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Margaret Nairne;

A Bundle of Jacobite Letters

THE national crisis that produced in Scotland the great-hearted men of Montrose and of the '15 and '45, produced also great-hearted women. Soldiers of a desperate cause, these mothers, wives, and daughters showed not only courage in hours of acute danger, but the resolute spirit of self-sacrifice that never shrunk under a life-time of adversity and of broken fortunes. True to the settled purpose of their lives, they accepted all hardships, all disabilities, all yielding of domestic security, as fruit of the high destiny to which they were called. Bright among the honoured names of those women who thus took part in the troubles of their country, is the name of Margaret Nairne. The daughter, the wife, the mother of men who bore distinguished part in the great struggle for the Stuarts, from the cradle to the grave all her interests, all her associations centred in the fortunes of that unfortunate family. Heroic blood ran in her veins, for she was the grand-daughter of Patrick Graeme of Inchbrakie, the gallant and faithful 'Black Pate' who followed in such splendid enthusiasm the sad and brilliant fortunes of Montrose. She was born to an inheritance of loyalty, to those traditions of honour and chivalry, which she was not only to exemplify in herself, but was to hand on to another and yet another generation.

Her father was Robert Nairne of Strathord. Born about 1620, he joined the Royal troops in 1651, and falling into the hands of the government at Alyth was imprisoned in the Tower of London for ten years. At the time of his capture he was betrothed to Margaret Graeme—a daughter of Black

Pate. He endured six years of his imprisonment alone; but in 1657, she joined him, and they were married in the Tower, remaining together there till his release at the Restoration in 1661. On his return to Scotland he was made one of the Lords of Session, and twenty years after he was granted a Peerage and the title Lord Nairne of Strathord.

All authorities agree in saying that the only child, Margaret, was born twelve years after the marriage of Robert Nairne and Margaret Graeme—and though I find a note in her own handwriting giving the date of her birth April 7th, 1673—sixteen years after her parents' marriage,—the register of Edinburgh gives the date of her baptism on October 17, 1669. The little daughter must have received a joyful welcome. No other child was born, so that when the title was bestowed on Robert Nairne—she being then eleven years old,—it was granted to her after her father 'and thereafter to any heir of her body by marriage with Lord George Murray,' or any of Atholl's younger sons. Robert Nairne died two years after, in 1683, and for seven years little Margaret was Baroness Nairne in her own right. We may suppose the child knew little of all the projects and disputes that went on during those years between her mother and the Atholl family regarding her marriage. Probably no choice would be given, or consent asked, even in the later stages of the negotiations. She was only seven years old when first she was contracted to the three-year-old Lord George Murray. The marriage was broken off some time later, on account of the bad state of the prospective bridegroom's health. He lived till his elder brother, Lord William, married the young Lady Nairne in 1690—dying the following year. Margaret was twenty-one at the time of the marriage, Lord William, who then in right of his wife, came into the title of Lord Nairne, was six years older. The marriage appears to have been a very happy one, and Margaret in the years that followed enjoyed the serenest moments her life was to know—before the enterprise of 1715 drew her husband into the activities of the Jacobite party.

Between 1690 and 1714 twelve children were born at Nairne—ten of these lived to take an active and distinguished part in the adventures of the '45. Devoted as was her own part in all that concerned the Stuarts, Margaret Nairne transmitted her principles of loyalty and self-effacement to her many children. The noble strain bequeathed by Black Pate of Inchbrakie met in these children with the equally heroic blood of Charlotte de la Tremouille, and of the gallant

Lord Derby who laid down his life for the cause in 1651, of whom William Murray was the grandson. The Nairnes proved true to the traditions of their race. The exploits of John, the eldest son, born in 1690, are well-known to history both in the '15 and the '45. He paid for his loyalty with life-long exile. Robert was killed at Culloden. James, the only Whig of the family, was the only source of trouble to his mother; her letters speak of him as her 'lost sheep' Of the daughters, Margaret married Lord Strathallan, a staunch Jacobite like herself. She suffered imprisonment after the '45. Amelia became the wife of Laurence Oliphant of Gask, who staked his all for the cause. Catherine married Lord Dunmore, one of those Jacobites sentenced and reprieved in 1746. Marjory married Duncan Robertson of Struan, and suffered with him a long exile. Charlotte was the ardent Lady Lude known to history. Louisa married the Jacobite Graeme of Orchill. Mary and Henrietta¹ died unmarried at Gask, and from their choice of such a home it can well be guessed what their principles were likely to be.

