

S.B
37-8

Before Earl Alexander returned to Sutherland his marriage to Barbara Sinclair had been dissolved and on the 13th December, 1573, he married Jean Gordon, daughter of George, Earl of Huntly. In 1567 she had divorced Bothwell in order that that nobleman might marry Queen Mary. She was ^{six} ~~seven~~ years older than Earl Alexander but the marriage was a happy one and of their seven children, the second surviving son was Sir Robert Gordon, who left an affectionate appreciation of his mother. She was, he said, "a virtuous comely lady, judicious, of excellent memorie and great understanding, above G; 168-9 the capacitie of her sex." Earl Alexander set himself to restore peace among the inhabitants of Sutherland, wearied with the calamities of the last few years. Many of the Murrays and Gordons, adherants of the Earl of Sutherland, who had fled to other districts during the reign of the Earl of Caithness, now returned to their homes. The power of the Earl of Caithness had been checked but was by no means ended and before long

old feuds were revived

~~many of these old feuds were revived.~~ old feuds were revived.

MacKay
142-3

When Y Mackay died in 1572, he left 4 sons. Two by his first marriage to a daughter of Hugh MacLeod of Assynt, Donald who was his cousin. They were ~~Hugh~~ Mackay of Scourie and John Beg Mackay. but the relationship of their parents was used to prevent their succession to MacKays lands. By his second marriage to Christina Sinclair, daughter of the Laird of Dun, ~~had~~ ~~had~~ Hugh, who succeeded him, and William of Bighouse. He had also three daughters. Hugh Mackay was only eleven when his father died. He was the ward of the Earl of Caithness, who brought him up and his brother William,. The Mackay estates were administered by John ~~More~~ Mackay, Sir Robert Gordon says he was enticed to Girnigo, where he died, ~~then~~ ^{then} Hugh's elder brother, John Beg Mackay took over the management, but he was killed in a clan feud at Durness in 1579. Sir Robert accuses the Earl of Caithness of both deaths, but there is no proof of this; Sir Robert is always lavish in accusations where the subjects

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173
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were not friendly to the House of Gordon. After the death of John Beg, Hugh Mackay took over the management of the estates himself. The Earl of Caithness had settled another of those marriageable daughters of his on Hugh MacKay. She too, must have been much older than her husband, and she was the widow of Alexander Sutherland of Duffus.

Earl Alexander brought a suit to reduce the powers of justiciary which the Earl of Caithness held over Sutherland. He obtained a verdict in his favour shortly before the death of Earl George, which took place in September 1582. He died in Edinburgh and was buried in Rosslyn Chapel; but his heart was enclosed in a casket of lead and taken to Caithness where it was placed in the church at Wick.

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G.177-8

Although in the pages of Sir Robert Gordon, George 4th Earl of Caithness appears as a sinister figure who allowed neither life nor honour to stand in the way of his ambitions, and though he is credited with a number of murders and with using his judicial powers to eliminate

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516

his adversaries; it may be doubted if he was worse than many of his contemporaries, who thought any means were justified to accomplish the ruin of an enemy.

The earl was succeeded by his grandson, son of the imprisoned Master. Far from being anxious to find a peaceful solution to the differences with the Earl of Sutherland, George, 5th Earl of Caithness was as ready his grandfather had been to carry on the old rivalry, and to give assistance to any dependants of the Earl of Sutherland who were not on good terms with their superior, or were engaged in disputes among themselves.

George Earl of Huntly died in 1576, his son was a minor and Earl Alexander was one of his curators, From the young earl Alexander received a grant of the superiority of Strathnavert together with the sheriffship of Sutherland, in exchange for the lands of Aboyne. The gift was confirmed under the great seal, whereby Sutherland and Strathnaver were disjoined from the sheriffdom of Inverness. This placed

G. 180
S?B 145

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686

the Earl of Sutherland in the position of being Mackay's superior a condition of affairs which was not relished by the Earl of Caithness who afterwards endeavoured to ~~induce~~ induce Huntly to revoke his grant, but the Earl of Sutherland refused to give up his acquisition. Instead, to the annoyance of Huntly, he resigned the lands ~~habds~~ of Farr and Strathnaver into the hands of the king, for a regrant to his eldest son John, Master of Sutherland, who received ~~from the king~~ a crown charter of resignation from King James VI. The Earl of Caithness then cast round for some means of revenge. When a quarrel broke out between Neil Huchesonson and Donald Neilson in Assynt, he allowed Hugh MacKay, whose sister was married to Donald Neilson, to take an army out of Caithness and lay siege to Neil of the Isle of Assynt. Neil was the vassal of the Earl of Sutherland and applied to him for assistance, and the earl sent two bodies of men, one to raise the seige and the other S.B. 148 to carry the war into Caithness. However Hugh Mackay, seeing

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686
862

matters were not likely to go well with him retired into Strathnaver, and the two earls were persuaded by mutual friends to meet in Elgin and make peace.

