

FIRE AND SWORD: A STORY OF THE MASSACRE OF GLENCOE.

CHAPTER XIV. DISGUISED VILLAINY.

Excitement and commotion stirred the little circle of malcontents immediately the swaggering Captain had drawn his sword against the young Glencoe Jacobite, and bloodshed would inevitably have supervened but for the plausibly worded interference of the host.

"What, gentlemen!" he expostulated throwing himself between the rival swordsmen; "would you shed blood?—and under this roof! I forbid it; another time and place. This is neither a barrack courtyard nor an open hillside. This is an hospitable board; and, listen, the clock chimes the knell of the old year and the birth of the new. Put past your swords, gentlemen, and let amity die with the dead year."

"Well spoken, friend Barcaldine," responded M'Ian, signalling Malcolm to peace. The new year gentlemen health and prosperity!—and inviting the company to respond the sentiments, he filled and drained a special beaker.

Obedient to the toast, swords were dropped and friendship ostensibly restored, the bragard Captain, however, muttering a threat of "having it out" with the "raw Jacobite" at some other time and place, an idle threat which Malcolm, while remembering, had the sense to overlook for the hour.

"You said that the hour has struck—that the year was out!" said M'Ian, addressing the question to Barcaldine.

"It is even so," he answered; "the hour has already struck, and, list, a second clock in the house attests the truth of it."

They all listened as if with one accord, and distinctly they heard the bell of the large clock in the hall solemnly voicing forth the hour.

M'Ian stood transfixed, mute as a marble statue, while the knell of the old year was being rung, and ere the echo of the last stroke of the bell had died away a blast of wind, loaded with sighing echoes, struck the windows of the room wherein they sat, and waiving disconcertedly round the house for a brief space, fled shrieking away, up among the neighboring hills like a frightened ghost.

There was a peculiar hollow ring in the warning blast, and the company superstitious to a fault, like all Highlanders of the period, looked inquiringly at each other, as if touched with a sudden awe.

"A warning to some one in this house remarked Barcaldine, looking round the group.

"Well, 'lamme!" exclaimed the loud-tongued Captain, "if it's me! come ghost or goblin, I'm ready!" and he swaggered defiantly about the room.

"It's to me the warning wind speaks," muttered the old Glencoe Chief, in a wapt and seemingly half-unconscious state, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling. "The last moment of my term of mercy with the Government has now expired, the 'oath' remains unaccepted, and the breasts of my beloved people are lying naked to the swords of the soldiery!" and, overcome with emotion, he sank into the chair, and drawing his hand across his eyes, as if to clear away a mist from his sight, he bent his head forward and audibly sighed.

In a moment John and Malcolm were by his side, and supported him with strong but kindly arms.

"Now I am right, lads; it's over," he said. "I had a vision, and I saw for a moment a gleam of fire and sword in the 'hen, with a wall of fire rising from and then dying away again among the hills."

Barcaldine threw a suggestive glance in the direction of Captain Drummond, who, however, failed to perceive it, but kept swaggering about the room, with drawn sword, exclaiming—"Ghost or goblin, I'm at your blessed service, to fight or socially fraternize! Where are ye, wandering and melancholy night-winds? Unfold your misty forms, spirits of health, or goblins damn'd! This blade, which will match a Ferrara, will rake your yet unexplored light-as-air internals to some purpose, I see warrant, and, acting on the impulse, the Captain, on whom the liquor was obviously working, made several highly melodramatic thrusts, cuts, and flourishes with his naked sword-blade at nothing.

"Fire and Sword!" These were the words ominously uttered by M'Ian, and these were the fatal words of the "Proclamation."

