

BATTLE OF DALREE, OR THE BROOCH
OF LORN.*

A.D. 1306.

As the traveller proceeds up the river Dochart in Perthshire, and thence descends Glenfalloch to reach the head of Loch Lomond, he will pass a locality called *Dalree*, a compound Gaelic word signifying the *King's Field*, between

* Barbour's Bruce; Fraser's History of the Family of Fraser; Lord Hailes' Annals of Scotland; Sir Walter Scott's Lord of the Isles; Statistical Account of Scotland; Gregory's History of the Western Highlands and Islands

Crianlarich and the elevated and dreary-looking village of Tyndrum, about twelve miles equally distant from Dal-mally and Killin. This sequestered and romantic spot was the scene of a battle, which occasioned its name, between King Robert Bruce and MacDougal, the powerful chief of Lorn, who attacked Bruce as he was travelling with a small band of followers in this direction towards Kintyre, to seek refuge in Ireland. In the neighbourhood there is a large wood, in which the King is said to have concealed himself for some time. The site of the hut in which he lodged is designated *the King's House*. A ford over the Tummel is still known as the *King's Ford*, and the eminence above is the *King's Watch Tower*.

In the spring of 1306, King Robert Bruce was crowned at Scone, and in the month of June he was totally defeated by the troops of Edward I. at Methven near Perth. His principal adherents, with few exceptions, were either executed, or compelled to save their lives and fortunes by embracing the English interest; his life for some time after this disaster was that of an outlaw, and verified an expression said to have been used by his queen, that he was for that year *a summer king, but not a winter one*. Proceeding towards Kintyre with about three hundred men, he was encountered in Glen-Dochart by Alexander of Argyle, ancestor of the MacDougals of Lorn, one of those Hebridean and Argyle chiefs who at that period, and for upwards of a century afterwards, considered themselves independent of the Kings of Scotland. MacDougal was in alliance with Edward I., but he had private motives of resentment to Bruce, as he was, according to Lord Hailes, uncle by marriage of John Cumine, whom Bruce had recently slain at Dumfries; but the genealogy given by Winton makes him to have married the third daughter of Cumine—

“ The third daughter of Red Comyn,
Alexander of Argyle syne,

Took and wedded till his wife,
 And by her he gat until his life
 John of Lorn, the whilk gat
 Ewen of Lorn after that."

The chiefs of Lorn were descended from Dougal, a son of Somerled, Lord of the Isles, slain near Renfrew in 1164, and a daughter of Olaus, King of Man. They assumed the patronymic appellation of *Mac-Dougal*, by which they are distinguished in subsequent centuries. This ancient and once powerful family, the chiefs of which were petty princes rather than feudal barons, is still represented by their descendant, MacDougal of Dunolly in Argyleshire.

The Lord of Lorn, with about a thousand Argyleshire Highlanders, attacked Bruce at the locality now called Dalree in Glen-Dochart, and the conflict was unfavourable to the latter. Many of the horses belonging to Bruce's party were killed by the long pole-axes, of which the followers of Lorn had learnt the use from the Norwegians; nevertheless the King's adherents behaved with such great gallantry as to command the admiration of Lorn himself, and successfully confronted the Argyleshire Highlander, although greatly inferior to them in numbers. At length Bruce sounded a retreat through a narrow and difficult pass, bringing up the rear in person, and repeatedly turning and driving back the more adventurous assailants. Lorn, while admiring the prowess of the King, and observing his skill in protecting the retreat of his followers, exclaimed to one of his men that he resembled Gaul, or Gol, the son of Morni, celebrated in Celtic tradition. Two brothers, the strongest among Lorn's followers, whom Barbour designates MacIndrosser, interpreted Durward or Porterson, resolved to rid their chief of his formidable enemy, and a third person, named MacKeoch, associated himself with them for this purpose. Watching an opportunity until Bruce's party had entered a pass between Loch-Dochart, and a precipice

where the King had scarcely space to manage his steed, those three persons threw themselves upon him. One seized his bridle, but Bruce dealt him a blow which struck off his right arm; a second grasped him by the stirrup and leg, but the King, putting spurs to his horse, threw him down, and dragged him along the ground still holding by the stirrup; a third, taking advantage of an acclivity, sprung up behind him on his horse, yet Bruce extricated himself from his grasp, threw him to the ground, and cleft his skull with his sword. By a similar exertion he killed the one holding by the stirrup. The old Scottish poet adds an anecdote characteristic of the sentiments of chivalry. MacNaughton, a baron of Cowal, could not refrain from pointing out to Lorn the valour displayed by Bruce in this memorable retreat, and spoke of him in terms of the highest admiration. "It seems to give thee pleasure," said Lorn, "that he makes such havoc among our friends." "Not so, by my faith," replied MacNaughton, "but be he friend or foe who achieves high deeds of chivalry, men should bear faithful witness to his valour, and never have I heard of one who by his knightly feats has extricated himself from such dangers as have this day surrounded Bruce." The brave Sir James Douglas, popularly called the Good Lord Douglas, and Sir Gilbert Hay, were wounded in this conflict. Sir Niel Campbell, who married Marjory, a sister of Bruce, was also present.

