

THE EXPLOITS OF COLKITTO.

COLL Macdonald, commonly called Coll-Kittoch or Colkitto from his being left-handed, is variously reported to have been the son of a gentleman of Iona, the natural son of the Earl of Antrim, and the son of Sir James Macdonald of Kintyre. But whatever was his parentage, he flourished toward the middle of the 17th century, and was a disinherited person of great consequence among the Macdonalds, and made a conspicuous figure in the civil wars of the Marquis of Montrose. He was noted for his strength and prowess, for his assiduity and daring, for his attachment to the cause of Charles I., and most of all for a fierce and furious antipathy to the noble family of Argyle and the whole great clan of the Campbells. He was at once poor, ambitious, and desperate, and seems to have acquired his asperities of character amid an early and rough acquaintance with adversity. Tradition says that he had large pecuniary claims through his mother upon the house of Argyle,—that, in fact, he was a nephew of

the Earl, and lawful heir to a large dowry, which had never been paid to his mother,—that he presented and urged and prosecuted his claims, and got only rebuffs and scorn and persecution in lieu of them,—and that, in revenge, he took violent possession of the island of Collonsay, and made frequent rieving descents thence upon the lands of the Campbells, and at last applied to the Earl of Antrim for an armed Irish force of sufficient strength to inflict punishment, on a great scale, on the whole country of Argyle.

This final scheme synchronised and coincided with a grudge which the Earl of Antrim bore to the Earl of Argyle for joining the Covenanters, and for several reasons of private quarrel, and with a wish which he cherished to afford some aid to the cause of Carlist prelacy and kingcraft. Colkitto, therefore, readily obtained in Ulster an army of 2,000 men or more for the invasion of Scotland; and with these, early in July, 1644, he sailed up the west side of Kintyre, and among the inner Hebrides, and made occasional descents upon the land, destroying the residences and pillaging the property of almost every Campbell who lay in his way. As he approached Duntroon Castle on the bay of Crinan, he sent his piper forward, in the capacity of a spy, to procure information and mislead the inmates. But the piper, on getting in, found that the place was strong enough to repel invaders, that the entrance to it was so narrow as to admit only one person at a time, and that he himself was speedily suspected, and obliged to yield himself prisoner in one of the upper turrets; and, when by and bye, he observed through some crevice or loop-hole that Colkitto was drawing near, he contrived to warn him of the danger of making an attack by playing on his bagpipes the well-known pibroch,

“ A cholla mo run seach ain an tur, seach ain an tur,
 A cholla mo ghaoil seachan an caol, seachan an caol,
 Tha mise an laimh, tha mise an laimh,” That is,

“ Dearest Coll, shun the tower, shun the tower,
Beloved Coll, shun the sound, shun the sound,
I am in hand, I am in hand,” or a prisoner.

Colkitto understood the warning; and, supposing Duntroon Castle to be impregnable, he left his faithful piper to his fate, and continued his career of plunder and devastation, through the estates of Duntroon, Rassly, and Kilmartin, away onward to Loch-Awe. “He carried away all the cattle,” says the New Statistical Account of one of the parishes, “with the exception of one dun cow that happened to escape his notice, being hid in a thicket of birch in a hollow below Kilmartin. This cow is still known by the natives by the name of *Bo-Mhaol othar Achabhean*, i. e., the humel dun cow of Achaven. It was this cow, by her lowing for her calf, which had been carried away with the rest of the cattle of the strath, that is said to have sounded the first note of lamentation and wailing among the inhabitants, when they ventured from their hiding-places in the hills, to behold the destruction of their dwellings, and the devastation of everything valuable that belonged to them.”

Colkitto's success in Kilmartin was well counterpoised by the reception he got in the adjacent district of Craignish. The chieftain of this tract got timely intelligence of Colkitto's approach; and being possessed of a resolute disposition, a very strong castle, and a body of devoted and stalwart retainers, he determined to offer a stern resistance, and to lose no property; and, accordingly, he sent away all the cattle on his mainland estates to the islets toward Jura, and increased the garrison of his castle by receiving into it all of his clan who were able to carry arms. Colkitto, on arriving at the place, could get nothing, and commenced a siege; but he was soon obliged to retire; and, when he rose to take his leave, a party from the castle made a sortie upon him, and

slew a number of his men, and compelled himself and the rest to scamper off in hurry and disorder.

