

## II.

NOTES REGARDING A BOX WHICH WAS PRESENTED BY ALEXANDER POPE, THE POET, TO HIS SUPPOSED RELATIVE, THE REV. ALEXANDER POPE, MINISTER OF REAY, CAITHNESS-SHIRE. BY ROBERT CHAMBERS, Esq., F.S.A. SCOT.

The Rev. ALEXANDER POPE, who died minister of Reay, Caithness-shire, in 1776, was not unknown in the literary world in his own day. In the appendix to Pennant's *Tour in Scotland*, in 1769, is printed an intelligent survey of the counties of Caithness and Sutherland, by this gentleman. He also communicated to Mr Pennant a translation of the work of the learned Torfæus, containing the early history of the Orkney Islands. When Cordiner subsequently made his tour of the northern counties (1776), he visited Mr Pope at Reay, from whose conversation he acknowledges himself to have received much instruction and entertainment. In his well-known volume, *Antiquities and Scenery of the North of Scotland*, Mr Cordiner printed copious extracts from Mr Pope's translation of Torfæus.

Mr Pope left behind him at his death a reputation for ability and energy of character, which is not yet forgotten in Caithness. We learn from a late writer, as a trait of his eccentric but resolute character, that "he used to drive his graceless parishioners to church with a stick, when he found them engaged on Sunday at games out of doors. Another of his reforming experiments was making all the rough characters in his parish elders of the church, so that, invested with ecclesiastical dignity and responsibility, they might be ashamed of vicious practices."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Life of Alexander Pope, by R. Carruthers, 1853.

The same writer assures us, as a well-ascertained fact, that this simple, enthusiastic clergyman, in the summer of 1732, rode on his pony all the way from *Caithness to Twickenham*, in order to visit his namesake the poet. "The latter," it is stated, "felt his dignity a little touched by the want of pomp and circumstance with which the minister first presumed to approach his domicile; but after the ice of outward ceremony had in some degree melted, and their intellects had come into contact, the poet became interested, and a friendly feeling was established between them. Several interviews took place, and the poet presented his good friend and namesake, the minister of Reay, with a copy of the subscription edition of the *Odyssey* in five volumes quarto,—a present which was highly valued, and is still preserved."

Mr Carruthers has been good enough to communicate privately some extracts from a letter of the poet, addressed to his *Caithness* namesake, from *Twickenham*, April 28, 1738, and apparently referring to some favour which had been obtained by the latter (from the *Sutherland* family?) through the esteem in which the poet's name was held. He says, "I think you pay me more than is due to me for the accidental advantage which it seems my name has brought you." And again, "It is certain I think myself obliged to those persons who do you any service in my name, and I am always willing to correspond with you when it can be in any way beneficial to you, as you see by my speedy answer to your last. I should think it an impertinence to write my *Lady Sutherland*, or I would do so to thank her for the great distinction you tell me she shows me." The writer shows the friendly terms on which he was with his namesake, by signing himself "sincerely your well-wisher and affectionate servant."

Mr Carruthers does not seem to have been aware that the poet also presented his namesake with a handsome snuff-box, which has come into the possession of his daughter's son, *James Campbell, Esq.*, Assistant Commissary-General, now residing in *Edinburgh*. This box, which was exhibited to the Society, is of an elegant form and gilt, with a *Watteau*-like allegorical scene ornamenting the lid, and the proprietor has caused the following inscription to be carved upon it:—

"This Box, with a copy of his published works, was sent by *Alexander Pope, Esq.*, the poet, accompanied by a written note, in which he claimed a distant relationship to my grandfather (on my mother's side) the *Rev. Alexander Pope*, minister of *Reay, Thurso, Caithness*, who was himself something of a literary character. The books, so received, were, on the death of *Mrs Pope*, who survived her husband, taken away by the relatives of the family who usually attend on such occasions—and the *NOTE* also, which my elder brother distinctly recollected to have often seen and read during my grandfather's life. The loss of this lat-

ter memento of a very eminent man is to me, as now the only male representative of both father and mother's families, a source of deep regret.

