



BRAHAN CASTLE.

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By JULIA MARCHIONESS OF TWEEDDALE AND LADY JEUNE.

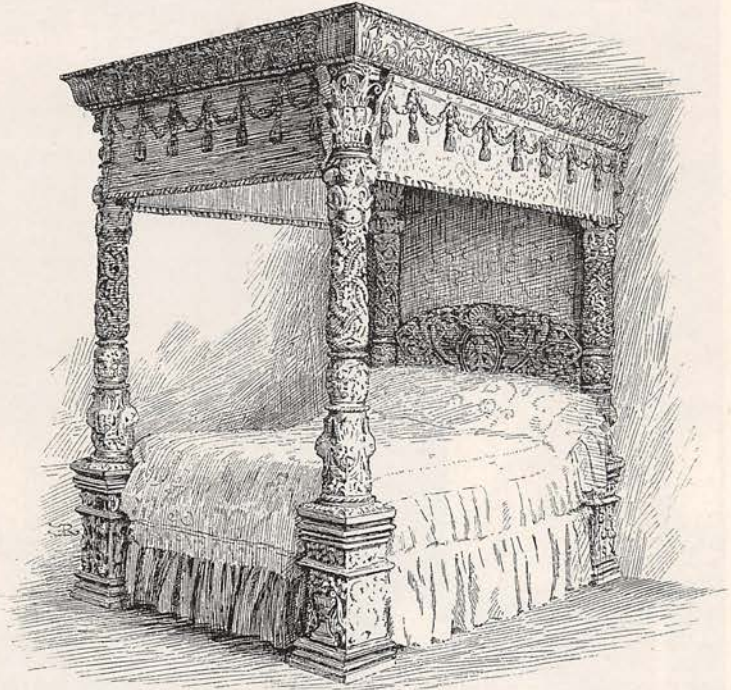
With Illustrations by THOMAS RILEY.

THE traveller from Perth to the north of Scotland passes in that short distance through a country with a past more full of romance and stirring incident than almost any other part of the kingdom. The Athole country, the Grant territory, the homes of the Cummings, Mackintoshes, and Lords Lovat recall incidents and characters in Scottish history characteristic of the courage and bravery of those stern and courageous people with which their history teems. But while large tracts of country represent to those interested in the Scottish past the stage on which the wild drama was being enacted, the homes of the men and women who were the principal characters in those stirring times are comparatively unknown, from the general idea that the roughness and hardness of Scottish life left no space for the more refining influences that culture and education had brought to bear on English men and women, and that however high the rank and position of a Scottish chief, he was, of necessity, more or less, an interesting savage. The homes of Buccleuch and Hamilton and other great southern families were of a more civilized nature, and their representatives were brought into more general contact with English culture, but north of the Tay a complete ignorance existed as to the homes and castles of the great Highland chiefs, who were, in reality, in their own country, kings with unlimited power. The object of this short paper is to give a sketch of an old house, the home and birth-place for generations of one of the most powerful of the Highland chiefs, the influence politically of which no longer exists, but, as a monument of a past intimately connected with some of the most stirring incidents in Highland history, may have an interest on other grounds. Blair Castle, the home of the Dukes of Athole, Castle Grant, of the great Earls of Seafield, and Beaufort Castle, of the powerful family of Lovat, are the three great historical

Highland houses that the traveller passes after leaving Perth. They lie close to the old highway to the north, and near the railway, and after crossing the river Beauly, with the great mass of mountains to the north, capped by Ben Wyvis, one gets into what was long ago the country and stronghold of the Clan Mackenzie. Lying under the shadow of Wyvis, and almost hidden among the trees and woods which clothe the sides of the route which rises behind Brahan and above the river Conon, stands the old square house, flanked by two large towers, which for over two hundred and fifty years has been the dwelling-place of the family of Seaforth.

Brahan Castle was built about the year 1630, by Colin, the first Earl of Seaforth, in deference to the advice of his guardian, the "tutor of Kintail," Sir Roderick Mackenzie, of Cogiach.

Lord Seaforth intended to have built his castle further eastward, nearer Dingwall, but "Sir Rory," who himself intended to build somewhere in that direction, and which intention he afterwards carried out by Castle Leod, the home of the Earls of Cromartie, did not wish to be overshadowed by so powerful a neighbour as his nephew, who had been a most headstrong and tiresome ward. It was then one of the finest and statelyst houses in Scotland, and Lord and Lady Seaforth divided their time between Brahan and the Castle of



THE GOLDEN BED.

