

CHAP. XII.

GLENBARR.

Glenbarr Abbey. — Its Position. — Scenery and Gardens. — Barr River. — Salmon spearing. — “It’s just the Sport.” — Timber. — Glen Scenery. — The River Defile. — A Memory-Picture. — Mouth of the River. — Seaward View. — Modern Nereids. — Scotch washing. — The River-tub. — The Princess Nausicaa. — Twenty-seven Centuries ago.

WE have not far to go. Here, where I have been standing to sketch, is a wicket-gate admitting us to a walk that will lead us down a steep bank and under lofty trees, immediately in front of the Abbey. So steep is the bank that the Abbey, which is at the foot of it, is not fifty yards from the village street, whose houses are built on a much higher elevation than the Abbey chimneys. The village is shut out from the Abbey grounds by a stone wall and a profusion of shrubs and trees, and to all appearance the Abbey lies in a sequestered glen, far away from human habitation. As a matter of course the house lies low, although the dip of the glen slightly falls from it to the river, which

runs at a short distance from the house, the ground then ascending sharply on the other bank to a considerable elevation. In the front of the Abbey the glen widens sufficiently to allow of a tolerably open space of greensward, dotted with fine timber, amid which the carriage-drive winds into the high road at the foot of the steep hill leading up the village; but in rear of the house, and within four hundred yards of the front, the glen narrows to a rocky defile, through which the river burrows, and amid great boulders and stony fragments brawls its way to the Atlantic. The steep sides of the glen are densely covered with foliage, much of the timber being of very fine growth. The late Colonel Macalister added considerably to the Glenbarr plantations, which, being well attended to and protected by their position from the influence of high winds and sea air, thrive far beyond expectation. The colonel's son, Keith Macalister, Esq.,* is the present proprietor of Glenbarr, and is one of the few landowners in Cantire who are resident upon their estates. Next to the Duke of Argyle, Mr. Macalister is the largest proprietor in Cantire, so that the example of residence set by him has the greater importance.

Glenbarr Abbey is a large and handsome stone mansion of some antiquity, though greatly altered and

* For the clan Macalister, see Skene's "Highlanders of Scotland," vol. ii, p. 93.

improved in later times. It outwardly represents what may be presumed to be the abbey style of architecture. The windows are mullioned, those of the principal rooms very richly so, with tracery in the upper com-



GLEN-BARR ABBEY, N.W. VIEW.

partments. The house is buttressed and turreted all round with Gothic pinnacles at each corner and angle. The porch is deeply recessed, its entrance being formed of three open lancet arches. Triple lancets above give

light to a pretty room opening into the drawing-room. Higher up is a crow-stepped gable, bearing the Macalister arms, and the motto "Per mare, per terras;" and this projecting portion of the Abbey is flanked by octangular towers, surmounted with crocketed pinnacles. The interior contains a spacious entrance-hall and staircase, "hung around with pikes, and guns, and bows," and family pictures, and foreign curiosities; and, among the rooms, the dining and drawing-rooms are noticeable for their large dimensions. They look westward, the drawing-room being over the dining-room, and commanding a very pleasant (though somewhat confined) view down the glen, bounded by a peep of the Atlantic. The gardens are behind the Abbey, and are extensive. The Barr river and a small tributary stream flow through them, and add to their picturesqueness. The fuschias formed noble shrubs from six to ten feet in height, as one sees them in favoured spots in the Isle of Wight, and, being in full bloom at the time of our visit, were very lovely additions to the beauties of the garden. Looking at them, one could scarcely imagine oneself so far north, and with the Atlantic close at hand; but we found them almost as large and luxuriant against the walls of fishermen's cottages down upon the sea-shore, and exposed to the full violence of the westerly gales. The very steep slope of the hill (on the village side) is not only a striking feature in the gardens, but

one that with its southern aspect was as favourable for fruit as for fuschias. A wide walk under an avenue of fine beeches, at the foot of this slope, is an important feature in the garden. This leads on, past the boundary of the gardens, to a wilderness-walk along the rocky slope of the glen, by the side of the brawling river, with a thick wood on either side of us. Here and there the water has been widened into a pool, where the salmon and grilse may love to congregate, and where the banks are fringed with a lovely medley of sedge and fern.

The Barr river is about five or six miles in length, its sources being Loch Arnicle, Loch Coiribidh, and other smaller lochs, and it flows in a tolerably direct course from east to west till it falls into the Atlantic. It is well stocked with salmon and salmon-trout, and is a stream after a fisherman's own heart, no less than a painter's. It is true that in these western Highland streams the fish do not increase to those enormous proportions with which they are often weighted in the most famous salmon rivers; but if a plentiful supply of ordinary-sized fish up to one that would turn the scale at twenty pounds can satisfy a fisherman, he will assuredly find that satisfaction in Barr river.

