

Neil Munro

John Splendid: The Tale of a Poor Gentleman, and the Little Wars of Lorn

EAN 8596547305163

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



Table of Contents

JOHN SPLENDID.
CHAPTER I.—FROM THE FOREIGN FIELD.
CHAPTER II.—GILLESBEG GRUAMACH.
CHAPTER III.—THE LADY ON THE STAIR.
CHAPTER IV.—A NIGHT ALARM.
CHAPTER V.—KIRK LAW.
CHAPTER VI.—MY LADY OF MOODS.
CHAPTER VII.—CHILDREN OF THE MIST.
CHAPTER VIII.—THE BALE-FIRES ON THE BENS
CHAPTER IX.—INVASION.
CHAPTER X.—THE FLIGHT TO THE FOREST.
CHAPTER XI.—ON BENS OF WAR.
CHAPTER XIII.—WHERE TREADS THE DEER.
CHAPTER XIV.—MY LADY AND THE CHILD.
<u>CHAPTER XV.—CONFESSIONS OF A MARQUIS.</u>
CHAPTER XVI.—OUR MARCH FOR LOCHABER.
CHAPTER XVII.—IN THE LAND OF LORN.
CHAPTER XVIII.—BARD OF KEPPOCH.
CHAPTER XIX.—THE MIRACULOUS JOURNEY.
CHAPTER XX.—INVERLOCHY.
CHAPTER XXI.—SEVEN BROKEN MEN.
CHAPTER XXII.—DAME DUBH.
CHAPTER XXIII.—THE WIDOW OF GLENCOE.
CHAPTER XXIV.—A NIGHT'S SHELTER.
CHAPTER XXV.—THE ANGRY EAVESDROPPER.
CHAPTER XXVI —TRAPPED

I caught M'Iver by the coat-lapels, and took him off the gasping cleric.

CHAPTER XXVII.—A TAVERN IN THE WILDS.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—LOST ON THIS MOOR OF KANNOCH.

CHAPTER XXIX.—THE RETURN.

CHAPTER XXX.—ARGILE'S BEDROOM.

CHAPTER XXXI.—MISTRESS BETTY.

CHAPTER XXXII.—A SCANDAL AND A QUARREL.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—THE BROKEN SWORD.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—LOVE IN THE WOODS.

CHAPTER XXXV.—FAREWELL.

r

DEDICATION.

Table of Contents

To read this tale, dear Hugh, without any association of its incidents with the old respectable chronicles of the Historians is what I should wish you could always do. That is the happy manner with Romance; that is the enviable aptness of the child. But when (by the favour of God) you grow older and more reflective, seeking perhaps for more in these pages than they meant to give, you may wonder that the streets, the lanes, the tenements herein set forth so much resemble those we know to-day, though less than two vears ago the bracken waved hundred nogu promontory. You may wonder, too, that the Silver Mines of Coillebhraid. discovered the in time of your greatgrandfather, should have SO strangely been anticipated in the age of Gillesbeg Gruamach. Let not those chronological divergences perturb you; they were in the manuscript (which you will be good enough to assume) of Elrigmore, and I would not alter them. Nor do I diminish by a single hour Elrigmore's estimate that two days were taken on the Miraculous Journey to Inverlochy, though numerous histories have made it less. In that, as in a few other details, Elrigmore's account is borne out by one you know to whom The Little Wars of Lorn and Lochaber are yet, as it were, an impulse of yesterday, and the name of Athole is utterly detestable.

I give you this book, dear Hugh, not for History, though a true tale—a sad old tale—is behind it, but for a picture of times and manners, of a country that is dear to us in every rock and valley, of a people we know whose blood is ours. And that you may grow in wisdom as in years, and gain the riches of affection, and escape the giants of life as Connal

did the giants of Erin O, in our winter tale, is my fervent prayer.

N. M.

September 1898.

JOHN SPLENDID.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.—FROM THE FOREIGN FIELD.

Table of Contents

Many a time, in college or in camp, I had planned the style of my home-coming. Master Webster, in the Humanities, droning away like a Boreraig bagpipe, would be sending my mind back to Shira Glen, its braes and corries and singing waters, and Ben Bhuidhe over all, and with my chin on a hand I would ponder on how I should go home again when this weary scholarship was over. I had always a ready fancy and some of the natural vanity of youth, so I could see myself landing off the lugger at the guay of Inneraora town, three inches more of a man than when I left with a firkin of herring and a few bolls of meal for my winter's provand; thicker too at the chest, and with a jacket of London green cloth with brass buttons. Would the fishermen about the quay-head not lean over the gun'les of their skiffs and say, "There goes young Elrigmore from Colleging, well-knit in troth, and a pretty lad"? I could hear (all in my daydream in yon place of dingy benches) the old women about the well at the town Cross say, "Oh laochain! thou art come back from the Galldach, and Glascow College; what a thousand curious things thou must know, and what wisdom thou must have, but never a change on thine affability to the old and to the poor!" But it was not till I had run away from Glascow College, and shut the boards for good and all, as I thought, on my humane letters and history, and gone with cousin Gavin to the German wars in Mackay's Corps of true Highlanders, that I added a manlier thought to my thinking of the day when I should come home to my native place. I've seen me in the camp at night, dog-wearied after stoury marching on their cursed foreign roads, keeping my eyes

