



INVERLOCHY CASTLE.

BATTLE AT INVERLOCHY—TALE OF
OMERON CAMERON. •

A.D. 1431.

THE turbulent and disorderly state of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland occupied the attention of James I., and, after concluding a truce with England in 1431, he turned his attention to these celebrated and remarkable

• Pinkerton's History of Scotland ; Buchanan's History ; Tytler's History ; Wood's edition of Douglas Peerage ; Note in Currie's edition of Burns' Works.

districts. The Lords of the Isles were then in their glory and maintained a dignity, importance, and independence, often rivalling that of the sovereign, and often opposed to his authority. One of these numerous battles between the Crown of Scotland and those fierce Island chiefs occurred in 1431. Donald Balloch, a near relation of the then potent Lord of the Isles, enraged at what he considered the pusillanimity of the chief in submitting to the King's authority, collected an army in the Hebrides, and disembarking in Lochaber, ravaged that district in the most relentless manner. To check his ferocity, and defend the western coast, Allan, Earl of Caithness, and Alexander, Earl of Mar, marched with a considerable force, and met the Island warrior at the ancient Castle of Inverlochy, near Fort-William, in the county of Inverness.

A bloody conflict ensued, in which the royal troops were completely defeated. Such was the fury of the attack, that the superior discipline of the Lowlanders gave way before the battle-axes and broadswords of the men of the isles. The Earl of Caithness was slain, sixteen of his personal attendants, and many barons and knights, were left dead on the field, while the army was almost annihilated. The Earl of Mar escaped with the utmost difficulty, and was compelled to betake himself to the mountain fastnesses of the district, for safety and protection.

Few particulars of this battle are recorded by the Scottish historians beyond the fact itself, and the results. Buchanan merely says of it that the Hebridean leader "having been informed that his opponents were straggling disorderly, and without encamping regularly, or setting watches, silently landed his men during the night, attacked them unexpectedly, and made a great slaughter." But the battle is chiefly remarkable for a beautiful and romantic

traditionary story, which of itself might be made the subject of an interesting imaginative tale. The Earl of Mar escaped in the dark without any attendants, and in the course of his flight came to the hut of a poor Highlander named Omeron Cameron. The Highlander was ignorant of the rank of his visitor, but received him with the utmost kindness. There happened to be no provisions in the hut, and, on discovering the state of his larder, he told his wife that he had resolved to kill the *maol-odhar*, or *brown humble cow*, to provide food for the stranger. "What!" exclaimed his wife, "Kill our only cow, our own and our little children's principal support?" Omeron, however, was deaf to her remonstrances, and resolved to observe the rights of hospitality, regardless of the future exigencies of his family. He killed the cow; the tenderest parts of the animal were roasted, and abundance of *innirich*, or Highland soup, was prepared to conclude the repast. The whole family and their guest ate heartily, and the time was spent in singing and in telling tales before a cheerful fire. The Earl forgot, in this humble Highland cot, his disasters, and even that he was liable every moment to be discovered and put to death by the victorious Islanders—a fate which his kind entertainer and his family would also encounter. When it became necessary to retire to rest, Omeron brushed the hearth, spread the hide of the cow over it, and desired the Earl to lie down. The Earl wrapped his plaid about him, and slept soundly on the hide, and Omeron's family betook themselves to a corner in the same apartment.

On the following morning, after a hearty repast, the Earl prepared to depart, and he asked Omeron Cameron if he knew whom he had sheltered and entertained. "You are probably," said the poor Highlander, "one of the King's officers; but, whoever you may be, you came here in distress, and here it was my duty to protect you,

To what my cot has afforded, you are most welcome." "Your guest," replied the Earl, "is the Earl of Mar, and if hereafter you fall into any misfortune, fail not to come to the Castle of Kildrummy." "My blessing be with you, noble stranger," said Cameron, "and if ever I am in distress you shall soon see me."

The royal army was soon reinforced, and the Macdonalds, finding it hazardous to attempt a second encounter, withdrew to their insular retreats. Donald Balloch, their leader, fled to Ireland, to avoid the vengeance which he was certain would be awarded to him. But, before they left Lochaber, they got notice that Omeron Cameron had sheltered the Earl of Mar, and this poor Highland Eumæus was compelled by them to leave his native district. Omeron remembered the Earl's invitation, and, with his wife and family, made his way to the Castle of Kildrummy, in the Braemar district of Aberdeenshire, which was then the principal residence of the Mar family. The Highlander, poor and fatigued, appeared at the gate of the baronial castle with his wife and little ones, and demanded admittance with a confidence which ill corresponded with his dress and obvious condition. The keeper informed him rudely that the Earl was at dinner, and could on no account be disturbed. When Omeron found this Cerberus inexorable, deaf to all his entreaties, and ridiculing his story of the Earl's invitation as a fable, he became clamorous and indignant. His arrival was at length announced to the Earl, who, when he heard it, started from his seat, and exclaimed in a kind of poetical stanza—"I was a night in his house, and fared most plentifully, but naked of clothes was my bed. Omeron of Breugach is an excellent fellow!" Omeron was introduced to the assembled guests and retainers in the great hall of the castle, and was received with the welcome he deserved. When the Earl of Mar was informed of the treatment he had re-

ceived, ne gave him a “four merk” piece of ground near Kildrummy Castle, and it is said that there are still in that neighbourhood a number of the descendants of Omeron Cameron, though the castle and estate have passed from the family of its ancient proprietor.

The Earl of Mar, of whom this traditionary story is told, was Alexander Stuart, illegitimate son of Alexander, Earl of Buchan, fourth son of King Robert II. His first public appearance was at the head of a band of robbers in the Highlands, and, having cast his eyes on Isabella Mar, Countess of Mar in her own right, he stormed her Castle of Kildrummy, and either by violence or persuasion he prevailed with her to marry him. It appears from the subsequent conduct of the Countess that she had no great aversion to him. The Earl died without issue in 1435. His colleague, the Earl of Caithness, who fell in the conflict at Inverlochy, was Allan Stuart, the second son of Walter Stuart, Earl of Atholl, second son of King Robert II., by his queen Euphemia Ross.
