

THE BURNING OF MACFARLANE'S FOREST
OF BEN LAOIDH.

THE sun had not yet disappeared behind the mountains on the western side of Loch Lomond, and the unruffled surface of the lake was gleaming with his parting rays, when the Laird of Macfarlane, as he was returning from the chase, looked down from the ridge of a hill over the glorious scene that lay extended beneath him. His eyes travelled far along the calm expanse of the waters, till they lost themselves in the distance, amid the tufted and clustering islands, which lay glittering in the fleeting light like gems on the bosom of Beauty,—he then recalled them along the romantic undulations and irregularities of its shores, to

dwell with peculiar pride and inward satisfaction on the wide stretch of those rich and smiling pastures which he could call his own, and on the numerous herds of cattle which his vassals were then driving to their home-grazings for the night. All was still and silent around, save when the quiet of the balmy evening air was gently broken by those rural sounds, which, when blended together and softened by distance, as they then were to Macfarlane's ear, never fail to produce a musical harmony, that thrills to the very heart of the true lover of nature. The lowing of the cattle—the occasional prolonged shouts of the herdsmen—the watchful bark of their attendant dogs, careful to permit no individual of their charge to stray from the main body—the shrill and solitary scream of the eagle, coming from the upper regions of the sky, as he soared to his place of repose amid the towering crags of Ben Lomond,—and, lastly, the mingled cawing of the retreating army of rooks as they wheeled away in black battalions, to seek for undisturbed roost among the branches of that forest which then filled the whole country, from Loch Lomond to Glen Urchay, with a dark and interminable sea of foliage. Such were the sounds that came in mellow

chorus on the delighted ear of Macfarlane. He sat him down on a mossy stone to rest for a while, that his eyes and his ears might have fuller enjoyment. His faithful sleuth-hounds and braches, overcome with fatigue, quickly stretched out their wearied bodies in ready slumber around him; and his numerous followers no less gladly availed themselves of their lord's example, to ease their tired shoulders of the heavy loads which the success of that day's woodcraft had imposed upon them.

Macfarlane was a stern chief of the olden time. Yet, what heart, however stark or rude, but must have been subdued and softened beneath the warm influence of those emotions which such a scene, and such sounds, and such an evening combined to excite? As he sat apart from his people, he was melted into a mood of feeling which he had rarely experienced during his life of feudal turmoil. His thoughts insensibly stole upwards in secret musings, which gradually exhaled themselves in grateful orisons to that Heaven, whence he felt that all the blessings he possessed had so liberally flowed; and, although these prayers were inwardly breathed in the formal and set terms prescribed by his church, yet his soul more fully and effectually suffused it-

self into them, than it had ever done before. That mysterious and uncontrollable desire which man often feels to hold converse with his Creator alone, gradually stole upon him ; and, having ordered his attendants to precede him, he arose soon after their departure, to saunter homewards through the twilight, in that calm and dreamy state of religious reflection, which had rarely ever before visited his stormy mind.

As he slowly descended the mountain side, that slopes down to the Arroquhar, the course of the little rill, which he followed, led him into a grove of natural birches, and his silent footstep betrayed him into an involuntary intrusion on the privacy of two lovers. These were his foster-brother, Angus Macfarlane, and Ellen, a beautiful maiden, who was about to become his wife. The wedding-day was fixed, as the Laird of Macfarlane well knew ; and as his heart was at this moment brimful of kindly feeling, the sight of this betrothed pair made it run over with benevolence.

“ What ho ! my fair Ellen,” cried he, as chased away by her modest confusion, her sylph-like form was disappearing among the tender foliage of the birchen bushes like some delicate thing of air ;

“dost fear the face of thy chief?—Knowest thou not that Macfarlane’s most earnest wish ever is to be held as the father of his meanest clansman? and think ye that he would be less than a father to thee, sad posthumous pledge of the worthiest warrior that ever followed the banner of Loch Sloy, or for whom a gallant clan ever sung a wailing lament?—But, ha!” exclaimed he, as he kindly took her hand to detain her; “why dost thou look so sad? By this light, such as it is, it would seem as if the tear-drop had been in that blue eye of thine. My worthy Angus could never have caused this? He loves thee too well, ever to give pain to so soft and confiding a heart as thine.”

“Angus never could wilfully give me pain,” said the maiden earnestly, and throwing down her eyes, and blushing deeply as she said so.

“Ha!” said Macfarlane, in a playful manner, “now I think on’t, yours may have been the tears of repentance, seeing that you most wickedly have seduced my trusty master herdsman from his duty this evening, and that he hath left his people and his beasts to take care of one another, that he might come over the hill here, to whisper soft things into thine ear, under the clustering wood-

bine, that wreathes itself through the holly there, and fills the air thus with its delicious perfume."

"My good lord, I would humbly acknowledge my fault, and crave your pardon," replied Angus; "I must confess that I did leave the lads and the cattle, to come to keep tryst here with Ellen. But albeit that she had some small share of blame in this; her tears fell not from compunction for any such fault. Say, shall I tell the cause, Ellen?—They fell because of a strange vision which her old aunt Margery saw last night."

"A vision!" exclaimed Macfarlane, seriously; "tell me, Ellen, what did she see?"

"It was last night, my lord," replied Ellen, that my aunt Margery came over to my mother's cottage to settle some matters regarding—a—a—I mean, to speak with my mother of some little family affairs, which kept her better than an hour after nightfall,—when, as she was crossing the hill again in her way home, she suddenly beheld a red glowing gleam in the sky, and, turning to look behind her, the whole of the forest below seemed to be on fire. She rubbed her eyes in her astonishment, and when she looked again the vision had disappeared."

“ Strange !” said Macfarlane, seriously.

“ But this was not all,” continued Ellen, with increased earnestness of manner, and shuddering as she spoke, “ for, by the light that still gleamed in the sky, she beheld a dark object at some distance from her on the heath. It moved towards the spot where she was. Trembling with fear, she stood aside to observe it, and on it continued to come, gliding without sound. A single stream of faint light fell upon it from a broken part of the sky, and showed the figure and the features of—of—you, Macfarlane.”

