeeded by his son James, the Royal Falconer above referred to. Sir Michael's second son, John, was chief chirurgeon to James VI. of Scotland, afterwards James I. of England, and to Henry, Prince of Wales. He died in London in 1613, and in his testament he leaves "his hert to his young master, the Prince's grace." Charles I., in his instructions to the President of the Court of Session, enjoins "that you take special notice of the children of John Naesmyth, so often recommended by our late dear father and us." Two of Sir Michael's other sons were killed at Edinburgh in 1588, in a deadly feud between the Scotts and the Naesmyths. In those days a sort of Corsican *vendetta* was carried on between families from one generation to another.

Sir Michael Naesmyth, son of the Royal Falconer, succeeded to the property. His eldest son James was appointed to serve in Claverhouse's troop of horse in 1684. Among the other notable members of the family was James Naesmyth, a very clever lawyer. He was supposed to be so deep that he was generally known as the "Deil o' Dawyk." His eldest son was long a member of Parliament for the county of Peebles; he was, besides, a famous botanist, having studied under Linnæus. Among the inter-marriages of the family were those with the Bruces of Lethen, the Stewarts of Traquhair, the Murrays of Stanhope, the Pringles of Clif-

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ton, the Murrays of Philiphaugh, the Keiths (of the Earl Marischal's family), the Andersons of St. Germain's, the Marjoribanks of Lees, and others.

In the fourteenth century a branch of the Naesmyths of Posso settled at Netherton, near Hamilton. They bought an estate and built a residence. The lands adjoined part of the Duke of Hamilton's estate, and the house was not far from the palace. There the Naesmyths remained until the reign of Charles II. The King, or his advisers, determined to introduce Episcopacy, or, as some thought, Roman Catholicism, into the country, and to enforce it at the point of the sword.

The Naesmyths had always been loyal until now. But to be cleft by sword and pricked by spear into a religion which they disbelieved, was utterly hateful to the Netherton Naesmyths. Being Presbyterians, they held to their own faith. They were prevented from using their churches, and they accordingly met on the moors, or in unfrequented places for worship.¹ The dissenting Presbyterians assumed the name of Covenanters. Hamilton was almost the centre of the movement. The Covenanters met, and the King's forces were ordered to disperse them. Hence the internecine war that followed. There were Naesmyths on both sides—Naesmyths for the King, and Naesmyths for the Covenant.

In an early engagement at Drumclog, the Covenanters were victorious. They beat back Claverhouse and his dragoons. A general rising took place in the West Country. About 6000 men assembled at Hamilton, mostly raw and undisciplined countrymen. The King's forces assembled to meet them,—10,000 well-disciplined

¹ In the reign of James II. of England and James VII. of Scotland a law was enacted, "that whoever should preach in a conventicle under a roof, or should attend, either as a preacher or as a hearer, a conventicle in the open air, *should be punished with death and confiscation of property.*"

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troops, with a complete train of field artillery. What chance had the Covenanters against such a force? Nevertheless, they met at Bothwell Bridge, a few miles west of Hamilton.

It is unnecessary to describe the action.¹ The Covenanters, notwithstanding their inferior force, resisted the cannonade and musketry of the enemy with great courage. They defended the bridge until their ammunition failed. When the English Guards and the artillery crossed the bridge, the battle was lost. The Covenanters gave way, and fled in all directions; Claverhouse, burning with revenge for his defeat at Drumclog, made a terrible slaughter of the unresisting fugitives. One of my ancestors brought from the battlefield the remnant of the standard; a formidable musquet—"Gun Bothwell" we afterwards called it; an Andrea Ferrara; and a powder-horn. I still preserve these remnants of the civil war.

My ancestor was condemned to death in his absence, and his property at Netherton was confiscated. What became of him during the remainder of Charles II.'s reign, and the reign of that still greater tormentor, James II., I do not know. He was probably, like many others, wandering about from place to place, hiding "in wildernesses or caves, destitute, afflicted, and tormented." The arrival of William III. restored religious liberty to the country, and Scotland was again left in comparative peace.

My ancestor took refuge in Edinburgh, but he never recovered his property at Netherton. The Duke of Hamilton, one of the trimmers of the time, had long coveted the possession of the lands, as Ahab had coveted Naboth's vineyard. He took advantage of the conscription of the men engaged in the Bothwell Brig conflict, and had the lands

¹ See the account of a Covenanting Officer in the Appendix to the *Scots Worthies*. See also Sir Walter Scott's *Old Mortality*, where the battle of Bothwell Brig is described.

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forfeited in his favour. I remember my father telling me that, on one occasion when he visited the Duke of Hamilton in reference to some improvement of the grounds adjoining the palace, he pointed out to the Duke the ruined remains of the old residence of the Naesmyths. As the first French Revolution was then in full progress, when ideas of society and property seemed to have lost their bearings, the Duke good-humouredly observed, "Well, well, Naesmyth, there's no saying but what, some of these days, your ancestors' lands may come into your possession again!"

