

## THE LORDS OF THE ISLES.

**THE Hebrides or Western Islands** comprise all the numerous islands and islets which extend along nearly all the west coast of Scotland; and they anciently comprised also the peninsula of Cantyre, the islands of the Clyde, the isle of Ràchlin, and even for some time the isle of Man. The chief of them shelter the western part of the Scottish mainland

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from the fury of the Atlantic ocean, and, in a certain and no mean degree, do it service as a sort of vast natural umbrella; and they closely resemble it in appearance and general character, and seem to have once been a continuation of its shores, and to have become disconnected by the disjoining action of the elements. They abound in at once the soft and the beautiful, the grand and the sublime, the picturesque and the wild, the dismal and the savage features of scenery. "What can be more delightful than a midnight walk by moonlight along the lone sea-beach of some secluded isle, the glassy sea sending from its surface a long stream of dancing and dazzling light,—no sound to be heard save the small ripple of the idle wavelet, or the scream of a sea-bird watching the fry that swarms along the shores! In the short nights of summer, the melancholy song of the throstle has scarcely ceased on the hill-side, when the merry carol of the lark commences, and the plover and snipe sound their shrill pipe. Again, how glorious is the scene which presents itself from the summit of one of the loftier hills, when the great ocean is seen glowing with the last splendour of the setting sun, and the lofty isles of St. Kilda rear their giant heads amid the purple blaze on the extreme verge of the horizon."—But pictures bright and interesting as these with their wild beauty, or bewildering and impressive with the grandeur of desolation, or mixedly playful and sublime in the twistings and aerial ascents of rock, or the *mêlée* and uproar of conflict among sea and wind and beetling cliffs, occur so often and so variously throughout the Hebrides, that no general description can convey an idea of their aggregate features.

The pirates of Norway were acquainted with the Hebrides, and made occasional descents on them so early as about the close of the 8th century, and during the whole of the 9th. Some petty Norwegian Kings, who resisted the celebrated Harald Harfager's monopoly of kingcraft in their hyperborean territories, made permanent settlements about the year 890

on several of the islands, and thence piratically infested the coasts of Norway. In 888, Harald retaliated on the pirates, and added the Isles to his kingdom. In 889, the petty Kings, or *Vikings*, shook off his authority, and bearded him anew in his Norwegian den; and next year they were again pent up in their insular fastnesses, and completely enthralled. But Ketil, their subjugator, and the emissary of Harald, worked himself into their favour, renounced the allegiance of his master, proclaimed himself King of the Isles, and established a dynasty who, though they maintained brief possession, are the only figurants in the annals of about 50 years.

In 990, the Hebrides passed by conquest into the possession of Sigurd, Earl of Orkney, and under the government of a jarl or vice-king of his appointment; they soon after were under the power of a king or usurper called Ragnal Macgophra; in 1004, they were again seized by Sigurd, and probably continued under his sway till his death, ten years later, at the famous battle of Clontarf in Ireland; in 1034, they were, after some alienation, reconquered by Earl Torfin, the son of Sigurd; from 1064 to 1072, they were annexed to the Irish dominions of Diarmid Macmaelhuambo; and they next passed into the possession successively of Setric and his son Fingal, Kings of the Isle of Man.

Godred Crovan, a Norwegian, having landed on the Isles as a fugitive in 1066, gradually drew around him influence and force, and, in 1077, after a desperate struggle, subdued and ejected Fingal; and he afterwards extended his conquests to the Scandinavian vikingrship of Dublin, and a large part of Leinster, and stoutly tried the tug of war with Malcolm Canmore, King of Scotland. In 1093, Sigurd, the son of Magnus Barefoot, King of Norway, in revival of the Norwegian claims which had long lain in abeyance, was placed by a powerful and conquering force on the throne of the Isles; and two years later, Godred Crovan, the dethroned prince, died in retirement on the island of Islay. Sigurd being called away,

on the death of his father, in 1103, to inherit his native dominions, Lagonan, the eldest son of Godred Crovan, was, seemingly with Sigurd's consent, elected King of the Isles; and, after a reign of seven years, he abdicated in favour of his brother Olave, a minor, and went on a pilgrimage to Palestine. Donald Mactade, a nominee of Murchard O'Brian, King of Ireland, was sent at the request of the Hebridean nobles, to act as regent during Olave's minority; but he played so obnoxiously the part of a tyrant as to be indignantly turned adrift after a regency of two years. Olave assumed the sceptre in 1113, and swayed it peacefully and prosperously till 1154, when he was murdered in the isle of Man, by his nephews, the sons of Harald. Godred the Black, Olave's son, succeeded him, and, early in his reign, conducted some successful wars in Ireland; but, puffed up with vanity and disposed to domineer, he speedily alienated the affections and poisoned the allegiance of his subjects.

