

FIRE AND SWORD:

A STORY OF THE MASSACRE OF GLENCOE.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE ROADSIDE INN—THE GLENCOE MENDICANT.

Slowly, irregularly, and with much difficulty Glenlyon marched his detachment forth of the doomed and blasted valley, the smoke of whose ruined villages bleeted the overlying stretch of sky, and hung in black mournful patches around the cloyen peaks of the mighty hills.

The numerous batches of horse and cattle which the invaders drove before them very much retarded their progress north, and the heavy snowfall of the previous night had all but rendered the roads impassable at some parts. The bloody task to which Glenlyon had willingly committed himself, had been duly accomplished, and he was satisfied with himself and men. Only one man of his detachment had been found guilty of conniving at the escape of the pursued clansmen that morning, and without formality, or the briefest court-martial examination, he had been taken to the front and summarily shot.

"Thank God, captain," he had answered, when questioned as to the charge, "I am able to truly say that I was soldier enough in spirit and true courage to persistently fire my musket into the air, if need be, guiltless of murder."

These words doomed the poor but callant Buckley, for it was none other than he, and within five succeeding minutes he had paid the penalty of his humanity with his life. So they left him lying there unburied save by the covering shroud of the snows.

"If a Macdonald is seen on the way north shoot him down, men." These were the Captain's words to his troops as they issued from the defiles of the great Glen. "The Government does not want to be burdened with prisoners, and we have more spoil than we can well carry, he added: "but we can spare a bullet or two, when well invested, remember."

But few if any of the fugitives were described during the return march. The Glencoe men, estimating at its true value the ferocity of the red-coats, had dragged their wives and families to the inaccessible retreats of the mountains forming the eastern extremity of the Glen. Within the drear shelter and unfathomable solitudes of the "Devil's Staircase" they crouched for sight, and the wild ravines of Appin, south of the Glen, screened them from the keen blast of the wintry air and the still sharper edge of the cruel bayonets. The mass of the men of the Glen is a historical fact, but the tragedy of perishing families located within these bleak and wintry wilds may be conceived in imagination but can never be written and remains recorded in the ear of Heaven alone.

There was only one open return road for Glenlyon's soldiery, and that, as we have already indicated, was the slightly round-about road by the head of Loch Leven, a few miles east of Inverloch. And this route the long, straggling cavalcade of men and animals were forced to take plodding their way through roads clogged with drifted snows, the surrounding hills echoing all the way with the angry noise and howlings of the wearied cattle.

Reaching the head of Loch Leven, they crossed without difficulty the small river which flows into it, and proceeded thence in oblique north-westerly direction towards the military garrisons stationed at Inverloch and Fort-William.

Holding due north, the roads in the vicinity of Glen Nevis were found so heavy with snow that the larger portion of the troops were obliged to bivouac in the open fields, forming a cordon-line round the restive droves of cattle, resuming their journey to Fort-William on the following day, whither Glenlyon and his subalterns, with a military escort, had preceded them.

That same night, and for weeks afterwards there was feasting and revelry among the rude soldiery and officers of the garrisons of Inverloch and Fort-William.

A portion of the appropriated cattle was sold, and the money thereby obtained was duly divided among the officers and men who took part in the bloody work in the Glen.

The song of the revellers was loud, but their mirth rang a hollow note. The shrieks of their late victims mingled with the hurrahs of their joviality, and the visionary gleams of the burning villages and the blood stained snows of the ravaged valley flitted in nightmare trances through the madness of their mirth.

Five days after the return of the soldiery, Sergeant Barber, along with two of his military associates, was sitting in a back room of a rude hostelry adjacent to the Inverloch garrison. Inverloch Castle, it may be mentioned was situated a couple of miles north of Fort-William at the junction of the Dochy with Loch Leven, or Loch-Eil, as it is more commonly called. The massive structure

still stands. It does not date further back than the Scottish War of Independence, and is believed to have been erected by Edward I., surnamed Longshanks, or the Hammer of Scotland, to overawe that part of the country. The castle since then has had a chequered history, and has played a prominent part in the stirring events of feudal times. A former castle occupying the present site is said to have been the residence of royalty more than a thousand years ago.

The strong military garrison then recently erected at Fort-William was the headquarters of Colonel Hill, and the soldiers had been transferred from the Castle because of insufficient accommodation, only a few men being left to sentinel its dismantled walls. Of this small garrison party Sergeant Barber formed a part, and the district being now overawed and quiet the military discipline and exercise was in consequence relaxed, and the hours accorded to social revelries proportionately extended.

