

# FEUDS OF THE SOMERVILLES.\*

A. D. 1593 AND 1596.

THE quarrels which existed between the families of persons of rank and their relatives in Scotland often exhibit a

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\* Memorie of the Somervilles; Pitcairn's Criminal Trials.

curious and lively picture of Scottish manners and of the state of society in former times. The law was completely disregarded; the parties whenever or wherever they met were certain to attack each other, and their encounters were often characterized by much bloodshed and loss of life. A bitterness of hatred, a desire of revenge, and a determination to retaliate real or imaginary grievances, were conspicuous in all those sanguinary quarrels, and these feelings were cherished by their dependants and retainers, who cherished all the resentments and animosities of their masters.

For some years previous to 1593 there was a deadly feud between the families of Cowthally and Cambusnethen, two branches of the noble family of Somerville. The Somervilles of Cambusnethen interested themselves in behalf of Gilbert, Master of Somerville, who was also connected with them by marriage, and according to the custom of the times engaged all their friends and allies to defend him in a dispute about certain landed property. Among the allies of the family of Cambusnethen was James Johnstone of Westerhall, whose mother had been a daughter of the former family, and who considered it his duty to support their pretensions and claims on all occasions. This gentleman was a thorough-bred Borderer, an excellent swordsman, and capable of contriving and executing the boldest enterprises. Among other exploits he had made himself conspicuous by killing in the park of Stirling, in 1584, Robert Hamilton of Inchmachan, a creature of James VI.'s unworthy favourite James Stewart, Earl of Arran, against whom he had sworn vengeance for causing Douglas of Mains to be executed upon his false accusation.

At a ford of the Clyde between Pittenain and Carstairs one of these feuds occurred. Johnstone of Westerhall had crossed the river at this ford attended by three domestics, and proceeded to a house in the vicinity where he intended to

remain until his business was settled. He had only been a few hours in the house when Hugh Somerville, second son of Lord Somerville, who had received intelligence of Johnstone's movements, repaired to the place with the intention of surprising him in the house, and revenging his family quarrel. Fortunately the approach of Somerville and his attendants was noticed by a servant girl, who exclaimed to Johnstone—"Those you are looking for are now coming." "How many are of them?" inquired the Laird of Westerhall. "Many," replied the girl, "but they ride so hard and close that I cannot count them." "To horse! to horse!" exclaimed Johnstone to his retainers; "this house can afford us no shelter, and we can make no defence here."

They instantly mounted their horses, and rode to the ford, which was within an arrow flight from the house, followed at full speed by Hugh Somerville and eight of his attendants, who attacked them near the ford. Johnstone, perceiving that all his intended assailants had not come up, ordered his three attendants to turn and face the enemy. He and his little party received their fire, which did them no injury, and they then discharged their own pistols. Their fire was so far effectual that the horse of Somerville of Blackpool was killed, the rider sorely bruised, and a retainer of Lord Somerville, a feuar in Carnwath, received a shot in his arm, which the unskillfulness of a surgeon caused to be amputated. After discharging their pistols both parties drew their swords, and inflicted several wounds on each other.

At length all Somerville's party came up, and Johnstone seeing the folly of contending with such numbers, ordered his retainers to cross the ford. He was followed by Hugh Somerville, and observing that gentleman to be nearest to him, he raised himself on his saddle, and exclaimed—"There are two brothers contending for a ship, but this

shall decide the controversy." Johnstone immediately discharged a reserved pistol, and Somerville made a narrow escape, as the ball grazed his breast, carrying off two buttons, and cutting the cloth. The Laird of Westerhall and his followers, severely wounded, succeeded in gaining the other side of the ford, but they would have been all taken and put to death by their pursuers if the villagers of Pettinain, attracted to the scene of strife by the firing of the pistols, had not interfered, by forcing the Somerville party back over the ford. Both parties stood for a short time looking at each other, separated by the Clyde, and after discharging a few pistol shots, which did no harm, they retired to their several homes. At this time the family of Westerhall possessed the estate of Pettinain in Lanarkshire, which had been bestowed on their ancestor in 1455, for his valour in the battle of Arkinholme.