Connected with this unfortunate skirmish is the celebrated *Brooch of Lorn*, a jewelled brooch of silver, and not of gold, as stated in Sir Walter Scott's "Lord of the Isles," as a means of keeping together the plaid and mantle which covered his armour. The tradition in the Family of the MacDougals of Lorn is, that their chieftain engaged in a personal conflict with Bruce while the latter was protecting the retreat of his men. MacDougal was struck down by the King, and would have been slain on the spot,

if two of his vassals, a father and his son, named MacKeoch, had not rescued him by seizing Bruce's mantle, and dragging him from above his adversary. The King rid himself of those foes by two blows of his battle-axe, but he was now so closely beset by the other followers of Lorn that he was compelled to leave the mantle and the brooch which fastened it in the dying grasp of the MacKeochs. The brooch continued for centuries in the possession of the MacDougals of Lorn as a proud trophy of their victory in Glendochart. Another tradition states that Finlay MacNab, chief of that clan, who was present at the conflict on the side of Lorn, engaged in a personal encounter with Bruce. Throwing down his sword, MacNab grappled with Bruce, and being a man of great strength, a quality in which the King also was not deficient, he was about gaining the advantage. When Bruce felt himself likely to be overpowered, he contrived to escape from the grasp of MacNab, leaving his mantle and the brooch in his hands.

The King and his followers were permitted to retire, and he is said to have taken refuge that night in a cave at the head of the glen of Balquidder still designated *Craigree*, or the *King's Rock*. There is also a tradition that Bruce took shelter in a cave at Craig-Royston on the side of Loch Lomond, having crossed the Falloch, which runs into the lake, and comes down thither on the north side. It is farther ludicrously added, that during the night Bruce slept in this cave his companions were a flock of mountain goats, who were in the habit of resorting to it for shelter. He found himself so comfortable with those animals, who were of gentler mood than the biped followers of Lorn, that he afterwards made a law, in compliment to his nocturnal associates, that all goats should be exempted from grass-mail or rent, as if the animals could be conscious of this mighty boon conferred on them. On the following day Bruce fell in with the Laird of Buchanan, who introduced him to the

loyal Earl of Lennox. That nobleman welcomed him with tears, but could render him no effective assistance. In this district the King and his few followers subsisted by hunting and fishing, until the weather compelled them to seek better shelter and sustenance than that which Highland mountains and lakes afforded. The Lord of the Isles, at that time in possession of a great part of Kintyre, received the fugitive monarch into his castle of Dunnavearty, but he was even compelled to leave the hospitable roof of this loyal chief, and he embarked with the remnant of his followers for a small island almost opposite the shore of Ballycastle, on the coast of Ireland, called Ratherin, or Rachrine. Here he resided until the approach of the ensuing spring, when he returned to Scotland with the resolution of achieving its independence, or of dying in the attempt.

But the brooch of Lorn, worn by Bruce at Dalree, must not be forgotten, as it is still in existence. There is a model of it in the Museum of the Antiquarian Society of Scotland in Edinburgh, but the brooch itself is carefully preserved in Dunolly Castle, the seat of MacDougal of Dunolly, the representative of the ancient Lords of Lorn. Sir Walter Scott makes the minstrel in the *LORD OF THE ISLES* exclaim—

“ Whence the brooch of *burning gold*,
 That clasps the chieftain’s mantle fold,
 Wrought and chased with rare device,
 Studded fair with gems of price ;
 On the varied tartans beaming,
 As, thro’ night’s pale rainbow gleaming,
 Fainter now, now seen afar,
 Fitful shines the northern star ?”

But the brooch, as already intimated, is not of gold, and we must view the above statement either as a poetical licence, or as proceeding from misinformation. It is of silver, and is described as consisting of a “ circular plate, about four inches in diameter, having a tongue like that of

a common buckle on the under side. The upper part is magnificently ornamented. From the margin rises a neatly formed rim, with hollows cut in the edges at certain distances, like the embrasures in an embattled wall. From a circle within this rim rise eight round tapering obelisks, about an inch and a quarter high, finely cut, and each shedded at top with a river pearl. Within this circle of obelisks there is a second rim, also ornamented with carved work, and within which rises a neat circular case, occupying the whole centre of the brooch, and slightly overtopping the obelisks. The exterior of this case, instead of forming a plain circle, projects into eight semi-cylinders, which relieve it from all appearance of heaviness. The upper part is likewise carved very elegantly, and in the centre there is a large gem. This case may be taken off, and within there is a hollow which might have contained any small articles upon which a particular value was set."

