

IV.

THE GORDONS OF CRAIG. BY JOHN MALCOLM BULLOCH, M.A., LL.D., F.S.A. SCOT.

The history of the Gordons of Craig is typical of many of the older Gordon families in Aberdeenshire, displaying over a period of nearly four hundred years the usual characteristics of great expansion and migration, followed by territorial contraction, and ultimately by extinction, not only as landowners, but in the male line.

Their early position answers very well to the theory that the key to the history of the Aberdeenshire Gordons lay in this—that while the heiress of the house, Elizabeth Gordon, who married Alexander Seton and thereby founded the ducal and marquissate lines, was established at Strathbogie, she was defended on the south in Rhynie by her cousin, “Jock of Scurdargue,” the handfasted son of her uncle, Sir John Gordon, and on the north in Ruthven by Jock’s brother, “Tam of Rivven.” That is to say, Jock and Tam, by founding families, formed defences for her on the south and on the north, their descendants gradually making an encircling ring round the heiress.

This theory seems at first sight to break down by the fact that all Jock’s four sons found habitats outwith Rhynie. The eldest son, Alexander, moved westwards into Banffshire; the second son, John, and the third son, William, settled respectively at Botarie and Tillytarmont in Cairnie, beside their uncle Tam; while the fourth son, James,

went due east to Haddo, becoming the ancestor of the Marquis of Aberdeen. But William's second son, Patrick, ultimately moved immediately southwards to the parish of Auchindoir and founded the Gordons of Craig.

From that point the history of the Craig Gordons is one of constant migration—in turn to Clatt; Drumblade; as far south as Aboyne in the shape of the Gordons of Tilphoudie; then eastwards to Daviot and Inverurie; while last of all we find them in Banchory Devenick. Not one of the many estates they held is owned by any Gordons to-day, and in most cases the male line has failed. This is notably the case with the Gordons of Craig, who sold that holding in 1892, while the male line petered out in 1857. The last woman laird was burned to death with one of her daughters at Nice in 1863, and another daughter committed bigamy and was divorced.

The career of the Craig family is not so romantic or exciting as that of many other branches of the huge house; it is not, for example, to be compared with the Gordons of Gight. There was, it is true, a dabbling with rebellious enterprises for over a hundred years, between 1592, when the third laird took part in the Donibristle affair, and 1716, when the seventh laird died of wounds sustained at Sherrifmuir.

This was balanced by more than a century (1753-1857) of lawyership, during most of which time three successive lairds were sheriff-clerks of the county. But the family had an unusual amount of pride in its pedigree, represented by its frequent appearance in genealogical literature. It is dealt with in the Balbithan MS., in the Harperfield Tables, and in the Prony MS. It was tackled, in his rather ramshackle way, by Captain Douglas Wimberley in his *Memorials of the Family of Gordon of Craig* (1904, 8vo, p. 55), which goes wrong in the female succession towards the end. Indeed, Captain Wimberley's interest in Gordon family history was aroused by the last male heir, Francis Gordon, XII. of Craig (1773-1857), who showed him the Harperfield Tables, and that led him to investigate other branches of the family, notably the Lesmoir group, which formed the second volume of the *House of Gordon*.

The accompanying table shows at a glance how the succession to Craig ran.

The first laird of Craig, Patrick Gordon, son of William Gordon of Tillytarmont, and grandson of Jock of Scurdargue, seems to have wandered about before finally settling down at Craig. He is sometimes designated "in Fulzemont"; also "in Durnach" (Durno); and he was "in Johnsleys" (Insch) at least as early as 1504. In 1510 he got the lands of Auchindoir, Fulzemont, and Crawok (now Craik, west of Craig Castle) from Sir Alexander Irvine of Drum, whose family had them from

Alexander Stewart, Earl of Mar, soon after Harlaw. According to the Balbithan MS., Patrick, who married a Barclay of Towie Barclay and who is supposed to have built the Castle of Craig, fell at Flodden; but he seems to have been alive in 1519.