G. 181

At this meeting all the blame for the late disturbances was thrown on the Gunns, and an agreement was made that ^{they} ~~these~~ unfortunate people should be driven from their lands. The Gunns got warning of the plot and made preparations for their defence, threatened on either side, they attacked their Caithness enemies, who were assembled near Aldgoun under the leadership of Henry Sinclair, brother of the Laird of Dun. They inflicted a crushing defeat on the Caithness men, who left one hundred and forty dead on the field, including their leader. Nevertheless these unfortunate people were gradually driven westwards and most of them lost their lives in disputes with other clans in the neighbourhood of ~~Loch~~ Loch Broom

G 185-x
S.B.
149.

An uneasy peace was maintained between the two earls for a time, then a fresh disturbance was caused by the murder

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862
1029

of George Gordon of Marle. Marle was a township on the Helmsdale river and George Gordon was an illegitimate son Gilbert Gordon of Garty. He inflicted a cruel insult on the Earl of Caithness by cutting off the tails of ^{some of his} horses ^{which} that were being taken south for the Earl's use by ^{the Earl's} servants and telling the men to show the earl what he had done. Earl George was not likely to overlook such provocation. Finding he could get no redress from the Earl of Sutherland, he sent a body of men to surround Gordon's house at night. Gordon fought bravely, killing one of the leaders of the attack; Then he broke out of the house ~~and~~ flung himself into the river and tried to swim across; He was killed by a shower of arrows before he could reach the opposite shore. " There were many presages of George his death and of the troubles and calamities ~~xxxxxx~~ which were shortly to ensure. The common people with whom superstition doth strangely work sped many rumours unworthy to be rehearsed."

G 193-4

Such defiance of the Earl of Sutherland' authority

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1029
1113

was bound to invite reprisals and Earl Alexander made preparations to invade Caithness. He gathered a veritable army, which included MacKenzie of Redcastle, Munro of Contaligh and Neil Huchesonson with his men from Assynt, and advanced toward Caithness. The Earl of Caithness also prepared to resist. His force included Hugh Mackay and the Strathnaver men, and John, Master of Orkney with many of his countrymen. The two armies faced each other across the river Helmsdale, where they remained for a considerable time without any action more serious than the exchange of flights of arrows. At length, a truce was arranged and the two earls were persuaded to meet in Edinburgh. From this truce Mackay was excluded as the Earl of Sutherland refused to treat with him except on his complete submission as a vassal. Mackay returned to his own country but a truce was made between the two earls

G 194

S:B:150
Feb 1587

G

1588-

Mackay, however, could not stand alone between the two adversaries; after long negotiations he accepted the

(165)

$$\begin{array}{r} 19 \\ 1574 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 169 \\ 1113 \\ \hline 82 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 19 \\ 152770 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 18 \\ 9 \\ \hline 152 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 165 \\ 1113 \\ \hline 1278 \end{array}$$

severe terms offered by Earl Alexander. He made
 feudal submission for his lands and in return was
 released from payment of dues of £50,000 Scots. Further,
 the earl offered him his eldest daughter in marriage.
 Mackay was not proof against such a bribe, she was only
 15, a lady of "^{excellent} wit and beauty". Mackay had divorced
 his Sinclair wife and was free to marry again. The
 marriage took place in December 1589.

But even before negotiations were completed
 Mackay had joined with Earl Alexander in an attack
 on Caithness. No sooner had the truce with Caithness
 expired, than Earl Alexander ^{again} (sent a fresh demand) for
 redress for the death of George Gordon, ^{the} which the Earl
 of Caithness refused. Whereupon Earl Alexander sent a
 body of men into Caithness who collected a great amount
 of booty, which they divided among themselves. This
 raid was known as the Hardship of Latheron. But
 (this) was only a preliminary to a much larger
 expedition led by the earl himself. Fortified by a commi

19
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 This was refused by the E. of C

G. 195

G 200

G 200.

