

CHAP. XXIX.

LARGIE.

Bradge House. — Tayinloan Village. — The Pig of Cantire. — Largie Castle. — The Macdonalds. — Proposal to shoot Largie with a Piece of Silver. — Popular Tales and the Tellers of *Sgeulachdan*. — The Fairies of Largie. — The Laird of Largie and the '45. — Another Version. — Macdonald's Pipers. — A Highland Improvisatore. — The learned Gentleman and MacMurchy. — The Story of the Laird of Largie and the beggar Captain. — The Macdonald's Grants of Property. — Model legal Documents. — The Hangman's Rock.

LEAVING Killean and its churches, we pass the farms and groups of cottages, called respectively Beachmenach and Tigha-chroman, and then come to the ruined kirk and kirkyard of Killean, which we have already noticed. To the right is Bradge House, a modern mansion, the residence of Colonel Hall. We are now abreast of the islands Cara and Gigha, which are only separated from us by less than three miles of waves. The geological character of the coast from here to Tarbert has been thus given by the Rev. D. Macdonald—“Sandy bays and low rocky headlands, the latter of which are frequently composed of red sand-

stone, alternating with pudding-stone, mica imbedded with veins of quartz, veins of basalt, and a few detached blocks of the same scattered along the shore,—whinstone, alternating with basalt, sandstone, and red shiver.”

Nearly two miles beyond the ruined kir'k of Killean, and seven from Glencreggan, is Tayinloan, from whence there is a ferry, and a post to Gigha. Tayinloan is a pretty village, imbedded in trees, like many a village in the heart of England. Its whitewashed village inn and post-office, backed by a mass of foliage, and the trout-stream overhung with trees, made a pretty sketch; but the most remarkable (though the least picturesque) object in the view (when I first looked upon it) was a pig! a veritable porker, who, stretched at full length on a couch of mud, *sub tegmine fagi*, was reposing in Sybarite fashion, and dreaming, doubtless, of grains and “histie-stibble.” He is worthy of special mention, as being the only pig that I saw in the country; and to me, therefore, he was “*the Pig of Cantire.*” He was in good condition “*pinguem et nitidum,*” despite his muddy couch, and evidently

“*Epicuri de grege porcum.*”

To the right of this village is Largie Castle*, the

* Not marked in Johnstone's large map. “Ballochayarran” is given in its place; but this was the ancient Gaelic name for the place



Cuthbert Bede, del:

Hanbart, Chromo-lith

seat of the Hon. Augustus H. Macdonald Moreton.* The old castle of Largie was merely a fortified house, strong but plain in character, and of small size; and the little that remains of it forms a portion of a farmhouse. The modern Largie Castle is of recent erection, and is a fair specimen of the nineteenth century reproductions of those baronial edifices erected in Scotland in the early part of the seventeenth century, wherein the characteristics of a French style predominated. Within, the Castle is arranged and fitted up in accordance with the comforts and luxuries of modern life. It is well situated in a finely-wooded park, containing timber of large growth. Since the commencement of the present century, the Largie plantations have been considerably increased, and are in a very flourishing state. The chief stream flows down to Tayinloan, through a lovely glen from Loch Ulagadale, and Loch nan Each. The poor upon the estate are well-cared for; and the charities of the various members of the

now known as Largie, in the same way that Ceann-an-loch was the ancient Gaelic name for the modern Campbelton. The word was spelt thus for me by a native of the place, Bealach-a-ghearran. The way Mr. Johnstone has spelt it gives the pronunciation.

* Second son of the first Earl Ducie; married Mary Jane, daughter of the late Sir C. Macdonald Lockhart, Bart., whose name he has assumed. (She died, 1851.) Educated at Merton College, Oxford. B. A., 1826. Is a member for county of Gloucester, and a M. and D. L. for county Argyle. Was M. P. for West, and afterwards for East Gloucestershire, 1835-1841. See Walford's "County Families" for 1860.

family,—more especially of the late Mrs. Macdonald Moreton, and of her mother, Lady Macdonald Lockhart, have been considerable, and productive of much good. The improvements upon the estate are advancing with the spirit of the times, and its agricultural condition has been greatly improved.