“ What, my figure !—my features !” exclaimed the laird, in a disturbed tone, and then, commanding himself, he quietly added, “ A well, and saw she aught else ?”

“ She did, my lord,” added Ellen, much agitated, “ for, borne over your right shoulder she beheld a human corse ; the head was hanging down, and the pale fixed features were those of—of—my betrothed husband !” Overpowered by her feelings, Ellen sank down on a mossy bank, and wept bitterly.

“ Let not these gloomy fancies enter your head at a time like this, Ellen,” said Macfarlane, roused



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by her sobbing from the fit of gloomy abstraction into which her narration had thrown him. "If not altogether an unaccountable and unreal freak of imagination, it can be interpreted no otherwise than felicitously for you. The burning forest is but a type of the extent and the warmth of your mutual affection, and the dead figure of Angus only shadows forth the fact that your love will endure with life itself."

"There needed not such a vision to tell us these truths," said Angus energetically.

"Yet do we often see matters as palpable as these, as wonderfully vouched for by supernatural means," said the chief. "Get thee home then, Ellen; and do thou see her safe, Angus, and let her not suffer her young mind to brood on such dreary and distressing phantasies as seem now to fill it. Be yours the joyous anticipations of the bride and bridegroom three days before they are made one for ever. Ere three days go round your indissoluble union shall be blessed by the happiest influence of the warm sunshine of your chief's substantial favour. Meanwhile, may good angels guard you both!—Good night."

With these words, Macfarlane sought his way

home, musing as he went, impressed, more than he even wished to own to himself, with the strange tale he had heard, and when he could contrive to rid himself of it, turning in his thoughts from time to time certain benevolent schemes which suggested themselves to him for the liberal establishment of Angus and his bride.

The next day's sun had hardly reddened the eastern sky, so as to exhibit the huge dark mass of Ben Lomond with a sharp and well-defined outline on its glowing surface, when the herdsmen of the Laird of Macfarlane arose and left their huts, with the intention of driving their cattle across the dewy pastures back to the slopes of the mountains. The thick summer mist still hung over the lower grounds; and the men wandered about, hallooing to each other whilst employed in actively looking for the animals of which they had the charge. They had left them the previous evening feeding in numerous groups among herbage of the most luxuriant description. They were well aware that it was much too fragrant not to tie them, by the sweetest and securest of all tethers, to the vicinity of those spots where they had been collected in herds; and they were quite sure that the animals

never would have left them voluntarily. But all their shouting and all their searching appeared to be unsuccessful, and the more unsuccessful they were likely to be, the more were their exertions increased. All was clamour, confusion, and uncertainty, till sunrise had somewhat dispelled the mist that had hitherto rolled its dense and silent waves over the bottom of the valley; and then one herdsman, more active and intelligent than the rest, having climbed the mountain that sends forth its root to form the boundary between the enchanting mazes of the beautiful oak and birch-fringed lakes of Balloch, and the long stretch of Loch Lomond's inland sea, and having looked up Glen Falloch, and far and wide around him to the full extent that his eyes could reach,—

“We are harried!” shouted he in Gaelic, to his anxiously inquiring comrades below. “Not a horn of them is to be seen!—I can perceive a large herd of deer afar off yonder, clustered together in the open forest glade, but not a horn or hide of cow, ox, quey, or stirk, do I see within all the space that my eyes can light upon; and unless the muckle stone, the *Clach-nan-Tairbh*, down below there, has covered them, as tradition

tells us it covered the two wild bulls, when the fury of their battle was said to have been so great as to shake it down from the very craig upon them, our beasts are harried every cloot o' them!"

"My curses on the catterans that took them then!" exclaimed Angus Macfarlane, the master of the herdsmen—"and my especial curses, too, because they have thus harried them the very night when I chanced to be wandering! But if they are above the surface of the earth we must find them,—so come, lads, look about ye sharply."

Like an eager pack of hounds newly uncoupled, who have been taught by the huntsman's well-understood voice, that a fresh scent is at hand, the herdsmen now went dodging about, looking for the track of those who had so adroitly driven off a *creagh* so very numerous, and so immensely valuable. Long experience and much practice in such matters soon enabled Angus to discover the country towards which the freshest hoof-prints pointed, and in a short time the whole band were in full and hot pursuit of the reavers.

"They are Lochaber men, I'll warrant me!" said Angus, whose sagacity and acuteness left him seldom mistaken; and guessing shrewdly at the

route they would probably take, he resolved to follow them cautiously with his assistants, that he might dog their footsteps and spy out their motions, whilst he sent one back as a messenger to the Laird of Macfarlane, to report to him the daring robbery that had been committed on him.

If you have been able to conceive the calm that settled upon Macfarlane's mind, when the placidity of the previous evening had brought it so much into harmony with all the surrounding objects of nature, that it might almost have been said to have reflected the unruffled image of Loch Lomond itself, you may easily imagine that the intelligence which he now received operated on him as some whirlwind would have done on the peaceful bosom of the lake. The eyes of the dark-browed chief kindled up into a blaze of rage, and shot forth red lightnings, and his soul was lashed into a sudden and furious storm ere the messenger had time to unfold half of his information.

“What! all harried, said you?—Bid the pipers play *the gathering*!—Shout our war-cry of Loch Sloy!—We'll after them with what of our clansmen may be mustered in haste. By the blessed

rood, we'll follow them to Lochaber itself, but we'll have back our bestial !”

But Macfarlane was not one who allowed his rage to render him incapable of adopting the proper measures for the sure attainment of his object. A numerous party of his clan was speedily assembled, all boiling with the same indignation that excited their chief. Macfarlane himself saw that each man was equipped in the most efficient manner for celerity of movement ; and when all were in order, he instantly set forward at their head, taking that direction which was indicated to him by the intelligence which the messenger had brought him.

In their rapid march through the great forest, they threaded its intricacies, partly trusting to their local knowledge, partly to their leader's judgment of the probable route of the reavers, partly guided by the fresh tracks which they now and then fell in with, and partly by certain signal marks which the wily Angus had from time to time left behind him, by breaking the boughs down in a particular direction. Once or twice they encountered some individual of the party of herdsmen in advance, whom Angus had station-

ed in their way to give his chief intelligence ; and at last, as the sun was fast declining towards the west, another man appeared, who came to meet them in breathless haste.

