

FIRE AND SWORD:

A STORY OF THE MASSACRE OF GLENCOE.

CHAPTER X.

THE SERGEANT'S MALICE FOILED.

When Malcolm arose from sleep on the following morning the incident of the previous evening was fresh in his mind, and the simple requirements of the Sergeant's challenge immediately occupied his attention.

An ordinary broadsword which hung above his bed was taken down and examined.

It was a weighty and somewhat coarse but trusty weapon, well suited for either attack or defence when wielded by a strong arm.

But it was chosen in preference to a lighter and finer blade because of its resisting powers, as Malcolm had early resolved to disarm his opponent, and then hand him back his life. He felt he had confidence in himself and his ability to bring the swaggering Sergeant to his knees without either taking or receiving a single cut. In reasoning thus he had not calculated on the deep craft of his opponent, which was to outwit him in a way he had not anticipated.

He had resolved, immediately he was aware of the nature of the Sergeant's note of challenge, not to inform Helen Cameron of its contents, well knowing that she would strive to confute his acceptance of it, and all that day he studiously avoided the locality of the farm at the Craigs.

The place of assignment named by the Sergeant was at the head of a wild, rugged, and secluded gully, situated midway in the Glen, and known as the "Devil's Staircase."

Full of a brave, if unwise, determination to meet and put to proof the Sergeant's reckless challenge, Malcolm sat early out, and arriving at the spot, found his opponent pacing up and down in momentary expectation of his arrival.

"What! unarmed?" questioned the Sergeant, failing to notice the short sword secreted under the young Highlander's plaid.

Throwing back a fold of his plaid Malcolm touched the hilt of the weapon significantly in answer to the question.

"Follow me," said the Sergeant, and, turning about, he strode northward for a considerable way along the cloven base of an impending parapet of hill.

In perfect silence they strode on, not a word was spoken by either party.

It was a fine evening early in September, and the gay gloaming was settling quickly down on the hills. The lordly eagle had sought his lonely eyrie on the rocky face of the mountain, and only a solitary hawk, or rather a golden plover, stirred the air with a passing wing.

Following up several paces in the rear Malcolm had thus ample time and opportunity to note the gait and exterior of the Sergeant.

That he was a man of very considerable bodily strength was evident at a glance. The deep chest and square shoulders which showed well under the gray military cloak he wore, foretold the possession of great physical strength and endurance, and the natural swagger of the walk betrayed the self-conscious pride and high passion of the man.

Malcolm weighed his chance against these, and believing in his own dexterity and acknowledged strength of arm, awaited the issue of the combat with assurance devoid of fear.

But he had not sufficiently estimated the malicious duplicity of his opponent, which was a more dangerous element to cope with than any else.

In the open generosity of his mind he had never for a moment suspected the Sergeant of possible treachery in thus leading him for an ostensible purpose whether he would. Honorable in his own actions towards men, he quite naturally judged other men equally just.

Furthermore, the possession of a trusty claymore, joined to his perfect knowledge of the lonely mountain passes amidst which they waited, banished from his mind every thought of fear.

They had now reached a lonely plateau, a considerable distance north of the Glen, when the Sergeant wheeled about, and faced his unflinching rival.

"This spot will do," he said; "business will not be here interrupted by the protecting embrace of a hysterical female. Let us prepare!" and he threw off his grey cloak preparatory to engaging in the deadly conflict.

The preceding allusion to Helen Cameron's interposition between them on the previous evening stung Malcolm into a passionate reprisal of words.

"I am ready, sir, and will bring an apology out of you before I quit this spot," and, casting off his plaid and his bonnet, he unsheathed his trusty sword, and stood prepared to meet an assault.

The ground on which they stood was marshy and wet, but the sides of the amphitheatre of hills which rose around them were glorious in the fading evening light with golden grass and the purple bloom of the heather.

On the one side, a low coppice ridge of ferns and bracken edged the rising

ground; on the other, a dark tarn or hill "loch" lay within a few yards of them. Not a sound was anywhere stirring, and the hills around, with the grey gloaming settling over them, looked as statuesque and as dumbly silent as the draped gods of ancient sculpture.

Once or twice Malcolm noticed, almost accidentally, the sullen eye of his opponent casting furtive glances towards the coppice ridge, and a slight stirring behind the bushes somewhere momentarily arrested his attention.

"Only a startled leveret," remarked the Sergeant assuringly, noticing Malcolm's observation of it. "One does feel unduly nervous on an occasion of this sort—rather," and as he spoke he unsheathed a long bright-polished blade.

