

**A HISTORY OF THE
HIGHLANDS AND OF THE
HIGHLAND CLANS, VOL.I
- PART II, PP. 190-447**

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HISTORY OF THE HIGHLANDS

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THE HIGHLAND CLANS,

BY

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Author of "Aperçu sur les Hiéroglyphes d'Égypte et les progrès faits jusqu'à présent dans leur Découverte,"
"A Critical Examination of Dr McCulloch's Book on the Highlands," &c. &c.

ILLUSTRATED BY A SERIES OF PORTRAITS AND OTHER ENGRAVINGS.

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instigated it is supposed by Huntly's enemies, attributed it to negligence on his part. The consequence was, that the earl was committed a prisoner to the castle of Edinburgh in the month of October, where he remained till the month of March following. He was compelled to renounce the earldom of Moray and the lordship of Abernethy, with his tacks and possessions in Orkney and Zetland, and the tacks of the lands of the earldom of Mar and of the lordship of Strathdie, of which he was bailie and steward, and he was moreover condemned to a banishment of five years in France. But as he was about to leave the kingdom, the Queen, taking a more favourable view of his conduct, recalled the sentence of banishment, and restored him to the office of Chancellor, of which he had been deprived; and to make this act of leniency somewhat palatable to the earl's enemies, the queen exacted a heavy pecuniary fine from the earl.

As the Highlands still continued in a state of misrule, principally owing to the conduct of John of Moidart, the queen sent the earl of Athole to the Highlands, the following year, with a special commission to apprehend this turbulent chief; and he succeeded so well by negotiation as to prevail upon John, two of his sons, and some of his kinsmen, to submit themselves to the queen, who pardoned them, but ordered them to be detained prisoners in the castle of Methven where they were well treated. Disliking such restraint, they effected their escape into their own country privately, where they again began their usual restless course of life.

The great disorders which prevailed in the Highlands at this time, induced the queen-regent to undertake a journey thither in order to punish these breaches of the law, and to repress existing tumults. She accordingly arrived at Inverness in the month of July, fifteen hundred and fifty-five, where she was met by John, Earl of Sutherland, and George, Earl of Caithness. Although the latter nobleman was requested to bring his countrymen along with him to the court, he neglected or declined to do so, and he was therefore committed to prison at Inverness, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh, successively, and he was not restored to liberty till he paid a considerable sum of money. Y-Mackay of Far, was also summoned to appear before the queen at Inverness, to answer for his spoliations committed in the country of Sutherland during the absence of Earl John in France; but he refused to appear. Whereupon the queen granted a commission to the earl of Sutherland, to bring Mackay to justice. The earl accordingly entered Strathnaver with a great force, sacking and spoiling every thing in his way, and possessing himself of all the principal positions to prevent Mackay's escape. Mackay, however, avoided the earl, and as he declined to fight, the earl laid siege to the castle of Borwe, the principal strength in Strathnaver, scarcely two miles distant from Far, which he took after a short siege, and hanged Ruaridh-Mac-Juin-Mhoir, the commander. This fort the earl completely demolished.

While the earl of Sutherland was engaged in the siege, Mackay en-

tered Sutherland secretly, and burnt the church of Loth. He thereafter went to the village of Knoekartoll, where he met Mackenzie and his countrymen in Strathbroray. A slight skirmish took place between them; but Mackay and his men fled after he had lost Angus-Mackean-voir one of his commanders, and several of his followers. Mackenzie was thereupon appointed by the earl to protect Sutherland from the incursions of Mackay during his stay in Strathnaver. Having been defeated again by Mackenzie, and seeing no chance of escape, Mackay surrendered himself, and was carried south, and committed a prisoner to the castle of Edinburgh, in which he remained a considerable time. During the queen's stay in the north, many notorious delinquents were brought to trial, condemned and executed.