open and the sleep at an arm's-length, that I might think of Shira Glen. Whatever they may say of me or mine, they can never deny but I had the right fond heart for my own countryside, and I have fought men for speaking of its pride and poverty—their ignorance, their folly!—for what did they ken of the Highland spirit? I would be lying in the lap of the night, and my Ferrara sword rolled in my plaid as a pillow for my head, fancying myself—all those long wars over, march, siege, and sack—riding on a good horse down the pass of Aora and through the arches into the old town. Then, it was not the fishermen or the old women I thought of, but the girls, and the winking stars above me were their eyes, glinting merrily and kindly on a stout young gentleman soldier with jack and morion, sword at haunch, spur at heel, and a name for bravado never a home-biding laird in our parish had, burgh or landward. I would sit on my horse so, the chest well out, the back curved, the knees straight, one gauntlet off to let my white hand wave a salute when needed, and none of all the pretty ones would be able to say Elrigmore thought another one the sweetest Oh! I tell you we learnt many arts in the Lowland wars, more than they teach Master of Art in the old biggin' in the Hie Street of Glascow.

One day, at a place called Nordlingen near the Mid Franken, binding a wound Gavin got in the sword-arm, I said, "What's your wish at this moment, cousin?"

He looked at me with a melting eye, and the flush hove to his face.

"'Fore God, Colin," said he, "I would give my twelve months' wage to stand below the lintel of my mother's door and hear her say 'Darling scamp!'"

"If you had your wish, Gavin, when and how would you go into Inneraora town after those weary years away?"

"Man, I've made that up long syne," said he, and the tear was at his cheek. "Let me go into it cannily at night-fall from the Cromalt end, when the boys and girls were dancing on the green to the pipes at the end of a harvest-day. Them in a reel, with none of the abulziements of war about me, but a plain civil lad like the rest, I would join in the strathspey and kiss two or three of the girls ere ever they jaloused a stranger was among them."

Poor Gavin, good Gavin! he came home no way at all to his mother and his mountains; but here was I, with some of his wish for my fortune, riding cannily into Inneraora town in the dark.

It is wonderful how travel, even in a marching company of cavaliers of fortune, gives scope to the mind. When I set foot, twelve years before this night I speak of, on the gabert that carried me down to Dunbarton on my way to the Humanities classes, I could have sworn I was leaving a burgh most large and wonderful. The town houses of old Stonefield, Craignish, Craignure, Asknish, and the other cadets of Clan Campbell, had such a strong and genteel look; the windows, all but a very few, had glass in every lozen, every shutter had a hole to let in the morning light, and each door had its little ford of stones running across the gutter that sped down the street, smelling fishily a bit, on its way to the shore. For me, in those days, each close that pierced the tall lands was as wide and high as a mountain eas, the street itself seemed broad and substantial, crowded with people worth kenning for their graces and the many things they knew.

I came home now on this night of nights with Munchen and Augsburg, and the fine cities of all the France, in my mind, and I tell you I could think shame of this mean rickle of stones I had thought a town, were it not for the good hearts and kind I knew were under every roof. The broad street crowded with people, did I say? A little lane rather;

and Elrigmore, with schooling and the wisdom of travel, felt he could see into the heart's core of the cunningest merchant in the place.

But anyway, here I was, riding into town from the Cromalt end on a night in autumn. It was after ten by my Paris watch when I got the length of the Creags, and I knew that there was nothing but a sleeping town before me, for our folks were always early bedders when the fishing season was on. The night hung thick with stars, but there was no moon; a stiff wind from the east prinked at my right ear and cooled my horse's skin, as he slowed down after a canter of a mile or two on this side of Pennymore. Out on the loch I could see the lights of a few herring-boats lift and fall at the end of their trail of nets.

"Too few of you there for the town to be busy and cheerful," said I to myself; "no doubt the bulk of the boats are down at Otter, damming the fish in the narrow gut, and keeping them from searching up to our own good townsmen."

I pressed my brute to a trot, and turned round into the nether part of the town. It was what I expected—the place was dark, black out. The people were sleeping; the salt air of Loch Finne went sighing through the place in a way that made me dowie for old days. We went over the causeway-stones with a clatter that might have wakened the dead, but no one put a head out, and I thought of the notion of a cheery home-coming poor Gavin had—my dear cousin, stroked out and cold under foreign clods at Velshiem, two leagues below the field of Worms of Hessen, on the banks of the Rhine, in Low Germanie.

