

THE TRAGEDY OF CLACH-NAN-CEANN

A Story of the Rannoch Camerons

When Lady Struan's mind was sufficiently composed, she enquired particularly regarding the relations subsisting between Marsali and The Mackintosh of Mackintosh prior to the marriage of the former with Ewen. William explained the circumstances as well as he could. "Ah! Struan," said her Ladyship, "I surmised there was an affair of jealousy in this case; and some men are very revengeful when they are slighted in love." "I was always under the impression," said Struan, "that, in love matters, women were much more revengeful than men." "That may be quite true," said she, "as a general rule; but, wherever you find a plausible and oily-mouthed man like The Mackintosh, who seems to drop honey at every word he utters, depend upon it, such an one has all the vices of a woman without any of her virtues, and is capable of perpetrating very cruel deeds." "Bravo!" exclaimed Struan, "you have hit the nail on the head; but that will not relieve poor Marsali!" "Then," said Lady Struan, "let us send her provisions and clothing, and particularly such things as will bury those poor murdered boys with decency." "That is something to the purpose now!" said Struan. "And," said Lady Struan, looking at her servants, "which of you maids will volunteer to go up to assist Marsali, and be her companion for some time?" "Please, my lady," said Margaret Robertson, a modest, comely young woman, "I will go; and my sister might take my place here." "Well done, you brave and thoughtful girl!" said Struan; "prepare to go immediately; and your sister shall have your place." Margaret curtsied, and retired blushing; and William's heart thrilled as his eye followed her with warm admiration. And now Lady Struan, having graciously bowed to William (which honour he respectfully acknowledged with a low inclination of his body) retired, following after Margaret Robertson to the house to help that young woman to prepare for her journey.

In a very short time, the expedition started from Dunalastair House. It consisted of Struan, William Cameron, Margaret Robertson, fourteen armed men, and several ponies carrying panniers laden with provisions and other things, each horse being led by a man. They travelled westward along the north bank of the Dubhag, passing on their way Milton of Lochgarry, Drummaglass, Auchtiobart, Drumcastle, Tom-a-chlachaig, and Craigvar, until they reached Kinloch Rannoch, then, as now, a village of some importance, at the east end of Loch Rannoch. Here they soon launched a boat, which, on account of its large size, was called Long Shruain, or "Struan's Ship;" and, having stowed in the contents of the panniers, and sent away the ponies and gillies, the whole party went aboard and set sail for Tigh-na-dige.

In the list of inedited Gaelic poems collected by the Dean of Lismore, there is one entitled "Long air Loch Raineach," or, "A ship on Loch Rannoch;" and, whether or not Struan's was the original of the ideal ship, this voyage of his deserved to be celebrated by the Celtic muse. A sail along this loch from east to west, save in a storm, when it is sublime, is always beautiful. The Sliosmin on the right, and the Sliosgarbh on the left, continually present new scenes of varied loveliness; while, in the rear, the conical Schiehallion seems to grow in charming symmetry and grace, until, at length, two miles along, it is a perfect gem; and then, in sailing on, it lessens inch by inch, and, like a small triangle in the clouds, vanishes at last behind the hills. Truly it is beautiful to sail along the Loch from east to west, extracting pleasure from the outer world; but far more beautiful it is to sail like Struan, to visit the widow and the fatherless, and so to realise that higher pleasure in the soul of doing good.

"Struan put a ship on Loch Rannoch,
From which he saw the beauty of Schiehallion,
When sailing between the pretty Sliosies -
More especially over against Annat;
But, when he placed the ship under sail
To render kindly aid to Marsali,
'Twas there the great beauty was
And more precious than all the gold of Scotland and England."

Meanwhile, Marsali, left alone in Tigh-na-dige in charge of the living and the dead, now felt more keenly than even on the previous day, the horrors and desolation of her widowhood. That morning she lay long in bed,

literally “watering her couch with her tears;” and when the cries of her only living child roused her, she groaned deeply, and said: -

“O little bonnie Ian Biorach,
The last bird left upon the roost,
I wonder not although thou cheep
Since the cat of ruin has ruined us;
But though to-day we are so feeble
And our blood has been sacrificed on the stone of cruithne,
I'd rather now be in Tigh-na-dige
Than be with infamy the Chief of a Clan.”

Hereupon she arose from her bed; and having lit a fire, and swept the house, and attended to her little boy's wants, as well as her own, she sat down for a long time on a stool, in the midst of what really was the silence of death in her household. Iain Biorach seemed awestruck and tongue-tied; while poor “Strone” gave an occasional whine, and at length placing his chin on his mistress's knee, looked up in her face so mournfully and lovingly, that the faithful beast appeared to sympathise with her in her sorrows.

Strone, thou dog of Ewen,” said Marsali,
Thou hast a right to be worthy and kind.

At this point, little Iain finding utterance, said, “Won't they rise any more, Mother?” Marsali's heart was too full to answer this question, so artlessly put; but, under the influence of the excitement produced by it, she rose from her seat, and, having carefully removed the white linen sheet, gazed full on the mangled features of her three murdered boys, and said, “That is, O Almighty One! why didst Thou permit the wicked man to shed the innocent blood of my three sons? But, O my God! didst Thou not permit wicked men to put Thine own Son to death? And O blessed Mary! if thou didst once on a time behold thy Son on the Cross, I have no cause of complaint now. But if I were to have evidence that the departed souls are safe, I should then be happy.”

Scarcely had Marsali uttered the above pious ejaculations, and decently covered again the faces of the dead, when a wonderful sight presented itself to her view. A swarm of large, black flies came in by the door, and having buzzed their way across the room alighted in such numbers on the white linen sheet that covered the bodies that in some places it looked almost black with them. Having obtained a foothold they all seemed determined to keep possession of the sheet; and their large, bloated bodies and the disagreeable odour they emitted made them very disgusting inmates in a house. In less than five minutes after this, however, another swarm of white flies came in by the door and proceeded straight to where the black flies lay. Here a fierce and notable contention took place over the bodies of the dead, which ended in the white flies victoriously driving all the black flies not merely from the linen sheet but also completely out of the room. This battle of the flies is handed down in the following lines: -

Marsail beheld a contest sair
Between the powers of the air
Over her children that were not
As proof to her they mercy got;
For soon the white flies cleared the room
From the black flies of death and doom,
And Marsail joyed (so runs the story)
Assured the dead were now in glory.

Having been thus comforted, Marsali washed her face and combed her hair, and, putting on her best attire, shone bright with the additional lustre always imparted by deep sorrow overcome to a beautiful woman; and, in the new strength given her, she went out to revisit Clach-iian-Ceann - that stone of destiny which now marked a new epoch in the history of her family. She found both the stone and the sward in front of it still gory with the blood of her boys. “O Prince of Peace,” said Marsali, “who didst shed Thine own blood to promote peace amongst men, when wilt Thou bestow peace on this poor, miserable country? When wilt

Thou make an end of the shedding of blood in our midst? Hasten the time when the massacre of Clach-nan-Ceann shall rouse a universal feeling of horror amongst the people of Scotland."

When Marsali had uttered this heartfelt and appropriate prayer, she raised her eyes eastwards towards Beinn-a-Chuallaich, whose bold escarpment from its hither side presented the appearance of a rocky coast that had long been beaten by the waves of some primeval sea, and on the loch below beheld Struan's well known ship sailing swiftly in the direction of Tigh-na-dige. She said –

"I see a sight serenely fair
In front of Beinn a Chualaich there
The good man's ship upon the deep
That I saw last night in my sleep.

"Great is our need of champions brave
To terrify each wicked knave,
And to his face the devil tell
Heaven has the upper hand of hell.

"While near this stone I now remain
Where yesterday my boys were slain,
No wonder though I feel opprest,
And heave a heavy sigh for rest.

"But though my heart is sorely wounded,
And my fireside with grief surrounded,
I see in Rannoch here this hour
Heaven working 'gainst oppression's power."

