
CHAPTER XII

THE DASHING HIGHLAND RED-COAT CAPTAIN

WHY do Scotsmen make good soldiers, and why are the Scottish regiments most famous? is a question often asked.

A Scottish lady on being asked, replied, "Because they can fight!" This is the truth.

A Scottish Governor, Miles Macdonell, backed with legal opinions, and inspired with the national hardihood, had issued his proclamation of "Embargo," and he proposed to stand by it. Free Traders, Indians, and half-breeds, who all regarded themselves as outside of law, and who were as free in their notions as their prairie winds, made outspoken dissent.

What would come of it?

The answer came from another tribunal four or five hundred miles away from Red River.

The McGillivrays, McLeods, and Camerons of the Montreal Fur Company and many others were Scotsmen too; and the blood of the Highland clansman was warm even to boiling over. So in August, 1814, in their annual meeting at Grand Portage on Lake Superior, they denounced in

The Scotsman in Canada

burning tones the high-handed order of Miles Macdonell, and vowed the destruction of Lord Selkirk's infant colony.

True, the great hall at Fort William resounded during the nights of their meetings with noisy revelry, and rum and music urged them on to extravagance ; but when it came to planning reprisals and driving out the interloper, the same spirit as that of Roderick Dhu against the invasion of the Sassenach stranger animated them, and they chose two of their most warlike and doughty leaders to meet the enemy. The first man chosen was well fitted for his work. He needed finesse to keep within the letter of the law, however much he might transgress the spirit, he must have the Highland pluck to claim the rights of Canadian law as having force in the Indian territories, for an Act of the Imperial Parliament seemed to give authority. He needed also the adroitness and the "illness," as Shakespeare called it, to coax or force according as circumstances might require it. Not too scrupulous, but not rash, not too timid to incite his followers to violence, but not afraid to discourage any evil intention, not too anxious to begin a quarrel unless he saw fair chance to gain his end. The man thus fitted by nature and experience to undertake such a task was Duncan Cameron. He was one of the Loyalist Scots who had come over from the United States to Canada and had grown up from boyhood in the Canadian wilds of the St. Lawrence and the Ottawa, where the intrepid hunter, daring boatman,

