

Ardencaple and Lewis MacAulays

In 1591 the MacGregors were threatening to make things more than uncomfortable for their neighbours on the shores of Loch Lomond, Gareloch, and Loch Long. They secured the alliance of MacFarlane of Arrochar, and it was possibly only to protect himself from their vengeance that MacAulay in 1591 found it prudent to sign the bond of manrent. He escaped, at any rate, from the fate which befell his neighbours, the Colquhouns. In the following year the MacGregors and MacFarlanes raided Colquhoun's lands, shut the chief up in his castle of Bannachra, shot him dead. Eleven years later the MacGregors, in still greater force, again raided the lands of Luss, defeated the Colquhouns with great slaughter in Glenfruin, and destroyed all the Colquhoun possessions. From such attacks the bond of manrent saved MacAulay and his lands of Ardencaple on the other side of the hill. The action of the Government of James VI. which followed, seems to have recognised the fact that MacAulay, in signing the bond of manrent with MacGregor, had merely done so under force majeure, for, while MacGregor was executed and his clan proscribed, Sir Aulay MacAulay of Ardencaple and his clan were exempted from retribution. The theory most in harmony with the annals of the house (of Ardencaple) fixes their descent from a younger son of the second Alwyn, Earl of Lennox." Alwyne or Aulay was a common Christian name in the Lennox family. The second and third of the early race of earls bore this name. The MacAulays, further, repeatedly appear in the deeds in the Lennox chartulary, and their relations with that house appear to have been fairly personal and close. If, as seems likely, they were really cadets of the Lennox family, they could claim kinship with James VI. himself, who was the actual head of that house, and this would largely account for the fact that they escaped prosecution after the battle of Glenfruin, when their quondam allies, the MacGregors, were being everywhere relentlessly hunted down. As if to show still more unmistakably that the statement of kinship with the MacGregors inserted in the bond of manrent of 1591, was no more than a convenient fiction, Sir Aulay MacAulay, when the MacGregors were proscribed for their evil deeds, was one of those who took up their prosecution with most energy. In view of all the facts it would seem that the tradition attributing the origin of the house of Ardincaple to a younger son of an Earl of Lennox, has the chief weight of evidence on its side. In any case the family was of consequence as early as the thirteenth century, for the name of Maurice de Arncaple appears on the Ragman Roll. Nisbet (vol. ii. appendix, p. 35) in his Historical and Critical Remarks on the Ragman Roll, states that MacAulay was not adopted as a surname till the time of James V. Alexander de Ardincaple, son of Aulay de Ardincaple, then adopted it as more suitable for the head of a clan than the feudal designation previously borne, of Ardencaple of that ilk. Sir Aulay MacAulay, of the time of the battle of Glenfruin, died in December, 1617, and was succeeded by his cousin-german Alexander. This chief's son, Walter, was twice sheriff of Dunbarton. The sheriff's son, Aulay MacAulay, though a member of the Episcopal Church, was by no means a Jacobite, but on the contrary, at the Revolution in 1689, raised a company of fencibles for the cause of William and Mary. It was with this chief that the decline of the family began. He and his successors, as a result of their extravagant habits, were forced to part with one possession after another, till every acre of their once great territories was gone. Aulay MacAulay, twelfth and last chief, sold his roofless castle to John, fourth Duke of Argyll, and died a poor man about 1767. Meanwhile, early in the eighteenth century, forced to migrate, probably, by the impoverished state of their chief, a number of MacAulays settled in Caithness and Sutherland, while others passed into Argyllshire, where

some of their descendants were afterwards known by the name of MacPheideran. A number also migrated to Ireland, where their chief owned the estate of Glenarm in Antrim.

Already, however, at an earlier date, another tribe of emigrants from Garelochside had moved farther afield. It was from this race that the chief distinction of the clan was afterwards to come. Settling at Uig, in the southwest of Lewis, they engaged in constant feuds with the Morrisons of Ness at the north end of the island. In the days of James VI, when the Fife Adventurers settled at Stornoway, in the first of those attempts to bring prosperity to the Lewis, of which the attempt of Lord Leverhulme is the latest example, an outstanding part in the strife that ensued was played by one of these MacAulays. This individual, known as Donald Cam, from his blindness in one eye, was renowned for his strength. His son, "the Man " or Tacksman, of Brenish, has had his feats commemorated in many songs and tales. His son again, Aulay MacAulay, was minister successively of Tiree and Coil and of Harris. Of the minister's six sons, five were educated for the ministry and one for the Bar. One of these sons, Kenneth, minister of Ardnamurchan, wrote the History of St. Kilda, praised by Dr. Johnson. Another, the eldest, the Rev John MacAulay, was minister of Inveraray, where he encountered Dr Johnson, and afterwards of Cardross on the Clyde. He had three distinguished sons. One became a general in the East India Company's service. Another, known by his literary works, was made vicar of Rothley by Thomas Babington, MP, who had married his sister. A third, Zachary, became notable as a member of the Anti-Slavery Society, under its auspices became Governor of Sierra Leone, and had his efforts recognised by a monument in Westminster Abbey. Zachary married Selina Mills, the daughter of a Bristol bookseller, and their son was Thomas Babington, Lord MacAulay, MP for Edinburgh, author of Lays of Ancient Rome, The History of England, and some of the most brilliant essays in the English language.