John and Malcolm Macdonald both started. The superstition of a foreboding and forewarning fear clung to them and chilled their blood. The supernatural awes of the blood of men. It is inexplicable perhaps, but nevertheless quite true, that men who will face death at the cannon's mouth and lanced will shrink with horror from a contemplation of the unseen and supernatural. The superstitious dread of impending trouble which had taken strong possession of their Chief's mind was also sympathetically shared in large part by these

"Would to God that I had trusted less to lying tongues, and bethought me earlier of my duty to my poor people!" exclaimed the old Chief, in a voice of deep emotion, as if seized with a sudden feeling of remorse. If Inverary was within twenty miles of here I would not rest my head on a pillow till I had seen Sir Colin, and settled my peace and conscience by a signed and witnessed acceptance of the 'Oath.'" But fate seems armed against me. I have fifty miles of a barrier to traverse, and the old Chief struck his forehead despairingly in deep mental agitation and distress.

"No need of despairing sorrow, my dear Glencoe," said plausible Barcaldine "the Earl himself should be here to-morrow, and I am sure will indorse your allegiance to the Government."

"God Save the King!" put in the Captain, bringing down his hand on the table with a loud bang, and tossing off a fresh beaker.

Barcaldine inclined his head in honor of the toast, but the Glencoe party were fixedly silent.

"Swords and pistols! I'm the only King's man in the company," shouted the loquacious Captain. Show me to my room my dear Barcaldine, for I'll be shot if I consent to stay longer in a company of disloyal, heather-smelling Jacobites, and acting on his word he staggered towards the door, and passed out of the room.

Stepping to the door after him Barcaldine leant over the banister stair and cried out, "Gibbie! Gibbie Glenbucket! show the Captain to his room."

"This way, Captain," said a voice in Lowland accent; "jist pick an' wile your steps wi' cannie care, for this is the touchest lobby a decent body was ever ca'd upon to walk owre. There na, Captain, there na; jist pick your steps cannie an' follow me." Gibbie was an old servant of Barcaldine's and had a large knowledge of human nature. Only a man of humor and genius could have thus adroitly, and without risk of detection, put the blame of the Captain's addiction to the bottle on the lobby fiend.

"Simply the d—est knock-you-down-and-pick-you-up-again domestic thoroughfare I ever walked in Barcaldine's," rejoined the Captain. "And I've more than once told him so."

"An' I've heard twa-three say so forby yersel', Captain," naively put in the long-headed Gibbie. "But put your feet down nice an' canny, an' follow me."

"Lochaber axes!" roared the Captain, as he swung a leeward lurch, and was on the point of falling entirely out of Glenbucket's reckoning by plunging involuntarily into a side passage—"I'm a going down a blessed hill now, I am! Glenbucket, where are ye?"

"Here I am, Captain," promptly answered the domestic, "here whaur I should be, assisting a gentleman to find his way through the crukitnest of crukit passages. Od' & I'm clean bate mysel', Captain, that's served here for near-han a score o' years—clean bate tag fin' my way and steady my steps. Obblege me wi' a bit haud o' your arm, Captain; it'll help to steady my feet. There na, that's grand. 'Od'! I feel like a new man. Come awa', Captain, come awa'."

"Stop, stop, my good friend," exclaimed the Captain; "let's see—there," and taking a guinea from his pocket he thrust it into the itching palm of Glenbucket, and expressed thereafter his willingness to walk arm-in-arm with him over general domestic flag-stones of the unevenest 'lay,' or, if need be, through thickest of thistles and heather.

Meanwhile Barcaldine had returned to his Glencoe guests.

"If it's your pleasure," began M'Ian, "I'd as lief get to bed now, as the hour is late, and our long journey to-day has wearied me."

"Your wish in that respect is my pleasure," responded the flattering host. "We shall just follow the Captain's example at once, and adjourn for the night. This way, gentlemen," and leaving the room, they passed downstairs, and along the passage whither Glenbucket and the Captain had just gone.

A narrow wooden stairway situated at the extreme end of the passage led to a suite of bedrooms above, and towards this stairway Barcaldine led the Glencoe party.