Channory, which latter residence was close to the great Abbey of Channory and Fortrose, one of the wealthiest and most powerful of the great ecclesiastical houses in Scotland. Architecturally, Brahan has nothing to be said in its favour. Whatever beauty it possessed when it was one of the strongest and most powerful of the old Highland castles has disappeared, for when General Wade, who was quartered there for some years after the "45," left it (though the Mackenzie's chief had gone over to the Hanoverian side), it was considered too strong and powerful a place to be left untouched, and it was dismantled by order of the English General, and when the English army marched southward, along the roads which have immortalized General Wade's memory, the winds and rain of heaven were allowed to blow undisturbed into the old house, which soon became almost a ruin.

Colin died, leaving no son, and the title and estates passed to his brother, Earl George, who left little to be remembered by in the old house, though he occupied one of the most important positions in the stirring history of his time, save a fine old carved bed known as the "Golden Bed of Brahan." It was brought over from Holland by a Colonel Mackenzie, a clansman, one of the many Scotchmen who in those days attained distinction by serving abroad, who intended it as a present to his old chief, Earl Colin, but on Colonel Mackenzie's arriving at Brahan he found that Earl Colin was dead, and presented it to his successor, Earl George. The old hangings of the "rich and sumptuous bed," to quote the old deed of gift, "were on a sea-green coloured velvet furniture, and were given by Colonel D. Mackenzie, who was sometime

in the service of the Earl of Seaforth, but afterwards went abroad and served with distinction in the wars in Moscow and Flanders. There having by his merit and valour run through the inferior degrees of honour, he at length attained that of a Colonel of a Regiment of Foot, and married the daughter of the Count de Bredrod in Flanders, a descendant of the noble house of Nassau." When the house was dismantled the bed seems to have been so carefully packed up and put away, that though the tradition remained of the "Golden Bed" it was treated as one of the fables of the family. Thirty years ago, in making some improvements in the stable, a gigantic case

was discovered, in which, on being opened, was found the Golden Bed and a few threads of the hangings of which all the glory was departed, but which are still preserved as a specimen of their pristine beauty.

A flight of stone steps leads up to the front door, and turning to the left lies the library, a long, low room, panelled with dark pine and a fine ceiling of which only the old oak rafters remain. The room was originally part of the old hall of the Castle which had been divided. A picture of Rizzio and Darnley, given to Kenneth Mackenzie, first Baron of Kintail, hangs on the left as you enter the room, both having been given to him by Queen Mary, whose Chamberlain he was; and a small plan of the battle-field of Glensheil hangs as a pendant, showing the disposition of the forces commanded by



A CORNER OF THE LIBRARY.

Lord Seaforth in 1716, 3,000 men of which were raised off his own property. The map is evidently drawn by some one with Hanoverian sympathies. The order signed "Seafort," and dated Inverness, 20th of October, 1715, to Ronald MacDonald, hangs close by, telling him to "march instantly with 200 men westward towards Lochness and drive here with you all the oxen and coves fitt for provisiones, as alsoe what meall you can find upon such horses as falls in your way, and such of the owners as are loyale subjects shall be satisfy'd according to the true valoure of what shall be brought from them, fail not to execute this with all expedition as you

shall be answerable," an order which Ronald no doubt faithfully carried out. It is in the Library that perhaps the dearest and most precious traditions of the house linger, for in that room Charles Edward dined and sat when he paid his visit to Lord and Lady Fortrose on the long and weary journey to the west after the defeat at Culloden. A room in the West Tower, the "Duke of Gordon's Room," so called because it was always used by the last Duke of that name when on a visit, is the room in which the Prince slept, but the most authentic account of his visit is best given in the words of Mrs. Stewart Mackenzie, who was told the story by "Long Peggy," a member of the Lentrán family, a neighbour and a keen Jacobite, who saw the Prince while in the Castle.

Mrs. Stewart Mackenzie says: "'Long Peggy' was one of those admitted to a sight through the drawing-room door of Prince Charlie when he visited at this Castle in 1746. Lady Mary Stewart, wife of Kenneth, Lord Fortrose, was a keen Jacobite,



THE DRAWING-ROOM.

