

## THE MACDONALDS. (Vol. II. p. 231.)

[Condensed from "Sketches of Early Scotch History," by Cosmo Innes, 1861.]

WHEN Angus Macdonald renounced all right, title, property, and possession to Islay, in favour of Sir John Campbell, Thane of Cawdor, the deed of renunciation was witnessed by three persons, one of whom was "Alexander Macdonald, of Lergie." "Soon after the cession of his claims," says Professor Innes, "the old chief of Islay died. His kinsman, Sir Ranald Macdonald, the son of Sorley Buy (afterwards Earl of Antrim), had, in the mean time, obtained a tack of the island, but had not peaceable possession of it. The castle of Dunyveg (in Islay), for a short time garrisoned by the Bishop of the Isles (Andrew Knox) for the government, had been surprised; and the Bishop himself, led into a trap by the sons of the old chief—brother of the captive of Edinburgh Castle—was obliged to leave his son and nephew in the hands of the rebels, as hostages for his performance of some conditions, especially for doing his utmost to obtain grants by the sovereign in their favour." The "captive" was Sir James M'Donald, "who had been 'warded' first in Blackness and then in Edinburgh Castle, since the year 1604; and who was tried and sentenced to death in 1609, but no time fixed for executing the sentence, and was still a prisoner in the Castle of Edinburgh." (p. 536.) Sir James had married Margaret Campbell, of Cawdor, sister of the above-named Sir John. "Early in the year 1615, the Knight of Cawdor, with the help of Sir Oliver Lambard's cannon, had

taken the castles of Dunyveg and Lochgorm, and ruled undisputed sovereign in the island of Isla. He and the lords of the council were planning the repression of the bands of M'Donald and their followers, now mere marauders and pirates on all the shores and seas of the west, when they were startled by the intelligence that Sir James M'Donald, so long a prisoner, had escaped from Edinburgh Castle (24th of May, 1615), and was hastening to put himself at the head of his clan, to gather round him the scattered outlaws of the isles, very ready to follow so daring a leader, and to recover his inheritance. The council seemed at first paralysed and helpless; and Sir James, with a few followers, dashed through Atholl and Rannoch in safety, and met with no opposition in the isles. The men of the north isles flocked to his standard. Isla was his first object. He surprised the castle, subdued the island, the natives evidently favouring him rather than the Campbells; and then he sent out the fiery cross, and overran his hereditary territory of Kintyre. But his success was short-lived. The council, compelled to some exertion in support of law, placed the affair in the hands of Argyll, though evidently unwillingly; and the head of the Campbells, with some soldiers hired at the public expense, an expense sorely complained of by the council, speedily brought the war to a conclusion. There was indeed no open war, no pitched battles. Equally in Kintyre and in Isla, M'Donald's undisciplined followers fell from him; and Sir James himself, almost singly, escaped to Ireland, and from thence to Spain. This remarkable person's career was not to end even there. After Argyll's apostasy and disgrace, and when he too had taken refuge in Spain, Sir James M'Donald returned to England, was restored to royal favour, and died a pensioner at London (1626).

“ We should err if we counted this last chief of the old race

of Isla a mere Celtic savage, as those who drew his indictment seem to have held him. He was no doubt unscrupulous, like his time and his country, and human life was not then held in much respect in the isles; but Sir James, with the virtues of a savage, had some tinge also of civilisation, and some qualities perhaps acquired during his long imprisonment. He was a reader, and he writes to his friend Lord Crawford very anxiously about books he left behind him in prison, and some that fell into the hands of his pursuers when he himself narrowly escaped. They were chiefly controversial books of the old religion, all indeed but one, a 'mekle old cornikle in writ.' Though his early exploits show him reckless of blood, in later life he was not cruel, and sometimes spared his enemies when in his power. His letters, many of which are preserved, and have been printed, show a touch of feeling and of self-respect, and of what was due to his ancient race, with a straightness and manliness of expression that contrast favourably with some of the lawyer's letters among which they are found.