G 196

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 1278
 1444

2

which he had obtained at Court by means of the
 Chancelleor Maitland, (for the death of George Gordon
 of Marle) the Earl gathered a force which included
 not only his vassal Mackay, but the Mackintosh, the
 Laird of Foulis, the Laird of Assynt, and the Lord of
 Rasay. Sir Robert Gordon does not say why these
 chiefs were willing to join in the attack and one
 may suspect that the prospect of plunder may have
 been the principal reason. Part of this force beseiged
 Girnigo for twelve days without success and meantime
 the rest of the army spread over Caithness burning
 and looting. They met with no resistance from the
 unfortunate inhabitants. The town of Wick was
 burned and the heart of the old Earl of Caithness, in
 its case of lead, was taken from the church and burst
 open by a Highlander named John MacGilli-calum of
 Rasay, but finding it contained no treasure, he threw
 it away. Finally, the seige of Girnigo was abandoned
 and the warriors returned to Sutherland laden with

S.B. 151
 G.

Calder

1444
 671
 1765

a collection of loot and cattle which was divided among those had taken part in the raid,

It would seem that the death of George Gordon was used as an excuse for an attempt to destroy the Earl of Caithness; but Girnigo was impregnable to such weapons as could be brought against it, and the earl survived to make further raids on Sutherland in reprisal.

To-day Girnigo is a solitary ruin: it stands on rock and is almost surrounded by the sea. To anyone acquainted with its history it is an eerie place. The keep is a hollow shell, only the lowest rooms remain, including the cell in which the unhappy Master of Caithness is believed to have been imprisoned. A beam, embedded in the wall is ^{thought} ~~believed~~ to be part of the gallows, where many a poor wretch met his end. Castle Sinclair, a more ^{completely} ~~complex~~ ruined than Girnigo, is a building of later date, when the cramped conditions of the older castle were no longer tolerated.

17
9
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1615
153
1768

153
1768
1921

After Earl Alexander returned to Sutherland arrangements were made for submitting both sides to arbitration. The Earl of Huntly was chosen as "overman" and a truce was concluded until a meeting could take place. But the ink was scarcely dry on the terms of the truce before a fresh series of raids began. Badenloch was invaded and the Earl of Sutherland's herdsman was killed. Earl Alexander retaliated by sending another expedition into Caithness which returned with much booty. It was followed by an invasion of 3000 Caithness men into Strathullie, led by the Laird of Murkle. At Liribel, they set fire to a hut occupied by four men who had been set to keep a look out in case of attack. Three were killed but the fourth broke through the flames and got away in time to give warning of the enemy's approach. Then Hugh Mackay, who was at Dunrobin, hastily gathered five or six hundred of the inhabitants and set out in pursuit; he came up with the Caithness men at Crissaleigh, at the head of Strathbrora, after some hard fighting the invaders were driven back and the stolen cattle

1921
153
2574

G 193-
197

than those that had gone before . Both earls were laid under heavy penalties to keep the peace, and they and their followers were enjoined to make reparations to the heirs of those who had been slain or who had been driven from their farms in fear of their lives. But this was never easy to enforce and ^{de}pre^aditions continued among their followers. In 1591, a fresh meeting[^] was arranged, between the two earls[^] to take place at Strathbogie. At this meeting[^] the terms of the previous arbitration were confirmed. The Earl of Caithness was required to hand^x over the lands of Strath Ullie, which had been granted by Earl Adam as far back as 1516, and the Earl of Sutherland agreed to give up Wick, Papigoe and other lands in Caithness . They then agreed to bury all their old grudges and henceforth to live in peace and ^aamity with each other.

G 204.

About this time, David Ross of Balnagowan was charged ^{1590.} with^{ing} the Sutherland lands, in February, 1590. There was taken from Strathbrora, 12 mares and a courser, the horses estimated at £100 scots each; but the greatest sufferer was Achany, from whose lands Ross was alleged to have carried off, in July 1593, 50 workhorses, 44 mares,

21
189
1328
15-17
15-2
7,669

nine score great kye with calf, 50 draught ~~xxxxxx~~, oxen, 20 young oxen, 250 milk ewes, 20^u wedders, 200 she goats 24 brood swine¹. They also carried away 3 score double plaids, 40 stones of wool at 10 merks the stone, 24 swords at £10 the peice, 30 bows and 30 dog arrows 30/- the dozen, 20 kettles £3. each, 10 brewing cauldrons and £1000 in 20 30 and 10⁷- peices and in $\frac{1}{2}$ merk peices. Rose was summoned to appear on February 15th 1594, but the differences between him and the earl were not settled S.B 163-4 when Earl Alexander died.

