

Scotland,

on the Cutting Edge

By Peter Caroline, Photos by Cold Steel, Inc.

*“Scots, wha hae wi’ Wallace bled,
Scots, wham Bruce has aften led,
Welcome to your gory bed
Or to Victorie!”*

– Robert Burns

Scotland is known for a number of things: superlative whisky, kilted Highland warriors, the Loch Ness monster and the intimidating haggis. And of course, we remember the legendary William Wallace, a giant of a man, noted for his prowess with the broadsword. Braveheart would be turning over in his several graves if only he knew of what’s going on in modern Scotland.

Alas, the Scots, never known as a timid people, have succumbed to a species of hoplophobic hoopiness normally associated with the English. To combat what Scotland’s justice minister refers to as the country’s “booze and blade culture,” the government has declared sweeping restrictions on the sale and possession of swords, machetes, knives and meat cleavers. There will be a ban on the sale of swords, and a licensing system for people who wish to purchase a knife not designed specifically for use in the kitchen. Shops licensed to sell knives will have to record the names and addresses of knife purchasers, and persons under 18 will not be allowed to buy anything with an edge. Police will be given greater leeway to “stop & frisk” people at will, and prison sentences for carrying knives will be doubled.

Is there actually a problem? Last year, a total of 72 people in Scotland died from stab wounds, and only eight from gunshot wounds. Let’s not forget that in Scotland, as in Washington, D.C., handguns are prohibited. Scots, unlike the denizens of our inner cities, take that rule seriously. And let’s also not forget that Scotland is a British Commonwealth country; self-defense is not merely considered a social *faux pas*, it’s an outright felony. It has actually come to the point where, should you wish to purchase a *sgian dhub* – that little knife that is traditionally displayed tucked into the top of one’s sock – what you will find for sale are examples where the handle and sheath are of one piece, with no blade.

There is a regrettably prevalent school of thought that believes that once you remove the

tools of violence – guns, knives, what have you – people will revert to a naturally peaceable state. Let’s all join hands in a circle and sing Kumbayah. This is demonstrably bullshit. Since the time when Cain killed Abel with a rock, certain members of society – not to mention societies as a whole – have demonstrated a propensity for violence.

I’ll be the first to admit that knives can be dangerous. My wife claims that I have cut myself with every knife I own. This is a gross exaggeration; I

have cut myself with only three pocketknives, and only two of those occasions warranted a trip to the emergency room. Perhaps, under the logic of the British legal system, I should not be allowed anything sharp. But despite the best efforts of the Nanny

“There is a regrettably prevalent school of thought that believes that once you remove the tools of violence people will revert to a naturally peaceable state”

State, life is not and cannot be risk-free. Some years ago, we dined at a national restaurant chain that featured chefs gleefully juggling large knives while they prepared our meal. Fortunately for all concerned, they were far less klutzy than I.

Here in the United States, we – gun owners and libertarians more than most – tend to have an aversion to prior restraint. If indeed someone picks up a gun or knife or baseball bat and does something ugly, then we should by all means throw the book at them. We do not believe in putting law-abiding citizens in padded cells for their own protection. We also do not believe that a government should have a monopoly on the instruments of violence. And that is why William Wallace despised the English, and why the English rewarded his love of freedom by hanging him, cutting out and burning his entrails, then decapitating him and cutting his body into four parts.