

## CHAPTER 9

### THE EARL OF SEAFORTH AND THE COVENANT

After Montrose and his army had departed to the south, the Covenanters in the north held a committee meeting on 24th April, 1639 at Kintore. The Earl of Seaforth was a member of this committee together with the Earl Marshal, Lord Fraser, the Master of Forbes and some of their followers. Those people in the area who had not yet signed the Covenant were requested to attend this meeting and sign. Failure to sign would be dealt with by the indiscriminate plundering of their property.

Around the 25th of May, the Earl Marshal met up with Montrose at Aberdeen with a force of 6000 men. Meanwhile a large body of northern Covenanters under the command of the Earl of Seaforth planned to join this army but they were suddenly opposed by the Gordons who had crossed the Spey. Seaforth entered into negotiations with the Gordons and obtained an agreement from them that if the Gordons withdrew back across the Spey then Seaforth would retire his men back to their homelands. Seaforth, however, disregarded this treaty and retained his army on the banks of the Spey.

The growing military power of Montrose forced the king to enter into a Treaty of Pacification on the 18th June, 1639, whereby the king agreed that all ecclesiastical matters would be dealt with by the kirk and all civil matters by parliament. It was further agreed that a free General Assembly would be held in Edinburgh on the 6th of August following and on the 20th August the parliament would meet in Edinburgh to ratify those matters decided on by the General Assembly, which would further peace and good in the Kingdom of Scotland. The terms of the treaty required that the armed forces disband within 48 hours and forts, castles and arsenals be handed over to the king at his demand. Montrose duly commanded Seaforth to disband his army and send them home.

Nonetheless, the king had little intention of giving in to the force of the Covenanters and already had made preparations to raise an army to support his Divine Right over all matters civil or ecclesiastical. The Covenanters on the other hand were justifiably distrustful and still retained armies which had not been disbanded and they remustered in Kelso and Dunbar during May of 1640. The king refused to consent to the actions of the Scottish parliament and as a result the Covenanters, under the military leadership of Montrose invaded England forcing the king to enter into another truce and another treaty in June 1641.

Charles' autocratic view of the rights of kings combined with his attitudes to the church and religion soon got him into trouble with the English parliament and when Charles raised his standard at Nottingham in 1642, the English parliamentarians looked for support from the Scottish Covenanters. The Scots agreed to attack the royalists from the north and subjected the English Puritans to the solemn

promise that they would bring English worship and ecclesiastical policy into line with that of Scotland. The Puritans, however, used the Scots for their own political ends and by 1644, the English parliament and army had been reorganized under that redoubtable leader and Puritan parliamentarian, Oliver Cromwell.

By this time, however, the Covenanters themselves had fallen out with each other and the Earl of Argyll, a strict Calvinist, exploited the situation for personal and ambitious ends and led the now politically extremist Covenanters with the aim of deposing King Charles I. The Earl of Montrose was much more moderate in his outlook. He and eighteen other nobles, including the Earl of Seaforth, met together at Cumbernauld House in Dumbartonshire in 1641 and signed the Cumbernauld Bond. This Bond committed the signatories to resist the extremism of the Covenanters and to act in co-operation to support the king.

Once again Highlands clans were in opposition to each other as each assessed the situation and tried to determine where advantage lay. Argyll led the Covenanters with the power of his mighty clan, the Campbells, while the leading royalist was the Marquis of Huntly, who commanded clan Gordon. As a result of the Cumbernauld Bond, Huntly could now look to the powerful and popular Montrose joining with him and bringing thousands of followers, not least among them being the clan Mackenzie under the leadership of their chief, the Earl of Seaforth. However, something caused Seaforth to waiver in his support of the king and presumably his conscience was torn in his disloyalty to the church. Whatever the reasons, a party of Irish troops led by Alexander MacDonald, were making their way to Atholl to meet up with Montrose in July, 1644 and were expecting to be joined by Huntly and Seaforth. They were in the process of passing through Badenoch when they were threatened by Seaforth as well as the Earl of Sutherland and a number of other clans. MacDonald avoided the conflict and made a different way to Atholl.

