

MR. RUSSEL AND THE REAVER.

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THE decided, though cruel measures which followed the defeat of Culloden, whilst they were sufficient to extinguish the hopes of the Highlanders who had so enthusiastically espoused the cause of Charles, were ill calculated to subdue their warlike spirits. They were driven, it is true, to seek shelter in those rocky and inaccessible fastnesses which their highest glens afforded them ; but there, amidst the wildest and most solitary scenes of nature, they permitted their minds to brood in bitter reflection over all their wrongs—over all those tragedies which history itself has blushed to record,—their wives and children massacred amidst the midnight conflagration of their humble dwellings, or perishing in their flight through the snows of

winter. But heroism such as theirs was not to be crushed even by such calamities as these,—calamities which were calculated to have bowed down less lofty and indomitable spirits to the very dust. With them the effect was like that which would result from some puerile attempt to curb and arrest the mountain cataract. They were divided, as its stream might be, into smaller and less important bodies, and their power was no longer so forcible as when they were united together in one stream, but each individual portion seemed to gain a particular character and consequence of its own, by its separation from the main body, where it had hitherto flowed undistinguished and unobserved.

It was thus that lurking in little parties, in retreats only known to themselves, among craggy ravines and pine-clad precipices, they now resumed that minor and predatory warfare which they had been wont to wage against the inhabitants of the more civilized parts of Scotland,—I mean that which consisted in plundering those richer districts of their cattle. Perhaps no inconsiderable degree of political animosity may have mingled itself in many instances, with the other motives that prompted these marauding expeditions in the

later times of which I am speaking. But, be this as it may, we must not look upon those who were engaged in them as we do upon the wretched cow-stealers of the present day. That which is now considered as one of the most despicable of crimes, was then, in the eyes of the mountaineer, esteemed as an honourable and chivalrous profession. In his untamed imagination, no one was looked upon with so much admiration and envy as that individual who might be chosen as the leader of a daring band to harry the low country of its live stock; for these proud sons of the Gael had ever held the inhabitants of the plains in the most sovereign contempt, and they regarded them and their more favoured pastures in no other light than as so many nurses and nurseries, destined by Heaven to rear the cattle which they were born to consume. I can instance one well authenticated example, which displays this opinion in its true light. The Laird of Grant, the great chieftain of the glen of Urquhart, having had his cattle driven off by a party of Camerons, and having sent a strong remonstrance to Cameron of Lochiel himself by a special ambassador, had his herds immediately restored to him, with a most courteous letter of apology, which, I believe, still exists, assuring him

that his stupid fellows had entirely mistaken his orders, which were, that they should not begin to plunder until they had reached "*Moray-land, where every gentleman was entitled to take his prey.*"

It was soon after the middle of the last century, that Mr. Russel, a gentleman of Morayshire, who resided at Earlsmill, near Tarnaway Castle, to the north of the Findhorn, and about ten miles from hence, was alarmed one morning by the unpleasant intelligence, that a strong body of Highlanders had come before day-break and carried off the whole of his cattle from this very farm of the Aitnoch, which he had at that time taken as a hill-grazing. Mr. Russel was an extremely active and intelligent man; and although he did not make all the war-like preparations which your friend the Laird of Macfarlane did, yet he was not deficient either in promptitude of decision or in readiness of action. After putting a few questions to the scared and breathless messenger, he lost not a moment in summoning and arming his servants; and, instead of taking this way—towards the Aitnoch, he struck at once diagonally across the country in a westerly direction, and marched with great expedition, in

order, if possible, to reach a part of the deep glen of the Findhorn, some miles above Dulsie yonder, in such time as to enable him to intercept the plunderers. You may trace with your eye the dark shadow of the glen, which sinks deep and abruptly into the bosom of those purple mountains which you see retreating behind each other in misty perspective. That is the grand pass into the Western Highlands, and Mr. Russel was well aware that if he did not succeed in arresting his cattle before the robbers had made their way through it, the boundless wastes to which it led would render all farther search after them quite hopeless. Having reached the course of the river, Mr. Russel and his party made their way down the steep hill-side, forded the stream to its southern bank, and carefully examining the ground, to ascertain whether any fresh foot-prints were to be observed, they took their stand, satisfied that they had been so far successful.

