

# RHYMES UPON FAMILIES OF DISTINCTION.

## HAIG OF BEMERSIDE.

Tide, tide, whate'er betide,  
There'll aye be Haigs in Bemerside.

'THIS family,' says Sir Robert Douglas,\* 'is of great antiquity in the south of Scotland; and in our ancient writings the name is written De Haga. Some authors are of opinion that they are of Pictish extraction; others think that they are descended from the ancient Britons: but as we cannot pretend, by good authority, to trace them from their origin, we shall insist no further upon traditionary history, and deduce their descent, by indisputable documents, from Petrus de Haga, who was undoubtedly proprietor of the lands and barony of Bemerside, in Berwickshire, and lived in the reigns of King Malcolm IV. and

\* Baronage.

William the Lion, which last succeeded to the crown of Scotland in 1165, and died in 1214.'

From this Petrus de Haga, the present proprietor of Bemerside is nineteenth in lineal descent. The above rhyme, which testifies the firm belief entertained by the country people in the perpetual lineal succession of the Haigs, is ascribed to no less an authority than that of Thomas the Rhymer, whose patrimonial territory was not far from Bemerside. 'The grandfather of the present Mr Haig had twelve daughters before his wife brought him a male heir.\* The common people trembled for the credit of their favourite soothsayer. The late Mr Haig was at length born, and their belief in the prophecy confirmed beyond a shadow of doubt.'—*Minst. Scot. Bord.*, vol. iii. p. 209. Apparently the family itself has had not less respect for the supposed prophecy: they take for their motto, according to Nisbet, 'TIDE WHAT MAY;' which, however, has, I believe, been latterly changed to 'BETIDE, BETIDE;' both being obviously in allusion to the Rhymer's prediction.

The family of De Haga is mentioned in *The Monastery* by Captain Clutterbuck, who says that his learned and all-knowing friend, the Benedictine, could tell to a day when they came into the country. There is a common saying in the south of Scotland—'Ye're like the lady o' Bemerside; ye'll no sell your hen in a rainy day'—probably alluding to some former Mrs Haig of more than usual worldly wisdom.

There is a parody on the above rhyme, disparaging a family of dull good men, resident in the neighbourhood of Bemerside—

Befa', befa', whate'er befa',  
There'll aye be a gowk in — ha'.

*Gowk* being, in plain English, a fool. A story is told of the representative of this hopeful family having once hinted to his neighbour, the Laird of Bemerside, the disagreeable likelihood of the original prophecy failing, on account of his wanting a male heir; when the other retorted, in high pique, that there was little chance of the part which related to — hall ever bringing any discredit on the prophet.

\* This gentleman, who bore the Scriptural name of Zorobabel, used to go out once or twice a-day to a retired place near his house, fall down on his knees, and pray that God would send him a son.

## SOMERVILLE—LORD SOMERVILLE.

The wode Laird of Laristone  
 Slew the worm of Worme's Glen,  
 And wan all Linton parochine.

This rhyme, popular in Roxburghshire, relates to a traditionary story connected with the noble family of Somerville. It is said that William de Somerville, the third of the family after its settlement in Scotland, obtained the lands of Linton in the above county, in 1174, from King William the Lion, as a reward for killing a serpent which infested the district. The family crest appears to bear reference to such an act, being—'on a wheel, *or*, a dragon, *vert*, spouting fire.' There is also, over the door of Linton church, a rude and now much-defaced sculpture, containing the representation of a horseman in armour charging with a lance a ferocious animal, but of the four-footed kind. The people likewise point to the scene of the alleged incident, being a small hollow called the Worm's Glen, about a mile from the same church.

Whatever truth there may be in the story, it is related with sufficient circumstantiality by a noble representative of the family, who compiled a memoir of his house about the middle of the seventeenth century, being the work published a few years ago under the title of the *Memorie of the Somervilles*.

'In the parish of Linton, within the sheriffdom of Roxburgh, there happened to breed a hideous monster in the form of a worm,\* so called and esteemed by the country people (but in effect has been a serpent, or some such creature), in length three Scots yards, and somewhat bigger than an ordinary man's leg, with a head more proportionable to its length than greatness, in form and colour to our common muir-edders.