The Sergeant then, as we have just said, was sitting in the back room of a rude roadside hostelry adjoining the Castle.

It was yet the middle of February, and the days were still short, and the nights chill, and dard, and long.

The day in question had been a stormy one, and the night was fast settling over the brow of the mighty Ben Nevis in clouds of darkness and snow.

"It was yet the middle of February, and the days were still short, and the nights chill, and dard, and long.

"A wild night outside, lads," remarked the Sergeant, as the wind struck, now and again, the broad-tinged shutter which protected the small bole-window of the apartment. "The wind is off the Ben, and has a searching pin in it," saying which he thrust his hands for the twentieth time amongst the tongues of flames which arose from a well-fed fire of peat and dried turf.

"Nothing for it, Sergeant," replied one of the three bon-rivants, "but to keep pledging the King's Royal health in the best of liquor."

"God save King William!" echoed the third person in the room.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the loud-voiced Sergeant, "that's rather good. Let's drink to that capital toast," and with one accord the three King's musketeers filled up and promptly drained off their tumblers.

"All out, lads?" asked the Sergeant, referring to the conditions of their general table canteen; "liquor dry?"

"As a drained moss, Sergeant," replied one of the three.

"Bang! bang! bang!" went the hilt of the Sergeant's sword on the rude table before which they sat, and quick on the summons the old hostess came waddling in as fast as loose clothing would allow, and although well-nigh eighty years of age still fresh and stuffy on her feet, having breathed all her days the finest air of mountain and hillside, and drank nothing more than unadulterated Highland whisky made from the clearest of barn water, and run from the "smallest of home-made stills."

"What wuss the shentleman's wull?" she asked, in a broken lowland tongue.

The three soldiers each shoved over their empty pots, and resumed thereafter their conversation by the fire, the homely-looking old hostess departing with empty "stoups" in silence.

In a very short time she had refilled them, and returning to the room, placed them one by one on the table, with the remark that "better drink wassa to be had between Cape Wrath an' the Mull o' Cantyre, which was a lang cry, as they wad allow. Na, lads, no even in the great Duke's cellar at Inverary," she added as a clinching climax.

"True, true, Mattie," acceded the Sergeant. "But tell me, Mattie, what's come of your pretty granddaughter Kate to-night? I miss her bonnie face much."

"Deed, Sergeant," replied the plain old hostess, "she's sheltered fore the cauld blast the night in the fauld's o' her shepherd's plaidie, I'm jabsin. She snoddled herself weel and bonnie an hour ago, an' I'm no looking for her back till the ten hours; at any rate the plaid's a warm hap, lad."

"The devil she is," exclaimed the non-plussed Sergeant, "then I may at once begin a pilgrimage of Jerusalem, done up in tears, lamentations, sackcloth, and general ashes."

"The ashes!" echoed the old hostess, not perceiving the point of the Sergeant's not-over-brilliant joke, "fat's the matter with the ashes, Sergeant, looking in the direction of the gate as she spoke? Does the fire need a fresh peat? There's an airaun' o' turf in the bunker beside ye there. Tak' yer wull o' thes, Sergeant, tak' yer wull o' thes, for the blast whilk is blawin' at Ben Nevis and through the snaw is c'en sharp and snell," and thus delivered, the tough old hostess waddled forth of the room, to resume her spinning wheel by the kitchen fire.

"A stiff old forest oak, that, Sergeant," said one of the three when in a small door which divided the hostelry, had closed on the old hostess, "a relic of the Flood I would opine."

"Yes," laughed the Sergeant; "and Kate, her pretty granddaughter, as you know, is undoubtedly a lineal descendant of the beauteous Eve. Thought I had

favorably impressed her," he added; "but devil seize these Highland jades, a Southerner has no chance with them. They hold the kilt before the trows in all cases, although the wearer should sport red hair, a freckled countenance, and a pair of national cheek-bones as high as tup's horns—fact!" and the loud speaking Sergeant laughed out his rude mirth, and was chorussed therein by his two merry associates.

"You're about right there, Sergeant," put in one of the revellers; "Here's 't'ye."

"So be it," acceded the other, and the Sergeant's "very good health" was thereupon duly pledged and drank.

"About right I am," Barber repeated, "should think so. When we were garrisoned at Fort William last year I fixed on to a pretty lass at Fassfern, up by Lochell—as pretty a bird as a fowler ever netted—and I thought myself favored by her; but she fits to the house of an obstinate old mule of an uncle in Glencoe, and when I next met her there, lo and behold! the kilt is once more triumphant and I practically nowhere. Beshrew me! but I could have shot the scoundrel. I promptly challenged him, but the dog would not fight," and strong in the assurance of his lying words, the bragart Sergeant applied his lips to his tumbler, and drained off a fresh glass.