How he got the means to do so I do not know, but he planted out his family very well. His eldest son, William, succeeded him as II. of Craig. The second son, Patrick, had Auchmenzie in Clatt, and was the ancestor of the Gordons of Tilphoudie. This branch was also very much interested in its origins, although it is summarily dismissed by the Balbithan MS. with a mere reference to its "cadents," the Gordons of Kinraigie, Balgown, Buntly, Collithie, Drumgask, Pot, and Cults, about whom the Balbithan compiler confesses he knew nothing. The gap is filled up by John Gordon, the last laird of Tilphoudie, who wrote a history of his family in 1712, ten years before his death. The curious (and misleading) Tilphoudie MS. has never been printed, but taking it as a rather picturesque basis, I have compiled a history of the family, which is still in manuscript. The family lost the estate to the Earls of Aboyne in the seventeenth century, but went on being called "of Tilphoudie," though it ended in an Aberdeen shoemaker, Francis Gordon (1714-77), a strong Jacobite, whose son James, an Aberdeen goldsmith (1740-1810), ended the entire line.

The first laird of Craig's youngest son, George Gordon of Milton of Noth, founded the Gordons of Coclarachie, who have also been fully described by genealogists as follows, arranged in the chronological order of their accession of property:

Coclarachie (Drumblade).—Acquired in 1587 by George, son of Patrick Gordon, I. of Craig; held till 1767, when it was sold to the Duke of Gordon. Male line extinct 1779 (*House of Gordon*, by the Rev. Stephen Ree, vol. i. pp. (119)-(132), (150)-(164)).

Auchintoul (Marnoch).—Acquired in 1646 by George, son of George Gordon, IV. of Coclarachie; sold 1798 to John Morison of Bognie. Male line, which included General Sir Alexander Gordon, the biographer of Peter the Great, extinct 1768 (*House of Gordon*, by Rev. Stephen Ree, vol. i. pp. (133)-(142); also *The Gordons of Auchintoul*, by J. M. Bulloch, in the *Huntly Express*, February 12, 1909).

Ardmeallie (Marnoch).—Held from 1672 by James Gordon, son of George, IV. of Coclarachie; sold about 1791 to John Morison of Bognie. Male line extinct 1791 (*House of Gordon*, by Rev. Stephen Ree, vol. i. pp. (143)-(149)).

Logie (Crimond).—Acquired between 1696 and 1708 by James, I. of Ardmeallie (*q.v.*), and sold for debt to Robert Duff of Fetteresso. Male line extinct 1803 in Alexander Gordon, army surgeon, father of Lady Bannerman, who was Carlyle's Blumine. Described by J. M. Bulloch in *Carlyle's First Love*, in the *Huntly Express*, December 3, 17, 31, 1909; January 7, 28, 1910.

Banchory Devenick.—Acquired in 1724 by James Gordon, son of

James, I. of Ardmeallie, and grandson of George, IV. of Coclarachie (*q.v.*). Sold by him in 1743 to Alexander Thomson. Banchory Devenick had been connected with a younger branch of the family before this, for James Gordon (died 1714), nephew of George, IV. of Coclarachie, was the famous "Parson of Banchory," whose son, grandson, and great-grandson were connected with the town of Montrose. Described by J. M. Bulloch in *A Notable Drumblade Family*, in the *Huntly Express*, January 8, 15, 22, 29; February 5, 1909.

Premnay.—Acquired by Thomas Gordon, only son of James, I. of Banchory Devenick (*q.v.*). He also bought Sheelagreen (Culsalmond) and Heathcot (Maryculter); *d.s.p.* 1819. Described by J. M. Bulloch in *An Aberdeenshire Laird on Sea-Power: A Dreadnoughter of 1779*, in the *Aberdeen Free Press*, August 30, 1910. Thomas's half-brother by his mother's second husband was John Gordon of Murtle (1757-1819), founder of the Murtle Lectures in Aberdeen University.

William, II. of Craig, who married a Stuart of Laithers and died before 1559, was predeceased by his elder son, Patrick, who was killed at Pinkie. His second son, James, settled at Tillyangus in Clatt, and is dealt with in Wimberley's *Memorials* of the Craig family (pp. 45-55). The Tillyangus family seems to have petered out in the seventeenth century. The Balbithan MS. tells us it became represented in James Gordon, "now of Cairnbrogie," Tarves, alive in 1731, about whom nothing is known.

Patrick, yr. of Craig, killed (*v.p.*) at Pinkie, married a Leslie of Wardes, and had two sons—William, III. of Craig, and John, who got Drimmies (Inverurie), though he founded no family.

William Gordon, III. of Craig, who married a Cheyne of Straloch, succeeded his grandfather. He was implicated in the murder of the bonnie Earl of Moray at Donibristle, and died about 1608. For the next two centuries the family, as I have said, dabbled in several of those rebellious enterprises which impoverished or absolutely ruined so many branches of the house.