This precious memorial of the great restorer of the Scottish monarchy is immortalized by our national minstrel. The Lord of Lorn is supposed to be the person who secured the brooch, and the song is in praise of his achievement, the whole being a vituperation of Bruce for the murder of Cumine.

Gem! ne'er wrought on Highland mountain,
 Did the fairy of the fountain,
 Or the mermaid of the wave,
 Frame thee in some coral cave?
 Did in Iceland's darksome mine,
 Dwarfs' swarth hands thy metal twine?
 Or, mortal moulded, comest thou here,
 From England's love or France's fear?

No! thy splendours nothing tell
 Foreign art or faëry spell,
 Moulded thou for monarch's use
 By the overweening Bruce,

When the royal robe he tied
 O'er a heart of wrath and pride ;
 Thence in triumph wert thou torn
 By the victor hand of Lorn !

While the gem was won and lost,
 Widely was the war-cry toss'd !
 Rung aloud Bendourish Fell,
 Answering Douchart's sounding dell,
 Fled the deer from wild Tyndrum,
 When the homicide o'ercome,
 Hardly 'scaped with scathe and scorn,
 Left the pledge with conquering Lorn !

Vain was then the Douglas brand,
 Vain the Campbell's vaunted hand,
 Vain Kilpatrick's bloody dirk,
 Making sure of murder's work :
 Barendoun fled fast away,
 Fled the fiery De la Hay,
 When this brooch, triumphant borne,
 Beam'd upon the breast of Lorn.

Farthest fled its former lord,
 Left his men to brand and cord,
 Bloody brand of Highland steel,
 English gibbet, axe, and wheel,
 Let him fly from coast to coast,
 Dogg'd by Comyn's vengeful ghost,
 While his spoils, in triumph worn,
 Long shall grace victorious Lorn !

The poet represents this song in praise of Lorn, as giving mortal offence to a warrior who heard it, who turns out to be Bruce himself, and the following fine historical passage occurs :—

As glares the tiger on his foes,
 Hemm'd in by hunters' spears and bows,
 And, ere he bounds upon the ring,
 Selects the object of his spring—
 Now on the bard, now on his Lord,
 So Edward glared and grasped his sword ;
 But stern his brother spoke—" Be still !
 What ! art thou yet so wild of will,

After high deeds and sufferings long,
 To chafe thee for a menial's song?
 Well hast thou framed, old man, thy strains,
 To praise the hand that pays thy pains.
 Yet something might thy song have told
 Of Lorn's three vassals, true and bold,
 Who rent their Lord from Bruce's hold,
 As underneath his knee he lay,
 And died to save him in the fray.
 I've heard the Bruce's cloak and clasp
 Were clench'd within their dying grasp,
 What time a hundred foemen more
 Rush'd in and back the victor bore,
 Long after Lorn had left the strife,
 Full glad to 'scape with limb and life.
 Enough of this. And, minstrel, hold,
 As minstrel-hire, this chain of gold.
 For future lays a fair excuse
 To speak more nobly of the Bruce.'

"Now by Columba's shrine I swear,
 And every saint that's buried there,
 'Tis he himself!" Lorn sternly cries,
 "And for my kinsman's death he dies."
 As loudly Ronald calls—"Forbear!
 Not in my sight while brand I wear,
 O'ermatched by odds, shall warrior fall,
 Or blood of stranger stain my hall!
 This ancient fortress of my race
 Shall be misfortune's dwelling place,
 Shelter and shield of the distress'd,
 No slaughter-house for shipwreck'd guest."
 "Talk not to me," fierce Lorn replied,
 "Of odds or match! When Comyn died,
 Three daggers clash'd within his side!
 Talk not to me of sheltering hall,
 The church of God saw Comyn fall!
 On God's own altar streamed his blood,
 While o'er my prostrate kinsman stood
 The ruthless murderer—e'en as now—
 With armed hand and scornful brow.
 Up, all who love me! blow on blow!
 And lay the outlawed felons low!"