"You would have your revenge out during the affair in the Glen," put in one of the sitters.

"Partly, friend, only partly! The old man was shot, and the maid throwing her arms about him at the moment shared the bullets meant for him alone, but the dog whose blood I thirsted for escaped me—coward that he was! Heaven send us another meeting some day soon! Drink, lads, drink!"

At this moment the door of the room was pushed up, and the broad face and form of the homely old hostess filled the nether end of the lobby.

"A stranger, gentleman," said Mattie. May I bring her in?"

"What! my pretty Kate?" eagerly asked the Sergeant, half rising from his seat, not thinking that his Highland hostess had unconsciously confused the genders.

"Na, na, Sergeant, she's only a pair o'uld beggin' gaberlunzie man. Can ye spare her a coin?"

"Bring the rascal in," replied the Sergeant, and presently the hostess returned to the room, followed by the bent and wasted looking form of an old man, covered with a jacket of ragged sheepskin, and wearing a beard and head of snow.

He had a wallet slung by his side, and his right hand clutched a knotted crutch, on which, with every alternate step, he heavily leaned for support, as if rheumatism in his lower limbs.

"Alms, gentlemen, alms; for the love of heaven!" petitioned the gaberlunzie, extending a trembling hand. His voice had a pathetic quaver in it when he spoke and his eye alone showed the presumption of aught approaching to mental elasticity or spirit. For these important facial organs were black and piercing, and despite the pressure of years and sorrow, which very obviously bore down the poor homeless mendicant, still looked out from beneath his white bushy eyebrows with something of the fire and energy of youth. "Alms, gentlemen, alms, for I am starving! and heaven bless your kind hearts!" he continued repeating, standing uncovered in the presence of the Sergeant and his two associates.

The apartment wherein they sat was unlighted save by the glow of the fire-light, and the face of the mendicant was in deep and impenetrable shadow. But such was the glow of his face seemed old and feeble and worn.

"Sit down, old man, sit thee down," said the Sergeant. "If I mistake not you are a Macdonald, by the color of the tartan rag wrapped round your extremities, and meant to pass muster for a kill, I suppose? Eh? What sayest thou, sir?"

"Alas, yes," acceded the poor, shivering mendicant. "I wass a Glencoe man, but I wass too old to be shot; too old to be shot! Would to God I had died w' the rest of the prave, prave men o' the Glen!"

"What, fellow! would you dare to speak well of these rascally thieves? and in the presence, too, of the very men to whose indulgence you owe your miserable life? Have a care, old scrap gatherer! Pray, for your own good sake, have a care!"

"Alack-a-day," sighed the aged beggar "that I should live to wander forth over Scotland a fugitive and a beggar!"

"Drink off that; there," and the Sergeant extended towards the trembling mendicant a jug of strong pot-ale. "You seem cold, old man; and if I mistake not there is snow on your bonnet and shoulders, eh?"

"That iss so, sir; the wind is frae the Ben, an' there is snow in it," replied the mendicant, and putting the jug to his lips he drained off a portion of the energizing liquid and seemed refreshed thereby, and thankful; but still kept his face well shaded from the glowing fire-light.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Rash Judgment.

We are daily tempted and solicited into rash and self-fettering judgments. The mental interests of society are too few to suffer personal character and faculty to remain unconvanched. Conversation runs on persons rather than on things, and we are directly asked for an opinion. Great evils come out of such questions. In the first place you may have no opinion, nor be entitled to have one. Your opinions of me slowly and silently grow up in you; and scarcely has this process begun when you are suddenly asked to define them. Yet it is probable, such are our habits, that you will not have the simplicity to resist the snare. You will be hurried into precipitate judgment—mere first impressions will be hardened into permanent conclusion—you will presumptuously speak of the deep inner nature or unknown capacity in a man from slight and insufficient hints—you will commit yourself to some defined view of him, and never again have the free privilege of open, candid, receptive intercourse unbiassed by your own rash judgment. There is a rudeness and irreverence of nature in thus assuming to judge any man. It is a barren attitude. When we have once judged a man we have as it were closed his access to us at all unexpected avenues. We are pledged to one view of him—he is no more an infinite possibility to us—we have measured him, and never more can look upon, with the freshness and reverence of an undefined hope.

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