

HISTORY OF THE CLAN NEISH OR MACNISH.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN OF THE NAME—NES, SON OF WILLIAM, LORD OF LEUCHARS
—ORABLE, DAUGHTER OF NES OF LEUCHARS—ANGUS MACNATH
OF STRATHEARN.

NEISH and Nish are the modern forms of the Early Irish "Naoise," famous as the name of the son of Usnech, with whom Deirdre eloped. The original form Naoise, or Mac-Naoise, is recorded as late as 1652 in Scotland.

Dr A. MacBain, a great authority, gave MacNish—Gaelic, MacNeis—from MacNaois, the Naois being a dialectic form of Aonghus or Angus. The connection of Naois with

Aonghus, however, appears to be very doubtful. Professor W. J. Watson agrees that Aonghus did not become Naoise in Gaelic at any time.

MacAonghuis and MacNaois(e) are, however, apt to be confused in anglicised forms (1).

The Nish Isle in Loch Earn is in Gaelic "Eilean an Naoisich"; a man of the Nish clan or sept was called "Naoiseach," just as a MacDonald is "Domhnallach," &c. Possibly the Isle was a stronghold of the chief, who would be "an Naoiseach" par excellence (1).

Nesse, Nessius, &c., of the early records may well be for Naoise; the fact that the Latin form is Nessius so often goes to show that the Gaelic form ended in e (1).

Naoise appears in Mid-Irish as Noise and Naise; in Early Irish as Noisiu.

The personal name Ness, Nisse, Nisi, Nissi, or Neise, occurs not infrequently in Early Irish literature and genealogy.

Domangart MacNisi died in A.D. 466. MacNisse, who died in 506 or 513, was the first bishop and founder of Connor.

Domangart, third King of the Dalriadic Scots, who died *circa* 510, was the son of Fergus Mor MacNisse. MacNissi, abbot of Cluain-mic-Nois, died in 590. Clonmacnoise, the Irish form of which is generally written Cluain-mic-U-Nois, "the meadow of the son of Nois's descendant" (2).

Nissi was occasionally equated with Aonghus in Early Irish literature. 'Chronicum Scotorum' gives "MacCnissi"—*i.e.*, Aengus, Bishop of Connor, whose father was called Fobrach and whose mother was Cnes, daughter of Comarde of the Dal Ceithire, from whom he was named MacCnisi. Nes or Neasa was apparently also a feminine name, and not connected with Aonghus.

Neasa, daughter of Eochaidh Salbhuidhe of Connaught, and mother of Conchubhar MacNeasa (3). This takes the form Ness elsewhere. MacNeise, the first name of St Caomhan, a disciple of St Partick (3). The following occur in the 'Leabhar Breac': Ness and MacCarthaind from Cill Nessi; Sinech and mac Nisse and Ethni from the cell of

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Ross; Colman Brecc mac Nisse maic Nemedan; Cellan and Garban, the two sons of Ness.

Nessan is a derivative of Ness. It occurs in Adamnan's 'Life of St Columba' as the name of a peasant near the loch called by Adamnan "Stagnum Aporum"—*i.e.*, Lochaber. It also occurs as an Irish personal name. St Neasan, "the leper," Patron of Mungairid, died *circa* 551 (3). Inis-mac-Nesan (A.D. 701), the Island of the sons of Nesan; the old name of Ireland's Eye, near Howth, Co. Dublin (3).

Re the etymology of the Inverness river name Ness: The name Ness appears in Adamnan's 'Life of St Columba' as Nesa. The word must be referred to an original form *nesta* according to Celtic philological laws, and this Dr Whitley Stokes has equated with the Sanscrit word "nadi," signifying river.

We may compare Nessa, the mother of the great mythic King of Ulster, he being Conchobar MacNessa (4).

The Scottish surname MacNaught is by most authorities derived from MacNeachd, son

of the pure one. It is, however, significant that Neachd or Necht does not appear as a personal name in early Irish and Scottish records. The earliest forms of the Kirkcudbrightshire surname MacNaught are Macenaght, Macnacht, Macnath, and Macnaicht. Compare the following early forms of Neish and MacNeish in Perth, Angus, and Fife: Nete (1500), Makniche (1590), Makneth (1491), Naiche (1529), Nethe (1501), Nece (1465), Neitche (1530), Neiche (1541), Nече (1560).