"Ready?"

"An hour ago," retorted Malcolm, white with suppressed passion at the Sergeant's sneering words.

"Then let us measure swords. I rather think I have the advantage of you in length," and he extended his hand for Malcolm's weapon.

"I accept the difference, Sergeant. Pray guard yourself.

"Nay, but I insist on fair play, or no play at all. Let us fairly measure weapons."

Involuntary and without the suspicion of possible duplicity Malcolm handed his opponent his sword, who stepped back a yard or two, and suddenly and with great force of arm flung it sheer into the middle of the small loch to the right.

"Dastard!" exclaimed Malcolm, making a rush towards the Sergeant, who suddenly drew a pistol on him and checked his precipitancy.

Immediately, as by concerted signal, two men—one of whom was rudely masked—dashed out from their place of hiding behind the coppice and rushed towards him.

The action was so sudden and unexpected that Malcolm stood paralyzed for the moment, but was recalled to action by the unscrupulous Sergeant snatching his pistol at him, which fortunately missed fire.

In another moment the Sergeant's two accomplices were on him, and dashing aside the mask from the face of the first, he discovered him to be the Red Highlander!

"Wretch!" cried Malcolm, and snatching from him a small dirk, he buried it to the hilt in a fleshy part of the shoulder, then dashing him on the head, he escaped the second man, and fled the spot.

Crack! went the Sergeant's pistol after him, and he heard the ball whistle over his uncovered head.

A few deer-like bounds, and the athletic young Highlander was presently a considerable way in advance of his pursuers.

Unarmed as he was, it was madness, yet he wished, and almost resolved to do so. If he had only had possession of his good broadsword, or had even retained the small dirk which he had driven deep into the Red Highlander's flesh! But he was entirely defenceless, and had to prudently curb the daring wish.

Reaching the crest of a piece of raising ground, he looked back on his pursuers and found that they had given up the chase.

Screening himself from observation, he was able to take note of their procedure.

Returning to their fallen companion, he saw them lift him up, and attempt to staunch the bleeding wound with a handkerchief.

The wounded man, supported by his associates, walked slowly away, and the Sergeant, having picked up his military cloak turned off in another direction, and made a detour from the hill-path, as if anxious to reach Ballachulish by a short way, and alone.

Malcolm burned for revenge, but it was not the revenge a mean malice that animated him. One of a set of men who were in many respects little better than savages, Malcolm was a savage of the nobler order, who instinctively put Honor before Self as a necessity of their nature, and on equal grounds he now more than ever desired to show the unscrupulous Sergeant that he was both morally and physically his superior.

The possibility of that opportunity was now being played into his hands, and his breast swelled at the thought of it.

He would watch and follow his enemy along the hillside and within the shadow of approaching night, and single-handed test his courage and strength.

Full of this determination he emerged from the cover of the cliff, and hurriedly set off with the intention of intercepting the Sergeant's path. His swiftness of hand and knowledge of the locality enabled him to overtake and waylay him within a very short time.

As for the Sergeant, he hurried homewards with a defeated hostility of malice in his breast and a crowd of irritating regrets in his mind.

"God! if I had only clubbed him where he stood," he mentally ejaculated, his features working convulsively under the influence of the baleful passions which enthralled him. "Curse that blink pistol-flint which wouldn't light. But the King's 'Proclamation,' which its alternative of prescription, is out, and I

may yet have revenge. If the old fox M'Ian remains recalcitrant to the last, then I am safe from revenge. Ha! who's here?"

"Villain!" exclaimed Malcolm, springing from concealment. "We are equal now," and he snatched the Sergeant's sword from its sheath and brandished it over him as he spoke.

"Nay, I am defenceless," whined the other, extending his hands towards his accuser in a half-reproving, half-supplicating manner.

"Were justice done I should run this blade through your dastard body; and had I my own weapon I would force you to defend your miserable life. But go (thrusting him from him), and I shall retain this weapon until you or your cowardly accomplices fish my own out of the waters of loch. "Go!" and he directed the crestfallen Sergeant from the spot at the point of the sword.

"We will meet again," he scowled as he turned to leave the ground.

"And if we ever chance to meet on equal terms I shall ring contribution from you," retorted Malcolm.

The humbled braggart, shorn at once of his malice and boasting arrogance, stopped not to hear the sentence out, but hurried off as fast as he could.

