

## THE HIGHLANDERS' REVENGE.\*

A.D. 1589.

ABOUT the time James VI. was married by proxy to Anne of Denmark, and on occasion of that event, Lord Drummond, who was steward of Strathearn and chief forester of Glenartney, received orders to provide a suitable supply of venison for the entertainment to be given by James to his

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\* Antiquities of Strathearn; History of the Clan Gregor; Oral Traditions of Perthshire.

Queen, who was daily expected. The extensive forests of Strathearn and Glenartney, the latter a royal one, abounded with deer, and Lord Drummond prepared to execute his part of the commands of the King by summoning his domestics, and selecting the finest animals of the herds for the royal table at Holyroodhouse.

In those times many of the powerful Highland proprietors had large deer forests on their estates, and though there were no game laws as at the present day, there were nevertheless certain rules in force for the protection of such forests, which were especially necessary in a rude and turbulent age. One point was, that all such forests were set apart for the private use of the proprietor, and it was consequently considered a gross act of hostility when any aggressions on those domains were made by neighbours or strangers. As it respects the clansmen, or feudal tenants on the estate, it was not deemed criminal if they killed a deer or a hare, wherever it was found, within the limits of the chief, and many persons made this liberty the means of their chief subsistence. A lawless and indolent turbulent peasantry were thus fostered in the Highlands at little or no expense to the chiefs, roving among the mountains, and occasionally encroaching on the territorial boundaries of their neighbours, especially on the properties of those with whom their chiefs happened to be at feud.

At the time when Lord Drummond's followers were hunting in the forest of Glenartney, some of the Macdonalds of Glencoe wandered from their own mountainous recesses, and were found trespassing on the royal domain of which his Lordship was chief ranger. They were seized by the under forester and his men, when in the act of carrying off a deer which they had brought down. Whether Lord Drummond was consulted respecting the punishment for this aggression does not appear, but the under forester and his followers had the cruelty to cut off the ears of the Mac-

donalds, and then forcibly expelled them from the forest with threatenings of instant death if they were ever again seen within the boundaries of Glenartney.

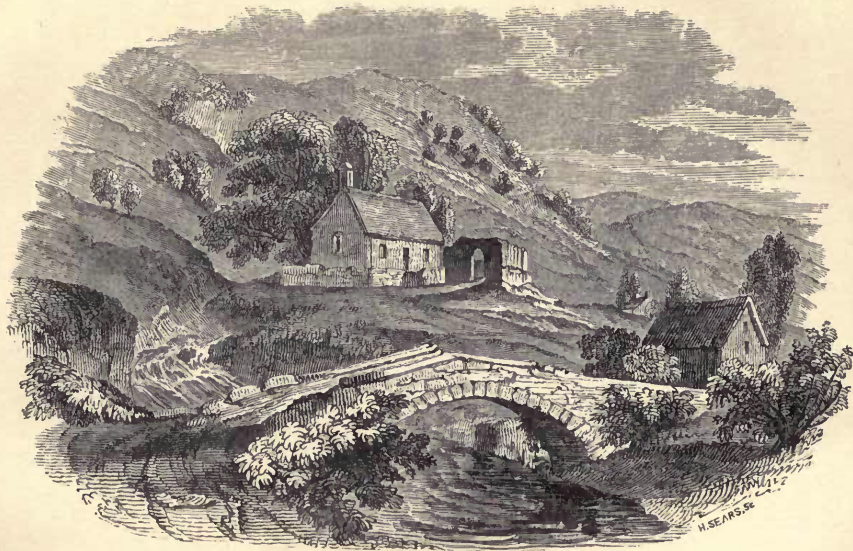
The Macdonalds of Glencoe were a sept who were certain to revenge such a gross outrage on their clan and kindred, and they soon returned in considerable numbers to the forest from which their mutilated friends had been excluded. They loitered in concealment on its boundaries, and at length they seized a favourable opportunity to kill Drummond of Drummond-Ernock. Having dispatched the man who had cropped the ears of their friends, they cut off his head, and carried it in savage triumph to his sister, a lady married to Stewart of Ardvoirlich on the banks of Lochearn. That gentleman was absent when those visitors arrived, and as the Macdonalds were well known depredators, they were received with considerable apprehension and distrust. The lady, however, resolved to treat them hospitably, and ordered some bread and cheese to be placed before them until better cheer was prepared. She left the room for that purpose, and during her absence the Macdonalds inhumanly placed the head of her unfortunate brother, still dripping with blood, on the table, and put a piece of bread and cheese in the mouth. When the lady of Ardvoirlich returned, the horrid spectacle met her gaze, and she recognised the head of the murdered Drummond-Ernock. She ran out of the house in a state of distraction, which caused insanity, and betook herself to the woods and mountains. When her husband arrived, he found that the Macdonalds had departed, having carried with them the head of his brother-in-law, and his wife was no where to be found. His distress was increased by the peculiar circumstances of his lady, who was far advanced in pregnancy. He long sought her in the woods and among the mountains, but no trace of her was visible. It happened to be autumn, which fortunately was conducive

to the preservation of the unfortunate lady, who, during her wanderings over hills and in lonely glens a solitary maniac, subsisted on such wild fruits as grew in those alpine regions.

After several weeks of fruitless search a half famished female figure was seen in the vicinity of the house of Ardvoirlich, lurking among the brush-wood, which the superstitious terror of the domestics induced them to suppose the spectre of their lady. They informed their master of the circumstance, and conjecturing the truth the proper means were taken for securing the fugitive. She was attended with the utmost assiduity, and fortunately after the birth of her child she recovered her senses, to the great joy of her family; but the son to whom she gave birth early exhibited fierce and ungovernable passions, and when he grew up to manhood he exhibited a savage appearance.

