

TALES
OF
THE SCOTISH WARS.

THE FEUD OF FRENDRAUGHT.

IN the year 1630, Banffshire and other districts on the south side of the Moray Frith were convulsed by a dispute which occurred between James Crichton of Frendraught, Frendret, or Frennet, and William Gordon of Rothiemay, which ended in tragical consequences. These two gentlemen were near neighbours, and their lands lay adjacent to each other. Part of Gordon's lands which marched with those of Crichton, were purchased by the latter; but a dispute having occurred about the right to the salmon fishings belonging to these lands, an irreconcilable difference arose between them, which no interference of friends could reconcile, although the matter in dispute was of little moment. The parties having had recourse to the law to settle their respective claims, Crichton prevailed, and succeeded in getting Gordon denounced rebel. He had previously treated Rothiemay very harshly, who, stung by the severity of his opponent, and by the victory he had obtained over him, would listen to no proposals of peace, nor follow the advice of his best friends. Determined to set the law at defiance, he collected a number of loose and disorderly characters, and annoyed Frendraught, who, in consequence, applied for, and obtained a commission

from the privy council for apprehending Rothiemay and his associates. In the execution of this task, he was assisted by Sir George Ogilvy of Banff, George Gordon, brother-german of Sir James Gordon of Lesmoir, and the uncle of Frendraught, James Leslie, second son of Leslie of Pitcaple, John Meldrum of Reidhill, and others.

Accompanied by these gentlemen, Crichton left his house at Frendraught on the first day of January 1630, for the house of Rothiemay, with a resolution either to apprehend Gordon, his antagonist, or to set him at defiance by affronting him. He was incited the more to follow this course, as young Rothiemay, at the head of a party, had come a short time before to the very doors of Frendraught, and had braved him to his face. When Rothiemay heard of the advance of Frendraught, he left his house, accompanied by his eldest son, John Gordon, and about eight men on horseback armed with guns and lances, and a party of men on foot with muskets, and crossing the river Deveron, he went forward to meet Frendraught and his party. A sharp conflict immediately took place, in which Rothiemay's horse was killed under him, who being unprovided with another, fought manfully, for some time, on foot, until the whole of his party, with the exception of his son, were forced to retire. The son, notwithstanding, continued to support his father against fearful odds, but was, at last, obliged to save himself by flight, leaving his father lying on the field covered with wounds, and supposed to be dead. He, however, was found still alive after the conflict was over, and being carried home to his house died within three days thereafter. George Gordon, brother of Gordon of Lesmoir, received a shot in the thigh, and died in consequence, ten days after the skirmish. These were the only deaths which occurred, although several of the combatants, on both sides, were wounded. John Meldrum, who fought on Frendraught's side, was the only person severely wounded.

The Marquis of Huntly was highly displeased at Frendraught, for having, in such a trifling matter, proceeded to extremities against his kinsman, a chief baron of his surname, whose life had been thus sacrificed in a petty quarrel. The displeasure of the Marquis was still farther heightened, when he was informed that Frendraught had joined the Earl of Moray, and had craved his protection and assistance; but the Marquis was obliged to repress his indignation. John Gordon of Rothiemay, eldest son of the deceased laird, resolved to avenge the death of his father, and having collected a party of men, he associated himself with James Grant and other freebooters, for the purpose of laying waste Frendraught's lands, and oppressing him in every possible way. Frendraught who was in the south of Scotland when this combination against him was formed, no sooner heard of it than he posted to England; and, having laid a statement of the case before the king, his majesty remitted the matter to the privy council of Scotland, desiring them to use their best endeavours for settling the peace of the northern parts of the kingdom.