'This creature, being a terror to the country people, had its den in a hollow piece of ground upon the side of a hill south-east from Linton church, some more than a mile, which unto this day is known by the name of the Worme's Glen, where it used to rest and shelter itself; but when it sought after prey, then this creature would wander a mile or two from its residence, and make prey of all sort of

\* Orme, or worm, is, in the ancient Norse, the generic name for serpents.

bestial that came in its way, which it easily did, because of its lowness, creeping among the bent heather, or grass, wherein that place abounded much, by reason of the meadow-ground, and a large flow moss, fit for the pasturage of many cattle (being naturally of itself of no swift motion). It was not discerned before it was master of its prey, instantly devouring the same, so that the whole countrymen thereabout were forced to remove their bestial, and transport themselves three or four miles from the place, leaving the country desolate; neither durst any passenger go to the church or market upon that road for fear of this beast. Several attempts were made to destroy it by shooting of arrows, throwing of darts, none daring to approach so near as to make use of a sword or lance; but all their labours were in vain. These weapons did sometimes slightly wound, but were never able to kill this beast; so that all men apprehended the whole country should have been destroyed, and that this monster was sent as a just judgment from God to plague them for their sins. During this fear and terror amongst the people, John Somerville, being in the south, and hearing strange reports about this beast, was, as all young men are, curious to see it; and, in order thereto, he comes to Jedburgh, where he found the whole inhabitants in such a panic fear, that they were ready to desert the town. The country people that were fled there for shelter had told so many lies at first, that it increased every day, and was beginning to get wings. Others, who pretended to have seen it in the night, asserted it was full of fire, and in time would throw it out; with a thousand other ridiculous stories, which the timorous multitude are ready to invent on such an occasion; though, to speak the truth, the like was never known to have been seen in this nation before. However, this gentleman continues his first resolution of seeing this monster, befall him what will: therefore he goes directly to the place about the dawning of the day, being informed that, for ordinary, this serpent came out of her den about the sunrising, or near the sunsetting, and wandered the field over to catch somewhat. He was not long near to the place when he saw this strange beast crawl forth of her den; who, observing him at some distance (being on horseback), it lifted up its head with half of the body, and a long time stared him in the face, with

open mouth, never offering to advance or come to him: whereupon he took courage, and drew much nearer, that he might perfectly see all its shapes, and try whether or not it would dare to assault him; but the beast, turning in a half-circle, returned to the den, never offering him the least prejudice: whereby he concludes this creature was not so dangerous as the report went, and that there might be a way found to destroy the same.

‘ Being informed of the means that some men had used for that end already, and that it was not to be assaulted by sword or dagger (the ordinary arms, with the lance, at that time), because of the near approach these weapons required, if the beast was venomous, or should cast out any such thing, he might be destroyed without a revenge. Being apprehensive of this hazard, for several days he marks the outgoing, creeping, and entering of this serpent into her den, and found, by her ordinary motion, that she would not retire backward, nor turn but in half a circle at least, and that there was no way to kill her but by a sudden approach, with some long spear, upon horseback; but then he feared, if her body was not penetrable, he might endanger not only his horse’s life, which he loved very well, but also his own, to no purpose. To prevent which, he falls upon this device (having observed that when this creature looked upon a man, she always stared him in the face with open mouth): in causing make a spear near twice the ordinary length, ordering the same to be plated with iron at least six quarters from the point upwards, that no fire, upon a sudden, might cause it to fall asunder: the which being made according to his mind, he takes his horse, well acquainted with the lance, and for some days did exercise him with a lighted peat on the top of the lance, until he was well accustomed both with the smell, smoke, and light of the fire, and did not refuse to advance on the spur, although it blew full in his face. Having his horse managed according to his mind, he caused make a little slender wheel of iron, and fix it so, within half a foot of the point of his lance, that the wheel might turn round on the least touch, without hazarding upon a sudden breaking of the lance.