Mention has more than once been made in these pages of the Macdonalds of Largie, who have always been one of the first families of Cantire—so much so, indeed, that it is said that Cantire proper was at one time reckoned within the boundaries of their estate, from Alt-nan-seunach to Alt-a-bhile. They were the Macdonalds of Clan Ronald Bane (“the light or white-haired”), and reigned despotically in Cantire, until their power was crushed in 1591, by James the Sixth of Scotland, who banished Angus the reigning laird, and made over all his possessions and authority to the family of Argyle. James Macdonald, Largie’s heir—the then rightful laird—escaped with difficulty. The story that is told of his escape is this: He was taken prisoner by a troop of horse, and conveyed to Campbelton. On the road, one of the officers proposed to the captain that they should halt and shoot “Largie” with a piece of silver. The captain would not accede to this; and afterwards whispered to Largie that he would be invited to dine with the officers at Campbelton, and would be asked to sit near the head of the table; that he must

avoid doing so, and must take his seat as near to the door as was possible; that he must watch his opportunity, and, when the officers had had pretty well of wine, he must slip out of the room; and that at the door he would find a bay mare with a knot in her bridle. Largie took the Captain's advice, and all came to pass in due order; he escaped from the room, found the bay mare at the door, and galloped off, hotly pursued. He led his pursuers northwards, along the eastern coast of Cantire, and by the time he had reached Carradale they were distanced. Largie then left his horse, and got on foot to the Largie Moors, where he lay concealed for a fortnight, and then escaped to the Western Islands; while Campbell of Inverawe took possession of Largie. At the end of eleven years, when the Duke of Argyle was beheaded, Largie was restored to its former laird.*

At Saddell, at Dunaverty, and at Campbelton, we have seen that the chief traditions and historical records were connected with the powerful clan of Macdonald; and I have already, in previous chapters, related some of the popular tales connected with the Macdonalds of Largie. But more remain to be told,

* Supposing this tradition to be correct, it would appear that the other possessions of the Macdonalds at Cean-loch, Dunaverty, &c., were not restored to them. See chap. viii.; see also Appendix, "The Macdonalds."

a circumstance not to be wondered at when the importance of the family is borne in mind, and when, in a country like that of Cantire and other old-world parts of the Western Highlands, a teller of stories, who is "good at sgeulachdan," is invested with a local interest and popularity, which cannot adequately be conceived by the civilised Englishman who reads his daily "Times" and subscribes to Mudie's. These narrators of popular legends and tellers of old stories, have orally handed down from generation to generation much that is valuable and interesting, and which cannot be obtained in any other way than from the lips of the reciters. They belong to a race now well-nigh extinct, and only to be found in such Western Highland districts as Cantire, where railroads and tourists are unknown and Gaelic has not succumbed to English.* Mr. J. F. Campbell has done a good work,

* They are capitally described in the introduction to Mr. Campbell's "Popular Tales," but at too great length to be quoted here. But his remarks on another branch of the subject must be made room for. "Surely Gaelic books containing sound information would be a vast boon to such a people. The young would read them, and the old would understand them. All would take a warmer interest in Canada and Australia, where strong arms and bold spirits are wanted, if they knew what these countries really are. If they heard more of European battles, and knew what a ship of war is now, there would be more soldiers and sailors from the Isles in the service of their country. At all events, the old spirit of popular romance is surely not an evil spirit to be exorcised, but rather a good genius to be controlled and directed. Surely

in rescuing from almost certain oblivion a goodly number of "Popular Tales of the West Highlands;" and although his published volumes contain but very slight references to Cantire, yet, as both he and his collectors are still at work, we may hope to be favoured with another instalment of these curious and interesting stories, in which the Cantire legends and "sgeulachdan" can have fuller justice done them than in the present work.

In the notes to his Islay tale of "The Smith and the Fairies," Mr. Campbell says, "Mr. John MacLean, Kilchamaig, Tarbert, Argyle, has sent me a version. The scene is laid on the Largie side of Cantire. The farmer's wife was idle, and called for the fairies, who wove a web for her and shouted for more work. She first set them to put each other out, and at last got rid of them by shouting 'Dunbhulaig on fire!' (This was the name of a farm, where the faries had a favourite haunt.) Their song when at work was,—

'Work, work, for a single hand
Can but little work command,

stories in which a mother's blessing, well earned, leads to success, — in which the poor rise to be princes, and the weak and courageous overcome giants, in which wisdom excels brute force, — surely even such frivolities are better pastime than a solitary whiskey-bottle, or sleep, or grim silence; for that seems the choice of amusements if tales are forbidden and Gaelic books are not provided for men who know no other language, and who, as men, must be amused now and then" (pp. 27, 28).