In a short time the ship arrived at a point opposite Tigh-na-dige; and Struan and his party at once proceeded to effect a landing. The first to go ashore was William, who eagerly ran to see how Marsali did, and to apprise her of the distinguished visitor she was to expect. The rest, however, soon followed, all being filled with a curiosity, not unmingled with awe, to see the scene and subjects of the bloody tragedy that had been enacted the day before. When Struan reached the top of the slight elevation that rose above the shore, he beheld Marsali and her little boy standing beside Clach-nan-ceann, with William at her right hand conversing with her. He admired her tall and commanding form, and her grave and beautiful face. She bowed gracefully to him; and Struan returned to this salutation a bow at once profound and deferential. He felt instinctively that he was in the presence of a superior woman. "Madam," said he to her, "I understand you are in distress, and I am come to give you all the assistance in my power." "Honoured chief," replied Marsali, "I am indeed in unspeakable affliction; but He who rules over all has wonderfully sustained me, and it was surely He that put it in your heart to come here to give me comfort and assistance. "Struan here presented Margaret Robertson and said, "I have brought this young woman to help you, and she has come of her own accord." "I feel very grateful to you both for this," said Marsali; "and I regard her as an angel sent from heaven to minister to me in the hour of need!" Hereupon Margaret stepped forward, and taking up Iain Biorach in her arms, kissed him. The poor little boy, notwithstanding his recent rough experience at the hands of strangers, took kindly to her at once, and flinging his arms around her neck kissed her in return. This sight was too much for Marsali. She cried out, "Thank goodness I see love to-day where there was hatred yesterday!" and laying aside that dignified reserve which she had been trying to maintain in Struan's presence, she took Margaret in her arms and tenderly embraced her, and cried and sobbed over her like a child. The scene was very affecting to all present. William felt a secret thrill in his bosom which rose up like an apple to his throat. Struan took out his pocket handkerchief and appeared for some time to be very busy in blowing his nose; and, whether from this exertion or from some deeper cause, copious tears were seen to flow down the worthy gentleman's cheeks. "But where," said he, recovering his equanimity, "where were the boys killed." "Marsali at once pointed to the stone on which, as well as on the sward below, the clotted blood of her children could still be so clearly seen. "Ah, yes!" said he, making an effort to restrain his feelings; "but where are the bodies of the murdered boys?" Hereupon she, taking little Iain Biorach by the hand, turned round and slowly walked towards Tigh-na-dige, at the same time making a sign to the chief and the rest to follow, which they did in deep silence.

On entering, Marsali uncovered the faces of the dead; and Struan, after having looked on them for some time, raised up both his hands, and, shaking them with horror, said: -

O, Mackintosh, thou didst the mischief
By thy brutishness in Rannoch;
For these children shall rise in every age
With many breaches in thy hall;
And thou thyself shalt wander a sorry wretch
From place to place beneath a curse,
Beholding as in a glass the little ones -
Betwixt Badenoch and Lochaber.

But soon Tigh-na-dige and the vicinity became a scene of bustle and confusion in the work of preparing for the funeral of the children. One party went to the ship to fetch ashore the articles taken from Dunalastair; another prepared the dead bodies for decent interment; while a third, led by Struan and Marsali, proceeded to look out for a suitable burying-ground. At first it was proposed to dig a wide grave for the three on the spot where the massacre had taken place; but this, from the nature of the ground, was found to be impracticable. They then fixed on the site of the present graveyard as, although rather shallow, the nearest suitable place they could find to the scene of the tragedy; and in a short time and under a shower of snow which now fell and covered the face of nature as with a great winding sheet of white, Struan's men dug a wide grave for the reception of the murdered innocents of Clach-nan-Ceann.

When all things were ready, the solemn funeral procession started from Tigh-na-dige to the place of interment. Struan's men carried the bodies; and Struan and Marsali, and Iain Biorach and William followed as chief mourners. The three bodies were gently laid down side by side in the grave; and Struan having placed a man at each corner of the parcel of ground, now enclosed by a stone dyke, dedicated it to St. Michael in the following words: -

“St. Michael thou Archangel great
This Cladh to thee I consecrate
Whilst thou in Rannoch hast thy fête.

“This day thou didst contend with might
Against bad spirits in a fight
And didst the devil put to flight.

“O keep this graveyard now for aye
From Satan and his powers each day,
And guard each corpse till Judgment Day.

“And I'll keep Marsail and her clan
And give them lands in Camghouran
To tell the tale of Clach-nan-Ceann.

“And Camerons shall in Rannoch grow
As in Lochaber times ago.
And shall 'neath Struan's banner go.”

After these words Struan threw a handful of earth on the bodies; and his men, taking the hint, soon shovelled the soil over them, and finished off the grave with a neat covering of sod surmounted with large flat stones, as the then usual protection against wolves. Marsali, though deeply affected, bore this trying ordeal with a measure of outward decorum, which showed the remarkable strength and firmness of her character; but Iain Biorach fairly broke down when he saw the men covering his brothers with earth, and said, “Shall I not see them any more, mammy?” “Be quiet, Iainie,” said Marsali, “your brothers are now in heaven!”

William and Struan's men now proceeded to search for the body of Iain, who had been drowned in the net on the previous day. They soon recovered it; and, having carried it in solemn silence to Tigh-na-dige, they

prepared it for interment. Another grave was opened in what was now known as Cladh Mhichael; a second funeral procession was formed from Tigh-na-dige; and the body of Iain was reverently laid in the tomb. Marsali, through sobs and tears, said, on seeing- him lying in the grave: -

“Iain, although thy death was sad,
To see thee in a grave I'm glad;
And this will keep thee aye in mind
That thou to me wast always kind.”

And after these words they filled in the grave with earth, and securely covered it with sod and stones like the other one.

But scarcely had the funeral obsequies of Iain been celebrated when Struan, turning his eyes towards the loch, observed a small skiff rowed by one man coming rapidly in their direction. It soon reached the land; and, when the funeral party crowded round it, they saw that it contained what proved to be the dead body of Ewen Cameron. The boatman said, addressing himself to the company: -

“This man was slain at the Red Cliff
By Ardlarich when in a huff;
But now he does regret that work
Of bloody vengeance with his dirk;
For evil spirits from below
By day and night around him go;
And he, desiring peace to seek.
Has sent the corpse to Tigh-na-dige.”

When Marsali recognised in the murdered man the defaced features of her late dear husband, she gave a loud shriek and swooned away. The sudden appearance of Ewen's body, together with the cruel words of the boatman, had evidently proved too much for her, and she fell down quite unconscious on the beach. Struan called on the crowd to stand back, and said with much emotion, “Poor Marsali! was ever woman before now overtaken by so many calamities? “Here Margaret Robertson stepped forward and bathed her temples with cold water from Loch Rannoch, whereon Marsali soon came to herself, and having risen to a sitting position, said to the boatman: -

“Though Ardlarich has broke my heart,
I don't refuse to him my peace;
But, since he ruthless is himself,
His seed shall have the second sight;
And Camerons shall arise in Rannoch
To whom this gift shall be a blessing.”

Ewen's body was now carried to Tigh-na-dige, where it was prepared for burial. A third grave was opened; a third funeral procession was formed from Tigh-na-dige; and, when the corpse was laid in the grave, Struan said: -

“Ewen, choice hunter of Sliosgarbh,
I lay thee now amongst the dead;
But though thy body lifeless lies
Thy soul's on high amongst the living;
For thy Saviour hath gotten the victory
And sent down Michael to protect the graves;
And Camerons plenty shall burst forth
From this graveyard on the Great Day.”

After these words had been pronounced, they filled Ewen's grave with earth, trimmed it with sod, and secured it with stones like the other ones - Struan all the while remaining uncovered - and Marsali deriving

what comfort she could from the honours thus paid to the remains of him whom she had loved more than any other on earth.

Having duly performed their last offices of kindness to the dead, the funeral party partook of a hastily prepared repast; and when Struan had arranged to leave behind him at Tigh-na-dige not only Margaret Robertson, but also her two brothers, Duncan and Donald, who were amongst his retainers, he bade them farewell, and having given a cordial invitation to Marsali and William to pay him a visit at Dunalastair, he went aboard ship with his remaining twelve men, and was soon sailing on his way towards Kinloch Rannoch.

“The ship went back to Kinloch Rannoch,
Bearing Struan as her Captain;
And when he went up to the Mount
His fame as high was as Schiehallion;
For many in the country gathered
To bid him cordial welcome home,
And tell him that he followed close
His ancestors in Marsail's cause.
And his calm lovely lady wept
On meeting him upon the threshold,
And with a kiss she said 'My love,
My Struan with the heart of wideness.'
Great was the joy beyond all riches
They had that night throughout the place;
For sweet's the glory of the man of might
When he is reckoned worthy here on earth.”

After Struan's departure from Tigh-na-dige, Marsali and William tried to shew every kindness and attention to the strangers who were left with them. The latter, however, insisted that Marsali should abstain from all work, and that they should be allowed to make themselves generally useful. Accordingly they set to work with right good will; and in a short time they removed so far as possible, all traces of the tragedy, and tidied up everything in the house. Supper was prepared; and they sat down in due form, Marsali presiding at the head of the table, and, in her own quiet dignified manner, doing the honours of the house. The conversation at first laboured under the restraint which the solemn sadness of the occasion rendered inevitable; but Marsali, though herself sick at heart, made an effort to infuse cheerfulness into the company; and social talk went the round somewhat more freely. The two Robertson men talked of the power and greatness of Struan; and that he was one of the few in Rannoch who could do noble and generous deeds. Margaret Robertson spoke of Lady Struan as even more than Struan himself - a beautiful specimen of what was gentlest and best in human nature. “Without the influence and example of these two,” said she, “Rannoch would sink under the weight of its own lawlessness and crime.” “May God bless them,” said Marsali, “for their goodness; and may He bless you for being admirers, and, it is to be hoped, imitators of their goodness!” She then repeated the old proverb: -

“Tis those that see good in other people
That will do good to one another.”

The conversation now turned to the subject of William's proposed departure next morning for Lochaber. Marsali said that for her own part she should prefer him not to go; because, if the tragedy should be reported to Lochiel, this would still further intensify the feud betwixt the Camerons and the Mackintoshs, and so be the means of spreading more bloodshed and strife throughout the land, which state of things she abhorred with all the sensitiveness of a tender-hearted woman. She said: -

“Though here they have me sore oppressed,
I bear no vengeance in my breast,
But my desire's for peace and rest.”