The spot chosen by Mr. Russel for his ambuscade was in the midst of that most beautiful range of retired and tranquil scenery known by the name of *The Streens*. There the hollow glen is so profound and so narrow in many places, that one of

those little clusters of cottages, which are now found here and there sprinkled in the pastoral bottom, has the name of *Tchirfogrein*, a Gaelic appellation implying that it never sees the sun. There were then no houses near the place they had selected, but the party lay concealed behind some huge fragments of rock, shivered by the wedging ice of the previous winter from the summit of a lofty crag, that hung half across the narrow holm where they had taken up their position. A little farther down the river the passage was contracted, and there was no approach from that point but by a rude and scrambling foot-path irregularly worn along the steep face of the mountain, and behind them the glen was equally confined. Both extremities of the small amphitheatre thus enclosed, were then, though they are not now, shaded by dense thickets of birch, hazel, and holly, whilst a few wild pines found a scanty subsistence for their roots on the face of the crags in midway air, and were twisted and writhed, by lack of nutriment, into the most fantastic and picturesque forms. The stillness of an unusually calm and breathless air hung over this romantic scene, and it was lighted by the now declining sun of a serene summer day,

so that half the narrow haugh was in broad and deep shadow, that was strongly contrasted with the brilliant golden light falling on the tufted tops of the trees of a wooded bank on the opposite side of the river.

Mr. Russel and his small party had not long occupied their post, when, as they listened in the silence of the evening, they heard the distant lowing of the cattle, and the wild shouts of the reavers, as they came faint and prolonged up the hollow trough of the glen. The sounds gradually drew nearer and nearer, and increased in volume as they were swelled and re-echoed from the rocks on either side. At length the crashing of the boughs announced the appearance of the more advanced part of the drove; and the tired animals began to issue slowly from among the tangled wood, or to rush violently forth as the shouts of their drivers were more or less impetuous, or their blows chanced to light upon them. As they appeared individually, they gathered themselves into a group on the level open sward, where they stood bellowing, as if quite unwilling to proceed any farther.

In rear of the last stragglers of the herd, Mr. Russel now beheld bursting singly from different

parts of the brake, a party of fourteen Highlanders, all in the full costume of the mountains, and wearing the well-known tartan of a western clan. All of them were armed with the dirk, pistol, and claymore, and the greater number of them carried antique fowling-pieces. Mr. Russel's party consisted of not more than ten or eleven persons; but they were well armed, and they were people upon whom he could depend. Exhorting them to be firm, therefore, he drew them suddenly forth from their ambush, and ranged them up in array upon the green turf. The robbers appeared to be confounded for a moment, and uttered some uncouth exclamations of surprise; but a shrill whistle from their leader made them quickly recover their presence of mind; and they rushed forward in a body, and formed themselves in order of battle in front of their spoil. Mr. Russel and his party stood their ground with determination, whilst the leader of the enemy seemed to be holding council with himself as to what he should do. He was a little spare athletic man, with long red hair curling over his shoulders, and with a pale and thin, but acute visage. After leaning upon his gun for a time, and surveying the party opposed to him with the



eye of a hawk, he shouldered his piece and advanced slowly a few paces in front of his men, until he considered himself to be sufficiently within ear-shot, and, raising his voice,—

“ Mr. Russel,” cried he, in very correct English, though with a Highland accent, “ are you for peace or war? If for war, look to yourself. But if you are for peace and treaty, order your men to stand fast, and let you and me advance and meet each other half way.”

“ I will treat,” replied Mr. Russel; “ but can I trust to your keeping faith?”

“ Trust!” exclaimed the other in an offended tone, and with an imperious air, “ methinks you may well enough trust to the word and honour of a gentleman!”

“ I am content,” said Mr. Russel.