Before I quit the persecutions of "the good old times," I must refer to the burning of witches. One of my ancient kinswomen, Elspeth Naesmyth, who lived at Hamilton, was denounced as a witch. The chief evidence brought against her was that she kept four black cats, and read her Bible with two pairs of spectacles! a practice which shows that she possessed the spirit of an experimental philosopher. In doing this she adopted a mode of supplementing the power of spectacles in restoring the receding power of the eyes. She was in all respects scientifically correct. She increased the magnifying power of the glasses; a practice which is preferable to single glasses of the same power, and which I myself often follow. Notwithstanding this improved method of reading her Bible, and her four black cats, she was condemned to be burnt alive! She was about the last victim in Scotland to the disgraceful superstition of witchcraft.

The Naesmyths of Netherton having lost their ancestral property, had to begin the world again. They had to begin at the beginning. But they had plenty of pluck and energy. I go back to my great-great-grandfather, Michael Naesmyth, who was born in 1652. He occupied a house in the Grassmarket, Edinburgh, which was afterwards rebuilt, in 1696. His business was that of a builder and architect. His chief employment was in designing and erecting new mansions, principally for the landed gentry

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and nobility. Their old castellated houses or towers were found too dark and dreary for modern uses. The draw-bridges were taken down, and the moats were filled up. Sometimes they built the new mansions as an addition to the old. But oftener they left the old castles to go to ruin ;



MICHAEL NAESMYTH'S HOUSE, GRASSMARKET.¹

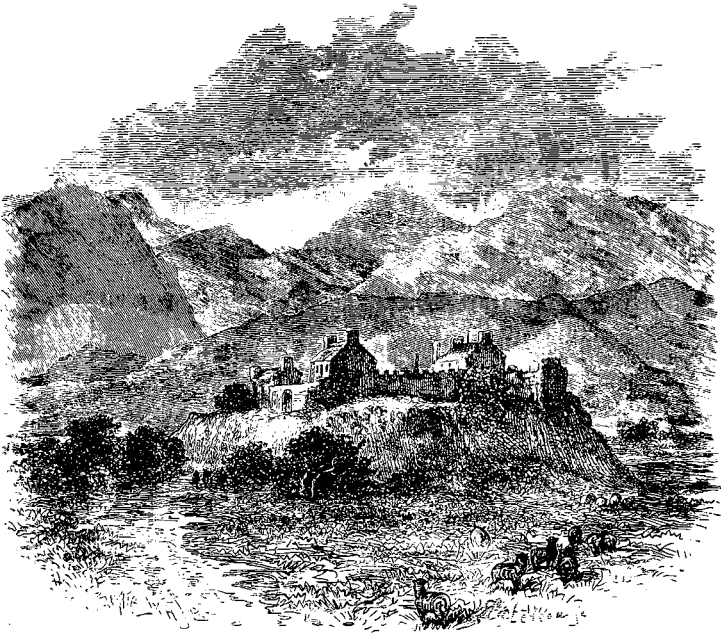
or, what was worse, they made use of the stone and other materials of the old romantic buildings for the construction of their new residences.

Michael Naesmyth acquired a high reputation for the substantiality of his work. His masonry was excellent, as well as his woodwork. The greater part of the latter was

¹ The lower house, at the right hand corner of the engraving, with the three projecting gable ends, is the house in question.

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executed in his own workshops at the back of his house in the Grassmarket. His large yard was situated between the back of the house and the high wall that bounded the Greyfriars Churchyard, to the east of the flight of steps which forms the main approach to George Heriot's Hospital.



INVERRNAID FORT. AFTER A DRAWING BY ALEXANDER NASMYTH.

The last work that Michael Naesmyth was engaged in cost him his life. He had contracted with the Government to build a fort at Inversnaid, at the northern end of Loch Lomond. It was intended to guard the Lowlands, and keep Rob Roy and his caterans within the Highland Border. A promise was given by the Government that during the progress of the work a suitable force of soldiers should be quartered close at hand to protect the builder and his workmen.

Notwithstanding many whispered warnings as to the danger of undertaking such a hazardous work, Michael Naesmyth and his men encamped upon the spot, though without the protection of the Government force. Having erected a temporary residence for their accommodation, he proceeded with the building of the fort. The work was well advanced by the end of 1703, although the Government had treated all Naesmyth's appeals for protection with evasion or contempt.

Winter set in with its usual force in those northern regions. One dark and snowy night, when Michael and his men had retired to rest, a loud knocking was heard at the door. "Who's there?" asked Michael. A man outside replied, "A benighted traveller overtaken by the storm." He proceeded to implore help, and begged for God's sake that he might have shelter for the night. Naesmyth, in the full belief that the traveller's tale was true, unbolted and unbarred the door, when in rushed Rob Roy and his desperate gang. The men, with the dirks of the Macgregors at their throats, begged hard for their lives. This was granted on condition that they should instantly depart, and take an oath that they should never venture within the Highland border again.

Michael Naesmyth and his men had no alternative but to submit, and they at once left the bothy with such scanty clothing as the Macgregors would permit them to carry away. They were marched under an armed escort through the snowstorm to the Highland border, and were there left with the murderous threat that, if they ever returned to the fort, certain death would meet them.¹

Poor Michael never recovered from the cold which he

¹ Another attempt was made to build the fort at Inversnaid. But Rob Roy again surprised the small party of soldiers who were in charge. They were disarmed and sent about their business. Finally, the fort was rebuilt, and placed under command of Captain (afterwards General) Wolfe. When peace fell upon the Highlands and Rob Roy's country became the scene of picnics, the fort was abandoned and allowed to go to ruin.