Three years afterwards Johnstone of Westerhall had an encounter on the same quarrel in Edinburgh with Hugh Somerville of Writes, commonly called *Broad Hugh*, from his bulk. Those gentlemen had often fought before upon equal terms, but it must be admitted that on this occasion Westerhall took an unseemly advantage of his opponent. He was walking up the curious old street which has now almost disappeared called the West Bow, at the head of which Broad Hugh happened to be standing, when a person who knew their family quarrels exclaimed to Johnstone — "There is Broad Hugh Somerville of the Writes." Concluding that Somerville was waiting for him at the head of the West Bow, or that he was acting in contempt, Johnstone instantly drew his sword, and exclaiming, "Turn, villain!" he ran furiously towards his opponent, and inflicted a dangerous wound on Broad Hugh's head. That gentleman, finding himself unexpectedly struck and sorely wounded, drew his sword as soon as he recognised Westerhall, who had not attempted to repeat his stroke, and being

the taller man, and of great personal strength, he pressed his antagonist. Johnstone traversed the breadth of the street, but Somerville kept close to him, having the advantage of the hill, the Bow having been a steep ascent. The utmost consternation prevailed in the neighbourhood. The people ran into the shops, and no one attempted to separate them, for every stroke of their swords threatened instant death to the combatants and to any one who might come near them. Broad Hugh pressed his antagonist to the foot of the West Bow at the Grassmarket, and by this time Johnstone was almost overcome by fatigue. He stepped within the door of a shop, and stood upon the defensive, and here the last stroke of Broad Hugh almost broke his sword in pieces, having hit the lintel of the door, the mark of which long remained.

The city was now in an uproar, and the magistrates being informed that two gentlemen were engaged in a deadly encounter in the West Bow—an incident too common in that age—sent their halbert-men to seize them, and they were both secured, and conveyed to their own residences. The wound on Broad Hugh's head was likely to prove dangerous, but he was at length perfectly cured. After the death of Lord Somerville he and Westerhall were reconciled, and all their differences forgotten.

In those times it was also no uncommon thing for the contending parties to besiege other in their mansion-houses, arming all their retainers. Gilbert Lord Somerville, a few years after the above encounter between Westerhall and Broad Hugh, having quarrelled with his brother Somerville of Cowthally, resolved to expel him forcibly from his own residence. It was garrisoned by Hamilton of Raploch, a number of persons named Hamilton and some Somervilles. Lord Somerville, assisted by his father-in-law, Somerville of Cambusnethen, prepared ladders at Carnwath for scaling the walls, and ordered most of the horses in that barony

to be employed in conveying heather from the muirs, to be made up in bundles for filling up the double ditches at Cowthally. From the house of Cambusnethen were brought four *hagbuts of found*, probably a kind of small swivel cannons, and the siege of Cowthally was regularly commenced. The swivels, placed on a sandy hill near the house, were of little use, and the besiegers were constantly exposed to the fire of the occupants of the mansion. Some of Lord Somerville's followers were hurt, and a son of the Laird of Cambusnethen died of his wounds.

The lawless proceedings of both parties greatly irritated the Government. A lion herald was despatched from Edinburgh with the King's command to take possession of the house of Cowthally, and to disperse Lord Somerville and his followers. His Lordship, afraid of incurring the penalties of rebellion, saw it prudent to obey, and the house of Cowthally was surrendered to the lion herald, who placed it under the charge of Robert Somerville of Overcallo. "This gentleman," we are told, "was a great confident of the Lord Somerville, being his lady's uncle, a stout and resolute man, who both before this and afterwards committed many wild pranks." Lord Somerville, as may be anticipated, soon obtained possession of Cowthally, which he made his residence, and his brother occupied the mansion-house of Drum, living "in much jealousy of each other on account of their several pretensions."