The Macdonalds carried the head of Drummond-Ernock with them, and proceeded to Balquhiddel, at no great distance, to join their allies the Macgregors. The slaughter of Drummond being considered a just retaliation for the insult given to the Macdonalds, the Macgregors highly applauded the deed, and on the following Sunday they assembled in the parish church of Balquhiddel, where they all laid their hands on the head of Drummond-Ernock, and solemnly swore to defend the Macdonalds from the consequences of the crime they had committed.

But it appeared afterwards that the Macdonalds, the real perpetrators of the murder, contrived to transfer the odium of it and the punishment to the Macgregors exclusively, and as such they were considered by the Government, in consequence of the oath in Balquhiddel church. Incensed at the outrage, James VI. and his Council issued a commission of fire and sword against the whole clan Gregor, in which the slaughter of Drummond-Ernock is particularly mentioned. In this proclamation it is stated:—“ Likeas,



CHURCHYARD OF BALQUHIDDER.

after the murder committed, the authors thereof cut off the said umquhile John Drumnond's head, and carried the same to the Laird of Macgregor, who, with his whole surname of Macgregors, purposely convened, upon the Sunday next thereafter, at the kirk of Balquhidder, where they caused the said umquhile John's head to be presented to them, and there avowing the said murder, laid their hands on the *pow*, and in heathenish and barbarous manner swore to defend the authors of the said murder." In consequence of this commission, which was to continue in force three years, the Earls of Huntly, Argyle, Athole, and Montrose, Lord Drummond, the Commendator of Inchaffray, Sir John Murray of Tulliebardine, Macfarlane of Arrochar, Buchanan of that ilk, several gentlemen of the name of Campbell, and others, were authorised to search for and apprehend Allister Macgregor of Glenstrae, and all others of the clan Gregor, wherever they may be found, and if they refused to be taken, or fled to places of strength, to pursue them with fire and sword.

In all this the Macdonalds of Glencoe are never mentioned, and they seem to have left their allies to experience the full vengeance of the law. It is also not a little remarkable that even the Drummonds seem to have been content with taking vengeance on the Macgregors. The warrant to exterminate the devoted was soon put in force, and Lord Drummond, impatient to revenge the slaughter of his relative, appointed a day with the Earl of Montrose to enter the parish of Balquhidder. In this expedition he was joined by Stewart of Ardvoirlich, equally eager to avenge the death of his brother-in-law. They kept their design so secret, that on the day appointed they made an easy conquest of the dwellings of the unsuspecting Macgregors, who were taken by surprise. A great slaughter of the clan ensued, and it is said that on one farm alone thirty-

seven individuals, who had no means of defence, were put to death.

As an inducement to activity in the crusade against the Macgregors, the Privy Council offered a reward for every one of the clan apprehended by the persons named in the commission. Not only was the proffered reward a temptation, but several of the lairds imagined that their activity would recommend them to the favourable notice of the Government. Among the gentlemen authorised by the commission to pursue the Macgregors was the Laird of Edinample in the neighbourhood of Balquhiddy, and as he considered this a very honourable distinction, he always kept some armed men near him to harass the proscribed clan.

Being informed that five Macgregors were enjoying themselves in a *clachan* or public-house at the head of Lochearn, at no great distance from his residence, he set out one winter evening to apprehend them. The reward for *five* of the clan was a strong inducement, but the Laird little anticipated the result of his adventure. He was not remarkable for courage, and when he arrived at the *clachan*, he ordered some of his men to remain outside, and took the rest with him into the house, while he entered the apartment in which the Macgregors were carousing, as if without any hostile purpose. As he was in no better costume than the ordinary Highlanders of the district, he was not recognized as the Laird of Edinample. The Macgregors, fatigued after a long chase of a deer which they had killed, and which lay on the floor, were regaling themselves with whisky. They asked the Laird to sit down and partake, which he did with great apparent alacrity, and drank a few glasses.

It happened that one of the Macgregors left the apartment in which his companions and the Laird were carous-

ing, and when passing through the only other room in the clachan he was astonished to see several armed men within and some without the house. He sought the landlord, from whom he soon discovered the rank of the Laird and the purpose of his visit. The Highlander ingeniously devised a stratagem to get rid of the Laird's followers, who were to enter the inner apartment and seize the Macgregors at a given signal. In a few minutes he came to them, and told them that Edinample wished them to go into the barn and drink some whisky, and that they were to remain there till he called for them. The coldness of the night induced them willingly to obey this welcome message. A light was procured, the whisky was brought, and they all went into the barn accompanied by the Highlander. The Macgregor drank their healths, and remained till every one of them, seventeen in number, had paid their respects to the liquor, when he went out, locking the door, and carrying off the key.

When he returned to his friends, with whom the Laird was still carousing, unconscious of the situation of his men, the Highlander seized him by the throat, and accused him of treachery. The astonished Macgregors, after hearing the story of their clansman, were for putting the Laird to death. From this crime they were dissuaded by their companion, but Edinample was to submit to a humiliating infliction. He was ordered to take the dead deer on his back, and accompany the Macgregors. He remonstrated against this indignity, reminding them that he was a gentleman, the reply to which was a naked dirk, and he was obliged to comply. They proceeded on the road to Balquhiddier. After travelling several miles, during which the Laird frequently fell under his burden from the roughness of the road, then covered with snow, they halted in the middle of a desolate heath. Here they took from him his load, and after assailing him with every opprobrious epithet for his



conduct, and threatening him with death. the ferocious mountaineers actually stripped him of his dress, and left him to find his way home in a state of complete nudity, exposed to the cold of a winter night.