His noble revenge completed, Malcolm then proceeded to retrace his steps towards the marshy plateau by the hill-side, where he recovered possession of his plaid and his bonnet. Recovery of his sword was, course, out of the question, so he merely stopped to shake the wet from his plaid, and throwing it across his shoulders set off for Auchencroft.

On his way home he diverged from the path that he might pass a brief moment with Helen Cameron at the "Craigs."

Night had descended on the hills, but the moon was shining like a silver crescent in the heavens, and the stars were multitudinous and full of bright and palpitating lustre.

Approaching the small, turf-happit shielin at the "Craigs," Malcolm first struck the Sergeant's sword half-way up to the hilt in a clump of moss heather, that he might show the beloved one no evidence of the quarrel, and putting aside from his manner all signs of recent excitement, he lifted the latch of the humble domicile, and was met in the lobby by Sandy and the dogs.

Helen was knitting by the fireside when he entered, and joyful, though inoffensive, was their homely but sincere greeting.

"Malcolm," at length said the old crofter, breaking a long silence. "have you heard the news?"

Malcolm looked ignorance, and waited an explanation.

"The Proclamation's out, Sign for the King, or die?" Malcolm maintained silence.

"A messenger from the Chief dropped the information at the Inn this evening, and I have just brought it along here."

"And how did M'Ian receive the papers?" questioned Malcolm.

"Threw them from him and swore at the King and his Court like a brave man and true Macdonald."

"There's trouble in store for the men of the Glen, I fear, Sandy. But if things come to the worst, for M'Ian stand or fall."

"Brave, true lad!" exclaimed the enthusiastic and zealous clanish old crofter. "I like your bold spirit. But it's the craft of the bad Earl I fear rather than the vengeance of the King's Government. It's his plaid and the wicked Masta's sword, 'em and both, hurry us out o' home and heritage."

"Never fear, Sandy, there's a strong clanship and old song if I'm true."

"Two hundred men marched on the Earl. With the sun had lit the hills. The foe were scattered fairly."

And a gleam of high pride irradiating his brow, Malcolm rose to go.

Another moment and the good leop had snatched a warm kiss from the lips of his betrothed, and was presently retracing his homeward path.

TO BE CONTINUED

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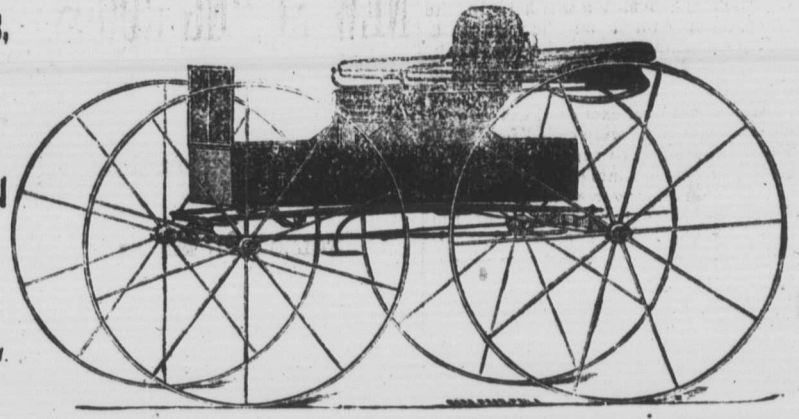
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The morning after the Princess came the colored maid, who was left there by Mr. Trimmingham, was told by one of the English maids that it was her duty to carry up at an early hour tea and biscuit to the Princess's bedroom. She was shy about doing so, and told the maids that she did not know what to say, and so on. However they duly instructed her to knock and say, "Your Royal Highness, your tea." So she proceeded up stairs on her errand, knocked at the door, and upon its being opened by the Princess the lesson was evidently forgotten, as she exclaimed: "My Royal Highness has brought your tea." The Princess, perhaps desirous of having more of this style of speech, called the girl into the room and had quite a talk while giving directions about certain things she wished her to attend to in the chamber. I can vouch for this story, but it is said that an old colored woman, whom I know well, met the Princess, stopped the carriage and begged her to shake hands, which she did, and old Sue exclaimed, as I know she can, "My, what a pretty creature you are; how is your dear ma? Why didn't you bring her to Bermuda with you?" I know the poor old soul said before the Princess came out that she had almost killed herself getting ready for her, for she had scrubbed the Ingleswood floors from one end of the house to the other.—[Bermuda letter to the Pittsburgh Dispatch.

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