It would appear from the above that MacNaught is also derived from MacNes or MacNeische (*circa* 1500).

Nes or Nesie survived as a Christian name in Scotland until the year 1602, and possibly later.

That there was a saint called Ness in Scotland appears from "Clach mo Neasaig," on the shore near Taynuilt.

The modern Gaelic pronunciation of Nish, which, of course, is of great and practically decisive importance, is strongly in favour of

connecting with the ancient name Naoise. I have good reason to believe that this was Dr MacBain's final opinion also, and that if he had lived to correct the second edition of his Dictionary, he would have altered the statement that Naois is from Aonghuis (1).

The personal name Malsnacht occurred in 1230 in Strathearn, in the area that was the centre of the Neish or MacNeish country. Some authorities derive Malsnecht from Mael-snechta, "Servant of Snow." We find, however, that Maol-nechtan (son of Lulach, Maormor of Mureve) appears as Maolsnechtan in the 'Annals of Ulster' *circa* 1085. Finechta also appears as Finsnechta in the 'Annals of Ulster.' Finsnechta or Finnachta, King of Ireland, slain in 694 (2). Apparently Malsnecht is a form of Mael-necht or Mael-neischt(nes).

The etymology of a similar but quite distinct clan name of Perthshire is as follows: Naughton (modern Gaelic, Neachdan; Irish, Nechtan) represents an early Nectagnos, sprung from Nectos. Here "a" is the form taken by the

stem vowel (which is really "o"); "gn" is contracted from "gen," "sprung from" (compare Dio-gen-es, &c., in Greek). In Old Irish "agnos" appears as "an," and was used as a diminutive ending, but in ancient personal names, such as Nechtan, the force of "an" is not diminutive; these names were formed when the original force of "agnos" was still active (1).

Mael, of course, originally meant "cropped, tonsured," and was applied to persons who were in a servile position (the nobles of the Gael wore their hair long); hence it was naturally applied to clerics, who were "servi Dei," not, of course, as a term of dishonour any more. But in many cases mael appears to be used very much as gille was used, without any notion of service (1).

The personal or Christian name Nes appears occasionally on record in Scotland, from the fifth to the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Domhangard, third King of the Dalriadic race in Alba, was the son of Feargus Mor, son of

Erc (Pictish, Erp). In the 'Annals of Ulster,' Domangart is called the son of Fergus Mor MacNisse; Nisse or Nessa was the mother of Fergus. Apparently the first Bishop of Connor was Aengus, the son of Nes or Nessa, the wife of Fobrach. It was not unusual for the ancient Gaels to be named after their mother. Mureheard, the King of Ireland, was called Mac-Erca, from his mother. The Christian name Nes was used by the Ramsays of Bamff (Alyth); "Nessus medicus noster," the King's physician, was granted a charter of the lands of Bamff by Alexander II. on the 9th October 1232. Nessus was a descendant of Simon de Ramsay, the first of the surname on record in Scotland, who received a grant of lands in Mid-Lothian from David II. *circa* 1130. In the Ramsay charters Nes appears in the Latin as Nessus, Nesius, Neisius, and Neso, and in the vernacular is found as Nes, Neis, Nesse, Nees, and Nece. Neis is the autograph of the last Ramsay of Bamff of that name, who succeeded in 1507.

There were several members of the Lundres family in Haddingtonshire during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries bearing the name of Nes.

Robert de Lundres (or London) was a natural son of King William (5). This Robert married the heiress of the House of Lundin of Lundin, and assumed the surname of Lundin, and from him the family of Lundin of Lundin were afterwards descended (6).

The Haddington family was variously described as "de Lundres, London, Lindores, Londres, and Lundref" (7).

Nesio, filio Nesii, witness to Carta No. 75 *circa* 1180. Nesii, filii Johis de Lundres (Carta 107). Carta Nesius de Londres (Nesii de London) No. 108. Nesii, filii Nesii, Carta *re* lands of Hartburn (No. 109). Nes, son of Nes, Carta No. 110. Confirmaco Nesii de Lundref *re* lands of Pouhou and Hartburn (No. 112). Oliver Nesius and William de Graham perambulated the lands of Haddington and Elbotle (No. 119), see 'Registrum S. Marie Newbotle.'

The personal name Nesse appears on record in Perthshire, the cradle of the clan of Neish, as early as the eleventh century.

