(A more complimentary sketch of Niniam Home is the following, which was in the possession of the late Hon. Frank Hume, of Washington, D.C.)

The Rev. Ninian Home

of Billie.

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A Biographical Sketch.

Mr. Ninian Home was born at Bellshill, in the parish of Hume, upon Sabbath, the 1st December, 1670. He was baptised on the 5th December following by the Rev. Mr. Stark, minister of Stitchell. His father was Abram Home of Bellshill, or Billieshill. His mother's name was Isobel Trotter. The proclamation of their marriage appears in the Gordon Parish Session Records on 5th February, 1670, and they were married on 1st April following in the parish of Hume and Stitchell. His grandfather was Ninian Home, tenant first of Bellsill, afterwards of Rumbleton Law, in the parish of Gordon. His great grandfather is believed to have been Abraham Home of Kirklands of Home, who is said to have been a natural son of William Home of St. Leonards. This is a point, however, upon which there is some uncertainty among authorities. William Home of St. Leonards had at least four sons: (1) Alexander Home of St. Leonards; (2) Ninian Home, Bailie of Home, ancestor of the Homes of Kennetsideheads; (3) William Home of Hernycleuch, or Hariscleugh, and (4) Archibald Home of Legerwood. It is also imagined that Abraham Home of Kirklands, ancestor of Ninian Home, was a son of St. Leonards. Ninian himself certainly believed in his relationship to St. Leonards, and looked upon the Kennetsidehead family as his heirs, failing his own family.

From the public records it can be shows that Ninian's father, Abram Home, was a man of property by his having granted bonds on the following dates to the parties mentioned:
On 31st September, 1670, to Robert Eadington; upon 16th November, 1670, to John Ritchie; on 19th November, 1670, to Robert Scott; on 7th April, 1671, to William Steel. In some of these he is described as "Portioner in Home". The various records also disclose other transactions and obligations entered into by him. Isobel Trotter, Ninian's mother, was on 5th April, 1703, able to lend her son 850 merks—a considerable sum in those days—while John Trotter, doctor of medicine, apparently Ninian's uncle, advanced him 200 Pounds Scots. Both sums were avowedly advanced as investments to facilitate his financial operations. James Daes, minister of Earlston, advanced various sums of money at, and prior to, 1659 to Sir Alexander Home of Halliburton, conform to an unrecorded bond in the writer's possession. All these transactions point to Ninian's ancestors on both sides possessing considerable means, and go to disprove the statements circulated of his extreme poverty and early struggles.

Ninian Home's grandfather, Ninian Home, tenant of Rumbling Law and Billiehill, married, about 1640, Jean Allan, Widow of Robert Moffat. He appears as a witness to a seisin, in 1634, in favour of Abraham Home of Kennetsideheads, and Elizabeth Home, his wife. He is found as a witness in 1640 to a Disposition by John Home of Ugston in favour of the said Abraham Home. His name also appears in various other ways in the records. A Ninian Home in Rumbling Law is found as one of the witnesses on a Retour of Inquest, finding that George Lord Home is the brother and nearest lawful heir of his sister Elizabeth, in the lands of Frierness. The Sasine following thereon is dated 10th July, 1546. One of the seals attached bears a LION RAMPANT with the legend "Ninian Foure". Though probably a tenant farmer, he is described elsewhere as "Bailie of Home", and is understood to have been a son of William Home St. Leonards.

Ninian's great grandfather, Abraham Home of Kirklands, who is supposed to have been a natural son of William Home of St. Leonards, bought Kirklands in 1598, and died in October, 1602. His wife's name was Bessie Cranstoun, who died in April, 1587, and her Testament was given up by her husband as administrator for their six children, therein
named on 2nd August, 1587. Letters of legitimation are said to exist in connection with this person, but be that as it may be, he has generally been acknowledged as the son of William Home of St. Leonards.

