

DERMID AND THE WILD BOAR.

ONE of the most popular of the ancient Gaelic poems, many of which have been attributed to the poet Ossian, is that of "The Death of Dermid." It is not found in any of Macpherson's collections, and may not have come from the pen of the famous Gaelic bard, but it deals with the same period to which most of his compositions belong, and the principal characters being Fingalians, there is no improbability in the suggestion that it is from his pen. It is to be found in the "Montrose Edition" of Gaelic Poetry, and, as given, is evidently a fragment of a larger poem which deals with the illicit love of Queen Grainne for the handsome youth Dermid.

The introductory note to the poem tells how Grainne, wife of the noble Fingal, who was Dermid's uncle, became enamoured of her nephew, when she saw him with manly spirit quelling a battle of infuriated dogs. She persuaded him, against his will, to elope with her, by declaring that she would die if he were to refuse. On their return to the royal court the King, full of wrath, plotted for Dermid's death, and the poem tells of the scheme and its success. He invited his nephew to play the part of Sir Lancelot in slaying a boar of great size and ferocity, which was alarming the neighbourhood, and whose lair was in a rocky ravine at the foot of Bengulbein. After slaying the monster with his sword, his spear having been chewed to pieces in the encounter, he was commanded by King Fingal to measure with bare foot his quarry from snout to tail, and then to take its measurement the reverse way. When so doing some of the sharp, fowl bristles pierced and poisoned his foot, and, after a futile appeal for a draught of life-giving wine from the King's golden cup, he died in great agony. When the Queen learned of his death she was so inconsolable that she flung herself upon an arrow and expired.

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In a volume of ancient Gaelic poetry, published in Glasgow in 1866, the poem appears in a modern versified translation. It is entitled "The Lay of Dermid or Fingal's Revenge."

A few of the verses will give some idea of the poetic form in which the original drama was composed. It opens thus—

"Hearken a little, I sing you a song
Of the great and the good who are gone,
Of Grainne and Finn the triumphant,
And the woeful fate of MacDoon.*

Sweet is Glenshee and the valley beside it,
With the voice of elk and deer;
And pleasant its stream tinged so often
With blood from the Fenian spear.

Fearing a device on the part of the King to cause the death of Dermid, the Queen endeavoured to dissuade him from undertaking the task of slaying the dreaded boar—

"O, Dermid! my own one!" said Grainne,
"Let the dogs drive the chase o'er the lea,
Come not thou near the proud son of Cumhal,
Who is wroth with my hero for me."

But Dermid was too proud to refuse to undertake this office of deliverer, and he succeeded where the King had hoped he would fail. Then came the cunning device by which he received his fatal wound. But there was still a chance of recovery if he could obtain a draught from the King's shell or cup, and he besought the King to grant him this favour, reminding him of the many good services he had rendered, but the King was implacable and threw the cup into the lochan, where it still lies—

"Shall I bring thee a draught thou fairs here?
From the lake with my life-giving shell;
When the ill, in one hour, thou hast done me,
Outweighs all the good thou canst tell?"

Distracted with grief the Queen cut her own life short, and Dermid and she who is known in tradition as "Fingal's faithless wife," were laid side by side amid the lamentations of the

* Dermid was the son of Dubhane (Doon).

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women at the foot of Glenbeg; and it is thought that two or three large boulders to be seen there mark their resting place. The poem concludes—

"Beneath thy grey stones, O Ben Goolbein!
The brown-haired chief is laid,
His blue eyes are sleeping for ever
Under thy green grassy shade."

There are many different places in the North of Scotland given as the scene of the tragedy. Tongue, Loch Nell, Strathconan and Glencoe have all been claimed as the locality of the Boar Hunt, chiefly on account of some large boulder or rough monumental stone in the district being associated with the name of Dermid. But there is no place that has so many landmarks connected with the poem as Glenshee. There is, first of all, the hill known as Bengulbein, referred to as Goolbein, then on the northern side of this mountain there is a steep and rugged gully called the Boar's Bed. A mile and a half up Glenbeg and a score of yards to the right of the road is "Fingal's Well" (Tober na Feinne), also called "The Wishing Well," because by walking round it three times holding a cup of the water any credulous person can register and obtain the wish which is nearest the heart. By following the peat road, which leads from the highway, nearly opposite Fingal's Well, and which crosses two large land slides, and turning sharply to the left beyond the farther of these, and ascending from twenty to thirty yards, one reaches "Ossian's Well" (Tober na Ossian), the water of which is tinged with iron and possesses valuable diuretic qualities.

On the rising ground across the stream from the Old Spital Farm, there is a mountain tarn, into which it is said the King threw his cup, and a short distance to the north of this lochan a small group of boulders is understood to mark the burial-place of Queen Grainne, Dermid and his white hounds.