Nesse, Cormac, son of Macbeath, and Malnethte, son of Beollani, members of the religious house of Abernethy, were witnesses to a grant by Ethelred, son of King Malcolm III., to the Keledei of Loch Leven *circa* 1093-1197 (8). Beollan is the Early Irish Beollain, now anglicised Boland in Ireland. O'Bealan was the patronymic or Gaelic name of the old Earls of Ross *circa* 1000. A powerful chief in the north of Scotland named Beolan married the daughter of Ganga Rolfe (or Rollo), the celebrated pirate, who became afterwards the first Earl of Normandy (Norse Saga). Hrolf, or Rollo, became Duke of Normandy in 912.

Beollan, son of Ciarmhac (Cormac), King of Loch Gabhar (Co. Meath?), died in 967-8 ('Chron. Scot.').

Malnethte and the Fifeshire Malfnacht form is probably for Mael-necht, which is probably a form of Mael-Nesse.

In 1160 Ness, son of the Countess Ada, and Robert de Quinci were witnesses to the charter of King Malcolm granting the lands and barony of Strathbran to Duncan, Earl of Fife, who had married Ada, a neice of King Malcolm IV. (9).

Malfnacht or Malfnath was a tenant of lands in Fife granted to St Andrews about the year 1200 (8).

It is probable that the Neishes and MacNishes of Scotland are descended from Ness, son of William, who was Sheriff of Perth and Lord of Leuchars. Ness left at least three sons at the period when surnames were becoming fixed among the Gaelic landowners of the Highland border and Fife.

It is evident that Nes, son of William, was a magnate, for the charters mention his Pincerna (cup-bearer), Seneschal, and Chamberlain. Most of the Royal charters he witnessed were dated in Fife or Perth, and the charter of King Malcolm (Dunfermline, p. 25) indicates that he was an official in Fife *circa* 1160, but the Royal

charters witnessed elsewhere are sufficient to show that he occasionally accompanied the King (10).

Nes, son of William, Lord of Leuchars (Fife), a witness to many charters of Malcolm IV. and King William before 1170 (10).

Neis, son of Chiluni (Chilunus), was a witness to the charter by Thor of the church of Tranent to the Abbey of Holyrood ('Chart. Holyrood,' No. 11) *circa* 1155. Chilun appears to be a clerical error for William.

Nesio, filio Willelmi, was a witness to the charter of Moregrundi (Morgan), Earl of Mar, of the church and lands of Tarland to the Priory of St Andrews *circa* 1165-1171 (8).

About the year 1170 Nessio, filii Willelmi, was a witness to a charter (No. 216) by Simon, son of Macbeth, granting to the canons of the church of St Mary of Cambuskenneth (after the decease of Hugh of Rokesburg, the Chancellor's clerk) the church of Tullibody, in free and perpetual alms, &c. Given at Stirling ('Reg. Mary de Cambuskenneth').

The lands of Collessie, the woods of Kyndeloch, and the Moor of Eden, probably came into the hands of the De Quincys in the same manner as the lands of Leuchars (5, p. 276).

Nesio, filio Willelmi, was a witness to Carta 12 of the Prioratus Insule de May, at Perth, during the reign of William the Lion.

Nees, Neisus, Nes, or Nessius appears as a witness to many charters of St Andrews during the latter part of the twelfth century.

In August 1175, William, King of Scotland, went to York to do allegiance and fealty to Henry, King of England. King William had been captured by the English at Alnwick in 1174.

The King of Scotland delivered up to King Henry, his brother David as hostage, with Earl Duncan (of Fife), Earl Waldeve (of Dunbar), Earl Gilbert, the Earl of Angus, Richard de Moreville the Constable, Nes, son of William, and other nobles (11).

Neis, son of William (Latin—Nesso, filio

Vilielmi), witnessed some charters of Cupar-Angus Abbey between the years 1175-1185.

King William granted a charter to Gilbert, Earl of Stradherne, of the lands of Vre (now Meikleour) and Lethendin (Lethendy), by the marches which Nes, son of William, Galfrid de Malvil (Melville), and another perambulated it for Malice, brother of the said Earl (5).