John Gordon, IV. of Craig, son of the third laird, became still further mixed up with the policy of the Huntly family, and as a strong Roman Catholic got into serious trouble, being excommunicated. He, too, like the founder of his house, married a Barclay of Towie. He seems to have died in the thick of the troubles of his time in 1634.

His son and namesake, John Gordon, V. of Craig, got into deeper waters still with the Church, perhaps because he reinforced his Gordon strain, for he married Jean Gordon, who was a daughter of Sir James Gordon of Lesmoir and widow of George Gordon, fiar of Coclarachie. He and his consort had to betake themselves to France, whither, Spalding tells us, he "schippit" in February 1643 with "four scoir soldiouris." He served in the regiment of James

Campbell, Earl of Irvine—son of the seventh Earl of Argyll—who distinguished himself in the French military service against Spain. Father Gilbert Blakhal met the laird of Craig and “his ladye” in Paris, as you will find furtively described in the *Breiffe Narration* (pp. 11-12, 14). They were then lodging at the sign of the Golden Fleur de Lys, in the great rue of St Jacques Faubourg. It was this laird who was apostrophied in Latin by Arthur Johnston: “Why, O Gordon, hide away from town a prisoner among Cabrach heather, among rocks and dens?” He remained a permanent sort of prisoner in France, where he died about 1644. It is not in the least surprising to learn, as we do from the Tilphoudie MS., that he was “brought low in condition by the Civil war and other misfortunes.” During this period his kinsman, George Gordon, VII. of Tilphoudie (1589-1654), “managed Craig’s fortune to the best account, took up his rents, paid his debts, kept fair terms with creditors, not to let the expenses increase, for the space of twenty years, and craved nothing for his trouble but his moderate expenses.” It was indeed a case of the blind leading the blind, for Tilphoudie ruined himself, and his son had to part with the family estates, although they still remained in Gordon hands, being absorbed by the Earl of Aboyne.

Francis Gordon, VI. of Craig, the only son of the fifth laird, was born and bred in France, and his Roman Catholicism must have been accentuated by his (first) marriage into the strong Roman Catholic family of Menzies of Pitfodels. When he returned home about 1649 he continued his “popery,” but with a little persuasion he gave in, and in May 1650 his parish minister was able to tell the Presbytery of Strathbogie that he was “keeping the kirk.” It is not in the least surprising that he was hard up, losing for a time at least several portions of his estates, notably Johnsleys, Ardglennie, Drimmies, and Diracroft.

Beyond various accounts of wadsets on his estates we know nothing about him. He lingered on till July 1686, when he was buried in the Snow Kirkyard in Old Aberdeen, the magistrates attending his funeral. The “buriall of old Craige” was attended by Patrick Gordon, of Auchleuchries, Peter the Great’s famous general, who was home at the time on one of his periodical visits from Russia. He was not overwhelmed with grief, for he tells us that after the ceremony “wee went to the master of the musick schoole his house and with excellent musick and many friends were very merry.”

Francis Gordon, VII. of Craig, only son of the sixth laird, had not learned his lesson, for he joined the Jacobites in 1715 and marched with the Earl of Mar to Sherrifmuir, where he was wounded and captured,

dying of his wounds at Stirling in 1716. He had married into a Royalist family, for his wife, Agnes Ogilvy (born 1651), was a daughter of the second Lord Banff, who fought and escaped from the battle of Worcester.

Francis Gordon, VIII. of Craig, succeeded his father, the seventh laird, at the age of thirty-five, and inaugurated a peaceable spell of life for the family. Little is known about him except that he married three times—first, a Barclay of Towie, widow of John Gordon of Rothiemay; secondly, his cousin, a Forbes of Balfluig; and thirdly, a Campbell of Lundie, widow of Patrick Russell of Montcoffer. He died “in England” in 1727. One of his sons went to Russia, where he died, though whether with “succession” is unknown.

John Gordon, IX. of Craig, eldest son of the eighth laird, not only settled down doucely like his father, but he took a definite step towards prosperity. He did not join the '15, and his prudent widow, Ann Reid of Haughton, who had previously been married to James Gordon of Auchlyne (died 1729), saw that all her three boys took service under the Crown. The eldest, John, became sheriff-clerk of the county. His second son, George, was in the Navy, dying in India in 1758. The third son, Francis, was an officer in the 88th Foot, who settled at Lumphart in Daviot, the succession to the Craig estates ultimately falling to his descendants. The only sister of those sons married John Brown, the minister of Newhills. The ninth laird, like his father, died away from home—at Leith, in 1740.