but Lord Fortrose having suffered in the cause with his father William, fifth Earl of Seaforth (forfeited in 1715) prudently withdrew to Kintail. Long Peggy begged of Lady Fortrose the Coffee Cup that the Prince used, and never allowed it to be rinsed out, and she also begged of my mother, who became Lady of Brahan in 1784, an old green velvet cushion on which the Prince rested his foot while conversing with Lady Fortrose, both of which were buried with her." Lord Seaforth, Lady Fortrose's father-in-law, retired on hearing of the Prince's arrival in the Highlands, to his west coast properties, where it is said, accompanied by the "Minister," a friend and sympathizer, he remained until the battle of Culloden finally annihilated the hopes of the Stuarts. The hall and dining-room of the Castle are the two finest rooms, the former with some fine tapestry and interesting pictures, one by Sir Joshua Reynolds of Mrs. Keith Stewart, a sweet little maiden in a white frock, which she holds up full of roses, a wreath of the same encircling her dainty head; Earl Colin and Francis, Lord Seaforth, the first and last of the ennobled ancestors of the house, gaze on each other across the hall, and a picture of Mrs. Stewart Mackenzie, the heiress of the last Lord Seaforth, the friend and devoted correspondent of Sir Walter Scott, the "gentle dame" of his lament at the fulfilment of the doom of the Seaforths, hangs by her father.

The dining-room, long and wide, built over a hundred years ago and only just fin-

ished, contains the great historic picture by West, of the tradition of the origin of the family of Seaforth. The faces are portraits of Francis, Lord Seaforth, and members of the MacRae families of Kintail, who claim a descent as ancient as their chief. Alexander II. granted Colin FitzGerald, who saved his life out hunting, as much land as he could find in the shape of a stag's head in Kintail, and they were the "gift lands" so inextricably entwined with the fortunes and history of the Seaforth family. To the left of the picture hangs Isabella, Countess of Seaforth, the destroyer of Kenneth Og, the Wizard of the North, whose revenge for his cruel death brought such disaster on the house of Seaforth. Below her hangs the picture of her husband, Kenneth, second Earl, whose handsome face betrays the fatal weakness which led him into the position where Kenneth Og told his haughty wife that he had found others, whose charms were more potent than hers, and truth to tell Isabella is not an attractive lady. Opposite to her hangs a full-length portrait of the unhappy Mary Queen of Scots, and given by her to her faithful servant, Kenneth, Lord Kintail. As a pendant to Queen Mary is the picture of a pale-faced, sad-looking lady, in widow's weeds, so white and forlorn that one sees no resemblance to her in the picture hanging opposite of the happy, smiling, girlish peeress, in her robes; the Eastern page-boy holding her coronet. Somehow sorrow seems more in keeping on the face of Lady Frances Herbert, daughter of the attainted Earl of Powis, mother of the forfeited and attainted Earl of Seaforth, and sister of Winnifred Herbert, the brave and beautiful Lady Nithsdale, than any joy or hope, for the long tale of family misfortune dates from the time when, in common with so many of their countrymen, the Seaforths threw in their lot with the ill-fated House of Stuart. The colleague of Mar, and one of the leaders of the Jacobite forces, her son William, fifth Earl, defeated the Earl of Sutherland at Bonar Bridge, and then collecting all the men of the clan that he could rally, marched southwards to Sherriffmuir, where over 3,000 Seaforth men were engaged. The attainder and forfeiture of nearly all the Highland estates and titles soon followed, and Seaforth followed his sovereign, King James VIII., into exile, at St. Germain, where, in company with his kinsman, Lord Powis, who had been created a Duke by the fugitive King, he received the empty honour of a Marquisate. Two years later, when the declaration of the war with Spain raised the hopes of the Jacobites, Seaforth again returned, and landing at Kintail, joined Lords Tullebardine, Marischal, and others, and fought a determined and bloody battle at Glensheil, where Seaforth was wounded. It was the last flicker of the candle, for the Highlanders were forced to surrender, and Lord Seaforth returned to France never to return to Scotland.

General Wade and a strong garrison were put into Brahan Castle, and the clan were called on to lay down their arms in the court-yard of the old house, where they had rallied so often round the standard of their King. The Mackenzies obeyed, making, however, the stipulation that they were to surrender their arms only to the English troops, and not to those of the Highland companies who had taken up arms against the Prince. General Wade's report gives an impressive account of the surrender, which was very incomplete, for soon after the Government encountered the greatest difficulty in collecting the rents of the Seaforth property in Kintail, and which, after a few ineffectual attempts, owing to the bravery and devotion of Donald Murchison, Lord Seaforth's factor, they were obliged to relinquish.

