

STEWART OF GARTH AND THE CLAN MAC-
IVOR—MACINTOSH AND LOCHEIL—MAC-
DONALDS AND CAMPBELLS—SERGEANT
MOR.*

A VOLUME might be written about the feuds of the Highland clans in former times, nor would the task be difficult, as all which is chiefly to be done is to collect the materials from various sources, and from family traditions. General Stewart of Garth relates a few such feuds, especially one which took place between an ancestor of his own and a clan named MacIvor, who then possessed the greater part of Glenlyon. The feud occurred in the fifteenth century, and it is here presented to the reader in the gallant writer's own language.

“ The Laird of Garth had been nursed by a woman of the clan Macdiarmid, which was then and still is pretty numerous in Glenlyon and Breadalbane. This woman had two sons, one of whom, foster-brother to the Laird, having been much injured by MacIvor in a dispute, threatened to apply for redress to his foster-brother. Accordingly the two brothers immediately set out for that purpose to the Castle of Garth, twelve or fourteen miles distant. In those days a foster-brother was regarded as one of the family, and MacIvor, well aware that the quarrel of the Macdiarmids would be espoused by his neighbour, ordered a pursuit. The young men, being hard pressed, threw themselves into a deep pool of the river Lyon, where they hoped their pursuers would not venture to follow them. The foster-brother was, however, desperately wounded

* Sketches of the Character, Manners, and Present State of the Highlanders of Scotland, by Major-General David Stewart; Scots Magazine for 1753.

with an arrow, and drowned in the pool, which still retains the name of *Linne Donnel*, or *Donald's Pool*. The other succeeded in reaching Garth. Resolved to avenge his friend's death, the Laird collected his followers and marched to Glenlyon. MacIvor mustered his men, and met the invaders about the middle of the glen. The chieftain stepped forward between the two bands in the hope of settling the affair amicably. Garth wore a plaid, the one side of which was red, and the other dark coloured tartan, and on proceeding to the conference, he told his men that if the result was amicable, the darker side of the plaid should remain outward as it was; if otherwise, he would give the signal of attack by turning out the red side. They were still engaged in the conference, when MacIvor whistled loud, and a number of armed men started up from the adjoining rocks and bushes where they had been concealed, while the main body were drawn up in front. 'Who are these?' exclaimed Stewart; 'and for what purpose are they here?' 'They are only a herd of my roes that are frisking about the rocks,' replied MacIvor. 'In that case,' said the other, 'it is time for me to call my hounds.' Then turning his plaid, he rejoined his men, who were watching his motions, and instantly advanced. Both parties rushed forward to the combat; the MacIvors gave way, and were pursued eight miles farther up the glen. Here they turned to make a last effort, but were again driven back with great loss. The survivors fled across the mountains to another part of the country, and were for some time not permitted to return. MacIvor's land was, in the meantime, seized by the victors, and law confirmed what the sword had won.

"The names of the river and glen still continue memorials of this sanguinary fray. Dhui and Glen Dhui were their former names. When the Stewarts were returning from the last pursuit, they washed their swords in the river,

which was discoloured a considerable way down with blood. ‘This stream,’ exclaimed the chieftain, ‘shall no longer be called Dhui, but Leiven, (*leiven is to wipe or lave,*) and the glen shall be called Glenleiven.’ Before the combat commenced, Stewart’s men pulled off a kind of sandals bound round the ankles with thongs, and called in Gaelic *cuaran*. These they laid aside, close to a small rock, which to this day is called *Leck-na-cuaran*, or the *stone or slab of the sandals*. The spot where they drew their swords is called *Ruskich*, to *uncover or unsheath*; the field where the encounter commenced *Laggan-na-cath*, the *field of battle*; and the spot where the last stand was made *Camus-na-carn*, from the *cairns or mounds* of stones which cover the graves, and which from the quantity show the considerable number slain, which tradition says amounted to one hundred and forty on the part of the MacIvors.”

In treating of the *arms* of the Highland clans, General Stewart observes, that the bow and arrow seem to have been but rarely used. “This,” says the gallant writer, “is the more remarkable, as these weapons are peculiarly adapted to that species of hunting which was their favourite amusement—I allude to the hunting of deer, or what is commonly called *deer-stalking*, where the great art consists in approaching the animal unobserved, and in wounding him without disturbing the herd.” General Stewart, however, produces two instances which occurred in the reign of Charles II., to show that bowmen were not unknown in the Highlands, although he thinks that these were among the last instances of such persons being employed; as it is clear from the *Disarming Act*, after the suppression of the enterprise of 1745, that no notice is taken of the bow and arrow as military weapons. “After a long and protracted feud between the Lairds of Macintosh and Locheil, commencing in a claim of the former to lands held by the latter, Macintosh, to enforce his claim,

raised his clan, and, assisted by the Macphersons, marched to Lochaber with fifteen hundred men. He was met by Locheil with twelve hundred men, of whom three hundred were Macgregors. About three hundred were armed with bows. When preparing to engage, the Earl of Breadalbane, who was nearly related to both chiefs, came in sight with five hundred men, and sent them notice that if either of them refused to agree to the terms which he had to propose, he would throw his interest into the opposite scale. This was a strong argument, and not easily refuted. After some hesitation his offer of mediation was accepted, and the feud amicably and finally settled.