The *adventures* of the Brooch of Lorn form an appropriate conclusion to the present narrative, and they are given in a well known and popular periodical. "The ultimate

ascendancy of Bruce proved ruinous to this great family, on the ruins of which rose the Campbells and other clans. In the seventeenth century the MacDougals, once styled of Argyle, afterwards of Lorn, but now of Dunolly, while boasting of a most distinguished ancestry, and the chiefs of their clan, possessed but a comparatively small estate. Dunolly Castle, which overlooks the sea near Oban, and Goalen Castle in the neighbouring island of Kerrera, were their chief seats. In the civil war, the MacDougal of that day adhered to the royal cause, and suffered as much thereby as his ancestor had done by opposing it. In 1647 he was besieged in Dunolly by a detachment of General Leslie's troops under Colonel Montgomery. From the impregnable nature of the situation, he was successful in holding out this strength, but Goalen Castle was taken, sacked, and burned. Campbell of Inveraw, who took part in the latter affair, secured the brooch of King Robert, or, as it was now commonly called, the *Brooch of Lorn*, which he took into his possession as fair spoil, though he did think proper to make his good fortune too well known, lest the MacDougal might have thought it necessary afterwards to attempt the recovery of the highly valued relic by force. Time rolled on; the MacDougal of the early part of the last century lost his lands in consequence of embracing the cause of the Pretender in 1715, but his son regained them in consequence of keeping loyal in 1745. Meanwhile the brooch won at Dalree continued safe, amidst all the vicissitudes of the family fortunes, in the strong chest at Inveraw. To the MacDougals themselves it was not even known to exist. At length this precious relic passed into the hands of a cadet of the Inveraw family, who at a subsequent time appointed it by testament to be sold, and the proceeds divided among his younger children. It was accordingly, about the year 1819, sent to Messrs Rundell and Bridge in London, to be exposed for sale. the price put

upon it being one thousand pounds. The late King George IV., then Prince Regent, is said to have offered L.500 for the brooch, but without obtaining it, and no customer appeared who was willing to give the large sum put upon it by the possessor. It must be understood that, when thus laid before the public, it was openly described as the *Brooch of Lorn*, originally the property of King Robert Bruce, yet the fact of its existence and exposure for sale did not become known to the representative of the MacDougal family till after it had been withdrawn from the market. Ultimately, in the year 1825, the late amiable General Campbell of Lochnell, being anxious to bestow some mark of grateful regard on his esteemed friend and neighbour MacDougal, purchased the brooch, and caused it to be presented to that gentleman by his chief, the Duke of Argyle, at a social meeting of the landholders of that county. It thus, after an interval of more than a century and a half, found its way back to the family, who, next to King Robert, and his heirs and representatives, were certainly its most rightful owners. It is at present kept with great care in Dunolly Castle."

The loss sustained by the MacDougals of their extensive possessions is given in a lucid and condensed manner by Mr Donald Gregory, in the Introductory Sketch to his *History of the Western Highlands and Isles of Scotland*. "In the series of struggles for Scottish independence which marked the close of the thirteenth and the opening of the fourteenth centuries, the Lords of Lorn, who were closely connected by marriage with the Comyn and Baliol party, naturally arrayed themselves in opposition to the claims of Bruce. On the other hand, the Houses of Isla and the North Isles supported with all their power the apparently desperate fortunes of King Robert I.; and thus, when he came to be firmly seated on the throne, had earned the gratitude of that prince, in the same proportion as the family of

Lorn, by the inveteracy of their hostility had provoked his resentment. On the forfeiture of Alexander Lord of Lorn, and his son and heir John, these extensive territories were granted by Bruce to various of his supporters; and among others, to Angus Oig, or *junior*, of Isla, and to Roderick or Ruari MacAlan, the bastard brother and leader of the vassals of Christina, the daughter and heiress of Alan MacRuari of the North Isles. The Isles of Mull, the possession of which had for some time past been disputed between the Lords of Isla and Lorn, Jura, Coll, and Tiree, with the districts of Duror and Glenco, fell in this way to the share of Angus Oig. Lorn Proper, or the greatest part of it, was bestowed on Roderick MacAlan, to whom his sister Christina gave at the same time a large portion of her inheritance in Gamoran and the North Isles. The lordship of Lochaber, forfeited by one of the powerful family of Comyns, seems to have been divided between Angus Oig and Roderick. The former likewise obtained in this reign the lands of Morvern and Ardnamurchan, which seem previously to have been in the hands of the crown. But while Bruce thus rewarded his faithful adherents, he was too sensible of the weakness of Scotland on the side of the Isles, not to take precautionary measures against the probable defection of any of the great families on that coast, who might with ease admit an English force into the heart of the kingdom. He procured from Angus Oig, who was now apparently the principal crown-vassal in Kintyre, the resignation of his lands in that district, which were immediately bestowed upon Robert the son and heir of Walter the High Steward, and the Princess Marjory Bruce. At the same time the fortifications of the Castle of Tarbert between Kintyre and Knapdale, the most important position on the coast of Argyleshire, were greatly enlarged and strengthened, and the custody of this commanding post was committed to a royal garrison. Fel-

lowing out the same policy in other places, the keeping of the Castle of Dunstaffnage, the principal messuage of Lorn, was given by Bruce, not to Roderick MacAlan, the *High Chief of Lorn*, but to an individual of the name of Campbell, who was placed there as a royal constable."

