

THE TROUBLES OF CARRICK.

CARRICK is the southern one of three districts of Ayrshire; and takes its name from the brokenness and boldness of a large portion of its surface, the word *carraig* in Gaelic signifying ‘a rock.’ It abounds in strong natural fastnesses, and has both a bold coast and a very diversified interior, and may easily be supposed to have witnessed many a rude conflict in early times. The old fabulists people it with a King and warriors in very remote times; and Boece assigns to it an ancient city of large size and great magnificence; and some scanty monuments and obscure traditions identify some of its localities with disasters and battles which are unknown to record; and the strongest presumptions, resting on a comparison of its situation and topography with well-ascertained facts in the history of Galloway and the Hebrides and the British territories in general, permit small room to doubt that it had a large share in the troubles of the Roman possession, the Norse invasions, and the wars of the Dalriads.

The castle of Turnberry, on the coast, 6 miles north of Girvan, was early a strength of great importance; and probably stands on or near the site of Boece’s ancient city, if ever there were such a place; it seems to have been used as a fortress by the old Gaelic lords of Galloway, during centuries prior to the wars of the succession; and it is mentioned,

in the following terms, by Blind Harry, as the scene of an event in the life of Sir William Wallace, when on his way northward, at the head of a party, after some exploits in Galloway:—

“ In Carrick syne they bowned them to ride,
Hasted them not, but soberly could fare
To Turnberry, that Captain was of Ayre
With Lord Piercie, to take his counsel haill.
Wallace purpos’d that place for to assail;
A woman told, when the Captain was gone
Good men of fence into that stead were none.
They filled the dyke with earth and timber haill,
Syne fir’d the yate, no succour might avail.
A priest there was, and gentlewomen within,
Which for the fire made hideous noise and din.
‘ Mercy,’ they cryed, ‘ for Him that died on tree.’
Wallace gart slake the fire, and let them be.”

This castle, together with the earldom of Carrick, was the patrimonial inheritance of the Bruce; and contests the honours of his pristine fame and domestic position with the castle of Lochmaben and the lordship of Annandale;—and it probably was the scene of many worse affairs than this of Wallace,—and may have witnessed many alarms and shocks which have become lost to history. During several years after Bruce commenced his warfare for the crown, it was held by an English garrison under Percy. But in the course of the war, Bruce stormed it, drove out the garrison, and compelled them to retire to Ayr; and it received such damage in the storming as to be virtually destroyed; and it does not appear to have ever afterwards been inhabited. Bruce’s first approach to it while it was in possession of the English, occurred, in a romantic manner, from his retreat in the Island of Airan; and is narrated as follows by the new statist of the

parish of Kilmorie:—“ Alone and disguised as a minstrel, he crossed over to Turnberry. Should he find matters favourable to his cause, he was to make a signal to his friends whom he left behind, by lighting a fire on an eminence above the castle, on seeing which they were to follow him. Instead, however, of finding them favourable, he found them quite the reverse. The garrison was strong and vigilant; his partisans, few, feeble, and dispirited; and even his own hereditary vassals indifferent, if not hostile.

‘ Long harassed by oppressor’s hand,
Courage and faith had fled the land,
And over Carrick, dark and deep,
Had sunk dejection’s iron sleep.’

The minstrel monarch was therefore on the eve of returning, when Providence achieved for him what his own prudence would not have permitted him to attempt. A fire was raised for some other purpose on the very spot where the preconcerted signal was to have been lighted. Aware of the consequence, Bruce spent the night on the beach, that he might apprise his friends of the mistake, before their arrival could be discovered by the enemy. They reached the shore before dawn, but when told of the circumstance, and though assured that any attempt to surprise or carry the castle, or to raise the country, was desperate, and though dissuaded, it is said, by their royal leader, and urged to return in silence to their former retreat, they resolutely refused to quit the land of their fathers, till they had either freed it, or fallen in its rescue.