But no sooner had she uttered these words than "Strone," who had been lying beneath the table, sprang to his feet, and, raising up his nose till the lower part of his head was in a line with his neck and breast, he gave three long-continued and weird howls as if he were seeing something that troubled him; and William, also trembling as if under the influence of some super-human agency, said: -

"I see five spirits in the air;
And Ewen's ghost, with threatening stare,
Says, I at dawn must go to tell
This tale of murder to Lochiel."

When William uttered those words they were all struck dumb with astonishment; and Marsali was more especially impressed with the solemn feeling that the tragedy in which she had hitherto been so deeply involved was not yet played out, but that still further developments of it were in store for the future. They retired to rest under a sense of a nearness to the world of spirits which was positively oppressive; and before daybreak William was up out of bed and pensively walking along on his way to Lochaber.

During William's absence, which extended over more than ten weeks, the stream of life in Tigh-na-dige, in so far as the altered circumstances of the case permitted, returned to its normal course. It is true Marsali continued to mourn for her dear husband and children; but, being a woman of piety and good sense, she endeavoured meekly to submit herself to the will of a Higher Power, and to centre her affections and hope on poor, little Iain Biorach, who was left to her as a bird escaped from the net of the fowler. Then Margaret Robertson was a great help and comfort to her. The kindness of this young woman both to herself and to her boy was unceasing - and fully justified Marsali's original expectation when she said she received her as an angel sent to minister to her. The two Robertson brothers went out to hunt daily in the Black Wood.

Week after week passed by in this way in Tigh-na-dige; and, as the months of October and November were that year more than usually mild, all the operations in-doors and out-of-doors were carried on for a long-time without interruption. But one morning about the beginning of December a robin redbreast, having winged its way from the Black Wood, entered the Cameron habitation, and, much to Iain Biorach's delight, perched on the nail on which the Mackintosh's bow was suspended. Marsali said: -

"O Robin with the breast of red,
In wrath thou hast not hither sped,
But to declare a storm shall blow
With Toiseach blood upon the snow."

And sure enough, before night came on, the snow did begin to fall; and the frosty wind howled round about Tigh-na-dige, and pierced through every open crevice; and all the inmates drew their seats nearer than they were wont to the blazing fire of logs from the Black Wood, which they were keeping on the hearth; and little Iain Biorach crept closer to his mother, as blast after blast made the roof creak over their heads, and gave them a practical illustration of the violence of a winter storm in Rannoch. And next morning, when they looked out, they saw both the Sliosmin and the Sliosgarbh clad in a huge garment of white, and the storm, still unabated, driving the snow along in fearful clouds of drift, and the dark waters of Loch Rannoch that lay between the two white sliosies wrought up into an angry sea of foaming billows: -

"Loch Rannoch is throughout the summer
Like lad that sweetly courts his cummer;
But winter changes all his tune
Like marriage after honeymoon,
When the young people often fret
And sometimes go into a pet."

When the storm began to abate, an intense frost set in, which, with the deep covering of snow on the ground, soon reduced the animal world to great straits. At the end of the second week, the wolves, descending to the lower grounds, were heard to howl through the Black Wood; and as the ominous sounds night after night drew nearer, they struck terror into the hearts of the in-mates of Tigh-na-dige. But soon the ferocious brutes

found their way to Cladh-Michael, evidently attracted through the keenness of their olfactory nerves by the dead bodies buried there; and the men had to watch over nights, and make all sorts of noises to frighten them away.

On the third night before Christmas eve, three very large wolves were seen to approach the graveyard. The moon shone bright overhead; and as the ravenous beasts were coming over the plain with that gait so peculiar to them when pressed with hunger in winter, the deep shadows they cast on the snow made them appear all the more formidable. The Robertson brothers went out as usual to scare them away; but the famished creatures, disregarding all the noises that were made, as well as the incessant barking of poor "Strone," who had no chance in close combat with three such monsters, proceeded directly to the graves, and set to scrape the snow and earth off them with all their might. And when the men saw that they could not drive them away they went in and told Marsali. She said, "Donald, you will fetch down the Mackintosh's bow; and here are three arrows for you, each of which, in the name of St. Michael, you will shoot at them." Donald took down the bow, and adjusted the bowstring; and, having received the arrows with the words proper for the occasion, he proceeded at once to execute his commission. He took up a position at a point overlooking the graveyard; and, having placed the arrow on the string, and, like a good archer, drawn it back to his right ear, he repeated the following prayer: -

"St. Michael now direct mine arrow
From string of Mackintosh's bow
Into the heart of yon great wolf."

And with these words he let fly the arrow, which, by the powerful aid of the good St. Michael, pierced one of the wolves through the heart and killed the monster on the spot. He then took up another arrow; and having placed it on the string and drawn it back, he repeated the same prayer and let it also fly. By the aid of St. Michael a second wolf was pierced through the heart and killed like the first. But Donald taking up the third arrow thought he might now dispense with the prayer, and accordingly shot it without having invoked the aid of the Saint. The arrow pierced the wolf, but not in a mortal part; and the savage beast, rendered fiercer by the wound inflicted, madly rushed on to, attack its human tormentor. When Donald saw the creature coming forward with its horrid jaws wide open, and that there was now no other way of escape from it, he adroitly thrust the end of the Mackintosh's bow down the wolf's throat; and then, drawing out his dagger, he raised it up and said: -

"St. Michael now direct my dirk,
Along with Mackintosh's bow,
Into the heart of this great wolf."

And having uttered this prayer, he struck a blow which laid his formidable antagonist dead at his feet.

Great was the joy and gratitude manifested that night in Tigh-na-dige for their wonderful deliverance from the terrible wolves. They expressed their joy because three ruthless enemies of the living and the dead were now laid low. They expressed their gratitude to heaven because these three enemies had been destroyed, in so far as they could judge, in a superhuman way - and that by the special interposition of Michael, the guardian Saint of their grave-yard.

The next was a notable day in the annals of Tigh-na-dige - a day the transactions of which Duncan Du Cameron, the Camghouran Sennachie, used to relate with great power and spirit. Duncan often enlivened the long and dreary winter nights in Camghouran by his many stirring tales of the times of old; and his narratives flowed on in such chaste and classical Gaelic, interspersed here and there with short snatches of poetry, each of which helped forward his story, that one of the best judges of the language in Perthshire declared he would willingly sit for hours at that old man's feet if only for the pleasure of listening to his admirable Gaelic, Peace to thy spirit, inimitable Duncan Du! Thy body now lies safe under the guardianship of St. Michael.

In the morning the Robertson men were early astir, and went directly to see the dead wolves. There lay the great monsters in the graveyard - two over the graves where they had been scraping away the snow and earth, and one at the scene of its desperate struggle with Donald - the three appearing terrible even in death.

The men first extracted the arrows from them; and, having dragged the carcasses, one by one, to the outside of Cludh Mhichael, they got an axe and block and proceeded to chop off their heads with the intention to set up these as trophies on some prominent part of Tigh-na-dige. But just as they were engaged in this operation, and discussing what was best to be done, who should burst in upon them but William Cameron, now newly returned all the way from Lochaber!

William said: -

“O, men, I've found you doing well;
But which of you has slain the wolves?”

“With Michael's help,” replied Donald,
“From string of Mackintosh's bow,
'Twas I that slew these mighty wolves.”

William said: -

“That bow was once a woeful bow;
'Tis well it is so useful now.
And that ye are yourselves so brave!”

Duncan said: -

“But did you come alone to Rannoch
All the way from Lochaber?”

William said: -

“The hero, Taillear-Dubh-na Tuaighe,
Comes after me with many people;
But I'll go in to Tigh-na-dige
To tell them he is on the way.”

And with that he bounded along and was in Tigh-na-dige in an instant.

But scarcely had the Robertsons finished their work of decapitating the wolves, when Taillear dubh Tuaighe himself with more than one hundred men fully armed burst in upon them. The Tailor stepped forward towards the two men; but, when he saw the three huge carcasses of the wolves, he placed the shaft-end of his Lochaber-axe on the ground, and, leaning on the steel part of the weapon, he gazed on the beasts for some time with silent admiration. He was a man of middle stature and sinewy frame, with dark hair and complexion, two large hazel-coloured eyes, and a countenance full of determination and fire. It was on account of his skill as a leader, and because he excelled all the rest of his clansmen in the use of arms, and specially of the Lochaber-axe, that, although by birth illegitimate, he was chosen to the honourable position of being Tutor to Lochiel during the minority of that chief; and it was in this capacity, and to vindicate the honour of his clan, that he now came to Rannoch in the depths of winter to enquire personally into the outrage of Clach-nan-ceann with a view to punish the perpetrators of that horrid tragedy.

The Tailor said: -

“Who are you ye, worthy men,
That now have killed these monstrous beasts?”

Donald replied: -

“We Robertsons are from Auchtarsin,
That Struan of the wide heart left,
To be the guards of Tigh-na-dige;
We killed these (wolves) by Michael's aid.”

