

# GLENCREGGAN.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### CANTIRE'S MONARCH OF MOUNTAINS, AND ITS LEGENDS.

A Highland Parish. — A native Poet. — Barr Glen. — Beinn-an-Tuirc. — What is a Mountain? — Hieland Hills. — Local Rhymes. — View from the Summit. — Legend of the Wild Boar. — Fingal compasses Diarmid's Death. — Diarmid a Victor. — Diarmid a Victim. — The One-eyed. — Versions of the Legend. — Ossian. — Legend of Robert Bruce. — A friendly Goat. — Bruce and the Beggar-man. — A Dish at a Pinch. — How to obtain an Answer to a Question. — Friends in need. — Highland Hospitality. — Bruce and Mackay. — A royal Bargain royally fulfilled. — Another Version of the Tale.



HERE is abundant variety in the landscape that I am endeavouring to sketch. It might be said of the parish in which Glencreggan is situated, as Christopher North said of his own native place (only for "loch" we must read "sea"): "It was as level, as boggy, as hilly, as mountainous, as woody, as lochy, and as rivery a parish, as ever laughed to scorn Colonel Mudge and his Trigonometrical Survey." And this applies to the

general features of the landscape, which, in its details, is much as follows.

The hill-side falls sharply from our feet into a valley (high above the sea) along which, in an easterly direction, runs a good road from the village of Barr for some four or five miles, communicating with several farm-houses on the Glenbarr estate. A few yards on the other side of the road is Barr river, hurrying on in its downward course towards the sea, over rocky fragments and ledges, and, for the most part, fringed and overhung with trees and hazel bushes up to its source. It is fed by many tributary streams, the chief of which flows from Loch Coiribh; but the main source of Barr River is Loch Arnicle, a wild and lonely loch at the western foot of the mountain Beinn-an-Tuire.

A local poet, who has not much of the fire of Burns, or the ancient Scalds, thus celebrates the lochs of Cantire:—

“The many lakes that stud Cantire,  
 No man would grudgingly admire,  
 But spare an hour for to retire  
 And take a view,  
 Which would his frame with health inspire,  
 And strength renew.”

The same poet — whose success in verse is not equal to his good intentions — has also tuned his strings in praise of the glens of Cantire:—

" Cantire's glens perfume the air  
 With roses sweet, and gowans fair ;  
 Their fertile sides, and crystal streams,  
 Dress'd with the sun's life-giving beams,  
 Delight the heart and eye.  
     A walk then on the field  
     Would health and vigour yield —  
 A feast of joys supply."

Barr Glen is cultivated throughout its whole extent, and has extensive sheep pasturage on either side. In this cultivated tract, farm-houses and cottages are dotted about near to the road side, leaving the hills to loneliness and heather. The river runs along the valley far below us; on its further side the hills again rise to a considerable height. They range from right to left, terminating five miles from us in Beinn-an-Tuire, near to whose base the shooting-party this morning commenced their day's sport.

Beinn-an-Tuire is the most considerable hill in Cantire, being 2170 feet above the level of the sea, and only 306 feet lower than the Paps of Jura; but as it does not rise abruptly from its base, but towers out of a confused mass of lofty hills, it appears of less altitude than other mountains that are its inferior in height, but are better seen from standing alone. It has also been omitted in the tables of the Scotch mountains and hills, which give various altitudes down to that of Arthur's Seat, which is 823 feet above the sea.

Why, this nameless hill on which we are now seated is much higher than that; and yonder hill on the other side of the Barr Glen is still higher!

What is a hill, indeed; and what a mountain? at what altitude does a hill end and a mountain commence? in fact, at what altitude does a rise of ground become a hill? In the flat fen counties of England, it takes a very small proportion of earth to be dignified with the title of a hill. The Cambridge man when he lionises his country cousins, shows them the Gogmagog Hills; and they look over the gently rising fields to which he is pointing, and strain their eyes in the vain expectation of seeing a blue range worthy of the name of hills. The Cambridge man makes a tour, ascends Mont Blanc, becomes a member of the Alpine Club, and scorns the Grampians as mere hillocks. While, in a land of mountains like the Highlands, what would be a mountain in lowland counties, dwindles to a hill. Thus, that young Scotch minister who is one of our most accomplished and genial essayists says, "I am writing north of the Tweed, and the horizon is of blue hills, which some Southrons would call mountains."\* And Christopher North, speaking of his boyhood's home "among moors and mountains," says, "mountains they seemed to us in those days, though now we believe they are only hills. But, such hills! undu-