Some to tease, and card, and spin ;
 Some to oil and weave begin ;
 Some the water for waulking heat,
 That we may her web complete.
 Work, work, for a single hand
 Can but little work command.'

And, when they departed in hot haste, their lament was,—

'My mould of cheese, my hammer, and anvil,
 My wife and child, and my butter crock ;
 My cow and my goat, and my little meal kist ;
 Och, och, ohone ! how wretched am I.' *

So much for the Fairies of Largie. Turn we now to other popular tales and storied traditions connected with Largie and the Macdonalds.

In the "Forty-five," the then Laird of Largie was for going out. He was to join with other lairds in taking ship at Tarbert. The minister of Kilcalmonell invited him to spend the night at the manse, on his way to Tarbert, and by the over exercise of hospitality, contrived that Largie should be late in getting up the next morning. And so it happened, that when Largie arrived at Tarbert with his contingent, the fleet had sailed. Thus was the property of Largie saved in '45. Afterwards, Largie went to Paris, and gave grand entertainments to the Prince, whereby he got so much into debt, as to be obliged to sell a portion of his estates.

* Vol. ii. pp. 53, 54.

The foregoing was told to me by the present Laird of Largie, who also kindly put me in possession of the family legend touching that Largie, whom it was proposed to shoot with a piece of silver; but from another source I have the following version of the story:—

In the "Forty-five," the proprietors of Cantire raised their men against Prince Charles, but Macdonald of Largie declared for the Prince. Upon this, the Laird of Tarbert sent him word, that if he intended to join the Prince, he would meet him on his way in passing, and that they would have a hot day of it, and that few Macdonalds should remain to join any party. On this, the Laird of Largie thought fit to change his mind, so he sent his men with the rest of the men of Cantire. Macdonald had two pipers, MacMurchy and MacLeolan, who played alternately. When they reached Inverary, MacMurchy played "the Campbells are coming," in order to announce their approach. The Duke of Argyll was in company with other gentlemen at the time, and did not take any notice of the tune, but when MacMurchy had finished, and MacLeolan struck up the air called "Fir Chinntyre," or "the Men of Cantire," the Duke immediately recognised it, and turning to those near him, said, "Come, gentlemen, we must go out and welcome the Cantire men." The Duke gave a grand ball to the Cantire men at Inverary, at which

Macdonald's pipers were present. The Duke himself danced "a high dance," to which MacLeolan was the piper. When the dance was ended, the Duke said to MacLeolan, "You are the sweetest player I ever heard, and you are the most ill-looking man I ever saw." MacLeolan replied, with a shrewd smile, "I think it was the same tailor that shaped us both." The Cantire men marched to Falkirk, but the battle was over before they reached it. They took refuge in a church, which was presently surrounded by some of the victorious Highlanders of Prince Charles's party. With their clothes crimsoned with blood, they burst into the church, with a cry that the Cantire men should be massacred; but their purpose was prevented by one of the Cantire men coming forward and saying, that it was against their inclination to fight against Prince Charles, but that they had been forced to do so by their lairds, and they begged to be leniently dealt with. Their request was granted, and after being detained as prisoners for some time, they were set at liberty, and returned to Cantire.

This MacMurchy, the piper of Largie, who had been sorely grieved at the Duke of Argyll passing over his playing, was accounted a very excellent poet. But that it did not require any very high powers of reflection, taste, or imagination, to constitute the poet of a clan, we may judge from the following Cantire legend of

him. A learned gentleman, who was a poet, one day visited Largie in disguise, in order that he might test MacMurchy's powers. The piper received him kindly, and entertained him with some tunes, the while some scones of bread were being toasted at the fire. The learned gentleman and poet either did not consider this as an entertainment, or thought it a fit subject for his manufactured verse. So he jumped up, and making for the door, exclaimed, (or rather *d*eclaimed,)

“Piobaireachd is aran tur,
 'S miosa lem na guin a bhais,
 Fhir a bhodhair mo dha chluais,
 Na biodh agad duais gu brach.”

which meant, “Piping and raw bread are worse to me than the pangs of death. O man, who hast dived both my ears, may you never get a reward!” MacMurchy, instead of losing his temper, and answering the stranger in prose that was more hearty than complimentary, dropped the pipe from his mouth, and immediately replied to him in this impromptu verse:—

“Slad a dhuine fan ricial,
 'S ole an sgial nach boin ri bun,
 Tha mo bhean a t-eachd on Chill,
 Is ultach d'on im uira muin.”

which meant, “Stop, man, and give ear to reason! bad is the story that has no foundation. My wife is coming back from Chill, with a load of butter on her back.”

