

FIRE AND SWORD:

A STORY OF THE MASSACRE OF GLENCOE.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RED HAND OF SLAUGHTER LIFTED.

While the two brothers are hastening towards Auchincloss we shall anticipate their arrival there by a few minutes.

In the big kitchen of the house of Allister Macdonald, the tacksman of the Glen, with whom Sergeant Barber was quartered, nearly half-a-score of Macdonalds were gathered, encircling a glowing fire which burned freely within a rudely formed fireplace right on the centre of the earthen floor.

The tacksman had become alarmed the previous day on overhearing an order delivered by Barber to one of his men, that the whole party should that night "sleep on their arms," so as to be in readiness for instant action. Against whom that instant action was to be directed was the point which at once addressed itself to the tacksman's mind, and communicating his suspicions to Malcolm Macdonald and others around him, they had that night resolved to "sit up" and take note of Sergeant Barber's suspected proceedings.

In reply to the tacksman's questioning the Sergeant had evasively answered in the same strain. His superior Glenlyon had done, that he was under orders to march against some turbulent Glenyarr men, that he would march his party down the Glen to Glenlyon's headquarters that night and not return to the village for a day or two. And, so far true to his deplorable speech, he did indeed repair with his party to Inverriggen. But the departure was merely a "blind" to cover his real intention, which was to covertly return and take the sleeping village by surprise.

The tacksman and his friends, among whom was Malcolm, son of the innkeeper, having thus seen the hated and suspected redcoats turn their back on them for the night, were just in the act of separating till next morning, that each might seek the solace of sleep, when the doorway was filled by the presence of John and Allister Macdonald, the respected sons of their beloved Chief.

Hurried greetings having been exchanged, the brothers excitedly related to the astonished villagers their suspicions of Glenlyon's treacherous and bloody designs on the lives of the Clanmen, and of his dying admonition to them to warn the Macdonald tenantry that Glenlyon meant fatal mischief to them before daybreak.

The information staggered the party. Bad as their opinion of Glenlyon and his subalterns were, they had never dreamed of an actual massacre by the soldiery in cold blood. Their suspicions of the armed Whigs were vague, and had never taken any definite form. They had merely viewed them all along as "opposites," whom the misfortune of circumstances had thrown into their midst to be tolerated and watched. But now danger, red-headed, threatened them at their very door-steps, and they started up as from a dream, one and all.

Malcolm's first and tenderest thought was of Helen Cameron at the Craigs; but believing with the rest that the sergeant had led his party down the Glen to join Glenlyon, he conceived that no danger lay immediately there, and thought next and most anxiously of his well-beloved Chief.

"If the ruffian soldiery meant the butchery of M'lan," he said, "we must all straightway repair, and at once, to Invercoe. M'lan's household must be defended, and that to our heart's last drop of blood."

To this the half-score of Macdonalds gathered under the tacksman's roof were ready to agree; and it was arranged, after brief discussion, that each man should meantime return to his own humble home, holding himself in readiness to answer the smallest alarm at a moment's notice.

It was now between two and three o'clock of the morning, and the two brothers, having thus duly apprised the Auchincloss folks, saw it their duty to return at once to Invercoe and apprise the Chief of what was occurring among the soldiery stationed in the Glen. Malcolm, on parting with them for the night expressed his determination of being with them again before daybreak, and in this understanding the friends went each their several ways.

Resuming their journey back through the Glen, the two Macdonalds looked neither to the left nor to the right, but pushed straight ahead in the face of a storm of snow and wind which was every hour becoming more fierce and dangerous.

The snows drifted down on them, chilling their faces, blinding their eyesight, and clogging their steps. But they were hardy sons of the mountain, possessed of splendid blood, and with nerves unwinded and unwearied by excess, they recked but little for the blast that blew, or the snows that ceaselessly fell.

The six inches of snow which already

glad the road rendered locomotion tardy, if not actually difficult, by heavily clogging their feet and half blinding their eyesight; but by keeping the main path they were sure at least of comparatively level footing.

They had not proceeded more than half way home, however, when the voices of approaching men were distinctly heard.

The suspicious condition of mind into which the events of the past few hours had thrown them at once suggested hiding as the proper course to follow, and, quick on the thought, the two Macdonalds unannounced themselves within the cover of some brushwood and there awaited results.

The voices, which were every moment becoming clearer, were that of the redcoats, they could presently discern; and momentarily their muffled forms, wrapped in grey military greatcoats, were distinctly outlined against a background of falling snow.

Sergeant Barber, they were able to note, marched at the head of his men. The party, they also noticed, had been very much strengthened. Instead of some twelve men, the returning Sergeant now marched before a full score.