The respective parties were now ordered to stand their ground, and the two leaders advanced about seventy or eighty paces each towards the middle of the open space, with their loaded guns cocked and presented at each other; and having abridged the distance that divided them to some ten or twelve paces, they halted, and the negotiation commenced. A certain sum was demanded

for the restitution of the cattle. Mr. Russel had not so much money about him ; but he offered to give all he had in his pocket, which amounted to a sum not a great deal short of what the robber had asked. After some little conversation this was accepted. The bargain was concluded—the money was paid—the guns were uncocked and shouldered—and the two hitherto hostile parties advanced to meet each other and to mingle together in perfect harmony.

“ And now, Mr. Russel,” said the leader of the band, “ you must look at your beasts, to see that none of them are wanting.”

“ They are all here but one small dun quey,” said Mr. Russel, after a minute examination of the herd.

“ Ha !” cried the Highland leader, darting an angry glance of inquiry around his men, “ how is this?—Ewan, I would speak with you.”

A tall handsome dark man, whom he had thus addressed, then moved a little way apart with him, and a conversation ensued between them in Gaelic, the sound of which could only be heard, whilst ever and anon the leader's eyes glanced towards one or other of his people ; and his voice and ges-

tures indicated anything but satisfaction. At last he returned towards the group.

“ Mr. Russel,” said he, “ you may make your mind easy about the dun quey. On the word of a gentleman, she shall be on your pasture before day-light to-morrow morning.”

The treaty being thus happily concluded, and the cattle taken possession of by those who were wont to have the charge of them, Mr. Russel and the Highland leader shook hands and parted, and each took his own way attended by his followers.

CLIFFORD (*interrupting the narrative*). Ah ! I have a shrewd suspicion that the cheese-shaped lump of tallow you spoke of will turn out, after all, to have been the produce of poor Dunny.

AUTHOR.—Have patience, and you shall hear.

We shall leave Mr. Russel and his people to return down the glen with the rescued herd, that we may enquire a little into the motions of the reaver and his men. They had no sooner threaded the mazes of the brake which shut in the upper end of the dell that was the scene of the strange negociation I have described, than the leader halted them, in order to hold a conference.

“Ewan,” said he to him who seemed to act as his second in command, “this is an awkward affair, and you have been much to blame. You had charge of the rear, and not a beast should have strayed. But your carelessness has brought my honour into pledge; and, by all that is good, you must redeem it. I have said that the dun quey shall be on Mr. Russel’s pasture in the morning; and, dead or alive, she must be there; for a gentleman’s word must be kept.”

“I own I have not been so sharp as I should have been,” said Ewan, with a mortified air; “but I think I have enough of cleverness in me to enable me to promise *you*, on the word of a gentleman, that *your* word shall be made good.”

“See that it be so, then,” said the leader, somewhat sternly, as he walked slowly away up the glen. “Take what strength you please with you, but see that you save both my honour and your own.”

His comrades crowded around Ewan, proffering him their friendly aid to enable him to search for and recover the quey. But he courteously declined all their kind offers; and tightening his plaid over his body with the utmost composure, he

sprang up the almost perpendicular face of the southern mountain with the agility of a deer, and disappeared over the brow of it, without permitting his breath to come much quicker there than it had done whilst he was in talk with his companions in the deep glen below.

Ewan wandered not over the moors and mosses which you see stretching over the mountain far off yonder, like one who was bewildered, or like a hound at fault. Circumstances had arisen to his mind, which had afforded him some clue to the search he had undertaken; and of that clue he had at once laid hold, with a determined resolution to unravel it as speedily as possible to the end. His course, therefore, was taken at once; and it was a most direct one. You see that singular opening in the country between us and Strathspey? Perhaps you may remember that there is a narrow pass there, where a small lake fills the bottom of the defile, and where the face of the mountain that rises over it has all the appearance of having been shaven down by the sword of some giant. The strange tradition of the country indeed is, that it was done by the mighty Fingal, by way of trying the temper of a claymore which

he had not yet put to the proof. Well does the weapon seem to have performed its office; and in honour of it the place has ever since been called *Beemachlai*, or the cut of the sword. Ewan then had no sooner breasted the mountain that hung over the Findhorn, than he turned his face directly southward, and took his way in a straight line for the pass; and despite of the ravines and burns, and peat-pots, and moss-hags, and all the other difficulties and obstructions that lay in his road; and the darkness of the evening which settled down upon that wild hill to make all these difficulties ten times greater than they otherwise would have been, he, in a wonderfully short period of time, found himself planted in the narrow path that ran between the loch of Beemachlai, on the one hand, and the mountain that rises from its western margin on the other.