Colkitto had various fortunes and made general havoc in other descents farther to the north; and at length, he made his final landing in Knoydart in Inverness-shire, where he expected to be joined by the Marquis of Huntly, who had just made a rising in favour of the King. The Marquis of Montrose, the master-mind of all the Scottish movements of the period in the cause of Charles, had only a few days before travelled clandestinely, incognito, and without any military support, from Carlisle into Scotland, and was at the moment lying perdu among the Highlands of Perthshire, at an utter loss for means or expedients to amass an army and commence a campaign. Colkitto, however, supposed Montrose to be in strength, though he knew not where, and imagined his own forces to be but a small reinforcement on the way to join a large army; and he marched boldly from the coast toward the Central Grampians, in the style of a great chief and commander. As he advanced into the interior he dispatched the fiery cross for the purpose of summoning the clans to his standard; but, although the cross was carried through a large extent of country, even to Aberdeen, he was only joined at first by the Clan-Donald, under the captain of Clanronald, and the laird of Glengary. The Marquis of Argyll collected an army to oppose his progress; and in order to cut off his retreat to Ireland, he sent some ships of war to Loch Eishord, where Colkitto's fleet lay, which captured or destroyed them. This loss, while it frustrated an intention which Colkitto entertained of returning to Ireland, in consequence of the disappointment he had met with in not being joined by the clans, stimulated him to farther exertions in continuing his march, in the hope of meeting Montrose.

As Macdonald was perfectly ignorant of Montrose's movements, and thought it likely that he might be still at Carlisle, waiting till he should hear of Colkitto's arrival, he sent let-

ters to him by the hands of a confidential friend, who resided in the neighbourhood of Graham Inchbrakie's house, where Montrose happened at the time to be ensconced. This gentleman, who knew nothing of Montrose's return to Scotland, having luckily communicated to Mr. Graham the secret of being entrusted with letters to his kinsman, Montrose, Graham offered to see them safely delivered to Montrose, though he should ride to Carlisle himself. The gentleman in question then delivered the letters to Graham, and Montrose having received them, wrote an answer as if from Carlisle, in which he requested Colkitto to keep up his spirits, that he would soon be joined by a seasonable reinforcement and a general at their head, and he ordered him with all expedition to march down into Athole. In fixing on Athole as the place of his rendezvous, Montrose is said to have been actuated by an implicit reliance on the fidelity and loyalty of the Athole-men, and by a high opinion of their courage. They lay, besides, under many obligations to himself, and he calculated that he had only to appear among them to command their services in the cause of their sovereign.

When Colkitto received these instructions, he marched towards Athole; but in passing through Badenoch he was threatened with an attack by the Earls of Sutherland and Seaforth, at the head of some of their people, and by the Frazers, Grants, Rosses, and Munroes, and other inhabitants of Moray, who had assembled at the top of Strathspey; but Colkitto very cautiously avoided them, and hastened into Athole. On arriving in Athole, he was coldly received by the people of that as well as the surrounding country, who doubted whether he had any authority from the King, and besides they hesitated to place themselves under the command of a person of neither noble nor ancient lineage, and whom they considered an upstart. This indecision might have proved fatal to Colkitto, who was closely pressed in his rear by the army of Argyle, had not these untoward

deliberations been instantly put an end to by the arrival of Montrose at Blair, where Colkitto had fixed his head-quarters. Montrose had travelled seventy miles on foot, in a highland dress, accompanied by Patrick Graham, his cousin, as his guide. His appearance was hailed by his countrymen with every demonstration of joy, and they immediately made him a spontaneous offer of their services. Accordingly, on the following day, the Athole-men to the number of about 800, consisting chiefly of the Stewarts and Robertsons, put themselves under arms and flocked to the standard of Montrose. Thus, in little more than twenty-four hours, Montrose saw himself at the head of a considerable force, animated by an enthusiastic attachment to his person and to the cause which he had espoused.

We need not follow Montrose through his well-known campaigns and battles; but may simply state that Colkitto followed him and co-operated with him, for some time, as one of his most active officers,—that, in the winter of 1644 5, the first winter after the events which we have been narrating, Montrose, with Colkitto and other leaders, made a terribly devastating incursion athwart the country of the Campbells,—that, after the battle of Inverlochy in February 1645, and in connexion with the overrunning of Argyleshire, Colkitto took possession of Kintyre as his inheritance,—that Alexander Macdonald, the son of Colkitto, served as Major-General under Montrose, and was knighted by him after the latter was appointed Captain-General of Scotland,—that, after the fracture of Montrose's fortunes at the battle of Philiphaugh, in September 1645, Sir Alexander Macdonald in the south and the Marquis of Huntly in the north were the only chiefs who remained in arms against the Covenanters—and that, amid the general and final wreck of the royalist cause in 1647, General Leslie and the Earl of Argyle, pursued Sir Alexander and Colkitto to Kintyre and the Hebrides, and put a tragical end to all their exploits and power.