Ninian Home acted as clerk to James Daes of Cowdenknowes, advocate, who had been denounced fugitive and rebel in the Porteous Roll of 20th September, 1684. He was married to his first wife Margaret, eldest daughter of Mr. Daes, at Coldenknowes by the Rev. Alexander Colden, minister of Oxhanham (Oxnam), on 7th November, 1700. He seems to have got a knowledge of law, though he was educated for the Church and graduated at Edinburgh University on 3rd July, 1693. He was first appointed Schoolmaster at Fogo, but he was afterwards licensed by the Presbytery on 7th April, 1696, and ordained minister at Preston on 30th July following. He was called to Sprouston in 1703, and again in 1704, and was finally settled there in 1706. While minister of Sprouston he was in great favour with the Countess of Roxburgh, whose husband, the Earl, was drowned about Yarmouth Roads, while sailing from London to Edinburgh, when in attendance upon the Duke of York, afterwards James the Second. Ninian Home assisted the Countess in the management of the extensive Roxburgh Estates during the minority of her son, and, what with the emoluments for his services to her and other parties, and those of his living (Sprouston is still considered a good living, even after repeated falls in the price of grain), he amassed a considerable sum of money. He was suspected of having a leaning towards the Jacobites, and, whether this was correct or not, he resigned, or was deposed from his living at Sprouston in 1718. Thereafter, he devoted himself to the management of various estates in Berwickshire. His ministry at Preston was acceptable to the parishioners, whose only complaint against him, it would appear, from a document in the writer's possession, was that he had not helped them in pressing their claims before the Presbytery to retain him as minister, but had rather favoured and supported the call to Sprouston, which had been pressed upon him twice by the Earl of Roxburgh. Even after he left Preston he was appointed by the Patrons the Tutors of the Marquess of Douglas, mandatory to act in the selection of his successor. The
influence he possessed is shown by his extensive correspondence preserved in various quarters. The Earl of Home of that day, writes him on 11th March, 1717, explaining how he had been prevented calling on him, stating that he would visit him in a few days, and expressing his friendship and regard for him, and for his brother James. The Earl expressly recognized them as kinsmen.

Andrew Fletcher of Milton, Lord-Justice-Clark, writes him on the 29th October, 1739, approving of certain things he had done, and inviting him to come and have "a bottle of the best!"

The Church too, held him in high esteem, for the Synod deputed him as early as 1701, to take the active part in forming a society for the reformation of the manners of the people, and the suppression of vice. There is an original letter in the writer's possession from Mr. Ninian Home to the Earl of Marchmont, dealing strongly and pertinently with these evils, and entreating his Lordship's countenance and assistance in furthering the object of the proposed Society.

When Boston, the well-known divine, was in great perplexity, as to which of the numerous calls addressed to him should be accepted, he appears to have been largely influenced by the advice of Mr. Ninian Home. In Boston's autobiography, we find the following passage:-

That afternoon, being at Langton, Mr. Balfour told me that the Laird had not taken the method laid down by Mr. Colden and him; whereby the call of Simprim might have been before the presbytery that day fortnight; and thereby I saw that I would not know before I went to Lothian whether that affair would issue in a call or not. Coming along the way with Mr. Ninian Home, then minister of Preston, a man of great parts, but not proportionable tenderness, and now several years ago deposed, I was much satisfied with his converse, so that the night was far spent ere we parted. And as we were about to part, he told me of a design some had for another to Simprim with which I was surprised and amazed; but in the progress of our discourse, I found that design to be only in case I
would not accept. Whereupon he advised me to accept and against going to Galloway. After I came home reflecting on these two things, I took both of them to be intended by Providence letting me see what were my thoughts under both, to clear me towards accepting of the call of Simprim if offered. That night I lay down meditating on that word "Abraham went out not knowing wither he went". Boston did accept the call from the small parish of Simprim, in preference to more important calls from other places, so that we may assume that Ninian Home's advice prevailed.

To understand the subsequent career and acting of Mr. Home, we must consider the state of the country, and particularly the position of the landed proprietors in the County. It would seem that the troublous times through which the nation had passed, had plunged most of the land-owners deeply into debt. Some of them hoping to retrieve their position had taken part in the Rebellion of 1715, and were attainted.

The Government of this period appointed a Commission to attend to the Confiscated Estates, survey, and dispose of them, but as no one would buy these lands against the interests of the attainted families, the aid of the notorious York Buildings' Company was invited. Prior to this, all kinds of devices were resorted to to secure the properties from the clutches of the Crown. Bogus claims were fabricated to attach lands by various processes, and thus prevent the Commissioners from stepping in. Even when the Commissioners did get possession, every imaginable expedient was resorted to to defeat a sale. The Countess of Panmure, for instance, protested against the sale of her husband's lands with the active sympathy and concurrence of two of the Judges of the Court of Session, one of whom actually appeared before the Commissioners, and supported her protest. Ninian Home therefore took the opportunities that occurred of assisting various landed proprietors with the ready funds he possessed by buying up the debts due by them, and by various other ways protecting their lands from the Crown or the York Buildings' Company. That he was not a usurious money lender, but a factor or agent, trying to act in the interests of his clients to save them and their property from ruin, we have ample evidence.
His successful efforts are proved by the fact that only one small estate in Berwickshire fell into the hands of the York Buildings’ Company, viz., East Renton, belonging to Robert Craw, and even it was first acquired by Mr. James Deas, for Mr. Ninian Home.