Hereupon the Tailor heartily shook hands with them; and, having called his own men, who soon came in crowding round the dead wolves, he spoke to them thus in reference to the sight before them: -

“O companions from Lochaber,
Great is the honour now to Rannoch,
That Struan has such valiant men
As these heroes from Auchtersin;
And may they long be spared alive
'Neath coat of arms of three wolves' heads;
And may St. Michael's graveyard, too,
Be guarded long by men as brave!”

The Camerons then gave three cheers in honour of the Robertsons; and the Tailor, after having given some instructions to his men, went to Tigh-na-dige to hold a private conference with Marsali.

When the gillies and sumpter-horses arrived with the baggage, they proceeded at once to light large fires and prepare breakfast for the whole company. This was done with a measure of military order and precision that would have reflected credit on the commissariat arrangements of a modern small detachment of regular soldiers, and showed the genius of their redoubtable leader.

There was abundance of firewood in the place; and, with the aid of some game and venison from the well-stocked larder of Tigh-na-dige, a plentiful meal was soon prepared for the whole company - to which ample justice was speedily done.

About ten o'clock, when breakfast was over and the men were comforting themselves before the fire, the Tailor came out from Tigh-na-dige, politely lending his left arm to Marsali and tenderly leading Iain Biorach with his right hand. Nothing could exceed the attention and kindness of the doughty warrior to the lonely widow and the fatherless child; and the simple sincerity of his nature won at once their confidence and affection. William followed with Margaret Robertson linked in his left arm; and the two Robertson brothers closed up the procession. They walked on slowly to Clach-nan-ceann, and took up their position in front of it. Here the Tailor, having taken a small whip from his belt, applied the shaft end of it to his lips, and gave a shrill whistle, on which, in less than three minutes, his men, fully armed and in perfect order, came up in single file, and formed themselves into a semi-circle half hemming in their leader and his party on the south side of Clach-nan-ceann.

Marsali gave the Tailor a simple but animated and realistic account of the Tragedy that had been enacted on that very spot on Michaelmas Day. In such a place stood the Mackintosh; in such a place stood she and her four boys. In such a way he took the first, in such the second, and in such the third, boy, and one by one dashed out their brains on that very stone, and scattered them on the green sward below - converting it into a place of blood. And in such a way did poor little Iain Biorach creep to her side, and hide himself from the dreadful man, in the folds of her dress. When the Tailor heard the whole thus described, and so vividly illustrated, he was deeply affected, and called out to his men in words which the already referred to Duncan Du used to recite with much glee and animation: -

“Sharpen your Lochaber-axes
On the stone on which he dashed the children;
If they kept Michaelmas in Rannoch
We will keep Christmas in Badenoch!”

An indescribable scene followed. The Camerons, in threes and fours at a time, according as they could conveniently work, proceeded to sharpen their Lochaber-axes on the now famous stone of the Tragedy; and the Tailor, having duly sharpened his own axe on the same, gallantly offered his arm to Marsali, and led her and the non-combatants back once more to Tigh-na-dige.

As soon as the Camerons had sharpened their Lochaber-axes they “piled arms” and proceeded to amuse themselves as their various inclinations led them. One party assisted the Robertsons in fixing up the three wolves' heads on the south-east side of Tigh-na-dige, which they did in such a way as to represent their

conquerors, as arranged on the Struan Robertson coat of arms. Another party taking the wolves' carcasses, dragged them to a stony bit of ground (since under cultivation), where they placed over them a cairn of stones, and named it "Carn nan tri madadh," by which name it continued to be distinguished until removed for the plough about a hundred years ago. The remainder of the men engaged in the exciting game of snow-balling one another. But soon the Tailor's voice was heard summoning them to arms, and to prepare for their onward march. They obeyed with an alacrity which showed alike the strictness of their discipline and the respect they had for their commander, and were soon under arms and standing in military array in front of Tigh-na-dige.

The Tailor and Marsali had come to an arrangement that Tigh-na-dige was to be closed up and that the whole company were to escort her to Dunalastair House, where she was to be placed, on account of her now being in an advanced state of pregnancy. The Cameron habitation was soon closed; Marsali, Margaret Robertson, and Iain Biorach were each placed on a pony; and the company was in a short time on its way marching eastwards through the Black Wood. The Tailor did himself the honour to lead the bridle of Marsali's pony; while William Cameron, on the other side, led the bridle of Margaret Robertson's.

When the party crossed what is now known as Dall Burn, the Tailor looked up to that lovely expanse of level land and said: -

"Here's bonny Dall of Inver Andran
Where was Andrea de Ferrara
Working as a famous blacksmith
Betwixt Camghouran and Carie:
In Italy he learnt the art
Of the well tempering of the steel;
And O! 'tis we that miss him now,
This worthy man throughout the Highlands."

Having passed by Carie and Alltruidhe, they reached Tigh-na-Cuil, then as now a small hut at the south east corner of Loch Rannoch. Here they were met by the Wadsetter of Innerhadden, who was then the Earl of Athole's Bailidh for the whole of Bunrannoch. This magnate, who was accompanied by about half a dozen armed men, cried out: -

"Whither will ye? Whither will ye?
Give his rent now to the Bailidh."

The Tailor, looking on him fiercely, said: -

"Hold your tongue, O Innerhadden,
Else I'll kill you as dead as a herring."

This roused Innerhadden's ire; and being, according to the Seanachie's account of him, a tall and powerful man, well skilled in sword exercise, and brave even to recklessness, he drew his sword - a veritable Ferrara blade - and challenged the Tailor to single combat. The Tailor fiercely raised his Lochaber axe. And now, Tigh-na-Cuil would have inevitably become the scene of a fight more famous than any that had ever been fought before in Rannoch, had not Marsali interfered in the interests of peace between the irate warriors. Having raised up her fair hand, she said: -

"Hold your own tongue now, O Tailor,
We'll give a shilling to the Bailidh."

And with that, smiling sweetly on the Bailidh, she put her hand in her pocket, and drawing thence a pure silver shilling (worth more than half a sovereign now) she handed it to him. He took the shilling, and having sheathed his sword, gallantly said to Marsali: -

"Twas thy sweet face, O lady fair!
And no dread from the Tailor there."

That has restrained me from the fight,
And made me sheathe my sword of might."

The Bailidh and his party thereupon retired from the pass; and the Tailor and his company proceeded without interruption. Having crossed the river Dubhag at the ford of Tom-a-Chlachaig, they proceeded straight on towards Dunalastair.

Great was the joy of Struan and his worthy lady when they saw Marsali and Margaret Robertson and Iain Biorach on horse back, accompanied by William Cameron, the Robertson brothers, and Taillear dubh na Tuaighe on foot (for the other men had stayed behind at Tigh-na-bruaiche) approach their hospitable mansion door. Her ladyship ran out to meet the party, took Marsali in her arms and kissed her, also kissed Iain Biorach and Margaret Robertson, and welcomed them all into the house. Struan shook hands with William and the two Robertsons; and, having been introduced to the Tailor, received him with the utmost cordiality and deference, and retired to hold an anxious conference with him on the situation of affairs, in his private chamber.

There was gladness that night in Dunalastair House. Lady Struan was delighted to have Marsali under her roof and once more to see her favourite servant. She had a strong spice of sentimentality about her; and an account of the romantic affairs of Tigh-na-dige from the very persons concerned had an unspeakable charm for her. She listened to the various incidents of the tragedy from Marsali's own lips, and wept at the most affecting parts of the narrative; but when she heard the story of the wolves, and how Donald Robertson had slain three of them in St. Michael's graveyard, she said,

"Marsail, thy privilege is great,
That heaven is now sustaining thee,
Although fierce dogs pursue thee sore."

Struan was equally delighted with the Tailor. The Cameron men were for that night put up in Dunalastair, and well entertained; and the host and his distinguished guest discussed the best things in the house, as well as Highland politics, until a late hour, when they both retired to rest. The Tailor, however, did not fail next morning to get up according to arrangement before the break of day; and having called his men, who also soon got up and arranged themselves, he proceeded at their head northwards through Auchtagsin, in the direction of Badenoch.

Immediately after The Mackintosh had committed the terrible crime of dashing Marsali's three little boys against Clach-nan-ceann, he was seized with a bitter fit of remorse, and he and his men fled with much precipitation from Rannoch to Badenoch. They seemed to have experienced that peculiar feeling which is known amongst military men by the name of panic - a terror proceeding, not from the physical, but the spiritual world. "The wicked flee," says the Jewish proverb, "when no man pursueth;" and the Mackintosh chief and his followers ran that evening round the west end of Loch Rannoch and northwards by the wilds of Loch Ericht, with as much speed as if all the furies of the nethermost abyss were hotly pursuing them. Hence the saying in reference to this: -

"Mackintosh ran off from Rannoch
Like dog with tail between his legs,
And his men wept and smote their palms;
But O! he 'scaped not from the court
That sat in Mackintosh's heart
And sentenced him in this great cause."

