

CHAPTER III

THE WHETTING OF SWORDS

MEANTIME the Atholemen were busy and excited. Through the stifling August night the camp hummed with preparations for the fight, with conferences, hurrying to and fro, muffled commands, and all the suppressed commotion of impending battle. The Castle lay a black, silent mass, without torch, without sound or sign of life. Colkitto and his men might be sleeping the deep sleep of perfect peace and security.

"He keeps dark and quiet," said an Atholeman, looking in vain for any movement in the Castle.

"Ay," replied another. "But take care of the wolf that crouches in the dark."

The Athole camp was pitched a furlong or two north of the Castle, and for an hour before daybreak the men rested on their arms, all except Struan, for whom there was neither ease nor sleep. Stealing forth alone he ascended a knoll whence there was a wide view southward through the valleys of Tummel and Tay, by Dunkeld and Perth, the bonnie St. Johnstone of song. Would to God, he prayed