\* Recreations of a Country Parson, p. 126.

lating far and wide away, till the highest, even on clear days, seemed to touch the sky, and, in cloudy weather, were verily a part of heaven." And Mr. Baillie Nicol Jarvie thus sums up the catalogue of items that constitute Highland scenery:—"These Hiellands of ours, as we ca' them, gentlemen, are but a wild kind of warld by themsells, full of heights and howes, woods, caverns, lochs, rivers, and mountains, that it wad tire the very deevil's wings to flee to the tap o' them." So we may come to the conclusion that "the Hielland hills," if not mountains, are very good representations of them; and that we may better understand the 2170 feet that go to make up the altitude of Beinn-an-Tuirc (*Beinn* or *Ben*, as we may remember, denotes a hill of the largest scale) we may call to mind the heights of the two greatest hills that a Londoner would first meet with on his travels northward; viz. the Malvern hills (Worcestershire Beacon) 1444 feet; and the Wrekin, 1320 feet. It was these "Hielland hills" that enabled the Scotchman to vanquish the Englishman with whom he was disputing as to the superiority of his native country in every respect over England. "But you must at any rate allow," said the Englishman, "that Scotland is smaller in extent than England." "By no means," was the reply; yours is a flat country, ours is a hilly one; and, if all our hills were

rolled out flat, we should beat you by hundreds of square miles.”

As Beinn-an-Tuire is the monarch of mountains in Cantire, he demands of us a due recognition and special notice; so, while I am busied with my paint-brush in endeavouring to represent him as he appears to us from this Glencreggan moor, let me tell you what I know concerning him. The local poet, from whom I have just now quoted, has crowned him with mortal verse, in stanzas commencing thus:—

“ Delightful task ’tis to ascend  
 Cantire’s hill with a true friend;  
 A page of nature’s book to spy,  
 When calm and cloudless is the sky.  
 A great expanse of sea and land  
 Stretches sublime from where we stand;  
 The ocean wide, a mighty sheet,  
 Spreads out the concave vault to meet.”

The mountain is upon the estate of Torrisdale, in the parish of Saddell, whose minister, the Rev. John Macfarlane, thus describes the view from its summit. “From no point of the same altitude in the country is the view more grand, extensive, or picturesque. In the foreground (to the east) is the island of Arran; to the south, the Frith of Clyde, the Craig of Ailsa, and the Irish Channel. From the Point of Corsil, in Wigtonshire, the eye can range along the intervening counties, until arrested by ‘the lofty Ben Lomond.’ Hence

the transition is easy to Ben Cruachan and Ben More, in Mull. To the north-west is the horizon line of the Atlantic, presenting portions of its blue surface through the openings of the different islands with which it is indented, from Mull to the Giant's Causeway. In this range are embraced portions of seven Scottish and two Irish counties, and the circuit is supposed to be little less than 300 miles."

The name Beinn-an-tuirc signifies "The Mountain of the Wild Boar," and the Cantire Highlanders tell the following legend in explanation of the name.\* Once upon a time, when this mountain was partly clothed with great forests, there lived among them a wild boar of enormous size and strength. He ravaged the country, wandering about for prey, and killing every man and beast that he met. For miles off he could be heard whetting his terrible tusks against the stately oaks, and people were afraid to pass that way, and had to drive their cattle to other pastures. The great hero Fingal came to Cantire, and was told of the wild boar's ravages. Among his brave men there was a mighty hunter named Diarmid †, of whom Fingal was jealous

\* There is no account of this, or of any history attaching to the mountain, given in the "Statistical Accounts of Scotland," or other books in which Cantire is mentioned.

