

CHAP. III.

IN KILBRANNAN SOUND.

Torrisdale. — Saddell Castle. — Wanton Destruction of national Antiquities. — Saddell Monastery. — The mighty Somerled. — A Highland Chieftain's Rent-Roll. — Macdonald and his Cuckoo. — My Thomson. — How Macdonald entertained his Irish Friends and the M'Leans. — The Lord of the Isles. — Robert Bruce and local Legends concerning him. — Fingal and his Dog Bran.



STEERING on from Carradale, we pass some flourishing plantations on the Cantire coast, and come to Torrisdale, with its pretty glen, and its modern castle, built by General MacAlister, and now the property of John Hoyes, Esq. It is a fine place, and is well kept up. As we sail on we pass almost under the shadow of Beinn-an-tuirc, the loftiest mountain in Cantire (of which I shall have occasion to speak in a future chapter), and soon we come to the picturesque little bay of Glen Saddell, with its fine woods and thriving plantations. As this is an interest-

ing locality, and that we may not have to go over the same ground twice, I will here refer to it in its proper place, instead of bringing the reader back again to the eastern coast of Cantire when I want to have his company on the western shore.

Saddell Castle is the most perfect of the ancient fortresses of Cantire. It stands near to the sea, on low ground, environed by wooded hills, and commanding an excellent view across the water to Arran. It is of a plain and massive character, quadrangular in form, like Skipness, and with an embattled and machicolated top, with small projecting turrets at the four corners. It was a place of great strength, and had at one time a regular gateway and courtyard, and is believed to have been surrounded by a moat. The castle commands the approach to the glen, down which flows the river, passing near to the castle, and making its channel over the sandy plain, and so into the sea. It is this sandy plain that gives its name to the place, for Saddell, or Sandel (for so it is found written in ancient chartularies), means *sandy plain*. At least so says the Rev. John Macfarlane in his history of this parish*; but the differences of etymologists are even greater than those of doctors, and the Rev. Dr. Macleod says that *Samhdail* is the original

* According to this author, there is a very good field for the botanist in this neighbourhood, and "plants of great beauty and interest" are to be found upon the "sandy plain."



Cuthbert, Scot., col.

Hanhart, Chromo. lith.

LODGE HOUSE AND CASTLE, CANTON

name, and that it “means the quiet peaceful valley;” while other authorities make it out to be derived from *Saigart-dail*, “the plain of the priests,” who occupied the monastery a little higher up the glen. All these meanings describe the spot. The castle is on the “sandy plain” of the sea beach, in the “quiet, peaceful valley” of the sequestered bay. An avenue of fine beech trees leads up to the castle, dividing it from the village. A good road is carried over the river by a bridge, and, on the opposite side of the stream, is Saddell House, the modern residence of the proprietor of the castle, which is now inhabited by dependants and old servants. We have a good view of both castle and house as we sail past, and also the picturesque mouth of the glen, but we cannot see the ruins of the monastery, unless, indeed, we see a portion of them in the additions to the old castle, which we afterwards find to be the case. As has been very truly remarked by Mr. Burns, in his “*Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Scotland*,” the landowners of the last century have done more than Knox and his followers ever did towards destroying the antiquities of their native country*; and this was a case in point. Frag-

* There is a sad significance in these remarks of Mr. Burns. “To the last hundred years Scotland can trace more destruction among her antiquities than ever occurred before; and her own children, from no religious or party prejudices, but from sheer motives of gain, have been the despoilers. Did the magnates of the burgh want a few good feasts? the funds were at hand by an appropriation of dressed stone

ments of tracery in the walls told their own tale, and divulged the theft. "After it had for centuries withstood the violence of the solstitial rains and equinoctial gales," says Mr. Macfarlane, "the hands of a modern Goth converted it into a quarry, out of which he took materials to build dykes and offices, paving some of the latter with the very gravestones. He did not, however, long survive this sacrilegious deed, as he soon afterwards lost his life by a trifling accident, which the country people still consider a righteous retribution, and the estate passed into other hands."

