

ANGUS OF THE ISLES—BATTLE OF THE BLOODY BAY—RAID OF ATHOLE.*

AFTER the unfortunate death of James II. at Roxburgh Castle, a Parliament was held at Edinburgh which was attended by the powerful Earl of Ross and all the Island chiefs. No records exist of this Parliament, but its proceedings displeased the Earl of Ross, and the banished chief of the House of Douglas, looking chiefly to the King of England for restoration to his former rank, used all his influence to induce the Earl to form a league with Edward IV. This was in 1461, and on the 19th of October the Earl of Ross, by the advice of his kinsmen and vassals, assembled a council in his castle of Ardtornish. The King of England had previously dispatched the exiled Earl of Douglas and his brother Sir John Douglas of Balvany, to meet Ross or his ambassadors, in the month of June that year. On the present occasion Ross assumed the style of an independent prince, and granted a commis-

* Douglas' Peerage by Wood; Gregory's History of the Western Highlands and Islands; Bishop Leslie's History of Scotland; Tytler's History of Scotland

sion to his *trusty and well-beloved cousins*, Ranald of the Isles, and Duncan Archdean of the Isles, to confer with the deputies of Edward IV. Those deputies were Lawrence, Bishop of Durham. the Earl of Worcester, Lord Wenlock, the Prior of St Johns, and a gentleman named Stillington, Keeper of the Privy Seal.

The deputies met at Westminster, and concluded a most extraordinary treaty, the grand design of which was the conquest of Scotland by the vassals of the Earl of Ross and the auxiliaries furnished by Edward. According to the conditions of this treaty the Earl of Ross, the celebrated Donald Balloch of Isla, who had some years before routed the royal forces under the Earls of Caithness and Mar, and John, the son and heir of the said Donald, and all their retainers, agreed to become the sworn vassals of Edward, and to assist him in all his wars, upon the payment to each of a stipulated sum of money. It is amusing to know that the sums which those personages were to receive for their important services were—to the Earl only L.200 sterling annually in time of war, and one hundred merks in time of peace; to Donald Balloch L.40, and to his son John L.20, in time of war, and during peace half of these sums respectively. It was also concluded that when Scotland was subdued, the whole of the kingdom north of the Forth was to be equally divided between the Earls of Ross and Douglas, and Donald Balloch, while Douglas was to be put in possession of his extensive estates between the Forth and the English Borders. When all this was effected, the money paid annually to the Earl of Ross and his associates was to cease.

While this novel and daring project, which exhibits a curious disclosure of the state of the country, was in contemplation, the Earl of Ross thought proper to raise the standard of rebellion. Assembling a large force under the command of his illegitimate son Angus. and the

veteran Donald Balloch, whose life had been one continued scene of turbulence, they made themselves masters of the Castle of Inverness, and there issued proclamations in the name of the Earl, who already had assumed the powers of a sovereign in the North. Those proclamations were addressed to all the inhabitants of the burghs and sheriffdom of Inverness, which included not only the present county of Inverness, but also Nairn, Ross, and Caithness, and the people were commanded to obey the said Angus as the Earl's lieutenant, under pain of death, which Angus was authorised to inflict upon the refractory—to pay to him all the taxes usually belonging to the crown, and to refuse obedience to King James.

It is not certain in what manner this extraordinary rebellion was suppressed. The Earl of Ross was summoned before Parliament for treason, yet though he failed to appear, the process of forfeiture against him was suspended, and he was even allowed to retain possession of his vast estates for about fifteen years after this period. It was in 1475 that the treaty between Edward IV. and the Earl was made known to the Scottish government, and it was in consequence resolved to proceed in right earnest against the latter as a rebel. He was summoned in his castle of Dingwall to appear before the Parliament at Edinburgh, and the Earl of Argyle received a commission to prosecute the decree of forfeiture. On the appointed day the Earl of Ross failed to appear, and the sentence was pronounced. The extent and formidable appearance of the preparations both by sea and land, under the command of the Earls of Crawford and Athole, to carry the sentence of the Parliament into effect, induced the forfeited Earl to sue for pardon by the intercession of the Earl of Huntly. He even appeared in person at Edinburgh, and with many expressions of contrition surrendered himself to the clemency of James III. The Queen and the States of Parliament

advocated his cause, and in July 1476 he was restored to the forfeited Earldom of Ross, and the Lordship of the Isles. He then voluntarily resigned that Earldom, the lands of Kintyre and Knapdale, and all the castles, forts, and other holds thereunto belonging; and in return he was created a Peer of Parliament, by the title of Lord of the Isles. The succession to the new title and estates was secured to his illegitimate sons Angus and John, the former of whom soon afterwards married a daughter of the Earl of Argyle.