Brought up at Nairne by such parents, all thought, all tradition, all education were centred in developing their minds in one direction. Lord Nairne had never taken his oath to the government, or his seat in Parliament. He is described as a 'mighty stickler against the Union,' but the activities of his life did not begin until he joined the famous hunting party at Braemar, and threw himself heart and soul into the attempt of 1715. To his wife and his children such action must have seemed the only natural course, though it meant the sacrifice of the home, the beginning of broken fortunes and lost security.

A bundle of old letters,² long long ago put away and forgotten, throw here and there a side-light on the history of the Nairne family. Their interest lies in their domestic simplicity—a charm of far-off lost days brought nearer by an intimate personal note.

In 1709 Lord Nairne and his wife were building a new house—the old one had been partly destroyed by fire in 1706, 'everything lost except one looking-glass.' This new house, according to family records (*Jacobite Lairds of Gask*), cost £5000, but as it was a large house, with a window for every day of the year, this estimate must be much under the real

¹ Henrietta, born in 1714, lived till 1803.

² Now in the possession of the miter, and (with one possible exception) not hitherto published.

cost. It only stood till 1768, when it was destroyed—but Margaret did not live to see the day.

In March, 1711, Lord Nairne writes the following concerning his children's marriages:—'I have yours of the 5th March with my brother Atholl's letter, and the list of the designed Justices of the Peace. I wish you had sent me your opinion about it, which should have been mine, for I am unacquainted with many of them, only I'll object against one, provest Rtson, who I know to be a tricky companion, and has lately given new proofs of it, as your son Willy will inform you, and how he has used me very ill in particular, aboute a man I designed for my brother Edward's company.

'I hope in God your son John will recover well of the Smallpox, my wife says tis a good signe they appear Red or firy. I'll send one of these days to enquire how he is, and then pray let me have your advice aboute the Justices of the Peace for I would write accordingly to my brother Atholl. Your son and daughter came here last week, and we have kept them till now, they go from here to-morrow morning and are to wait on you very soon. My wife and I have spoake to them fully about what we discoursed with you, they both appear to have a great desire to please and obey you in everything, being sensible 'tis much their duties, and I'm convinced their inclination, for they have both a large share of sense and goodnature. My wife undertakes for our Katherine and I no less for our Willy, that in everything they will make it their study to satisfy you and your lady, to whom both my wife and I sends our humble service, and I am ever, your most affate. cusin and humble servant,

NAIRNE.'

The Katherine here spoken of was born in 1702, and her brother William in 1700; it is evident that the father's allusions refer to projected marriages for these two children with their cousins.

Across the path of Margaret Nairne lay already the shadow that was to darken her days. Yet when the call to arms came, she would have been the last to withhold either husband or son—that they should be first in the field must have seemed a fulfilled ambition. On November 14, 1716, Lord Nairne and his eldest son were taken prisoner at Preston; on the 28th it is known that Lady Nairne left Edinburgh for Preston to see her husband and son; we must suppose she had her place in the pathetic procession which, to the lasting shame of the English Government, passed with ignominy through the

streets of London to Newgate and the Tower. Fortunately Lord and Lady Nairne were assigned quarters in the Tower—John was sent to fever-stricken Newgate. The trial and condemnation of father and son are matters of history. Some historians say that Lady Nairne was with Lady Nithsdale when she made her frantic appeal to the King. But it was by the intervention of Nairne's cousin, Lord Derby, that a reprieve was granted both for father and son.