On one morning during our stay, there was a salmon-spearing about two miles above the Abbey, which resulted in the capture of ten fish in most excellent condition, varying from four to sixteen pounds in

weight. When laid out upon the lawn for the ladies' inspection, with their silvery sides glistening in the sun, they formed a group to delight the eyes of piscatorial old Isaak himself. I asked old Maccallum,—the elder of the fishermen, to whom the chief honours of the day were due,—how he, an old man, could be battling about in a rocky stream from five in the morning till after mid-day, with not a crust to eat or (which was more to the purpose), a drop of whiskey to drink. "It's just the sport!" Macallum pithily answers; and, now that it is over, he is very ready to toss off any number of glasses that the laird will deign to give him.

Barr river is even more picturesque between the Abbey and the sea than towards the hills. In the front of the Abbey, as I have said, the glen widens, and leaves a pleasant plot of greensward, along which the river brawls, and across which the high road is taken. We pass through a gate on the other side of the road into a small meadow, which is rapidly narrowed into the form of an acute triangle, by the steep sides of the glen contracting to enclose it. The sloping bank to our right is thickly covered with timber, much of it being of large dimensions and luxuriant growth. The soil is well adapted for the growth of forest trees; and where they can be sheltered from the cutting sea-blasts, as in a glen like this, they thrive amain. There are oaks

and pines ; but the trees that flourish most are ash, plane, elm, beech, mountain-ash, alder, black Italian poplars and larch. Underneath these trees there was a most luxuriant undergrowth of wild flowers and shrubs, the ferns being of great size and beauty. Winding walks have been cut on the hill-slope to the right of the glen, and seats placed at those spots from whence the best views are attained.

Here is a seat placed most temptingly for the sketcher. We have been following the path by the side of the river, and it has now taken us up out of the valley, on to this rock some sixty feet above the stream. The glen has narrowed to a defile, through which the river forces its way over a multitude of stony obstacles, and making a very sharp turn to the right through steep rocks, cloven as though by art, hurries on to the Atlantic. We are on the verge of the precipitous rock just above this acute bend in the river. We look up the river ; and through a vista of forest trees to the west front of Glenbarr Abbey, backed by woods and hills ; the rocky walls rise on either side the stream, hung with ivy and creepers, and with a tangled mass of ferns and heather and wild flowers growing on every ledge and “coign of vantage,” the trees on the opposite banks nearly meeting over the river, that dashes on far below amid the rocks and white boulders that chafe its dark boulders into angry foam. It is a lovely scene,

and one of a similar character, though on a less extensive scale, to the matchless glen at Roslin.* Barr river is precisely one of those streams that an artist loves to paint; and no one with a feeling for the beautiful could see it without longing to carry away some delineation or memory-picture of its wild and rugged banks, its overhanging trees, its deeps and shallows, its mossy stones and dark rocks and grey boulders; its multitudinous tiny waterfalls, and its rapid hurrying course from the hills to the Atlantic. Its waters varied greatly in colour and depth, according to the time and the season; and I saw them under more than one aspect; but when I first set eyes on the Barr water, it had been swelled with a “fresket” from the hills, and was so impregnated with peat that it was of a rich coffee colour, —

“Red came the river down, and, loud and oft,
The angry spirit of the water shrieked!”

but Barr was something more than red, for he was of the hue of dark mahogany.

Now we climb by the winding path to the extreme height of the rocky wall, until we emerge from the woody screen of stately trees, and come in sight of the Atlantic. The trees still abide with us, but their crests have been smoothly shaven by the cutting western

* See the Frontispiece to the Volume.

winds, and they cannot compare with their near neighbours in the favoured bend of the glen. The river is murmuring below us, between its steep rocky walls, but we cannot see it as yet. To our right is a thin belt of young plantation of larch and firs, which are thriving well. Presently the path takes us to a little heathery plateau on the edge of the rock, where there is a garden seat, to suggest that we should “rest, and be thankful” for the dainty repast so liberally supplied by nature for the refreshment of our artistic appetite. Barr river is in sight now, brawling at our feet, though at some distance below us. It takes a twist to the right, and then again to the left, amid the rocky banks and a confused *débris*. The geological authorities inform us, that micaceous schist is the leading class of rock in this glen, with veins and detached blocks of primary sandstone, quartz, basalt, whinstone, and red shiver.

