

# "The Fiery Cross."



"SPEED, MALISE, SPEED."

As some of our readers may be at a loss to know, and therefore may not appreciate the meaning of the title chosen by us for the magazine, an explanatory note will not be out of place. It was the means by which the Scottish Clansmen were summoned to arms of old, and similar in purpose to the beacon lights on the hilltops by which, alike Scots and English used to herald the news of war—the sign to rally. Prof. Ayton, in his *Edinburgh after Flodden*, says:

"All last night we watched the beacons  
Blazing on the hills afar,  
Each one bearing, as it kindled,  
Message of the opened war."

Sir Walter Scott, in his *Lady of the Lake*, gives a fuller description of the "Fiery Cross." His delightfully descriptive pen portrays to a nicety the procedure by which Roderick Dubh rallied C'an Alpine's warriors, before they appeared, as it risen from their "mother earth," to the brave Fitzjames's astonished gaze. The cross, made from yew twigs, was dipped in the life-blood of a goat, by Brian, C'an Alpine's mysterious seer and priest; he blessed it, and imprecated curses on every son of Alpine who failed to respond to its summons, and then handed it to his chief, who passed it on to his henchman, Malise.

"Speed, Malise, speed!" he said, and gave  
The crosslet to his henchman brave.  
'The muster place be Lanrick mead—  
Instant the time, Speed, Malise, Speed.'

Sir Walter describes Malise's headlong

career until, arriving at Duncraggan, he places the Cross in other hands. Duncan, the old Lord of Duncraggan, was

"Gone on the mountain,  
And lost to the forest."

Malise found the mourners gathered to pay their last respects to his memory; the funeral cortège was about to proceed when Roderick Dubh's messenger arrived with the Cross of Fire.

"All stand aghast; unheeding all,  
The henchman bursts into the hall;  
Before the dead man's bier he stood;  
Held forth the Cross besmeared with blood:  
'The muster place is Lanrick mead:  
Speed forth the Signal! Clansman, Speed!'"

"Angus, the heir of Duncan's line,  
Sprung forth and seized the fatal sign.  
In haste the stripling to his side  
His father's dirk and broadsword tied;  
But when he saw his mother's eye  
Watch him in speechless agony,  
Back to her opened arms he flew,  
Pressed on her lips a fond adieu—  
'Alas,' she sobbed, 'and yet begone,  
And speed the forth like Duncan's son?  
'One look he cast upon the bier,  
Dashed from his eye the gathering tear,  
Breathed deep to clear his labouring breast,  
And tossed aloft his bonnet crest,  
Then, like the high-bred colt, when, freed,  
First he essays his fire and speed,  
He vanished and o'er moor and moss  
Sped forward with the Fiery Cross."

And so  
"Benledi saw the Cross of Fire,  
It glanced like lightening up Strath-Ire."

Until, on reaching Armandave, the Fiery Cross is again passed on to another messenger of war.

It was the wedding morn of young Norman, of Armandave; but, as in the case of Angus of Duncraggan, who had to leave his father's bier in order to follow his chief's commands, so Norman had to tear himself away from his newly wedded bride for a like purpose.

"The muster place is Lanrick mead,  
Speed forth the Signal! Norman Speed!"

Past Lock Lubnag, Lock Voil, and Loch Doine; by Balvaig and Strath Gartney, onward he sped,

"Till rose in arms each man might claim  
A portion in Clan Alpine's name."

Ours is not a call to arms. The days when such calls were necessary are happily no more. But just as the early missionaries utilised many heathenish rites by substituting for them Christian festivals on corresponding dates, so we can recall events, and utilise emblems commemorative of the stirring days of yore, for purposes appropriate to, although not necessarily in strict accordance with their original uses.