“ Well !—what tidings now ? ” demanded the Laird.

“ They are Lochaber men, sure enough, ” replied the man.

“ Pshaw ! I never doubted that, ” said Macfarlane, impatiently ;—but, quick !—tell me whither you have tracked them. We have no time to lose.”

“ I'm thinking you may take your own leisure, Macfarlane, ” replied the man, “ for I'm in the belief that they are lodged for the best part of this night, tethered as they are with the tired legs of the beasts. ” And so he went on to explain that they had been traced into what was then one of the thickest parts of the forest to a spot lying between Loch Sloy and what is now the wide moss of the *Caoran*, stretching south-east from Ben Laoidh.

“ Then they cannot be far distant from the bothy of the Lochan, where I slept when we last hunted in that quarter ? ” said the Chief.

“ Sure enough, you have guessed it, Macfarlane, ” replied the man, “ sure enough they are there, and

Angus and Parlane, and the rest, are watching them. By all appearance there's a strong party of the limmers, and I'll warrant me they keep a good guard."

"Let them guard as they may, our cattle are our own again," said the Chief, with a laugh of anticipated triumph; "Saint Mary! but we'll make these gentlemen of Lochaber pay for their incivility, and for the unwilling tramp they have given both to us and to our beasts! Not a man of them shall escape to tell the tale!"

A general exclamation burst from his followers. "Not a man of them!" was echoed around, and they besought Macfarlane to lead them instantly to the slaughter.

"No!" replied he sternly, "I have said, and I now swear by the roof-tree of my fathers, and by the graves where they rest, that not a man of these vermin shall escape! and Macfarlane has never yet said, for weal or for woe, what he did not make good to the very letter. But no advantage must be lost by rashness. Every precaution must be taken coolly and deliberately, so that not a man of them may ever return to parent, to wife, or to child. Lochaber shall wail for them from one end

of it to the other, and the men of that country shall pause long before they again attempt to lay hand even on a cat belonging to Macfarlane."

Having thus checked their impatience, he marched them slowly onwards, without noise, till he discovered a thicket by the side of a brook, where, sheltered and concealed by an overhanging bank, his men could rest and refresh themselves without being observed, and there he patiently halted to wait for the night, and for farther intelligence.

Impenetrable darkness had settled over the forest, and the Macfarlanes had sat long in silence, listening eagerly to catch the distant but welcome sound of the lowing of the cattle, that came on their ears faintly at intervals, and assured them that they were now within a short march of their enemies; when the cracking of the withered branches of the firs at some distance a-head of them, made them stand to their arms and look sharply out from their ambush. Human footsteps were evidently heard approaching. Not a word was uttered by those in the thicket, but every eye that peered from it was steadily fixed on a natural break among the trees growing on a

bank, that rose with a gentle slope immediately in front of their position, where the obscurity being less absolutely impervious, they might at least be enabled to see something like the form of any object that came, however imperfectly it might be defined. The sounds slowly advanced, till at length one human figure only appeared on the knoll that crowned the bank. It stood for some moments, as if scrutinizing every bush that grew in the hollow below. It moved—and then it seemed to stop, as if in hesitation. Macfarlane's henchman raised his arquebuss to his shoulder, and proceeded to light a match for its lock. The click of the flint and steel made the figure start.

“It is a patrol of the Lochaber men,” whispered the henchman, raising the piece to his shoulder to take aim; “I'll warrant they have got hold of Angus and the rest. But I'll make sure of that fellow at any rate.”

“Not for your life!” replied Macfarlane in the same tone, whilst he arrested his hand. “The whole forest would ring with the report, and all would be lost.”

Seizing a cross-bow from one of his immediate attendants, he bent it, and fitted a quarrel-bolt

to it, and, having pointed it at the object on the summit of the knoll, he challenged in such an under tone of voice, as might not spread alarm to any great distance, whilst, at the same time, he was quite prepared to shoot with deadly certainty of aim, the moment he saw the figure make the smallest effort to retreat.

“ Ho, there !” cried the chief.

“ Ho, there !” replied the figure, starting at the sound, and turning his head to look eagerly around him.

“ Where grew your bow, and how is it drawn ?” demanded Macfarlane, in the same tone.

“ It grew in the isles of Loch Lomond, and it is drawn for Loch Sloy,” was the ready reply.

A longbreath was inhaled and expired by the lungs of every anxious Macfarlane, as he recognized the well-known voice of Angus, the master herdsman.

“ Advance, my trusty Angus,” said the chief; “ the brake is full of friends.”

Angus had never left his post of watch, until he was satisfied that the Lochaber men were in such a state of repose as to ensure to him time enough to return to meet his chief. He then planted some of his people to keep their eyes on the enemy, whilst

he found his way back alone, to make Macfarlane fully aware of their position. The plunderers lay about a mile from the spot where the chief had halted. The great body of them, consisting of some thirty or more in number, had retired into the hunting-bothy, before the door of which a sentinel was posted, to give alarm in case of assault. To prevent the cattle from straying away, they had driven them together into a large open hollow, immediately in front of the knoll on which the bothy stood; and to take away all risk of their escape or abstraction, four men were stationed at equal distances from each other, so as to surround them. The poor animals were so jaded with their rapid journey, that they drew themselves around the shallow little *loch* or pool in the bottom of the hollow, from which the bothy had its name, and having lain down there, they showed so much unwillingness to rise from their recumbent position, that the watchmen soon ceased to have any apprehension of their running away. The men rolled themselves up in their plaids, therefore, and each making a bed for himself among the long heather, they indulged in that sort of half slumber, to which active-bodied and vacant-minded people must natu-

rally yield the moment they are brought into an attitude of rest.

Macfarlane had no sooner made himself perfectly master of all these circumstances, than he at once conceived his murderous plans—took his resolution—gave his orders ; and, having cautioned every man of his party to be hushed as the grave, they proceeded, under the guidance of Angus, to steal like cats upon their prey—foot falling softly and slowly after foot, so that if they produced any sound at all, it was liker the rustle of some zephyr, passing gently over the heather tops, than the pressure of mortal tread.