During Mackay's detention in Edinburgh, John Mor-Mackay, who took charge of his kinsman's estate, seizing the opportunity of the earl of Sutherland's absence in the south of Scotland, entered Sutherland at the head of a determined body of Strathnaver men, and spoiled and wasted the east corner of that province, and burnt the chapel of St Ninian. Mac-Mhic-Sheumais, chief of the Clan-Gun, the laird of Clyne, the Terrell of the Doill, and James Mac-William having collected a body of Sutherland men, pursued the Strathnaver men, whom they overtook at the foot of the hill called Ben-Moir in Berridell. Here they laid an ambush for them, and having, by favour of a fog, passed their sentinels, they unexpectedly surprised Mackay's men, and attacked them with great fury. The Strathnaver men made an obstinate resistance, but were at length overpowered. Many of them were killed, and others drowned in the water of Garwary. Mackay himself escaped with great difficulty. This was one of the severest defeats the Strathnaver men ever experienced, except at the battle of Knoeken-dow-Reywird.

On the release of Mackay from his confinement in the castle of Edinburgh, he was employed in the wars upon the borders, against the English, in which he acquitted himself courageously; and on his return to Strathnaver he submitted himself to the earl of Sutherland, with whom he lived in peace during the remainder of the earl's life. But Mackay incurred the just displeasure of the tribe of Slight-ean-Voir by the committal of two crimes of the deepest dye. Having imbibed a violent affection for the wife of Tormaid-Mac-Iain-Mhoir, the chieftain of that tribe, he, in order to accomplish his object, slew the chief, after which he violated his wife, by whom he had a son called Donald Balloch Mackay. The insulted clan flew to arms; but they were defeated at Durines, by the murderer and adulterer, after a sharp skirmish. Three of the principal men of the tribe who had given themselves up, trusting to Mackay's clemency, were beheaded.*

In the year fifteen hundred and sixty-one, several petty feuds occurred in Sutherland and Caithness. Hugh Murray, of Aberscors, killed

* Sir R. Gordon, p. 136.

Imhear-Mac-Iain-Mhic-Thomais, a gentleman of the Siol-Thomais, for which act he incurred the displeasure of the earl of Sutherland. Murray thereupon fled into Caithness, and sought the protection of the earl of Caithness. Houcheon Murray, the father of Hugh, being suspected by the earl of Sutherland as having been privy to the murder, was apprehended and imprisoned in Dunrobin castle; but after a slight confinement he was released as innocent, and by his mediation his son Hugh was restored to the favour of the earl. No reconciliation, however, took place between the Murrays and the Siol-Thomais, who continued for a long period at variance. About the same time, William and Angus Sutherland, and the other Sutherlands of Berridale, killed several of the earl of Caithness people, and wasted the lands of the Clynes in that country. For these acts they were banished by the earl from Caithness; but they again returned, and being assisted by Hugh Murray of Aberseors, they took the castle of Berridale, laid waste the country, and molested the people of Caithness with their incursions. By the mediation of the earl of Sutherland, William and Angus Sutherland, and their accomplices obtained a pardon from Queen Mary, which so exasperated the earl of Caithness, that he imbibed a mortal hatred not only against the earl of Sutherland, but also against the Murrays, and all the inhabitants of Sutherland.*

Amongst the many acts which disgrace the memory of James, Earl of Moray, the bastard brother of queen Mary, the murder of Alexander Gun, son of John Robson, chief of the Clan-Gun, in the year fifteen hundred and sixty-five, must not be overlooked. The cause of the earl's antipathy was this:—On one occasion, the earls of Sutherland and Huntly happened to meet the earl of Moray directly in the face on the high street of Aberdeen. Alexander Gun was then in the service of the earl of Sutherland, and as he was walking in front of his master, he declined to give the earl of Moray any part of the height of the street, and forced him and his company to give way. As he considered this to be a deadly affront put upon him, he resolved upon revenge, and seizing the opportunity of the earl of Sutherland's absence in Flanders, he, by means of Andrew Monroe of Miltoun, entrapped Gun, and made him a prisoner at the Delvines, near the town of Nairn, from whence he was taken to Inverness, and after a mock-trial, was executed. Alexander Gun is reported to have been a very able and strong man, endowed with many good qualities.†

George, earl of Caithness, who had long borne a mortal hatred to John, earl of Sutherland, now projected a scheme for cutting him off, as well as his countess, who was big with child, and their only son, Alexander Gordon; the earl and countess were accordingly both poisoned at Helmsdale while at supper by Isobel Sinclair, wife of Gilbert Gordon of Gartay, and sister of William Sinclair of Dumbaith, instigated, it is said, by

* Sir R. Gordon, p. 139.