But before taking up his post, the cautious Ewan stooped down, and carefully passed his hand over the whole surface of a bare spot, of some dozen or so of square yards in extent, which he knew must necessarily have been crossed by every man or beast travelling that way, to ascertain whether any fresh foot-prints had been made

in the soft black surface of the moss. His experience in such investigations was so great as to enable him perfectly to satisfy himself that no animal at least had recently trodden there; and with this assurance he stationed himself in the very hollow of the pass, and, seated on a bank, he turned his head towards the north, whence the path came downwards along the base of the hill, and kept eager watch both with eyes and ears. The moon was at this time but young, and the sky was partially covered with thin fleecy clouds; so that when it did rise, it gave but a scanty and uncertain light, though it was enough to pourtray the bold profile of Fingal's hill on the calm bosom of the lake, as well as to enable any one to distinguish a human figure at some little distance.

Ewan had not remained long in this position, when he distinctly heard the short sharp cry used by Highlanders for urging on a bullock. It was occasionally repeated; and by and bye it was followed by the faint sound of the footsteps of a beast and its driver, which grew upon his ear. Ewan bent his head towards the ground, that he might the better catch the figures of both against the sky; and ere they had already come within fifty

yards of him, he rubbed his hands together with satisfaction to find that his judgment had not deceived him, and starting up to his feet, he planted himself directly in the middle of the path, so that his figure threw a broad shadow across it; and leaning on his gun, he calmly waited the advance of him who came. He was a tall—nay, almost a gigantic man, with an awkward shambling gait; and he held the dun quey by a long halter with his left hand, whilst he drove her on with a huge rough stick which he carried in his right. He halted the moment that Ewan's dark figure appeared.

“What is it that stands there?—Answer, in the name of God!” cried he, in Gaelic, and in a tone that manifested great alarm.

“Methinks a foul thief like you had little ado with any such name, Gilliesh,” replied Ewan resolutely.—“What devil tempted you to steal the dun quey from our herd?”

“What devil told you that I had stolen her?” demanded Gilliesh, much relieved to find that he had to deal with nothing more than mortal flesh.

“Did I not see thee lurking among the birches on the Doun of Dulsie?” said Ewan; “and did I



not know that thou couldst be there for no good end,—and when the quey was missed, did I not put that and that together to help my guessing,—and have I not guessed rightly?”

“What an you have?” replied Gilliesh; “’tis but a poor prize I have gotten after all, and hardly worth your tramping so far for. You had surely enough, without grudging me this bit dwinning beast.”

“Such base thievery cannot be suffered,” said Ewan,—“besides, I have reasons of my own for what I do. Come away, then, and give me the rope; and bless your stars that you escape, for this time at least, being hanged by one. The beast must back with me, and you may take your own way home to Dulnan side at your leisure; and thank your good fortune that you get there in a whole skin.”

“Well may you speak so bold indeed,” said Gilliesh bitterly, “with that big black gun in your hand, ready to bring me down in a moment like a muir-cock off a hillock. But by the great oath, ye would crack less crouse if ye stood there before me with nothing but your claymore by your side.”

“Ye lie, ye thieving vagabond,” cried Ewan, “I’ll

stand at all times before you or a better man with this good sword alone. See here,—my gun shall rest against this rock; and on the word and honour of a gentleman, I'll never touch stock or lock of it till I shall have chastised thee to thy heart's content, if thou wilt so have it."

"Be it so," said the crafty Gilliesh; "and I'll tether the quey to this moss-fir stump here, and let her stand by to see the stoure, and to be the prize of him who may prove himself to be the better man."