Whilst they were proceeding in this cautious manner, Angus, who was at the head of the men, was observed suddenly to raise his cross-bow, and to point it in the direction of Macfarlane, who was, at that moment, some ten or fifteen paces before the party. Filled with horror, the men who were nearest to him sprang upon him to prevent so great a treason as the murder of their chief. Angus was felled to the ground—but his bolt had already flown—and, with a sure aim too, for down fell among the heath, weltering in his blood, and with an expiring groan, not the chief of the Macfarlanes, but one of

the Lochaber men. The quick eye of Angus had detected him standing half concealed by the huge trunk of a tree, exactly in the very path of the chief. Three more steps would have brought Macfarlane within reach of the very dirk of the assassin, which was already unsheathed, and ready to have been plunged in his bosom. Amazement fell upon all of them for some moments. Macfarlane could with difficulty comprehend what had happened; but when he was at length made to understand the truth, he ran towards Angus. He was already raised in the arms of those of his friends who had so rashly judged and punished him, but who were now sufficiently ashamed and repentant of their precipitation.

“Look up, my brave Angus,” said Macfarlane to his clansman, as he began to revive; “look up to thy chief, grateful as he is for that life which thou hast preserved to him!—Heaven forbid that it were at the expense of thine own life; and that, too, taken by the too zealous hands of Macfarlanes.”

“Fear not for me,” replied Angus, somewhat faintly, “I was but stunned by the blow; and he that gave it me would have been well excused if

he had given me a death-wound, if I could have been justly suspected of traitorie to my chief;— and well I wot the bare suspicion of such villainy is wound enough to me.”

“ Nay, nay, Angus,” said Macfarlane; “ you must not think so deeply of this accident. The judgment was necessarily as sudden as the action, and no wonder that it was faulty. But, how came this stray man to be patrolling about? Are we betrayed or discovered, think ye?”

“ I would fain trust that we are not,” replied Angus. “ As we watched, we saw one man leave the bothy to go out and spy around their post; as we guessed; but, as we afterwards saw a man come in again, we took him to be the same, when, I’ll warrant me, he has been the fellow whom the first man went out to relieve. But, if we were deceived, the fault is luckily cured now, for this is doubtless the very man who——”

“ Aye,” said the chief interrupting him; “ the very man, indeed, who would have certainly taken my life, had it not been for thine alert and timely aid. What do I not owe thee, my trusty Angus! But, stay; let him sit down and rest for a brief space, till he recovers his strength, and then, if I

mistake not, we shall bloodily revenge his passing injury."

They now again moved forward, with much circumspection, until they at length began to perceive a distant light, which occasionally twinkled in advance of them. As they proceeded, the light became broader, though it was still broken by the intervention of the thick set stems of the forest. But after groping their way onwards with redoubled care for some hundred yards farther, it burst forth fully and steadily on their eyes, as the trees ceased suddenly, and they found themselves close to the very edge of the open hollow, described by Angus, and in the middle of the herdsmen who had been left by him as spies. After using their eyes very earnestly and intently for a little time, they could now perceive the surface of the shallow pool, which lay in the still shadow, in the centre of the bottom below them, and they could dimly descry the dusky mass of cattle lying crowded together around it. As the Macfarlanes stood peering into the obscurity, a low and melancholy voice of complaint would every now and then burst from some individual beast, reminiscent of the rich Loch Lomond pasture, from which it had been driven, and bitterly

sensible of the sad change of fortunes which a few hours had brought to it. The figures of the four watchmen were as yet invisible ; but the whole face of the opposite knoll being free from wood, the door of the hunting bothy was clearly defined, by the bickering blaze of faggots that burned in the middle of the floor within, distinctly displaying the sentinel as he walked to and fro across the field of its light. The thick wooding of the forest, that encircled this natural opening, came climbing up the rear of the knoll until its tall pines clustered over the back of the bothy itself, and the existence of high grounds rising with considerable abruptness at no great distance, if not previously known, could only have been guessed at by the greater density of the shade which prevailed over every thing that was beneath the lofty horizon, the limits of which were easily distinguished by the partial gleam that proceeded from the sky above it. There the clouds were now every moment growing thinner and thinner, as the driving rack skimmed across the face of heaven, with a velocity that proclaimed an approaching hurricane.

In obedience to the orders already given to them by their chief, the Macfarlanes retreated a few steps

into the thick part of the skirting forest, the dark foliage of which arose every where around this naturally open space, and beneath its impenetrable concealment they made a silent movement to right and left, during which they posted single men at equal distances from each other, until they had completely surrounded the hollow, the bothy, and the whole party of Lochaber men, together with their booty. This manœuvre was no sooner silently and successfully executed, than four choice young herdsmen, remarkable for their daring courage as well as for their strength and agility, were selected by Angus. These had well and accurately noted the respective spots where each of the Lochaber watchmen had lain down, and after some consultation, each had one of them assigned to him as his own peculiar object of attack. Having gone around the edge of the wood till each man was opposite to his slumbering enemy, they glided down the sloping edges of the hollow, armed with their dirks alone, and they crept on their bellies towards the bottom, drawing themselves like snakes silently and imperceptibly through the long heather. Full time was to be allowed for each man to reach his prey; and although the period was not in reality

very long, yet you will easily believe that it passed over the heads of the Macfarlanes with a degree of anxiety that made it appear long enough. The moment the four herdsmen began to descend into the deep shadow which filled the sides of the hollow, their figures were entirely lost to the view of those who were stationed within the skirt of the surrounding forest. Every heart beat with agonizing suspense. The smallest accident might ruin all. An occasional prolonged moan was heard to come from some of the cattle, and all felt persuaded, however contrary it might be to reason, that each succeeding recurrence of it must awaken the slumberers. But at length, whether from the operation of some peculiar instinct, or from some remarkable sense of smell which these creatures have occasionally proved that they possess, it happened that they really did become sensible of the approach of some of those who were wont to attend on them, I know not; but all of a sudden some ten or a dozen of them sprang up to their legs, and changed their long low moan into that sharp and piercing rout into which it is frequently known to graduate.