It is a curious business this riding into a town in the dark waste of night; curious even in a strange town when all are the same for you that sleep behind those shutters and those doors, but doubly curious when you know that behind the dark fronts are folk lying that you know well, that have been thinking, and drinking, and thriving when you were far away. As I went clattering slowly by, I would say at one house front, "Yonder's my old comrade, Tearlach, who taught me my one tune on the pipe-chanter; is his beard grown yet, I wonder?" At another, "There is the garret window of the schoolmaster's daughter—does she sing so sweetly nowadays in the old kirk?"

In the dead middle of the street I pulled my horse up, just to study the full quietness of the hour. Leaning over, I put a hand on his nostrils and whispered in his ear for a silence, as we do abroad in ambuscade. Town Innera-ora slept sound, sure enough! All to hear was the spilling of the river at the cascade under the bridge and the plopping of the waves against the wall we call the ramparts, that keeps the sea from thrashing on the Tolbooth. And then over all I could hear a most strange moaning sound, such as we boys used to make with a piece of lath nicked at the edges and swung hurriedly round the head by a string. It was made by the wind, I knew, for it came loudest in the gusty bits of the night and from the east, and when there was a lull I could hear it soften away and end for a second or two with a dunt, as if some heavy, soft thing struck against wood.

Whatever it was, the burghers of Inneraora paid no heed, but slept, stark and sound, behind their steeked shutters.

The solemnity of the place that I knew so much better in a natural lively mood annoyed me, and I played there and then a prank more becoming a boy in his first kilt than a gentleman of education and travel and some repute for sobriety. I noticed I was opposite the house of a poor old woman they called Black Kate, whose door was ever the target in my young days for every lad that could brag of a boot-toe, and I saw that the shutter, hanging ajee on one hinge, was thrown open against the harled wall of the house. In my doublet-pocket there were some carabeen bullets, and taking one out, I let bang at the old woman's

little lozens. There was a splinter of glass, and I waited to see if any one should come out to find who had done the damage. My trick was in vain; no one came. Old Kate, as I found next day, was dead since Martinmas, and her house was empty.

Still the moaning sound came from the town-head, and I went slowly riding in its direction. It grew clearer and yet uncannier as I sped on, and mixed with the sough of it I could hear at last the clink of chains.

"What in God's name have I here?" said I to myself, turning round Islay Campbell's corner, and yonder was my answer!

The town gibbets were throng indeed! Two corpses swung in the wind, like net bows on a drying-pole, going from side to side, making the woeful sough and clink of chains, and the dunt I had heard when the wind dropped.

I grued more at the sound of the soughing than at the sight of the hanged fellows, for I've seen the Fell Sergeant in too many ugly fashions to be much put about at a hanging match. But it was such a poor home-coming! It told me as plain as could be, what I had heard rumours of in the low country, riding round from the port of Leith, that the land was uneasy, and that pit and gallows were bye-ordinar busy at the gates of our castle. When I left for my last session at Glascow College, the countryside was quiet as a village green, never a raider nor a reiver in the land, and so poor the Doomster's trade (Black George) that he took to the shoeing of horses.

"There must be something wicked in the times, and cheatery rampant indeed," I thought, "when the common gibbet of Inneraora has a drunkard's convoy on either hand to prop it up."

But it was no time for meditation. Through the rags of plaiding on the chains went the wind again so eerily that I

bound to be off, and I put my horse to it, bye the town-head and up the two miles to Glen Shira. I was sore and galled sitting on the saddle; my weariness hung at the back of my legs and shoulders like an ague, and there was never a man in this world came home to his native place so eager for taking supper and sleep as young Elrigmore.

What I expected at my father's door I am not going to set down here. I went from it a fool, with not one grace about me but the love of my good mother, and the punishment I had for my hot and foolish cantrip was many a wae night on foreign fields, vexed to the core for the sore heart I had left at home.

My mind, for all my weariness, was full of many things, and shame above all, as I made for my father's house. The horse had never seen Glen Shira, but it smelt the comfort of the stable and whinnied cheerfully as I pulled up at the gate. There was but one window to the gable-end of Elrigmore, and it was something of a surprise to me to find a light in it, for our people were not overly rich in these days, and candle or cruisie was wont to be doused at bedtime. More was my surprise when, leading my horse round to the front, feeling my way in the dark by memory, I found the oak door open and my father, dressed, standing in the light of it.

A young *sgalag* came running to the reins, and handing them to him, I stepped into the light of the door, my bonnet in my hand.