They were laughing and talking aloud as they passed, and indulged in rude coarse jests, as if fired with strong liquor.

"A sheep apiece, men, anyhow," they heard the Sergeant remark, "but the Captain stipulates that the work be quickly and effectually done. The order of the hour must be no friendship, and no escapes, but military law all through; and the cry must be—God save the King!"

A moment after, the picket had passed out of sight and hearing in the obscuring curtains of the snow.

That the Sergeant's descent on Glenlyon's quarters was merely undertaken as a "blind" to put the sense of alarm away from the minds of the Auchincloss Clanmen, was the conviction of the two Macdonalds as they emerged from the cover of the coppice and resumed their descent of the Glen.

The Sergeant, however, had economized his opportunity to have his guard doubled, fearing, very probably, the courage and fighting powers of Malcolm, the Inn-keeper's son, whose personal valor and spirit he only too well knew, and of young Ronald Macdonald, the impetuous and the daring brother of Allister, the tacksman, with other Macdonalds, who shared in the physical strength and personal progress which were the inalienable heritage of the Clan. Thus assured of an easy triumph over the unarmed villagers, and a bloody and most exacting revenge on his rival lover, the braggart Sergeant was hurrying back through the storm of wind and snow which swept the gorge of the Glen, with Glenlyon's latest instructions as to the hour and method of attack secretly treasured up in the malice of his callous heart.

The road was heavy with snow, as we have said, and the progress of the two Macdonalds was much impeded by the heavy drifts which were fast settling across every descending hollow of their path.

Within half an hour, however, they had reached within hail of Glenlyon's quarters, and from their familiarity with the locality were again able to approach the camp unobserved.

Great was their alarm to find the camp all but deserted.

Approaching a sentry, they were called to account by the redcoat leveling his musket at them and calling a "halt."

The password they had given was rejected, a new sign and countersign having been recorded to the soldiery within the past two hours.

Advancing towards the Macdonalds, the sentinel—who was none other than Buckley, who had openly expiated to his comrades in arms his dislike of butchering the men of the Glen in their beds—at once dropped his arms on perceiving the Chief's sons approach, and hurriedly and secretly urged them to fly the spot, taking the hill passes, if they meant to escape with their lives.

"Glenlyon has just set out for Inverriggen," continued Buckley, "and Lieutenant Lindsay has preceded him by marching on the Chief's quarters half an hour ago. I thank God I am left sentry here. I could not and would not take part in such work. Fly, lads, if you value your lives! There is not a moment to lose!"

Struck dumb with horror and amazement for the moment, the Macdonalds could only write the honest hand of the humane redcoat, and thrilling with emotion, hurry blindly forward through the mist of snows, leaving Buckley to resume his out-post watch by the road.

Allister, the younger brother, had a double stake at risk in the issue of the impending massacre. His young wife—who, as has already been stated, was niece to Glenlyon—was located at Inverriggen, and his aged sire, who claimed his fealty and heart worship, was living spared. All under "seventy" years of age were foredoomed in accordance with the instructions served, and the tender innocence of childhood was stretched dead side by side with the bent and trembling form of age.

and secure from insult his young wife, but on the suggestion of his brother John, he decided on first directing his steps to Invercoe, in the hope and belief that Glenlyon, as the elder Macdonald suggested, would surely and most naturally protect from hurt or insult his own niece.

Strong in the hope of this, Allister agreed to accompany his brother John to Invercoe, but ere they had well set out their hearts were smitten with the deadliest apprehension on hearing the reports of musketry echoing with deadly precision from that direction.

"God in heaven!" exclaimed the elder Macdonald, "I would give ten years of my life to be at this moment by the side of M'lan."

"Fear not, brother," replied Allister, "M'lan's arm has ever proved mighty in battle. He is surrounded with true men and brave, who will be answerable for his life with their own."

"Ay, ay, Allister, but what is steel to powder? or valor to cunning? Bread-bane's minions have scented blood, and the rancor of personal feeling will add, if possible, a keener sharpness to their malicious fangs. God! if the echo of the hills do not deceive me, I hear the noise of musketry all along the pathway of the Glen."

The younger of the Macdonalds answered not a word, but the intense working of the features, blanched white with excitement, and the increased speed of his reckless plungings through the drifted snows, attested the depth and intensity of his emotions.

The sound of firing which was now distinctly heard throughout the length of the Glen was only too truly prophetic of the harvest which duplicity and revenge was about to reap.