The only estate Ninian Home acquired during his lifetime, regarding which there has been any complaint, was that of Billie. David Renton of Billie was an advocate of considerable ability in Edinburgh, and not one who was likely to be taken advantage of by any one. His affairs were certainly embarrassed, and Ninian Home bought his debts in Mr. Renton’s own interest to protect his wife’s (Jean Home) jointure. About that time Mr. Renton died, and Mr. Home, to preserve the estates from the diligence of the creditors, in a process of Ranking and Sale, and, as he has especially recorded in his manuscript writings to protect Lady Billie’s jointure, which, by the way, consisted of a chalder of oatmeal, a chalder of bier, and 600 Pounds Scots, led an adjudication of the lands. At the same time he was careful to execute a back letter in favour of her daughters, to the effect that if they ever repaid him the sums he had advanced to buy their father’s debts, amounting to 17,862 Pounds Scots, and the sums he had paid their mother, amounting to 8,424 Pounds Scots, that he would recover the lands to them. He made it very clear that he only held in trust, for in a list of heritors prepared about that period he is described not “of Billie” but “for Billie Estate”. There is also preserved the correspondence that took place between him and David Renton and other members of his family, which fully bear out the above statements.

Lady Billie’s daughters were never able after the mother’s death to redeem the property, and consequently he left it to his second son, disinheriting his eldest, for reasons we shall hereafter state.

His only other transaction to which exception has been taken, was the proceedings he adopted in connection with the Lands of Wedderburn. George Home of Wedderburn was deeply in debt, his creditors were pressing him on every side, and, to make matters worse, he joined in the rebellion of 1715. His desperate financial position is shown by the pleadings in an action of Aliment his father raised, before the Privy Council against his own mother,
who had married the Laird of Balfour.

In these pleadings, Sir George Home stated that his grandfather and father were both killed at the battle of Dunbar in 1650, left the estates so burdened that he had been forced to contract debts to maintain himself and his family. He was now so sorely pressed for payment of such debts that he was compelled to raise this action of Aliment against his mother, who enjoyed the liferent of the Lands of Wedderburn. The defences lodged by the mother contain further acknowledgement of the burdened condition of the property.

Reference may also be made to Sir John Scott of "Scotstarvels Staggering State of Scottish Statesmen", where the following passage occurs: "Sir George Home of Wedderburn was also Comptroller to King James, but had no better success than the rest of his predecessors; for he behoved to quit it, the King being much in his debt, which brought on such a burden on his house, that it is in hazard to perish, albeit there belonged to it a great patrimony. And the last two lairds, both father and son, were killed (being commanders at the unhappy field of Dunbar) by the English, as seven others of their forefathers had been before, so that never one of that house died in their beds, only he who was Comptroller".

After George Home was attained, his estates fell to the Crown, and the Commissioners proceeded to survey the lands in conformity with the statute. They would sooner or later bring the estate to public sale to be in turn acquired by the York Buildings' Company. The only step, therefore, which Ninian could devise in the interests of George Home and his family, was to buy up the claims against Mr. Home and lead an adjudication of the lands, thus cutting out the claim of the crown. This having been done, Mr. Ninian Home granted a disposition of the lands on 20th April, 1725, in favour of the six sons of George Home in their order and to their heirs male, whom failing, to his three daughters and their heirs without division.

In 1727, Mr. Ninian Home led another adjudication of the lands, and having obtained a Crown Charter from George II, on 18th February, 1729, he again, on 23rd January, 1733, executed a deed of entail, finally settling Wedderburn upon the four sons, then surviving, and the three daughters of the forfeited Laird, and then to the sons of Francis
Home of Quixwood, advocate, the brother of Wedderburn, one of whose unworthy descendents
Lieut. George Home, who was undoubtedly the heir male of the families of Wedderburn and
of the Earl of Marchmont, wrote the "Memoirs of an Aristocrat", in which Ninian was first
held up to public execration.