“ Answered fierce Edward, ‘ Hap what may,
In Carrick, Carrick’s lord shall stay;
I would not minstrel told the tale,
Wildfire or meteor made us quail,

I will not credit that this land,
So famed for warlike heart and hand,
The nurse of Wallace and of Bruce,
Will long with tyrants hold a truce,
Prove we our fate, the brunt we'll bide.'
So Boyd—so Haye—so Lennox cried,
So said, so vowed the leaders all.
So Bruce resolved—' And in my hall,
Since the bold Southern make their home,
The hour of judgment soon shall come,
When with a rough and rugged host,
Clifford may reckon to his cost. "

The earldom of Carrick was given by Robert Bruce to his fiery brother Edward; and it afterwards reverted to the Crown, and became a transferable title among the princes of the blood, and was borne among others by the Duke of Albany's royal victim who was starved to death at Falkland, and is now one of the hereditary titles of the eldest son of the British monarch; so that, if we were to follow the name Carrick through all its historical associations, to say nothing of tracing out all the scenes of conflict and murder and tragedy within the territory itself, we might find thousands of wails and dools to relate under the designation of the Troubles of Carrick. But we shall restrict ourselves, in the sequel, to brief notices of two or three chief things in the history of the Kennedys,—the most powerful of all the Carrick septs, and the ancestors of the present Marquis of Ailsa; and must refer any of our readers who have a curious or antiquarian thirst for acquaintance with smaller events or minuter details, to the Statistical Accounts of the parishes of Carrick, to Pitcairn's Criminal Trials, and especially to a remarkable old work recently printed in a manner uniform with the publications of the Ballantyne and Maitland clubs, under the title of the "Historie of the Kennedyis."

The principal branch of the family were created first Lord Kennedy and afterward Earl of Cassilis; and either directly, or through the medium of collateral and subordinate branches of their sept, they long wielded such power over the district that they were called both popularly and by historiographers “Kings of Carrick;” and they made the castle of Maybole their chief residence, and used it as the metropolitan palace of their “kingdom.” This pile still stands in good preservation, near the middle of the town; and is a high, well-built, imposing structure, one of the strongest and finest unfallen buildings of its age and class. It was the scene of some sad events; and the town’s people assume looks of solemn mystery when turning a stranger’s attention to it, and tell strange traditions respecting things which took place within its walls. The whole town indeed was long the focus of feudal oppression over a large tract of surrounding country, and anciently wielded enormously more influence than is due to any modern provincial metropolis. It possessed the winter residences of a large proportion of the Carrick barons, amounting to no fewer than twenty-eight stately, turreted, strong, baronial mansions; it borrowed great consequence from the ecclesiastics of its own collegiate church, and especially from those of the neighbouring huge abbey of Crossraguel, who, in a dark age, had more power and wealth than most of the nobility; and it was also the place where all the Carrick law cases of any importance in a roistering and litigious age were tried, and therefore the home of many lawyers, and the resort of crowds of litigants, bullies, and retainers. Its very nature was a vortex of troubles.

The Countess of the sixth Earl of Cassilis is famous in balladry and tradition for a very singular and sad elopement. She was the daughter of the first Earl of Haddington, and was born in the year 1607. It is said that she was married to the Earl of Cassilis against her inclination,—that her affection had been previously engaged to a certain Sir John Faa

of Dunbar—and that, soon after her marriage, when she was residing at Cassilis Castle on the banks of the Doon, and while her husband was absent on some public mission to the parliament of England, Sir John Faa, at the head of a body of followers, all disguised as gypsies, went to her residence, and contrived to get an interview with her, and persuaded her to elope with him to England. But an old well-known ballad, supported by a general tradition and by the verdict of many matrons, “spinsters and knitters in the sun,” asserts that the abductors were actual gypsies, yet allows that they used “glamourie,” or succeeded with the aid of charms and philtres.

“ The gypsies they cam to my Lord Cassilis’ yett,
And O! but they sang bonnie;
They sang sae sweet, and sae complete,
That doun cam our fair lady.