Somerled, the powerful and ambitious Lord of Argyle, who had married Ragahildis, the daughter of Olave, who had some remote claims on the Hebridean throne by his own ancestors, and who became the founder of the great family of Macdonald, Lords of the Isles, now carried his son Dugall, the infant nephew of Godred, through all the islands, except that of Man, which was the seat of the royal residence, and compelled the principal inhabitants to give hostages on his behalf as their King. Godred, informed late of the rebellious proceedings, sailed away with a fleet of 80 galleys, and gave battle to the rebels; but was so gallantly resisted, and became so doubtful of success, that, by way of compromise, he ceded to the sons of Somerled the Scottish Hebrides south of Ardnamurchan. The kingdom of the Isles was now, in 1156, divided into two dominions, and rapidly approached its ruin. In 1158, Somerled, acting nominally for his sons, invaded and devastated the isle of Man, drove Godred to seek a refuge in Norway, and apparently took possession of all the Isles;

and, in 1164, becoming bold in the spirit of conquest, he menaced all Scotland, landed a powerful force on the Clyde near Renfrew, and there perished either in battle with Malcolm IV., or by assassination in his tent. The northern isles now returned with the isle of Man to Godred; Islay was allotted to Reginald, a son of Somerled; and all the other isles were inherited by Dugall, in whose name they and the whole Hebrides had been seized by Somerled. All the princes, and afterwards three successors to their dominions, were contemporaneously called Kings of the Isles, and appear to have held their possessions in subordination to the Kings of Norway.

The Scots having long looked with a jealous and ambitious eye on the existence, so near their shores, of a foreign domination, Alexander II. died on the coast of Argyleshire, at the head of an expedition intended to overrun the Isles. In 1255, Alexander III. ravaged the possessions of Angus Macdonald, Lord of Islay, and descendant of Reginald, in revenge of his refusing to renounce fealty to the King of Norway, and gave it to himself. In 1263, Haco of Norway poured down his northern hosts on the intrusive Scots, drove them from the Isles, and chased them into Ayrshire, but, seeing his army shattered by adverse elements, and by the battle of Largs, retired to an early grave in Orkney. Alexander III. now resumed his schemes with so great vigour, that, in 1265, he obtained from the successor of Haco, a cession of all the Isles to Scotland. Islay, and the islands adjacent to it, continued in the possession of the descendants of Reginald; some of the northern isles were held by the descendants of Ruari, both sons of Somerled, and Skye and Lewis were conferred on the Earl of Ross,—all in vassalage to the Scottish monarch.

In the wars of the succession, the houses of Islay and of the North Isles gave strenuous and hearty support to the doubtful fortunes of Robert Bruce. In 1325, Roderick

MacAlan of the North Isles, intrigued against Robert, and was stripped of his possessions; and about the same date Angus Oig of Islay, who had specially and devotedly supported Robert, received accessions to his territories, and became the most powerful vassal of the crown in the Hebrides. John, the successor of Angus, adopted different politics from his father's, joined the standard of Edward Baliol, and, when that prince was in possession of the throne, received from him the islands of Skye and Lewis. David II., after the discomfiture of Baliol, allowed John to have possession of Islay, Gigha, Jura, Scarba, Colonsay, Mull, Coll, Tirree, and Lewis; and granted to Reginald, or Ranald, son of Roderick Mac-Alan, Uist, Barra, Eig, and Rum. Ranald dying, in 1346, without heirs, Amie, his sister, married to John, became his heir; and John, consolidating her possessions with his own, assumed the title of Lord of the Isles.