When the chief arrived at his Castle in Badenoch, he found that although he could transfer his body he could not transfer his mind from the scene of the tragedy. It is a curious psychological, and, perhaps, partly physiological fact, that, when a man commits a murder in cold blood, the world of consciousness becomes to him for some time at least greatly enlarged, so as to embrace within its cognisance certain portions of the spiritual world. Whether this arises from the supremacy claimed by conscience over the inner man, or from the deeper impressions made by deeds of horror on the tablets of the memory and imagination, or from a combination

of both, the stern reality remains all the same, that the murderer is doomed while in this world to endure sights and visions of the world of spirits; and that in some cases he propagates his new faculty in the form of second sight to his posterity. The Mackintosh soon felt the full force of this enlarged faculty of vision. The scenery of Rannoch was now ever present in his sight as a view within the view around him; and the dead bodies of the children and Ewen and Ian appeared fixedly before his eyes in the act of being slain. The scenery and subjects of the murder also haunted his nightly slumbers, and were only interrupted by more horrible visions of avenging demons and a threatened judgment to come. Then at night noises were constantly being heard throughout the Castle, passing from room to room. At one time a tap-tap-tap was made at the stair-head; at another time a noise was heard as if a dead weight were being dragged across one of the room floors; and always about the still hour of midnight the faint and weird cry resounded through the Castle as of little children that were being murdered in some far distant place. Day and night were alike rendered hideous under this new faculty of revelation.

The poor chief was in a sad predicament. A settled gloom took possession of his countenance, and he lost flesh day by day, until at length he was reduced to a gaunt and miserable skeleton of his former self. His attendants got alarmed, and recommended a change of scene as the most likely means of alleviating his melancholy. He removed to Moy Hall; but the scene and subjects of the murder still dogged him there, and some circumstances of terror were added even more alarming. He removed thence to Aberarder; but the scene and subjects of the murder still dogged him there, and some circumstances of terror were superadded even more alarming. At length, in despair, he wandered away alone to a desolate moor on the confines of Lochaber; but even then he found that the vast solitudes of nature in the external world were no refuge to him from the cloud of witnesses that troubled his repose in the inner man, and constantly bore testimony against him at the bar of conscience.

At long last The Mackintosh went to a priest and made confession. The good man received him kindly, and heard his tale of murder to the end. He then shook his head, and said he could not grant absolution for the sin and guilt incurred by the commission of such an awful crime without deep and heartfelt repentance, and a long course of severe penance. The priest recommended him, however, in the meantime to go to his castle in Badenoch; and, as often as his melancholy and pneumascopy came on, to make his piper play one of those doleful laments which form such an important branch of Highland pipe music, and to make confession of his sins while the piper was playing. "Your case," said the worthy father, "is partly like that of King Saul; you require music to drive away the evil spirits that trouble you and to make you well, and melancholy music is the proper cure for melancholy. Your case is also partly like that of King David, who composed and sang the Miserere in confession of his sins, and so obtained pardon; and you should also sing the confession of your sins, and so obtain pardon through the finished work and intercession of the Saviour."

The Mackintosh felt considerable relief after having thus unburdened his mind to a fellow-mortal who so faithfully enjoined repentance and held out some hope of ultimate pardon. He returned to Badenoch; and, having sent immediately for his piper, he requested him to be at all times ready to play in front of the castle - when asked to do so - a selection of the most mournful airs and laments he knew in Highland pipe music. The piper touched his bonnet, bowed gracefully to his chief, and told him he should have much pleasure in so serving him; and on the spur of the moment he went out and composed and played in front of the castle a lament which has ever since become classical in Highland music; and it is said that he performed on his instrument the various measures of this extemporised Pibroch in such melting and exquisite wails of sorrow, that the Mackintosh not only felt his hard heart softened down and subdued, but was so fired with an inspiration kindred to that of the musician that he composed the following stanzas and sang them at intervals to the recurring strain: -

I
"Marsali, Marsali,
Marsali of Dunan,
I've a wretch been on earth
Ever since you refused me;
'Tis the Mackintosh lament
That I feel I have wronged you;

But 'twas the bow of ill omen
That made me so brutish.

II

“Tigh-na-dige, Tigh-na-dige,
Tigh-na-dige is wailing
With the blood of Clach-nan-ceann
Up to the heavens;
Croiscrag and Leagag
Reply to one another
The top of Meall-a-Bhubair
And the bends of the streamlets.

III

“The spectres, the spectres,
The spectres of the children
Now rise up before me
As if in a mirror;
Ewen on the beach
Murdered by Ardlarich
And Iain in Loch Rannoch
Drowned in the fish-net.

IV

“I have sinned, I have sinned
Against Thee, O God, now;
'Gainst Thee have I sinned
O Father in the heavens;
But cleanse me in the fountain
That was opened effectual
And I shall be whiter
Than the snow on Ben Nevis.”

The chief continued to practise this choral repentance to the notes of the bagpipes for more than a month. Never before or since were such strains of doleful and melancholy music so constantly and unvaryingly played around a human habitation; and never was there a more extraordinary course of penance performed to such music than could now be listened to at the Mackintosh's castle in Badenoch. The scenery and subjects of the Clach-nan-ceann tragedy came back over and over again in all their sickening horrors; and it was found out that the constant wailing of the bagpipes out-of-doors, and the constant confession of the guilt and the enormity of the crime indoors were the only efficacious means for exercising the avenging demons of Rannoch from the mental vision of the chief.

But although The Mackintosh was sincere enough in his repentance, and earnestly desired to have the guilt of the murders he had committed removed from his conscience, it was manifest that he could not long bear the strain of the penance he was undergoing from day to day, and that a violent reaction must sooner or later needs come. Judging, indeed, from the moral constitution of the man, it could not well be otherwise; for to suppose that under such circumstances a permanent saint could all at once, and without any relapse, be formed out of such material would be the premising of nothing short of a miracle.

About the beginning of December, when the snow-storm already referred to came on, a small party of the chief's old boon companions paid him a visit, and, as had been their wont in former times, stayed along with him for some time as guests in the castle. They experienced every kindness at the hands of their host, but they could not help expressing to him their astonishment at the continual wailings of the bagpipes outside the castle, and his own strange and unaccountable conduct within. “What is the reason, chief,” asked they, “that you are keeping that poor piper of yours out in this cold weather at all hours of the day and night playing one continual string of coronachs, and that you are yourself so sad and sorrowful?” The chief frankly told his

friends all the circumstances of his case - the affair of the Bow; the Tragedy of Clach-nan-ceann; how he was troubled with the scenery and ghosts of Rannoch; how he had gone to a priest; and how he was now carrying out that holy man's recommendation that he should make a long and continuous confession of his sins to the saddest airs and laments that could be played on the bagpipes. This narrative brought on nothing but great guffaws of laughter from his companions. Mackintosh bit his lip, but was too polite to tell them how annoyed he felt at their making light of what was to him in reality a very serious matter. But from laughter they proceeded to earnest, and recommended him to change this way of doing altogether by telling the piper to strike up a more lively air, and by himself consenting to eat and drink and make merry with his friends. The chief hesitated for some time, as if in very serious doubt what was best to do in the circumstances; but at length the reactionary force, already at work within him, combined with the desire to be hospitable to his guests, carried the day against the dictates of religion and conscience. He sent word to the piper to strike up a lively tune; ordered the bottles and glasses to be produced; and there and then entered upon a course of eating and drinking, which for weeks to come rendered his castle an extraordinary and disgusting scene of dissipation and revelry. It was here as elsewhere in the physical and moral worlds - a tendency to swing from one extreme to the other - from an extreme of religiosity on the one hand, to an extreme of casting aside all the bonds of religion and decency on the other.

On Christmas Eve a high festival was held in the castle, not so much in honour of the Babe of Bethlehem as of Bacchus. The chief and his friends ate and drank, and finished off as usual by getting- glorious over their glasses. But when The Mackintosh was retiring at midnight the ghost of Ewen Cameron appeared before him in the corridor, and raising up his shadowy right arm pointed to him with his hand, and, in hollow and sepulchral tones said: -

“O Mackintosh that slew my children,
To-night thou'lt be a sorry wretch,
And sore dishonoured by the Tailor.”

Mackintosh shuddered in the presence of the terrible phantom, and, with hair standing on end, said: -

“Sliosgarbh abductor of my bow,
'Twas not by me thou wast laid low,
Therefore, in name of Heaven, avaunt!
Or tell me now what dost thou want?”

The ghost replied: -

“Since, Mackintosh, 'twas not thy knife,
But Ardlarich 's, that took my life,
Thou shalt be spared in coming strife;
But, since my bairns fell by thy hand,
From Clach-nan-ceann proceeds a band
With fire and sword to waste thy land!”

The ghost thereafter giving a loud “sgreuch” vanished out of sight; and this, as well as the ominous words spoken in his ears, had the effect of immediately sobering the poor chief, who now felt new terrors added to the stings of conscience that daily and hourly were pricking his troubled heart. He went out to the door; but what was his horror to see by the light of the moon shining overhead that all his men on guard had been killed, and that his castle was now in the hands of Tailleir Dubh-na-Tuaighe and his victorious Cameron band! The Tailor, on seeing the chief, called out with stentorian voice: -

“Come out here, Mackintosh the daring
Else I will roast thee like a herring?”

