

CHAP. XXVII.

MUASDALE ; A WATERING-PLACE — IN CLOUDLAND.

The bending Line of Shore. — An ideal Watering-place. — The Highland Aberystwith. — Muasdale's Superiorities. — Lions of the Neighbourhood. — Climate and Longevity. — Necessities and Attractions. — A Prophecy. — Killean Manse. — The minor Prophets. — Muasdale Village. — A Farina Mill. — Legend of the fourteen Farmers of Muasdale. — Clachaig Glen. — Legend of Beith and the Arch-fiend. — The two Bridges. — The dry Bones of a Sketch. — How to manufacture a Picture. — Plenty of Smoke. — Half-price Distinction.

RETURNING to Beallachaghaochan Port and Bay, let us wander northward up the beach to Muasdale. The varying hues upon the sun-lit sea remind us of Southey's lines:—

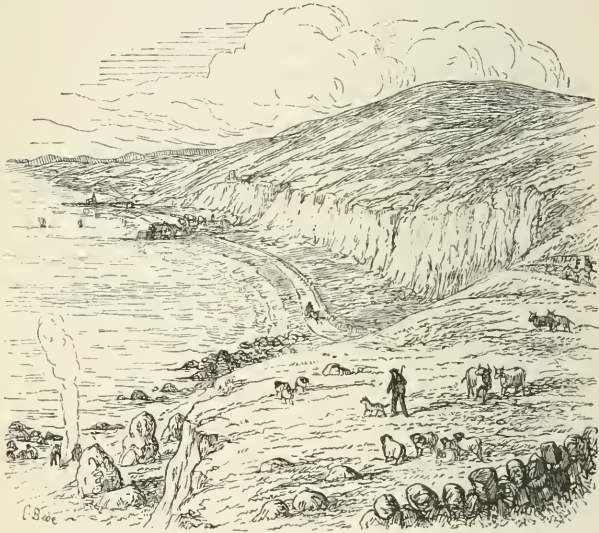
“How beautiful beneath the bright blue sky
 The billows heave! one glowing green expanse,
 Save where along the bending line of shore
 Such hue is thrown, as when the peacock's neck
 Assumes its proudest tint of amethyst,
 Embathed in emerald glory.”

“The bending line of shore,” for the next mile and a quarter, is marked by two crescents; the middle horn

being occupied by the Manse of Killean, and the further horn by the Church—both Church and Manse standing on the very verge of the Atlantic. Muasdale Village lies between the two, in the second crescent. The high road from Campbelton to Tarbert, which has wound round the spur of the Cliff in whose base is Beallachaghaochan Cave, runs along the level by the sea-shore, being divided from the sands by a narrow strip of cultivated land. On the other side of the road is another, but wider strip of flat land, now covered with golden corn; and from this rises an amphitheatre of hills, following the crescent shape of Beallachaghaochan Bay, and in character, much the same as the Isle of Wight Undercliff. Close by us, where are the fishing-boats and the children at play, the sea is studded by a crowd of half sunken rocks, a valuable field for the kelp gatherers, and where, after a storm, we saw so much sea-weed, that the spot bore a similitude to a tanyard. From here to the further point of the crescent, where the Manse is, the beach is smooth and sandy, and well adapted for sea-bathing throughout its greater extent; though here and there, it is rough with large boulders of red sandstone, trap, or whin.

The double crescent curve of the shore reminds us of Aberystwith, with its first sweep from the Castle Hill to the Marine Baths, and its second from the Baths to Constitution Hill. Here, the Manse occupies

that central position, which, at Aberystwith, is monopolised by the Baths. Now, what a delightful situation for a fashionable watering-place, this Muasdale would be, if one could only get the fashion to it—if one could only see the way to reach it and to leave it with



VIEW FROM BEALLACHAGHAOCAN TO MUASDALE AND KILLEAN.

any degree of comfort. And yet it is scarcely more inaccessible than Aberystwith is even at this present hour; and as Aberystwith is a creation of the last half-century, perhaps the next fifty years may do as much for Muasdale; and, in the absence of railroads, four-horse coaches may run in the summer season, from Camp-

belton to Tarbert, and thence to Ardrishaig and the Crinan Canal, and round by Inverary to Tarbert, or Loch Lomond — thus conveying travellers who might object to the sea voyage from Greenock to Campbelton, through a magnificent range of country, surpassing even the Wye and Severn scenery on the two routes to Aberystwith.