*Edinburgh, April 1854.*

(Signed) "JAS. CAMPBELL,  
*Asst. Commissary-Genl.*"

Mr Campbell's report of his brother's recollection as to the relationship alluded to in the lost letter, is an interesting circumstance to future biographers of the bard of Twickenham. It is unfortunate that the evidence is so slight; but there is at least nothing in the assertion contrary to probability. There is remarkably little known with certainty regarding the paternal ancestry of the poet, beyond the fact that his father was a linen-draper of Lombard Street, who had become a convert to the Catholic religion, and realized a small competency. It is but doubtfully established, that the paternal grandfather was a clergyman in Hampshire. Pope himself stated to Lord Hervey, that his father was of a "tolerable family;" and in a note to his Epistle to Arbuthnot, he went farther, and said—"of a gentleman's family in Oxfordshire, the head of which was the Earl of Downe;" but this, we are well assured, was no more but a fond imagination. Beyond his father, indeed, or at the utmost his grandfather, he seems to have proceeded upon mere conjecture or some faint family tradition.

Thus we can readily understand that, if the Rev. Mr Pope showed him any feasible ground for the presumption of a Scottish descent, the poet had nothing to present in the way of objection. That such a presumption, connected with that of a common ancestry, did arise between these two Alexander Popes, is on the other hand rendered likely by what we know of their friendship. When we reflect on what a journey from Caithness to London was in 1732, we can scarcely suppose that the minister of Reay was without some grounds for believing that the poet represented some branch of his family, and that he was going to hold intercourse with a cousin not entirely beyond Scottish reckoning. When we reflect, moreover, on the tenacious feelings of Scotchmen, and particularly of northern Scotchmen, of that age, we must see that the counting of kin with the most brilliant poet of his age was precisely such an object as would avail with the minister of Reay, in inducing him to undertake such a journey. Viewing, further, the present of books and of the snuff-box, and the evidence of something beyond a common friendly civility in the letter possessed by Mr Carruthers, it must be admitted that the statement from the recollection of Mr James Campbell's brother is not without some support.

For additional light on this obscure subject we may reasonably look to the domestic annals of the northern part of our island. What traces of Popes have we in the north, prior to the time of the Lombard Street linen-draper? It

clearly appears from Sir Robert Gordon's *History of the House of Sutherland*, that there was a race of this rare name in Ross and Sutherland shires so early as 1585. Sir Robert gives a curious anecdote of a trio of brothers Pape (for such was the old Scotch form of the name, and pronounced *Paup*), whom he must have known personally. A Mr William Pape, he tells us, "a reasonable good scholar, and of a quick and ready wit," came out of Ross, about 1585, and settled at Dornoch in Sutherland, where he first acted as schoolmaster, then as minister, becoming finally "chanter" of the cathedral. This man acquired considerable property, and by-and-bye introduced his two brothers into the same town, one of whom, Thomas, became chancellor of Caithness and minister of Rogart, while the other, Charles, was a notary and messenger-at-arms. The prosperous career of the brothers was interrupted, in 1607, by a squabble with some violent men of the town, which terminated in the slaughter of Charles; after which William retired to the parochial charge of Nigg in Ross-shire, and Thomas also ceased to live at Dornoch. Sir Robert speaks of these men as having been too much puffed up with worldly prosperity, and seems rather to have relished the decline of their fortunes. He tells, however, nothing of them which denotes their being more than men of unusual energy and success in worldly matters. One cannot help thinking that it was precisely from such a family that some stray offshoot might most likely have gone forth and found his way southward even to the mighty Babylon itself. The grandfather of the Lombard Street linen-draper, in short, may have been a Pope from Ross-shire, and some faint echo of the fact might be brought into shape between the two Alexander Popes when they met at Twickenham in 1732.

A genealogical tree, now shown, exhibits the whole array of the descendants of the father of the Rev. Alexander Pope, namely, the Rev. Hector, minister of Loth in Sutherlandshire, of whom it is recorded by Mr Carruthers, that he continued till his death, in 1719, to wear the prelatical surplice, having been, we may presume, a minister under the Episcopal establishment before the Revolution, —a point of character which accords well with the supposition of his descent from either the chantor or the chancellor of the Caithness cathedral. Respecting the intermediate generations we may hope to hear something by-and-bye from the local antiquaries of the north.