She cam tripping doun the stairs,
Wi’ a’ her maids before her;
As soon as they saw her weel-far’d face,
They coost their glamourie owre her.”

But whether real gypsies or disguised gentlemen, they precipitated both the lady and themselves into dire disaster. The Earl returned home before they had proceeded far on their journey; and he pursued and overtook them, and slew all except one in instant conflict, and brought back the runaway Countess, and shut her up for life in a dungeon or prison-chamber of the castle of Maybole. It is alleged that she lived long enough to work a piece of tapestry, still preserved at Colzean House, in which she represented her unhappy flight, but with circumstances unsuited to the details of the ballad, and as if the deceits of “glamourie” had still bewildered her memory, for she figures there in gorgeous attire on a

superb white courser, surrounded by a group of persons who bear no resemblance to a gang of gypsies; but some critics have suspected that this tapestry is only some old fragment, with a totally different subject, which the house-keepers of Colzean have ignorantly or craftily identified with the tradition.

Gilbert, the fourth Earl of Cassilis, lived in the unsettled period succeeding the commencement of the Reformation, and made extraordinary efforts of rapacity and crime to obtain a lion's share of the spoils of the Romish Church. He pushed his power into Galloway, and, by means of murder and forgery, seized the large possessions of the abbey of Glenluce. The office of abbot of Crossraguel was, for some time, held by his uncle, but eventually passed to Allan Stewart, who enjoyed the protection of the Laird of Bargany; and the Earl then longed to lay an appropriating hand upon all its revenues and temporal rights. His brother, Thomas Kennedy, having at his instigation enticed Stewart to become his guest, the unprincipled Earl conveyed the ensnared abbot to Dunure Castle, the original residence of the Cassilis family, and there, by subjecting him to such torments as have rarely occurred except among the most ferocious savages, or in the dungeons of the Inquisition, forced him to resign by legal instruments the possessions of the abbacy. The narration of this affair in the original "historie," though very horrible, is worth being quoted; and we shall give it with the simple alteration of modernizing the spelling:—

" And so, as King of the country, the Earl apprehended the said Mr. Allan and carried him to the house of Dunure, where for a season he was honourably entertained (if a prisoner can think any entertainment pleasing). But after that certain days were spent, and that the Earl could not obtain the fees of Crossraguel according to his own appetite, he determined to prove if a collation could work that which neither dinner nor supper could do of a long time. And

so, the said Mr. Allan was carried to a secret chamber; with him passed the honourable Earl, his worshipful brother, and such as were appointed to be servants at that banquet. In the chamber there was a great iron chimney, under it a fire; other great provision was not seen. The first course was, ‘ My Lord Abbot,’ said the Earl, ‘ it will please you confess here, that with your own consent you remain in my company, because you dare not commit yourself to the hands of others.’ The abbot answered, ‘ Would you, my Lord, that I should make a manifest lie, for your pleasure? The truth is, my Lord, it is against my will that I am here; neither yet have I any pleasure in your company.’—‘ But you shall remain with me at this time,’ said the Earl.—‘ I am not able to resist your will and pleasure,’ said the abbot, ‘ in this place.’—‘ You must then obey me!’ said the Earl. And with that were presented unto him certain letters to subscribe, amongst which there was a five year tack and a nineteen year tack, and a charter of feu of all lands of Crossraguel. . . After that the Earl espied repugnance, and that he could not come to his purpose by fair means, he commanded his cooks to prepare the banquet. And so first, they flayed the sheep, that is, they took off the abbot’s clothes, even to his skin; and next, they bound him to the chimney, his legs to the one end and his arms to the other; and so they began to beat the fire, sometimes to his buttocks, sometimes to his legs, sometimes to his shoulders and arms. And that the roast should not burn, but that it might roast in soup, they spared not ‘ flambing’ with oil. (Lord look thou to such cruelty.) And that the crying of the miserable man should not be heard, they closed his mouth, that the voice might be stopped. In that torment they held the poor man, while that oftentimes he cried, ‘ For God’s sake to despatch him; for he had as much gold in his own purse, as would buy powder enough to shorten his pain.’ The famous King of Carrick, and his cooks, perceiving the roast to be enough, commanded