As a matter of course, in consequence of these spoliations, there are but few actual remains of the monastery, and they have no particular beauty or architectural interest. The buildings formed a square, in which the main fabric took the form of a cross. The length from east to west was about 136 feet by 24, and of the

from the ready-made quarry presented by the old cathedral or abbey. Did the baronial leader, or the laird descended from him, want farmsteadings, stone walls, or cottars' houses built? the old abbey or castle wall was immediately made use of. Those who wish proof of this assertion may see its evidences, either at the village of New Abbey, near Dumfries, or in the dikes about Kildrummie, in Aberdeenshire. So strong, indeed, was the desire for appropriating such precious spoils in Scotland, that even in a report from a surveyor to the government, some few years back, upon the cost of some repairs to another building, the destruction of one of the most interesting baronial remains in the country (the Earl's Palace, at Kirkwall) was suggested, on account of the saving to be effected by using its materials."

transept, from north to south, 78 feet by 24. The body of the church itself, from east to west, measured 60 feet, and the height of the side walls 24 feet. The extent of the monastic buildings was originally marked out by "consecrated dust" (whatever that may be) "brought from Rome;" as much ground as the dust could be made to cover, so much was to be built upon. This was done by Reginald, the son of Somerled — the "mighty Somerled" of Scott — who was Thane of Argyle and Lord of Cantire and the Isles, and was slain, in 1163*, in an endeavour to subjugate the whole of Scotland, and was buried at Saddell. He had commenced the monastery — which was for monks of the Cistercian order — and it was completed by his son and successor, Reginald, who assumed the title of King of the Isles and Lord of Argyle and Cantire. In conformity with a common practice among the Scandinavian sea-kings, he is said to have lived for three years without entering under the roof of any house where a fire had been kindled, and thus accustomed himself to privation and hardship. The site for the monastery had been well selected in the hollow of the glen, surrounded by woods and rocks, and close by the trout and salmon-stocked river. The churchyard is beside it, shaded by tall ash and elm trees, and containing some very interesting and ancient tombstones,

* As appears from the Chronicle of Melross.

rich in sculptures of abbots, and warriors, and Lords of the Isles, more or less mutilated.

Among the monuments are some in memory of Macdonalds, the former possessors of Saddell. Although the worldly possessions of these Scottish chieftains were so extensive and varied, and their power so great, yet, so far as money went, their income must have been no larger than that of a merchant's clerk. This chiefly arose from their rentals being generally paid in produce—beef, and mutton, and meal, and malt, and cheese, and geese, and poultry, taking the place of pounds, shillings, and pence. The rent-roll of one of the Macdonalds, who was Lord of Cantire, and Lord also of Islay and Rheinds, in the year 1542, was scarcely equal to 140*l.* sterling. And yet these Macdonalds of Saddell were some of the greatest among the great. Our Prince of Wales still bears the title that they held, and in future pages we shall have occasion to make frequent mention of them. Many are the legends of their prowess and power, though the tales told of one of them are more peculiar than pleasing. It is said of this chieftain, surnamed "Rìgh Fiongal," that he was accustomed to amuse himself by keeping watch from the battlements of his castle, and firing at any suspicious-looking person, with a gun that he called "the cuckoo," the notes of which, as may be imagined, were listened to with less delight than those of the "blithe new-comer

of the spring." There is a legend extant that this proprietor of "the cuckoo" went to Ireland, and not only fell in love with the wife of another man, but brought her back by force to Saddell Castle. The husband followed, and Macdonald made him a prisoner (without the wife's knowledge), and endeavoured to rid himself of the encumbrance by the tedious process of starvation. So he shut him up in a barn; but the poor fellow kept himself alive by eating the grain. Then Macdonald moved him to another place, where a generous hen came daily, and charitably laid an egg for him, by means of which diurnal gift he sustained life. Macdonald then shut him up in the deep dungeon of the castle, where no aid could reach him, when the poor wretch died miserably, after gnawing his hand and arm. But Macdonald gave him burial; and his widow saw the funeral from the top of the castle, and asked whose it was. "It is Thomson's," said Macdonald. "Is it *my* Thomson?" she asked. "Yes!" was the reply. "Wait a little, and I will be with you," she said; and she leapt from the battlements. So they buried her in the same grave with her husband.

This little mishap, however, did not prevent Macdonald's Irish friends from paying him a visit. One day three of them came, and were hospitably entertained. They were housed in the barn, where their host went early next day to wish them a good morning.

