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THE HAYS OF LONCARTY, A SCOTTISH TRADITIONAL STORY.\*

It was in the course of those romantic days, in the tenth century, when deeds of violence prevailed, and some of our ancient families gained possession of title and fortune at the risk of life and limb, that the noble line of the Hays first began to have an historical origin in Scotland. Denmark, at the time we speak of, was a warlike kingdom, and for a considerable period carried on with more or less success a system of predatory invasion of the northern parts of Britain.

When the intelligence of Haco's intended invasion reached the Scots, the consternation and anxiety were proportionate to the occasion. Learning the tidings, the Scottish monarch immediately despatched messages to all his nobles and chiefs that could be reached, for them to come forth with their followers, and meet him near the east coast, to encounter the Danes, and vanquish them before they should take the kingdom.

Landing at the mouth of the Esk in Angus, the rapacious legions of Denmark soon overrun the coast country. Robbery and rapine had its full sway for a time: the unresisting people fled before the invaders, who spread terror and desolation wherever they went, and harried and burnt all the towns and villages from Bervio in Forfar to the Firth of Tay. It was not until the invaders were within a few miles of Perth, which they had determined immediately to carry by storm, as well as to gut and pillage the old palace of Bertha, that the army, hastily collected by the Scottish king, were able to offer some check to their progress.

When the Scots came up, they found the Danes in a crowded encampment on the face of a hill near a village by the Tay, in the parish of Redgorton, Perthshire, and still—though known chiefly in the neighbourhood as an extensive bleaching ground—well remembered in history by the name of Loncarty. When the Danes saw the Scottish army approach, and the latter descried the formidable legions of their invaders, pitched rank behind rank on the face of the height, a solemn pause took place between the armies, as if both felt that the fate of their existence or that of their country was almost too much to be put to the risk of a single engagement.

On the edge of a hollow, on a branch of the stream near which the armies lay, there lived at this time an industrious "landwart man," who, notwithstanding the terrors of invasion, peacefully prosecuted the labors of the field. Athletic and powerful, though not very rich, this farmer had two sons as brave as himself, yet by no means as peaceably inclined, or on an occasion like this so disposed to their labors, when war and revenge were almost at their ears, and the cry of the coming foe began to be shouted along the valley of Glanshec, the hearts of the young men beat high at the sound; they looked on their father's ploughings with youthful contempt, and murmured and muttered,

\* This story, a mixture of history and popular tradition, is extracted, with some alterations and additions, from a work entitled "Traditional Stories," by A. Picken.

as young men will do, that no one would lead them to the forthcoming battle.

"Why should we labor," they said, "on this cold sterile spot, while there are rich lands on the Tay from Errol to Kinnoul, which the king has to give to his defenders? The Danes are come to the very hill of Loncarty, while we roost here over our plough, like base louts of the field. Will no one give us a sword or hauberk, that we may strike a stroke for Scotland and the king?"

"Hooley, boys, hooley," said the cool, landwart man, "the maiden does not dance till she's bid to the floor, and the piper does not pipe till he knows who hires him. The lands, to be sure, are broad in Strath-tay, and rich in Gowrie, but every cheese must keep to its own chisset, and every man to his own trade, till fortune comes to buy him lands that his father never paid for. So keep your valour till you get the word, and hold your plough irons to defend your own heads. Up! the sun is high, let us go to the ploughing."

With reluctant steps the youths followed to their labors, but the sigh of war rose up through the glen; the boom and buz of distant squadrons disturbed their industry and swerved their attention, the shrill note of the pibroch came fitfully on the blast to make their hearts bound with stirring thoughts, and crowds of stragglers hurrying down the valley unsettled their minds to their lowly toil. But we must now return to the king's camp in the neighborhood, and speak of the great things that were doing in the war.

The armies were now ready for the onset, the Danes descending to the foot of the hill, and the Scots in lines on the little field below. Malcolm Duff, "Prince of Scotland and Lord of Cumber," led the right wing; Duncan, thane of Athol, the left, while the king himself, with the principal nobles and best men, took charge of the centre. The anxiety of the Scots monarch for his kingdom and his existence was shown by the pains which he took to animate his army. "To move his nobles with courage and spirit," says the old chronicler Boethius, whose graphic account of this engagement we cannot hope to equal, "King Kenneth discharged them of all mahse and duties to him for five years to come, then promised, by open proclamation, to give ilk man that brought him the head of ane Dane ten pund, or else land perpetually." When this was done, the worthy king "made orison to God to send his cause gude fortune."

"The armies stood long arrayet," continues the able chronicler, "while at last the Scots, too fierce and desirous of battle, came with incredible shower of darts, arrows, and ganyes on the Danes, who, impatient to sustain the invasion of Scotland, came forward with great noise." No corresponding shout, however, was set up by Kenneth's army, who joined in battle without even a sound of trumpet, and both "fought so fiercely that none of them might sustain the price of the other."

Whatever was the patriotic ardor of the Scots on the present emergency they do not appear to have forgot their individual interests; so the ten pounds or ten pund that the king had promised so ran each man's mind while he fought, that the heads of Danes, with a view to their value, were the chief thing that all aimed at to the great detriment of the general battle.