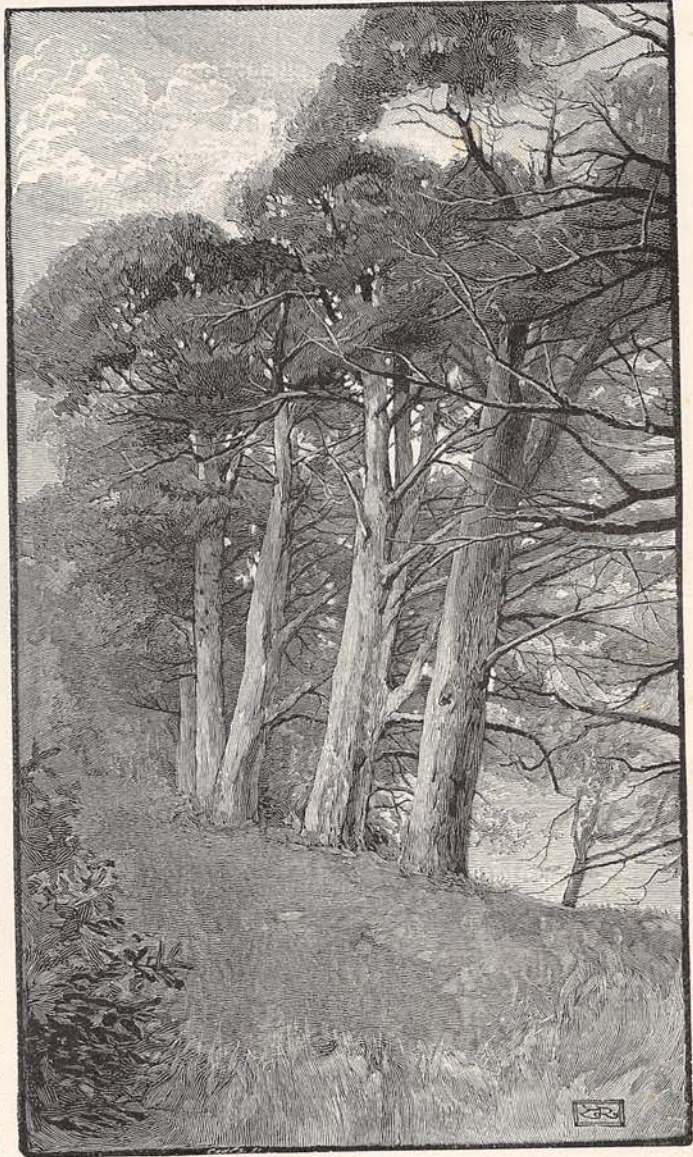
Brahan for many years remained uninhabited and uncared-for, though one historic event took place beside its walls. In 1778 the Earl of Seaforth, who had been created an Irish Peer by George III., raised a regiment of 1,130 men, five hundred being his own vassals, and the remainder from among the neighbouring families of Mackenzie, the MacRaes of Kintail, the subject clan of Mackenzie rallying in large numbers to the call of their chief. In 1793 his successor again raised a regiment for the service of the King, and the notice calling on his men to rise and enlist, promising them "high bounties and soldier-like entertainment, and that they will not be drafted into other regiments," and winding up with the words "Now for a go at the Mounseers, my boys," still hangs in a room in the Castle.

To the right of the steps at the entrance is a small door, which leads to the cellars over the dungeons of the old fortress, in one of which the ill-fated Montrose spent some weary days on his way to Edinburgh, after his capture in Assynt. How strange the irony of fate to find himself a prisoner in the house of one of his greatest friends and comrades, who, like himself, had fought for both King and Covenant, but who had escaped the cruel fate in store for him.

The panorama of the distant blue hills to the south, glowing with the deep rich purple of the heather, forms a fitting frame to the greensward stretching down to the River Conon and the walk along its banks. The grim Scotch firs, which seem to restrain the rushing torrent, and the mass of rhododendrons, which grow beneath their shadow, grow along the walk laid out by the "Little Countess," Frances Herbert, in imitation of the river walk of her old home at Powis Castle, and only terminate when the broad breast of the river opens out and the Rock of Brahan and the distant hills cast deep shadows on its still bosom. Into one of the deep pools of the river tradition says the jewels and plate of the family were thrown during the Rebellion, and among them a golden kettle of great value, which has given its name to the spot. The island holds the ruins of an old chapel, now buried under the decay of ages, and the stillness and loneliness is intensified in the darkness caused by the thick limes which fringe the banks and throw their deep shadows over the silent waters.

A large circle of beech trees close to the Castle marks the spot on which once stood a circle of large upstanding stones, probably the remains of the ancient worship of the country, but which have now disappeared, owing to the zeal of an improving factor, who, during the absence of Lord Seaforth in Barbados, broke them up to make roads. The garden, lying on a sunny slope to the south, stretches away below the Rock of Brahan, a large mass of conglomerate rock four miles in length, behind whose shadow lies the Loch of Ussie, which owes its existence, so runs the tradition, to the magic stone thrown into the small well, which formerly existed there, by the wizard Coineach, when pursued by the revengeful Countess of Seaforth after he had foretold the doom of her house. On the stone falling into the well, the waters gushed out with enormous rapidity, flooding the surrounding district and filling the lake under whose waters lie the charm which will some day give the same gifts to the finder as those possessed by its ill-starred owner.