It appears that John, the son and heir of Alexander MacDougal of Lorn, who encountered Bruce in Glen-Dochart, received a great portion of his family possessions from David II., consisting of the Isles of Isla, Gigha, Jura, Scarba, Colonsay, Mull, Coll, Tiree, and Lewis, and the districts of Morvern, Lochaber, Duror, and Glenco. The representatives of the MacDougals of Lorn had married a niece of the King, which facilitated his restoration to these portions of his family estates. His daughter and heiress carried Lorn Proper to her husband Robert Stuart, founder of the Rosyth branch of the House of Stuart, by whom the lordship was sold to his brother, John Stuart of Innermeath, ancestor of the Stuarts, Lords of Lorn.

Yet Bruce did not subdue the indomitable MacDougals without an infinitude of trouble. After his return from the exile occasioned by his defeat at Dalree and the unbending opposition of the Lord of Lorn, he resolved to take the first opportunity of requiting the latter for the injuries he had received. Marching into Argyleshire, he laid waste the country, carrying every thing before him, until he came to the formidable and narrow pass between Dalmally and Bunawe, along the verge of the vast and precipitous mountain Cruachan-Ben, and guarded on the other side by a precipice overhanging Loch Awe. No position is apparently stronger, but the genius of Bruce overcame the difficulty. While his main body engaged with the men of Lorn, and kept their attention directed to the point, Bruce ordered James of Douglas, Sir Alexander Fraser, Sir William Wiseman, and Sir Andrew Gray, to ascend the mountain with a select band of archers, who obtained possession of the

heights commanding the pass. A volley of arrows intimated to the men of Lorn that resistance was now useless, and they betook themselves to a precipitate flight. Barbour informs us that the deep and rapid river of Awe was even in that early period passed by a bridge, which the Argyleshire men attempted to demolish; but the followers of Bruce were too close upon their rear, and they were dispersed with great slaughter. John of Lorn, anticipating the issue of this conflict, had early betaken himself to his galleys upon Loch Awe. After this decisive engagement Bruce laid waste Argyle and besieged Dunstaffnage Castle, which he compelled to surrender, and, as already intimated, placed a royal garrison in that principal stronghold of the Lords of Lorn.

Notwithstanding all the vicissitudes of fortune, owing to their hereditary enmity to the house of Bruce, the MacDougals of Lorn continued to survive the loss of power, and, says Sir Walter Scott, they "afford a very rare, if not an unique, instance of a family of such unlimited power, and so distinguished during the Middle Ages, surviving the decay of their grandeur, and flourishing in a private station. The Castle of Dunolly, with its dependencies, was the principal part of what remained to them, with the right of chieftainship over the families of their name and blood. Nothing can be more wildly beautiful than the situation of Dunolly. The ruins are situated upon a bold and precipitous promontory, overhanging Loch Etive, and distant about a mile from the village and port of Oban. The principal part which remains is the donjon or keep, but fragments of other buildings, overgrown with ivy, attest that it had been once a place of importance, as large apparently as Artornish or Dunstaffnage. These fragments include a court-yard, of which the keep probably formed one side, the entrance being by a steep ascent from the neck of the isthmus, formerly cut across by a moat, and defended, doubtless, by out-

works and a drawbridge. Beneath the castle stands the present mansion of the family, having on the one side Loch Etive with its islands and mountains, on the other two romantic eminences tufted with copse wood. There are other accompaniments suited to the scene; in particular, a huge upright pillar, a detached fragment of that sort of rock called plumb-pudding-stone, upon the shore, about a quarter of a mile from the castle. It is called *Clach-na-cau*, or the *Dog's Pillar*, because Fingal is said to have used it as a stake to which he bound his celebrated dog Bran. Others say that when the Lord of the Isles came upon a visit to the Lord of Lorn, the dogs, brought for his sport, were kept beside this pillar. Upon the whole, a more delightful and romantic spot can scarce be conceived, and it receives a moral interest from the considerations attached to the residence of a family once powerful enough to confront and defeat Robert Bruce, and now sunk into the shade of private life."
