
CHAPTER X

THE SCOTTISH COLONISER, LORD SELKIRK

THE name of Selkirk is that of a man who after a hundred years is coming to his own. A century has vindicated the name, character, motives, and influence of a great Scotsman—a nobleman, a coloniser, a patriot, and wise Empire-builder.

Thomas Douglas, fifth Earl of Selkirk, belonged to the noble family of Douglas, which appears in different branches and under different titles in Scottish history.

The fifth Earl of Selkirk belonged to St. Mary's Isle, at the mouth of the Dee, which enters Solway Firth at the old town of Kirkcudbright. He was the youngest of seven sons, and had as a lad no hope of ever becoming Earl of Selkirk; but his sickly brothers faded away so soon that at the age of twenty-eight he inherited the title. Thinking before this he should have to make his own way in the world, young Douglas went to the University of Edinburgh and gained the acquaintance of a large number of Scotland's leading young men. He was a cotemporary and intimate friend of Sir Walter Scott. His fame as a student in

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the class-room has not come down to us ; but his sympathy, independence of view, charitable disposition, restlessness of temperament, breadth of interest, and public spirit have caused him to be remembered. He became, along with others, interested in the condition of the poor in Edinburgh and he took a part in alleviating their sad condition. He was particularly fond of his own country-people. In the summer months he for several years visited the Highlands in his native Scotland for the purpose of learning the Gaelic language, and this that he might know better how to make himself useful as a benefactor to them. He wrote articles on the condition of the poor and on the subject of national defence ; while he published a plan for uniting the people in defence of their country against the French, who were then engaged in the terrible Napoleonic wars. Lord Selkirk was born in 1771, and was at the time of Napoleon's progress and world-destroying campaign at the age of thirty. It was at this time that he was drawn into schemes on behalf of the poor, the unfortunate, and the homeless.

As a young man he was much interested in the cause of liberty in France, and like many of the youth of his time, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, favoured the revolutionists. But later the cruelty and violence of the leaders and their indiscriminate slaughter alienated his sympathies and turned him, as it did many others, against the revolutionary party.

On succeeding to his title and estate in 1799,