Sir Walter Scott, by an easy anachronism, carries back the title of Lord of the Isles to the time of Somerled, and particularly applies it to Angus Oig,—and then, by poetical licence, he changes Angus's name into Ronald, and makes him the hero of his well-known poem in celebration of the exploits of Robert Bruce,—whom he represents as saying to “Ronald,”—

“One effort more, and Scotland's free!  
 Lord of the Isles, my trust in thee  
 Is firm as Ailsa-rock.”

And by way of picturing the extent of “Ronald's” territory and renown, he introduces the nurse of his desponding bride as leading her to the summit of a turret of the Castle of Artoinish, on the coast of Argyleshire, on the morning of her espousals, and saying to her

\* \* “These seas behold  
 Round twice an hundred islands roll'd,

From Hirt, that hears their northern roar,  
To the green Islay's fertile shore;  
Or mainland turn, where many a tower  
Owns thy bold brother's feudal power,  
Each on its own dark cape reclined,  
And listening to its own wild wind,  
From where Mingarry, sternly placed,  
O'erawes the woodland and the waste,  
To where Dunstaffnage hears the raging  
Of Connal with his rocks engaging,  
Think't thou, amid this ample round,  
A single brow but thine has frown'd,  
To sadden this auspicious morn,  
That bids the daughter of high Lorn  
Impledge her spousal faith to wed  
The Heir of mighty Somerled;  
Ronald, from many a hero sprung,  
The fair, the valiant, and the young,  
Lord of the Isles, whose lofty name  
A thousand bards have given to fame,  
The mate of monarchs, and allied  
On equal terms with England's pride."

John, the son of "Ronald" or Angus Oig, and the first real wearer of the title of Lord of the Isles, in resistance or revenge of some fiscal arrangements of the Scottish government, broke loose into rebellion, and, after being with difficulty subdued, was, in 1369, reconciled with David II., a year before the King's death. Having previously divorced his first wife Amie, and married Lady Margaret, daughter of Robert, High Steward of Scotland, he, in 1370, when Robert succeeded to the throne, altered the destination of the Lordship of the Isles, so as to make it descend to his offspring by his second wife, the grandchildren of the King. Ranald, a younger son of the first wife, and more accommodating and

wily than Godfrey his eldest son, who claimed the whole possessions, expressed formal acquiescence in the alienating arrangement from the rightful line of descent, and was rewarded by a grant of the North isles, as well as lands on the continent, to be held of the Lords of the Isles. John died in 1380, after having propitiated monkish and priestly favour by liberal largesses to the church, and obtained from the cowed and insatiable beggars, who happened to monopolize all the pitiful stock of literature which existed at that period, the posthumous and flattering designation of "the good John of Islay."

Donald, his eldest son by the second marriage, succeeded him as Lord of the Isles; and, marrying Mary Leslie, who afterwards became Countess of Ross, was precipitated, with all the clans and forces of the Hebrides at his heels, into the well-known contest with the Regent Albany respecting the earldom of Ross, and into its celebrated upshot, the battle of Harlaw. Acknowledged by all the Hebrides, even by his half-brothers, as indisputably Lord of the Isles, admitted to have earned in liberality and prowess and lordly qualities what he wanted in real justness of claim, and possessing strictly the status of the first Earl of Ross of his family, he died, in 1420, in Islay, and, as his father had been before him, was pompously sepulchred in Iona.

Alexander, the third Lord of the Isles, was formally declared by James I. to be undoubted Earl of Ross, and, in 1425, was one of the jury who handed the Duke of Albany, and his sons, and the aged Earl of Lennox, over to the slaughter. Having become embroiled with his kinsmen, the descendants of the first Lord of the Isles by his first marriage, and having shared in conflicting agencies which had thrown the Hebrides into confusion, he was, in 1427, summoned, along with many Hebridean and Highland chieftains, to appear before a parliament convened at Inverness. No sooner had he and his subordinates arrived than, by a strata-