We lose the tall overhanging trees; but the banks are thickly covered with brushwood. Sheep-pastured downs slope upwards from the rocky banks on either side. The rocks gradually lessen in height, until, at no great distance from us, they fall to the level of the roadway that is carried over a very Welsh-like bridge that spans the stream. Beyond this bridge, the river streams on over the sand upon the sea-shore, until its waters are lost in the dash of the Atlantic. As we sit here, the upland downs on either hand shut in the sea-

ward view, and confine it to that portion of the Atlantic between Islay and Rathlin Island. No land is therefore seen to break the ocean prospect; we look out towards the sea, and far away there, over that dark blue horizontal line with which Britannia rules the waves, is America. Distant vessels fleck the wide expanse of ocean, which, under this bright mid-day sun, assumes the very faintest sea-green hue, save that distant horizontal line of dark blue. Nearer in shore, the waves change to a pearly grey, shot with emerald green, glittering in the sunbeams, and crisped with foam, as they break upon the yellow beach with a soothing cadence. Columns of white smoke go up from the beach high into the air, from fires kindled by the kelp burners, whom we see against the bright sea, like black specks upon the shining sand. Beyond the bridge, Barr river glistens white over the beach, as colourless as molten silver; but below us, among the rocks and boulders, it is dark and peat-stained. Approaching the bridge from the down on the left is a herd of Highland cattle with their attendant lassie. On the bridge itself, on a certain day, might have been seen one of the ladies of our party, landing a salmon that had been hooked and “played” by one of the gentlemen, — the same gentleman whom (on another day) we might have seen shooting at the seals as they disported themselves in the sea, a few hundred yards from the mouth of Barr river.



Cuthbert, Bede, del.

Hanhart Chromo-lith.

BARR GLEN CANTIRE
looking over the Atlantic

It murmurs musically at our feet ; now hurrying over rocky shallows in tiny waterfalls, now coursing round great boulders that half block up its narrow bed, now hiding itself in natural caverns hollowed out of the base of the rock by centuries of floods and freshets, now dallying in deep pools whose blackness is only broken by the silvery circles left by the leaping salmon, now sweeping into those crescent harbours, where the ceaseless action of the hurrying water has scooped out the rock into smooth semicircular baths in which Nereids might love to sport. Here, with my feet among the fragrant heather, with the river murmuring below me, and the wide expanse of the Atlantic glistening before me, I sit and sketch. Would that I could represent, with even a faint approach to truth, the wonderful beauty of the confused mass of verdure (in which heather and ferns are predominant) with which the rocky walls of Barr river are adorned. He indeed must be a skilful and a patient colourist who could hope to depict but a hundredth part of the minute and manifold beauties of that nearest rock-wall on the other side of the brawling stream, where every little mossy ledge is crowned with coronals of ferns, and gemmed with the varied hues of heather and wild flowers, while ivy clings to the grey rock, and trailing creepers hang in luxuriant festoons from the shrubs that fringe the edge of the downs. So I plod on with my pencil in the hot

glare of the mid-day sun, pleased at seeing the rude counterpart of the beautiful scene gradually assuming shape and colour upon the virgin leaf of my sketching-block ; yet (if it must be confessed) sad at heart at my inability to represent with patient toil of brush the wondrous minutiae painted by one glance on the retina of the eye ; so I plod on, till eye and brain become confused, and demand a few moments' rest. Let me leave my drawing materials upon this seat, secured by this rude paper-weight of rock ; they will be safe ; for there is no pic-nic party here to-day from Campbelton, or elsewhere, as is frequently the case during the summer season.* So I take my pannikin, in order that I may fill it with clean water for painting, and I make my way down to the river's edge, by a very circuitous course, however ; and I am half way towards the bridge, before I can clamber down the broken rocks sufficiently near to the water to fill my pannikin.

In accomplishing this feat, and endeavouring to regain the path by a less steep and slippery road, I am brought in full view of that portion of the river which, by making a sudden turn from right to left, had been concealed from me by the steep rocky wall. A moment ago, I said that there were spots in this Barr river where Nereids might love to sport. But, in these rail-

* Mr. Macalister liberally grants permission to such parties to make use of his grounds.

way days, romance yields to reality; and the only Nereids who now honour the stream by their presence, are some of the neighbouring cottagers, who, by an old custom, which they have come to regard as their pre-



SCOTCH WASHING.

scriptive right, make use of a certain shallow spot on the left bank of the river for the purpose of a laundry, and thus convert Barr river into a wash-tub for foul

linen. This takes place at regularly-recurring periods, opposite to that detached rock, which may be noted in my sketch, upon the right bank of the river towards the bridge. The sketcher, therefore, who goes to that spot to fill his pannikin with water, may, if he time his visit aright, glean materials for a picture of "Scotch washing," which, if it be not quite so pretty as that well-known print after Mr. Harvey's painting, may at least be a little more true to the ordinary type of the Highland lassie and her various attitudes during her sanitary proceeding.