The Chief replied: -

“If thou'rt Black Tailor of the axe
That put The Mackintosh to flight,

Roast me and then thy fame shall wax
To be a mighty Cook in fight!"

The Tailor's stern features relaxed into a smile on hearing this grim joke, and he retorted in kind: -

"I'll grant thy life now, Mackintosh,
If thou come forth upon the plain,
And, like a bird, 'scape from the cook!"

The Mackintosh, finding that there was no other alternative chance for saving his life save this one offered him by the Tailor, accepted it; and, having adjusted his brogues, walked out. He now saw more clearly the force of men by which his castle was surrounded and the number of his own followers that had been slain. As they walked past the ramparts they met William Cameron, who said: -

"Whilst thou'rt away we will set fire
To castle and make it a pyre."

The Tailor gave to this the oracular response: -

"Open the Mackintosh's doors
So that they be not roast' alive!"

The Tailor then, armed as he was with his Lochaber axe, proceeded along- with the Chief until they reached a stretch of level ground that lay at some distance from the castle. The Tailor gave him twenty yards of a start for his life; and the race soon began in real earnest. The Mackintosh ran well, considering the circumstance of his previous long debauch; but his opponent in the end proved too nimble for him. As the Chief was crossing a high stone dyke, the Tailor got hold of his kilt with his left hand, and, flourishing his Lochaber axe over his head, said: -

"Although I could I will not deign to slay,
But place on thee a lasting stain this day,"

and with that he docked off the tail of his kilt all round with his axe, and shaking this in triumph, said: -

"Behold! the tail of the great Badenoch cat
Cut off from him by the grim Tailor's axe
To avenge the bloodshed of the children small!"

The poor Chief went on his way, trudging as best he could through the snow. He felt keenly the degradation of his position. Not only was his person now bare and exposed to the bitter frosty blasts of heaven, but his honour as a chief was for ever compromised by the cruel words of scornful mockery which his enemy had uttered in granting him his life. His first impulse was to commit suicide; because, thought he, life received on such terms was a thousand times more miserable than death itself, which is the final termination of all earthly troubles. But as he walked along, thinking over this matter, he met in with his piper, who, in the general confusion, had contrived to make good his escape from the avenging axes of the Camerons. Society is the best antidote to thoughts of self-destruction. The Chief and his piper retired to a hill; and the latter, having made a cushion of his ample plaid, placed it on the snow, and they both sat thereon and watched the Castle, which was now in flames, until it was burnt down to the ground. They had also the mortification to behold all the other Mackintosh habitations in the vicinity, one by one, consigned to the flames, and the inhabitants either slain or rendered homeless.

The destruction of his country and clansfolk by the axes and faggots of the Camerons, and his own utter inability to render them any help, filled the Chief with shame and sorrow; and each time he fidgetted round on his seat his bare body came in contact with the surrounding snow - which vividly reminded him of the terrible mark of disgrace the Tailor had inflicted on him as the boasted head of the Clan Chattan in Badenoch. Hence the lines: -

"Mackintosh sat on a hill,
Like tailless cat upon a block,
And saw his house and country round
Consumed with fire for his own crime;
And then his thoughts crept to his exposed person
All bare and harassed on the snow,"

When the Cameron men had departed, the Mackintosh and his piper came down the hill - both shivering with cold - to view the ruin and desolation of the land. At every burned-down habitation Mackintosh blood shone red 'neath the pale beams of the moon on the snow; and here and there, amongst the ruins, houseless wretches were seen to cower for protection from the bitter cold and other more dreadful terrors of that Christmas night. When they reached the Castle they found that it was not only a heap of smouldering ruins, but also a holocaust of the slain. Several of the Castle servants, no doubt, had escaped, but many of them perished, and the companions of his debauch were all burnt to cinders. How often does it happen in this world that when vengeance comes it is not the man that committed the crime that suffers death but others in his stead as a vicarious sacrifice! When kings wantonly go to war, or commit any other folly, it is the people that have, in the first instance at least, to suffer the evil consequences thereof. In this connection most true is the adage of the Roman bard: - "The Greeks suffer for whatever folly their princes commit."

But although the Mackintosh saw his guests reduced to charcoal, and so many of his servants and clansmen slain, and so much property destroyed, all for the murder of the innocents at Clach-nan-Ceann, and himself, the murderer, still spared alive, this had the effect of only rendering his remorse and misery the more intense and heart-crushing. His first impulse was to burst into a passion of railing against his own evil destiny - against Marsali and her brats, against Macgregor of Ardlarich, and against Taillear dubh na Tuaighe, and the whole Cameron Clan - but cool reflection on his situation brought on calmer thoughts. The question occurred to him, How and why was he spared in the midst of so much carnage and destruction? Why were his companions and clansmen, who were innocently put to death, and he who was the perpetrator of the tragedy that had called forth the vengeance, allowed to live?" Was it because they were prepared to depart to another state of existence and he unprepared? or was it because he was to have one more opportunity on earth of repentance and reconciliation with heaven? Happily for the chief and his house he fixed on the latter as the true reason; and having taken up his position on a stone amid the ruins of his castle he made his piper go round and round playing the "Mackintosh Lament," while he himself resumed in right good earnest the singing of those mournful and penitential stanzas from which about a month before he had been dissuaded by the evil counsel of his now burnt-up companions. Very different from Marius sitting among the ruins of Carthage was now the poor Mackintosh chief sitting amid the dust and ashes of his own ancient keep; for his thoughts were not on revenge but on how he might obtain the forgiveness of heaven, and make some reparation to his fellow creatures for all the evil he had brought on them by his own folly and wickedness.

And now, while the piper was playing his mournful lament and the chief singing his early "matins" in the sorrowful and heartfelt confession of his sins, who should appear upon the scene but the priest who had advised him to enter on this course of penitence with the hope of ultimate pardon. He was a smart little dapper man with grave aspect, and dressed in a clerical every-day suit of dark serge, with a fur overcoat to guard him against the severity of the weather. Raising his hand and beckoning to the piper, who immediately discontinued his playing, he thus addressed the Mackintosh in solemn tone of authority which well became a messenger of heaven: -

I
"O Mackintosh, it was thy folly
That was the cause of this great ruin
Which roasted up thy house and country.

II
"When thou hadst killed the little children
Thou didst cry unto the Most High
To grant the pardon through the Saviour.

III

“And when to thee He turned His ear
Thou didst backslide to evil ways
And the devil o'er thee his power regained.

IV

“Then the Most High did plague thee sore
To draw thee in Covenant of love
And from the fire He snatched thee out.

V

“’Twas He that hardened the Tailor's heart,
As erst He'd done unto King Pharaoh;
And he cut thy kilt from off thy haunches.

VI

“Take to thy Saviour, Mackintosh,
And glorify thou the Most High,
And thy seed shall possess this land.”

The Priest thereupon vanished from sight and was no more seen; but the solemn words which he had spoken fell like good seed into the now deeply-ploughed soil of the Mackintosh's heart, and produced abundant and happy fruits for the benefit of himself and his clan and posterity. Over the ruins of his Castle good and wise resolutions were formed, and were so well persevered in that, under him, the House of Mackintosh once more arose like another Phoenix from its ashes! It is quite true that the curses entailed by the murder of Clach-nan-ceann has ever since continued to dog the family, producing “many breaches” in the succession in Moy Hall; often, like the destroying angel of old, taking away the first-born son - the “roof-tree of the house,” in the prime of manly strength and beauty and hopefulness; but the house has, nevertheless, continued to flourish in the midst of all its family mishaps and trials, and it is now reckoned one of the oldest and most respectable amongst the native aristocracy of the Highlands. Long may the chiefs of the clan continue to base the stability and greatness of their house on a true “Mackintosh Lament” for the follies of youth and the errors and shortcomings of maturer years!

Meanwhile Taillear Dubh na Tuaighe and his men, after they had burnt the castle and country of the Mackintosh in Badenoch, and put a great number of people to death by their avenging axes and faggots, collected as many cattle as they could find and were driving a huge “creach” before them in a south-westerly direction. This was the general termination in those times of every successful fray into hostile territory; and the Camerons of Lochiel were reckoned more than ordinary experts in the pursuit of this most gentlemanly calling. Cattle were then looked on in the same light as deer are nowadays. They were only imaginary property - that is, property so long as they remained on one's land, but no longer; and it was only by a process of hanging everybody that “lifted” cattle or sheep that Highlanders could be brought to see that there was any moral delinquency in using those animals for food which the green grass of their native hills supported.

On the second morning after the burning of the Mackintosh's country in Badenoch, the Tailor and his company arrived with their Creach at a spot called Tom na Ceardaich on the Sliosnin, about a quarter of a mile distant from where the river Ericht discharges itself into Loch Rannoch. Here they pitched their camp, refreshed themselves and allowed the cattle to browse on such herbage as they could manage to pick up by burrowing amongst the snow with their snouts and fore feet. They were now on Macgregor of Ardlarich's territory, and within a few hundred yards of his house; and Tom na Ceardaich was chosen as a place of encampment, because from that point they could best defend the cattle from any sudden attack that might be made on them. But no enemy, nor human being, nor beast, appeared in sight; no smoke arose from any habitation of man; and all the country round about seemed to be deserted. The Tailor naturally asked the question, “Is this the silence of desolation or the silence of stratagem?”