† Keefie of Gigha carried off Diarmid's wife, and was slain by him. See chap. xiv.



and wished to be rid; so to him was committed the dangerous task to slay the boar. Diarmid accepted the task with joy, and set out for the mountain. He entered the oak forest that then grew at its base, and soon got upon the track of the boar. He followed it through the brushwood and the thick hazels that gave to Caledonia its name \*, and presently heard the boar crunching the bones of a bullock. Diarmid sprang upon him with his spear †, but it broke off short in the wild boar's chest, and the beast, maddened with pain and savage anger, rushed upon him. Diarmid stepped lightly aside, and the boar, in his blind fury, dashed his tusk against the hard trunk of an oak. Diarmid was instantly upon him with his sword, and plunged it in his bristly body up to the very hilt, and the boar rolled over and died. Diarmid blew his horn and obtained help, and they dragged the dead body of the boar to the tent of Fingal, where there was great

\* This, however, is a doubtful etymology; for though Caledonia is said by some to mean "the land of hazels," which grow there in such luxuriance, yet others would derive the word from *Na Caoillain*, "the men of the woods;" and the *Deucaledones* has the like signification. Tacitus is the earliest author who uses the word *Caledonii*.

† The readers of "Ossian's Poems" may call to mind the strife of the two kings, Culgorm and Sucandrolo, who jointly killed a boar, and then, like modern shooters with a bird, each laid claim to the honour of the deed. They quarrelled over it, and ended the dispute by a war.



rejoicing at the deed, and many shells \* were quaffed in honour of Diarmid.

But there were many among the followers of Fingal who envied Diarmid his victory over the dreaded wild boar, and the great Fingal himself was enraged to see him return alive and successful; so, while some were preparing the pit with smooth stones, in which to roast the boar, others were speaking aside against Diarmid, and Fingal was revolving in his mind how he might best rid himself of the man who had so aroused his jealousy at his brave deeds. Then came there one to Fingal and said, "It is not wonderful that Diarmid hath slain the boar, for the boar had no power to hurt Diarmid." Then Fingal demanded how that might be; and was answered: "Diarmid hath a charmed body; no sword or spear of man, nor yet the tusk or horn of beast can wound him, save but in one little spot." "Tell me that spot," said Fingal, "that I may wound him there! where is it?" "Upon his heel," was the reply.

Now the dead body of the wild boar was lying near, and Fingal and his followers went to view it, and to express their wonder at its huge size and great length.

\* In olden times the Highlanders drank from shells, a practice, indeed, which is not quite extinct in the present day. Thus it is in "Ossian's Poems" that a banquet-hall is called "the hall of shells," and the host, "the chief of shells;" while the wine-drinking is poetically termed "the joy of shells."

Then Fingal called Diarmid to him and complimented him on his prowess, and bade him measure the boar with his feet, to see how long the monster was. Diarmid was barefooted; but he stepped on to the head of the boar, and so measured it with his feet from the head downwards, the strong bristles yielding to his tread. Then Fingal bade him measure the boar again by treading backwards against the grain. Diarmid did so; but the stiff bristles were no longer pressed downwards, and they pierced his heel; and Diarmid bled to death. It was in this manner that the people of Cantire were rid of the terrible wild boar, and that Fingal compassed the death of Diarmid; and in memory of the monster whom he slew the mountain was called *Beinn-an-tuire*, or “The Mountain of the Wild Boar.” It is said also of this Diarmid that he had but one eye, and was therefore called in Gaelic *Camshuil*, or “the One-eyed;” and that the Campbells are descended from him, and retain in their armorial bearings a boar’s head in remembrance of his exploit. Their descent from this Fingalian Achilles is also denoted in their title of *Clann Dhiarmaid*, “the children of Diarmid.” \*

\* Mr. Campbell tells us of a namesake who “believed that Diarmaid, the Irish hero, was his ancestor, and his own real name O’Duine. He spoke of ‘his chief MacCalain,’ and treated me with extra kindness as a kinsman. ‘Will you not take some more?’ (milk and potatoes).”

The Achillean invulnerability of Diarmid is worthy of notice.\* The legend, at least so far as I have been informed, does not tell us how Diarmid's body was brought to its invulnerable state, but simply that it was so. Mr. Campbell, in his "Popular Tales of the West Highlands," briefly refers to the legend thus: "The boar was the animal which Diarmid slew, and which caused his death when he paced his length against the bristles; the venomous bristles pierced a *mole in his foot.*" † So that this would appear to be a different version of this portion of the legend. Mr. Campbell again speaks of the legend at the close of his second volume (p. 473). He first quotes Dr. Smith, of Campbellton. " 'DIARMAID. — This poem is generally interlarded with so much of the ursgeuls, or later tales, as

'Perhaps we may never see each other again. Are we not both Campbells?' " — *West Highland Tales*, vol. i. p. 34.

