

CHAPTER II.

The Sinclairs of Caithness.

THE LAND OF THE CATTIANS.

THE first inhabitants of the British Islands were cave-dwellers, and lived by hunting and fishing. They were a short, dark, and wiry people, and were apparently of the same race as the Basques and Eskimos. For want of a better name they are sometimes spoken of as Iberians. They were followed by Keltic tribes from Gaul, who conquered them and gradually absorbed them. The Anglo-Saxons began to settle in South Britain in 449 A. D., and in the southern part of North Britain about 547 A. D. Until 800 A. D., the Highlands and Islands of Scotland were wholly occupied by Keltic tribes. These tribes were divided politically into two peoples, the Picts and the Scots. The Picts seem to have been partly real Picts—who were a branch of the same stock as the Britons—and partly Gaidels. The Scots came from Ireland about 506 A. D. They settled in Argyll and became mixed up with the people of that district. They were Gaidels, Gael, or Gaelic-speaking Kelts. About 825 A. D., the Norwegians began to form settlements in the Scottish Islands. In 870 or thereabouts, they took permanent possession of the Shetlands, Orkneys, and Western Islands, and in a few years made themselves masters of the Isle of Man, Arran, Bute, Kintyre, and the western coast of Argyll, Inverness, and Ross. They began to attack Caithness about 880, and gradually extended their sway over the whole of the northern part of Scotland as far as the Beaully Firth. The Scottish kings kept up a war against them, and finally destroyed their power at the battle of Largs in 1263.