“ Look out !—look out there !” cried one of the

Lochaber watchmen in Gaelic, and half-raising himself as he spoke.

“Look out!” cried one of the others laughing, “I’m thinking that I would need the blazing eyes of the devil himself to be able to look at any thing here.”

“What’s the matter?” shouted the sentinel at the door of the bothy; and as he said so, he halted in the midst of his walk, and bent his body forward in all directions in his eagerness to descry the cause of the alarm.

“Tut, nothing,” replied another of the watchmen, “all’s well, I warrant me.”

“Aye, aye,” said another, “we’re safe enough from all surprise this night; for, as Archy says, it would need the fiery e’en of the red de’il himself to grope a way through the forest in such darkness as this.”

“It’s dark enough to confound an owl or a bat, indeed,” said the watchman who first spoke, “but mine are eyes that can note a buck on Ben Nevis’ side of an autumn morning, a good hour before the sun hath touched his storm-worn top; and, by St. Colm, I swear I saw some dark-looking thing glide over the lip of the bank yonder.”

“It must have been a dark-looking thing, in-

deed, to have been visible there," replied his comrade; "but if it were not fancy, it must have been a fox or a badger."

"Be it what it might," replied the man, "I swear I saw the back of the creature as it came creeping over the round of the bank."

"What, think ye, makes the cattle rout so strangely?" demanded the sentinel.

"That which makes the pipes skirl so loudly," replied one of the men below, "a stomach full of wind. I promise you the poor beasts got but a scanty supper ere the sun went to. And here, unless they can eat gravel or sand in this hole, or heather as hard as pike-heads, they have little chance of filling their bellies with aught else but wind."

A noise of talking was now heard within the bothy, where all had been so quiet previously, and immediately afterwards the doorway was darkened by the figures of two or three men, who came crowding out to gaze ineffectually around them. Some talking took place between them and the sentinel; and Macfarlane and his people gave up all hope of the success of the manoeuvres they had planned. But after some moments of most painful suspense, the talk of the Lochaber men termi-

nated in a loud laugh, produced, no doubt, by some waggish remark made against some individual of the little knot, after which the figures retired into the hut. The sentinel resumed his silent walk, and the watchmen in the hollow below seemed to relapse into their former state of slumber.

The silence that now prevailed was not less deep and intense than the darkness that sat upon this wild forest scene, where the plunderers lay unconsciously surrounded by their mortal foes. Macfarlane moved cautiously round the circle of his men, to assure himself that all were prepared, and sufficient time having now expired, to have allowed the slumber of security to have again crept over his victims, he took a matchlock from his henchman, and stepping forth from under the trees, he pointed it with a deliberate and unerring aim at the sentinel, as he stood for a moment directly opposed to the full light proceeding from the doorway. He gave fire.—This was the fatal signal— instantaneously fatal to him against whom the deadly tube was levelled, who sprang into the air and fell without a groan, pierced through the very heart. But it was not fatal to him alone; for ere

the report of the shot had re-echoed from the surrounding heights of the forest, or its myriads of feathered inhabitants had been roused by it on the startled wing, the dirks of the four Macfarlane herdsmen had bathed themselves in the life's-blood of the four Lochaber watchmen; so that their living slumbers were in one moment exchanged for those of death. The wild war-shout of "*Lochsloy!—Lochsloy!*" arose at once from every part of the ring of the Macfarlanes, who environed the place; and each man keeping his eyes on the light that issued from the bothy, on they ran towards it as to a centre from all parts of the circle. So sudden was the attack, that those within had hardly time to start from their sleep, and to hurry in confusion to the door, ere the Macfarlanes were upon them. The clash of arms was terrific, and the slaughter fearful. At once driven back in a mass, the remnant of the Lochaber men barricaded the doorway in despair, and determining to die hard, they fired many shots from behind it, as well as from a small window hole near it; but discharged as these were from a crowded press of men, where no aim could be taken, no very fatal effect could be produced by them. On the other

hand, the assailants could do nothing, till Macfarlane kindled a slow-match, and prepared to thrust it into the dry heather that covered the roof.

“ Macfarlane !” cried Angus, eagerly endeavouring to interpose ; “ for the love of the Virgin fire not the thatch !—Think of old Margery’s vision !”

Macfarlane did think of it ; but, alas ! he thought of it too late ; for the slow match had been already applied—had already caught fatally ; and in one instant it had burst into a blaze, that, amidst the pitchy darkness of that night, would have been a magnificent spectacle, could any one have beheld it without those dreadful emotions naturally excited by the cruel cause that created it, and the horrible circumstances that attended it. In one moment more the whole of the wooden structure was in flames, and inconceivably short was the period in which the tragedy was consummated. Loud and piteous were the cries for mercy ; but they fell on ears which revenge had rendered deaf to mercy’s call. The half-burned Lochaber men, yelling like demons, rushed in desperation forth from the blazing walls ; but dazzled by the glare, they only rushed to certain destruction on the spears of the

Macfarlanes, and were hewn down by their trenchant claymores, or despatched with their ready dirks ; so that ere a few brief moments had fled away, all those who had been so recently reposing in fancied security, with the full pulses of robust life beating vigorously within their hardy frames, were heaped up in one reeking mass of carnage before the burning bothy.

“ Let us rid the earth of these carcasses ! ” said Macfarlane after a pause ; for now that the keenness of revenge and the exciting eagerness of enterprise had been fully satiated by success, he was half horror-struck with the ghastly fruits of it, which he thus beheld piled up before him. In obedience to his command, the whole of the dead bodies were immediately gathered together, and thrown within the burning bothy, where they were quickly covered with branches and half-decayed pieces of wood, hastily dragged from the forest, till the fire that was thus created shot up far above the trees in one spiral pillar of flame, bearing on its capital a black smoke that poisoned the air with the heavy and sickening taint with which it was loaded.