gem of the King, they were arrested, and conveyed to separate prisons. Though suffering himself no other castigation or inconveniency than temporary imprisonment, he was galled by the execution of not a few of his chieftains, and roused to revenge by the indignity practised on his own person; and, in 1429, he made a levy throughout both the Isles and his earldom of Ross, and, at the head of 10,000 men, devastated the crown-lands in the vicinity of Inverness, and burned the town itself to the ground. The King, informed of his proceedings, so promptly collected troops, and led them on by forced marches, that he confounded the Lord of the Isles by suddenly overtaking him in Lochaber, won over by the mere display of the royal banner, the Clan Chattan and the Clan Cameron, two of his most important tribes, and so hotly and relentlessly attacked and pursued him that he vainly sued for terms of accommodation. The Lord of the Isles, driven to a fugitive condition, and despairing to escape the pursuers whom the King, abandoning personally the chase, had left to hunt along his track, resolved to cast himself on the royal mercy; and, on the eve of a solemn festival, clothed in the garb of pauperism and wretchedness, he rushed into the King's presence, amidst his assembled court in Holyrood, and, surrendering his sword, abjectly sued for pardon. Though his life was spared, he was endungeoned for two years in the castle of Tamtallon; and he learned there such lessons of rebuke from his chastisement, that, when afterwards pardoned by parliament for all his crimes, he conducted himself peaceably, and even rose into favour. During the minority of James II., he held the responsible and honourable office of Justiciary of Scotland north of the Forth; and, probably more as its occupant, than in the use of his power as Lord of the Isles, he drove the chief of the Clan Cameron, who had deserted him in his conflict with the Crown, into banishment to Ireland, and virtual forfeiture of his lands. In 1445, however, he took part in a treasonable league with the

Earls of Douglas and Crawford against the infant-possessor of the royal throne, and probably contemplated nothing short of aiding an usurpation ; but, before his treasons had time to be summed into maturity, he died, in 1449, at his castle of Dingwall.

John, the fourth Lord of the Isles, and the third Earl of Ross, having sold himself to the rebellious and mischief-making Earls of Douglas, who had justly though too severely reaped the fruits of the royal displeasure, despatched, in 1455, an expedition of 5,000 men to Ayrshire against James II., but reaped little other fruit than the ravaging of Arran and the Cumbraes, the wringing of some exactions from the isle of Bute, and the driving into exile of the bishop of Argyle or Lismore. Finding himself balked by his faithless allies, the Earls of Douglas, John, Lord of the Isles, made his submission to the King, and seems to have been fully received into royal favour. In 1457, he filled the very important and responsible office of one of the wardens of the marches ; and, in 1460, previous to the siege of Roxburgh castle, he offered, at the head of 3,000 armed vassals, to march in the van of the royal army so as to sustain the first shock of conflict from expected invasion of the English, and was ordered to remain, as a sort of body-guard, near the King's person. But, on the accession of James III., he gave loose anew to his rebellious propensities, and, in 1461, sent deputies to the King of England, who agreed to nothing less than the contemplated conquest of Scotland by the forces of the Lord of the Isles jointly with an English army. While his deputies were yet in negociation, he himself impatiently burst limits, poured an army upon the northern counties of Scotland, took possession of the castle of Inverness, and formally assumed a regal style of address and demeanour. In 1475—though he had been previously forborne for 14 years, and allowed, by compromise or connivance, to run unmolestedly a traitorous and usurping career—he was sternly denounced as a traitor and rebel, and

summoned to appear before a parliament in Edinburgh to answer for his crimes. Held back by a sense of guilt from confronting his accusers, or showing face to his judges, he incurred sentence of forfeiture; and, menaced with a powerful armament to carry the sentence into execution, he gladly put on weeds of repentance, and, under the unexpected shelter of the Queen and of the Estates of parliament, appeared personally at Edinburgh, and humiliatingly delivered himself to the royal clemency. With great moderation on the part of the King, he was restored to his forfeited possessions; and, making a voluntary surrender to the Crown of the earldom of Ross, and some other continental possessions, he was created a baron and a peer of parliament by the title of Lord of the Isles. The succession, however, being restricted to his bastard sons, and they proving rebellious, John, either actually participating in their measures, or unable to exculpate himself from the show of evidence against him, was finally, in 1493, deprived of his title and estates. A few months after his forfeiture, making a virtue of necessity, he voluntarily surrendered his Lordship; and, after having become, for some time, a pensioner on the King's household, he sought a retreat in Paisley abbey, which he and his ancestors had liberally endowed, and there sighed out the last breath of the renowned Lords of the Isles.