He found them asleep, lying close beside each other, with their necks bare. Now, for a long time past, Macdonald had greatly wished to try the strength of his arm and the temper of his blade. Here was a chance not to be thrown away; so he tried the experiment, and found that it answered his most sanguine expectations; for, with one swishing stroke of his sword, he decapitated his three Hibernian friends. It is also told of this disgrace to the Lords of the Isles, that having had to make peace with the clan of M'Lean, he invited M'Lean and his principal chieftains to a feast, in order to cement their friendship. But when they came he threw them into his dungeons; and hung one of them every morning after breakfast, until, the King of Scotland hearing of it, forbad him to gibbet the small remnant of the M'Leans, and to come to the Parliament at Campbelton and answer for his misdeeds. Macdonald went, and was very humble, and swore allegiance; but no sooner had the king sailed away, and before he was out of sight, than Macdonald hoisted a flag of defiance. But one of his ancestors was a man of a far different stamp. This was —

“ The heir of mighty Somerled, —
Ronald, from many a hero sprung,
The fair, the valiant, and the young,
Lord of the Isles, whose lofty name
A thousand bards have given to fame: ”

though, as Sir Walter Scott explains in a note, the true name of the hero of his poem was Angus Oig *, exchanged for "Ronald," *euphoniæ gratiâ*. How this Angus or Ronald supported the interests of Robert Bruce, we may pleasantly learn from Scott's poem, to which we may add a fact not mentioned by Sir Walter, that Bruce crossed over from Arran, and was entertained at Saddell Castle, and afterwards at Dunaverty Castle, in the Mull of Cantire, and finally removed by Angus in safety to his Island of Rathlin, between the Mull of Cantire and the Irish coast. It was to this Angus, on his arrival at Torwood, near Falkirk, that Bruce addressed these words, still borne as a motto by the lineal descendants of the Lords of the Isles, "My hope is constant in thee." He had waited for him in anxiety; for some had begun to suspect his allegiance, and the King of England, with a mighty army, was at hand. A battle was impending, the battle of Bannockburn, in which Angus nobly repaid his monarch's confidence by his assistance in the final and decisive charge. It is to that juncture, indeed, that the poet transfers the words of Bruce:—

"Lord of the Isles, my trust in thee,
Is firm as Ailsa Rock;
Rush on with Highland sword and targe,
I, with my Carrick spearmen, charge;
Now, forward to the shock!"

* Buried at Iona. See Pennant's "Hebrides," p. 250.

At this point in our passage our friend at the wheel waxes mighty eloquent on the subject of "the Breeyuice," as he terms the valiant King Robert, for recollections of him beset us on both sides. Nearly opposite to Saddell, he points out to us the basaltic cliff of Drummoduin *, on the Isle of Arran, jutting precipitously into the sea. Near this the hungry waves have eaten away the base of the white gritstone cliff, and hollowed it into caves, the largest of which is called "the King's Cove." *The Breeyuice* is said to have made this cave his residence, when, as a fugitive, he first landed upon the island. A rude sculpture on the wall of the rock is pointed out as having been carved by the king, *pour passer le temps*, a tradition thus rejected by the matter-of-fact Macculloch (who, however, takes no notice of any connection between Bruce and this cave, and Pennant and Martin are also silent on the subject): "the sculptures, as they are called, consisting of rude lines scratched in the soft rock, are more likely to be the work of the children who herd the cattle along this open shore." But our friend at the wheel, and all true Highlanders, prefer to father all these things upon their idol, Robert Bruce; and they also call the neighbouring caves by the names of the king's kitchen, the king's cellar, and the king's stable. The chief cave (says

* Or *Druim-an-Duin*, "the Ridge of the Fort," from a round tower on its summit.

Pennant) is 112 feet long and 30 feet high. Lord Teignmouth mentions that Mackinnon, the patriarch of the lay preachers of Arran, was accustomed to preach in this cave; and that, on one occasion, when a woman who heard him had fallen into convulsions, he coolly observed, when they had ceased, "Poor thing! what a struggle she had with the devil!" For then, as in these later revivalism days, a convulsive emotion or external bodily sign was looked upon as an evidence of conversion. Mackinnon, however, was not the first who had preached in this spot; for Martin records that, one hundred and fifty years ago, a minister preached in this cave "in regard of its being more central than the parish church."