it to be taken from the fire, and the Earl himself began the grace in this manner: ‘Benedicite Jesus, Maria! You are the most obstinate man that ever I saw! If I had known that you had been so stubborn, I would not for a thousand crowns handled you so! I never did so to man before you! And yet, he returned to the same practice, within two days, and ceased not till that he obtained his foremost purpose; that is, that he had gotten all his pieces subscribed, as well as a half-roasted hand could do it!’

A series of feuds had long raged between the Earls of Cassilis and the Lairds of Bargany, with such fury and frequency that scarcely could one sink into quietness before another arose from some new act of violence and treachery; and the tormenting and plundering of the abbot of Crossraguel, in defiance of the Laird of Bargany’s protection, were too terrible an outrage not to be followed by further wrongs and a fierce conflict. Accordingly, fresh wrath was kindled between the Earl and the Laird, and soon set the district in a blaze.

One day in December 1601, the Laird of Bargany had occasion to ride with only a few followers from the town of Ayr to his mansion on Girvan-water; and the Earl of Cassilis rode out from Maybole Castle, at the head of 200 armed men, in order to waylay and attack him. The Earl’s party drew up at the Lady Corse, about half a mile north of Maybole; and the Laird of Bargany, with his small retinue soon appeared on the opposite side of the valley; and, seeing the Earl and not wishing to come in his way, passed onward by Bogside, and made no attempt to cross the rivulet and its marshy bed. The Earl’s party, however, moved down alongside of him; and, on coming to some earthen walls which offered a good support to the arms of his followers, he ordered them to halt and take a position and fire. Bargany now saw that he could not avoid a rencounter; and determining to make the most of his desperate circumstances, he boldly sprang across the

burn, and made a show of fiery courage. But on getting across, he observed that none of his followers had accompanied him except the Laird of Auchendrane, the Laird of Cloncaird, and two others; and he said to them, “ Gude sirs, we are ower few ! ” Yet the five heroes stood firmly to it against the two hundred assailants, and defended themselves with wolfish resolution, and inflicted many wounds and several deaths. But they were soon overwhelmed with numbers. One was slain, another was unhorsed, Auchendrane was shot through the thigh and brought to the ground ; and only Bargany himself and Cloncaird remained to bear the whole fury of the fray. Yet in the face of at least thirty mounted antagonists, all struggling to be at him and to hew him down, he continued unyielding and undaunted, and was only raised to red heat by desperation, and dashed wildly in amongst them, calling out for Lord Cassilis in person, and challenging him to stand manfully up to a single combat. But he got no consideration for his bravery,—no attention to his calls of honour ; but was overwhelmed by a general pressure upon him, and basely struck down from behind, with a weapon which mortally cut him “ through the craig and through the thropill.” He was conveyed to Maybole, when Lord Cassilis, in the capacity of “ Judge Ordinar ” of the country, resolved to kill him if he should show any symptoms of recovery ; and he was removed thence to Ayr, and died in a few hours. He was only about 25 years of age ; yet seems to have been a person of rare promise and great local celebrity ; and he is described by the old historian as “ the bravest man that could be found in any laud, of high stature and well-made, the bravest horseman and the best at all pastimes, fierce and fiery and wonderful nimble.”

This murderous deed is narrated by some writers more favourably for Lord Cassilis than we have done, and possibly comprised some palliative circumstances which we have not mentioned. Yet viewed in any light, it was appallingly tru-

culent, and affords a melancholy illustration of the shattered condition of society at the period when it occurred. The age was one of lawlessness and oppression, of the reckless rioting of the strong over the weak,—of the shadow and framework of kingly government without much of the reality. The murder of Bargany was too flagrant an outrage, and too slenderly propped by all possible apologies and pretences of provocation, to pass wholly without question; and accordingly it reached the ears of the higher authorities, and seemed for a moment to demand investigation and punishment; but it was hushed up by means of court influence and bribery, and came even to be pronounced by a formal act of the council a piece of “good service to the King!”