A commission was thereupon granted by the lords of the council to Frendraught and others, for the purpose of apprehending John Gordon and his associates; but, as the commissioners were not able to execute the task imposed upon them, the lords of the council sent Sir Robert Gordon, tutor of Sutherland, who had just returned from England, and Sir William Seaton of Killesmuir, to the north, with a new commission against the rebels; and, as it seemed to be entirely out of the power of the Earl of Moray to quell the disturbances in the north, they gave the two commissioners particular instructions to attempt, with the aid of the Marquis of Huntly, to get matters settled amicably, and the opposing parties reconciled. The lords of the council, at the same time, wrote a letter to the Marquis of Huntly to the same effect. Sir Robert Gordon and Sir William Seaton accord-

ingly left Edinburgh on their way north, in the beginning of May 1630. The latter stopt at Aberdeen for the purpose of consulting with some gentlemen of that shire, as to the best mode of proceeding against the rebels; and the former went to Strathbogie to advise with the Marquis of Huntly.

On Sir Robert's arrival at Strathbogie, he found that the Marquis had gone to Aberdeen to attend the funeral of the laird of Drum. By a singular coincidence, James Grant and Alexander Grant descended the very day of Sir Robert's arrival at Strathbogie from the mountains, at the head of a party of two hundred Highlanders well armed, with a resolution to burn and lay waste Frendraught's lands. As soon as Sir Robert became aware of this circumstance, he went in great haste to Rothiemay-house, where he found John Gordon and his associates in arms ready to set out to join the Grants. By persuasion and entreaties, Sir Robert, assisted by his nephew, the Earl of Sutherland, and his brother, Sir Alexander Gordon, who were then at Frendraught, on a visit to the lady of that place, who was a sister of the Earl, prevailed not only upon John Gordon and his friends to desist, but also upon James Grant and his companions-in-arms, to disperse.

On the return of the Marquis of Huntly to Strathbogie, Rothiemay and Frendraught were both induced to meet them in presence of the Marquis, Sir Robert Gordon, and Sir William Seaton, who, after much entreaty, prevailed upon them to reconcile their differences, and submit all matters in dispute to their arbitrament. A decree-arbitral was accordingly pronounced, by which the arbiters adjudged that the laird of Rothiemay, and the children of George Gordon, should mutually remit their father's slaughter; and, in satisfaction thereof, they decerned that the laird of Frendraught should pay a certain sum of money to the laird of Rothiemay, for relief of the debts which he had contracted during the disturbances between the two families, and that he should

pay some money to the children of George Gordon. Frendraught fulfilled these engagements most willingly, and the parties shook hands together in the orchard of Strathbogie, in token of a hearty and sincere reconciliation.

The laird of Frendraught had scarcely reconciled himself with Rothiemay, when he got into another dispute with the laird of Pitcaple, the occasion of which was as follows:— John Meldrum of Reidhill had assisted Frendraught in his quarrel with old Rothiemay, and had received a wound in the skirmish, in which the latter lost his life, for which injury Frendraught had allowed him some compensation; but, conceiving that his services had not been fairly requited, he began to abuse Frendraught, and threatened to compel him to give him a greater recompense than he had yet received. As Frendraught refused to comply with his demands, Meldrum entered the park of Frendraught privately in the night-time, and carried away two horses belonging to his pretended debtor. Frendraught, thereupon, prosecuted Meldrum for theft, but he declined to appear in court, and was consequently declared rebel. Frendraught then obtained a commission, from the lords of the privy council, to apprehend Meldrum, who took refuge with John Leslie of Pitcaple, whose sister he had married. Under the commission which he had procured, Frendraught went in quest of Meldrum, on the 27th of September 1630. He proceeded to Pitcaple's lands, on which he knew Meldrum then lived, where he met James Leslie, second son of the laird of Pitcaple, who had been with him at the skirmish of Rothiemay. Leslie then began to expostulate with him in behalf of Meldrum, his brother-in-law, who, on account of the aid he had given him in his dispute with Rothiemay, took Leslie's remonstrances in good part; but Robert Crichton of Couland, a kinsman of Frendraught, grew so warm at Leslie's freedom, that from high words they proceeded to blows. Couland then drawing a pistol from his belt, shot at and wounded Leslie in the arm,

who was, thereupon, carried home apparently in a dying state.