“ The other instance happened about the same time, in a contest between the Macdonalds of Glencoe and the Breadalbane men. The former, being on their return from a foray in the low country, attempted to pass through Breadalbane without giving due notice or paying the accustomed compliment to the Earl, who a short time previous had been raised to that rank. A number of his Lordship’s followers, and a great many others, who were assembled at the Castle of Finlarig to celebrate the marriage of a daughter of the family, enraged at this insult, instantly rushed to arms, and following the Macdonalds with more ardour than prudence, attacked them on the top of a hill, north of the village of Killin, where they had taken post to defend their cattle. The assailants were driven back with great loss, principally caused by the arrows of the Lochaber men. It is said that nineteen young gentlemen of the name of Campbell, immediate descendants of the family, fell on that day. Colonel Menzies of Culdares, who had been an active partizan under the Marquis of Argyle and the Covenanters in the Civil Wars, and whose prudent advice of attacking in flank the hot-headed youth despised, had nine arrow wounds in his legs and thighs. These wounds he received in retreating across

the River Lochy, and when ascending the hill on the opposite side of the valley. Though the arrows were well aimed, much of the force was lost by the distance, and consequently the wound was slight."

The Earl of Breadalbane here mentioned was Sir John Campbell of Glenorchy, first created Earl of Caithness in 1677, but which he was obliged to relinquish in favour of George Sinclair of Keiss, and in 1681 he was created Earl of Breadalbane. The daughter whose marriage was celebrating at the time of the above feud must have been his Lordship's only female child, Lady Mary Campbell, who was married to Cockburn of Langton—an estate in Berwickshire, which is now in possession of the Marquis of Breadalbane, in right of his mother, a daughter of David Gavin, Esq. of Langton. This Earl of Breadalbane was the nobleman deeply implicated in the massacre of Glencoe, and as some assert the cause of that horrible butchery, for which a process of high treason was instituted against him, and he was committed a prisoner to the Castle of Edinburgh, where he remained some time, but was at last discharged without trial. He received L.12,000 to keep the Highlands quiet after the Revolution, most of the chiefs being notoriously attached to King James, and it is alleged that he appropriated the greater part of that sum to his own use. When the Earl of Nottingham wrote to his Lordship, requesting him to account for the L.12,000 given to him to be divided among the Highland chiefs, his answer, as transmitted to that minister, was very characteristic. "My Lord, the Highlands are quiet, the money is spent, and this is the best way of accounting among friends."

Every one has heard of the famous Rob Roy Macgregor, and his name is immortalized by the Author of Waverley in the admirable story which bears his soubriquet. Many years after Rob had been gathered to his fathers there

flourished a noted personage called John Dhu Cameron, but who was better known by the appellation of *Sergeant Mor*—the epithet *Mor*, though meaning *great*, being also bestowed on men of large bodily appearance, of whom the Sergeant was a remarkable specimen. He had held the rank of sergeant in the French service, which occasioned his title, and came to Scotland in 1745, when he became an active partizan in the ever-memorable enterprise of Prince Charles. “Having no settled abode,” says General Stewart, “and dreading the consequence of having served in the army of France, and of being afterwards engaged in the Rebellion, he formed a party of outlaws, and took up his residence among the mountains between the counties of Perth, Inverness, and Argyle. While he plundered the cattle of those whom he called his enemies, he protected the property of his friends, and frequently made people on the borders of the Lowlands purchase his forbearance by the payment of *black-mail*. Many stories are told of this man. On one occasion he met with an officer of the garrison of Fort-William on the mountains of Lochaber. The officer told him that he suspected he had lost his way, and having a large sum of money for the garrison, was afraid of meeting with *Sergeant Mor*; he therefore requested that the stranger would accompany him on the road. The other agreed; and while they walked on they talked much of the Sergeant and his feats, the officer using much freedom with his name, calling him *robber*, *murderer*. ‘Stop there,’ interrupted his companion: ‘he (the Sergeant) does indeed take the cattle of the Whigs and Sassenachs, [the supporters of the Hanoverian Family and the Lowland Presbyterians,] but neither he nor his *kearnachs* ever shed innocent blood, except once,’ he added, ‘that I was unfortunately at Braemar, when a man was killed, but I immediately ordered the *creach* (spoil) to be abandoned,