The absence of public justice, and especially the keen and festering sense of private wrong, unrestrained by right principle and irritated by habits of vice and malice, now led to the concoction of a horrible revenge. Mure of Auchendrane had an old grudge against the Cassilis' family,—and particularly against Sir Thomas Kennedy of Colzean, on account of having been turned out of an office of high trust and respectability, that of the bailiary of Carrick, by the Earl of Cassilis' art and through Sir Thomas Kennedy's influence; and he passed on from mere grudge to deadly hatred, on account of his sympathy and alliance with Bargany, of the attack upon them at the Lady Corse, of his own severe wound and Bargany's mortal injuries there, and of the whole affair being declared good service to the King. He therefore thirsted for the blood of a Kennedy; and he was not long in finding an opportunity to obtain it,—and that too in the quarter which he most wished. He learned that Sir Thomas Kennedy was about to pass his vicinity on a journey to Edinburgh; and he employed a party of his retainers to waylay him at a place appointed for a repast, and there to overwhelm and murder him. Sir Walter Scott, in his Ayrshire Tragedy, makes Mure himself narrate in graphic terms the circumstances of

the assassination, but with the poetic substitution of the Earl of Cassilis for Sir Thomas:—

“ Midst this, our good Lord Gilbert, Earl of Cassilis
Takes purpose he would journey forth to Edinburgh;
The King was doling gifts of abbey lands,
Good things that thrifty house was wont to fish for.
Our mighty Earl forsakes his sea-washed castle,
Passes our borders some four miles from hence;
And, holding it unwholesome to be fasters
Long after sunrise, lo! the Earl and train
Dismount to rest their nags and eat their breakfast.
The morning rose, the small birds caroll'd sweetly—
The corks are drawn, the pasty brooks incision—
His lordship jests, his train are choked with laughter;
When,—wondrous change of cheer, and most unlook'd for,
Strange epilogue to bottle and to baked meat!—
Flash'd from the greenwood half a score of carbines,
And the good Earl of Cassilis, in his breakfast,
Had nooning, dinner, supper all at once,
Even in the morning, that he closed his journey;
And the grim sexton, for his chamberlain
Made him the bed which rests the head for ever.”

So trusty to their master were the assassins, and so wily and warily had Auchendrane selected and instructed them, that no evidence was ever likely to transpire of his connexion with the murder, except that only of a poor student of the name of Dalrymple who had given him intelligence of the place of repast. He was strongly suspected, indeed, and even openly accused of having instigated the crime; but he indignantly asserted his innocence, and stoutly denied all knowledge of Sir Thomas's intended journey, and went so far as to beard and defy the chiefs of the Kennedys and some of the public authorities who hinted their suspicion of his guilt.

And Sir Walter Scott makes him and a companion say, as interlocutors in the Tragedy,—

“ Ay, 'tis an old belief in Carrick here,
Where natives do not always die in bed,
That if a Kennedy shall not attain
Methuselah's last span, a Mure has slain him.
Such is the general creed of all their clan.
Thank Heaven, that they're bound to prove the charge
They are so prompt in making. They have clamoured
Enough of this before, to shew their malice.
But what said these coward pickthanks when I came
Before the King, before the Justicers,
Rebutting all their calumnies and daring them
To shew that I knew aught of Cassilis' journey—
Which way he meant to travel—where to halt—
Without which knowledge I possess'd no means
To dress an ambush for him? Did I not
Defy the assembled clan of Kennedys
To show, by proof direct or inferential,
Wherfore they slandered me with this foul charge?
My gauntlet rung before them in the court,
And I did dare the best of them to lift it
And prove such charge a true one—Did I not?”
“ I saw your gauntlet lie before the Kennedys,
Who look'd on it as men do on an adder,
Longing to crush, and yet afraid to grasp it.
Not an eye sparkled—not a foot advanced—
No arm was stretch'd to lift the fatal symbol.”