Lieutenant Lindsay, conformable to the orders of his military superior, Glenlyon, had sallied out from the headquarters of the detachment at Inverriggen, and marched direct to the Chief's house at Invercoe between three and four o'clock in the morning; and while the snows of winter and the darkness of night yet filled the skies the sleeping village was invested with a ring of leveled bayonets, and the alarmed Clanmen, rushing unarmed from their beds, were shot down or slaughtered in cold blood ere they had the opportunity of either escape or flight.

The house of the chief was the starting-point of the work of slaughter. M'lan once struck down, Glenlyon calculated on confusion and terror paving the whole village. But the Chief, Lieutenant Lindsay well knew, was a man of great personal strength and courage, and he feared an open encounter with him. He stood over six feet in height, and, although fully sixty years of age, the sweep of his gigantic claymore was reported to be as destructive in fight as a falling avalanche.

With the duplicity of a base cowardice, therefore, Lindsay, on arriving within hail of the Chief's residence, posted half a score of picked men at the door, and sent up a friendly message to him desiring a brief interview on a matter affecting the welfare of the Clan; and the unsuspecting Chief, having ordered the Lieutenant to be admitted and refreshments provided for him, got then out of bed, and while preparing to dress, the soldiery rushed into his bedroom and shot him ruthlessly down.

"My claymore, friends! my claymore!" were the last and only words he uttered as he fell forward mortally wounded by the assassin bullets of the redcoats.

Beside herself with excitement and horror, the wife of M'lan sprang from bed and threw herself on the prostrate and bleeding body of her cherished husband, pleading in her anguish the just vengeance of heaven on the heads of his ruthless murderer. But the savage soldiery had no tender ears for her wailings. Full of malice and private hate, Argyll's militia seized the helpless lady, and ferociously tore the jewelled rings from off her fingers with their gleaming teeth, and otherwise treated her so cruelly that she died the following day.

Two of the male house domestics who had been aroused from sleep by the firing of the muskets came rushing up to M'lan's bedroom to learn the cause, and being unannounced, were cut down as they entered. A third person, Duncan Don, the Braemar letter-carrier, who happened to be lodged with the Chief that night, had barely time to leap from bed, and so escape the murderous soldiery by getting out of the house through a back window.

At Inverriggen the savage Glenlyon, armed with the military "orders" of his superiors, and impelled thereto by the keen zest of rival clanship, was pursuing at the same moment of time a similar brutal and unlooked-for butchery. Here the redcoats seized half a score of Macdonalds, whom they had dragged from their beds, and after having securely bound them hand and foot, they deliberately shot them singly, and in cruel detail.

Neither were the gray hairs of age spared. All under "seventy" years of age were foredoomed in accordance with the instructions served, and the tender innocence of childhood was stretched dead side by side with the bent and trembling form of age.

"Save the life of that brave youth!" cried a voice, on witnessing a powerful and courageous young clansman successfully resisting the murderous attack of three redcoats, who were trying to club him to death with the butt-ends of their emptied muskets, "save the brave youth's life," but Captain Drummond, who was on the spot, drew a loaded pistol from his belt, and savagely shot the brave lad through the head; then turning about, he the next moment ferociously ran his sword through the body of a boy who was clinging for protection to the knees of Glenlyon.

Meantime John and Allister the chief's sons were hurrying frantically towards the scene of slaughter just enacted under their father's roof. There was now no longer ground for hope. The work of slaughter was on all sides a bloody and remorseless tragedy.

Already they were within hearing of the shouting soldiery and within sight of their blazing torches which were firing the huts of the Clanmen when the form of a man was seen swiftly approaching them through the thick haze of falling snow.

The figure was running in their direction, and the brothers unshathed their claymores, and stood on their defence.

Another moment and their old and trusty friend Duncan Don, the Braemar letter-carrier, was by their side.

"Run, lads, run! for God's sake, turn and fly! Your father and mother are murdered under their own roof! Come!" and the Braemar post-runner, shocked with horror at what he had just witnessed, attempted to drag back the two Macdonalds who were making to rush forward to the bloody scene.

"Nay, Duncan, it were unmanly to fly the spot, finding safety in cowardice," urged the brothers.

"But what would ye?" he asked. "The red work is already done! Hark, the soldiers are coming! Fly with me, or we shall all be shot without mercy or preparation for death! Come, lads, ye may yet live to avenge this awful hour! And God grant that it may yet be so!"

It was as true as his words. The soldiers were everywhere scouring the village and its outskirts for fresh victims. Already their forms were seen approaching. To stay there was to invite certain death. So, turning about, the three fugitives sought safety in present flight. (TO BE CONTINUED.)

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