

BATTLE OF LUNCARTY.*

ABOUT A.D. 980.

IN the parish of Redgorton, upwards of four miles from the city of Perth, is the field of Luncarty, noted in the ancient history of Scotland for a fabulous tradition of the origin and rise of the Noble Families of Errol, Kinnoul, Tweeddale, and others of inferior rank, as related by Boece and Buchanan. In the reign of Kenneth III. an army of Danish invaders disembarked at the mouth of the Esk in Forfarshire, seized and plundered the nearest towns, and committed the most merciless ravages. If the description of Scotland by an author not inclined to depreciate his native country is to be credited, it is impossible to conjecture the inducements of the Danes to invade Scotland. Referring to this battle of Luncarty, he says—"A large fleet of those rovers was seen off Redhead in Angus, where for some days they lay at anchor, and during this time they consulted among themselves whether they should make a descent at that very place, or put to sea, and set sail for England, which was then, as now, the more opulent country. The soil was fruitful, the air wholesome, the lands well cultivated, the granaries full, the cities populous, and the people become too easy, not so patient of the hardships of war; besides, there were a great many Danes and Norwegians already settled in that kingdom. On the other hand, Scotland was a country considerable only by reason of its fierce

* Statistical Account of Scotland; Memorabilia of Perth; Adamson's Metrical History of Perth; Chalmers' Caledonia; Buchanan's History of Scotland; Abercrombie's Martial Achievements of the Scots Nation.

unconquered inhabitants—a race of men hardened by labour and strengthened by poverty; few or no cities worth plundering, few lands worth wasting, no gardens, orchards, or baths for pleasure, no plenty of food or drink for feasting, no incitements to luxury; nothing to be met with but steep hills, inaccessible fortresses, dangerous bogs, and withal a hardy robust enemy determined to dispute every inch even of that barren ground made fertile by nothing more than the scattered carcasses of former invaders, particularly Danes.” Thus far Dr Patrick Abercrombie in his “*Martial Achievements of the Scots Nation*”—a work, though curious, of a very apocryphal nature. The worthy Doctor’s notion of the Scots in those times being “strengthened by poverty” is a *little* at variance with the modern ideas connected with that misfortune.

The Danes, it is said, ravaged the whole county of Angus, and entered Perthshire in their desolating progress by the Carse of Gowrie. The writer just quoted observes, that Scotland, a “country so much undervalued upon the score of its unfruitfulness, was nevertheless a sure inlet into England.” If this was the intention of the Danes, their disembarkation at the mouth of the Forfarshire Esk evinces that they were miserably deficient in geographical knowledge and ignorant of the country, for it was the height of folly to land there at all, when a few hours’ sailing might have conveyed them to the coast of East Lothian or Berwickshire; and it was still more absurd to be found at Luncarty on their way to England. Be this as it may, we shall in the meantime follow the traditionary narrative of the battle. Kenneth III., who was then at Stirling, soon received information of the ravages of the invaders, from the fugitives who had escaped their fury. Assembling his forces, he appointed the ground at the confluence between the Tay and its tributary the Earn as the place of rendezvous. While here mustering his troops it was inti-

mated to the King that the Danes were besieging Perth. Alarmed at the supposition that a place so important might fall into the hands of the enemy, Kenneth immediately marched thither with such troops as he had collected. When the Scots first beheld the Danes they were stationed most advantageously on a hill, where they could not be attacked without great risk. Anxious for revenge the Scots drew up in order of battle and advanced against the enemy, who, being forced from their position by the archers and dartsmen, were compelled to engage. A sanguinary conflict soon took place, and the battle raged with terrible slaughter on the ground designated Luncarty. Even while the victory was doubtful, the Danish leaders sent a notice throughout their host that no man need ever return to the camp if they did not obtain the victory. This was responded by loud acclamations, and the Danes charged the Scots with such impetuosity, that the latter gave way and fled, keenly pursued by the enemy.

At this crisis of affairs a rustic man and his two sons happened to be engaged in tilling a neighbouring field. Seeing their countrymen running across this field, the father seized the yoke of his plough, and his sons whatever weapons were readiest, as arms, and stationing themselves in a convenient position, they endeavoured by persuasions and reproaches to revive the courage of the Scots. They even struck down some of the fugitives nearest to them, exclaiming that they, too, would be Danes to cowards. This conduct caused a reaction; the Scots rallied, and, led by this ploughman and his sons, faced about on the Danes with dreadful fury, uttering loud cries and yells of revenge, which were increased by the shouts of the baggage servants. The Danes, supposing that a fresh reinforcement had come to the assistance of the Scots, now in turn gave way, and sustained a complete defeat. Those who escaped the sword were drowned in the Tay, which was then swollen

by the rains and had overflown its banks. "This," says Buchanan, "is that victory obtained near the village of Luncarty, which was celebrated with the greatest rejoicings during many days, and the fame of which will extend to the latest posterity. When the victors were dividing the spoil, the countryman and his two sons were the object of universal applause, numbers of noblemen attesting that wherever they attacked the Scottish ranks were restored, and those of the enemy overthrown. When brought to the King, the man spoke modestly of his services, and on being offered splendid robes for himself and his sons to render their entrance into Perth more conspicuous, he declined the honour, and only wiping away the dust from the garments he had worn every day, and carrying the yoke he had used in battle, he entered the city preceded by an advanced guard, and followed at a considerable distance by a numerous train appointed by the King. The attention and admiration of all who had assembled to witness this spectacle were turned upon him only who had contributed to the triumph of the day."