\* The reader who wishes to see how many Highland legends and fairy tales can be traced to a mythological source, and appear in sundry forms among different peoples, can scarcely do better than refer to Mr. Campbell's volumes; and more particularly to the chapter entitled "Highland Romances and Superstitions," in the fourth volume of Macculloch's "Highlands and Western Isles," a book to which Mr. Campbell does not refer, although he goes over precisely the same ground as that so well trodden by Macculloch in the chapter just mentioned. But Mr. Campbell has brought to his task a large share of that varied information and reading of which Macculloch gives so formidable a list, as being necessary to him "who may undertake the office of a Highland Grimm" (vol. iv. p. 322).

† Vol. i. Introd. p. xci.

to render the most common editions of it absurd and extravagant. But the fabulous dross of the fifteenth century is easily separated from the more precious ore of the ancient bards.' Of part of the same story of Diarmaid, Mrs. MacTavish writes in 1859: 'A *dan* or song which I heard an old ploughman of my father's sing very near sixty years since. He had a great collection of tales and songs, and often have I stood or sat by him in winter when kiln-drying corn, or in summer when building a peat-stack, listening to what was to me so fascinating in those days. And then follows the story of how Diarmaid was killed by pacing barefooted against the bristles of a boar which he had killed, and the lament of Diarmaid's love, and the music to which it used to be sung; and this same story of Diarmaid and the boar was sung to me by Alexander Macdonald, in Barra, in September, 1860, together with other long Gaelic poems: and whatever may be thought of Macpherson's collection (*i. e.* Ossian's poems), this at least is genuine old poetry, and still known to many in the Highlands.'" Mr. Campbell also says in another place: "I know not how many cairns are supposed to contain the bones of the wild boar whose bristles wounded the feet of Diarmaid when he paced his length against the hair."\* The mountain of Sliobh-ghoil, in South Knapdale, is one of these places,

\* Vol. i. p. 40.

and is visible from Beinn-an-tuirc. The Fingalian heroes had as many burial-places as Homer had birth-places.

Mr. Campbell tells us that he copied Dr. Smith's note on "Diarmaid" from some manuscripts belonging to the Highland Society, to which he was permitted to have access. He also transcribes from the same source the "advertisement" to "MS. poems collected in the Western Highlands and Islands by Dr. John Smith," which agrees in part with the introductory observations on the Gaelic poems, printed at pp. 126—130 of Dr. Smith's "Gaelic Antiquities."\* This is a quarto

\* "Gaelic Antiquities: consisting of a History of the Druids, particularly of those of Caledonia; a Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian; and a Collection of Ancient Poems, translated from the Gaelic of Ullin, Ossian, Orran, &c. By John Smith, Minister at Kilbrandon, Argyleshire. Edinburgh, 1780." Mr. Campbell mentions Dr. Smith's "book on Gaelic poetry" (vol. i. p. 20), and says, "he condemns the 'urskels' as 'later tales' unworthy of notice, probably because they were different from the poetry of which he collected so much." This statement, however, is taken from that manuscript "advertisement" belonging to the Highland Society. In the printed book Dr. Smith speaks at some length of the great assistance he had derived from "the traditional tales or *sgeulachds* which always accompany and explain the old Gaelic poems, and which often remain entire when the poems themselves are reduced to fragments." He also says: "The style of these tales is highly figurative and poetical, and the words and ideas so well arranged that they take the most lasting hold of the memory and imagination: insomuch that they are frequently to be met with where the poems are beginning to be rare" (p. 129). Dr. Smith also gives an account of his labours in collecting,

volume, published before Dr. Smith went to Campbelton and obtained his degree. The poems are fourteen in number, and are among those which "had escaped the inquiries of the able and ingenious translator of Ossian, whose researches were more chiefly confined to the more northern parts of the Highlands." One of the poems narrates the "Legend of Diarmid and the Wild Boar;" and although it differs considerably from the version of the story which I have already given, and transfers the scene of the exploit to the mountain of Sliobh-ghoil, in northern Argyleshire, it may be interesting to quote it here, and it will probably be new to the reader; but as the poem occupies sixteen pages of a quarto volume, it has been thought best to transfer it to the Appendix, to which place I beg to refer the reader.