Lord Nairne writes from his prison, on February 25, 1716, to the Duke of Atholl:

'Until I be really Dead I can never be nearer it than I thought myself yesterday, for just an hour before the time apointed for my going to execution, I got an account that ye King had been pleased to give me a reprieve to the 7th March; this I believe is much owing to my cusin Derby who has shewed himself a true friend to me.'³

Lady Nairne writes to her daughter, Lady Strathallan, on the same day, giving a very moving account of her husband's bearing under the terrible strain. She herself brought him the reprieve. Two of her daughters⁴ came in while she was writing, greatly to her surprise, as since Lord Nithdale's escape 'all is kept with double strictness.' Lord Nairne writes again to the Duke on March 16th, 'I have twice escaped my execution, and Wedensday nixt is apointed for ye third time. What my fate is then to be, God only knows.'

The terms of the pardon seemed to Lord Nairne, thinking of his twelve children, the youngest only three years old, too hard to be accepted. The following letter is endorsed 'Copy Letter to the Earl of Derby by my dear Lord.' It is in the handwriting of Margaret.

July 17, 1716.

MY DEAR LORD,

Since I have not had the honour of seeing your Lordship I thought fit by this line to acquaint you with the reasons made me desire your favour. I understood there is a Bill passed ye House of Comons and twice read in ye House of Lords that disables the King from shewing any compassion to ye wives and children of any who have drawn forfeiture upon themselves. I can never think mv wife and children ought to be put in a worse condition especially since the estate came to me by her. No man is more sensible how much I owe to your Lordship for your saving my life. But if I

³ *Chronicles of the Atholl Family.*

⁴ One was Charlotte, afterwards Mrs. Robertson of Lude.

can hold it no other way, but by seeing my wife and children starve, I'll choose much rather to loos it, than live a Witness to the Misery of my Famyly, and be as much indebted to your Lordship for using your endeavour to have my head struck off, as I was, formerly, to have it kept on,—and when I have the honour to see your Lordship I'll convince you it is no flash but a firm and steady resolution, but while I have life I shall ever be, my dear Lord

Your Lps. most obliged and most obedient servant

W. MURRAY.

An Act of Parliament was passed in 1717 'to enable His Majesty to make provision for Margaret, Lady Nairne, out of her paternall estate, forfeited during the life of William Murray, late Lord Nairne, her husband.'

Lady Derby writes the following letter to Lady Nairne in the Tower:

Halnaker, Oct. 4th.

MADAM,

I was very glad to hear by your Ladyships kind letter that your good Lord and selfe with the rest of your good family, are well under your close confinement; if it were any way in my power to serve you, your confinement would soon be over. I do not know when my Lord intends to be in town. I hope Lady Collchester has bin so good-natured as to make you some visits in the Tower. I am glad that my cosen Nairne also continues well in his worse confinement. With my humble service to your Lord, your son and daughters is all from, dear Madam,

your most obliged humble servant

M. DERBY.

From this letter it appears as if the members of the Nairne family who had travelled from Scotland to bid their condemned father adieu, were now detained with him in the Tower. The unfortunate John Nairne was endeavouring to get his wretched quarters changed from one end of Newgate to the other, as he was confined in a room with four others, one suffering from malignant fever. His aunt, Lady Lovat, writes some particulars in a letter to Mr. Patrick Murray of Ochertyre.

Edin., May 30, 1716.

I had a letter from my sister Nairne who desired with her service to you that you would be pleased to inquire what Robin Murray is doing and to give him your advice that he

may be diligent to gett up Rents quickly. She writes to my Lady Strathalan and me to advise our friends to make all the interest they can while ye Justice Clark is at London, for they think one thing he has gone for is to gett instructions about ye Gentlemen's tryalls here, which she says will be like ye laws of ye Meads and Persians, unalterable. My nephew Nairne has gott his indictment and was to appear yesterday and Mr. Bassell Hamilton, with 5 others. Philiphaugh went to Townsend to desire his brother- in-law might have leave to put in the other end of Newgatt from ye fever. He said he would if ye Phisitions would declare it was malignant, but next day when he went,—he refused it. . . . Curie has made his escape yesternight and was not mist till to-day at ten o'clock. Your son is sume better, but his Stitches comes and goes. Etc., etc.

