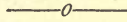


## THE ISLE OF SKYE IN THE OLDEN TIMES.

By the Rev. ALEX. MACGREGOR, M.A.



OF late years, and even this present season, much has been written about this interesting Island by tourists and others; yet there are many relics, legends, and subjects of folk-lore connected with the far-famed "Isle of Mist" which have not as yet been fully developed. Such learned and enthusiastic gentlemen as the late Alexander Smith, Sheriff Nicolson of Kirkcudbright, and others, have given vivid descriptions of the unrivalled scenery of this remarkable island; yet still much remains to be explored and detailed as to the origin, history, and antiquity of the numberless duns or forts which once surrounded and protected it. With each and all of these romantic places of defence there is a history connected, and where that history is not reliable and confirmed by facts, the blank is amply supplied by fanciful but interesting legends, handed down from ancient days by tradition, and fostered by the natural feelings and superstitious beliefs of the natives

How well if the talented "Nether-Lochaber" were located even for a month in this interesting isle, to enjoy the pure hospitality and friendship of its proverbially kind inhabitants. How well were he to roam freely amid its peaked mountains and shaded valleys, to visit its duns and strongholds, and its variegated natural curiosities, and withal to make his magic pen bear upon its archæological stores and its numberless specimens of interesting folk-lore. My learned friend would feel no ordinary interest in handling, if not in wrapping himself in, the Fairy Flag preserved in Dunvegan Castle. This mystic flag is the palladium of the Macleod chiefs, and if tradition be true, the fortunes of that brave clan depend upon it. Miraculous properties were given to the celebrated banner by a Saracen chief, who presented it to one of the Macleods, or "Siòl Tormaid," during the Crusades, with an assurance that so long as it was preserved, no injury would befall the family.

Skye is a lovely isle! Perhaps no other locality in the United Kingdom is so well calculated to afford such a number of

romantic and picturesque subjects for the brush of the painter, yet it may be said with equal truth, that there is no other region in our dominions so sure to furnish the pen of the archæologist with more befitting materials than this winged, misty isle.

Speaking of dùns and forts, there were three in the island which surpassed all others in their strong and almost impregnable defensive fortifications. These were Dunskaich, in the parish of Sleat (a fort alluded to by Ossian), and Duntulm Castle, in the parish of Kilmuir, both of which are now in complete ruins ; and the third was Dunvegan Castle, in the parish of Duirinish, which is still inhabited by the Macleods of Macleod. These forts were almost impregnable, having been provided with wide moats and strong drawbridges, and all the implements of warfare used in these remote and warlike times. Duntulm was the stronghold of the Lords of the Isles, the powerful "Clann Dòmhuill," before they removed to Monkstadt, and Armadale Castle in the parish of Sleat. In the same way Dunvegan Castle was the stronghold of "Clann Tormaid," that is the Macleods of Macleod, who were likewise great warriors and very powerful as a clan. These two septs or clans had extensive possessions and stedfast retainers. They never wanted their distinctive race of pipers and bards. The Macdonalds had the Macarthurs for ages in this capacity, while the Macleods of Dunvegan had the far-famed MacCrimmons for a long succession of centuries. Bloody feuds existed very frequently between these rebellious clans as well as between them and the surrounding chiefs on the mainland, such as the Mackenzies, the Macleans, the Macdonalds of Clanranald, and many others.

Some centuries ago one of the chieftains of Sleat had a daughter married to Macleod of Dunvegan, but unfortunately they did not live happily together. On one occasion the quarrel betwixt husband and wife became so desperate, that Macleod sent her home to her father, when the father in return sent her back to her husband. Much about this time a number of Highland chiefs met at Dunvegan Castle to hold a sort of council with Macleod relative to some feudal differences. There were present Macdonald of the Isles, Mackinnon of Strathswordale, Maclean of Duart and of Lochbui, Macleod of Lewis, MacGhillechalluim of Raasay, and others. Each chieftain had his

piper and bard along with him. In this conclave it was *inter alia* agreed that the bard who made the best "ràn" or rhyme in praise of his own master was to receive a prize or badge of honour immediately after breakfast next day. Macdonald of the Isles had Macarthur, his own piper and bard, there with the rest. He was commonly called "Uilleam MacBeathaig." Lady Macleod having come to understand that the competition was to take place, felt a deep interest in the success of "MacBeathaig," her father's bard. She had a private interview with him, and told him that he behoved to compose a "ràn" or poem setting forth that she, as daughter of a Lord of the Isles, was of higher descent and of nobler blood than Macleod her husband, who strongly maintained the reverse. As a reward for his services, the good lady promised him a "triubhas" of "clòdh breac scarlaid"; being a cloth that she herself had prepared for her husband. MacBeathaig said but little to the lady at the time, but requested her to tell him when breakfast was over next morning.