So much for Beinn-an-tuirc in the olden days of Fingal. But it has also a later history, in which there is likewise a very strong flavour of the legend. It relates (of course!) to that other Scottish hero, Robert

"from different quarters, as many editions as possible" of the old Gaelic poetical tales. This task occupied him for ten or twelve years. He collected the tales through the medium of several correspondents in the Northern and Western Highlands and Isles, and also "by oral recitation;" and he gives the names of thirteen persons who were his chief helpers. In short, he pursued precisely the same plan as that so effectively carried out by Mr. Campbell nearly a century after. Dr. Smith's labours have not been sufficiently recognised.

Bruce, of whom there are quite as many romances told as were ever narrated of Fingal; and, as we saw when we were off the coast of Arran, the two heroes often run in couples. The following is the local legendary tale of Robert Bruce and Beinn-an-tuirc.\*

In the days when King Robert Bruce was a wanderer, and was hiding himself like a hunted partridge on the mountains from the murderous Southrons, who had set a price upon his royal head and strove to take him dead or alive, he came to Sliobh-ghoil, that mountain in South Knapdale (North Argyleshire) nearly thirty miles due north of this spot, plainly visible from most parts of Cantire, and, by some, pointed out as the scene of Diarmid's death. On that bleak mountain the hunted monarch passed a cheerless night. He was well-nigh spent out with fatigue and hunger; and to add to his distress the night was bitterly cold. He would probably have perished had not a goat come to him and laid herself down beside him. She suffered him to refresh himself with her milk, and she kept him warm all the night through. It was in grateful memory of this that when he "en-

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\* The latter portion only of the legend, *i. e.* that relating to Mackay of Ugadale, is told in Smith's "Views of Campbelton." It is not mentioned in the other works that relate to Cantire. I owe this legend to Mr. Macintosh of Campbelton.



joyed his ain agen," he made a law that forbade anyone to poind (or pound) a goat.

Refreshed by his night's rest and the goat's milk and warmth, the Bruce came on to Cantire the next morning. On his way he met a beggar-man. The King was very hungry by this time, and he asked the beggar-man if he had any food. He answered, that he had but a little barley-meal. The King said that it was very good; and they went to a spring of water, where the King took off his shoe, and moistened the meal in the heel of the shoe. Then he made a hearty meal of it, and said, in Gaelic: —

“Is maith an còcair' an t-acras,  
'S maireg ni tallach air a' bhiadh,  
Fuarag eorna a beul mo bhròige,  
An lòn is fear a fhuair mi riamh;”

which means, in English — “Hunger is a good cook; it is bad to slight food; barley-meal brose out of my shoe is the best food that ever I used.” Then the King came on towards Beinn-an-tuirc, and reached its eastern side, where was the forest of Bunlaradh. It was a most lonesome spot; but a man was there, and the King asked him his name. The stranger instead of answering put the same question to the King, who, of course, would not disclose himself. So, as neither would answer, they drew their swords, and forthwith fell upon each other. They fought desperately for

some time, for both were equally expert; till at length they became exhausted, and sat themselves down to rest. When they had got fresh breath, they set to again; and again had to pause from exhaustion. A third time they renewed their contest, and a third time had to cease from it quite exhausted. Then said the King: "This is pitiful work that we give ourselves, alone, and in this dreary place. It will answer no good end, even if we should kill each other. Tell me your name, and I will tell you mine!" "Agreed," replied the stranger. "I am Robert Bruce!" said the King. "And I," replied his adversary, "am General Douglas!" Now General Douglas was one who had espoused the cause of Bruce, and, like his monarch, a price had been set on his head by the English, and this had made him a fugitive like the Bruce. So, when these two friends in misfortune knew each other, they threw aside their swords, and fell upon each other's necks, and embraced and kissed each other; so they went both of them together out of the forest of Bunlaradh, down to Ugadale near the eastern shore.\* There was a farm there, occupied by an honest man named Mackay, who happened to be entertaining some