It is hardly to be wondered at that people who suffered spoilations on such a scale should try to recoup themselves at the expense of an unfriendly clan. The lean Highland cattle must have been for ever on the move and the active part of the male population S.B. 164. always in a state of unrest.

Earl Alexander died in 1594, age 43, he had lived through a bitter period in the history of Scotland; but

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1669
152
1821

B21
171
1992

the flight of Queen Mary and her imprisonment in England, the changes in the Regency and the struggle of the Kirk to establish its authority had little effect on happenings in the northern Highlands. Sutherland was still mainly Catholic. Bishop Robert Stuart had given nominal adherence to the reformed church, but his last years were spent in St. Andrews. He can seldom have visited his diocese, but he drew part of its revenues up to the time of his death, which took place in 1586. He had been commended for the number of kirks he had established in the diocese, but there are no other records of his benefactions. His cathedral was a blackened ruin. He had turned his palace in Dornoch over to the Earl of Sutherland. Skibo castle his summer 'palace' was held by Gilbert Gray, son of John Gray as Hereditary Constable. Many of the clergy of the diocese had also disposed of the lands attached to their offices to their own advantage. After the death of Bishop Stuart no Bishop was appointed till Alexander Forbes was appointed by the crown to the Bishoprick of

Bentinck
143

Bentinck
136-41

Caithness in 1604

1992
182
2174

How much influence the Ministers of the kirk had is difficult to assess. In 1588, the General Assembly had made a complaint to the King that the Earl of Sutherland with his ladie and friends, papists, were 'vehementlie suspected latelie to have had masse.' and that they were 'contemners of the Word and Sacrement's'. But the Assembly never lost sight of its ultimate goal of forcing the northern earls and their followers to conform. Had King James sided with the Ministers the Earls of Sutherland, Huntly and many others would have been subjected to harsh penalties; but King James was no lover of the Kirk and he ignored the demands of the Ministers that his Catholic subjects should be stripped of their possessions.

Bentinck
156-7

G 169

Sir Robert Gordon says that Earl Alexander was of a 'sacklie disposition' and whether from reasons of ill-health or from indifference, he took no part in the hazards of Huntly's career as leader of the Catholic party. (He died on December 6th, 1592, aged 43 and was succeeded by his son, John, 12th Earl, who was 18 and still a minor.

Sir Robert Gordon was 14 when his father died. The youngest son, Alexander, was born in 1584. Of his own youth

2174
206
2380

he says that he was in his infancie noorished and fostered at Culmaillie- Kirketon with Margaret MacKreth, the widow of John Gordon of Drummuy. After his infancie and childhood he was sent to school, together with his eldest brother John, (then Mr of Sutherland) to be bred in the toun of Dornogh with Mr William Pape, the schoolmaster of that place, wher he staid until the yeir of God 1596.'

G. 314

Elsewhere he says William Pape was ' a reasonable good

G. 255
256.

scholar of a quick and reddie will.' That did not complete their education . The young earl went on a visit to the Duke of Lennox, who was his cousin and when he returned he sent paid what was meant to be a visit of friendship to the Earl of Caithness at Girnigoe. But

Earl George could never resist a chance of making fresh mischief and while he entertained his guest he encouraged the Sutherlands of Berridale--- who were his vassals-- to attack David Donaldson, one of the Clan-Gunn who had been a trusted servant of Earl Alexander'sc . By a fortunate chance Donaldson was absent from home, and

1830
21350
21563

when they could not find him the Sutherlands revenged themselves by killing one of his servants before they returned to Caithness. This might have set off a fresh series of reprisals had not the Earl of Huntly persuaded Earl John to keep the peace.

G234

The troubles with Caithness having died down, Earl John left his earldom in the care of his mother and went south. He spent a year at the Court of King James, then, in July, 1598, he went to France for two years. This was the education of a youth of noble family in the south. It would strengthen the ties with his southern relatives and break the isolation of his northern upbringing. The Court of King James was a homely and somewhat shabby establishment compared with the splendours of France, but it had many contacts with the continent and it was the battleground of the new and the old Scotland which would emerge, tested and victorious, in the years to come.

G 239

strengthen

165-
2563
2728