This affair was the signal for a confederacy among the Leslies, the greater part of whom took up arms against Frendraught, who, a few days after the occurrence, viz. on the 5th of October, first went to the Marquis of Huntly, and afterwards to the Earl of Moray, to express the regret he felt at what had taken place, and to beg their kindly interference to bring matters to an amicable accommodation. The Earl of Moray, for some reason or other, declined to interfere; but the Marquis undertook to mediate between the parties. Accordingly, he sent for the laird of Pitcaple to come to the Bog of Gight to confer with him; but, before setting out, he mounted and equipped about thirty horsemen, in consequence of information he had received that Frendraught was at the Bog. At the meeting with the Marquis, Pitcaple complained heavily of the injury his son had sustained, and avowed, rather rashly, that he would revenge himself before he returned home, and that, at all events, he would listen to no proposals for a reconciliation till it should be ascertained whether his son would survive the wound he had received. The Marquis insisted that Frendraught had done him no wrong, and endeavoured to dissuade him from putting his threat into execution; but Pitcaple was so displeased at the Marquis for thus expressing himself, that he suddenly mounted his horse and set off, leaving Frendraught behind him. The Marquis, afraid of the consequences, detained Frendraught two days with him in the Bog of Gight, and, hearing that the Leslies had assembled, and lay in wait for Frendraught watching his return home, the Marquis sent his son John, Viscount of Aboyne, and the laird of Rothiemay along with him, to protect and defend him if necessary. They arrived at Frendraught without interruption; and being solicited to remain all night, they yielded, and, after partaking of a hearty supper, went to bed in the apartments provided for

them. A beautiful little poem, founded upon some old lyrics, and published among Finlay's Ballads, supposes the party to have in the course of the feud slain the laird of Frendraught, and represents them as wilily and treacherously enticed to Frendraught Castle by his lady with a view to revenge :—

“ When Frennet Castle’s ivied walls
Thro’ yellow leaves were seen;
When birds forsook the sapless boughs,
And bees the faded green;

Then Lady Frennet, vengeful dame,
Did wander frae the ha’,
To the wild forests dowie gloom
Among the leaves that fa’.

Her page, the swiftest of her train,
Had clumb a lofty tree,
Whose branches to the angry blast,
Were southing mournfullie.

He turn’d his e’en towards the path,
That near the castle lay,
Where good Lord John, and Rothemay,
Were riding down the brae.

Swift darts the eagle from the sky,
When prey beneath is seen,
As quickly he forgot his hold,
And perch’d upon the green.

‘ O hie thee, hie thee, lady gay,
Frae this dark wood awa’,
Some visitors, of gallant mien,
Are hasting to the ha’;

Then round she row'd her silken plaid,
 Her feet she did na spare,
 Until she left the forest skirts,
 A lang bow shot and mair.

' O where, O where, my good Lord John.
 O tell me where you ride;
 Within my castle wall this night
 I hope you mean to bide.

Kind nobles, will ye but alight,
 In yonder bower to stay ;
 Saft ease shall teach you to forget
 The hardness of the way.'

' Forbear entreaty, gentle dame ;
 How can we here remain ?
 Full well you ken your husband dear
 Was by our father slain.

The thoughts of which with fell revenge,
 Your angry bosom swell ;
 Enrag'd, you've sworn that blood for blood
 Should this black passion quell.'

' O fear not, fear not, good Lord John,
 That I will you betray,
 Or sue requital for a debt,
 Which nature cannot pay.

Bear witness, a' ye powers on high,
 Ye lights, that 'gin to shine,
 This night shall prove the sacred cord,
 That knits your faith and mine.'

The lady slee, with honeyed words,
Entic'd thir youths to stay;
But morning sun ne'er shone upon
Lord John nor Rothemay."