Montrose, who was made a Marquis by a grateful Charles I caused great havoc in the Highlands, burning and plundering wherever he went. In particular, the Clanranald went into Argyll and Lorn and killed eight hundred and ninety five Campbells with little opposition, while their chief, the Earl of Argyll, fled leaving his clan without a leader.

Montrose moved from Argyll, collecting more supporters to his cause as he made his way to Inverness which he intended to seize. Inverness was always regarded as the capital of the Highlands and was an important prize. By the time Montrose reached the head of Loch Ness his army amounted to only 1500 men since many of his Highlanders had gone home to hide away the booty they had collected on their various raids with Montrose. Booty was the only really effective way of paying for the support of an army, particularly in such a poor country as Scotland. Unfortunately for Montrose, he was to experience the loss of many of his Highlanders at critical times and one of the reasons Montrose has become such a famous military figure in Scottish history is because of his stunning military successes even when he was substantially outnumbered by his opponents.

In February, 1645, the news reached Montrose at Loch Ness that Seaforth was advancing to meet him with an army of 5000 horse and foot. These included not only Mackenzies but the garrison from Inverness and clan Fraser as well as forces from Sutherland, Caithness, Moray and Ross-shire. Montrose, however, learnt by messenger that the Earl of Argyll had entered Lochaber with an army of 3000 Covenanters and since Montrose had no respect for Argyll's military abilities, he led his men away from Loch Ness. Thus a battle with Seaforth was avoided.

Montrose took his MacDonalds up Ben Nevis and from there they charged down the slopes onto the unsuspecting Campbells camped below, engaging them in a fierce battle. Once again Argyll left the scene of the battle leaving his men to fend for themselves. 1500 Covenanters were killed while only ten royalists lost their lives.

The Marquis of Montrose won an incredible number of battles as Lieutenant-General of the King's forces in Scotland. But in England Charles was having a hard time and had been badly beaten by Cromwell's forces at the Battle of Marston Moor in July 1644 and the Battle of Naseby in 1645. Montrose alone gave the royalists cause for hope.

In the meantime, Seaforth once again changed sides and decided to rejoin the royalist forces under Montrose in March 1645. Montrose was pleased to have the strength of the Mackenzie clan on his side and Seaforth accompanied Montrose in his marches until he was released to return to Ross-shire to defend his estates against the Covenanters.

In the words of James Browne in his *History of the Highlands*:

The Earl of Seaforth obtained an infamous notoriety by again joining the ranks of the Covenanters. In a letter written by Seaforth to the Committee of Estates he claimed he had only joined with Montrose through fear and that henceforth he would abide by "the good cause to his death".

Montrose's men entered Elgin and seized Seaforth's two younger brothers, Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscardine and Simon Mackenzie of Lochslin, both of whom were imprisoned in Inverness. At the entreaty of Seaforth they were later released, but Seaforth was playing such a deep and mysterious game that some people suspected that he had conspired at their arrest in the first place. It is an interesting, and at the same time a curious fact, that although Simon Mackenzie of Lochslin presumably supported his brother, the Earl, in his support of the Covenanters at this time, his son George was to become infamous as the King's Advocate in Scotland through his dedicated prosecution of so many Covenanters during the period of the persecutions. He became known as "bloody Mackenzie."

Seaforth later joined with the Earl of Sutherland, clan Fraser and others at

Inverness. A total force of 3,500 foot and 400 horse was commanded by Major-General Hurry, the second in command to the Commanding General Baillie. Baillie was answerable to a Council of War which in turn was heavily influenced by the kirk whose dogmatic decisions made the task of the military leaders near impossible, particularly against a flexible and imaginative opponent such as Montrose.

General Hurry, acting under the orders and constraints of the kirk gave battle to Montrose in May, 1645. The Battle of Auldearn gave another victory to Montrose who lost only 200 men to Hurry's losses of 2000. Montrose followed up his success by exercising a campaign of revenge against those who had opposed the royalist cause by burning and destroying many houses including the Elgin home of Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscardine. Pluscardine himself was to adopt the royalist cause a few years later and lead his own uprising.