It is no mere latter-day speculation that these place names combine to mark off the spot as the scene of *The Dermid Tragedy*. Some of these names have appeared in deeds of ownership and transfer of land for hundreds of years. In a Gaelic poem on the *Boar Hunt*, written by Allan M'Rory, and published by Sir James Macgregor, Dean of Lismore and Vicar of Fortingal, in

1512, the author lays the scene in Glenshee. He appears to have been a native of the Glen. The opening verse from a translation by the Rev. Dr. M'Lauchlin is as follows:—

"Glenshee, the vale that close beside me lies,
Where sweetest sounds are heard of elk and deer,
And where the Fauns did oft pursue the chase,
Following their hounds along the lengthening vale,
Below the great Ben Gulbin's grassy height,
Of fairest knolls that lie beneath the sun,
The valley winds."

So that there is satisfactory evidence that the belief has existed for five hundred years.

The Campbells trace their lineage from Dermid. They are known in genealogical records as Siol Diarmad, the descendants of Dermid, the son of Duibhane (Doon). Their battle cry had its origin in a fierce encounter between a party of Campbells who had abducted the heiress of the family of Calder (Cawdor), and her own clansmen, who were aided by the Roses of Kilravock, who were also relatives. When Campbell of Inverliver felt the stress of battle in conflict with the clansmen of Cawdor he cried out, "Far's the cry from Loch Awe, and help from the race of O'Duine," and the words have passed into a proverb, signifying a pressing and immediate need with but little hope of assistance.

The crest of the Campbells is a boar's head, the origin of which is too evident to require any comment.

AN OLD HIGHLAND FEUD.

SOME three miles to the south of the Spital stand two farm-houses, less than a mile apart, on opposite sides of the river. That on the west side is called Finegand, that on the east, Broughdearg. In the middle of the seventeenth century these farms were occupied by families belonging to two notable septa of the Clan Chattan—the Mackintoshes and the Farquharsons. John Mackintosh, *alias* McComie Mor, was proprietor of Finegand as well as of Cronaherie, a farm and grazing three miles north of the Spital, while Robert Farquharson, a much younger man, had succeeded his father as owner and occupier of Broughdearg. Besides being neighbours they were near relations, for McComie's mother was the granddaughter of Finla Mor, and Robert Farquharson was the great-grandson of the same famous founder of the clan.

Round the name of McComie there gathered many traditions of valour and daring, perhaps the most stirring of these being his attack upon the Kain-gatherers, who had exacted more than their due from an aged widow who dwelt in a cottage a little way from Finegand, and his defeat of the Italian broadsword champion who had thrown down the gauntlet in Blair Athole and worsted all those in that district who took up his challenge.

As a breeder of stock John Mackintosh or McComie amassed no little wealth, and by the purchase of small properties on both sides of the Shee he almost linked up Finegand with Cronaherie. But he came to find that holdings at so great a distance from his homestead were difficult to manage, and, in 1651, he purchased, or took a wadset of the more compact estate of Porter, in the upper valley of Glenisla, and then disposed of his various Glenshee properties, Robert Farquharson's brother, Donald, becoming proprietor of Finegand.

As Porter Castle, the residence of the Earl of Airlie, and known in the old ballad as "The Bonnie Hoose o' Airlie," had been burned down by order of the Earl of Argyll in 1642, McComie built himself a new house at Crandart, a mile and a half further up the Isla. The Earl of Airlie had originally reserved a stretch of forest land in the upper waters called Candelochan or Glascorie, but McComie seems to have obtained a feu of that, along with "letters of forestry," which gave the right of grazing, peat-cutting, timber-felling, and hunting the deer.

All this happened a few years after the closing of the Civil War, and the setting up of the Commonwealth, and, although during the conflict, McComie of Finegand, along with his neighbours, the Earl of Airlie and Farquharson of Broughdearg, had sided with the King, and was found fighting in Montrose's army when it marched into Aberdeenshire, yet, after the Royalists had come to terms with General Middleton in 1646 and had laid down their arms with the granting of indemnity, and the apparently firm establishment of the Commonwealth, McComie changed his views and party and became an active supporter of the new regime. This naturally incensed his Royalist neighbours, and brought him into disrepute; and it was evidently with reference to the spirit of animosity they displayed towards him, that, when he built the house of Crandart he placed a stone over the portal bearing the legend, "I shall overcome invy with God's help. To God be all praise, honour, and glorie. 1660." This stone has been removed to Balharry, a mile below Porter Castle. The Earl of Airlie showed his displeasure by demanding the resignation of the feu of Glascorie, and soon after the Restoration presented a petition to the Scottish Parliament praying that the feu be terminated, and Glascorie rights of grazing and forestry be restored to him. It was unfortunate for McComie that feeling ran so high at the time, for though he employed the most talented counsel, the case was decided against him, and besides the loss of the grazing, which carried "a hundred nout and a score of milch kine," he was excluded, with many others, from the Act of Indemnity, and penalised in a sum of eighteen hundred pounds (Acts of

