

CONFLICT AT TANNACH.*

A.D. 1464.

THE Gunns of Caithness are mentioned as something like the Swiss, inasmuch as they were hired to fight. A quarrel took place between them and other inhabitants of Caithness, and the Keiths, the vassals of the Earls Marischal, or properly speaking of Keith of Ackergill. Doubtful of

* History of the Mackays; History of the Earls of Sutherland; Statistical Account of Scotland; Feuds of the Highland Clans.

their own strength, the Keiths implored the assistance of Angus Mackay, a chief of that numerous sept, who willingly listened to the request. The Gunns, who were to be remunerated for their exploits, and the other opposing parties, hastily convened, and met the Mackays and the Keiths at a place called the *Moor of Tannach*, near the east coast of Caithness, three miles south from Wick, so that the Mackays, who entered the county on the west, had to march about thirty-four miles through an hostile district, which intimates that their numbers must have been considerable.

It was suggested by some present, to prevent the unhappy effusion of blood by a general combat, that riders on twelve horses should meet at an ancient ecclesiastical edifice now in ruins called St Ere's, or St Tayr's Kirk, a little below Ackergill Tower. It was agreed by the parties that the Gunns should muster man for man, and three for *Keachmore*, or *Muckle Keith*, on the principle that in fairness a very strong man ought to have more than one to match him. At the time and place appointed the Gunns appeared twelve in number, and as the Keiths had not arrived they employed the time in devotion. At length the Keiths appeared, when it was discovered that they had craftily mounted two men on each horse. With this superior force they immediately fell upon the Gunns, who were soon overpowered, and compelled to fly for sanctuary to St Ere's chapel, where most of them were put to death.

The fate of the Gunns assumes something like a retaliatory aspect. There is a tradition that some time previous to this affair a number of them surrounded this very chapel, when the people of the neighbourhood were assembled in it for divine service, and slaughtered many of them in cold blood. Sir Robert Gordon relates that in his time the blood of the Gunns put to death by the Keiths was seen on the walls of the chapel. The son of the leader of the Gunns left Caithness with a number of his clan, and settled in

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Sutherland. The son of this gentleman and a number of his sept afterwards intercepted Keith of Ackergill, accompanied by his son, and twelve of their followers, on their journey from Inverugy to Caithness, and killed them all in revenge of the massacre committed in the chapel of St. Ere.