But Muasdale would be greatly superior to Aberystwith in its sea-view, as well as in its position. In our imaginary Highland watering-place, the moors and glens would be a great element of attraction, and would afford an endless variety of lovely walks close at hand; whereas at Aberystwith, you can only vary your walk from the Castle Hill to Constitution Hill, by going from Constitution Hill to the Castle Hill. Here too, along this crescent of hills might arise the Muasdale Marine Parade, which would leave that at Aberystwith in the shade; for here, instead of being on a dead level, the houses might be built up the face of the hill, as they are at Ventnor, high above the sea, and with the hills sharply rising like a rampart of rock behind them; and above them might spring up even a higher crescent, that might rival the York Crescent at Clifton in position and beauty, and yet should have this one among many other advantages over the Southern Queen, that the Argyle crescent of our Muasdale watering-place, though perched so high, should have

hills behind it, upon which you could step out of your back door (as at Malvern Wells); but they would be Highland hills, crowded and tumbled together, empurpled with heather, gashed with glens, and musical with rills and torrents.

Here is one of these rills; it makes its way towards that part of the crescent, in the direction of the Manse, and there dashes over the face of the rocky rampart, in a cascade, thin but tall, and finds its way through the sweep of greensward, and down to the beach. This might be made a pretty feature in our new watering-place, and at this extremity of the Crescent, there is Bealachaghaochan Cave, with the Port and Bay. As for other "lions," there is, on the one side, within the compass of an easy walk, Glenbarr Abbey, with its lovely glen, and the walk home by Glenacardoch Point, and the sea-shore where we saw the kelp gatherers, and those detached rocks; and on the other side, is Muasdale Village, and Killean, with certain beautiful attractions, of which I will presently endeavour to give you an idea. On the important subject of climate, I have already spoken. It is mild and salubrious, despite the "varra coorse" and "saft" weather; in proof of which, you may notice those fuchsias in front of the fishermen's cottages down on the beach at Muasdale; they are barely a stone's throw from the sea, and are frequently (literally) watered by its spray — they face

the Atlantic, and the strong westerly gales — and yet they are growing up to the top of the cottage, with trunks like little trees, and are covered with a profusion of bloom, as we saw them in the Glen Garden, at Glenbarr Abbey, and as the reader may have seen them at Bonchurch. The grim testimony of the grave-yards may also be brought forward to show the advanced age attained by the generality of the natives. I have already mentioned the death, in April last (hastened by the unusual severity of the previous winter), of an old woman, aged one hundred years; and when Mr. Macdonald was preparing his Statistical Account of the parish of Killean, he mentioned the recent death of a woman aged one hundred and three, and that the united ages of five men in the parish, who were then alive, amounted to four hundred and thirty-five. We may be sure then, that even at the worst seasons of the year, our Muasdale watering-place would be a healthy resort.* In fact, it may be attri-

* This part of the world must indeed be considered a healthy one, if we may credit all the records of the longevity of its inhabitants. Provost Brown, of Inverary, headed one of the contending parties in a shinty match, and carried the town's colours in procession among the victors, when he was a hundred years old; and he lived for sixteen years after. But Gilrour MacCrain, of the Isle of Jura, was a patriarch whose age far outtopped that of Provost Brown, and even exceeded that of Parr or Jenkins; for it is said that he died in the reign of Charles I., after having kept one hundred and eighty Christmasses in his own house. *Credat Judæus!*

butable to the healthiness of the district, that no medical man is to be met with between Campbelton and Tarbert, so that at present, if any one at Muasdale should need surgical aid, he must send fifteen or twenty-four miles for his doctor. But we know that eagles will flock to the carcass; and we may feel sure that if our ideal watering-place should ever take the semblance of reality, the M.R.C.S.'s, and L.A.C.'s, to say nothing of the M.D.'s, will fully recognise their duties to society and to themselves.