It would have been a sight of some interest to have watched the preparations for this very extraordinary single combat. On the part of Ewan they consisted merely in his placing his gun against the rock with great tranquillity and with great care, and then drawing his claymore from its scabbard, and twisting the folds of his plaid tightly over his left arm, ere he put himself into the proper position for action. As for Gilliesh, he had no sooner tied the end of the quey's halter to the moss-fir stump, than he drew a broadsword of a magnitude so tremendous, as well corresponded with his almost Philistian height. The bare, flat, mossy, piece of ground already noticed, was the arena on

which they were to contend ; and if it was free from prints of any kind when Ewan examined it a brief space before, it was now destined ere long to have enow of them impressed upon it by the coming struggle. Aware of the great advantage which Gilliesh had over him from his superior height, and still more from the greater sweep of his arm and sword, Ewan approached his adversary very cautiously at first. On the other hand, numerous, and rash, and awkward, were the cuts and the thrusts which Gilliesh attempted to make ; but they were given with a force and a fury that rendered it necessary for Ewan to use all the skill of which he was master, to enable him to dodge and to parry them. Now and then their blades came into fearful contact ; and when they did so, the shearing of them together produced a sheet of flame that gave a temporary illumination to the deep shadow which a projecting bank threw over that part of the lake immediately below. As their desperate play went on, the clashing of the glowing steel struck terror into the timid animal that had occasioned the fight ; and the powerful efforts which her fear impelled her to make, having at last burst her tether from its fastening, she fled away

beyond hearing of the fray. Meanwhile, the combat continued to rage, and as it went on, the combatants gradually shifted their ground until they had changed places. On the part of Gilliesh this was not done without its intention; for no sooner did he find himself within reach of Ewan's gun, than he seized it up, and presented it without scruple at its owner, and without one shadow of remorse drew the trigger. But the hammer fell harmless into the empty pan. Ewan sprang upon him in a moment, and ere he could recover the use of his sword, he gave him one desperate cut across the temple, that brought him to the earth with his face bathed in blood.

“Villain!” cried Ewan, as he stood over his prostrate foe with the point of his sword at his throat. “Traitor that thou art, wouldst thou have been a murderer as well as a thief? Had not a stray stag crossed me at a distance as I came over the hill, and tempted me to take an idle chance shot in the twilight, when my haste would not allow me to load again, I should have been at this moment stretched out a corpse by thy treachery.”

“Spare my life!” cried the wretch, piteously.

“Spare thy life,” replied Ewan contemptuously, as he quietly picked up his gun, and proceeded to load it; “I have no mind that thy worthless and cowardly life should stain this good sword of mine with dishonour, nor do I choose that it should be the means of cheating the gallows of what so justly belongs to it. Gather thyself up, then, as thou mayest, and take thy way to Dulnan side; for, by all that is good, if thou dost shew thine ugly visage again to me, like a grim ghost on the moor, I’ll not miss thy big body as I did that of the stray stag, but I’ll open a door in it wide enough to allow thy rascally soul to issue forth and to join its kindred malignant spirits of the swamp and the fen.”

With these words Ewan threw his gun over his shoulder, and set out in search of the stray heifer. It was some time before he found her, and a still longer time after he had found her before he caught her; and after he had caught her, it was but the commencement of a most toilsome night with her, ere he could compel her, tired as she was, to travel through bog and mire to the place of her destination. But be this as it may, Ewan saw that the reaver’s word was made good,—next

morning the dun quey was seen grazing with the rest of the herd on the farm of the Aitnoch. Nobody could tell how she came there ; but the eagerness with which she plucked at the pasture, and her jaded and draggled appearance, afforded sufficient evidence of the length and nature of the night journey she had been compelled to perform.