Parliament of Scotland, Vol. VII.). But he was so convinced of the legality of his title to Glascorie, notwithstanding that it was now let to his neighbour, Robert Farquharson of Broughdearg, that he still continued to occupy it. Hence arose the dispute between these former friends. Each was persuaded that the other was an intruder upon his rights of pasturage, and for a series of years the matter was left unsettled. The Act in favour of the Earl of Airlie is dated May, 1661, and for nearly a decade following the relations of the two families became more and more strained. An incident of a more domestic nature helped to add fuel to the flames. Robert Farquharson had, probably before the Glascorie dispute began, become engaged to McComie's only daughter, but as the contention became acute, his feelings gradually cooled, and he eventually transferred his affections to Miss Helen Ogilvie, daughter of Colonel Ogilvie of Shannalie, whom he married in 1666.

A matter of that sort, touching the family pride and honour, and wounding the feelings not only of the lady herself, but of all her near relatives, rendered the possibility of reconciliation still more remote. As an evidence of the widespread feeling aroused by the dispute, we find the Chief of the Mackintoshes writing in 1666 to Lord Macdonell and Arce that "he has to go on Thursday morning to Glenylea (Glenisla) to settle two near kinsmen who are likely to fall out very foully." But his well-intentioned effort at mediation was of no avail. Up to that time the warfare had been carried on by means of threats and vituperation, and "invasions of grazings," but, in less than two months from the date of the Chief's letter, Robert Farquharson had taken the law into his own hands. On New Year's Day, 1667, accompanied by his brothers and friends, "aiders and abettors," armed with "swords, dirks, pistols, hagbutts, targes, halberts, axes and other weapons," he came by night to Crandart, and, in the dark of the winter morning, when McComie Mor came out of his house to attend to "his lawfull affaires," they took him by force, and though only partially clad, carried him off to Broughdearg, and, the same evening, for greater security, conveyed him to "a desert place" called Tombey (birch-hill), on the hill side above the Spital,

and kept him a prisoner. The following day five of McComie's sons appeared at Broughdearg, but they too were made prisoners, nor were they and their father released until they had given a bond for seventeen hundred merks. This was afterwards declared by the Lords of Session to be null and void, owing to the manner in which it had been obtained. An action was then raised in the Sheriff Court of Forfar by McComie, for illegal detention, and a warrant issued for the apprehension of Farquharson, but nothing came of it, as it was proved that the warrant had not been legally served.

The next incident in the quarrel was an attack, the following year, by McComie's sons in the forest of Glascorie, upon the person of Broughdearg, who had to flee for his life, leaving behind a couple of horses, which his assailants seized and took away to Crandart.

The Farquharsons were not long in retaliating, and they, in turn, carried off some of the Forter cattle. There was then a double action raised in the Sheriff Court of Forfar, the result of which was that McComie was ordered to give a bond for the value of the horses, while, for his non-appearance, a warrant or "letters of caption" was issued for the apprehension of Robert Farquharson.

In January, 1673, accompanied by his brothers, friends and servants, Broughdearg went, in obedience to the citation, to the county-town, but he arrived too late, and was informed that the Court was closed. When McComie's sons, who were also there, and who had obtained further letters of caption, learned that their enemy had set out on his way home, fearing that he would again escape them, they obtained the services of the Court messenger, and started in pursuit. They overtook their opponents at a place called Drumgley, near the Moss of Forfar, about three miles distant from the town. When the Sheriff-Officer called out that he had a warrant, Farquharson took to flight, but one or two of the McComies came up with him, and one of them seized hold of him to detain him; whereupon, Farquharson's brothers turned their guns upon him, and shot him down. This was the climax of the dispute. The years of strife and bitterness culminated in a melee there and

then, which resulted in the deaths of Robert Farquharson, his brother John, and two of McComie's sons, John and Robert.

The Farquharsons were the first to take further action, and in the course of two or three weeks after the fatal fray, the McComies found themselves charged with "a horrid murder" committed upon Robert Farquharson of Broughdearg and his two (!) brethren! A Commission was immediately appointed by the Privy Council, to bring the "murderers" to trial. A week later, on a petition being presented by McComie, stating that he and his two sons, William and Mr. Angus (who was a student in St. Andrews University) had immediately repaired to the place of purpose, to vindicate their innocence, and that they were prepared to stand their trial, the Commission was recalled, and the McComies, after finding caution to the amount of 5000 merks for their appearance, were permitted to return home.

When the Farquharsons found that there would be a double action, and that they themselves might be charged as "murderers," both parties being conscious that they were equally guilty, an understanding was come to that the processes to be determined in the month of June, 1673, should be "deserted."

