

THE STRIFES OF MORTLACH.

MORTLACH, a large parish in the Moray district of Banffshire, is famous as the scene of a signal victory achieved by

Malcolm II., in 1010, over the Danes. He had been beaten by these foemen in the preceding year, and compelled to leave them in possession of the province of Moray. Returning from the south with a reinforced and powerful army, he burned to expel the intruders, and found them in readiness to give him battle. The armies came in sight of each other near the church of Mortlach, and engaged a little to the north. Three of the Scottish generals fell in the first shock of collision; and panic and confusion followed among the Scottish troops. The King was reluctantly borne along with the retreating crowd till he was opposite the church of Mortlach, then a chapel dedicated to St. Molach; and here, while his army were partially pent up in their flight by the contraction of the vale, and the narrowness of the pass, he performed some of the showy rites of saint-worship, and rallied and roused his troops with an animated appeal to their patriotism, and, placing himself at their head, wheeled round upon the foe, threw Enotus, one of the Danish generals, from his horse, and killed him with his own hand. The Scots, now flung back from fear to enthusiasm, made an impetuous onset, carried victory in their van, and thickly strewed the ground with the corpses of their foes. A fuller account of this battle, together with some notice of local vestiges of it, is given on pages 9—11 of the second volume of these Tales. Had the Danes been victors on this occasion, they would in all probability have obtained as broad and firm a footing in Scotland as they did in England; but they were all along indefatigably and most determinedly opposed, and only four years afterwards were completely and almost finally chased out of the country, by the Scottish monarch of the period, he who

“Thirty years of variegated reign,
Was King by fate, Malcolm.”

About the year 1670, a hereditary feud which had long existed between the powerful clans of the Mackintoshes and the Gordons, and which had often been alternately suppressed and revived, broke suddenly out and came to a curious tragical termination. The castle of Auchindune, Auchindoun, or Auchindown, situated on a green conical mount, overlooking the river Fiddish, in the parish of Mortlach, is supposed to have been built by Cochrane, the favourite of James III., and was for some time the property of the Ogilvies, and part of the lordship of Deskford, but passed in 1535 into the possession of the Gordons, and continued till 1670 to be one of their princeliest residences and most imposing fortalices. William Mackintosh, a young man of high spirit, was the heir to the chieftainship of the Clan Chattan or clan of the Mackintoshes; but, in consequence of the feud with the Gordons, and of confusions which it had occasioned, he did not get into possession of his rights without difficulty; and he seems to have promptly and sternly formed a purpose to hurl his newly acquired power at the Gordons by burning their castle of Auchindune. The execution of this purpose is commemorated in the following terse stanzas of an old song:—

“ As I came in by Fiddich-side
 In a May morning,
 I met Willie Mackintosh
 An hour before the dawning.

‘ Turn again, turn again,
 Turn again, I bid ye;
 If ye burn Auchindown,
 Huntly he will head ye.’

‘ Head me, hang me,
 That sall never fear me,
 I’ll burn Auchindown
 Before the life leaves me.’

As I came in by Auchindown
In a May morning,
Auchindown was in a bleeze
An hour before the dawning.'

The Marquis of Huntly immediately marched against the aggressor at the head of his retainers; and a fierce struggle ensued. The Mackintoshes were overpowered; and the chief despairing of mercy at the hands of Huntly, appealed to his lady, before whom he presented himself as a suppliant, in the absence of her husband. The marchioness, however, showed herself a fit mate for such a lord. Seeing the enemy of her house suing for mercy upon her hearth, the inexorable virago, insensible alike to compassion and humanity, caused his head to be struck off, and by this bloody act for ever dishonoured her family and name. The death of the chief, however, was productive of no further injury or loss to the clan. The feud seems to have been extinguished in his blood; and as Huntly now found himself opposed by a party of the nobility, all of them more or less intimately connected with Mackintosh, he was obliged to put the son of that ill-fated chief in possession of his paternal inheritance.

Another old fortalice in Mortlach, the house of Edin-glassie, though vastly inferior in both architectural grandeur and historical note to Auchindune Castle, possesses considerable interest in connexion with the ensanguined story of Highland feuds, and was the scene of an appalling instance of the miseries of civil war, and of the tyrannical and detestable power which was often wielded by the chieftains and barons of the fental age. Some of the Highland clans, on their march from Strathspey through Mortlach to Strathbogie, in 1690, the year of the engagement on the haughs of Cromdale, having burnt the house in prosecution of the public dissen-

sions of the period, the laird, whose name was Gordon, seized 18 of them at random, when they were returning a few weeks after, and hanged them all on the trees of his garden.