The incursion into Argyleshire, in the winter of 1644-5, was dictated mainly by a spirit of retribution and revenge; but it repaid at least tenfold all the injuries and disasters which it professed to punish. Montrose, at the devising of it, was pausing in Athole, after having traversed Aberdeenshire and Inverness-shire, and driven the Covenanters' troops to nonplus and inertion by a rapid series of brilliant skirmishing and countermarching; and it is said that he intended at first to have transferred the seat of war at once to the Lowlands, where he expected to be better able to support his troops during winter, but that he was induced to give up this plan by Macdonald and the captain of Clanranald, who, out of their strong dislike to Argyle, advised him to invade the territory of their common enemy. Nothing could be more gratifying to Montrose's followers than his resolution to carry the war into Argyle's country, as they would thus have an ample opportunity of retaliating upon him and his retainers the injuries which, for a course of years, had been inflicted upon the supporters of royalty in the adjoining countries, many of whom had been ruined by Argyle. The idea of curbing the power of a haughty and domineering chief whose very word was a law to the inhabitants of an extensive district, ready to obey his mandates at all times,—and the spirit of revenge, the predominating characteristic of the clans, smoothed the difficulties which presented themselves in invading a country made almost inaccessible by nature, and rendered still more unapproachable by the severities of winter. The determination of Montrose having thus met with a willing response in the breasts of his men, he lost no time in putting them in motion. Dividing his army into two parts, he himself marched with the main body, consisting of the Irish and the Athole men, to Loch Tay, whence he proceeded through Breadalbane. The other body, composed of the Clan-Donald and other Highlanders, he despatched by a different route, with instructions to meet him at an assigned

spot on the borders of Argyle. The country through which both divisions passed, being chiefly in possession of Argyle's kinsmen or dependants, was laid waste by them, and particularly the lands of Campbell of Glenorchy.

Argyle at the moment was passing his time at Edinburgh; and when he heard of the ravages committed by Montrose's army on the lands of his kinsmen, he hastened home to his castle at Inverary and gave orders for the assembling of his clan, either to repel any attack that might be made on his own country, or to protect his friends from future aggression. It is by no means certain that he anticipated an invasion from Montrose, particularly at such a season of the year, and he seemed to imagine himself so secure from attack, owing to the intricacy of the passes leading into Argyle, that although a mere handful of men could have effectually opposed an army much larger than that of Montrose, he took no precautions to guard them. So important indeed did he himself consider these passes to be, that he had frequently declared that he would rather forfeit a hundred thousand crowns, than that an enemy should know the passes by which an armed force could penetrate into Argyle.

While thus reposing in fancied security in his impregnable stronghold, and issuing his mandates for levying his forces, some shepherds arrived in great terror from the hills, and brought him the alarming intelligence, that the enemy whom he had imagined were about a hundred miles distant, were within two miles of his own dwelling. Terrified at the unexpected appearance of Montrose, whose vengeance he justly dreaded, he had barely self-possession left to concert measures for his own personal safety by taking refuge on board a fishing boat in Loch Fyne, in which he sought his way to the Lowlands, leaving his people and country exposed to the merciless will of an enemy thirsting for revenge. The inhabitants of Argyle being thus abandoned by their chief, made no attempt to oppose Montrose, who, the more effectually to

carry his plan for pillaging and ravaging the country into execution, divided his army into three parties, each under the respective orders of the captain of Clanranald, Macdonald, and himself. For upwards of six weeks, viz., from the 13th of December, 1644, till nearly the end of January following, these different bodies traversed the whole country without molestation, burning, wasting, and destroying every thing which came within their reach. Villages and cottages, furniture, grain, and effects of every description were made a prey to the devouring element of fire. The cattle which they did not succeed in driving off were either mutilated or slaughtered; and the whole of Argyle as well as the district of Lorn soon became a dreary waste. Nor were the people themselves spared; for although it is mentioned by one writer, that Montrose "shed no blood in regard that all the people (following their Lord's laudable example) delivered themselves by flight also," it is evident from several contemporary authors that the slaughter must have been immense. One of these says, that Montrose spared none that were able to bear arms, and that he put to death all the men who were going to the rendezvous appointed by Argyle. Probably the 895 persons mentioned by the author of the Red Book of Clanranald, as having been killed by the party of Clanranald without opposition, may be those alluded to by Wishart. In fact, before the end of January, the face of a single male inhabitant was not to be seen throughout the whole extent of Argyle and Lorn, the whole population having been either driven out of these districts, or taken refuge in dens and caves known only to themselves.