Buchanan says that the name of this countryman was Hay, but there is another tradition that after the victory was gained, the old man, while lying on the ground wounded and fatigued exclaimed *Hay! Hay!* and that this word became the surname of himself and his posterity. To reward the signal service he had rendered, it was resolved in a convention of the States held at Scone, to give the old rustic the choice of the hound's chase or the falcon's flight over land as a suitable possession. The chance of the falcon's flight was preferred, and the bird was allowed to take its flight from Kinnoul Hill—

"Kinnoul, so famous in the days of old,
Where stood a castle and a stately hold,
Of great antiquity, by brink of Tay,
Woods were above, beneath fair meadows lay."

The bird entered the Carse of Gowrie, and flew over an extent of ground several miles in length. It alighted on a stone near the banks of the Tay, upwards of a mile south of the mansion-house of Errol, which is still called the *Falcon Stone*. The old countryman was ennobled, and the King assigned three shields or escutcheons for the arms of the family, to intimate that the father and his two sons had been the three fortunate shields of Scotland. The Earls of Errol bear for their crest a falcon, and the supporters are two men in country habits holding the yokes of a plough over their shoulders, with this motto, *Servi jugum*, in allusion to their origin.

Such is the story gravely related by Buchanan and Boece of the battle of Luncarty, and "to confirm the truth of this ancient piece of history," says a writer in the Statistical Account of Scotland, "we have the uninterrupted tradition of the country, the testimonies of our most ancient historians, the undoubted marks of a battle, the armorial bearings of the Errol Family, the bows and the yokes, as far back as the twelfth century." But with all due deference to these statements, the account of the battle of Luncarty, so far as the origin of the Hays of Errol is concerned, is altogether a fiction. The legendary tale may give some explanation of the armorial bearings of the Family, but it is satisfactorily ascertained that the Hays of Scotland are a branch of the Anglo-Norman Hays who came into Britain with William the Conqueror.

The battle of Luncarty has been altogether denied, probably on account of the fictitious story of the origin of the Hays, but it is absurd to doubt the fact of the battle. Redgorton, or *Redgoretown*, the name of the parish in which Luncarty lies, is, according to an old tradition, derived from the battle, when many of the wounded were brought to the house of an ecclesiastic, which on that account was designated *Red-gore-town*, or *the town of the red*

gore. The country people pretended, and probably may do so still, to show the ridges where Hay and his sons were ploughing when they joined the battle, and these were distinguished from the rest of the field by small stripes of grass on each side, which no farmer had courage to break up till the *end of the eighteenth century*! They affected to show the narrow pass where the Hays rallied their fugitive countrymen, which is now levelled, but which a writer mentions he had seen entire, when it much resembled the small Roman stations existing in many places of Scotland, though not so regular.

The most convincing proofs of the battle are the *tumuli*, which still exist, and the human bones, and the hilts and blades of swords, spears, and bits of bridles, occasionally found. There is indeed a probability that there had been several separate engagements from the situation of these *tumuli* or burying-places. A writer says—"I have seen a great number of *tumuli* scattered over the field of battle where the dead were buried, not raised in any regular order, or in one place, but wherever the slain fell in the greatest numbers; these are now almost level with the rest of the ground. I have seen many of them opened, and the light ashes found in great quantities evince the nature of their contents." The graves of the Danish general and his officers are still indicated by large stones near some cottages which are called *Denmark*, or properly *Dane-Mark*, and near this place were dug up the handle and part of the blade of a sword, now in the possession of the Earl of Kinnoul. There is a rising ground called *Turn-again-hillock*, where the Danes began to retreat, and the hollow path is shown under cover of which the Highland clans surrounded the enemy. There were six or seven *tumuli* on the top of *Turn-again-hillock*, which were levelled in 1770, and it was evident that the earth had been artificially thrown up to cover dead bodies laid together. About three hundred yards eastward a large

tumulus was removed, on account of it interrupting the high road. In it were found skeletons almost entire not more than two feet and a half below the surface, the earth above them being a light gravel. In addition to these incontestible proofs the names of several places in the neighbourhood refer to the battle fought between the Scots and Danes at Luncarty, and the traditions of it evince the dreadful carnage which must have characterized a conflict the local recollections of which have been transmitted from generation to generation for many centuries.