The sleeping apartment of Lord John was in the tower of Frendraught, leading off from the hall. Immediately below this apartment was a vault, in the bottom of which was a round hole of considerable depth. Robert Gordon, a servant of the Viscount, and his page, English Will, as he was called, also slept in the same chamber. The laird of Rothiemay, with some servants, were put into an upper chamber immediately above that in which the Viscount slept; and in another apartment, directly over the latter, were laid George Chalmer of Noth, Captain Rollock, one of Frendraught's party, and George Gordon, another of the Viscount's servants. About midnight the whole of the tower almost instantaneously took fire; and so suddenly and furiously did the flames consume the edifice, that the Viscount, the laird of Rothiemay, English Will, Colonel Ivat, one of Aboyne's friends, and two other persons, perished in the flames. Robert Gordon, called Sutherland Gordon, from having been born in that country, who lay in the Viscount's chamber, escaped from the flames, as did George Chalmer and Captain Rollock, who were in the third floor; and it is said that Lord Aboyne might have saved himself also, had he not, instead of going out of doors, which he refused to do, ran suddenly up stairs to Rothiemay's chamber for the purpose of awakening him. While so engaged, the stair-case and ceiling of Rothiemay's apartment hastily took fire, and, being prevented from descending by the flames, which filled the stair-case, they ran from window to window of the apartment piteously and unavailingly exclaiming for help. The fragment of an old ballad on the subject says:—

“ The reek it rose, and the flame it flew,
An oh! the fire augmented high,
Until it came to Lord John’s chamber window,
And to the bed where Lord John lay.

‘ O help me, help me, Lady Frennet,
I never ettled harm to thee;
And if my father slew thy lord,
Forget the deed, and rescue me.’

He looked east, he looked west,
To see if any help was nigh;
At length his little page he saw,
Who to his lord alone did cry,

‘ Loup down, loup down, my master dear;
What tho’ the window’s dreigh and hie,
I’ll catch you in my arms twa,
And never a foot from you I’ll flee.’

‘ How can I loup, you little page?
How can I leave this window hie?
Do you not see the blazing low,
And my twa legs burnt to my knee?’ ”

The news of this calamitous event spread speedily throughout the kingdom, and the fate of the unfortunate sufferers was deeply deplored. Many conjectures were formed as to the cause of the conflagration. Some persons laid the blame on Frendraught; though he himself was a considerable loser, having lost not only a large quantity of silver plate and coin, but also the title deeds of his property and other necessary papers, which were all consumed. Others ascribed the fire to some accidental cause. But the greater number suspected the Leslies and their adherents, who were then so enraged at

Frendraught, that they threatened to burn the house of Frendraught, and had even entered into a negotiation to that effect with James Grant the rebel, who was Pitciple's cousin-german, for his assistance, as was proved before the lords of the privy council against John Meldrum and Alexander Leslie, Pitciple's brother, by two of James Grant's men, who were apprehended at Inverness and sent to the lords of the council, by Sir Robert Gordon, sheriff of Sutherland.

The Marquis of Huntly, who suspected Frendraught to be the author of the fire, afterwards went to Edinburgh and laid a statement of the case before the privy council, who, thereupon, issued a commission to the Bishops of Aberdeen and Moray, Lord Carnegie, and Crowner Bruce, to investigate the circumstances which led to the catastrophe. The commissioners accordingly went to Frendraught on the 13th of April 1631, where they were met by the Lords Gordon, Ogilvie, and Desford, and several barons and gentlemen, along with whom they examined the burnt tower and vaults below, with the adjoining premises, to ascertain, if possible, how the fire had originated. After a minute inspection, they came to the deliberate opinion, which they communicated in writing to the council, that the fire could not have been accidental, and that it must either have been occasioned by some engine from without, which was highly improbable, or raised intentionally within the vaults or chambers of the tower. A tradition, embodied in an old but lost song, says that the laird and lady of Frendraught locked the door of the tower, and flung the keys into the draw-well; and this tradition is alleged by another and more modern one to have been corroborated, about two generations or so ago, by the finding of the keys at the clearing out of the well.