In December, 1645 Montrose reduced the garrison of Inverness and part of the reason for this was a plan to try and persuade Seaforth to join with the royalists again. Seaforth must have been impressed with the military successes of Montrose for he did indeed change sides once more and became the ardent royalist. Unfortunately, for all his wavering, Seaforth's decision to go to the royalist cause was the wrong one and henceforth the Mackenzie support of the Stewarts was to prove to be their ultimate ruin along with the ruin of the Stewarts themselves.

The Covenanters meanwhile were encouraged by the proceedings in England and they summoned a parliament to St Andrews on 26 November 1645 without any authority from the king. The General Assembly of the Church also met at the same time so that both the ministers and their lay brethren were united in their efforts for the upholding of the Covenant. To quote Browne once again:

It is truly melancholy to find men, under the pretence of religion, demanding the lives of their countrymen as a sacrifice which they considered would be well-pleasing to God; yet, whilst every well-disposed mind must condemn the fanaticism of the Covenanters, it must be remembered that the unconstitutional efforts of the king to force protestant episcopacy upon them—a system which they detested,—the severe losses which they had sustained from the army of Montrose, and the dread of being subjected to the yoke of prelacy, and punished for their resistance, had aroused them to a state of frenzy, over which reason and religion could have little control.

It was against this background of a doomed king and an hysterical kirk that George Mackenzie, 2nd Earl of Seaforth unwisely changed sides for the last time and became a royalist.

In September 1645, Montrose attempted to join with the English royalists but, as so often happened when he crossed the Highland line, he lost many of his Highland troops who returned home. On September 13th, Montrose was surprised by

a much larger army under David Leslie, Lord Newark<sup>1</sup> at Philiphaugh near Selkirk. An early morning fog did not help Montrose in directing the battle which arose of a sudden when Leslie's forces of 6,000 veteran English troops and cavalry, who had fought at the victory of Marston Moor, surprised the 1,500 Scots and for the first time Montrose was routed. He did, however, manage to escape with some of his Highlanders. The Battle of Philiphaugh took place prior to Seaforth's decision to support King Charles I which further questions the wisdom of his move.

The royalist prisoners taken at Philiphaugh were cruelly treated and many were executed. When three eighteen year old boys were beheaded, the Covenanting minister in attendance is said to have rubbed his hands in glee and to have remarked, "the work gangs bonnily on."

Montrose tried to secure the position of the royalist forces in Scotland by linking up with the Marquis of Huntly. This latter gentleman persisted in trying to make a name for himself as a military leader, comparable to Montrose, by capturing a number of obscure castles of no strategic importance.

Montrose now had the Earl of Seaforth on his side and who had induced other Highland chiefs to form a confederation for obtaining a national peace. But in May 1646, General Middleton, at the head of the Covenanting army, marched for Inverness. Montrose was in no position to do battle and retreated through Beaully into Ross-shire. Seaforth's men began to desert Montrose in large numbers being in their own homeland. Middleton cautiously decided not to pursue Montrose and elected instead to lay siege to Seaforth's castle in the Chanonry of Ross which he took after four days. Middleton behaved with great politeness to the Countess of Seaforth who lived in the castle and after removing the ammunition held there, he restored it to her.

Meanwhile matters were proceeding to a rapid close. In the same month of May, 1646, Charles surrendered to the Scottish Covenanters' army. Whether through pride or stubbornness Charles still refused to sign the Covenant. If he had done so he might have saved his crown. As it was he was handed over to the English in part payment of the money owed to them under the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant. The Earl of Argyll and the Duke of Hamilton each retained the vast sum of thirty thousand pounds of this award as recompense for damage done to their estates by the war. Such were some of the rewards forthcoming for selecting the winning side.