Your most affate. humble st.

A. LOVAT.

This lady was Amelia, sister of Lord Nairne, wife of Hugh, 10th Lord Lovat, who was carried off by force by Simon, 12th Lord Lovat in 1697—for which he was outlawed. She writes another long letter to Lady Nairne in the Tower in July.

Edin. July 3rd.

I have two of yours, deare sister, which I was glad of, after your longer silence than usual, but especially your last to my Lord Strathalen with your good news of my dear Brothers getting a month reprieve, which I hope in God is a forerunner to his liberation Our Ministers were all silenced, soe last Sunday we had noe prayers nor sermon, but in one Meeting House one Minister was sike when the others cald. I think we are little obliged to the English Clarge that lets us be soe used, etc.

Ever yours.

Lord Nairne was set at liberty in August, 1717, and returned to his own house in Scotland in July, 1718. The family life began again, but under sadly impoverished conditions, the fearful strain of his condemnation and imprisonment must have been severely felt all the rest of his life. He was destined never again to strike a blow for the cause he loved. In 1722 he writes to his brother the Duke that he and his wife were just setting out for Glen Derby, his new house on the estate in the parish of Moulin, once called Glen Gynate. Another letter concerns a curling match, another thanks for young trees for Glen Derby. Business letters seem

to have been left to Margaret to write. He lived till 1726—it is almost certain his death occurred in February of that year. He was buried at Auchtergaven, the family burial-place.

Margaret Nairne outlived him for twenty-two years. Five of her children were already married, and the years must have been full of interest. She seems to have lived sometimes at Glen Derby and sometimes at Nairne House. Another letter from Lady Derby, undated, is addressed to her at Nairne House.

Halnaker, Jan. 19.

I take it as a great favour from good Lady Nairn that she will let me have the pleasure of hearing how it fairs with her and her good family. I am allso glad to hear that your Episcopal congregations increase and are so good Christians. I wish I could say we were so in South Britain; hear is great work in Treating and making interest for the choice of the next Parlimente and I believe it may be much the same with you in Scotland. It is to be hoped it will not be long before the Elictions are to be, for the continual feastings I fear will kill half the nation, besides the making the common people so very idle I am glad to hear you have the satisfaction of seeing your daughters live in a happy comfortable way. Give my humble service to those I know and with my most hearty wishes for the prosperity of yourself and yours, I am, dear Madam,

your obliged cosen and humble servant

M. DERBY.

The following letter is written by Margaret Nairne, Lady Strathallan, June 15, 1737, to her mother at Nairne House. Evidently the young sons of John, 3rd Lord Nairne, were staying with their grandmother, and some opposition was expected to their returning to their school at Perth. ‘Nephew Harry’ was John’s eighth son, born in 1727.

‘I have my dear Mothers. My Brother has grown every day easier than he was since Munday tho he halts still and cant walk much. My side thank God has been pretty easie. . . . I told Sister Nairn⁵ about Nephew Harry if he has got your dose of physick to-day, she thinks he may get the other in Perth and she begs your Ladyship will send them both into Perth to-morrow for she says it was her greatest grudge of coming here till once she got them sent to Perth. Both my brother and her desires your ladyship to send them in to-

⁵ Katherine Murray, wife of 3rd Lord Nairne.

morrow, and the dose of physick to their Landlady to give Nephew Harry, and if 'tis not possible for your Ladyship to get them sent to Perth, Sister Nairne says she hopes you will send them to Stanley. I wish they were sent to Perth, for I think 'tis hard they should be from the Schooll longer. Both Brother and Sister Nairne wants much to have them in to Perth, and hopes your Ladyship will send them there to-morrow. Cultequhey will tell your Lordship how my brother is, he is to be at Dunkeld to-morrow night. I shall be sure to writt by Perth. I hope your Ladyship will do so too that we may hear how you gett up, and sister Hariot and how all at Lude are. I forgot to tell your Ladyship that last night they say it was a foot deep of snow on ye hills in our view. Brother Nairne is glad to hear there was rain at Stanley, we could not get him to believe it last night when our rain came on, that there was any.