When the Camerons had breakfasted they cautiously led their cattle down from the braeface to Cul-a-Mhuilinn, crossed the Ericht with them, and drove them westward to the first passable ford of the Gaur - a

river that enters the west end of Loch Rannoch after having drained the famous Madagan-na-moine. Here the Tailor ordered them to halt; and, having selected a small band of swift-footed men, sent them forward under the charge of William Cameron to reconnoitre in the direction of Dunan, to bring back word if the Macgregors were to be seen in force in that locality.

Meanwhile the Tailor proceeded to tell his followers that the Badenoch Creach was to be sent entire to Tigh-na-dige to stock the land which Struan had so kindly allotted to the Camerons on the Sliosgarbh and of which Marsali was to have the principal share. This intimation was received with loud applause. He then asked if any man present would volunteer to go in charge of the cattle and stay in the new settlement? The proposal soon met with a response: -

“I'll go, said Gillesp' Nevis-man
“If I get a share of the spoil.”

The Tailor said: -

“Well done thyself, Gillesp' from Lundie,
Thou dost inherit to be thrifty;
And thy seed shall have luck in Rannoch
As erst thy forbears in Lochaber.”

After Gillesp' a little man with a bow in his hand and a quiver full of arrows at his back stood up: -

Then up spoke Duncan MacGillonie
“I'll go if I get a hillside bothy,
With right to hunt in the great forests
Betwixt Rannoch and Glenlyon.”

The Tailor replied: -

“Thou shalt get that, O MacGillonie,
But better are cattle than forest venison;
For Saxon men will ruthless come
And snatch this privilege from thy seed!”

The two men thereupon crossed the Gaur with the cattle, drove them on to Camghouran, and there, according to Duncan Du, the already referred to sennachie, became the founders of the Nevis and Gillonie sept of the Cameron Clan on the Sliosgarbh of Rannoch.

The Tailor now led his main company westward in the direction of Dunan; and met William Cameron's picket returning at the famous Caochan-na-foila - the scene of that bloody conflict which had first given the Clan Gregor possession of the Sliosmin. The picket were marching in very precise military order around a Macgregor sgalag whom they held as a prisoner; and he in his turn was conducting on a rope a large and handsome deer hound, which had long been the pride of Macgregor of Dunan - who on account of his having been so often seen with this dog was commonly called “the long man of the dun dog.” This sgalag told them that Macgregor of Dunan and his followers and all the other Macgregors of the Sliosmin had fled down the country from some vague warning they had got that the Camerons were to burst upon them with great force and fury from the north and root them out of the land. The old man had left the hound in his charge for fear it might fall into the hands of his enemies and be the means of taking him out in his retreat by its keen sense of smell; and this was now exactly what happened.

The Tailor at once ordered the hound to be led to smell the human tracks that were seen on the snow leading from Dunan house, with the result that the animal soon came on its master's scent. And now having formed his men in a half-moon shape around the sgalag and dog, and the baggage (the semi-circumference sweeping round behind) he led them rapidly towards the east on the scent of the Macgregor. From Tom-Mhic-Ghriogair where the scent was first discovered, they proceeded through Coille-Bhienie until they arrived at Ken-a-Chlachar, where the scent became somewhat confused among the high-standing boulders and broken

marshes. Having recovered it, however, they traced it northwards towards Tom-na-Sgreadaile, not far from the present Rannoch Lodge. Thence the scent went due north until they reached the north-west corner of Loch Rannoch, when it turned towards the east, and led them to the river Erich. Having crossed this stream below Cul-a-Mhuilinn, the hound again discovered the scent, which went on across Torn Dubh, and led upwards to Ardlarich House.

When they reached Ardlarich the Tailor commanded his men to search all the houses and outhouses for the chiefs of the Clan Gregor. They did so, but found they were deserted, and that not a single soul could be seen in the locality. Thereupon the Tailor set fire to Ardlarich House, which soon lit up and was burnt to the ground; but no other human habitation was set fire to.

Having formed anew, the Camerons followed the hound smelling along- towards the shore. This led the Tailor to suspect that possibly the Macgregors might now be lying hidden in Eilean-nam-faoileag - that famous "Ile of Loch Rannoch" which lay just over against where they were standing. But the Tailor observed that the "Ile" had been dismantled some time before then, and that it could not form as it stood a secure position for any body of armed men. Besides the scent went unmistakably towards the east. The Church of Killichonan was visited; and the scent showed that Macgregor evidently had been there, probably confessing his sins to the priest. Proceeding eastward through a birch wood, since known by the name of Talla-bheithe wood, whence the summit of Schiehallion can be seen. They at length reached Liaran. It is said that on this farm at Baile na Creige the scent became confused, as Macgregor had evidently doubled, by having gone up to the top of Creag-na-ceardaiche to see if the coast was clear and coming down again. The scent was, however, recovered; and the Camerons proceeded on their way through a thick wood where they were often so entangled in bogs and marshes and thickets that, if attacked by an enemy with bows and arrows, they might be reduced to great straits. But no enemy appeared; and Aulich was at length reached. The scent crossed the burn of Aulich just below the present bridge; and having recovered it on the other side, they proceeded to Clack na-h-iobairte, a standing stone situated below the present shooting lodge of Craganour. Here the Camerons rested; and while partaking of a hasty lunch, admired the beautiful golden streaks of the afternoon sun as it shone on the white snow that clad the conical Schiehallion, seen from this point swelling out like a true maiden's pap from the fair bosom of the surrounding mountain range.

From Clack na-h-iobairte, supposed by at least one acute Gaelic scholar to be the western boundary of the Annat, the company followed the scent along the Mil-reidh passing on their way Lag' 'n-iasgair and the Annat burn from which the scent turned up the brae until they reached Leargan, the third seat of the Macgregors on the Sliosmin. This place they also found deserted; and they followed the scent in an eastward down-hill direction towards Clachghlas, a large stone marking the eastern extremity of the Macgregor territory in Rannoch. From Clachghlas the scent went to Clach a mharsanta - a stone associated in modern times with a story of the accidental strangling of a poor stupid packman - but which seems more probably to have marked the eastern boundary of the old ecclesiastical church property of the Annat -part of which is still known by that name. From Ciach a mharsanta they followed the scent above the village of Kinloch Rannoch, the braeface; and having passed Clach-a-chlagarnaich under Sron-an-dachar of Creag-a-Bharra, and Alltenlas the hound went directly to the ford of the Dubhag at Tom a chlachach over against the famous Seomar-na-staing on the south side of the river, where Wallace is said, to have at one time encamped. The Camerons soon crossed this ford; and having discovered the scent on the south side they followed it through Innerhadden and Dalchosnie, until they reached the Clach Sgoilte - a large split boulder with a larch tree now growing up in the crack - alike curious in its conformation and notable as connected with many stirring events in the early clan history of Rannoch. From Clach Sgoilte they followed the scent eastwards through West Tempar, Tom Tempar, Lassintullich, and Crossmount; where now the hound began to get very excited and gave several short yelps which evidently showed that the objects of their pursuit were not very far away.

The Tailor called on his men to halt, and having with his well known skill as a tactician and leader rearranged their ranks so as to be able to work to the best advantage in rough and rocky ground, he exhorted them to advance with the utmost caution and care and to be ready at any moment to encounter the enemy - if there was need - in deadly combat. These words wrought up the Camerons to a state of fierce excitement, whilst at the same time they marched forward with that heroic coolness and confidence which they always felt when fighting under the command of their redoubtable leader.

When the Camerons were advancing and nearing that rocky cavern high above the southern bank of the Dabhag, which from the event has since been called Macgregor's Cave, the Tailor was astonished to see in the far distance a large company of the Robertson men led by his friend Struan flanked by another company of men led by Menzies of Weem, the feudal superior of the Macgregors on the Sliosmin. Struan waved a salute to the Tailor who at once commanded his men to halt, and approached in person to meet the Robertson chief. "You have come just in the nick of time" said Struan, "to complete the cordon round about the Macgregors in that cave where we at length have got them secure; and now I must introduce you to the laird of Weem." And with that Menzies, a tall and firm looking chief, came and cordially shook hands with the Tailor, after which the three held an anxious conference over the situation of affairs.

After the early morning departure of Taillear Dubh na Tuaighe from Dunalastair to Badenoch, as already detailed in this history, Struan who had risen to see them off, lay down again in bed; having fallen asleep and dreamed a most wonderful dream which was thrice repeated to him that morning. He thought as he lay down that old Macgregor of Roro in Glenlyon, long since dead, appeared to him, and implored him with the most piteous entreaties to exert himself on behalf of his now threatened race on the Sliosmin.

"Send word to-day to Castle Weem
Concerning Taillear Dubh na Tuaighe
Who now so sore pursues my seed
And ruthless would Sliosmin destroy,
That Menzies may come up himself
And give to every man justice due."