Approaching the spot, voices were heard in apparent high altercation, and the forms Glenbucket and the demonstrative Captain were seen at the foot of the staircase expostulating apparently about the practicality and non-practicality of a meditated adventurous ascent.

"Face it!" the Captain was heard to exclaim, as they neared him; "certies, I'll face it, though it were surrounded with all the ghosts and goblins in the parish of Barcaldine. Advance, Glenbucket!" and drawing his sword he pointed the domestic in the direction of the stairhead.

"Na, na, Captain," expostulated Glenbucket, "you gang up first! I dinna muckle care o' proceeding sic a pointed argument as you carry in your hand. Gif I was meeting the enemy half-way up the stairs, and fa'ing back on the reserves, it wad for certain prove sair on the hips. A lad arrangement, Captain! a rale lad arrangement! Gang you up first, Captain, as I'll gather up your coat-tails.

Quick step! march!" and attempting to storm the stair, the slightly mixed Captain dashed up three of the steps, but losing balance swung back, and falling against the unfortunate Glenbucket bore him suddenly to the ground, and fell lengthwise across him.

The next moment Barcaldine and the Glencoe party were alongside of them, and the disordered Captain, thinking the enemy were upon him, gathered himself together with great alacrity, and sword in hand made a rush on the group.

"Where is he?" asked the Captain, when he noticed Barcaldine beside him. "Where is the gallant Glenbucket?"

"Here I am," answered the domestic, straightening himself up to his full height—which was not great.

"Safe?" asked the Captain. "Ou, ay! safe aneuch, Captain, but no vera sound. Od's Captain, ye're jist a most fearful wecht tag fa' on a body—a perfect Ben Nevis! Hech, sirs! the win's clean out o' my racket body; ow, ow!" and Glenbucket held his two sides as if his corporation was about to immediately separate into parts.

"The reserves are safe," shouted the Captain, who had a confused notion that an imaginary enemy was planted somewhere at the top of the stairway; "move forward in echelon of division, Glenbucket, and I'll advance straight from the centre."

"Yes, that's sense," answered Barcaldine; "Glenbucket, you take these gentlemen to their rooms, and leave the Captain to me."

"Ay! ay! your honor!" promptly responded the ready domestic; he's a fine chiel the Captain, but his reckonin's a wee thought eise. Twa an' twa's no four wi' him the nicht. He's watered his dram owre sair—a dangerous experiment in could weather. Come this way, gentlemen; come this way!" and turning about Glenbucket led the Glencoe party to their respective bedrooms upstairs.

"Where's my blessed room, Barcaldine—I'm mixed somewhat"—said the Captain when left alone with his host.

"I want my bed, for if the Earl's coming down here to-morrow I must be up for times and look my military best."

"Breadalbane will not be here to-morrow," curtly answered Barcaldine.

"You said so to Glencoe, didn't you, eh?"

"Not so loud, Captain, not so loud," whispered Barcaldine. "Come, I want a word with you in private. You are not drunk, Captain?"

"As sensible as ten parsons," devoutly responded the Captain.

"The Earl's policy," whispered Barcaldine, "is to get Glencoe trapped, so that the vengeance of the Government may justly fall on, and for ever crush him. He is behind time with his oath of allegiance, and is anxious to repair it, and so frustrate the punishment due to him by his obstinacy and disdeeds. Assist me in detaining him by fair pretences, and we shall both equally earn the good Earl's lasting gratitude."

Slowly, as if awakening from a confusing dream, the Captain perceived by degrees the clear point of Barcaldine's intentions, and thinking it his duty to serve his king before his conscience—a common error of that rude age—he grasped the hand of his wily host, and declared the confession "sacrosanct."

Therefore the two friends went back to the room they had lately vacated and sat down to concoct a plot of detention to be used against Glencoe on the morrow. And the wind blew coldly outside, and the snow fell; but wind and snow were less cold and less treacherous than the malice of these two plotting hearts.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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