Angus of the Isles, early accustomed to rebellion, and being of a violent temper, soon obtained an ascendancy over his father, of which circumstances enabled him to take advantage. The resignation of the Earldom of Ross, and of the lands of Kintyre and Knapdale, had irritated the Island chiefs descended from the original family, who alleged that the new Lord of the Isles had made improvident grants of land to the Macleans, Macneills, Macleods, and other tribes. The vassals consequently came to be divided into two factions—the clans just named adhering to the Lord of the Isles, and the various branches of the great Clan Donald making common cause with his turbulent son and heir Angus.

This restless personage not only behaved with great violence to his father, but contrived to involve himself in various feuds, especially with the Mackenzies of Kintail. Kenneth Mackenzie had for some real or imaginary cause repudiated his wife, Lady Margaret of the Isles, sister of Angus, and the latter, assisted by his kinsmen, resolved to make his quarrel with the Mackenzies a pretence to regain possession of the whole or a part of the Earldom of Ross. He invaded Ross at the head of a numerous band of Island warriors. The Mackenzies turned out to oppose him, and a conflict ensued at a place called *Lagebread*, where they were defeated by the Islanders with consider-

able loss. It is traditionally said that the Earl of Athole commanded the troops opposed to Angus of the Isles on this occasion, but it no where appears that the former had any occasion to interfere in the feud between the Mackenzies and their enemies.

Angus of the Isles was now such a formidable opponent, that the Government had recourse to the Earls of Crawford, Huntly, Athole, and Argyle, to reduce him to obedience. Argyle and Athole procured an interview between him and his father, in the hope of reconciling the contending parties, but they were disappointed, and another conflict widened the breach. This was a sea fight between the factions, in which Angus again triumphed, and caused his opponents to retire with great loss. This engagement took place in a bay of the Island of Mull, near Tobermory, and is still traditionally known as the *Battle of the Bloody Bay*.

Not long after this conflict, the name of which sufficiently intimates the ferocious slaughter which ensued, the Earl of Athole crossed privately to Isla, and carried off the infant son of Angus, called *Donald Dubh*, or the *Black*. It is somewhere stated that Angus, who was married to the Earl of Argyle's daughter, had no issue, and the legitimacy of young Donald Dubh was afterwards denied by the Government; but the men of the Isles always maintained that he was the lawful son of Angus, and as such they brought him forward at a future period as heir to the Lordship of the Isles. Athole placed young Donald Dubh in the hands of his maternal grandfather Argyle, and as the infant was considered a captive of consequence, he was carefully guarded in the castle of Inchconnell in Lochow, one of Argyle's strongholds. When Angus discovered by whom his child had been carried off he was frantic with rage. Summoning his adherents, he sailed to the neighbourhood of Inverlochry, where he left his galleys, and at the head of a chosen body of Island warriors he

made a rapid and secret march into the district of Athole, where he committed the most appalling excesses. This expedition is known as the *Raid of Athole*, and, by all accounts, a fearful one it was. The inhabitants, taken by surprise at the unexpected appearance of this ferocious chief, could offer no resistance. The Earl of Athole and his Countess took refuge in a chapel dedicated to St Bride—a sanctuary to which many of the people also fled for shelter with their most valuable effects. But an edifice consecrated to religion could not protect those within it from the vindictive Island chief. He dragged from it the Earl and Countess of Athole, and seized them as prisoners; and his followers, loaded with plunder, conveyed them to Inverlochy. Here he embarked them in his galleys, and sailed for Isla; but in the voyage from Lochaber to the “green-clad Isla” many of his galleys sunk in a dreadful storm which he encountered, and his plunder was irretrievably lost in the depths of the ocean.

Notwithstanding his turbulence and ferocity, Angus of the Isles was under the influence of the religious superstitions of the age. The loss of his galleys in the storm, which he believed to have been occasioned by his desecration of the chapel of St Bride, had such an influence upon his mind that he soon liberated his prisoners, without procuring what seems the chief object of his *raid* into Athole, the release of his son. He even performed a humiliating penance in the chapel he had violated. But the career of this Island chief soon terminated after this event. He marched to Inverness to attack his old enemy Mackenzie of Kintail, when he was assassinated by an Irish harper, before the year 1490.