Your Ladyships most humble duty
My dear Mothers,
most dutyfull and obedient Daughter

M. STRATHALLAN.

It is interesting to know that Nephew Harry survived the physicking, as administered by his grandmother and his landlady, and lived to his 90th year.

The Duchess of Gordon, wife of the 3rd Duke Cosmo and daughter of the Earl of Aberdeen, writes the following letter to Lady Nairne in 1743:

Haddo House, Dec. 24.

'I only had the honour of your letter of the 7th instant some days ago. I am glad to hear that you are well and that Mrs. Murray is so well recovered again. I think myself very much obliged to your Ladyship for the particular concern your so good as to take in asking about the Marquess. I thank God I left him in good health on Thursday morning. He is bathed every morning in cold water, it seems to be quite easie to him, for he never cries or appears to be in the least disturbed with it. He gets meat in the morning and at night, either Bread Berry or Ale Berry but he hardly ever tastes it, but milk which is the only thing that he is fond of. I should make an apologie to your Ladyship for writing so particularly about him, if you had not desired me to do it. The Duke and his sisters and I came to this place yesterday to keep our Xmas and we designe some time in Jan. to go to Edinburgh for a few weeks, so I hope to have the honour of seeing your Ladyship in the Spring, as the Duke and I intends to come

home by Perth Shire. I am sorrise that we could not go, on that road, for the Duke has some business to do at Edin. which requires his being soon their. The Duke desyres to make his compliments to your Ladyship and family
your Ladys most obedient

humble servant.

H. GORDON.

As for the news your Ladyship writes me of a Cationer, it is more as I know forgive this bad write Adieu.

The little Marquess was born June 18, so was six months old when this account was given. His strong sense in declining the Bread and Ale Berry may partly have contributed to the good old age he attained—he lived to be 83.

James, the 2nd Duke of Atholl, nephew of Margaret Nairne, had married Mrs. Lannoy. Their eldest child, Marquess of Tullibardine, was born and died in April, 1729. Two girls were born in 1730 and 1731. Four years later came another son and heir, born in March, 1735—the last of their children. Great were the rejoicings over the birth of this boy. ‘The child is as tall as ever anybody seed a new born infant, and a very strong cry,’ Lord George Murray writes. The neighbouring Lairds write to the Duke a round robin congratulating him on the ‘thumping boy.’ Dunkeld was illuminated, and a Procession of Freemasons celebrated the event ‘the fraternity in their aprons made a circle about the Bonfire, crosst arms, shook hands, repeated healths, and a Marquess for ever.’⁶ He lived only a few months. The following letter from his Mother to Lady Nairne is dated from London, Feb. 24th, 1736:

MADAM,

I cannot express the agony of my soul for the loss of my Dearest Boy. I have not only the heart breaking sorrow of a Mother’s heart but the grief and anguish to see my dear lord oppressed with affliction, which adds to my sorrow. Almighty God enable us to bear this great triall with due submission to his Divine Will. We lookt upon the Dear child as a gift and blessing preserved by the imediate interposition of Gods great mercy to us, but now alas he is knatcht from us and our fond hopes are blasted its impossible for me to say more on this melancholy subject, its a point to tender for me att present. I return your Ladyship a thousand thanks for

⁶ Chronicles of the Atholl Family.

your tender care and concern of my dear children and beg you'll make my thanks and most humble service to lord Nairne and all your young ladys. Miss Lannoy⁷ begs leave to offer her compliments to your Ladyship and family, and I am with the greatest respect

