

Napier, I suppose, he then imbibed the holy fears and commentaries of master Christopher Goodman, and as other great mathematicians ended so he began his career with that myllicious book.

I have not been able to trace Merchiston from the university, till the publication of his Plain Discovery, at Edinburgh, in the year 1593; though Mackenzie, in his lives and characters of the most eminent writers of the Scottish nation, informs us (without quotation, however, of any authority) that he passed some years abroad, in the Low Countries, France, and Italy, and that he applied himself there, to the study of mathematics.

In the British Museum there are two copies of this letter to Anthony Bacon, the original of which, is in the archbishop's library at Lambeth, entitled, 'Secret inventions, profitable and necessary, in these days, for the defence of this island, and withstanding strangers, enemies to God's truth and religion,' which I have caused to be printed, in the Appendix to this tract. This letter is dated June 7, 1596, about which time it appears, as shall be shewn hereafter, that he had set himself to explore his logarithmic canon.

I have enquired, without success, among all the descendants of this eminent person, for papers or letters, which might elucidate this dark part of his history; and if we consider that Napier was a recluse mathematician, living in a country very inaccessible to literary correspondence, we have not much room to expect, that the most diligent explorations would furnish much to the purpose, of having the progress of his studies.

Among Mr. Briggs's papers preserved in the British Museum, I looked for letters from Napier, but found only what Mr. Briggs calls his *Imitatio Nepeira*, five application omnium fere regularum, suis Logarithmis pertinentium, ad Logarithmos; which seems to have been written in the year 1614, soon after the publication of the Canon.

Though the life of a learned man is commonly barren of events, and best unfolded in the account of his writings, discoveries, improvements, and correspondence with the learned men of his age, yet I anxiously sought for somewhat more, with respect to a character I so much admired; but my researches have hitherto been fruitless. Perhaps from the letters, books, and collections of societies or of learned individuals, to which I have not had access, something may hereafter be brought to light: and one of the inducements to offer a sketch of this kind to the public, is the tendency it may have to bring forth such information. His Plain

Discovery has been printed abroad, in several languages, particularly in French, at Rochelle, in the year 1693, 8vo. announced in the title, as revised by himself. Nothing could be more agreeable to the Rochellers, or to the hugonots of France, at this time, than the author's announcement of the pope as antichrist, which in this book he has endeavoured to set forth, with much zeal and erudition.

That Napier had begun, about the year 1593; that train of enquiry, which led him to his great achievement in arithmetic, appears from a letter to Cruregus from Kepler, in the year 1624; wherein, mentioning the Canon Mirificus, he writes thus, 'Nihil autem supra Neperianam rationem esse puto: cū Scotus quidem literis ad Tychohem, anno 1594, scripsit, jam spem fecit Canonis illius mirifici,' which allusion agrees with the idle story mentioned by Wood in his *Athenæ Oxon.* and explains it in a way, perfectly consonant to the rights of Napier as the inventor; concerning which, I shall take occasion to comment in the account of his works: nor is it to be supposed, that had this noble discovery been properly applied to science, by Justice Byrgius, or Longomontanus, Napier would have been universally acknowledged by his contemporaries, as the undisputed author of it.

No men in the world are so jealous of each other as the learned, and the least plausible pretence of this sort, could not have failed to produce a controversy, in the republic of letters, both in his lifetime and after his death, when his praises were sounded all over Europe.

When Napier had communicated to Mr. Henry Briggs, mathematical professor in Gresham college, his wonderful canon for the logarithms, that learned professor set himself to apply the rules in his *Imitatio Nepeira*, which I have already mentioned, and in a letter to archbishop Usher, in the year 1614, he writes thus, 'Napier, lord of Merchiston, hath set my head and hands at work with his new and admirable logarithms. I hope to see him this summer if it please God, for I never saw a book which pleased me better, and made me more wonder.'

It may seem extraordinary to quote Lilly the astrologer with respect to so great a man as Napier; yet as the passage I propose to transcribe from Lilly's life, gives a picturesque view of the meeting betwixt Briggs and the inventor of the logarithm, at Merchiston near Edinburgh, I shall set it down in the original words, of that mountebank knave.

I will acquaint you with one memorable story related unto me by John Marr,