During the rest of that day MacBeathaig remained pensively silent, while the other bards taunted him by saying, "Come on, William, come on, my man, you do not attempt any preparation to praise your master at all. You see and hear how we are exerting ourselves." MacBeathaig retorted and said:—

'Se sinn fein a mholamaid,  
 Mar linne loma-làn ;  
 Na h-uile sruthain a's tana,  
 'S iad a's àirde gàir.

The meaning of which is:—

Our praise of self  
 Is like a full flood ;  
 While all the shallowest streams  
 Will make the loudest noise.

The other bards listened but said nothing. Next day came, and the lady told her protegee, MacBeathaig, that the breakfast was just finished. He thanked her ladyship and went immediately forward to the breakfasting-hall. He quietly knocked, and on the door being opened he stood there silently after bowing to the assembled guests. Macleod addressed him and said, "A Ghoistidh, thig air t-achairt," that is, "My friend, come forward."

MacBeathaig in bold, firm language expressed himself in the following emphatic terms :—

Cha'n fhéudar beannailt ri luchd nan còmhladh,  
 'S ann de'm' òghnadh ;  
 Fhùair sibh tigh agus leth Alba,  
 Le neart bhur daoine ;  
 MacIonmhuinn, MacIlleathan, 's MacLeoid Leòthais,  
 Triuir bha 'feitheamh dréuchd  
 A'n teachd Mhic Dhomhnuill ;  
 Fear-ionaid MhicLeoid a' Dunbhegain—  
 Dorsair seomair,—  
 'S bu mhath an inbh dha  
 Bhi 'feitheamh còmhlaidh ;  
 Morair Hundaidh nan each seanga,  
 Dha 'm biodh mòr-shluagh,—  
 Bhiodh esan am freasdail stiorraip  
 'N am tearnaidh ;  
 Fhuair iad duais mhaith a' cheann sin,  
 'Badenach o cheann gu ceann di,—  
 Aca tha i—aca tha i.

In these lines the bard considered the chieftains present as in no better position than mere menials or door-keepers to his own renowned master, “Domhnull Gòrm,” Lord of the Isles.

Macleod attentively listened to the rhyme, but, furious with rage, he addressed the bard saying, “A' chon bhodaich, rinn thu luchd-muinntir uile dhinn” (You churlish dog, you made servants of us all). The bard said nothing, but, turning on his heel, went to his own chamber. Macleod knowing well that MacBeathaig's poem was the best, soon followed him with the badge, promised to the best bard, in his hand, and, having entered the room, said, “Thig an so, a' MhicBeathaig, agus gabh do dhuais” (Come hither, MacBeathag, and receive your badge). The bard, according to the following emphatic words, looked upon the badge with scorn, and told Macleod plainly, but sarcastically, that he would receive a badge or reward in the halls of music and song from his own great heroic chief, “Domhnull Gòrm;” and not only so, but would enjoy that distinguished hero's hospitality in all manner of profuseness and comfort.—

'S ann a gheibhinn mo dhuais  
 Ann an talla nan téud,  
 Bho Dhomhnull Gòrm, an t-èrmunn tréun,  
 Bho Dhomhnull Gòrm, bu clòmhnaid céum,

Fodh chòmhrag àrm,—  
 Bho Dhomhnull Gòrm, 'nan cliàr 's nan creach,  
 Mo bhiàdh 's mo dheoch,  
 M' uisge-beatha 's m' fhionn gu moch,  
 'S mo ghriàn air loch.

Macleod's lady whose heart was gladdened by the bard's success, took all care that before he left Dunvegan he was supplied with enough for a new suit from her web of "clòdh breac scarlaid."

### LOCH MAREE.



Daughter of giant hills,  
 Nursed on a thousand rills,  
 Earth has no lovelier jewel than thee ;  
 Decked with the fairest isles,  
 Wreathed in the sweetest smiles,  
 Queen of the Highlands, O ! beauteous Maree.

Slioch's majestic crest  
 Towers o'er thy placid breast,  
 Where his dark shadows eternally be ;  
 Down his black gorges steep,  
 Foaming his torrents leap,  
 Singing wild songs to his gentle Maree.

Light thro' thy birchen groves  
 (Sacred to Highland loves)  
 Summer winds whisper in voices of glee ;  
 Rowan and mountain pine  
 Echo the joy divine,  
 Wafting their perfumes o'er blushing Maree.

Beauty's supernal charms  
 Dwell in thy wintry storms,  
 Nature's rich graces are dowered to thee ;  
 Surely some wizard hand  
 Shaped thy enchanting strand,  
 Dear Highland fairyland, matchless Maree.