"The documents illustrative of his romantic life are to be found in the 'Records of Secret Council,' and among Secretary Binning's letters in the Advocates' Library. Most of them have been printed or used in well-known publications:—Gregory's 'History of the Highlands and Isles,' c. vii. viii.; Pitcairn's 'Criminal Trials;' the 'Melros Papers' (Abbotsford Club), &c. pp. 545-6-7."

The history of the Macdonalds is given at some length in the second volume of Skene's "Highlanders of Scotland" (ii. pp. 35—106). They "were anciently included under the general designation of the Siol Cuinn, or race of Conn, a remote ancestor of the tribe." In speaking of the feuds between the Macleans and Macdonalds, Mr. Skene continues thus:—

“ At length, towards the close of the sixteenth century, the Macdonalds appear to have united for the purpose of effectually crushing the rising power of the Macleans. At the head of this union was Angus Macdonald of Kintyre, who had married Maclean’s sister, and between whom and Maclean disputes had arisen in consequence of both possessing lands in Jura. The Macdonalds of Sleat were involved in the dispute, in consequence of Sleat having landed on Maclean’s property in Jura, on his way to visit Macdonald of Kintyre, when the Kintyre Macdonalds carried off some of Maclean’s cattle during the night, in order that he might impute the theft to Macdonald of Sleat. In this they were successful, for the Macleans were no sooner aware of their loss than they attacked the Macdonalds of Sleat, and defeated them with so much slaughter that their chief with difficulty escaped.” The Macdonalds shortly afterwards sustained a second defeat, and “ never again attempted to invade the possessions of the Macleans ; but a bitter enmity existed between the Macleans and the Macdonalds of Isla and Kintyre, who, failing to make any impression upon them by force, resorted to treachery. With this view, Angus Macdonald of Kintyre effected a reconciliation with Lachlan More (chief of the Macleans), and, the better to cover his intended fraud, he visited him at his castle of Dowart, where his purpose was anticipated by Maclean, who took him prisoner, and did not release him until he had given up his right to some of the lands in Isla, and had left his brother and his eldest son at Dowart as hostages. Maclean was then invited to visit Macdonald at Kintyre, which, relying upon the security of the hostages, he agreed to do, and arrived there, having left Macdonald’s brother at Dowart, and being accompanied by the other hostage, his uncle, and seventy gentlemen of his clan. They were received with apparent cordiality, but

had no sooner retired for the night than the house was surrounded by the Macdonalds, with Angus at their head, and, after an obstinate resistance, the Macleans were made prisoners. Angus now satiated his vengeance by executing two of the Macleans every day, reserving their chief Lachlan More to the last; and he had already in this way slain them all except the chief, when, two of the gentlemen of his clan having been taken prisoners in Mull, he was obliged to exchange Lachlan for them. No sooner, therefore, was Lachlan at liberty, than he applied to the government, and obtained letters of fire and sword against Macdonald, with an order upon Macleod and Locheil to assist him. With these means he sailed for Isla, attacked and defeated the Macdonalds, burnt the whole island, and drove Angus to seek refuge in his castle, who, seeing that he could not resist Maclean, bought his forbearance by giving up to him the half of the island of Isla. On the death of Angus of Isla, this grant produced some negotiations between Maclean and James Macdonald, Angus's son; and, in order to settle their difference, a meeting was agreed upon between them, but Maclean coming unadvisedly with a small attendance, and his boats being stranded by the retiring tide, he was surprised by James Macdonald, and killed after a brave resistance. And thus fell the greatest chief whom the Macleans ever had, a victim to the treachery of the Macdonalds of Isla." (ii. 210, 212.)

For further particulars of the Macdonalds see (in the same volume) under the heads of "Ross," "Clan Kenneth," "Clan Leod," &c. See also Major-General Stewart's "Sketches of the Highlanders," i. 102, &c. "Regiment of the Isles," "Macdonald's Highlanders," &c.