"Step in, sir, caird or gentleman," said my father—looking more bent at the shoulder than twelve years before.

I went under the door-lintel, and stood a little abashed before him.

"Colin! Colin!" he cried in the Gaelic "Did I not ken it was you?" and he put his two hands on my shoulders.

"It is Colin sure enough, father dear," I said, slipping readily enough into the mother tongue they did their best to get out of me at Glascow College. "Is he welcome in this door?" and the weariness weighed me down at the hip and bowed my very legs.

He gripped me tight at the elbows, and looked me hungrily in the face.

"If you had a murdered man's head in your oxter, Colin," said he, "you were still my son. Colin, Colin! come ben and put off your boots!"

"Mother——" I said, but he broke in on my question.

"Come in, lad, and sit down. You are back from the brave wars you never went to with my will, and you'll find stirring times here at your own parish. It's the way of the Sennachies' stories."

"How is that, sir?"

"They tell, you know, that people wander far on the going foot for adventure, and adventure is in the first turning of their native lane."

I was putting my boots off before a fire of hissing logs that filled the big room with a fir-wood smell right homely and comforting to my heart, and my father was doing what I should have known was my mother's office if weariness had not left me in a sort of stupor—he was laying on the board a stout and soldierly supper and a tankard of the red Bordeaux wine the French traffickers bring to Loch Finne to trade for cured herring. He would come up now and then where I sat fumbling sleepily at my belt, and put a hand on my head, a curious unmanly sort of thing I never knew my father do before, and I felt put-about at this petting, which would have been more like my sister if ever I had had the luck to have one.

"You are tired, Colin, my boy?" he said.

"A bit, father, a bit," I answered; "rough roads you know. I was landed at break of day at Skipness and—Is mother ———?"

"Sit in, laochain! Did you meet many folks on the road?"

"No, sir; as pestilent barren a journey as ever I trotted on, and the people seemingly on the hill, for their crops are unco late in the field."

"Ay, ay, lad, so they are," said my father, pulling back his shoulders a bit—a fairly straight wiry old man, with a name for good swordsmanship in his younger days.

I was busy at a cold partridge, and hard at it, when I thought again how curious it was that my father should be a-foot in the house at such time of night and no one else about, he so early a bedder for ordinary and never the last to sneck the outer door.

"Did you expect any one, father," I asked, "that you should be waiting up with the collation, and the outer door unsnecked?"

"There was never an outer door snecked since you left, Colin," said he, turning awkwardly away and looking hard into the loof of his hand like a wife spaeing fortunes—for sheer want, I could see, of some engagement for his eyes. "I could never get away with the notion that some way like this at night would ye come back to Elngmore."

"Mother would miss me?"

"She did, Colin, she did; I'm not denying."

"She'll be bedded long syne, no doubt, father?"

My father looked at me and gulped at the throat.

"Bedded indeed, poor Colin," said he, "this very day in the clods of Kilmalieu!"

And that was my melancholy home-coming to my father's house of Elngmore, in the parish of Glcnaora, in the shire of Argile.

CHAPTER II.—GILLESBEG GRUAMACH.

Table of Contents

Every land, every glen or town, I make no doubt, has its own peculiar air or atmosphere that one familiar with the same may never puzzle about in his mind, but finds come over him with a waft at odd moments like the scent of bogmyrtle and tansy in an old clothes-press. Our own air in Glen Shira had ever been very genial and encouraging to me. Even when a young lad, coming back from the low country or the scaling of school, the cool fresh breezes of the morning and the riper airs of the late afternoon went to my head like a mild white wine; very heartsome too, rousing the laggard spirit that perhaps made me, before, over-apt to sit and dream of the doing of grand things instead of putting out a hand to do them. In Glascow the one thing that I had to grumble most about next to the dreary hours of schooling was the clammy air of street and close; in Germanie it was worse, a moist weakening windiness full of foreign smells, and I've seen me that I could gaily march a handful of leagues to get a sniff of the salt sea. Not that I was one who craved for wrack and bilge at my nose all the time. What I think best is a stance inland from the salt water, where the mountain air, brushing over gall and heather, takes the sting from the sea air, and the two blended give a notion of the fine variousness of life. We had a herdsman once in Elrigmore, who could tell five miles up the glen when the tide was out on Loch Firme. I was never so keen-scented as that, but when I awakened next day in a camcelled room in Elrigmore, and put my head out at the window to look around, I smelt the heather for a second like an escapade in a dream.

Down to Ealan Eagal I went for a plunge in the linn in the old style, and the airs of Shira Glen hung about me like friends and lovers, so well acquaint and jovial.