But even this wise decision did not terminate the case. The wheels of Law "grind slowly," and seldom can the litigant see the end from the beginning. Two of McComie's sons, William and Alexander, who had taken active part in the violent collision on Forfar Moss, had not appeared with their father and brothers in June to meet the charge, and they had been declared fugitives from justice. After several petitions for delay, their case was set down for trial on the tenth of June, 1674. But some weeks prior to that date, McComie Mor paid the debt of nature, and was laid to rest in Glenisla Kirkyard, beside his two valiant sons, who had fallen victims in the melee at Drumgley.

The sons, therefore, now stood alone, and after proof and pleading before a jury, in the Justiciary Court, the verdict given was, "We find the pannells clean from the crimes insisted on."

In the report of the case given in Volume II. of the Justiciary Records, the writer states that "all he finds proven is 'that

Burghdearg was killed and his son wounded, but *non constat* which of the pannells did it. It is proven that the pannells were in arms and that there was shots, among the parties, but it is not proven who shot first. It is also proven that the defunct and his party had their swords first drawn."

The legal expenses of these various pleas, especially those before the Privy Council and the Justiciary Court, constituted a heavy drain upon the finances of both families, who found it necessary to raise loans upon their lands. This is not to be wondered at, for the highest talent of the Scottish Bar had been engaged in these several suits. Sir George Lockhart, who had been counsel for the Earl of Airlie in 1661, appeared along with Sir Robert Sinclair for the Farquharsons, and he in time became Lord President; while McComie employed from first to last, Sir George Mackenzie, who became Lord Advocate, and is otherwise known to fame as the founder of the Advocates' Library. The consequence was that, in a few years' time, the Forter wadset was resigned (in 1681) to the Earl of Airlie, and two years later the lands of Broughdearg were decreed away from Robert Farquharson's only son, Alexander, by the Court of Session.

The sons of McComie left Forter, and sought new homes, one of them, Angus, going to Fife, where the name was changed to McThomas, and latterly to Thomas; another son, Donald, the youngest, took up the trade of blacksmith in Alford, Aberdeenshire, and by his grit and inherited knowledge of stock-raising, became the founder of the well-known family of McCombie, one of whom, the laird of Tillyfour, shared with Watson of Keillour, Coupar Angus, the honour of improving the popular breed of polled cattle called "Aberdeen Angus."

Farquharson's son, Alexander, became a physician in Braemar, and to him we are indebted for the "Broughdearg MS.," a history of the Clan.

Sir Aeneas Macpherson, in his quaintly-titled MSS., deals with the Mackintoshes and the McComies, and, writing thirty years after McComie Mor's death, acknowledged that he was

one of the wisest authorities on Highland genealogies he had ever met.

NOTE.—By the kind assistance of Mr. Mackenzie Shaw, W.S., of Forfar, I am able to give the names of the proprietors of Broughdearg from the period when it passed out of the hands of the Farquharsons to the present time, showing the strong hold the old homestead evidently had upon the affection of that family. William Farquharson, who succeeded his father as proprietor, did not reside in Broughdearg, but at Muckle Doonies in Glenisla. There is still to be seen there a lintel-stone bearing his own and his wife's (Jean Ballantine) initials, and the date of their marriage, 1722. Circumstances compelled him to dispose of Broughdearg, and in 1738 it found a new owner in Dr. Arnot. In 1768 he, in turn, sold it to William Shaw, son of Duncan Shaw of Crathie, from whom it passed to his son, James. In 1805 it passed by purchase into the hands of Thomas Farquharson of Baldovie, Glenisla, a descendant of its former owners. Four years later he sold it to Mrs. Catherine Farquharson of Invercauld. In 1841 she granted a disposition of it, as she had previously done of several farms in Glaushee, to the trustees of William Macdonald of St. Martins, to whose estate Colonel Macdonald Macdonald succeeded in the same year. In 1896 his son, Captain Montague Macdonald, sold Broughdearg and his other lands in the Glen to his kinsman, Lieut.-Colonel Farquharson of Invercauld, the present proprietor.

Mr. Mackenzie Shaw, one of whose relatives purchased Broughdearg and afterwards the estate of Gray, is the son of the late Mr. William Shaw, Fineand, who was largely esteemed on account of his many services to the community. Two of his brothers, Dr. Peter Shaw and Dr. Charles Shaw, are in medical practice in Blairgowrie and Montrose respectively. Another is in the Mercantile Marine. His younger brother, Captain William Shaw, of Killisnoak, is a London stockbroker, and was elected Member of Parliament for Forfarshire in 1922. One of his sisters is the wife of Dr. Charles Lunan, M.D., and the other of Mr. R. Robertson Black, solicitor, Blairgowrie.