Madam, your Ladyships
most obedient and
most humble servant

J. ATHOLL.

Margaret was evidently the tender friend to whom many turned in the hour of trouble, but she was also a woman of strong character and influence over men. It was from the living influence of their Mother that the Nairnes drew their Jacobite principles, and the fortitude to put these into practice. All her life she had drawn men to follow the hazardous path on which her own feet were so stedfastly set. The Duke, her brother-in-law, writing to Lord James Murray of Garth, says: 'I hope you will have as little to do with my Lady Nairne as possible, for there cannot be a wors woman. I impute the ruine of my 3 sons to her artifices.' It is not easy to-day to sympathise with the Duke's point of view, but he thought he witnessed in the career of William Lord Tullibardine, Lord Charles and Lord George Murray, the disgrace of the name and lineage that we now think they covered with glory. Had the eyes of Margaret Nairne been fixed upon the future verdict of history, instead of singly on the fortunes of the Stuarts, she could not have better trained the heroic band of her sons and daughters. Although she saw misfortune overtake family after family, as they fell in the general ruin that followed the '45, she could have suffered no pang of regret for the training that made it possible. Her life, which had flowed evenly since the death of her husband, knew all its bitterest sorrows at its close. She lost none of her twelve children till 1743, when the sailor son, William, died at sea off the coast of St. Helena; and she had the humiliation of knowing that her son James fought on the wrong side. But hope and joy came in old age too—she shared in the passionate enthusiasm of the '45, and welcomed Prince Charlie himself at Nairne House, the day before he entered Perth. She saw two of her sons, John, Lord Nairne, and Robert throw in their lot with the gallant and perilous enterprise. Her lofty spirit could never have stooped even to

⁷ A daughter of the Duchess by her first marriage.

an unspoken wish that they had chosen differently. She saw John, attainted and ruined, passing into an exile that, for him, was never to be at an end. She knew that Robert died at Culloden—where he lies now in the indistinguishable moorland graves. There fell also her son-in-law, Lord Strathallan. Another son-in-law, Laurence Oliphant, ruined and attainted, went into exile. A third, William Murray, was arraigned and condemned for high treason. The families of both her daughters Marjory, Mrs. Robertson of Struan, and Charlotte, Mrs. Robertson of Lude suffered an exile that lasted over thirty years. Not the least of her bereavements was the death of William, Lord Tullibardine, in the Tower—he whose loyalty and self-surrender in the cause had perhaps been first set alight by her own example and influence. His sister, Lady Mary Murray, writes her the following letter:

Dear Madam,

18 July, 1746

We are very sensible of your Ladyship's sympathy with us. The Marquess was indeed all your Ladyship says of him which may give his friends great comfort as we are sure of his happiness and makes us less regret his leaving a world of troubles. Mama offers her most humble service to your Ladyship, and our sincere compliments to the young ladys who I hope are well and the rest of your Ladyship's friends. I am with duty and respect your Ladyships

most obt. humble servt.

MARY MURRAY.

Mama got a letter yesterday from London acquainting her of my Dear Brother's death on the 9th, and that the Governor had offer'd the Chapel for the corps to be deposited and the Lieutenant Governor takes on him the management of the funeral in a private way. We were very well assured that had it pleased God to spare his life he would never have suffered. But he is far happier.

Margaret Nairne did not long survive the bitter griefs of her old age. She died at Nairne House in 1747. 'You're not to lament her,' writes Laurence Oliphant to his wife, 'as she is happy, free of the solicitous cares of this worthless world, and I believe now knows the events that are to happen to our country and what regards it, which I pray God may be, and they *will* be, suitable to his infinite Goodness.'

The countless descendants of Margaret Nairne may boast a strain of blood as heroic as any that made the olden Scotland

the scene of perilous and unforgotten deeds. Not in one generation, or in two, was quenched the stedfast light she set burning. Even when the Cause to which her life had been devoted had taken its tragic place in history among the lost Causes, one of her blood and her name⁸ sang the sad and beautiful songs that were to help to make it immortal. She had learned in suffering what another voice was to teach in song.

E. MAXTONE GRAHAM.

⁸ Carolina Oliphant, Lady Nairne, was *doubly* the great-granddaughter of Margaret Nairne.