‘ All things being fitted according to his mind, he gave advertisement to the gentlemen and commons in that country that he would undertake to kill that monster, or die in

the attempt, prefixing a day for them to be spectators. Most of them looked upon this promise as a rodomontade; others as an act of madness, flowing from an inconsiderate youth; but he concerned not himself with their discourses. The appointed day being come, somewhat before the dawning of the day he placed himself, with a stout and resolute fellow, his servant (whom he gained by a large reward to hazard with him in this attempt), within half an arrow-flight, or thereby, to the den's mouth, which was no larger than easily to admit the outgoing and re-entering of this serpent, whom now he watched with a vigilant eye upon horseback, having before prepared some long small and hard peats, bedaubed with pitch, roset, and brimstone, fixed with small wire upon the wheel at the point of his lance: these being touched with fire, would instantly break out into a flame. The proverb holds good, that the fates assist bold men; for it was truly verified in him, fortune favouring the hardy enterprise of this young man. The day was not only fair, but extremely calm, no wind blowing but a breath of air that served much to his purpose.

'About the sunrising, this serpent, or worm (as by tradition it is named), appeared, with her head and some part of her body without the den; whereupon the servant, according to direction, set fire to the peats upon the wheel at the top of the lance, and instantly this resolute gentleman put spurs to his horse, advanced with a full gallop, the fire still increasing, placed the same, with the wheel and almost the third part of his lance, directly into the serpent's mouth, which went down her throat into her belly, which he left there, the lance breaking with the rebound of his horse, giving her a deadly wound; who, in the pangs of death (some part of her body being within the den), so great was her strength, that she raised up the whole ground that was above her, and overturned the same to the furthering of her ruin, being partly smothered by the weight thereof.

'Thus was she brought to her death in the way and manner rehearsed, by the bold undertaking of this noble gentleman, who, besides a universal applause, and the great rewards he received from his gracious prince, deserved to have this action of his engraven on tables of brass, in a perpetual memorial of his worth. What that unpolished age was capable to give, as a monument to future generations, he

had, by having his effigy, in the posture he performed this action, cut out in stone, and placed above the principal church-door of Linton Kirk, with his name and surname, which neither length of time nor casual misfortune has been able to obliterate or demolish, but that it stands entire and legible to this very day; with remembrances of the place where this monster was killed, called the Serpent's Den, or, as the country people named it, the Worme's Glen; whose body, being taken from under the rubbish, was exposed for many days to the sight of the numerous multitude that came far and near from the country to look upon the dead carcase of this creature, which was so great a terror to them while it lived, that the story, being transmitted from father to son, is yet fresh with most of the people thereabout, albeit it is upward of five hundred years since this action was performed.'

At another part of the work, the author mentions a popular misconception of the knight who performed this enterprise. 'Some inhabitants of the south,' says he, 'attributing to William, Baron of Linton, what was done by his father, albeit they have nothing to support them but two or three lines of a rude rhyme, which, when any treats of this matter, they repeat—

Wood Willie Sommervill,  
Kill'd the worm of Wormandaill,  
For whilk he had all the lands of Lintoune,  
And sex mylles them about.'

## KENNEDY.

'Tween Wigton and the town o' Ayr,  
Portpatrick and the Cruives o' Cree,  
Nae man need think for to bide there,  
Unless he court wi' Kennedie.

This rhyme is remarkably expressive of the unlimited power wielded by a set of feudal chiefs over a subject territory, before the laws of the country were enforced for the protection of individual liberty. The district described is one of full sixty by forty miles, in the south-west province of Scotland. The chief of the Kennedies was the Earl of Cassillis, seated at Cassillis Castle, near Maybole in Ayrshire. The principal subordinate chiefs, possessing scarcely less power, were Kennedy of Colzean, direct ancestor of the

present Earl of Cassillis (Marquis of Ailsa), and Kennedy of Bargeny. The lairds of Girvanmains, Baltersan, Kirk-michael, Knockdon, Dunure, and Drumellan, were but a selection of the lesser barons of the name. A memoir of the family, written about the time of the Revolution, by Mr William Abercromby, minister of Maybole, after enumerating these and other Kennedies of note, says, ' But this name is under great decay, in comparison of what it was ane age agoe ; at which time they flourished so in power and number, as to give occasion to this rhyme :—

'Twixt Wigtowne and the town of Aire,  
And laigh down by the Cruves of Cree,  
You shall not get a lodging there,  
Except ye court a Kennedy.\*

#### MOSMAN OF AUCHTYFARDLE.

It is said that the progenitor of this family, at some period antecedent to his acquisition of the estate, being applied to by some famished drovers for a fardle or cake of household bread, presented them with no fewer than eight ; whereupon, like the witches in *Macbeth*, they saluted him in the style of his future dignity, by pronouncing the following punning rhyme upon his beneficence, which is still well known in Lanarkshire, and especially in the parish of Lesmahagow :—

Aucht fardle sin' ye gie,  
Auchty fardle ye shall be !