† Ibid. p. 144.

the earl; but their son, Alexander, made a very narrow escape, not having returned in time from a hunting excursion, to join his father and mother at supper. On Alexander's return the earl had become fully aware of the danger of his situation, and he was thus prevented by his father from participating in any part of the supper which remained, and after taking an affectionate and parting farewell, and recommending him to the protection of God and of his dearest friends, he sent him to Dunrobin the same night without his supper. The earl and his lady were carried next morning to Dunrobin, where they died within five days thereafter, in the month of July, fifteen hundred and sixty-seven, and were buried in the cathedral church at Dornoch. Pretending to cover himself from the imputation of being concerned in this murder, the earl of Caithness punished some of the earl's most faithful servants under the colour of avenging his death; but the deceased earl's friends being determined to obtain justice, apprehended Isobel Sinclair, and sent her to Edinburgh to stand her trial, where, after being tried and condemned, she died on the day appointed for her execution. During all the time of her illness she vented the most dreadful imprecations upon her cousin, the earl, who had seduced her to commit the horrid act. Had this woman succeeded in cutting off the earl's son, her own eldest son, John Gordon, but for the extraordinary circumstances of his death to be noticed, would have succeeded to the earldom, as he was the next male heir. This youth happening to be in the house when his mother had prepared the poison, became extremely thirsty, and called for a drink. One of his mother's servants, not aware of the preparation, presented to the youth a portion of the liquid into which the poison had been infused, which he drank. This occasioned his death within two days, a circumstance which, together with the appearances of the body after death, gave a clue to the discovery of his mother's guilt.*

Taking advantage of the calamity which had befallen the house of Sutherland, and the minority of the young earl, now only fifteen years of age, Y-Mackay of Far, who had formed an alliance with the earl of Caithness, invaded the country of Sutherland, wasted the barony of Skibo, entered the town of Dornoch, and, upon the pretence of a quarrel with the Murrays, by whom it was chiefly inhabited, set fire to it, in which outrage he was assisted by the laird of Duffus. This happened in the year fifteen hundred and sixty-seven. These measures were only preliminary to a design which the earl of Caithness had formed to get the earl of Sutherland into his hands, but he had the cunning to conceal his intentions in the meantime, and to instigate Mackay to act as he wished without appearing to be in any way concerned.

In pursuance of his design upon Alexander, the young earl of Sutherland, the earl of Caithness prevailed upon Robert Stuart, bishop

* Sir R. Gordon, p. 147.

of Caithness, to write a letter to the governor of the castle of Skibo, in which the earl of Sutherland resided, to deliver up the castle to him: a request with which the governor complied. Having taken possession of the castle, the earl carried off the young man into Caithness, and although only fifteen years of age, he got him married to Lady Barbara Sinclair, his daughter, then aged thirty-two years. Y-Mackay was the paramour of this lady, and for continuing the connexion with him she was afterwards divorced by her husband.

After Y-Mackay had burned Dornoch, he made an attack upon Hugh Murray, son of Houcheon Murray of Aberseors, in the village of Pitfur in Strathfleet, took him prisoner, and killed his brother, Donald Roy-Murray, and a kinsman named Thomas Murray. A few of the inhabitants of Sutherland went in pursuit of Mackay, whom they overtook in the Breachat; but Houcheon Murray prevented them from attacking him, as he was afraid that his son, then a prisoner in Mackay's hands, would be killed by the Strathnaver men to prevent a rescue. With a few words of defiance, and some arrows discharged on either side, according to the ordinary custom of commencing skirmishes, the matter ended, and the Sutherland men returned to their homes. The interference of Houcheon Murray was certainly judicious, for Mackay delivered up his son after a short captivity. As the tribe of the Siol-Phaill had been the cause of the dissension between Mackay and the Murrays, a feud occurred on the release of Hugh between the Murrays and the Siol-Phaill, in which lives were sacrificed on both sides, and which continued till a reconciliation was effected by the earl of Sutherland on coming of age.*