As a matter of course, where there is anything rather remarkable, whose history is lost in the mists of antiquity, that renowned gentleman Fingal must be thrust forward to play his part. Accordingly, we are told that he inhabited this cave for the convenience of hunting, and that the sculptures of men and animals were made by him, and not by "the Breeyuce." "Fingal's Cave," says Pennant, "branches into two towards the end; within these two recesses, which penetrate far, are, on each side, several small holes, opposite to each other; in these were placed transverse beams, that held the pots in which the heroes seethed their venison; or, probably, according to the mode of the times, the bags

formed of the skins of animals slain in the chase, which were filled with flesh, and served as kettles, sufficiently strong to warm the contents, for the heroes of old devoured their meat half raw, holding that the juices contained the best nourishment." * Which is the reason why the boating heroes of modern times are prescribed the diet of half-cooked steaks. But, as to this cooking of venison for Fingal, hear matter-of-fact Macculloch: — "Near Tormore are to be seen some caves in the sandstone, the supposed habitations of traditional heroes, not a little problematical. Fingal, like our Arthur, the ubiquarian king and warrior, is said to have occupied them during his hunting excursions. It is not improbable that they have been inhabited in later times, as they are much better adapted for human habitations than almost any caves in the Western islands, being dry, light, and convenient of access, while they are capacious enough to receive a large community. It is not long since the caves of Isla were inhabited, and those of Bridgenorth have been converted into commodious houses in the present days. In such circumstances the holes which, in the caves of Arran, seem to bespeak contrivances for cookery, may have been made." †

* Voyage to the Hebrides, pp. 181, 182.

† Vol. ii. p. 321. In the town of Kidderminster, and within a circuit of four miles, there are scores of houses made in the sandstone rock.

Close adjoining these caves, at Tormore, are traces of (supposed) Druidical circles and Celtic cairns, and there are also three pillars of old red sandstone sunk deeply in the ground, and five yards in height above the soil. Through one of these stones a hole has been drilled, and this hole (according to one account) received the cord that was passed round the victim's neck, and strung him up to the sacrifice*; but, according to another and more innocent version of the story, it was made in order that Fingal's dog, *Bran*, might be tied up to it. (By the way, the adjacent village is called *Shedog*; but whether this has anything to do with Fingal's dog, or if, indeed, *Bran* was of the feminine gender, we are not informed.) In the notes to Ossian's poems — poems of which Buonaparte was so fond, that they formed the chief portion of his poetical library † — Macpherson says, “there is a stone shown still at Dunscaï, in the Isle of Skye, to which Cathullin commonly bound his dog *Luath*.” So here is a companion stone of a companion dog. “*Bran* is howling at his feet, gloomy *Luath* is

* “He cross'd his brow beside the stone,
Where Druids erst heard victims groan;
And at the cairns upon the wild,
O'er many a heathen hero piled,
He breath'd a timid prayer for those
Who died ere Shiloh's sun arose.”

Lord of the Isles, canto v. 6.

† See Sir James Mackintosh's “*History of England*,” vol. i. p. 86.

sad ;” says Ossian, in “*Temora*.”* And he thus sings of Bran:—“A deer fell by every dog ; three by the white-breasted Bran.” † “Bran does not shake his chains at the gate.” ‡ “There shone to the moon the broken shield of Clatho’s son, and near it, on the grass, lay hairy-footed Bran.” § *Bran* signifies “a mountain stream ;” it is a common name for a Scotch deer-hound. It was to Trathal, Fingal’s grandfather, that the fall of the Druids may be imputed. He was the Vergobretus, or chief magistrate, and when a new war arose between the Caledonians and Romans, the Druids, in order to strengthen their position, attempted to resume their lapsed right to appoint the Vergobretus. On the refusal of Trathal to lay down his office a civil war arose, the Druids were conquered, and soon became extinct.

* Book i.

† Fingal, book vi. Cf. “*Temora*,” book viii.

‡ Fingal, book v.

§ *Temora*, book vi. Macculloch has an interesting chapter on “Ossian” in the second volume of his “*Highlands*,” pp. 190—225.