It was not very long after this that Mr. Russel happened accidentally to have ridden up to his farm here one morning, and, as he was engaged in moving about looking at his stock, his attention was attracted by a long drove of cattle, which he observed straggling up yonder opposite bank of the Dorback branch of the river Divie, to the eastward there, evidently with the intention of crossing at a ford a little way above. At first sight there appeared to be little remarkable in this, for he well knew that to be a common track, travelled by all whose route lay through this country, stretching up the south side of the Findhorn. But the drovers and their herd had no sooner passed the Dorback, and gained its western bank, and begun to advance in a direction pointing towards the course of the Findhorn, than Mr. Russel recognised the same Highland party and the same bold leader, from

whom he had so recently recovered his own cattle. Some of the men who were about him were led, from certain circumstances, to know that the drove of beasts which they now saw had been carried off from Gordonston, the seat of Sir Robert Gordon, about thirty miles distant in the *Laigh of Moray*. Mr. Russel was in habits of friendship with Sir Robert, and he quickly came to the resolution that he should allow no such hostile and predatory act to be done to him if he could help it, and above all that he should not facilitate it by permitting a passage for the robbers and their booty through his territory. He was here not only in the midst of his own people, but he was, moreover, in the very centre of Lord Moray's estate of Brae-Moray, of which he had the entire management, and accordingly he resolved to avail himself of these circumstances, and he determined immediately to arrest them. With this intention he hastily collected all the dependants who were within his reach, and, before the robbers came up with their booty, he found himself at the head of double their number of well-armed men.

When the party arrived within hearing, Mr. Russel hailed the leader, and at once plainly told

him that he could not stand by and suffer the cattle of his friend Sir Robert Gordon to be thus harried, far less could he tamely permit them to be thus driven through his farm. He therefore called upon the robber to halt, assuring him that if he offered to advance with his party, or to persist in driving the cattle one step farther, it should be at his own peril, and he must take the consequences ; for that nothing but force should compel him to give them way.

“ Mr. Russel ! ” cried the leader, stepping before the rest with a haughty air ; “ this is not what I expected from you, after what has already passed between us. You stopped and recovered your own beasts, and nobody could blame you ; but, sir, it is not like a gentleman to offer to hinder me from taking cattle from anybody else.”

“ My principles are very different,” said Mr. Russel, with great coolness.

“ I tell you again,” cried the little man ; “ that you will be acting unjustly if you persevere, and that you have no right to do so.”

“ I am determined to persevere, notwithstanding,” said Mr. Russel, with great strength of emphasis and firmness of expression.



“Then, sir, I must caution you that you had better take care what you do,” said the Highlander.

“I am prepared for all consequences,” said Mr. Russel.

“Well, well, sir,” said the Highlander frowning, “we cannot help it; you are in your own kingdom here, and you must have your own way; but, I bid you take heed—you’ll rue this yet—look well to yourself.”—So saying, he called to his followers in Gaelic, who, with much apparent dissatisfaction, abandoned the cattle, and the whole party took the road to the hills, muttering dark threats and half-smothered imprecations against Mr. Russel.

These denunciations were little heeded, and were probably soon forgotten by him against whom they were uttered, or if they were remembered at all it was only to produce greater vigilance on the part of those who had the charge of his stock. But, it so happened, that during the course of the ensuing winter, some express business, connected with his charge of Lord Moray’s affairs, carried Mr. Russel to Edinburgh. When he was on his return homewards, he arrived late one stormy and tempestuous night at the solitary inn of Dalnacaerdoch, situated,

as every body knows, at the southern extremity of that part of the great Highland road leading through the savage pass of Drumonachter. Seeing that it was quite hopeless to think of prosecuting his journey that night in such weather, he took a hasty supper, and went to bed, with the resolution of rising as early next day as the lack of light at that season would permit.

He was accordingly up in the morning, and in the saddle before he could well see his horse's ears, and he set out through the snow for the inn of Dalwhinnie, situated at the northern end of the pass, attended only by a single servant. He had not proceeded far into the wild and savage part of that solitary scene, where high poles, painted black, are erected along the edge of the road, to serve as beacons during winter, to prevent travellers from deviating from the road and being engulfed in the snow-wreathes, when, by the light of the dawn, he descried a man, at some two or three hundred yards' distance, who came riding towards him. As he came onwards, Mr. Russel had time to remark that he exhibited a thin spare figure, which was enveloped in a long dark-brown cloak or great-coat. He rode one of the loose made