and left to the owners, retreating as fast as we could after such a misfortune.' 'You?' said the officer; 'what had you to do with the affair?' 'I am John Dhu Cameron,' was the reply. 'I am the Sergeant Mor; there is the road to Inverlochry (Fort-William); you cannot now mistake it. You and your money are safe. Tell your governor to send in future a more wary messenger for his gold. Tell him also, that although an outlaw, and forced to live on the public, I am a soldier as well as himself, and would despise taking his gold from a defenceless man who confided in me.' The officer lost no time in reaching the garrison, and never forgot the adventure, which he frequently related.

“ Some time after this the Sergeant Mor was betrayed by a treacherous friend, and taken by a party under the command of Lieutenant (afterwards Sir Hector) Munro. This happened at the farm of Dunan in Rannoch, where he was in the habit of sleeping in safety, till that night, when it is said that his landlord sent notice to Lieutenant Munro, who was stationed two miles distant. Cameron slept in a barn, his arms having, as was supposed, been secretly removed by his false friend. He was found asleep, and the soldiers rushed in and seized him; but being a powerful man, he shook them all off, and made his way to the door, where he was overpowered by those on the outside. He threw off one of the soldiers with such force against the wall of the barn that the man was long disabled by the bruises. Cameron was carried to Perth, and tried before the Court of Justiciary for the murder in Braemar, and various acts of theft and cattle stealing. One of these acts was stealing from the Duke of Athole's park at Blair two wedders, which the party killed for food on their retreat from Braemar. Cameron was executed at Perth on the 23d of November 1753, and hung in chains.

The unfortunate Sergeant Mor, or the Big Sergeant, who was a contemporary of the unfortunate sons of Rob Roy, is thus noticed in the *Scots Magazine* for 1753:—“ At Perth, John Dow Cameron, *alias* Macmartine, *alias* Bottie, commonly called Sergeant More, was tried on two indictments, one accusing him of the murder of John Bruce in Inneredrie, for sundry acts of theft, and as habit and repute a common and notorious thief; and the other accusing him and Angus Dow Cameron of stealing two wedders belonging to the Duke of Athole. Each of the libels was found relevant to infer the pains of law. Both were remitted to one jury, who ‘found the pannel (Sergeant Mor) guilty, art and part, of the murder libelled—of stealing three horses and a filly belonging to John Blair in Ballachraggan—and of being habit and repute a common thief in the country.’ He is sentenced to lie in Perth prison till the 23d of November, fed on bread and water, in terms of the act 25 George II., that day to be hanged at the common place of execution near to that borough, and then his body to be hung in chains. He would not suffer the *dempster* to come near, but struck at him. The diet was deserted as to Angus Dow Cameron, and he was recommitted, on notice of his accession to some acts of theft.”

The Sergeant’s conduct in the Justiciary Court, in reference to the *dempster*, or hangman, is thus noticed by General Stewart:—“ It was then the practice in the Court of Justiciary to call the doomster (an officer so called) into the Court, after sentence of death was passed, to place his hand on the head of the criminal, as a token that he was in future to be under his care. A friend of mine, who was present at this trial, informed me that when the doomster approached the Sergeant Mor, he exclaimed—‘ Keep the caitiff off—let him not touch me;’ and stretching his arms, as if to strike, the doomster was so terrified by his

look, action, and voice, that he shrunk back, and retired from the Court, without going through the usual ceremony.'

Sergeant Mor was of course a person who could expect no favour or mercy, and the sentence was inflicted, there being then too many persons of his description, or rather of his vocation, in the Highlands, though few were so notorious, if we except the sons of Rob Roy Macgregor. Whatever may have been the nature of the crimes of which the Big Sergeant was found guilty, it must be evident that he was rather an idle outlaw than a depraved and hardened criminal. As such he was at least viewed by the Highlanders, and among those of them with whom he was acquainted he seems to have been popular. "It was generally believed," says their gallant historian in another part of his work, while dwelling on the incorruptible fidelity of the Highlanders, "that this man (the Sergeant) was betrayed by a false friend, to whose house he had resorted for shelter in severe weather. The truth of this allegation, however, was never fully established; but the supposed treacherous friend was heartily despised, and having lost all his property by various misfortunes, he left the country in extreme poverty, although he rented from Government a farm upon advantageous terms on the forfeited estate of Strowan. The favour shown him by Government gave a degree of confirmation to the suspicions raised against him, and the firm belief of the people to this day is, that his misfortunes were a just judgment upon him for his breach of trust towards a person who had without suspicion reposed confidence in him."