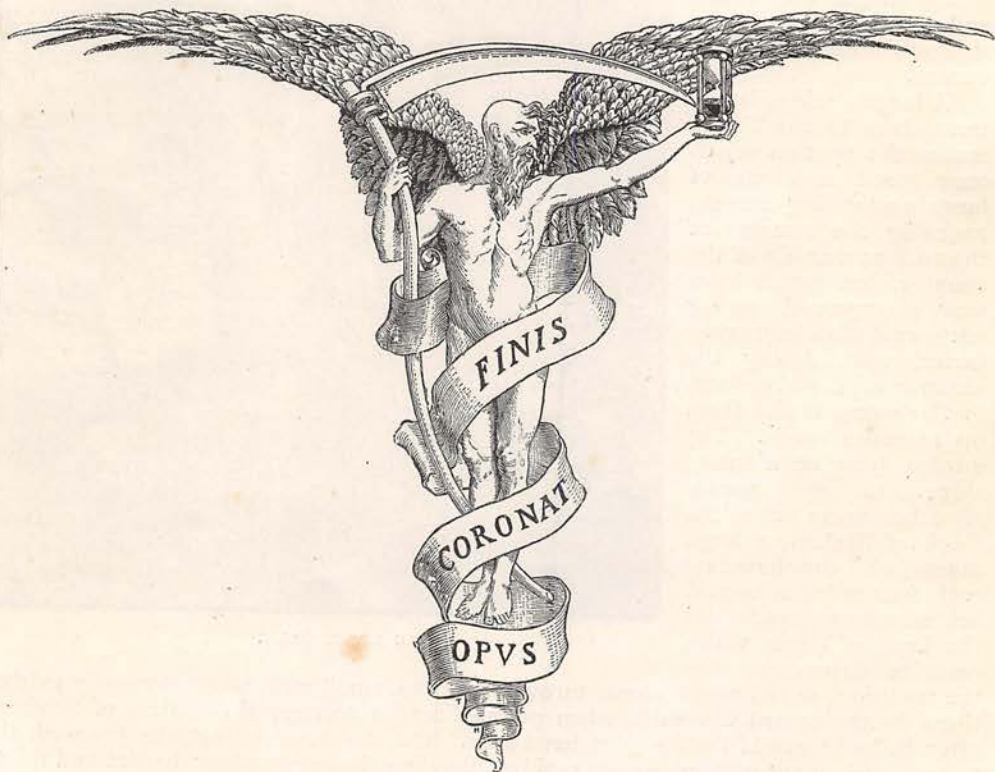
A little to the left of the lake is a high rocky slope, at the foot of which not many



THE RIVER WALK.

years ago stood eight curiously shaped stones, now unfortunately removed, or broken, known as "Brodie's Grave." The tradition is that in the good old times the laird of Brodie, the head of a clan in Nairnshire (who were allies of the chiefs of the Mackenzies), and his seven sons, were on returning from a visit to his friend, informed that the MacDonalds—a powerful and warlike clan—were marching on Seaforth to attack him. Without waiting for rest or food, Brodie instantly returned to the assistance of Seaforth, and found him engaged in a fierce encounter at the foot of the rock, in which Brodie and his seven sons were slain, and at the end of the day were all buried on the field of battle. The spot and the last resting-place of the gallant allies of the Mackenzies and their followers is still shown with great delight by the poor people who reside on the hillside.

The legends connected with the life of Coineach still linger all around the district, and are inextricably associated with Brahan and its neighbourhood. The fulfilment of his prophecy regarding the Seaforth family in the person of the last Lord Seaforth, the deaf and dumb Seaforth, who with his three bonnie sons was to be the last male of his race, and "the dark-eyed woman from the East, with snow on her coif, who was to be the last Mackenzie," is too long a story and too well known to need more than a passing mention here. The prophecy was well known and believed long before its fulfilment, and Sir Walter Scott, one of the oldest friends of the family, mentions its existence in a letter to Lockhart some time before it was accomplished. Such coincidences and the glamour and mystery connected with the superstitious belief of the Highlanders, give a poetry and reality to the traditions which linger about the old house, and which, in spite of all the materializing influences of modern days, will there, as in common with many other Scotch families, survive the destruction of many other more apparently stable things.



DRAWN BY T. ERAT HARRISON.