

Glencoe

I

The snow is white on the Pap of Glencoe,
And all is bleak and dreary,
And gladness reigns in the vale below
Where life is blythe and cheery.
Where the old MacDonal stout and true
Sits in the hall which his father's knew;
Since with the sword which his fathers' drew
On the old wall glancing clearly.
Where the dry logs blaze on the huge old hearth,
And the old wine flows that fans the mirth
Of the friends that love him dearly.
Heavily, heavily lies the snow
On the old gray ash and the old blue pine,
And the cold winds drearily, drearily blow
Down the glens with a moan and a whine.
But little reck they how the storm may bray
Or the wind may roar in the glen;
When the bright cups flow and the light jests play
And MacDonal is master of men.
Where MacDonal is king of the feast tonight,
And sways the hour with a landlord's right,
And broadens his smile and opens his breast
As a host may do to a dear loved guest.
And many a stirring tale he told
Of battle and war and chase,
And heroes that sleep beneath the mould,
The pride of his lordly race.
And many a headlong venture grim
With the hounds that track the deer
By the rifted chasms hanging rim
And the red-scaured mountains shear.
And many a song did the harper sing
Of Ossian blind and hoary
That made the old oak rafters ring
With the pulse of Celtic story.
And a piper blew a gamesome reel,
And the young blood hotly stirred,
And they beat the ground with lightsome heel
'Till the midnight bell was heard.
And then to rest they laid them down,
And soon the strong sleep bound them
While the winds without kept whistling rout
And the thick snow drifted round them.

II

But one there was whose eyes that night
No peaceful slumber knew,
Or if he slept he dreamt of blood
And woke by foe's far-sounding flood
To make his dreaming true.
A Campbell was he of a hated clan
(God's curse be on his name)
Who to MacDonald's goodly glen
On traitor's errand came.
He had the old man's niece to wife,
A love that should have buried strife,
And shook his hand for faithful proof,
And slept beneath his friendly roof;
And he that might have shared the mirth
Around the old man's friendly hearth,
And wise in devil's art,
Had laughed and quaffed and danced and sung
And talked with honey on his tongue
And murder in his heart.
And now to buy a grace from power,
And men the slaves of the venal hour,
Or with the gust of blood to state
A heart whom luxury was hate,
His hand was on the whetted knife
That thirsts to drink the old man's life;
And soon the blood shall flow
From which the curse shall grow
That since the world to sin began
Pursues the lawless handed man;
And false Glen Lyons' traitor name
Shall live a blazing badge of shame
While memory links the crimson crime,
The basest in the book of Time,
With Campbell and Glencoe.

III

'Tis five o'clock i' the morn of light
No glimmering ray is seen,
And the snow that drifted through the night
Shrouds every spot of green.
Not yet the cock hath blown his horn
But the base red-coated crew
Creep through the silence of the morn
With [?] work to do.
And now to the old man's house they came,

Where he lived in the strength of his proud old name,
A brave unguarded life.
And now they enter the old oak room,
Where he lay all witless of his doom,
In the arms of his faithful wife;
And through the grace of his hoary head
As he turned him startling from his bed
And reaved his purple life;
Then from the lady where she lay
With outstretched arms in blank dismay,
They rove the vest and in deray
They flung her on the floor,
And from her quivering fingers tore,
With their teeth, the rare old ring she wore,
Then hauled her down the oaken stair
Into the cold unkindly air;
And in the snow they left her there
Where not a friend was nigh,
With many a curse and never a tear
Like an outcast beast to die.

IV

And now the butcher work went on,
Hotly, hotly up the glen,
For the order was given full sharply then:
The lion to stay with the cubs in his den
And never a male to spare.
And the king's own hand had signed the ban
To glut the hate of the Campbell clan,
And the spite of the master of Stair.¹
From every clachan in long Glencoe
The shriek went up and the blood did flow,
Reeking and red on the wreathed snow.
Every captain had his station
On the banks of the roaring waters
Watching o'er the butchered nation,
Like the demons of the slaughter.
Lindsay raged at Invercoe,
And laid his breathless twenty low.
At Inverriggen Campbell grim
Made the floor with gore to swim;
Nine he counted in a row,
Brothered in a bloody show.
And one who oft for him had spread

¹John Dalrymple, 1st Earl of Stair

The pillow neath his traitor's head,
To woe the kindly rest
At Auchnachoin stern Baker pressed
The pitiless work with savage zest.
And on the broad mead by the water
Heaped ten souls in huddled slaughter:
The young man blooming in his pride,
The old man with crack'd breath,
The bridegroom severed from his bride;
And son with father side by side
Lie swathed in one red death.
And Firi made league with murder fell
Where flung by many a raging hand;
From house to house the flaming brand,
Contagious, flew and crackling spar,
And crashing beam made hideous jar,
And pitchy volumes swell.
What horror stalked the glen that day;
What ghastly fear and grim dismay
No tongue of man may tell.
What shame to Orange William's sway,
When murder throve and honours decked,
And every traitor stood erect,
And every true man fell.

V

'Tis twelve o'clock at noon.
Heavily, heavily on the hill
The storm outwreaks his wintry will
And flouts the blinded sun;
And now the base redcoated crew
And the fiends in hell delight to view
The sanguine slaughter done.
But where be they the helpless troop,
Spared by red murder's ruthless swoop:
The feeble with her suckling child,
And all who fled with timely haste
From hissing shot and sword uncased,
Hurrying from the reeking glen?
They are fled some here, some there;
Some have scrambled up the Ben
And crossed the granite ridges bare
And found kind word and helping hand

On Appin's green and friendly strand.
Some in the huts of lone Glencoe
Found kindly care and shelter sure,
And some in face of the tempest's roar
Behind the shelving Buchailmore
With stumbling foot did onward press
To thy Ben-girdled nook, Dalness;
And some huge Cruachan's peak behind
Found a broad shield from drift and wind,
And warmed their frozen frames at fires
Kindled by friendly Macintyres.
But most o' Heaven a feeble nation
Crept slowly from the mountain station.
The old, the sickly, and the frail
Went blindly on with staggering trail:
The little tender footed maid,
The little boy that loved to wade
In the clear waters of the Coe
Ere blood had stained their amber flow.
On them ere half their way was laid,
Some on the scaurs of the jagged Bens,
Some in black bogs and stony glens,
Faith and worn till kindly death
Numbed their limbs and froze their breath
 And wound them in the snow.
And there they lay with none to know
And none with pious kind concern
To honour with a cross or cairn
 The remnant of Glencoe.
And on the hills a curse doth lie
 That will not die with years,
And oft times 'neath a scowling sky
Through the black-rent, where the torrent grim
Leaps 'neath the huge crags frowning rim,
The wind came down with a moan and a sigh
And a voice like the voice of a wail and a cry
 The lonely traveller hears:
A voice like the voice of Allyn weeping
For the sorrow and the shame
That stained the British soldier's name;
Where kingship was in butcher's keeping
 And power was honour's foe.
Weeping for scutcheons rudely torn,
And worth disowned and glory shorn,
And for the valiant-hearted men
That once were mighty in the glen,
Of lonely, bleak Glencoe.

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John Grant