Nessio, filio Willelmi Lineth, vice-comite de Pert (Perth), was a witness to Carta No. 5 of Scone Abbey, in the reign of King Malcolm, at Stirling (12). William Lineth was no doubt the William de Lene who was a benefactor of Scone (12). Two percatas of land in Perth was granted by William, son of Lean, to the monks of Cupar Abbey during the reign of William the Lion (1163-1214). He appears as Willielmo, filio Lene, in Carta No. 21 of Cupar Abbey. This grant was confirmed by Alexander II., at Scone, on the 17th March 1235-6.

Several persons bearing the name of Lene or Lenna are mentioned in the early Drummond Castle charters.

Lene, the father of William, was probably connected with the Lennies of Lennie. The lands of Leny are situated 2 miles north-west of Callander, near Loch Lubnaig. Gillespie Lenny, *circa* 1200, held the lands of Lennie by virtue of a small sword which King Culen (965-70) gave as a symbol to Gillespie Mor, his ancestor, for a particular service.

Allan, the second son of the first Sir Maurice Buchanan (*circa* 1300), married Margaret, heiress of Gillespie Leny of that ilk.

According to a family manuscript pedigree, quoted in Buchanan of Auchmar's account of the Leny branch of the Buchanans, the early proprietors of the estate of Leny had no charters, but carefully preserved a large sword, and one of the teeth of St Fillan, the possession of which was held to be a sufficient title to the lands.

Between 1180 and 1200 Nessyo, fil Willi, was a witness to charters Nos. 4 and 10 of the Abbey of Arbroath *re* lands in Angus and Perth (13). About the year 1200 a "Charter by Seher de Quinci, Earl of Winton, with the

consent of his son, Robert, granting to the church of St Mary of Stirling and the canons thereof, for the welfare of the souls of William, King of Scots, and of his ancestors and successors, the whole land of Duglyn, by the same marches by which Nesus, the son of William, his grandfather, possessed it; to be held of the said Seher and his heirs in free and perpetual alms, as freely as any alms was held by any religious persons in the realm of Scotland. The granter warranting the said land against Duncan, the son of Hamelin, and against all men." Carta 70 (14).

In Carta 73 we find that Duncan, son of Hamelin, and Adam his heir had resigned for himself, to the Earl, in his full court at Locres, all right which they had or could have in the land of Duglyn, and delivered up to him all the charters which he had thereof (14). Duglyn is probably the old name of the lands in the parish of Arngask, now known as Glen Deuglie and Wester Deuglie.

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Hamelin or Hamlin is a form of Gaelic,

“Amalghaidh”; Irish, Amalgaid, pronounced Aulay. It appears in the old Lennox charters as Aulay, Aulech, Auleth, Amelech, Amhlew, Hameleu, Hamelyn, Havel, and Amelic.

Very little is known about the children of Nes, son of William; the records show that he left at least three sons and a daughter.

The daughter, Orable, married Robert de Quinci, and the greater part of the lands of Nes appear to have passed into the hands of De Quinci with this marriage.

The eldest son of Nes was probably Constantine, who appears as Constant, filius Nesse, in several charters of St Andrews Priory.

Patrick, son of Nes, was a witness to several St Andrews charters with Constant and Math, the sons of Nes; his name appears in Latin as “Patcio, fil Nesii,” and Patricius, fil Nes.

At this period, the early thirteenth century, Gaelic was still the common language of Fife and Strathearn, and Patrick, as well as the other sons of Nesse, would have been known as MacNesses or MacNeises by the native Scots.

It is very probable that Patrick, son of Nes of Leuchars, settled in Nithsdale, where we find, about the year 1210, "Patcio magillnes" as a witness to Carta 340 (Carta super ecclesiam de Killosbern) of Kelso Abbey, with other men of Dumfriesshire ('Liber de Calchou').

Killosbern is now known as Closeburn, where in later years we find many records of MacNeishes and MacNachts.

Roger de Quinci, son of Robert de Quinci and Orable (daughter of Nes), was a nephew of Patrick MacNes. Roger married Helena, daughter of Alan, Lord of Galloway, before 1230, and succeeded to lands in Galloway. Probably Patrick MacNes or his sons obtained lands in Nithsdale through the influence of his relative Roger, who on the death of Alan, Lord of Galloway, in 1233, succeeded to the office of Constable of Scotland.