On each of the three occasions that he appeared the old Macgregor chief seemed to be in tremendous earnest; and a something appeared in his gestures which threatened the sleeper in case he should refuse to comply with the request of his phantom visitant. Struan rose up out of bed, and, having dressed himself, left the bedroom with a feeling of eeriness exceeding even that which he had experienced when the ghost of Ewen Cameron disturbed his morning slumbers after the tragedy of Clach-nan-ceann perpetrated on the Feast of St. Michael. When he reached his business room he sat down at once and penned a letter to the Laird of Weem - in which he recounted the vision he had just had of the old Macgregor chief - his own experience of the Tailor, and his fears of an attack by him on the Sliosmin, and an advice to "Menyers" to come up in force to Rannoch and take measures along with him for the peace and order of the country, until the Lochaber men should return to their own land. This letter he immediately dispatched by the hand of a trusty messenger on horseback to Castle Menzies. Thereafter he went to Lady Struan (who had been sleeping- in a different bedroom), and told her about the dream and the imminent danger the Macgregors of the Sliosmin were in; and her ladyship, with that fondness for communicating news so peculiar to women, rushed at once to Marsali's room and related everything to her.

When Marsali came to realise the situation of affairs, she was filled with grief and consternation. Her kindred had, it is true, used her very badly; but her Christian spirit had enabled her from the heart to forgive them; but she felt horrified at the idea that for her sake they were now in danger of being rooted out of the land and perhaps utterly destroyed. As her time was now about to be fulfilled at any rate, the terrible agitation produced by the warnings contained in Struan's dream, together with the fatigues of the previous day, had the effect of bringing on the pains of travail: -

"Marsali cried in her distress,
'My pangs are rising very sore,
While this world and I are in confusion.'"

And while the mother was in this state her poor little boy cried like to break his heart: -

"Poor Iain Biorach wept right sadly,
When he saw his mother in her travail,
And her eyelashes flashing wildly."

And there was also much talk and tittering amongst the servants in Dunalastair over the aspect matters had now assumed.

Struan and Lady Struan and Margaret Robertson held an anxious consultation regarding what was best to be done. It was resolved to send for the midwife; and a man on horseback was accordingly dispatched to Bolespic to fetch up a famous "howdie" that resided there. And when the "carlin" arrived, Marsali in a surprisingly short time was delivered of a male child, which, as might have been expected, showed some marks of that hard and cruel usage to which its mother had been subjected during the period of gestation. We read that, on account of the cruel and turbulent scenes through which the beautiful Mary Queen of Scots had personally to pass, her son, James VI. of Scotland and I. of England, was from his birth so affected by them, that he never had the proper mastery of his limbs. He could not approach a stranger without visible alarm, and could not for the life of him bear the sight of a drawn sword. And in like manner Marsali's newly-born babe seemed to twitch and tremble from head to foot, and withal presented a dusky complexion all over the body. When she was shown her son, she said: -

"Mother of Iain Biorach yesterday,
Mother of Iain Ciar to-day:
Here's the Cameron of the butter,
There's the Cameron of the curds!"

And as the child seemed to be weakly it was baptized as Iain Ciar that very evening by the Vicar of Fortingall, who came up to spend his Christmas with Struan in Dunalastair House.

On Christmas day the Laird of Weem came to Dunalastair with a considerable force of the Menzieses of Appin-i-Dull; and there he and his men were sumptuously entertained. Struan had collected a strong company of his Robertsons and stationed them on the "Mount" in view of the unsettled state of the country; and the two bodies of men held Christmas together in right jolly style. But the two chiefs were closeted together for hours in deep consultation over what was to be done with the Macgregors. At length it was resolved to send to the latter an express messenger charged with letters to the three Ceann tighes, apprising them of their present imminent danger, and recommending them all to flee for safety to a large cave on Crossmount estate, opposite Dunalastair House - just above the southern bank of the intervening river. And when the messenger departed all in Dunalastair were in the utmost anxiety as to whether or not those headstrong Macgregors would take the advice tendered - which for the present seemed their only possible way of escape from impending ruin.

The Macgregors were at first very reluctant to take the advice thus so considerably given them. They scouted the idea of retreating with their wives and children and followers to a cave, for a safety that ought to dwell in the good broadswords of the brave and renowned Clan Alpine. The supposed ignominy of the thing caused them for a long time to hesitate. But at length, on the morning of the second day after Christmas, news was conveyed to the "Mount" that all the Macgregors on the Sliosmin headed by their three leaders of Dunan and Ardlarich and Leargan were seen to pass by Kinloch Rannoch on their way to hide themselves in the Crossmount Cave. All eyes in Dunalastair scanned the windings of the Dubhag, eager to see the coming motley host of fugitives. At length the Macgregors were seen to wind their way in a long line through West Tempar, Tom Tempar, and Lassintullich until they were lost to view amongst the rough rocky grounds of Crossmount. Towards the evening of the same day another messenger arrived also at the "Mount" with the news that the Camerons were coming in full force in pursuit of the Macgregors - led by the scent of Macgregor of Dunan's stag hound.

"A fine situation of affairs," said Struan.

"And what shall we do?" said the Laird of Weem. "If God will, I shall!"

"We will at once cross the river with our men," said Struan, "and guard Macgregors' cave from the east until the arrival of the Cameron men; and I think I can manage to get round the Tailor to spare the poor Macgregor fugitives."

In a very short time the Robertsons and Menzieses mustered to arms and were put in position; and having marched down to the river and crossed it climbed up the rocks on the south side, and took up their position along the east and south side of the now closely beleaguered Clan Gregor. And this brings on the action to the point of time already described when the three chiefs met in anxious consultation on the south side of Macgregors' cave.

"Let us smoke them out of the cave," said the Tailor, "as we should do a lot of foxes!"

"Would you smoke out Marsali's father?" said Struan, "and by doing so kill her, poor woman, to the bargain?"

"Well, I didn't remember that she was a Macgregor," said the Tailor, "and I confess I shouldn't like to do her an injury."

"Will you refer the case then to her arbitration?" said Struan.

"Yes I will," said the Tailor, "that is, with one exception, that should she pardon the whole I am determined that Macgregor of Ardlarich shall not escape punishment for the murder of Ewen Cameron." A message was now sent to the cave to tell the Macgregors that their lives depended on the decision of Marsali who was now on child-bed in Dunalastair House - the only exception being Macgregor of Ardlarich whose crime the leader of the Camerons could not consent to pardon. The Macgregors with many sighs and groans acquiesced in the arbitration. Thereafter William Cameron was despatched with haste to Dunalastair House to ask Marsali's decision. She replied: -

"Although my own friends broke my heart,
My peace to each of them I give;
For since they now are in the cave (Gaelic, grave)
I seek no further victory over them."

When William arrived and repeated this stanza the three leaders laughed at Marsali's wit; but the Tailor raising his axe and putting on a stern face said, "but I am determined nevertheless to have Macgregor of Ardlarich's life!" But on hearing these words Macgregor who had been on the alert rushed out of the cave and effected an enormous leap, which is still pointed out by the inhabitants of the place as the "Macgregor's leap" - a leap which set him free from ever experiencing the keen edge of Taillear-Dabh-na-Tuaighe's axe. The Tailor, on seeing this, said that we gave up the game; and the Macgregors were thereafter allowed to defile in safety out of Macgregor's cave, when, and as best they could.

The Camerons and Menzieses and Robertsons, with their chiefs, thereafter adjourned to Mount Alexander. The men were all treated most sumptuously by Struan, and enjoyed themselves to their heart's content. The Tailor and Menzies of Weem formed a jolly trio that evening in Dunalastair House; and rejoiced that there was now an end of the Tragedy of Clach-nan-ceann.

Lady Struan led her husband and Menzies of Weem and the Tailor to Marsali's bedroom. They greatly admired her and her two sons - Iain Biorach and Iain Ciar - and wished her greater joy of them than of the poor departed ones. The Tailor now in a humorous manner recounted his midnight chase of the Badenoch Cat, and amid much laughter presented Marsali with the Tail of Mackintosh's kilt, which she received as the final fulfilment of her dream of destiny. She said: -

"I'll keep this safely for my children
As a memorial of Clach-nan-ceann,
And of how Taillear Dubh na Tuaighe
Triumphed o'er the Great Badenoch Cat."

And she did preserve this unique piece of Mackintosh tartan very carefully in Camghouran until her dying day.

Next day William Cameron was married by the Vicar of Fortingall to Margaret Robertson; and by this alliance became the progenitor of the Sliochd Uilleim sept of Camerons in Rannoch. Thereupon Taillear Dubh na Tuaighe and Menzies of Weem set off with their men to their respective localities of Lochaber and Appin-i-

Dull. In due time also Marsali and her two boys, and William Cameron and Margaret Robertson accompanied by Donald and Duncan Robertson proceeded to Camghouran, and became the founders of the colony still occupied by their descendants.

Marsali lived to extreme old age in Tigh-na-dige and Camghouran, revered like a queen, as she truly was, amongst her devoted people; and the Camghouran folks still delight in naming at least one daughter in each family, Marsali, in honour of the famous Marsali Macgregor, who did such wonderful things in Tigh-na-dige.