The earl of Caithness having succeeded in his wishes in obtaining possession of the earl of Sutherland, entered the earl's country, and took possession of Dunrobin castle, in which he fixed his residence. He also brought the earl of Sutherland along with him, but he treated him meanly, and he burnt all the papers belonging to the house of Sutherland he could lay his hands on. Cruel and avaricious, he, under the pretence of vindicating the law for imaginary crimes, expelled many of the ancient families in Sutherland from that country, put many of the inhabitants to death, disabled those he banished, in their persons, by new and unheard of modes of torture, and stripped them of all their wealth. To be suspected of favouring the house of Sutherland, and to be wealthy, were deemed capital crimes by this oppressor.

As the earl of Sutherland did not live on friendly terms with his wife on account of her licentious connexion with Mackay, and as there appeared no chance of any issue, the earl of Caithness formed the base design of cutting off the earl of Sutherland, and marrying William Sinclair, his second son, to Lady Margaret Gordon, the eldest sister of the earl of Sutherland, whom he had also gotten into his hands, with

* Sir R. Gordon, p. 151.

the view of making William earl of Sutherland. The better to conceal his intentions the earl of Caithness made a journey south to Edinburgh, and gave the necessary instructions to those in his confidence to despatch the earl of Sutherland; but some of his trusty friends having received private intelligence of the designs of the earl of Caithness from some persons who were privy thereto, they instantly set about measures for defeating them by getting possession of the earl of Sutherland's person. Accordingly, under cloud of night, they came quietly to the burn of Golspie, in the vicinity of Dunrobin, where, concealing themselves to prevent discovery, they sent Alexander Gordon of Sidderay to the castle, disguised as a pedler, for the purpose of warning the earl of Sutherland of the danger of his situation, and devising means of escape. Being made acquainted with the design upon his life, and the plans of his friends for rescuing him, the earl, early the following morning, proposed to the residents in the castle, under whose charge he was, to accompany him on a small excursion in the neighbourhood. This proposal seemed so reasonable in itself, that, although he was perpetually watched by the earl of Caithness' servants, and his liberty greatly restrained, they at once agreed; and, going out, the earl being aware of the ambush laid by his friends, led his keepers directly into the snare before they were aware of danger. The earl's friends thereupon rushed from their hiding-place, and seizing him, conveyed him safely out of the country of Sutherland to Strathbogie in the year fifteen hundred and sixty-nine. As soon as the earl of Caithness' retainers heard of the escape of earl Alexander, they collected a party of men favourable to their interests, and went in hot pursuit of him as far as Port-ne-Coulter: but they found that the earl and his friends had just crossed the ferry. In the act of crossing they were overtaken by a great tempest which suddenly arose, and made a very narrow escape from drowning.*

Shortly after this affair a quarrel ensued between the Monroes and the Clan Kenzie, two very powerful Rosshire clans which happened thus: Lesley, the celebrated Bishop of Ross, had made over to his cousin, the Laird of Balquhain, the right and title of the castle of the Canonry of Ross, together with the castle lands. Notwithstanding of this grant, the Regent Murray, had given the custody of this castle to Andrew Monroe of Milntown; and to make Lesley bear with the loss, the Regent promised him some of the lands of the Barony of Fintry in Buchan, but on condition that he should cede to Monroe the castle and castle lands of the Canonry; but the untimely and unexpected death of the Regent interrupted this arrangement, and Andrew Monroe did not, of course, obtain the title to the castle and castle lands as he expected. Yet Monroe had the address to obtain permission from the earl of Lennox during his regency, and afterwards from the earl of Mar, his successor in that office, to get possession of the castle. The Clan Kenzie grudg-

* Sir R. Gordon, p. 154.