In December 1647, Charles signed a treaty known as "The Engagement" under the terms of which Scotland would provide Charles with military support provided he agreed to make England presbyterian for a period of three years. It is doubtful whether Charles had any intention of honouring this treaty and it was naive of the Scots to expect that the English people would accept such a state of affairs. Nevertheless an army was duly raised in Scotland which united large numbers of

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<sup>1</sup>David Leslie's father was one of the Fife adventurers who tried, unsuccessfully, to colonize Lewis.

former adversaries. The army was known as the Engagers, but the leading Covenanters were not supportive of the treaty. The Earl of Seaforth actually raised an army of 4,000 men for the Engagers. But Seaforth was not acceptable to them since it was believed that he would alienate the hard line Covenanters having previously been an unreliable supporter of their cause. Twenty four members of the Mackenzie clan refused to join the Engagers unless they were led by their chief, and this is an indication that clan loyalty remained an important component in the army and affairs of state. The Engagers' army duly invaded England in support of Charles I but were beaten at Preston in August 1648.

Cromwell's English parliament tried King Charles I and he was sentenced to death. He was executed at Whitehall, London on 30 January 1649.

On 5 February 1649, King Charles II was proclaimed King of Scotland and in the early days of his reign he held his court at the Hague in Holland. His court consisted of his close advisers and supporters which included the new Duke of Hamilton, the Marquis of Montrose and the Earl of Seaforth in addition to other nobles and heads of the Engagers. The Covenanters required that Charles II sign the Covenant before he could officially claim the Scottish throne, but Montrose advised the king to allow him to win the throne by conquest from the control of the hardline Covenanters. Like his late father, Charles was not averse to a little double-dealing and while agreeing to Montrose's plan of conquest he continued to talk with the Covenanters sent by Argyll.

Almost immediately following the death of Charles I, the Mackenzies led an uprising in the Highlands before Montrose had had a chance to return to Scotland to do the same thing. The brother of the Earl of Seaforth, Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscardine (the same Pluscardine who had his house burned down at Elgin by Montrose), with the support of Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty, Colonel Hugh Fraser and Colonel John Munro of Lemlair and many of the Mackenzie clan entered Inverness on 22 February 1649. They expelled the troops garrisoned there and demolished the town's walls and fortifications. Pluscardine maintained he took this action because the Scottish parliament had sent a commission to arrest them. But there were reasons to believe that Pluscardine was in private communication with Charles II and it was the king himself who was the secret cause of this insurrection. It is not impossible to believe that Seaforth himself might have played his hand in this affair being Pluscardine's brother and being close to the king's ear in The Hague. General David Leslie was sent to the north once again to suppress this new rebellion, but the insurgents retreated into the mountains. Leslie was diverted from his task by the news of a rising in Atholl in favour of the king under the leadership of Lord Ogilvy and General Middleton.

Leslie came to terms with Urquhart, Munro and Fraser. But Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscardine was not prepared to submit to Leslie under any circumstances, with the result that Leslie moved off to suppress the rising in Atholl leaving behind a garrison in the Mackenzie castle at Chanonry together with three

troops of horse to watch out for Pluscardine's movements. Pluscardine quickly came down from the mountains and attacked and retook the castle. His nephew, Lord Reay, joined him with 300 men increasing his total force to about 850 men.

Leslie successfully put down the rising in Atholl. He heard that Pluscardine had now been joined by Lord Ogilvy and General Middleton and they were now advancing southwards into Badenoch to raise the population in that area for the king. The young Marquis of Huntly, who now joined with Pluscardine and the others, had previously taken the castle of Ruthven.

Leslie set off to stop the advance and despatched the Earl of Sutherland to the north to raise Highlanders. Mackenzie of Pluscardine and General Middleton who were now with their army at Balvenie in Moray decided to negotiate with Leslie and they rode off with a troop of horse to meet Leslie leaving behind Ogilvy, Huntly and Reay in charge of the forces. On the 8th May this force was attacked by surprise at dawn by the Earl of Sutherland's men who captured Lord Reay and his men. Huntly and Ogilvy, who were lodged a mile away, escaped.

Lord Reay, Mackenzie of Redcastle and other Mackenzies were jailed in Edinburgh. Other prisoners were sent home on giving an oath not to take up arms against parliament again. Huntly, Mackenzie of Pluscardine, Ogilvy and Middleton were allowed to return to their homes against security to keep the peace. One of Leslie's officers, a Colonel Kerr, later took Redcastle's home and demolished it, hanging the unfortunate persons who tried to defend it for their master.