Shira Glen, Shira Glen! if I was bard I'd have songs to sing to it, and all I know is one sculduddry verse on a widow that dwelt in Maam! There, at the foot of my father's house, were the winding river, and north and south the brown hills, split asunder by God's goodness, to give a sample of His bounty. Maam, Elrigmore and Elrigbeg, Kilblaan and Ben Bhuidhe—their steep sides hung with cattle, and below crowded the reeking homes of tacksman and cottar; the bums poured hurriedly to the flat beneath their borders of hazel and ash; to the south, the fresh water we call Dubh Loch, flapping with ducks and fringed with shelisters or water-flags and bulrush, and farther off the Cowal hills; to the north, the wood of Drimlee and the wild pass the red Macgregors sometimes took for a back-road to our cattlefolds in cloud of night and darkness. Down on it all shone the polished and hearty sun, birds chinned on every tree, though it was late in the year; blackcock whirred across the alders, and sturdy heifers bellowed tunefully, knee-deep at the ford.

"Far have I wandered," thought I to myself, "warring other folk's wars for the humour of it and small wages, but here's the one place I've seen yet that was worth hacking good steel for in earnest!"

But still my heart was sore for mother, and sore, too, for the tale of changed times in Campbell country my father told me over a breakfast of braddan, fresh caught in a creel from the Gearron river, oaten bannock, and cream.

After breakfast I got me into my kilt for town. There are many costumes going about the world, but, with allowance for every one, I make bold to think our own tartan duds the gallantest of them all. The kilt was my wear when first I went to Glascow College, and many a St. Mungo keelie, no

better than myself at classes or at English language, made fun of my brown knees, sometimes not to the advantage of his headpiece when it came to argument and neifs on the Fleshers' Haugh. Pulling on my old breacan this morning in Elrigmore was like donning a fairy garb, and getting back ten years of youth. We have a way of belting on the kilt in real Argile I have seen nowhere else. Ordinarily, our lads take the whole web of tartan cloth, of twenty ells or more, and coil it once round their middle, there belting it, and bring the free end up on the shoulder to pin with a brooch not a bad fashion for display and long marches and for sleeping out on the hill with, but somewhat discommodious for warm weather. It was our plan sometimes to make what we called a philabeg, or little kilt, maybe eight yards long, gathered in at the haunch and hung in many pleats behind, the plain brat part in front decked off with a leather sporran, tagged with thong points tied in knots, and with no plaid on the shoulder. I've never seen a more jaunty and suitable garb for campaigning, better by far for short sharp tulzies with an enemy than the philamore or the big kilt our people sometimes throw off them in a skirmish, and fight (the coarsest of them) in their gartered hose and scrugged bonnets.

With my kilt and the memory of old times about me, I went walking down to Inneraora in the middle of the day. I was prepared for change from the complaints of my father, but never for half the change I found in the burgh town of MacCailein Mor. In my twelve foreign years the place was swamped by incomers, black unwelcome Covenanters from the shires of Air and Lanrick—Brices, Yuilles, Rodgers, and Richies—all brought up here by Gillesbeg Gruamach, Marquis of Argile, to teach his clans the arts of peace and merchandise. Half the folk I met between the arches and the Big Barns were strangers that seemingly never had tartan on their hurdies, but settled down with a firm foot in the

place, I could see by the bold look of them as I passed on the plain-stanes of the street A queer town this on the edge of Loch Finne, and far in the Highlands! There were shops with Lowland stuffs in them, and over the doors signboards telling of the most curious trades for a Campbell burgh horologers, cordiners, baxters, and such like mechanicks that I felt sure poor Donald had small call for. They might be incomers, but they were thirled to Gillesbeg all the same, as I found later on.

It was the court day, and his lordship was sitting in judgment on two Strathlachlan fellows, who had been brawling at the Cross the week before and came to knives, more in a frolic than in hot blood, with some of the town lads. With two or three old friends I went into the Tolbooth to see the play—for play it was, I must confess, in town Inneraora, when justice was due to a man whose name by ill-luck was not Campbell, or whose bonnet-badge was not the myrtle stem.

The Tolbooth hall was, and is to this day, a spacious high-ceiled room, well lighted from the bay-side. It was crowded soon after we got in, with Cowalside fishermen and townpeople all the one way or the other—for or against the poor lads in bilboes, who sat, simple-looking enough, between the town officers, a pair of old *bodachs* in long scarlet coats and carrying *tuaghs*, Lochaber axes, or halberds that never smelt blood since they came from the smith.

It was the first time ever I saw Gillesbeg Gruamach sitting on the bench, and I was startled at the look of the man. I've seen some sour dogs in my day—few worse than Ruthven's rittmasters whom we met in Swabia—but I never saw a man who, at the first vizzy, had the dour sour countenance of Archibald, Marquis of Argile and Lord of Lochow. Gruamach, or grim-faced, our good Gaels called him in a bye-name, and well he owned it, for over necklace or gorget I've seldom

seen a sterner jowl or a more sinister eye. And yet, to be fair and honest, this was but the notion one got at a first glint; in a while I thought little was amiss with his looks as he leaned on the table and cracked in a humoursome laughing way with the paneled jury.