#### LESLIE.

The family of Leslie, to which belong two of the Scottish peerages, traces its origin to Bartholomew, a Flemish chief, who settled with his followers in the district of Garioch, in Aberdeenshire, in the reign of William the Lion. He took the name ' De Lesley ' from the place where he settled. The heralds, however, have an old legend, representing the first man of the family as having acquired distinction and a name at once by overcoming a knight in battle at a spot between a *less lee* and a greater :—

Between the Less-Lee and the Mair,  
He slew the knight, and left him there.

\* See Account of the Kennedies, edited by R. Pitcairn, Esq. 4to. Edinburgh : 1830.

The family of Leslie is one which may be said to have had a brief period of unusual distinction. In the reign of Charles I., the Earl of Rothes, chief of the family, was a political character of the first consequence. At the same time some gentlemen of his name were gathering laurels in foreign service. One of these was a Count Leslie, in the service of the Emperor of Germany. Other two were Alexander and David Leslie, who espoused the opposite side of a great quarrel, and served Gustavus Adolphus, the heroic king of Sweden. Alexander being chosen by the Scottish Covenanters to head their army in 1639, had the good fortune to receive the reward of a coronet from the king against whom he led his troops: he was made Earl of Leven by Charles I., in 1641. David soon after obtained high command in the army of the Scottish Estates, fought well at Long Marston Moor, and overthrew Montrose at Philiphaugh. A few years afterwards (1650), when the Estates took up the cause of Charles II. as a limited and covenanted monarch, and raised an army to repel the invasion of Cromwell, David Leslie was appointed to the chief command, and it was from no failure on his part that this force was overthrown disgracefully at Dunbar. Tradition preserves a rhyme respecting him and the principal officers associated with him:—

Leslie for the kirk,  
 And Middleton for the king;  
 But deil a man can gie a knock  
 But Ross and Augustine.\*

Ultimately, on Charles being restored to all his kingdoms, David Leslie was made a peer, by the title of Lord Newark—although, as his father, a bitter Cavalier, half-jocularly told him, with regard to his former proceedings as the parliamentary leader, ‘he should rather have been hangit for his *auld wark*.’

\* Middleton, one of the ablest officers of his time, was afterwards infamous in Scotland as the minister of Charles II. in 1662, when Episcopacy was established. Ross was a celebrated captain of horse in the service of the Parliament, *anno* 1650; and distinguished himself so much at the battle of Kerbester, where Montrose was taken, that he received the thanks of that body, besides a pecuniary gratuity. Augustine, by birth a high German, but who seems to have entertained a sentiment of regard for Scotland almost amounting to *patriotism*, had the command of a troop in the same army, and rendered himself famous by some very heroic exploits performed against the English army under Cromwell.

Other Leslies gained honour and fortune in continental service; and hence several counts of the name now exist in Germany, besides many considerable families in France, Russia, and Poland. It is also worthy of note that Bishop Leslie, the intrepid friend of Queen Mary, and Charles Leslie, author of the *Short and Easy Method with the Deists*, were cadets of the house of Leslie of Balquhain in Aberdeenshire.

THE DOUGLAS FAMILY.

So many, so good, as of the Douglasses have been,  
Of one surname was ne'er in Scotland seen.

HUME'S *History of the House of Douglas*.

GUTHRIE.

Guthrie o' Guthrie,  
Guthrie o' Gaiggie,  
Guthrie o' Taybank,  
An' Guthrie o' Craigie.

