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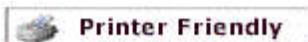
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Sketches of The Character, Manners, and Present State of the Highlanders of Scotland

Fencible Regiments

Breadalbane Three Battalions 1793 and 1794

"He who gave glory to his country," said an illustrious statesman, "gave that which was far more valuable to it than any acquisition whatever. Glory alone was not to be taken away by time or accidents. Ships, territories, or colonies, might be taken from a country, but the mode of acquiring them could never be forgotten. The acquisitions that were the consequence of the glorious days of Cressy and Poitiers, had long since passed to other hands, but the glory of these illustrious achievements still adhered to the British name, and was immortal." [Mr Wyndham's Speech on the vote of thanks for the battle of Maida.]

Such being the imperishable attributes of military glory, those men may well be styled patriots, who essentially contributed to its attainment, if not by their personal services in the field, at least by the proper application of that influence which their rank, property, and general estimation in society, ensure to them. In this high station stood several Highland noblemen and gentlemen, who, with much barren land and moderate revenues, but with great personal and family influence, could, on any emergency, step forward at the head of a body of brave and hardy men, to assert and support their country's claim to the glorious distinction so eloquently described by the enlightened statesman whose opinions have been just quoted.

Among Highland proprietors the Earl of Breadalbane holds a pre-eminent rank. Possessing an estate superior in extent to many Continental principalities, and but little inferior to some of them in the number of its people, he made an early offer of his services to raise two Fencible regiments, which were rapidly completed in the summer of 1793. [Lord Breadalbane's estate, which supports a population of 13,537 persons, commences two miles east of Tay Bridge, in the county of Perth, and extends westward ninety-nine and a half miles to Easdale, in Argyleshire; varying in breadth from three to twelve and fifteen miles, and interrupted only by the property of three or four proprietors, who possess one side of a valley or glen, while Lord Breadalbane has the other, so that, varying his direction a little to the right or left, he can travel nearly one hundred miles from east to west on his own property, on the Mainland, besides several small islands on the coast of Argyleshire.] In a few months afterwards, a third battalion was embodied; the whole force amounting to 2300 men, of whom 1600 were from the estate of Breadalbane. Thus, while Lord Breadalbane managed his great estate so as to preserve many able men in those pastoral and agricultural occupations which generally ensure virtuous contentment and happiness; they, in gratitude for such patriarchal kindness, and in the hope that the same fatherly protection would be continued, came forward, at the call of their Chief, in the numbers just mentioned. And certainly the man who can command the services of such a body contributes in no small degree to lay the foundation of that "glory to his country which is far more valuable to it than any acquisition whatever;" for, without good and brave men to fight our battles, we should soon have neither country, independence, nor glory. And next to the commander, whose talents and courage lead the soldiers of his country to victory, is the person who, by a humane and judicious management of a numerous body of people placed by Providence under his charge and control, promotes those habits, and that prosperity and independence, which are necessary to form virtuous men and good soldiers. Such was Lord Breadalbane when he presented his King and country with 1600 able men; nor is it to be doubted that he will continue the same course, and preserve an independent, virtuous, and high-spirited

peasantry, and not, like more northerly proprietors, forget the claims of an ancient and valuable race; banish them from their native land, or reduce those who are permitted to remain to the situation of day-labourers; [See Note N, in the Appendix.] a situation not well calculated to foster that independence of spirit which lays the foundation of the "glory of those illustrious achievements which adhere to the British name, and are immortal."

Some persons, probably from a wish to depreciate the character of the Highlanders, in extenuation of their own conduct towards them, have observed, as I have more particularly noticed in the last article, that there is much of self-interest in those voluntary, or rather, as they call them, in-voluntary services; as the men expect some reward in the shape of small settlements for themselves when disabled or discharged, or some favour in behalf of their aged parents in their absence. All this may be very true; for we are not to suppose that the Highlander is careless of his own interest, or that he willingly undervalues any services he may perform. When a man confers a favour, it is quite natural that he should expect some return from a person who has ample power to repay him; and when a young Highlander makes a voluntary surrender of his personal services, to his landlord, it is rather too great a refinement on generosity to accuse him of selfish motives, because he may expect a small spot of that land, of which the other has so much to spare, as a future settlement for himself if he lives to return home, or for his aged parents, should he be killed, or die, and they lose his support. Nor will this expectation be deemed unreasonable when the boon amounts to no more than a simple preference of occupancy, the tenant who had served his country paying as good rents as the land is worth:—in short, the preference being only on the condition of paying equal rent with a stranger. These stipulations, accompanied by a small bounty of twenty shillings, surely cannot be held to indicate a greater degree of selfishness than is reasonable in a people who are believed to be nowise indifferent to their own welfare, or deficient in parental or filial affection.

