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Zachary Mor MacCallum (1625 - 1697) 4th Laird of Poltalloch

Excerpt from The Malcolm Name:

Archibald was born in 1605, and in 1627 graduated from Glasgow University with a Master of Arts. Archibald had three sons, Zachary, Donald and Neil. Zachary Mor MacCallum, who succeeded his father in Poltalloch, was renowned for his strength and skill as a swordsman. At the battle of Ederline in 1647, Zachary met with Alasdair MacCholla (Colkitto, The Devastator), a MacDonald, who was renowned as the most ferocious swordsman in all Gaeldom. In single combat Zachary beat this giant of a man who stood almost seven feet tall. The Red Handed Horse Knight had met his match in Zachary Mor.

And now the details of the story:

Tales from Loch Awe

By A.C. McKerracher

Goc Am Go

At the birth in 1605 of Alasdair MacCholla MacDonald, son of old Coll Ciotish of Clonsay, every sword in the house rattled in its scabbard and all the locks snapped off the guns. His superstitious father would have had him drowned immediately, but for the nurse, a Wise Woman, persuaded him the signs were good, not evil. Alasdair grew into a ferocious youth, able to tear apart a bull's carcass with his bare hands, for in his veins ran the blood of Conn of the Hundred Battles and of Viking *berserkers*. When he came of age his old nurse burned blue thread in a kiln, and peering into the smoke predicted he would perform mighty deeds and be successful in all things, but that his downfall would occur when a silver coin leapt from his banner, and he met with Gocam-Go. Alasdair laughed aloud in the arrogance of youth, for when was there ever Gocam-Go, or Spy, amongst kinsfolk.

Around 1639 Alasdair and his father were driven from their Colonsay homeland by the avaricious Campbells, and the son took refuge with his kin in Ireland, the MacDonells of Antrim. Here he brooded until 1644 when he learnt that James Graham, the Great Marquise of Montrose, had raised an Army for Charles I against the Covenanters, and he saw in this the means of his revenge.

Alasdair joined Montrose at Blair Castle in Atholl in August, 1644, along with 600 fighting men from Ireland. He was then aged forty, a giant of a man nearly seven feet tall, with red, shaggy hair and long drooping moustaches. He was prone to heavy drinking, sullen moods and sudden violence but his bravery was already legend. A curious bond developed between the slender, intellectual Marquise and Alasdair MacCholla, the politically naïve, savage, fighting man from a bygone age. Together they carved a place in Scotland's history during the Annus Mirabilis of 1644-45 when, with only a small force, they won a series of brilliant victories at Tippermuir, Fyvie, Inverlochy, Auldren and Kilsyth. Alasdair was knighted and created Major-General of the King's army, and his great, two-handed Claymore was to the fore in every battle. Being ambidextrous like his father, he acquired the same nickname, Cholla Ciotich, the Left Handed one, which the terrified Lowlanders altered to 'Colkitto', and used it to frighten unruly children for generations to come.

After the Battle of Kilsyth, Alasdair led his men north to harry the lands of his hated Campbell enemies, leaving Montrose's depleted forces to be cut to pieces at Philiphaugh by a Covenanting

army and General David Leslie. During the years 1646-47, he carved a swathe of destruction through Argyll, leaving it like a desert, and his enemies gave him another name, Alasdair MacCholla, 'The Devastator'. However, he failed to breach the Campbell castles, and on 21st May, 1647, the army of Leslie and Argyll arrived at Inverary.

Alasdair rallied his forces at the south end of Loch Awe where his standard bearer planted his flag on a hill behind Ford, and as the shaft hit the ground, a silver coin sprang up. Unaware of this strange event, Alasdair advanced to the narrow pass beside Loch Ederline to find it blocked by a party of local people commanded by Zachary Mor MacCallum, Chief of Clan Malcolm. Alasdair, impressed by such determination, uttered the now classic phrase, "None remained loyal to Campbell but stone and lime and MacCallum," and suggested a single combat.

Both sides ground their weapons to watch this classic meeting for Zachary Mor was also noted as a master Swordsman. The two blades rose and fell as the fighters circled and parried, and Alasdair stopped several times to compliment MacCallum on a skillful move. However, there was no doubt about the outcome for Alasdair MacCholla, 'The Red handed Horse Knight' was renowned as the most ferocious swordsman in all of Gaeldom.

The blades continued to meet and clash until suddenly a sword spun through the air, and a great gasp arose. Alasdair stared dumbfounded at his empty sword hand, then turned whitefaced to the equally astonished MacCallum, "What Place is this?" he whispered. "Why Go Am Go," came the surprised reply "the False Outlet, where once the water of Loch Awe drained to the sea from the south." Alasdair staggered back in horror, realizing he had misheard his old nurse, and that what she had said was Goc-Am-Go, Gocam-go. But still reluctant to believe, he took a charm shone from his pocket and flung it over the heads of his troops. Always had this been found before but now it fell into muddy reeds and disappeared.

Alasdair rallied his force in silence, and drove south into Kintyre with the Devil behind him – leaving historians to puzzle ever since when he failed to hold the easily defended, narrow isthmus at Talbert. He left three hundred men to garrison Dunaverty Castle at the mull of Kintyre, and took passage in a moat, with his terror so great that he hacked off the fingers of those who clung to the gunwales and might delay him. From here he fled to Gigha, then to Islay, where he left another party commander by his seventy-seven year old father to hold Dunnybeg castle. All of those left behind were to die later after surrendering on honorable terms. Now Alasdair fled to Antrim, trying to escape his fate, and here on the 12th of November, 1647, he was treacherously stabbed to death in the back. Sir Alasdair MacCholla 'Ciotich' MacDonald, Major-General of Montrose's army, who history books call 'Colkitto', whom the Campbells called 'The Devastator' but who all Gaeldom honoured as the 'The Red Handed Knight', had finally met his Goc-Am-Go, at the False Outlet of Loch Awe.

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