

THE MACDOUGALLS.

THE MacDougalls, as well as the MacDonalds, are descendants of the great Somerled, the Thane of Argyle; and they were long represented by their chief family the Lords of Lorn, just as the MacDonalds were represented by the Lords of the Isles. But they do not come prominently into notice till the time of Robert Bruce; and then the Lord of Lorn and his son John, stimulated by considerations of relationship by marriage to the Red Comyn whom Bruce slew at Dumfries, signalized themselves by hot and fiery efforts on the side of England and the Comyns.

In the summer of 1306, Bruce made his first grand martial thrust for the crown, in an expedition against the city of Perth, but was discomfited and very nearly destroyed at Methven. He narrowly escaped personal captivity and death, and suffered severe loss and dispersion of his troops, and retired with only

a small and dispirited remnant into the fastnesses of Athole. He lurked some time among the profound solitudes of the central Grampians, enduring excessive privation and fatigue; and then passed for a little into the low country of Aberdeenshire; and then, at the approach of some English forces, retreated back to the Grampians, and crept cautiously along the alpine glens of Perthshire, into the district of Breadalbane.

Here, in the vicinity of a little village which now bears the name of Clifton, he was sought out and confronted by the Lord of Lorn. His force, though very small, was lion-hearted, and stood firmly up to the fight. Lorn's army amounted to upwards of a thousand, and had among them the barons of Argyle, and were fresh and full of hope. The clash and fury of the conflict were terrible. Both sides fought with steel, and thrust and tugged in the closest encounter; and, says Barbour,—

“ The King's folk full well them bare
And slew and fell'd and wounded sare;
But the folk of the other party
Fought with axes most fellily.”

Two of Bruce's chief knights were soon wounded; and the whole of his small band, though holding doggedly to the conflict, felt speedily compelled to yield some ground. Bruce rode hardily into the thickest of the fray, and not only inspirited his own men, but made havoc among the foe, and “ferl of them there gart he fall.” But he promptly saw the necessity for prudence; and, sounding a retreat, he employed dexterous skill and heroic valour in holding his little force together, and defeating the onsets of their pursuers.

“ Then he withdrew them hailily,
But that was not full cowardly,

For fast into a sop hold they
And the King him abandon'd ay
Behind, for to defend his menzie ;
And through his worship so wrought he,
That he rescued all the fleers,
And stinted straggat all the chasers,
That none durst out of battle chase,
For always at their hand he was,
So well defended he his men
That whosoe'er had seen him then,
Prove so worthy in vassalage,
And turn so oft-time his visage,
He should say, he ought well to be
A king of a great royalty."

The Lord of Lorn was grievously mortified at the orderliness of Bruce's retreat,—“right angry in his heart,” and sorely vexed, at being hindered from reaping some fair fruit of victory; and he made strenuous attempts to hang disastrously on Bruce's rear, but was destined only to experience further mortification. And a story is told by Barbour—perhaps with some embellishment of circumstances—that three of his men “the hardiest of hand in all the country,” resolved to slay Bruce in the retreat, or perish,—that they made a simultaneous attack upon him at a choking part of a gorge, where he had scarcely room to turn his horse,—and that he struck off the arm of one, clove another “on the head to the harns,” and slew outright and single-handedly all the three, so as to strike awe and respect into all their comrades who were coming on behind.

Some additional notices of this conflict, together with notices of disagreeable consequences of it to Bruce, are contained in the article entitled “The Battle of Dalree,” on pp. 56-70 of the Second Volume of these Tales. Nor was this the only instance in which Bruce's life was put in jeo-

pardy by the unrelenting hostility of the MacDougalls. On another occasion, when he had been obliged to conceal himself from the pursuit of his enemies, he was tracked by John of Lorn and a party of his followers, who were led on by a blood-hound; and he only escaped falling into their hands by an incredible effort of courage and activity. In his day of adversity, they were the most persevering and dangerous of all King Robert's enemies.