James IV. seems now to have resolved on measures for preventing the ascendancy of any one family throughout the Isles; and, proceeding warily and liberally to work, he went in person to the West Highlands to receive the submission of the vassals of the Lordship. Alexander of Lochalsh, who was the presumptive heir before the last Lord's forfeiture, John of Islay, who was the descendant of a side branch from the first Lord, John Maclean, of Lochbuy, and other chief vassals immediately waited on the King, and were favoured with an instatement by royal charter in their possessions; and the first and the second received, at the same time, the

honour of knighthood. But several other vassals of power and influence delaying to make their submission, the King made a second and a third visit to the western coast, repaired and garrisoned the castle of Tarbert, and seized, stored, and garrisoned the castle of Dunaverty in Cantyre. Sir John of Islay, deeply offended at the seizure of Cantyre, on which he made some claims, came down on the peninsula when the King, with a small rear-body of his followers, was about to sail, and stormed the castle of Dunaverty, and hanged the governor before the King's view. James IV., though unable at the moment to retaliate or punish, soon after had Sir John and four of his sons captured, carried to Edinburgh, and convicted and executed as traitors. A year after, he made a fourth expedition westward, and received the submission of various powerful vassals of the defunct Lordship, who hitherto had declined his authority. In 1496, an act was passed by the Lords of Council, making every chieftain in the Isles responsible for the due execution of legal writs upon any of his clan, on pain of becoming personally subject to the penalty exigible from the offender. In 1497, Sir Alexander of Lochalsh first invaded Ross, and was driven back by the Mackenzies and the Munroes, and next made an ineffectual attempt to rouse the Isles into rebellion round his standard, and drew upon himself, in the island of Oransay, a surprise and slaughter from Macian of Ardnamurchan, aided by Alexander, the eldest surviving son of Sir John of Islay.

In 1499, the King suddenly changing his policy, revoked all the charters he had granted to the vassals in the Isles, and commissioned Archibald, Earl of Argyle, and others, to let, in short leases, the lands of the Lordship within all its limits as they stood at the date of forfeiture. The vassals, seeing preparations afoot for their ejection, and having now amongst them Donald Dubh, whom they viewed as the rightful Lord, and who had just escaped from an incarceration, one main

object of which was to prevent him from agitating his claims, formed a subtle, slowly-consolidated, and very dangerous confederacy. In 1503, Donald Dubh and his followers precipitated themselves on the mainland, devastated Badenoch, and wore so formidable an insurgent aspect as to rouse the attention of parliament, and agitate the whole kingdom. Though all the royal forces north of the Clyde and the Forth were brought into requisition, and castles in the west were fortified and garrisoned, and missives, both seductive and menacing, were thrown among the rebels, two years were required for the vindicating of the King's authority. In 1504, the army acted in two divisions,—the northern, headed by the Earl of Huntly, and the southern, rendezvoused at Dumbarton, and led by the Earls of Arran and Argyle, Macian of Ardnamurchan, and Macleod of Duavegan; but, except its besieging the strong fort of Carneburg, on the west coast of Mull, and probably driving the islanders quite away from the continent, it did little execution. But, next year, the King personally heading the invasion of the Isles on the south, while Huntly headed it on the north, such successes were achieved as completely broke up the insurgent confederacy. Torquill Macleod of Lewis and some other chiefs still holding out in despair, a third expedition was undertaken in 1506, and led to the capture of the castle of Stornoway, and the dispersion of the last fragmentary gatherings of rebellion. Donald Dubh, the last male in the direct line of the forfeited Lords of the Isles, was again made prisoner, and shut up in Edinburgh castle. Sheriffs or justiciaries were now appointed respectively to the North Isles and to the South Isles, the courts of the former to be held at Inverness or Dingwall, and those of the latter at Tarbert or Lochkilkerran; attempts were made to disseminate a knowledge of the laws; and the royal authority became so established that the King, up to his death, in 1513, was popular throughout the islands.

