

The Rival Clansmen

A Scottish Vendetta.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DARK DEED—A WELL-KNOWN VOICE—A LONG JOURNEY—THE WITCH OF BEN-LAIR IN DANGER.

"The old hag deserves what she'll get to-night."

It was Rory who spoke.

"And more; death's too good for her," replied his companion, who then continued—"She has ruined both the Caterans and the McKenzies by her prying and by her chattering. Instead of Droghdairech being able to live at home, among society, and tell us whenever there was anything to be lifted and assist us to do it, he has now to fly like a hunted outlaw before the soldiers and the M'Leods; and it's been all done by this Witch of Ben-Lair. Curse her, she should have been dragged through the loch before to-night."

"There's been nothing worth doing for a while," returned Rory, who probably had his eye on gain; "but I think the Chief will pay well for this work if we can do it well."

"Droghdairech always pays well," replied the other; "and as for this work being done well, I'll answer for that. She is sure to be in her hut on a night like this, and if we don't cut the old witch up and roast her, it will because the devil is on her side."

"But are you quite sure, Donald, that she may not work a spell upon us, or call in the assistance of evil spirits? I don't know, but I almost think she has cast glamour over the Caterans of Ben-Chruil already; for ever since the night Cameron met her when taking young M'Leod to the old ruin on the Holy Isle everything has gone against us. The M'Leods have twice defeated us—once in the corrie, and last night at Skerry-vach."

"This was intelligence to Hector which caused him to thrill with joy. He had feared as to the result of the struggle when he left his clansmen engaged with the Caterans; now he learned from their own mouths, though they knew it not, that the Caterans had suffered defeat. But he was about to get information which would move him more. Hush!"

"True, Rory; but do not forget how many of the M'Leods the Caterans have caused to sleep at the bottom of Loch Maree since that night. That was the end of the struggle in the corrie of Ben-Stegach; that night crushed them; that broke old Malcolm's heart, and sent him to his last account. A rare stroke of the Caterans that, Rory, and I delight in it all the more that the thought was mine. It was my thought to scuttle the boats; and when young McKenzie came down the glen and learned what I had caused to be done, he hugged me to his breast with joy, and put shining gold into my hand."

It was with no ordinary effort that Hector succeeded in restraining himself from rushing forward and cutting down the villain. Here was the demon in human shape, whose mind, filled with thoughts hellish as the archfiend's, had suggested the infernal scheme which had caused such an overwhelming disaster to the M'Leods, and had truly—too truly, alas!—broken old Malcolm's heart, and sent him to his grave. If, from the first moment our hero had gathered from their conversation that they intended the murder of the Witch of Ben-Lair, these ruffians, and especially the one who had just spoken, had any chance of escaping the sword of the man who followed them, that chance was gone now. No man could be the instigator of a calamity like that which had befallen the M'Leods, and boasting of it in Hector's presence be allowed to live. Now he was glad he had followed the ruffians—glad because he would be able, God helping him, to save the Witch of Ben-Lair from their lawless attack, and because he would be able to execute summary vengeance upon the villain who had avowedly wrought him so much misery, who had rendered so many children fatherless and so many wives widows.

They were now far up the gorge—a wild awesome spot—but even here the young Chief would have revealed his presence, and would dashed upon them, had it not been that he was anxious to find the Witch of Ben-Lair, and knew that by them he would be led to where she was to be found.

"The old hag is at home—look, Rory," suddenly said one of the men.

M'Leod also looked forward, and saw about a hundred yards in front of the two ruffians a dark object like a hut, through one of the windows of which emanated a feeble gleam of light. The gorge seemed to open out here into a flat level space, at one side of which stood the hut, while the mountain rose up full three thousand feet behind, its face smooth and perpendicular as a bare wall. A mountain torrent dashed down the face of the rocks and through the gorge with a loud rushing noise.

"Is that the face?" inquired the other in a slightly tremulous voice.

"It is; you're not afraid of the work, are you?"

Whether Rory actually felt afraid is an open question, but he replied that he was not.

"Come," he continued—"come, Donald, let us break in upon her at once, and be done with it."

"Ready!" was the response, and they crossed the clearing and advanced towards the hut.

Hector, cautiously followed, but did not emerge into the open space until they had reached the door. They did not pause to knock, but a loud crash announced that the door had been burst open, and the figures of the ruffians disappeared within.

Then did M'Leod bound after them, but, quick as he was, he was none too soon; for, ere he could reach the door, a woman's wild despairing cry for help was raised, and the trampling of feet and deep oaths and curses had told that the villains had begun their murderous work.

The Praying Women.

The Montreal Witness says: What is more remarkable than the spread of the women's temperance movement in the United States, is the sincere respect which has been manifested towards it by the secular press, and by the reporters who have spread the news of it over the continent. Of all the people in the world, those with least reverence are American reporters, and yet no spirit of raillery has prevailed in their dealing with this singular crusade. Those writers whose contempt is manifest in every line when discussing or describing Women's Rights Conventions, seem solemnly to bow to the earnestness of this uprising. Those who would have despised a revival of religion, have few words of scorn for a course of action which, tho' it cannot but have objectionable features, and sets itself at times above law, yet finds its warrant in the conscience of the nation. Women who demand the suffrage are patronizingly stroked down or up, according to the taste of the writer;



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but women who demand the stoppage of a traffic which is the acknowledged shame of our race, receive little but encouragement from all that calls itself respectable. While we join with the many who side with the praying women in heartily wishing them God speed, we may express gratitude to Him who has already given them such startling success, and hope that it may be permanent. There is certainly the need for such a crusade here, whether we have the women for it or not. We are not prepared to urge our Christian ladies to copy, in all particulars, what has been done in Ohio, but the remarkable success of those ladies suggests the serious enquiry whether ours have not some mission in the premises.

Leather, chemically considered, is oxide of beef.

What is the difference between a farmer and a bottle of whiskey? One husband the corn, and the other corns the husbands.

To Business Men.

The circulation of the Mercury and Advertiser being nearly five times that of any other paper published in the County of Wellington, business men and others would study their own interests by advertising in the Mercury and Advertiser.

FACTS FOR ADVERTISERS.

In this, as in everything else, the best papers will command the best prices. It is cheaper to pay 5s. for inserting your advertisements in a journal having a circulation of 5,000, than to pay 2s. for one that has only a circulation of 1,000. Of this you may be sure, that any journal that inserts advertisements too cheap, is, in fact, an almost worthless medium. If it were really a good one, it would have no need to lower its prices, for its sheet would be better filled without the sacrifice. You may lay it down as a rule that every journal knows its value, and that if it adopts low prices it is because it is conscious that it has a low circulation in number or respectability.—Wilson's Handbook for Advertisers.

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Of a superior class, with variable cut off. Also cheap Portable and Stationary Engines, the smaller sizes of which are designed for Printing Offices, and others requiring small power.

Jobbing will Receive Careful Attention.

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NOTE THE FOLLOWING LINES

Good Factory Cotton for 9 cents ; Good Bleached Cotton for 8 cents ; Horrockses Cotton for 10 cents. See them

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Dress Goods in Endless Variety at any price.

MANTLES AND SHAWLS WILL BE SOLD TO SUIT EVERY ONE.

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Guelph Feb. 19, 1874 d&w