Mr. Ninian Home's eldest son, by his first marriage, Alexander Home of Jardine-
field, married George Home of Wedderburn's second daughter, while he himself married the
eldest daughter. To make the disapproval of his son's conduct, he excluded him from the
succession to the Estate of Billie, which he settled upon his second son. It has always
been said that Mr. Ninian Home wanted his eldest son to marry Margaret, the eldest daughter,
and on his declining to do so Ninian married her himself, and was scandalized when his son
married her younger sister, Isabel. Ninian Home had a town house in the Covenantclose,
Edinburgh, where he died on 17th December, 1744, aged 74. He was buried no doubt beside
his first wife Margaret Dasa, in Greyfriars Churchyard, in the tomb of Thomas Kincaid of
Auchenrook, Surgeon Apothecary in Edinburgh, who had been proprietor of Linthill near
Eyemouth, where Ninian chiefly resided in his latter days, and where his widow Margaret of
Wedderburn died in 1752, caused through the villany of her servant Norman Ross. She was
buried under the old Apse at Bunkle, a fragment of the Pre-Reformation Parish Church.

Strange indeed were the subsequent events. One after another of the four sons
of George Home died unmarried, and the unexpected did occur when his succession to Wed-
derburn opened up to Ninian's own family by his second wife, the eldest daughter of George
Home. Stranger, too, was it in after years to observe how one after another the
children of his second marriage died, either unmarried or without issue, thus once more
opening up the succession, not only to Wedderburn, but also to Billie, to the son of his
eldest son by his first marriage, whom he had disinherited.

Such is the true story of Ninian Home, briefly told. There is nothing to justify
the hard language used in the "Memoirs of an Aristocrat", or elsewhere, regarding him.
He indeed wrought wonders in trying and difficult times. He certainly changed the ultimate
succession to Wedderburn to some extent from the heirs of Francis Home, advocate, but nothing he ever did can warrant the slanderous innuendoes which have been cast upon his memory.

His chief accusers, the claimants to Marchmont Peerage, and his son, popularly known as "the Aristocrat", are now long dead, and all their families seem to have either died without issue or otherwise disappeared. Hugh Home, third Earl of Marchmont and Lord Polwarth (a cadet of Home of Wedderburn) died without male issue in 1794. The claimant — Alexander Home, Captain in the Royal Navy, was served nearest and lawful heir male to the families of Wedderburn and Marchmont, in 1799, and his claim and that of his son to the titles of Marchmont and Polwarth, have been several times before the House of Lords, but, as Sir William Fraser acknowledges in the appendix to the 14th report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, recently published, such claims do not appear to have been actively pressed, probably we presume through want of lineal descendant.

A word in conclusion may be said upon another matter on which reckless writers to the local press are continually at fault. The present highly esteemed family of Milne Home are in no way descended from Mr. Ninian Home. They are heirs of line of the Old Barons of Wedderburn through Jean, youngest daughter of the forfeited Laird who married the Rev. John Tod, minister of Ladykirk, (1741-1786), and James Tod, their son, did actually succeed to Wedderburn in 1820, on the death of George Home, clerk of session, son of Alexander Home of Jardinefield, the disinherited son of Ninian's first marriage. A few months after, however, James Tod died, and the succession opened up to his only sister's son John Foreman in terms of the old entail executed by Ninian Home in 1733, and which George Home C.S., had no power to override. Another brother, William Foreman, succeeded to Billie and Paxton in terms of a new entail executed by George Home, just before he died in 1820. William Foreman, probably a scion of the old family of Foreman of Sutton, was an Attorney at Law in Berwick-on-Tweed, and is described by George Home as his "cousin".

On the death of his brother, John Foreman, who had married Mlle. Adelaide Rochard, and
had no issue, William Foreman, who took the name of Home, succeeded also to the lands of Wedderburn. He was the grandfather of the present proprietor, Colonel Milne Home, late M.P. for Berwick-on-Tweed, who is consequently the great-great-great-grandson of the forfeited Laird.

The writer possesses original letters and papers on which the foregoing narrative is based, and he has had access to other original sources of information which admit of no cavil or dispute, and he trusts that this contribution to a longstanding vexata question will help to clear the way for a future authoritative memoir of an old Berwickshire worthy whose memory has been unduly and unwarrantably traduced.

C.S.R.

Edinburgh, 2nd November, 1895.