

ACTS OF THE LORDS LOVAT.*

HUGH FRASER, seventh Lord Lovat, succeeded his father Alexander in 1560. He was at first a zealous supporter of Queen Mary, but he thought proper to change his politics some years afterwards, and when the Regent Moray visited Inverness in 1570, every honour was rendered to him by Lovat, whose vassals waited upon him as if he had been their own chief. It was probably on this, if not on some previous visit, that the chief of the clan Gunn was executed at Inverness for no other crime than taking the *crown of the causeway* from the Regent Moray—a striking proof of the oppressed state of the people, and of the small value in which human life was held in those times.

Lovat ruled with such despotic sway over his own vassals, that, notwithstanding all the factions he promoted for his own purposes, he restrained them from committing any depredations on each other, or against his friends and allies.

* Anderson's Historical Account of the Family of Fraser.

So effectually did his severity operate, that it is said a chain of gold, which was suspended from a solitary tree during night, was found untouched in the morning. But an anecdote of a collision with his own shepherd is not a little characteristic. We are told that it was his Lordship's custom to ride in disguise throughout his district, to mingle with his numerous clan, and to note the conduct and opinions of individuals. Passing one evening the cottage of his shepherd, when returning from one of these disguised rambles, he looked through the window into the interior, and saw the man heartily feasting himself with excellent mutton. "You answer this to-morrow," cried Lovat, through an aperture of the window, and instantly galloped off. He had not proceeded far when an arrow from the shepherd overtook him, so skilfully aimed that it stuck in a part of his hunting cap. On the following day all the vassals were convened, including the shepherd, by Lovat's order. When the delinquent appeared before his chief, he saw the cap and the arrow lying on a table. "Is that arrow yours?" asked his Lordship sternly. An undaunted answer in the affirmative staggered him. "Think ye," said the man, "that I could be a fit person to guard your sheep, if I had not drawn as I did?" "Aim better in future," was Lovat's brief reply, and the shepherd escaped for that time.

At one of the many rencontres in tilting, fencing, and riding, which often took place between the nobility and chiefs of the district at Inverness, Lord Lovat dismounted the Laird of Grant and the Sheriff of Moray. This discomfiture, followed by some taunt, so irritated Grant and the Sheriff as to occasion some sharp language between them and Lovat, when the latter coolly told them that as he had given them a specimen of his tilting, he would now try their mettle in horsemanship. Spurring on his steed, he rode through the river, and galloped direct to the hill called

Clagnahayre, telling his companions to follow him. When there he leaped his horse over the ledge of the rock, and dared them to do the same; but Grant and the Sheriff were awed by the dangerous appearance of the place, and would not hazard themselves. It is said that the impression of the shoes of Lovat's steed was visible on the spot where he landed from his daring leap upwards of sixty years afterwards, and were kept clean by a man who had an annual salary for preserving this memorial of the recklessness of his chief.

The history of the celebrated Simon Lord Lovat, who was beheaded for being concerned in the enterprise of 1745, is well known, and is perhaps one of the most extraordinary records of cunning, profligacy, and despotic tyranny, combined with great abilities, in existence. But there were several of Lord Lovat's ancestors not a little remarkable in their way. In the neighbourhood of Inverness there is a curiously formed mound of earth called *Tomnahurich*, which is evidently artificial, and on the top of it the chiefs of Lovat were wont to dispense what they caricatured by the name of justice. The acts of these singular courts were distributed throughout the districts comprehended within the authority of the judge. It appears that among the several articles on which the chiefs of Lovat gave decisions, they regulated the rates of servants' fees, and the prices of corn, cattle, timber, clothes, and shoes. The following instance of *liberality*, on the part of Thomas Lord Lovat about 1514, is amusing:—"In a fire which broke out at Lovat at this time, Rory Mackenzie of Fairburn, son of Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail, and nephew to Lord Lovat, being a *great bare-headed boy* in his uncle's house, rushed through the flames, and brought out the family charter-chest and other valuables, for which service he was considered amply recompensed by the gift of a *bonnet and a pair of shoes!*"

In the year 1597-8, during the time of Simon eighth Lord Lovat, a serious disturbance took place at Loggierigh, on the banks of the Conan in Ross-shire, on the 4th of February. We are told that "John M'Leod M'Gilcallum, brother to Rasa, a bravo, who traversed the country with a band of seven or eight ruffians committing every excess with impunity, under the countenance of some Lairds equally vicious as himself, had laid hold of a shopman's wife, and seized upon her goods, when he was beheld by John Bain, brother of the Laird of Tulloch. Being touched with compassion Bain espoused the weaker side, and commanded M'Leod to desist. From words they came to blows. John Bain gave the ruffian three mortal wounds, and killed two of his associates, His only second in this conflict was his foster brother, Donald Fraser M'Alister. The uproar spread; the Mackenzies took the part of M'Gilcallum; the Monroes joined Bain; blows were dealt alike on friend and foe, numbers were slain; and the chase or running fight was pursued down the Frith to Mulchaich. Bain and his armour-bearer retired unhurt to Beauly, where Lord Lovat protected them, and dispatched Fraser of Phopachy with an account of the matter to the King, then at Falkland, whereupon an ample remission was sent to Bain, and his opponents ordered to be proceeded against as traitors. A different colour is given to this affair by the Mackenzies, but they agree in the main points."

In the time of Hugh, ninth Lord Lovat, son of the former, there occurred a barbarous act of injustice, which is aggravated by having occurred with his sanction. Lady Lovat, a daughter of Wemyss of that Ilk, had brought to the North with her, as part of her marriage portion, a quantity of gold and jewels which disappeared, and were said to be stolen by one of her female domestics, named Kennedy. The unfortunate girl was ordered by Lovat to be drowned for her supposed crime. After being in the

water she was drawn out in the hope of eliciting a confession, and she stretched out her arms as if intimating that she intended to utter something, but she immediately died from exhaustion. Some time afterwards a certain blacksmith found a pot of gold, and as Lovat considered it impossible for any person in such a condition of life to have discovered or obtained the said gold in an honest manner, he was ordered to be put to the torture. But his resolution baffled his tormentors as it respects a confession, and the unfortunate man died in chains in the vault of Beaully, leaving his wealth to his own family.