\* Smith, in his "Campbelton," begins the story here, making Bruce land at Ugadale from Loch Ranza, in Arran. The rest of the tale is made up from Smith's account, and that of Mr. Macintosh. General Douglas does not figure in Smith's version.

friends at a kind of merry-making. There they went, and Mackay received them with Highland hospitality, placed them near to the fire, and presented them with a quaigh of usquebaugh. Bruce declined it; but Mackay pressed him with a sort of hearty command, saying, "I am king in my own house." Mackay gave them comfortable beds to sleep on, and a substantial breakfast the next morning; after which, the King asked him to show them the way to the western coast of Cantire. Mackay went with them willingly, and took them up Beinn-an-tuirc. When they were on the top, the King could see the western coast of Cantire, so he would not take Mackay any further, but thanked him for his kindness and hospitality; and ended by telling him that he was Robert Bruce, and for the protection and assistance which he had afforded him, he would grant him any favour he would wish to receive, if he was ever successful in regaining his throne. Mackay replied that if he had the farms of Ugadale and Arniele for his own property he would be as happy as a king. So, the Bruce promised that when he wore his crown again Mackay should have the two farms. The spot where they stood upon the top of Beinn-an-tuirc is marked by a large stone, which is called to this day, "*Cross Mhic Caidh*," or "the Cross of Mackay." When they parted, the King told Mackay to come to him in Edinburgh, when he saw a fire blazing on a certain hill in

Galloway. Then they went down from Beinn-an-tuirc, on their several ways.

Mackay looked long and anxiously for the signal-fire, especially after the tidings had reached him of the great battle of Bannockburn. At last he saw the beacon, and hastened to meet the King. The Bruce recognised him, and kindly entertained him, and made him a gift of the lands which he farmed, giving him the title-deeds of Ugadale and Arniele, to be possessed by him and his heirs for ever. They are still in the possession (it is said) of George M'Neill, Esq. of Ugadale. Before Mackay left, the King offered him a goblet of wine, but Mackay declined it; whereupon the Bruce said that he must drain it, for that *he* also was now "King in his own house."

Such are the popular tales that are told in connection with Cantire's "monarch of mountains." But this Cantire legend of their popular hero King Robert Bruce would appear to be but another version of a West Highland story told by Major-General Stewart in his "Sketches of the Highland Regiments."\* James I. (of Scotland) had endeavoured to suppress the feuds of the Highland chief; and Donald Balloch, a kinsman of the Earl of Ross, made several descents on the west coast of Scotland. "To check these devastating invasions, the Earl of Mar, who commanded at Harlaw,

\* Vol. ii. p. 456.

accompanied by Allan Stewart, Earl of Caithness, son of the Earl of Athole, marched with a considerable force to Lochaber; and in August 1428 lay at Inverlochay, a place celebrated both for its ancient castle and the different battles fought near it. Donald Balloch had good information from his scouts; and learning that the Earl of Mar, neglecting the necessary precautions of an experienced and brave commander, as he had shown himself at Harlaw and in the wars in Flanders and the Low Countries, where he commanded large armies in several campaigns with great military talents and success, or, perhaps, trusting to his numbers and despising his enemy, kept no night-guard or outposts, Macdonald landed from his fleet of galleys, and, at midnight, attacked the King's troops so unexpectedly, that they were totally routed with great slaughter. Of this number was the Earl of Caithness, and Mar escaped with difficulty. Retreating through the mountains to Braemar, he was two days without food, when he met with a man herding some cattle. This man had a small quantity of barley-meal, which he gave to the unfortunate commander. He mixed the meal with a little water in the heel of his shoe, and greedily swallowed it. Lord Mar told the shepherd, that if ever he required assistance to repair to Kildrummy Castle, where he would meet a grateful friend. The shepherd soon appeared at the castle; he was kindly received by

Lord Mar, who settled him, rent free, on a small farm well stocked, declaring that the handful of barley-meal and water in the heel of his shoe was the sweetest morsel he had ever swallowed. This afterwards became a proverb in the Highlands, something similar to *Hunger requires no sauce.*"