Edward Waverley, as you may remember, when he approached the Baron of Bradwardine's manor-house, saw, upon the green, two bare-legged damsels, each standing in a spacious tub, and performing with their feet the office of a patent washing machine. "These did not, however," says his biographer, "like the maidens of Armida, remain to greet with their harmony the approaching guest; but, alarmed at the appearance of a handsome stranger on the opposite side, dropped their garments (I should say garment to be quite correct), over their limbs, which their occupation exposed somewhat too freely, and with a shrill exclamation of 'Eh, sirs!' uttered with an accent between modesty and coquetry, sprung off like deer in different directions." *

This tub-washing seems to have been an old custom ;

* Waverley, vol. i. chap. ix.

for, in those “curious letters,” as Sir Walter Scott calls them, which were written from the Highlands in 1754, the author* takes notice of “what is commonly seen by the side of rivers, that is, women with their coats tucked up, stamping, in tubs, upon linen by way of washing; and this, not only in summer, but in the hardest frosty weather, when their legs and feet are almost literally as red as blood with the cold; and often two of these wenches stamp in one tub supporting themselves by their arms thrown over each other’s shoulders.”†

The modern process in Barr river dispenses with the tub, and is extremely simple, though, I should think, not very efficacious for the proper “getting-up” of fine linen. The clothes are placed in a shallow part of the river, and the women and girls stamp upon them with their naked feet, their petticoats (of very scanty longitude in the first instance,) being tucked up for that purpose. Occasionally a stout cudgel is also brought into play to thump the linen. A little hand-washing is added, and the garments are then wrung out, and spread upon the river’s bank to be dried by the sun. Starching and ironing are deemed vain superfluities.

After all, this is a very ancient custom, and dates back to those old-world days when even princesses were their own shepherdesses and laundresses. Homer, for

* Who is understood to have been Captain Burt.

† Letters from a gentleman in the North of Scotland, &c., Letter III.

example, tells us, that when the Princess Nausicaa, daughter of King Alcinous, was going to be married, the Goddess of Wisdom justified her claim to that title by bidding her get all her clothes washed. With that, the young lady borrowed her papa's chariot, and in addition to her own *trousseau*, also took the greater part of the wardrobe of her three brothers*, and drove off at dawn of day, with her maids, to the river, which appears to have been at a considerable distance. Like

* As the *Deus ex machinâ*, probably, which should enable her to clothe the naked Ulysses, with whom, she holds a long conversation before she gives him the clothes. ("Odyssey," book vi.) This, however, was in the free-and-easy days of "The Golden Age," when a young lady would attend a young gentleman to the bath. So in the case of Telemachus; he pays a visit to Nestor, and a princess of his house, whom he had the pleasure of meeting for the first time, performs for him this "pleasing rite," quite as a matter of course and ordinary compliment.

"Sweet Polycaste took the pleasing toil
To bathe the prince, and pour the fragrant oil."

See "Odyssey," book iii.; see also "Iliad," book xxii. 153, for the washing of garments in river cisterns by the feet; and "Odyssey," book vi. 40, 86. The bason, or cistern, was called *Plunos*, from the Greek *Pluno*, to wash or clean. Aristophanes ("Acharnians," 381) applies this verb exactly in the slang way in which we now use it when we say, Such a man has been *wiped down* handsomely; *i. e.* has had "a good dressing." Sir Robert Ker Porter, in his "Eastern Travels," describes a visit that he paid, with a male friend, to the ladies' baths at Tiflis, where the Georgian Venuses continued to bathe before them with the same unblushing coolness that was displayed by Nausicaa and her young ladies in the presence of Ulysses.

as in the Barr river, the place for washing was close to the sea-shore ; and they then, as in modern days, preferred the pure river stream to the rough salt sea-water. In the river were certain basons or cisterns, which were either made of marble, or wood ; and in these the Phæacian damsels of twenty-seven centuries ago were wont to wash their garments, by trampling them with their feet, just in the same way that the Highland lassies do up to the present hour.

Tempora mutantur: but it seems that we don't always change in them.