He might have been a plain cottar on Glen Aora side rather than King of the Highlands for all the airs he assumed, and when he saw me, better put-on in costume than my neighbours in court, he seemingly asked my name in a whisper from the clerk beside him, and finding who I was, cried out in St. Andrew's English—

"What! Young Elrigmore back to the Glens! I give you welcome, sir, to Baile Inneraora!"

I but bowed, and in a fashion saluted, saying nothing in answer, for the whole company glowered at me, all except the home-bred ones who had better manners.

The two MacLachlans denied in the Gaelic the charge the sheriff clerk read to them in a long farrago of English with more foreign words to it than ever I learned the sense of in College.

His lordship paid small heed to the witnesses who came forward to swear to the unruliness of the Strathlachlan men, and the jury talked heedlessly with one another in a fashion scandalous to see. The man who had been stabbed—it was but a jag at the shoulder, where the dirk had gone through from front to back with only some lose of blood—was averse from being hard on the panels. He was a jocular fellow with the right heart for a duello, and in his nipped burgh Gaelic he made light of the disturbance and his injury.

"Nothing but a bit play, my jurymen—MacCailein—my lordship—a bit play. If the poor lad didn't happen to have his dirk out and I to run on it, nobody was a bodle the worse."

"But the law"—started the clerk to say.

"No case for law at all," said the man. "It's an honest brawl among friends, and I could settle the account with them at the next market-day, when my shoulder's mended."

"Better if you would settle my account for your last pair of brogues, Alasdair M'Iver," said a black-avised juryman.

"What's your trade?" asked the Marquis of the witness.

"I'm at the Coillebhraid silver-mines," said he. "We had a little too much drink, or these MacLachlan gentlemen and I had never come to variance."

The Marquis gloomed at the speaker and brought down his fist with a bang on the table before him.

"Damn those silver-mines!" said he; "they breed more trouble in this town of mine than I'm willing to thole. If they put a penny in my purse it might not be so irksome, but they plague me sleeping and waking, and I'm not a plack the richer. If it were not to give my poor cousin, John Splendid, a chance of a living and occupation for his wits, I would drown them out with the water of Cromalt Burn."

The witness gave a little laugh, and ducking his head oddly like one taking liberties with a master, said, "We're a drouthy set, my lord, at the mines, and I wouldn't be saying but what we might drink them dry again of a morning, if we had been into town the night before."

His lordship cut short his sour smile at the man's fancy, and bade the officers on with the case.

"You have heard the proof," he said to the jury when it came to his turn to charge them. "Are they guilty, or not? If the question was put to me I should say the Laird of MacLachlan, arrant Papist! should keep his men at home to Mass on the other side of the loch instead of loosing them on honest, or middling honest, Campbells, for the strict virtue of these Coillebhraid miners is what I am not going to guarantee."

Of course the fellows were found guilty—one of stabbing, the other of art and part—for MacLachlan was no friend of MacCailein Mor, and as little friend to the merchant burghers of Inneraora, for he had the poor taste to buy his shop provand from the Lamont towns of Low Cowal.

"A more unfriendly man to the Laird of MacLachlan might be for hanging you on the gibbet at the town-head," said his lordship to the prisoners, spraying ink-sand idly on the clean page of a statute-book as he spoke; "but our three trees upbye are leased just now to other tenants—Badenoch hawks a trifle worse than yourselves, and more deserving."

The men looked stupidly about them, knowing not one word of his lordship's English, and he was always a man who disdained to converse much in Erse. He looked a little cruelly at them and went on.

"Perhaps clipping your lugs might be the bonniest way of showing you what we think of such on-goings in honest Inneraora; or getting the Doomster to bastinado you up and down the street But we'll try what a fortnight in the Tolbooth may do to amend your visiting manners. Take them away, officers."

"Abair moran taing—say 'many thanks' to his lordship," whispered one of the red-coat halberdiers in the ear of the bigger of the two prisoners. I could hear the command distinctly where I sat, well back in the court, and so no doubt could Gillesbeg Gruamach, but he was used to such obsequious foolishness and he made no dissent or comment.

"Taing! taing!" said one spokesman of the two MacLachlans in his hurried Cowal Gaelic, and his neighbour, echoing him word for word in the comic fashion they have in these parts; "Taing! taing! I never louted to the horseman that rode over me yet, and I would be ill-advised to start with the Gruamach one!"

The man's face flushed up as he spoke. It's a thing I've noticed about our own poor Gaelic men: speaking before them in English or Scots, their hollow look and aloofness would give one the notion that they lacked sense and sparkle; take the muddiest-looking among them and challenge him in his own tongue, and you'll find his face fill with wit and understanding.