The Macfarlanes stood for a while grouped in

front of it, in silent contemplation of its fitful changes ; but its light shewed little of the flush of triumph on their sullen brows. Each man held dark communing with his own gloomy thoughts. Their chief, leaning on the deadly instrument which had given the fatal signal, looked on the scene with a cloud on his brow, not less dark than that of the murky smoke itself. Whatever his reflections were, there was a restless and uneasy expression on his countenance. He started—for a dreadful sound came crashing through the forest. It was like that which might well have announced the coming of the demon of destruction or the angel of vengeance ; and before he could mutter the Ave-Maria which mechanically came to his lips, that hurricane which the careering rack of the clouds had been for some time unheededly announcing, came rushing upon them with the swiftness of lightning and with resistless force. In one moment the frail wooden walls of the bothy, already yielding to the influence of the combustion, were levelled with the ground ; and some six or eight of the tallest pines which stood nearest to them behind, were laid across them with all their branches in one heap by the blast. Mac-

farlane and his men were driven down on their faces, and compelled to cling to the knoll on hands and knees, like flies to a mushroom top. So tremendous was the violence of the tempest, that they could not rise from their crouching position, nor even dare to lift up their heads without the certainty of being whirled off their feet, and dashed to atoms against the boles of the neighbouring trees. This furious fit of the elements endured not long; but when a sudden lull of nature did allow them to assume the erect position, how terrible!—how appalling was the scene they beheld!

The funeral pile which they had themselves kindled for the massacred men of Lochaber, now arose in one broad resistless tower of fire, crowned, as it were, with many a pointed pinnacle of flame, that appeared to pierce the very sky, lighting up every part of the surrounding elevations, nay, every little crevice in the rocks, and every tree, bush, or petty plant that grew upon their rugged surface. If the spectacle was grand before, it was now sublime beyond all imagination. But, alas! the Macfarlanes were occupied with other contemplations; for the huge fallen pines which had so much augmented the conflagration,

had formed a train of communication from the burning bothy to the thick forest immediately behind it; and the flames had spread so rapidly far and wide on every side, that already the whole of the surrounding circle of wood presented nearly one dense and lofty wall of fire through which there was hardly any door of escape left for them. For one instant, and for that one instant only, something like dismay appeared in Macfarlane's eye, as he first gazed around him, and then cast a glance full of anxious expression towards his faithful clansmen.

“Perhaps I might have shewn more mercy,” half-muttered he to himself. “But if it be the will of Heaven to punish me, oh! why should these poor fellows suffer for the sin of their chief? My brave men,” continued he aloud, “we cannot stand here. The air already grows hot and scanty.—Follow me, and let us try to burst through yonder point where the flames seem to burn thinnest.—Come on.”

Followed by his people, Macfarlane rushed down the sloping face of the knoll, with the intention of cutting across the open space by the most direct line towards the spot he had indicated; but

they had not gone many steps ere the hurricane again came sweeping over the woods with all its former fury,—the enormous pines bent and groaned as if from the agony they were enduring,—the violence of the conflagration was increased tenfold.—the wall of fire by which they were environed was speedily closed in, so as to annihilate every lingering hope of escape,—and the Macfarlanes were compelled to throw themselves again flat on the ground, and to scramble down into the bottom of the hollow, to avoid being scorched up like moths by the fire which the uncertain whirlwind darted suddenly hither and thither in different directions, and to escape the risk of being snatched up into the air and launched amid the burning pines.

It had happened so far well for the sufferers, that the cattle, terrified by the shouts of the conflict, and still more by the first blaze of the bothy, had fled up the bank from the hollow, and, forgetting their fatigue, they had charged full-tilt through the forest, routing and bellowing in that direction which led to their own Loch Lomond pastures, from which they had been so unwillingly driven. The small space towards the bottom of the hollow, therefore, was thus left entirely disencumbered of

them ; so that when the Macfarlanes were forced down thither, they were enabled to gather around the shallow pool of water in the centre of the place. There they endeavoured to defend themselves against the flying embers, by rolling up their bodies tight in their plaids. But although they were rid of the cattle, they were not left as the only occupants of the spot ; for the place was soon covered with swarms of mice, weasels, adders, frogs, toads, and all the minuter sorts of animals, like them, driven into the centre of the circle by the scorching heat of the devouring element that surrounded them. For now the flames raged fiercer than ever, and the dense canopy of smoke that covered the comparatively small space where they lay, was so pressed down upon them by the fury of the blast, that it appeared to shut out the very air ; and they seemed to breathe nothing but fire, and burning dust and ashes. Their very lungs seemed to be igniting,—whilst at every temporary accession of the tempest, the half-consumed tops of the blazing pines were whirled among them like darts, inflicting grievous bruises and burns on many of them.

And now, as if to consummate their afflictions

and their miserable fate, the long, dry, and wiry heath that grew within the open space where they lay, was laid hold of by the fire; and the flames, running along the ground from all sides towards the centre, threatened them with instant, awful, and inevitable death. But one resource now remained; and to that they were not slow in resorting. They rolled themselves into the shallow pool, and wallowed together in a knot. They gasped like dying men, and their eye-balls glared and started from their sockets with the agony they endured; and in their utter despair they sucked the muddy water of the *lochan* in which they lay, to cool their burning mouths and throats. Macfarlane felt as if they had been already consigned to the purifying pains of that purgatory through which, as his religion told him, their guilty souls must pass. Their bewildered brains spun round, and strange and terrific shapes seemed to pass before their eyes. Some short ejaculations for mercy were breathed, but not a groan, nor a word, nor a sound of complaint, was permitted to escape from any one of their manly breasts, even although the pool, their last frail hope, was now fast drying up from the intensity of the heat.