The learned gentleman and poet found that MacMurchy was quite his match as an improvisatore, so he accepted the invitation, and waited till the gude wife came home. Then he eat of the buttered bannochs, and passed a very agreeable evening with the piper of Largie.

In a previous chapter * I had occasion to speak of the numerous vagrants who used to wander through the now depopulated Mull of Cantire, and, by the aid of their fiddles and tale-telling powers, maintained a sufficiently comfortable and prosperous existence. I have met with a popular story of a Cantire vagrant, which has a peculiarity and romance of its own, and which, from its connection with Largie, may be here told. It is the story of the Laird of Largie and the Beggar Captain.

A long time ago there was an Irish gentleman, tall, handsome, and strong, who traversed Cantire for years, sleeping chiefly in caves, and begging his way from house to house. He was insane, but quiet and peaceable. The tale told of the loss of his reason is a romantic one. He was an officer of high rank in the army, and had distinguished himself in battle. The war over, he returned to his native country, to the girl he had left behind him. They had been engaged for some time, and had sworn to be true to each other till death. Her father refused to give him her hand, so they eloped,

* Vol. i. chap. v.

but were overtaken in a deep glen by her relatives and a body of armed men. The officer made a desperate defence, protecting his bride with uncommon bravery; but he was soon overpowered by numbers, and, in the *melée* that ensued, an unfortunate stroke from his sword pierced his bride's breast, and she fell dead. He no longer attempted to defend himself, and was hurried off to prison, where he was condemned to death. He contrived, however, to make his escape, and fled across the waters to Cantire; but his reason had sunk under the shock, and for the remainder of his life he wandered about these hills and dales a harmless fugitive, talking to himself in those continental languages in which he could pour forth the tale of his sufferings, with none to understand his words, though with all to pity him. His connection with Cantire is said to have been severed thus: he had wandered to Largie, and, in search of food, had approached Macdonald's house. The illustrious chieftain, who was the then Laird of Largie, was wont to devote his nights to whiskey, and, even when he was alone, would have his importance denoted by twelve lighted candles placed before him on the table. The poor demented officer, attracted by the genial light streaming out upon the darkness, made his way to the window, and saw Macdonald seated before a plentiful table. Clammed with hunger he made his way into the room, and asked for food. Macdonald

seized his sword and ordered him away. The poor man replied that he did not come for any harm, but that he wanted some food; and, as there was plenty on the table, Macdonald should feed the hungry. Macdonald's reply was a flourish with the sword. The poor gentleman parried the thrusts with his staff, and, being an expert swordsman, wrested the weapon out of Macdonald's hand. The chieftain, finding himself out-mastered, invited his opponent to the table, plied him with whiskey, and, when the few poor senses that were left to him were overcome by the strong drink, Macdonald ordered his men to carry him away, and put him in a boat, and leave him at Kilberry. This was done, and the poor man was never afterwards seen in Cantire. What became of him is not known.

This Laird of Largie was a character as exceptional as unpleasant; for, in a general way, the Macdonalds were much celebrated for their hospitality and generosity. A night's lodging or a simple meal was often rewarded with the grant of a farm; that of Coul, in Islay, was presented to one who had given a flounder to a Macdonald when much exhausted. The grants of property from these Lords of the Isles were sufficiently laconic and unique; and, though divested of all legal jargon and circumlocution, were not on that account the less strong and expressive. The following are specimens, and are model legal documents for perspi-

cuity and brevity, although in a great measure divested, by translation, of the spirit of the original: "I, Donald, chief of the Macdonalds, give here in my Castle to Mackay, a right to Kilmahumay, from this day till to-morrow, and so on for ever." "I, Macdonald, sitting upon Dundonald, give you a right to your farm, from this day till to-morrow, and every day thereafter, so long as you have food for the great Macdonald of the Isles." The saving clause in the latter charter is worthy of all imitation. Dundonald was a castle of the Macdonalds, a few miles north of Campbelton, on the western coast, annually visited by "the great Macdonald" when he collected his rents. Near to the castle was a cliff, still called *stac-a chrochaire*, "the Hangman's Rock," from which, doubtless, those who were behind-hand with rent or civility, were suspended with very little ceremony.