This rhyme refers to the respectable old Forfarshire family of Guthrie, in its main line and principal branches. The following is the traditionary account of the origin of the Guthries:—One of the kings of Scotland, when on an aquatic excursion to the northern part of his dominions, was overtaken by a storm, and driven ashore on the east coast, somewhere between Arbroath and Montrose. Getting in safety to land, the king, like the pious Æneas under similar circumstances, turned his thoughts upon the means of acquiring food, wherewith to satisfy his own hunger and that of his attendants, both considerably sharpened by the sea-breeze. He had not, however, the good fortune of the Trojan hero, in seeing

—' tres littore cervos  
— errantes:'

nothing appeared on the bare Scottish coast but a poor fisherwoman, who was cleaning some small fishes she had just caught. 'Will you gut one to me, goodwife?' said the monarch. 'I'll gut three!' being her immediate answer, the king exclaimed, in gratitude for her heartiness and hospitality,

'Then, Gut three  
Your name shall be!'

and immediately put her family in possession of the adjoining lands, which yet continue to be the property of her descendant, the present *Guthrie of Guthrie*.

## THE DUKE OF ATHOLL.

Duke of Atholl—king in Man,  
And the greatest man in a' the land!

The idea expressed in this popular rhyme is supported by high authority. 'I shall conclude with the opinion of all the great lawyers in England who have had occasion to mention the Isle of Man; namely, that it is a royal fief of the crown of England, and the only one; so that I may venture to say without censure, that if his Grace the Duke of Atholl is not the richest subject the King of Britain has, he is the *greatest man* in his majesty's dominions.'—NISBET'S *Heraldry*, ii. 201.

## FRASER.

As lang as there's a cock in the north,  
There'll be a Fraser in Philorth.

The 'Cock o' the North' is a familiar name of the head of the Gordon family: the rhyme promises that the Frasers, Lords Salton, the proprietors of Philorth, shall exist as long as that greater line.

## CLAN GREGOR.

Cnoic is uisgh is Alpanich,  
An truir bu shine 'bha 'n Albin.

*Literal Translation.*

Hills, and waters, and Alps,  
The eldest three in Albin.

The Macgregors are esteemed in the Highlands as one of the oldest, if not the very oldest, of the clans. This is implied by the above rhyme, in which they are designated as Alpanich, with reference to their descent from Alpin, a king of Scotland in the ninth century. They derive their descent, and also their name, from Gregory, a king who was grandson to Alpin, and whose posterity would have continued to enjoy the crown, but for the law of tanistry, which preferred a full-grown nephew or uncle to an infant son. Their being thus dispossessed of the sovereignty is adverted to in an old Gaelic rhyme, of which Mr Alexander

Campbell has given a translation, in his edition of *M'Intosh's Gaelic Proverbs*:—

Sliochd nan righribh duchaisach  
 Bha shios an Dun staiphnis  
 Aig an robh crun na h' Alb' o thus  
 'S aig a bheil duchar fathasd ris.

The royal hereditary family,  
 Who lived down at Dunstaffnage,  
 To whom at first the crown of Albin belonged,  
 And who have still a hereditary claim to it.

BARCLAY OF MATHERS'S TESTAMENT.

This may be the most appropriate place to introduce a fragment of ancient wisdom, which tradition ascribes to one of the family of Barclay of Mathers, who flourished early in the sixteenth century.\* The rhymes, which seem to have some claim upon a place in this collection, though they do not strictly fall under any of the heads into which it has been divided, are usually called by the above title, being designed by the composer as an advice to his son and heir:—

If thou desire thy house lang stand,  
 And thy successors brook thy land,  
 Above all things, love God in fear,  
 Intromit not with wrangous gear;  
 Nor conqress† naething wrangously;  
 With thy neighbour keep charity:  
 See that thou pass not thy estate;  
 Duly obey the magistrate;  
 Oppress not, but support the puir;  
 To help the commonweal take cure.  
 Use nae deceit—mell not with treason,  
 And to all men do right and reason.  
 Both unto word and deed be true,  
 All kind of wickedness eschew.  
 Slay nae man, nor thereto consent:‡  
 Be not cruel, but patient.  
 Ally aye in some guid place,  
 With noble, honest, godly race.

\* This was the family which, a hundred years later, produced the celebrated author of the 'Apology for the Quakers.'

† *Acquire*, specially applicable to land.

‡ An advice highly characteristic of the age of the author.

Hate lechery, and all vices flee;  
Be humble; haunt guid company.  
Help thy friend, and do nae wrang;  
And God shall cause thy house stand lang.

---