But in whatever light we may view these conditions, sanctioned merely by the word of the Chieftain, which was sufficient, without any written contract, they were effective; for, in a few days, and indeed as quickly as the oaths could be administered by several neighbouring gentlemen who attended as justices of the peace, 500 men were attested at Taymouth Castle, the rest quickly following. They were then removed to Perth, where they were joined by those raised there and in different parts of the country; and the whole were embodied, and formed into two battalions, called the 1st and 2d Breadalbane Fencible Highlanders.

Seeing with what facility these battalions were raised, it was a matter of subsequent regret that their terms of service were limited to Scotland. Five years afterwards (in 1798), when political affairs offered no prospect of a speedy termination of hostilities, and when the inefficiency of the Scotch Fencibles, from their confined sphere of service, was perceived, they were disbanded. In this reduction the first and second battalions of Breadalbane were included. The third battalion was retained, as the service had, from its origin in 1794, been extended to Ireland.

This battalion was accordingly removed to Ireland in 1795, and was stationed in different parts of that country till 1802, when it was reduced. In support of the opinion which I have, with perhaps too much presumption, offered on the superior value and virtue of an agricultural population, and in justification of the feelings with which I have viewed the proceedings of those who have depopulated so many Highland valleys, I state the following fact, which is well worthy the notice of the nobleman whose estates produced so great a proportion of these three corps, and equally deserving the attention of Government. The fact to which I allude is, that, in the five years during which those corps were embodied, only five men of those recruited in the Highlands were subjected to punishment. The state of society, on which those principles were formed, has a claim to some notice; and an increase of revenue may cost too much, if obtained by the destruction of those habits, and of that loyalty to the King, and attachment to landlords, which produced such good effects. As the men of Breadalbane have long possessed those virtues, and as they will no doubt receive full encouragement and protection from their immediate superior,—we may, in the next war, expect to see 1600 men of that district assembled for several years, without the commission of a disgraceful act. The unfortunate misunderstanding which occurred in Glasgow [See article on the Mutinies of the Highland Regiments.] was of a different cast, and would probably not have happened, had the character of the men been properly appreciated, and their dispositions studied; for that severity of punishment which is necessary, and without which it would be impossible to curb and preserve in due discipline certain descriptions of men, would totally destroy others, and produce the very crimes which it was intended to prevent. It will be seen in another article, that the attempt to enforce this power, which every commander of a corps ought to have, (though it should be used with great discretion, and not without extreme necessity), was attended with the worst effects; for the horror excited by this sort of punishment in the minds of men who viewed it, as all such punishments ought to be viewed, namely, as a misfortune and disgrace, occasioned in the Breadalbane Fencibles an open violation of all order and military discipline. The conduct of the men on this occasion, after the first burst of indignation and horror had subsided, and after they had become sensible of the breach of duty which they had committed, was manifested in the voluntary surrender of a few, who offered themselves for punishment as an atonement for their comrades. This was a conclusive proof of the principles on which they acted; and as contrition for a crime is often admitted as a proper satisfaction, more particularly when originating in honourable, though mistaken motives, military discipline would not probably have suffered had these men been pardoned. Officers who have violated the laws by killing an antagonist in a duel, are allowed the plea of honour as a sufficient defence; therefore, when soldiers act from a principle of honour, why should not the same excuse be extended to them? By thus admitting them within the pale of honour, would not an additional security for their future conduct be obtained? Might not the generous self-devotion and sacrifice of life of the soldier Macmartin, to save from censure his officer and friend, who had conceded so much to his solicitation, have been accepted as a sufficient expiation for the crimes of the whole, including Sutherland, the soldier who was shot?

But the circumstance was not publicly known at the time. Had it been so, it would undoubtedly have been duly

appreciated by those who had the power to direct, and whose duty it was to see that the discipline was applicable to the character of the troops; to foster and preserve honourable feelings and principles among them; and to reward, by proper notice and encouragement, every instance in which those desirable characteristic traits were exhibited. How well this soldier merited pardon for his offence is evident, from his voluntary sacrifice of life, merely to screen his officer from the reprimand to which his neglect of duty would subject him. Had the officer's life been at stake, the devotion of the soldier would have been conspicuous. When the responsibility was so trifling, the magnanimity of mind was perfect; and, had it been known, would certainly have saved him from being sent to the colonies as a *degraded man*.

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