I was preparing to leave the court-room, having many people to call on in Inneraora, and had turned with my two friends to the door, when a fellow brushed in past us—a Highlander, I could see, but in trews—and he made to go forward into the body of the court, as if to speak to his lordship, now leaning forward in a cheerful conversation with the Provost of the burgh, a sonsy gentleman in a peruke and figured waistcoat.

"Who is he, this bold fellow?" I asked one of my friends, pausing with a foot on the door-step, a little surprised at the want of reverence to MacCailein in the man's bearing.

"lain Aluinn—John Splendid," said my friend. We were talking in the Gaelic, and he made a jocular remark there is no English for. Then he added, "A poor cousin of the Marquis, a M'Iver Campbell (on the wrong side), with little schooling, but some wit and gentlemanly parts. He has gone through two fortunes in black cattle, fought some fighting here and there, and now he manages the silver-mines so adroitly that Gillesbeg Gruamach is ever on the brink of getting a big fortune, but never done launching out a little one instead to keep the place going. A decent soul the Splendid! throughither a bit, and better at promise than performance, but at the core as good as gold, and a fellow you would never weary of though you tramped with him in a thousand glens. We call him Splendid, not for his looks but for his style."

The object of my friend's description was speaking into the ear of MacCailein Mor by this time, and the Marquis's face showed his tale was interesting, to say the least of it.

We waited no more, but went out into the street I was barely two closes off from the Tolbooth when a messenger came running after me, sent by the Marquis, who asked if I would oblige greatly by waiting till he made up on me. I went back, and met his lordship with his kinsman and minemanager coming out of the court-room together into the lobby that divided the place from the street.

"Oh, Elrigmore!" said the Marquis, in an offhand jovial and equal way; "I thought you would like to meet my cousin here—M'Iver of the Barbreck; something of a soldier like yourself, who has seen service in Lowland wars."

"In the Scots Brigade, sir?" I asked M'Iver, eyeing him with greater interest than ever. He was my senior by about a dozen years seemingly, a neat, well-built fellow, cleanshaven, a little over the middle height, carrying a rattan in his hand, though he had a small sword tucked under the skirt of his coat.

"With Lumsden's regiment," he said. "His lordship here has been telling me you have just come home from the field."

"But last night. I took the liberty while Inneraora was snoring. You were before my day in foreign service, and yet I thought I knew by repute every Campbell that ever fought for the hard-won dollars of Gustavus even before my day. There were not so many of them from the West Country."

"I trailed a pike privately," laughed M'Iver, "and for the honour of Clan Diarmaid I took the name Munro. My cousin here cares to have none of his immediate relatives make a living by steel at any rank less than a cornal's, or a major's at the very lowest Frankfort, and Landsberg, and the stark field of Leipzig were the last I saw of foreign battles, and the God's truth is they were my bellyful. I like a bit splore, but give it to me in our old style, with the tartan instead of buff,

and the target for breastplate and taslets. I came home sick of wars."

"Our friend does himself injustice, my dear Elrigmore," said Argile, smiling; "he came home against his will, I have no doubt, and I know he brought back with him a musketoon bullet in the hip, that couped him by the heels down in Glassary for six months."

"The result," M'Iver hurried to exclaim, but putting out his breast with a touch of vanity, "of a private *rencontre*, an affair of my own with a Reay gentleman, and not to be laid to my credit as part of the war's scaith at all."

"You conducted your duello in odd style under Lums-den, surely," said I, "if you fought with powder and ball instead of steel, which is more of a Highlander's weapon to my way of thinking. All our affairs in the Reay battalion were with claymore—sometimes with targe, sometimes wanting."

"This was a particular business of our own," laughed John Splendid (as I may go on to call M'Iver, for it was the name he got oftenest behind and before in Argile). "It was less a trial of valour than a wager about which had the better skill with the musket. If I got the bullet in my groin, I at least showed the Mackay gentleman in question that an Argile man could handle arquebus as well as arme blanche as we said in the France. I felled my man at one hundred and thirty paces, with six to count from a ritt-master's signal. Blow, present, God sain Mackay's soul! But I'm not given to braggadocio."

"Not a bit, cousin," said the Marquis, looking quizzingly at me.

"I could not make such good play with the gun against a fort gable at so many feet," said I.

"You could, sir, you could," said John Splendid in an easy, offhand, flattering way, that gave me at the start of our acquaintance the whole key to his character. "I've little

doubt you could allow me half-a-dozen paces and come closer on the centre of the target."

