

THE FEUD BETWEEN LORDS AIRLIE AND ARGYLE.

A FEUD between the Ogilvies, Earls of Airlie, and the Campbells, Earls of Argyle, was of long continuance, and produced much commotion and disaster. When or how it began is not known; but so fierce was it that the great wilderness of moor and mountain which extends from Loch Etive to Strathtay was no hinderance to its outbursts and desolating movements. In the year 1591, when the Ogilvies were residing peaceably in Glenisla, a body of Argyle's men made an inroad upon them, ravaged their estates, killed several of their people, and compelled their chief and his lady to flee for their lives. And during the civil war between the Covenanters and the Royalists, the private feud between the Campbells and the Ogilvies blended itself with the public quarrel, and borrowed thence at once pretexts, opportunities, and means for venting its wrath and executing its vengeance. The Earl of Airlie was one of the most distinguished and inflexible champions of the cause of Charles I., and acted for some time as official director of his interests throughout the central parts of Scotland, and exerted strenuous and persevering energy in his behalf both in the council and in the field,—both by efforts among the Scots at home and by services under the monarch's own eye in England; and he was therefore specially obnoxious to all the public partisans of the National Covenant,—and very eminently so to the Earl, afterwards the Marquis of Argyle.

The most notable of all the results of this state of things was the burning of several castles and mansions of the Ogilvies, particularly Airlie Castle, "the Bonnie House of Airlie" of Scottish song, in 1640. Airlie Castle occupied a commanding site on the rocky promontory at the confluence of the Melgum and the Isla, about 5 miles north of Meigle in Strathmore; it possessed great strength of both position and masonry, and ranked as one of the proudest and most massive fortresses in Central Scotland; and, previous to the introduction of artillery, it must have been almost if not entirely impregnable. It had the form of an oblong quadrangle; and occupied the whole summit of the promontory, with the exception of a small space at the extremity, which is traditionally said to have been used for exercising the horses. The wall which protected it on the eastern and most accessible side—high and massive, together with the portcullis entry—still remains in connexion with the modern mansion of Airlie; and the fosse also continues distinct, but has been partially filled up, in order to render the place accessible to carriages.

In July 1640, the Earl of Argyle, acting secretly upon the personal resentment which he had all his life long entertained against the Ogilvies, but overtly upon an express commission given him for the public service by the Committee of Estates, raised a body of 5,000 men of his own clan, and led them across the Grampians and down Strath-tay to devastate the territories of the Earl of Airlie. He is said by an old tradition to have halted them for the night on the haughs at the village of Rattray; and, in accordance with this, though most diminishingly out of reckoning with regard to the numbers, the old ballad says,—

"Argyle has raised a hunder men,
A hunder men and mairly,

And he's awa down by the back o' Dunkeld,
To plunder the bonnie house o' Airlie."

The Earl of Airlie, at the time, was absent in England, whither he had gone as much to avoid the necessity of subscribing the Covenant, as to render immediate service to the King's cause. Lord Ogilvie, the Earl's eldest son, held the charge of Airlie Castle, and had recently maintained it against the assault of a party under the Earl of Montrose; but, on the approach of Argyle's army, he regarded all idea of resisting them as hopeless, and hastily abandoned the castle and fled. Argyle's men plundered the place of everything which they coveted and could carry away, and then proceeded to damage the castle to the utmost of their power by dilapidation and fire; and Argyle himself acted so earnest a part in the demolition, that, according to the report of the historian Gordon, "he was seen taking a hammer in his hand, and knocking down the hewed work of the doors and windows till he did sweat for heat at his work."

Argyle's army next marched to the Castle of Forter, the ordinary residence of Lord Ogilvie, and treated it in the same manner that they had done the Castle of Airlie. Lady Ogilvie was in it at the time of their approach, and was far advanced in pregnancy, and is believed to have heard of their coming with great apprehension, and to have sent messages of entreaty to their leader to grant her some clemency in consideration of her condition. But Argyle would not allow her to retain possession of the place till her accouchement, nor even permit her to go to the house of her grandmother, his own kinswoman, Lady Drimmie; but turned her adrift from Forter summarily and ruthlessly, and proceeded forthwith to burn and demolish her castle. Yet a tradition of the district asserts that the Campbells kept possession of Forter during several months, before they destroyed and abandoned it.

The house of Craig, in Glenisla, belonging to another near

branch of the Airlie family, was not included in Argyle's commission from the Committee of Estates, yet shared the same fate as the Castles of Airlie and Forter. Gordon says respecting it, "At such time as Argyle was making havoc of Airlie's lands, he was not forgetful to remember old quarrels to Sir John Ogilvie of Craig, cousin to Airlie. Therefore he directs one Sergeant Campbell to Sir John Ogilvie's house, and gives him warrant to sleight it. The sergeant coming thither, found a sick gentlewoman there and some servants, and looking upon the house with a full survey, returned without doing anything, telling Argyle what he had seen, and that Sir John Ogilvie's house was no strength at all, and therefore he conceived that it fell not within his orders to cast it down. Argyle fell in some chafe with the sergeant, telling him that it was his part to have obeyed his orders, and instantly commanded him back again, and caused him deface and spoil the house."

The case of the house of Craig concurs with a great deal of other evidence to show not only the fact but the intensity of pent-up feudal resentment on the part of Argyle; and some events afterwards occurred, particularly a severe act of retaliation on Argyle, in the destruction of his castle of Gloom, near Dollar, in 1645, to deepen and perpetuate the many exacerbations of the feud. Yet the old ballad of "the Bonnie House o' Airlie" represents the affair between the Earls as a sudden dispute, an accidental quarrel, which fell out "on a bonnie summer day," while the oat-crops "grew green and early." But indeed all the main incidents of the ballad are contortions; and, in particular, the Countess of Airlie is put for Lady Ogilvie, and the burning of Airlie Castle for the burning of Forter Castle,—and the heroine of the piece is made to have seven children, while the actual Countess had only three, and the actual Lady Ogilvie only one. Yet the effusion blazes so fiercely with both the poesy and the politics of the period that fully one-half of its

stanzas are well worth quotation; and these we shall take from Mr. Chambers' collated edition:—

“ The lady look'd over her window sae hie,
 She lookit lang and weary,
 Till she has espied the great Argyle,
 Come to plunder the bonnie house o' Airly.

He has taen her by the middle sae sma',
 Says, ' Lady, where is your dowry?'
 ' It's up and down by the bonnie burn side,
 Amang the plantings o' Airly.'

They soucht it up, they soucht it down,
 They soucht it late and early,
 Till they fand it in the bonnie ploom-tree,
 That shines on the bowling-green o' Airly.

He has taen her by the middle sae sma',
 And O, but she grat sairly!
 And he's set her up on a bonnie knowe-tap,
 To see the burning o' Airly.

' O, I hae seven brave sons,' she says;
 ' The youngest ne'er saw his daddie;
 And although I had as mony mae,
 I wad gie them a' to Charlie!

But gin my gude lord had been at hame,
 As this nicht he is wi' Charlie,
 There's na a Campbell in a' Argyle,
 Durst ha' plunder'd the bonnie house o' Airly!

Were my gude lord but here this day,
 As he is wi' King Charlie,
 The dearest blude o' a' thy kin
 Wad sloken the burning o' Airly!'"