John Gordon, X. of Craig, succeeded his father, the ninth laird, at the age of nine. He was educated at Marischal College, and was the first of the lairds of Craig to adopt a definite profession, becoming an advocate in Aberdeen in 1753. He was apprenticed sheriff-clerk of the county in 1764, and this post was held by him and his successors continuously for ninety-three years. He married first his distant kinswoman, Anne Gordon of the Banchory Devenick family, and secondly a Cumming of Kininmonth, and died in 1800.

James Gordon, XI. of Craig, like his father, the tenth laird, also took to the law and became a member of the Scots Bar. Lord Cockburn had a great and, as some think, an unjustified contempt for him, describing him in 1847 as “the only Aberdonian I ever knew at the Bar who had not one particle of granite in his head or his discourse—all splutter, and froth and declamation.” Five years later he dismisses him as the “most splutteratiuous of orators.” He succeeded his father as sheriff-clerk in 1800, and held the post for fifty-two years. He is the only member of his house who ever took to authorship, for in 1828 he published a small pamphlet, *A Few Notes on the Proposed New Entail Law of Scotland*, by “A Freeholder of Aberdeenshire.” He improved his

estate and beautified his lands by afforestation. He married Elizabeth Johnstone (1776-1852), of the Alva family, whose nephew, Charles Kinnaird Johnstone, married the niece of the eleventh laird, and died without issue in 1852.

James Gordon entailed his estate on 22nd May 1822—it was registered in the Books of Council and Session 6th April 1829—reserving the right to alter it. During the next quarter of a century he changed his mind about the succession no fewer than five times—on 10th July 1826; 4th January 1831; 4th April 1833; 18th February 1839; and last of all, in holograph, on 11th December 1847, five years before his death. The changes were probably conditioned by his relations falling out of favour with him. The final succession ran as follows:—

1. To himself in fee and the heirs whatsoever of his body.
2. To his brother, Francis Gordon of Kincardine.
3. To his niece, Elizabeth Shepherd Gordon, daughter of Francis Gordon, and wife of Captain Charles Kinnaird Johnstone and the heirs male of her body. In the 1839 alteration the destination was to the heirs whatsoever of her body.
4. To James Francis Shirrefs, lawful son of his second cousin, Major Alexander Shirrefs, and the heirs male of his body, this being the first mention of this heir in any of the entails.
5. To the aforesaid Captain Charles Kinnaird Johnstone and his heirs male or female by Elizabeth Shepherd Gordon.
6. To John Gordon of Cairnfield and his heirs male.
7. To Robert Grant of Craighall and Druminor and his heirs male.
8. To the Rev. Robert Abercromby Johnstone (seventh son of James Johnstone of Alva and nephew of the entailer's wife) and his heirs male.
9. To Francis William Johnstone, 27th Foot, brother of No. 8.
10. To the second son of Captain James Elphinstone Dalrymple of Westhall and his heirs male.
11. To the nearest heirs and assignees of Elizabeth Shepherd Gordon or Johnstone.

In the previous forms of the entail he had sometimes mentioned fifteen heirs, including members of the families of the Gordons of Avochie, Cairnbulg, Overhall, Pitlurg, and Rothney, and also the families of Foulerton, Dunlop, and Leith. In the first four entails he had mentioned after his brother Francis, their sister Anne (died 1850), wife of the Rev. George Brown (1754-1818), parish minister of Glenmuick.

Anne, who married in 1803, was the second wife of the Rev. George Brown, whose first wife was her first cousin, Elizabeth Brown, daughter

of the Rev. John Brown, of Newhills, by his wife, Barbara Gordon (1726-98), daughter of John Gordon, X. of Craig.