After a complication of indescribable torments, which made the passing minutes seem like hours, the force of the hurricane suddenly slackened for a short time, and the thick surface of heath around them having been by this time burnt out, and the trees which grew upon the immediate confines of the circle having had their boughs and foliage consumed and their trunks prostrated, the open space within which they were enclosed grew wider in its limits, and consequently the air became more abundant and freer in its circulation; so that they began gradually to revive. By degrees they were enabled to raise themselves in a weak and half-suffocated state, from what was now reduced to little more than the mere mud of the pool. Then it was that their chief, though himself much overcome by the conjunction of his own bodily and mental sufferings, was roused to active exertion by that anxious desire to preserve his people, which now sprang up within him, to the utter extinguishment of all consideration for his own person. He was so faint, that it was with some difficulty he could ascend the knoll; but he hastened to climb it, that he might endeavour to discover from thence whether any hope was likely to arise for them. There

he found that the bothy, and the fuel and pine-trees that had been heaped upon it, had already sunk into a smoking hillock of red-hot ashes, from the smouldering surface of which the ghastly half-consumed skulls of his Lochaber foes were seen fearfully protruding themselves. The undaunted heart of Macfarlane quailed before a spectacle so unlooked for and so unwelcome at such a moment. He started back and shuddered as their blackened visages met his eye, grinning, as it were, with a horrible fiend-like expression of satisfaction at his present misery. He turned from the sight with disgust, not unmingled with remorse, and then sweeping his eyes around the now far-retreating circle of the burning forest, and reflecting on the imminent destruction which he and his clansmen had so recently escaped, and looking to the peril by which they were yet environed, he crossed himself,—threw his eyes upwards,—uttered an inward prayer of penitence and of thankfulness, and then he bravely prepared himself to take every advantage of whatever favourable circumstances might occur.

After scanning the blazing boundary all around with the most minute attention, Macfarlane thought

he could perceive one narrow blank in the continuity of the fiery wall. His knowledge of the forest enabled him to be immediately aware, that the blank was occasioned by a ravine, which he knew was but partially covered with wood, through which a stream found its way. He took his determination; and summoning his people around him, and pointing out this distant hope of escape, he called to them to follow him. With resolute countenances they immediately began to make their difficult and hazardous way over the torrid and smoking ground, among the red-hot trunks of the pine-trees which stood half-consumed—smouldering fallen logs—tall branchless masts, which still blazed like upright torches, and which were every moment falling around them, or those which had already fallen, or which had been broken over, hanging burning in an inclined position across their way—whilst they were, every now and then, tripped and thrown down by some unseen obstacle among the scorching embers; and ever and anon each returning gust of the hurricane whirled up around them an atmosphere of ignited dust and cinders, almost sufficient to have deprived them of the breath of life. But still, with their heads half-

muffled in their plaids, they persevered, till the increasing heat of the air they inhaled and of the ground they trod on, and the multiplication of the difficulties they had to encounter, would have been enough of themselves to have convinced them of their approach to the more active theatre of the conflagration, even if its fiery enclosure, and the groaning and crashing of the falling timber had not been but too manifestly before their eyes and loud in their ears.

The difficulties and dangers of their progress now became infinitely multiplied. Hitherto their endeavours to keep together had been tolerably successful; but now each individual could do no more than take care of himself, and every cloud of burning cinders that blew around them, produced a greater separation among them, till finally they became so dispersed, that when the chief reached the head of the narrow ravine, through which he had hoped that he might have led them in a body, he cleared the burning dust from his eyes, looked every where around him eagerly for his people, and, to his bitter mortification, he beheld no one but his trusty Angus, who, amidst all the obstacles and hazards through which they had

passed, had still contrived to stick close to his master. Old Margery's vision came across his mind, and, in the midst of the burning heats to which he was subjected, the blood ran cold to his heart. He cast his eyes down the trough of the ravine, over which clouds of flame and smoke were then rolling, and there, indeed, he did, at transient intervals, behold a handful of his clansmen toiling through the perilous passage. He shouted aloud to bid them stay; but the overwhelming roar of the whirlwind, combined with that of the combustion of the neighbouring trees, rendered his voice altogether powerless. Distressing doubts arose within him as to the fate of those who appeared to be amissing; but the rapid growth of the conflagration around him compelled him to shake off all such thoughts, and summoning up his sternest resolution, he rushed down into the ravine, with Angus at his back, as if he had been rushing to an assault under the spirit-stirring influence of the war-cry of the Macfarlanes. And few assaults indeed could have been so hazardous, for, ever and anon, huge burning pines were precipitated from the steeps above, so that even the water-course itself was in a great measure choked up by their hissing and

smoking ruins. But still Macfarlane fought his way onwards amidst burnings and bruises, many of them occasioned by his frequently looking round with anxious solicitude for the safety of his faithful follower; but, in spite of all these difficulties and perils, he had already made considerable progress down the ravine, when, in one instant, he was deprived of all sense by the sudden descent of an enormous pine, which he could neither avoid nor see.

When the chief recovered from his swoon, he found himself lying on his back, in a shallow part of the little stream, which there crept along between two great stony masses. He had been struck down by the spray and smaller branches of the upper boughs of the tree, which, fortunately for him, had rested across the great stones in such a manner as to form an arch over his body; and, as this arch naturally produced a rush of air under it, he was thus saved alike from being crushed to death and from suffocation. Raising himself on his hands and knees, he made his way out from under the burning boughs, and got up so stunned and battered, that some moments elapsed ere he quite recovered his recollection. Recent events

then crowded fast to his mind, and with these his anxiety for the safety of Angus recurred more strongly than ever. He called loudly and frequently on him by name, but the well known voice of his faithful follower came not in return. A lurid light was thrown down into the depth of the ravine by the conflagration which was spreading widely above. He moved anxiously around the tree, looking earnestly every where underneath the smoking branches, till at last the manly countenance of Angus Macfarlane met his eye. The forehead exhibited a fearful ghastly looking wound, and his body was lying so crushed down beneath the boughs that pressed upon it, as to take away all chance that a spark of life remained within it. With desperate strength and anguish of mind the chief drew his claymore, and hewed away the interposing branches, till he had so far relieved the body as to be able to draw it forth. He eagerly felt for the pulses of life, but they were for ever stilled.

“ Alas, alas, my faithful Angus ! ” cried Macfarlane ; “ art thou gone for ever ! Alas, thy fate was indeed too truly read ! But I cannot leave thee to feed the devouring flames, or to be a banquet for the ravens when this awful burning shall

have passed away. Alas! I promised to provide for thy bridal, and now, since it hath pleased Heaven to dispose it otherwise, it shall not be said that thy chief permitted thee to lack funereal rites!"