garrons of the country, of a dirty mouse colour, having no saddle, and no other bridle than a halter made of small birchen twigs, twisted into a sort of rope, called by the common people a *woodie*. In spite of himself, the recollection of the Highland reaver and his angry threats darted across Mr. Russel's mind; and he was somewhat alarmed at first, when he observed that he who approached, carried in his hand, poised by the middle, a very long fowling-piece, of that ancient character and description which gave our ancestors excellent hope of killing a wild-duck sitting in the water half way across a lake of half a mile broad. Mr. Russel instinctively pulled out his pistols and examined their locks, and he made his servant do the same by his; but the inequality of such weapons, compared with that which I have this moment described, was only thereby rendered the more wofully apparent to both of them. Mr. Russel rode slowly but resolutely on however, with his eyes intently watching every motion of him who came, and who was now drawing nearer and nearer to them. The stranger himself seemed to advance cautiously, but no sooner had he come close enough to enable him to recognise a human countenance, than he

pushed up his shying steed by the application of ardent and repeated kicks; and, when he had at length succeeded in compelling him forward, to Mr. Russel's no inconsiderable relief he recognised in him—the landlord of the inn of Dalwhinnie!

“Keep us a', I'm glad I ha'e forgathered wi' ye in time, Mr. Russel!” he exclaimed in a south country tone and dialect, and without waiting for the ordinary preliminary salutations.

“Why, what's the matter?” demanded Mr. Russel.

“Matter!” replied the man; “a matter o' murder, gif I'm no far mistane.”

“Mercy on me! Who has been murdered?” cried Mr. Russel.

“I didna' say that ony body was murdered,” answered the man; “but, an ye persevere on your road through the pass, I'm thinkin' that somebody will be murdered.”

“What makes you fancy so?” asked Mr. Russel.

“Were ye no to hae been at my hoose last night?” demanded the Dalwhinnie landlord.

“I did so intend,” said Mr. Russel; “but the road turned out to be so much heavier than I had

anticipated, that all I could do was to reach Dal-nacaerdoch, and that at a late hour."

"It was the yespécial providence o' Heevin that you didna' get forrit," said the landlord, throwing up his eyes as if in thanksgiving, "for, if you had, you would have been assuredly a cauld corp at this precious moment."

"A corpse!" exclaimed Mr. Russel; "what has put that into your head?"

"Troth, as sure as ye are noo sittin' on your horse," replied the landlord, "ye wad ha'e been murdered, though you had had mair lives nor a cat."

"Explain yourself, I entreat you!" said Mr. Russel.

"It's an awfu' story," said the landlord, shuddering at the mere recollection of it. "It was at the dead hour o' the night, ye see, whan we war a' sound sleepin' in our beds, we war a' alarumed wi' a sudden noise and rissellin' in the yard, an' afore we kent whar we wuz, the hoose was filled wi' better nor twa dizzen o' great muckle armed hillan'men, wi' blackit faces. Aweel! they lighted great big lunts o' moss-fir at the kitchen fire, and cam' straught to my bed-side, brandishin' their

pistols and durks, and lookin' as if they wad eat me up.—'Whar's Mr. Russel sleepin'?' cries they.—'Gentlemen,' says I, 'as sure as death, Mr. Russel's no in this hoose.'—'We ken better,' says they; 'we ken he was to be here this night.'—'Some mistak, gentlemen,' says I; 'I'm dootin' that ye maun ha'e made some mistak; for Mr. Russel's not only no here, but, an' ye'll believe me, troth I didna' even expeck him.'—A' this only made them waur. They threatent and swoore at me like very rampawgin deevils,—and then they begud to search ilka hole and bore and cranny and corner in the hoose; an' no contented wi' the hoose, they rummaged a' the oot hooses, lookin' even into places whaur it was just simply impos- sible that a very cat could ha'e concealed hersel', an' forcin' me along wi' them a' the time, half naked, an' near hale dead wi' fear. And syne, whan they could find neither you nor your horses, preserve us a' what a furious hillant yell they did set up!—they war just a'thegither mad wi' rage and disappointment; an' some o' them war for burnin' the very hoose, that they might mak' sure that ye warnna' lurkin' somewhere aboot it after a'. At length, a stiff, stern wee body, wha

seemed to be their captain, soelected them in a moment; and having spoken to them for some time in Gaelic, their violence was moderated, or rather it seemed to be converted into downright hunger and drouth, for they begud to look for bread and cheese, and ither eatables, and whisky, for themsel's. Weel I wot, I gied them what they wanted wi' gude heart and wull, houpin' to get the sooner quite o' them; and little payment, I trow, did I expeck for my cheer. But, what think ye, sir? As I'm a sinner, they honestly paid me every farden o' their shot afore they ga'ed awa."