Francis Gordon, XII. of Craig, was eighty years of age when he succeeded his brother, the eleventh laird, in 1852. He got a commission as a boy of twelve as an ensign in the 68th Foot, but exchanged a few months later to the 16th Foot, "on account of ill-health," drawing half-pay for the rest of his life, a spell of seventy-two years. He became an Aberdeen advocate, deputising as sheriff-clerk for his brother James. "He probably indentured a larger number of apprentices than any other advocate, and made the transaction a remunerative one." He bought the estate of Kincardine O'Neil from the Douglasses of Tilquihilly about 1817, and resided there mostly till his succession to Craig on the death of his brother. He married a Gordon of Rosieburn, and had two sons and three daughters. The elder son, John, predeceased him, dying young, while the second, James, was mentally incapacitated, and died at the Manse of Abernethy in 1871—the last male member of his house, which had lasted as lairds of Craig for 361 years. In view of James's condition the estate was propelled to his only surviving sister, the other two having died young. Their father, Francis, died in January 1857 at the age of eighty-four, and was succeeded by his daughter, Elizabeth Shepherd Gordon, XIII. of Craig. She had married in 1837 Charles Kinnaird Johnstone of the Alva family, who was a nephew of her aunt, Mrs James Gordon, and who assumed the additional name of Gordon. She and her eighteen-year-old daughter Mary were burned to death at Nice in June 1863. They had been at a ball given to the King of Bavaria, and on coming home the girl's dress caught fire. She rushed to her mother's room in flames and was fearfully burned, dying on 16th June from shock. The flames set her mother on fire, and she died four days later; while the father, in trying to rescue both, was burned about the legs. He died six years later (1869) at Pau.

Mrs Johnstone Gordon was not succeeded in Craig by her three daughters, for the entail extended only to her sons, who predeceased her. But she left the estate of Kincardine O'Neil to the eldest girl, Elizabeth Isabella, who had married in 1857 Hugh Scott of Gala (1822-77). This lady also had an unfortunate experience in France. While staying with her husband at Avranches, she left him and went by herself to reside on a property at Maderia, which she had inherited. Shortly afterwards she went to England, and in June 1876 went through a marriage ceremony in London with a Frenchman known as Baron Bellet. The pair lived for several days in an hotel at Carlisle as the Baron and Baroness Gordon, and actually spent part of the

summer at Kincardine O'Neil, which she had inherited from her mother. On 6th December 1877 she was divorced by her husband, who died three days later.

The lady corresponded with me in 1905, calling herself the Baroness de Roissard Gordon. Her adventure was a strange ending to the long spell of canny lawyerdom in her family, and justified the disposition of the estate by her granduncle, James, the eleventh laird, to another branch of the family. The lady almost seemed determined to show that even in Victorian times the Gordons still possessed some of the recklessness of the past. The affair was certainly the most sensational episode in the history of the Craig family. The estate of Kincardine O'Neil went to her son, J. H. F. K. Scott of Gala, who sold it in 1893 to Mrs Henry Dawnay Umfreville Pickering (*d.* 1930), whose father was a Black of Waterlidgemuir.

Meantime the succession to Craig had passed, under the terms of her granduncle James's entail, on the death of Mrs Johnstone Gordon in 1863, to the great-grandnephew of the tenth laird. This curious jump has puzzled the genealogists, especially Captain Wimberley, who believed that the descent was through the daughter (Mrs Barbara Brown, wife of the minister of Newhills) of the ninth laird, instead of through her brother Francis (died 1788). The latter began his career in the Army as an officer in the 88th Regiment, then the Royal Highland (Campbell's) Volunteers (1760-3); it was revived in 1779 as the 88th Foot, and became the first battalion of the Connaught Rangers. He spent three years in the regiment and then retired, settling at the Mill of Lumphart in Daviot. How he came to settle there is a mystery, and the name of his wife is unknown. But his daughter Anne married (in 1796) an Aberdeen advocate, Alexander Shirrefs (1760-1823). Shirrefs had a son, Alexander (1801-76), who started life as a law apprentice in Aberdeen and then entered the Madras Army, retiring as colonel in 1854. He lived at Torryburn, Kintore, and it was his son, James Francis Gordon Shirrefs, who succeeded in 1863 to Craig as fourteenth laird on the tragic death of Mrs Johnstone Gordon, adding the name of Gordon to his patronymic of Shirrefs. Like his father, he had been in the Madras Army, but retired on succeeding to Craig. Colonel Shirrefs Gordon got two other estates, Blairmormond and Knowsie, through his marriage with Barbara Smith (1840-92), who was the adopted daughter of Shirrie Lumsden Shirrefs (1798-1870), who was the daughter of George Lumsden Shirrefs of Blairmormond.

Colonel Shirrefs Gordon and his wife had six sons and eight daughters. He sold Craig in 1892 to William Penny Craik, and died

suddenly at Cheltenham on 26th June 1893. The estates of Blairmormond and Knowsie went to the fourth son, John Lumsden Shirrefs Gordon (born 1867), who sold them in 1898, so that all the landed property of the Craig Gordons vanished.

It may be noted that another estate of Craig, in Balmaclellan, in the parish of Holm, Kirkcudbright, was also held by a family of Gordon, who first appear in 1634, but like the northern group they too have vanished.