By this time we were walking down the street, the Marguis betwixt the pair of us commoners, and I to the left side. Lowlanders and Highlanders quickly got out of the way before us and gave us the crown of the causeway. The main part of them the Marguis never let his eye light on; he kept his nose cocked in the air in the way I've since found peculiar to his family. It was odd to me that had in wanderings got to look on all honest men as equal (except Camp-Master Generals and Pike Colonels), to see some of his lordship's poor clansmen cringing before him. Here indeed was the leaven of your low-country scum, for in all the broad Highlands wandering before and since I never saw the like! "Blood of my blood, brother of my name!" says our good Gaelic old-word: it made no insolents in camp or castle, yet it kept the poorest clansmen's head up before the highest chief. But there was, even in Baile Inneraora, sinking in the servile ways of the incomer, something too of honest worship in the deportment of the people. It was sure enough in the manner of an old woman with a face peattanned to crinkled leather who ran out of the Vennel or lane. and, bending to the Marguis his lace wrist-bands, kissed them as I've seen Papists do the holy duds in Notre Dame and Bruges Kirk.

This display before me, something of a stranger, a little displeased Gillesbeg Gruamach. "Tut, tut!" he cried in Gaelic to the *cailltach*, "thou art a foolish old woman!"

"God keep thee, MacCailein!" said she; "thy daddy put his hand on my head like a son when he came back from his banishment in Spain, and I keened over thy mother dear when she died. The hair of Peggy Bheg's head is thy doormat, and her son's blood is thy will for a foot-bath."

"Savage old harridan!" cried the Marquis, jerking away; but I could see he was not now unpleased altogether that a man new from the wide world and its ways should behold how much he was thought of by his people.

He put his hands in a friendly way on the shoulders of us on either hand of him, and brought us up a bit round turn, facing him at a stand-still opposite the door of the English kirk. To this day I mind well the rumour of the sea that came round the corner.

"I have a very particular business with both you gentlemen," he said. "My friend here, M'Iver, has come hotfoot to tell me of a rumour that a body of Irish banditry under Alasdair MacDonald, the MacColkitto as we call him, has landed somewhere about Kinlochaline or Knoydart This portends damnably, if I, an elder ordained of this kirk, may say so. We have enough to do with the Athole gentry and others nearer home. It means that I must on with plate and falchion again, and out on the weary road for war I have little stomach for, to tell the truth."

"You're able for the best of them, MacCailein," cried John Splendid, in a hot admiration. "For a scholar you have as good judgment on the field and as gallant a seat on the saddle as any man ever I saw in haberschone and morion. With your schooling I could go round the world conquering."

"Ah! flatterer, flatterer! Ye have all the guile of the tongue our enemies give Clan Campbell credit for, and that I wish I had a little more of. Still and on, it's no time for fair words. Look! Elrigmore. You'll have heard of our kittle state in this shire for the past ten years, and not only in this shire but all over the West Highlands. I give you my word I'm no sooner with the belt off me and my chair pulled in to my desk and papers than its some one beating a point of war or a piper blowing the warning under my window. To look at my history for the past few years any one might think I was Dol' Gorm himself, fight and plot, plot and fight! How can I help it—thrust into this hornets' nest from the age of sixteen, when my father (beannachd leis!) took me out warring against the

islesmen, and I only in the humour for playing at shinty or fishing like the boys on the moor-lochs behind the town. I would sooner be a cottar in Auchnagoul down there, with porridge for my every meal, than constable, chastiser, what not, or whatever I am, of all these vexed Highlands. Give me my book in my closet, or at worst let me do my country's work in a courtier's way with brains, and I would ask no more."

"Except Badenoch and Nether Lochaber—fat land, fine land, MacCailein!" said John Splendid, laughing cunningly.

"You're an ass, John," he said; "picking up the countryside's gossip. I have no love for the Athole and Great Glen folks as ye ken; but I could long syne have got letters of fire and sword that made Badenoch and Nether Lochaber mine if I had the notion. Don't interrupt me with your nonsense, cousin; I'm telling Elrigmore here, for he's young and has skill of civilised war, that there may, in very few weeks, be need of every arm in the parish or shire to baulk Colkitto. The MacDonald and other malignants have been robbing high and low from Lochow to Loch Finne this while back; I have hanged them a score a month at the town-head there, but that's dealing with small affairs, and I'm sore mistaken if we have not cruel times to come."

"Well, sir," I said, "what can I do?"

The Marquis bit his moustachio and ran a spur on the ground for a little without answering, as one in a quandary, and then he said, "You're no vassal of mine, Baron" (as if he were half sorry for it), "but all you Glen Shira folk are well disposed to me and mine, and have good cause, though that Macnachtan fellow's a Papisher. What I had in my mind was that I might count on you taking a company of our fencible men, as John here is going to do, and going overbye to Lorn with me to cut off those Irish blackguards of Alasdair MacDonald's from joining Montrose."