But notwithstanding all this bravado, Mure was tortured with apprehension, and saw the sword of public justice dangling over him suspended by a hair. He was particularly afraid of the poor lad Dalrymple, and put him long out of the way, in several lurking places about Auchendrane and in the Isle of

Man, and even got him to serve five or six years as a soldier in Buccleuch's regiment in Holland. Nor when Dalrymple returned home, after that long period, did Auchendrane feel any abatement of terror, but rather an increase of it; and he therefore resolved, with the help of his son, who now shared his mortal resentments, his guilty horrors, and his tormenting fears, to put an end to the lad's life. The Mures accordingly got a vassal, called James Bannatyne, to entice Dalrymple to his house, situated at Chapel-Donan, a lonely place on the coast; and there, at midnight, they murdered him, and buried his body in the sand. The corpse was speedily unearthed by the tide, and was carried out by the assassins to the sea at a time when a strong wind blew from the shore, but was very soon brought back by the waves, and lodged on the very scene of the murder. The Mures fell under general suspicion; they had been observed to tamper with Dalrymple; they failed any longer to deceive their neighbours and hold the authorities at bay by bravadoing and bullying; they felt the responsibilities of their guilt closing rapidly and sullenly around them; and they resolved, by way of sweeping off the worst evidence which could come against them, to murder Bannatyne also, the accomplice and the witness of their previous murder. But Bannatyne was on his guard, and likewise felt wrung with remorse, and he delivered himself up to the civil authorities, and made full confession of the tragic horrors of Chapel-Donan; and the Mures—who had already been thrown into prison on the strength of the strong presumptive evidence, and the general cry of indignation against them—were brought up to a long and most solemn trial, and were found guilty, and afterwards publicly beheaded at the market-cross of Edinburgh, amid general execration. An affecting circumstance is that, at the time of his execution, the elder Mure must have been nearly eighty years of age.

The trial is published in full from original documents in Pitcairn's Criminal Trials; and is characterised by the editor

as "one of the most remarkable in the whole range of the criminal annals of this or perhaps of any other country." "In it," he remarks, "are unfolded the Mures' most hidden transactions, and the secret springs of their most private and craftily contrived plots, all of them leading to the perpetration of crimes so singular in atrocity, and of so deep a dye, that one can hardly expect to meet with their parallel, even in the pages of romantic fiction. By the clew, now afforded, may be traced almost the secret thoughts of two of the most accomplished and finished adepts in crime—individuals who murdered by rule, and who carried forward their deadly schemes of ambition, by means of a regularly connected chain of plots and stratagems, so artfully contrived, as to afford them every reasonable prospect of success—and even in the event of the entire failure of their plans, almost to ensure their escape from suspicion; at the least, in their estimation, to warrant their security against ultimate detection, and consequently exempt them from the penalty of capital punishment. Ambition and the lust of power appear to have been the immediate procuring causes of all the crimes in which these infatuated men were involved. Theirs was not the sudden burst of ungoverned passions, which might have hurried them on to the commission of a solitary deed of frightful but unpremeditated violence—nor were their crimes the consequence of ancient feuds, inherited from their restless and vindictive ancestors—nor yet had they the too common apology that they originated in impetuous assaults made upon them, and that their hasty quarrels sprung from a fiery and unbridled temper, which had unfortunately terminated in fatal results. On the contrary, the whole of their numerous attempts and crimes may be characterised as cool, calculating, and deliberate acts, anxiously studied, and by slow and patient, but sure degrees, matured and prosecuted, for a long series of years, until at length 'the measure of their iniquities overflowed,'—and the unlooked-for concurrence of an

extraordinary train of circumstances, the most unlikely to have happened, eventually led to a triumphant discovery of their enormous crimes.”