"Have you any notion as to whither they went after they left your house?" demanded Mr. Russel.

"Some o' our herds war sayin' that their tracks i' the snaw lay towards Loch Ericht," replied the landlord; "and, gif so be the case, I'se warrant that they have darned themsel's in some o' the queer hidy-holes about the craigs there awa'. And, I'll be bailed, they'll be ready to come back again or e'er ye ken whaur ye are, to murder you clean oot o' hand, for surely they maun contrive some-hoo' or ither to ha'e gude information."

"It is certainly most strange how they could

have known so well what my plans were," said Mr. Russel.

"Troth, sir, they're just deevils incarnate," continued the landlord; "but ye maun on no account think o' gaein' on, Mr. Russel; for, gif ye do, ye gang to certain death. Gae ye yere ways back to Blair or Dunkeld, for I'm dootin' ye'll no be safe nae gate else, and I'll send ower into Morayshire for some o' your ain fouk, weel accoutred and furnished, to convoy ye safe hame."

Mr. Russel was no coward, but he well knew the nature of the Highlanders he had to deal with. And what could the pistols of two men do against two dozen of well-armed assassins, springing on them at unawares by the way, or attacking them in their beds? After some little consideration, therefore, he deemed it most prudent to take the landlord's advice; and, accordingly, after he had thanked the honest fellow for the zeal he had manifested for his safety, and after the landlord had looked suspiciously around him and scanned the faces of the hills to their very tops with strong signs of apprehension, earnestly praying to God that their interview might not have been overlooked and



watched by any of the robbers or their spies—they parted ; and Mr. Russel and his servant retraced their steps at a good round pace.

After nearly a week's delay at Dunkeld, Mr. Russel was enabled to renew his journey at the head of a well armed party of between thirty and forty of his own people, who came to escort him. They travelled along with great caution, but they did not perceive the smallest show of hostility till they got into the middle of the pass of Drumouachter. Then, indeed, they observed that they were reconnoitred from the rough face of one of the hills overhanging the road, by a body of more than twenty armed mountaineers. They seemed to have issued from the recesses of one of those *Corries* or ravines, which there yawn over the valley like gashes on the lofty brow of a warrior ; and after some minutes apparently spent in consultation, they began to move along the steep acclivity in a line parallel to the road which Mr. Russel pursued. Their dark tartans waved in the wind, and their figures were boldly relieved against the glazed and brilliant surface of the snow they trod on. A certain degree of hesitation seemed to mark all their movements, which appeared to have a manifest reference to those of the party below. Mr.

Russel marched on with a steady and resolute pace, his men keeping a sharp look out in all directions, and being perfectly prepared to resist any sudden attack. But the mountaineers, being conscious of an inferiority of strength which rendered any open attempt on their part quite hopeless, did not venture to assault so large and so well armed a band. After skirting along the hill sides for five or six miles, they seemed gradually to slacken their pace till the whole body came to a halt on a prominent point of the mountain, where they remained, following Mr. Russel and his people with their eyes, and probably with their curses also, so long as they remained within sight. Mr. Russel thought it prudent to halt but for a short time at Dalwhinnie; and well was it for him that he did not tarry there all that night, for the house was again surrounded and searched by an overwhelming force, whilst Mr. Russel was urging his way homewards with an expedition that enabled him to reach his residence in perfect safety.

Whether a natural or accidental death, or some other cause, put an end to any farther attempts on the part of the vindictive mountaineer, I know not; but certain it is, that Mr. Russel was never more troubled either by him or by his people.