Colkitto retained possession of Kintyre and some of the chief adjacent islands, from the spring of 1645 till the spring of 1647; and he was joined, at the latter date, by his son, Sir Alexander, who then retreated from conflict with the Covenanters in the Central Highlands, and was at the head of a force of about 1,400 foot and two troops of horse

Both father and son felt too secure in their remote position, and totally lacked the advantage of fair intelligence, or almost any intelligence at all, of General Leslie's movements; and when, on the 21st of May, 1647, the latter was already at Inverary, with an army, in search of them, they were altogether ignorant of his approach, and had taken no precautions to guard the passes leading into Kintyre, which might have been successfully defended by a handful of men against a considerable force. Having secured these difficult passes, Leslie advanced into Kintyre, and after skirmishing the whole of the 25th of May with Macdonald, he forced him to retire. After throwing 300 men into a fortress on the top of the hill of Dunaverty, and in which "there was not a drop of water but what fell from the clouds," Macdonald, on the following day, embarked his troops in boats provided for the occasion, and passed over into Islay.

Leslie, thereupon, laid siege to the castle of Dunaverty, which was well defended; but the assailants having carried a trench at the bottom of the hill which gave the garrison the command of water, and in the storming of which the besieged lost forty men, the latter craved a parley, in consequence of which Sir James Turner, Leslie's adjutant-general, was sent to confer with the garrison on the terms of surrender. Leslie would not grant "any other conditions than that they should yield on discretion or mercy. And it seemed strange to me (continues Sir James Turner) to hear the lieutenant-general's nice distinction, that they should yield themselves to the kingdom's mercy, and not to his. At length they did so, and after they were come out of the castle they were put to the sword, every mother's son, except one young man, Maccoul, whose life I begged to be sent to France, with a hundred fellows which we had smoked out of a cave, as they do foxes, who were given to Captain Campbell, the chancellor's brother." This atrocious act is alleged to have been perpetrated at the instigation of John Nave or Neaves,

whom Turner calls "a bloody preacher," but, according to Wodrow, an "excellent man," who would not be satisfied with less than the blood of the prisoners. As the account given by Sir James Turner, an eye-witness of this infamous transaction, is curious, no apology is necessary for inserting it. "Here it will be fit to make a stop, till this cruel action be canvassed. First, the lieutenant-general was two days irresolute what to do. The Marquis of Argyle was accused at his arraignment of this murder, and I was examined as a witness. I declared, which was true, that I never heard him advise the lieutenant-general to it. What he did in private I know not. Secondly, Argyle was but a colonel then, and he had no power to do it of himself. Thirdly, though he had advised him to it, it was no capital crime; for counsel is no command. Fourthly, I have several times spoke to the lieutenant general to save these men's lives, and he always assented to it, and I know of himself he was unwilling to shed their blood. Fifthly, Mr. John Nave (who was appointed by the commission of the kirk to wait on him as his chaplain) never ceased to tempt him to that bloodshed, yea, and threatened him with the curses which befell Saul for sparing the Amalekites, for with them his theology taught him to compare the Dunavertie men. And I verily believe that this prevailed most with David Leslie, who looked upon Nave as the representative of the Kirk of Scotland." The statement of Sir James's and David Leslie's repugnance to shed the blood of those defenceless men is fully corroborated by Bishop Guthry, on the authority of many persons who were present, who says that while the butchery was going on, and while Leslie, Argyle, and Neaves were walking over the ancles in blood, Leslie turned out and thus addressed the latter:—"Now, Mr. John, have you not once got your fill of blood?" The sufferers on this occasion were partly Irish, and partly belonging to the clan Dougal or Coull, to the castle of whose chief in Lorn, Colonel Robert Montgomerie

now laid siege, while Leslie himself, with a part of his forces, left Kintyre for Islay in pursuit of Macdonald.

On landing in Islay, Leslie found that Macdonald had fled to Ireland, and had left Colkitto, his father, in the castle of Dunniveg, with a force of 200 men to defend the island against the superior power of Leslie. The result turned out as might have been anticipated. Although the garrison made a brave resistance, yet, being wholly without water, they found themselves unable to resist, and offered to capitulate on certain conditions. These were, that the officers should be entitled to go where they pleased, and that the privates should be sent to France. These conditions were agreed to, and were punctually fulfilled. Old Colkitto had, however, the misfortune not to be included in this capitulation; for, before the castle had surrendered, "the old man, Coll," says Sir James Turner, "coming foolishly out of the house, where he was governor, on some parole or other, to speak with his old friend, the captain of Dunstaffnage castle, was surprised and made prisoner, not without some stain to the lieutenant-general's honour. He was afterwards hanged by a jury of Argyle's sheriff-depute, one George Campbell, from whose sentence few are said to have escaped that kind of death."