With these words, Macfarlane stooped him down, and raised the body of Angus upon his shoulders. The way down the water-course was obstructed by the huge half-consumed trunks of the fallen pines, which lay in every direction across, resting irregularly on the large blocks of slippery stone, with their branches interwoven like hurdles. But Macfarlane, weakened as he was by the accumulated fatigue and suffering he had undergone, staggered on under his burden with an unsubdued spirit, determined to bear it so long as his limbs were able to sustain his own person. Inconceivable was the toil which he underwent, and many were the hair-breadth 'scapes which he made from instantaneous destruction. But still he persevered with undiminished courage, until his heroic exertions were at length rewarded by his reaching a spot of comparative safety, beyond the fiery barrier which had so long environed him. But here he only stopped to breathe for a moment, for, toil-spent, exhausted, and bruised, and faint as he was,

he was still compelled, by a regard for his own life, to urge onwards over the smoother ground which he now trod, with longer and less cautious strides. His way was illuminated for an immense distance before him, by the triumphant conflagration that came roaring after him, and it was still gaining fresh strength every succeeding moment from the furious aid it was receiving from the increasing hurricane.

As he bore his burden resolutely onwards, his uncertain path led him across a mossy patch of heath, where there were but few trees. There the lurid light of the conflagration, reflected as it was from the heavens, was sufficient to show him a white figure, advancing hastily towards him. It was a maiden's slender form—she came—she uttered one wild and piercing shriek, and then she sank down amid the long heath. Macfarlane laid the body of Angus upon a small hillock, and ran to her aid. It was Ellen. He flew to a rill hard by, and brought water in his bonnet. She still breathed, but, as he lifted her head on his knee, each succeeding inspiration became fainter and fainter, till her fair bosom ceased to heave, and her lovely features settled into the marble stillness

of death. Her frenzied efforts had been greater than her delicate frame could bear, and the severe mental shock which she received had suddenly expelled her pure spirit from its earthly tenement.

Macfarlane leant over her for a time, altogether absorbed in the intensity of those feelings to which human nature compelled him to yield. But it was not long till the increasing roar of the advancing conflagration, which was now fearfully extending the breadth of its line of march, roused him from his stupor. What could he now do? Was he to abandon both, or even one of the bodies of those, the memory of whom he so much cherished, in order to consult his own safety? or was he to peril his own life for the purpose of performing a pious but by no means an imperatively necessary duty? He hesitated for a moment—a transient and accidental gleam disclosed to him the honest countenance of Angus—his heart filled with many an old recollection—his lip quivered—his eyes became moist—he moved towards the hillock, where the body of Angus lay, and stooping down hastily, he raised it again to his right shoulder, and then, passing onwards, he put his left arm around the slim form of Ellen, and lifting it up, he laboured onwards

under the weight of both, with the long hair of the maiden sweeping over the tops of the purple heath as he went. Louder and louder came the roar of the conflagration behind him. He quickened his steps, toiling on every moment more and more breathlessly. But again the trees grew thicker as he advanced, and his way became more and more encumbered by their stems. The heat of the advancing flames now came more and more sensibly upon him, yet still he struggled on, firmly resolved not to relinquish either of his burdens till dire necessity should compel him to do so. The moment when this alternative was to arrive seemed to be fast approaching—nature was becoming exhausted—when his ears caught a shout, which he well knew must come from some of his own clansmen. Faint as he was, the chief was not slow in replying to it; and, to his great relief, he was soon joined by some of those from whom he had been separated during the earlier part of their dreadful and bewildering retreat. He was now speedily relieved of both his burdens, and the flagging spirits of all of them being in some degree restored by this meeting, they again pushed onwards with renewed exertions, and without a halt, for some miles,

during which they picked up several stragglers, whose bruised and blackened figures gave sufficient evidence of the dangers and difficulties they had passed through.

Worn out almost to death, this remnant of the Macfarlanes with difficulty climbed the gentle slope of a considerable eminence that lay in their way, and as they wound over the summit of it, where the trees grew somewhat thinly, Macfarlane, as he looked behind him, had at last the satisfaction to perceive that they had now gained so much on their pursuing enemy as to render them *secure* of a safe and easy retreat. Many, I trow, was the cross that was signed, and the broken thanksgiving that was uttered ere the chief and this fragment of his followers threw themselves down to rest a while, and to contemplate the awful scene of destruction from which they had so wonderfully escaped, of which their present commanding position gave them a full view.

The flames had now spread for miles in every direction over the thickest parts of the forest, rising over the crested ridges, and swelling elevations, and diving into the deepest valleys and hollows. It seemed like one great billowy sea of fire, agitated

as it was from time to time by the hurricane, which, as it approached its termination, came in gusts, violent in strength, but short in duration. As each of these successively swept over the blazing woods, its terrible roar was mingled with the fearful crash of thousands of gigantic pines, which were levelled like reeds before it. These, as they fell, tossed up myriads of mimic stars and meteors into the firmament, which, being surrounded by a zone of dense and inky clouds on its horizon, shone from within that circumference to its very centre, like one vast concave plate of red hot brass. The scene was enough to humble the proudest heart. The very deer were terrified into an unwonted degree of familiarity with man, for a herd of them that came sweeping over the brow of the eminence, flying in terror from the devouring flames, halted by them, and mingled with them, as if to claim protection from them. The dauntless heart of Macfarlane himself sank within him, as the whole desolating circumstances of this terrible night came crowding to his mind. It was wrung by a deep pang as he recalled the horrible spectacle of the massacred men of Lochaber—he wept like a child when he again looked on the inanimate bodies of

those whose appointed bridal-day must now become that of their funeral. He groaned deeply as he gathered from his people around him the sad fate of many of those who were not now to be seen among them—and when such thoughts as these could be so far subdued as to permit him to gaze on the red and resistlessly devouring element, which was so rapidly annihilating his forest, he pictured to himself the melancholy devastation it would produce over his wide domains, and the destruction it would occasion to his hunting grounds,—and already, in imagination, he beheld the sable livery of mourning that must soon be spread over his hitherto magnificent territory. And how well his anticipations were verified, we know from the fact, that ere many days went round, the whole of the forest, covering that country for above twenty-five miles in length, and of a breadth corresponding to that extent, was completely burned down, and the mosses which afterwards originated from it, and which still exist, are full of the embalmed witnesses of this terrible calamity.