But the time for retribution at length arrived. When Robert Bruce had firmly established himself on the throne of Scotland, one of the first objects to which he directed his attention, was to crush his old enemies the MacDougalls, and to revenge the many injuries he had suffered at their hands. With this view, he marched into Argyleshire, determined to lay waste the country, and take possession of Lorn. His adversaries, however, were not unprepared to meet him, and to dispute his progress. On advancing, he found John of Lorn and his followers posted in a formidable defile between Ben Cruachan and Loch Awe, which it seemed impossible to force, and almost hopeless to turn. But the military eye of the King soon discovered that the natural difficulties which this position presented might be overcome by a combined attack; and, accordingly, having sent a party to ascend the mountain, gain the heights, and threaten the enemy's rear, he immediately attacked them in front, with the utmost fury. For a time the MacDougalls sustained the onset bravely; but, at length, perceiving themselves in danger of being assailed in the rear, as well as the front, and thus completely isolated in the defile, they betook themselves to flight; and the difficulties of the pass, which had been of advantage to them in the first instance, now that they were broken and thrown into disorder, proved the cause of their ruin. Unable to escape from the mountain gorge, they were slaughtered without mercy; and by this reverse, their power was completely broken. Bruce then laid waste Argyleshire, be-

sieged and took the castle of Dunstaffnage, and received the submission of Alister of Lorn, the father of John, who now fled to England. Alister was allowed to retain the district of Lorn; but the rest of his possessions were forfeited, and given to Angus of Islay, who had all along remained faithful to the King's interests.

When John of Lorn arrived as a fugitive in England, King Edward was making preparations for that expedition, which terminated so gloriously for Scotland in the ever-memorable battle of Bannockburn. John was received with open arms, appointed to the command of the English fleet, and ordered to sail for Scotland, in order to co-operate with the land forces. But the total defeat and dispersion of the latter soon afterwards confirmed Bruce in possession of the throne; and being relieved from the apprehension of any further aggression on the part of the English King, he resolved to lose no time in driving the lord of Lorn from the Isles, where he had made his appearance with the fleet under his command. Accordingly, on his return from Iréland whither he had accompanied his brother Edward, he directed his course towards the Isles, and having arrived at Tarbet, is said to have caused his galleys to be dragged over the isthmus which connects Kintyre and Knapdale. This bold proceeding was crowned with success. The English fleet was surprised and dispersed; and its commander having been made prisoner, was sent to Dumbarton, and afterwards to Lochleven, where he was detained in confinement during the remainder of King Robert's reign.

On the death of Bruce, however, John recovered his liberty, and by a politic alliance with the royal family, regained the possessions which had been forfeited in consequence of his connexion with the Red Comyn. In the early part of the reign of David II., he married a grand-daughter of Robert Bruce, and through her not only recovered the ancient possessions of his family, but even obtained a grant of the

property of Glenlyon. These extensive territories, however, were not destined to remain long in the family. Ewen, the last lord of Lorn, died without male issue; and his two daughters having married, the one John Stewart of Innermeath, and the other his brother Robert Stewart, an arrangement was entered into between these parties, in virtue of which the descendants of John Stewart acquired the whole of the Lorn possessions, with the exception of the castle of Dunolly and its dependencies, which remained to the other branch of the family; and thus terminated the power of this branch of the descendants of Somerled. The chieftainship of the clan now descended to the family of Dunolly, which continued to enjoy the small portion which remained to them of their ancient possessions until the year 1715, when the representative of the family incurred the penalty of forfeiture for his accession to the insurrection of that period; thus, by a singular contrast of circumstances, "losing the remains of his inheritance to replace upon the throne the descendants of those princes, whose accession his ancestors had opposed at the expense of their feudal grandeur." The estate, however, was restored to the family in 1745, as a reward for their not having taken any part in the more formidable rebellion of that year.