So ended the insurrection of February to May 1649. As far as the Marquis of Montrose was concerned the rising was premature. He, of all people, could have successfully enlisted these men and used them to much better effect since he was not only a great military strategist but he was popular with the masses.

James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, made his preparations to return to Scotland to win back the throne for Charles II by conquest. As Lieutenant-Governor and Captain-General for his Majesty of the Kingdom of Scotland he published his appeal to the people of Scotland to join him. He wrote a letter to the Earl of Seaforth in December 1649 in which he indicated he was on the point of sailing for Scotland. But it was not until the following February that he left Gottenburg accompanied by 500 mercenaries and was joined by royalists on his arrival in the Orkneys in March. Montrose marched to Carbisdale on the borders of Ross-shire where he halted a few days expecting to be joined by the Mackenzies. Seaforth, of course, was still in Holland and the Mackenzies had already suffered as a result of their preemptive uprising the previous year and as a consequence there were military garrisons around their territory.

So, without the expected support from the Mackenzies, Montrose went into battle at Carbisdale on 27 April 1650 and suffered a bad defeat. Montrose managed to escape and fled to the protection of Macleod of Assynt. To his everlasting shame and that of his clan, Assynt handed Montrose over to the government in exchange for the reward of twenty-five thousand pounds, a huge amount of money in those days,

especially so for the impoverished Highlands.

All of the officers in Montrose's army at Carbisdale were executed and the Marquis himself went to the scaffold on 21 May 1650. An immense crowd of Edinburgh folk turned out to see the folk hero of Scotland and many were moved by this elegant nobleman as he was led calmly to his place of execution. An English onlooker noticing the impact Montrose had upon the crowd remarked, "It is absolutely certain that he hath overcome more men by his death in Scotland than he would have done if he lived".

Charles II, meanwhile, disowned the loyal Montrose and returned to Scotland. He put his trust in his formerly hated enemy the, now, Marquis of Argyll. Charles was finally obliged to bow to the power of the haughty and principled presbyterians and Covenanters by signing the Covenant. As a result, the Covenanters' army under David Leslie, were now opposed to Cromwell, since they supported the return of Charles II to the throne of Scotland.

Following Leslie's defeat at the hands of Cromwell's army at the battle of Dunbar in September, 1650, King Charles had no chance of ruling effectively. The nobles, Seaforth, Huntly, Atholl and Middleton took an oath of engagement to support Charles. These oaths were of no avail, however. The king went down to defeat at the Battle of Worcester and, once again, went into exile. General Leslie was imprisoned and the self-serving Marquis of Argyll was forced to accept Cromwell's rule.

At the Battle of Worcester Charles had the support of Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscardine once more, this time as a Colonel in his army, and also of Alexander Mackenzie, 4th son of Mackenzie of Gairloch. The Earl of Seaforth, meanwhile, heard of the defeat of Charles at Worcester and is said to have sunk into a profound melancholy and died in 1651 at Schiedam in Holland. He was 43.

King Charles II did not return from exile until the Restoration in May 1660, following the death of Oliver Cromwell. On his return to England the Marquis of Argyll sought an audience with the king but, to his surprise, he was refused. Argyll was arrested and sent back to Scotland to stand trial for treason on account of the part he had played in the execution of Charles I. Argyll was ably defended by a 25 year old lawyer, George Mackenzie, the son of Simon Mackenzie of Lochslin who, in turn, was the younger brother of the 2nd Earl of Seaforth and Thomas Mackenzie of Pluscardine. So successful was the young George Mackenzie in his pleading that he managed to have Argyll acquitted on the charge of treason. The prosecutor Monck, however, was able to produce evidence proving that Argyll had acted alongside of Cromwell and on this point he was judged guilty. Thus the devious Marquis of Argyll suffered death on the scaffold. His head was placed on the same spike that his former adversary Montrose's head had been exhibited a few years earlier.