Math (or Matheus) was probably the third son of Nesse of Leuchars; he appears as Math, fil Nesse, as a witness to some charters of St Andrews. No doubt Nesse left some part of

his Strathearn estates to his sons, probably to Math and Constantine. Math MacNes died about the year 1260, and about 150 to 200 years later we find a Neish clan in Upper Strathearn, and a number of Neishes established in Lower Strathearn, probably descendants of Math.

Orable, mother of Saher de Quincy, is proved by the 'Chartulary of the Priory of St Andrews' (pp. 254-5) to have been the daughter and heiress of Nes. Whether "heir" means sole legal representative is doubtful, for Nes had certainly four sons, probably by another wife.

Large Scottish possessions came to the De Quincys through the marriage of Robert de Quincy (father of Saher, afterwards Earl of Winchester) with Orable, daughter of Nes, son of William Lineth. And the name "Nesgasc" would suggest that this part of Gask had been the property of Nes.

On the back of Carta (Inchaffray) No. 10 is the following memorandum:—

Item ex dono eiusdem Gileberti Comitatus ecclesiam de Madernin (Madderty) cum

pertinentiis suis. Et molendinum super pefrin in Balemacgillon (now Bellyclone). Ex dono Orable Matris Seer de Quinci. xiii acras terre in territorio de Gasg (Gask). See the Bull of Innocent III. ; infra. Robert de Quinci by his marriage with Orabilis ; got with her the large estate of Locres (Leuchars) and Lathrisk.

A charter by Seyer de Quinci about Dauch Icthar Hathyn (modern form would be Auchtereden) mentions that the lands were given to the priory of St Andrews by his mother.

There are chronological discrepancies in the printed accounts respecting Orable and her son. Earl Saher is stated to have married about 1170, and to have been a knight in 1172. If so, he must have been about sixty-five when he joined the Crusade, and his mother must have been married not later than 1155. On the other hand, the charter of the church of Leuchars to St Andrews by Nes and Orable conveys the impression that Orable was then a child, and it is clear that it was this charter,

and not that on p. 287 of the 'Chartulary' evidently thought otherwise.

Her style as Countess of Mar is not explained by any known marriage; but, in the opinion of the writer, Robert de Quinci, having gone to the Holy Land in 1191, never returned, and his widow married Gilchrist, Earl of Mar, whom we take to be G. Com de Mar, who witnessed Lady Orable's charters of the Davoch Fethar Hathyn to St Andrews (pp. 290-91).

This suggestion implies that Saher de Quinci confirmed his mother's grant in the lifetime of both his parents. Saher died in November 1219 at Damietta (10).

Orofile MacNes.—Sir J. B. Paul, in 'Scots Peerage,' 1908, says: "Perhaps a solution may be found in the suggestion that she was the wife of De Quincy first, and was divorced from him, after which she became the wife of Adam, son of Duncan, a Fifeshire noble, who was her husband about 1172-80, and between that date and 1199 she married Earl Gilchrist; she died before June 1203."

The form Malsnacht occurred in Strathearn, in the year 1230, in Carta No. LVII. of the Abbey of Inchaffray:—

Grant of lands by Robert of Methven.

Robert of Maggefen makes known that, with the assent of Soliue, his wife, and of their children, he had given to the abbot and convent of Inchaffray in pure and perpetual alms two tofts and four acres of land in the ville of Kenandheni, which by another name is called Dolpatrick—to wit, the toft in which Alan of Kyntocher dwelt when the present was given, with the acre which pertained to the same toft at that time, and with the buildings which were then on the toft; and also the toft and land which then lay between the house of Richard and the house of Malsnacht, &c., &c. Witnessed by the Earl of Strathearn and others, 1226-34.

Symon de Nysi (Nesse) was a witness to a Scone Abbey charter during the reign of Alexander II. (1214-49). Symon may have

been the fourth son of Nesse, son of William, Sheriff of Perth.

Angus MacNath and other chiefs and barons of Perthshire signed the "Ragman Roll" at Berwick-on-Tweed on the 28th of August 1296.

The seal of Anegos Makenathe is described as follows :—

"Two lions passant: sigillum en
broken, joined by strings" (24).

Angus MacNath of MacNeth was probably the chief of the MacNeishes of Strathearn in 1296.

Note that the head of the MacNaught family of Kilquonnedie, in Kirkcudbrightshire, was, in 1496, described as Fergus Maknath. Makneth was a tenant in Strathearn in 1491; and the form Macnecht occurred in Perthshire in 1525.