In November, 1513, amid the confusion which followed the battle of Flodden and the death of James IV., Sir Donald of Lochaleh seized the royal strengths in the islands, made a devastating irruption upon Inverness-shire, and proclaimed himself Lord of the Isles. The Earl of Argyle, and various other chieftains in the western islands, exhorted by an act or letters of the council, adopted measures against the islanders, but only checked and did not subdue their rebellion. Negotiation achieved what arms could not accomplish, and, in 1515, brought the rebels into subjection, and effected an apparently cordial reconciliation between Sir Donald of Lochaleh and the Regent Albany. In 1517, however, Sir Donald was again in rebellion; but he so disgusted his followers by deceptions which they found him to have used in summoning them to arms, that they indignantly turned upon him, and were prevented, only by his making an opportune flight, from delivering him up to the Regent.

In 1527, the tranquillity of the Isles was again menaced by the inhuman conduct of Lauchlan Cattanaich Maclean of Dowart to his wife, Lady Elizabeth, daughter of Archibald, second Earl of Argyle. On a rock, still called "the Lady's Rock," between Lismore and Mull, the lady was exposed at low water by this monster, with the intention of her being swept away by the tide; but, being accidentally descried by a boat's crew, she was rescued, and carried to her brother's castle. One of the Campbells unceremoniously taking revenge by assassinating the truculent chief, the Macleans and the Campbells both ran to arms for mutual onset, and were prevented from embroiling the Isles only by the special interference of government.

In 1528, all grants of the Crown lands in the Isles, made during the regency of the Earl of Angus, and considerable in extent, having been withdrawn, the Clan Donald of Islay and the Macleans, who were interested parties, rose up in insurrection, and drew down a devastation upon large por-

question of the day—support or resistance of the views of the King of England—made munificent offers to Donald Dubh and the liberated chiefs to induce their detachment from the English party, but was mortified with total failure, and doubly mortified to reflect, that, by connivance at Donald, and the liberation of the chiefs and hostages, he had himself originated the evil which he now vainly negotiated to avert. In 1544, during the expedition of the Earl of Lennox to the Clyde, the islanders readily responded to a call by that commander and the English King, perpetrated hostile excesses in all accessible quarters where support was given to the Earls of Argyle and Huntly, and, in some instances, gave bonds of future service to England. Among the English in their defeat, in 1545, at Ancrum, was Neill Macneill of Gigha, one of the Hebridean chiefs,—present, possibly, as an ambassador from Donald Dubh. In June, 1545, the Regent Arran and his privy council, learning that the islanders were in course of formally transferring their allegiance from Scotland to England, issued against them a smart proclamation, and, afterwards, seeing this to be regarded as a mere “brutum fulmen,” commenced prosecutions for treason against the principal leaders. On the 5th of August, however, Donald Dubh and his chiefs in capacity of Lord and Barons of the Isles, appeared, with 4,000 men and 180 galleys, at Knockfergus in Ireland, and there, in the presence of commissioners sent to treat with them, formally swore allegiance to England; yet, acting under the advice of the Earl of Lennox, and regarding him as the real regent of Scotland, they did not consider themselves as revolting from the Scottish monarch. Four thousand armed men were, at the same time, left behind them under leaders in the Isles, to watch and check the movements of the Earls of Argyle and Huntly; and these, in common with the 4,000 in attendance on Donald, were kept in pay by the English King to take part in a contemplated but abortive expedition against Scotland, and, immediately after

Donald's return, quarrelled among themselves respecting the distribution of the English gold.

Donald dying toward the close of the year, at Drogheda in Ireland, seemingly while in the train of the baffled and retreating Earl of Lennox, the islanders elected James Macdonald to succeed him in his titular Lordship of the Isles. Yet the Macleods, both of Lewis and of Harris, the Macneills of Barra, the Mackinnons and the Macquarries, who had supported Donald, stood aloof from James Macdonald, and asked and obtained a reconciliation with the Regent; and, in the following year, the Island-chiefs in general were exonerated from the prosecutions for treason which had been commenced against them, and sat down in restored good understanding with the Scottish government. James Macdonald now dropped the assumed title of Lord of the Isles, and seems to have been the last person who even usurpingly wore it, or on whose behalf a revival of it was attempted.