Then, for other necessities or attractions, there is a capital road, equal to any turnpike road in England, with the immense superiority that it has no turnpike throughout its whole length and breadth. There is a daily delivery of letters, brought by a dashing mail-cart, which traverses the road twice a day, and has its relays of horses all the way from Campbelton to Lochgilp-head. There are communications with the outer world even now, by means of carriers, who will bring to you what cannot be supplied by the wonderful village-shops that deal in every thing — though, of course, our watering-place *in nubibus* (which answers to the Romanists' *in partibus infidelium*) would arise in all the completeness of fashionable shops with plate-glass fronts. If you are of the Presbyterian persuasion, there are two Churches (the Established and Free) within five minutes' walk; and there are some excellent

sites for Church of England Churches, if you are inclined to build, and support them.

Then there is fishing and shooting in abundance; ranging from salmon to seals, from grouse to sea-gulls, and from hares to otters. There is also the little excitement of a sea-port in the crab and lobster-fisheries of the Muasdale men, and the consequent supply of those dainties, with prawns and shrimps, Loch Fyne herrings, and Loch Tarbert oysters, fresh to your table. There is also the neighbourhood, which, though it may not exactly permit you (unless you boat over to Jura) to "follow the stag on the slippery crag," yet will enable you "to chase the bounding roe, with a yoho, yoho," like the gentleman in the song—provided that you go to the right place, and obtain the laird's permission. And as for the scenery in general, what more could you require? Before you, is the broad Atlantic, studded with half a dozen of the Hebrides, and a view ranging from the Giant's Causeway up to the misty mountains of Mull—a century of miles visible in one unbroken range. From your front door, you face the glorious sunsets; from your back door you can step out on to the hills, and (if you have imbibed enough mountain air to constitute yourself a parishioner, and make you feel national) you can cry with Macgregor, "My foot is on its native heath!" for you will be knee-deep in heather; and if you continue your hill-

climb for about a quarter of an hour, you will find yourself some fifteen hundred feet above the level of the sea, and looking over the lovely Isle of Arran, and up to distant Ben Lomond. Facing round, you will see the Atlantic waves on the farther side of the southern group of the Highland Archipelago; and if you want a pleasant excursion on a calm day, you can boat over to Gigha, and Cara, and on to Islay or Jura or Colonsay; or you might even go over to the Irish coast, and visit the Giant's Causeway.

What more could be required by the fastidious visitor or daring speculator; if only this "very eligible spot" was not quite so far distant? But if the day should ever come, when tourists, having exhausted all other spots in Great Britain, should turn towards Cantire, I think that it would not require much of the prophetic power of Scotch second sight to foresee the realisation of my Highland watering-place—at present situated in cloud-land—and to predict that Muasdale would make itself a name, and be found a fashionable quarter.

But let us now leave this ideal Muasdale, with its aëry, sunset-facing crescents, rising like tiers in an amphitheatre on the sharp hill-sides, and let us pass on to the real Muasdale. First in position, as well as importance, is the Manse of Killean, a large well-built house, erected in 1803, on a low projecting headland at

the crescent's verge, and standing so close to the sea, that the waves, in rough weather, fling their spray against its white face. A cluster of trees behind it assist in screening extensive outbuildings; there is a paddock in which are some sheep and poultry, flanked by the carriage-drive, up and down which a peacock is proudly strutting. On the other side of the paddock is a walled enclosure,—the Manse garden,—where (as Wordsworth says)—

“The good priest, who, faithful through all hours
To his high charge, and truly serving God,
Has yet a heart and hand for trees and flowers,
Enjoys the walks his predecessors trod,
Nor covets lineal rights in lands and towers.” *

Such is the Manse of Killean, — a type of the better class of residences provided for the Clergy of the Church of Scotland, and to be distinguished from that class of Manse mentioned in Dean Ramsay's *Reminiscences*, where a Scotch pastor, who has been introduced to a little closet, asks if it is meant for his bed-room; “’Deed ay, Sir,” is the answer, “this is the prophet’s chammer.” Whereupon says the pastor, “It maun be for the *minor* prophets then.”

The present Minister of Killean is the Rev. Duncan Macfarlane, who is much respected for his worth and attainments, and to whom I (and my readers) are

* Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1831, vol. iv.

indebted for valuable information most kindly communicated, and here gratefully acknowledged.*

Following the high-road along the sea-shore, and passing the Manse, and commencing with the second of the two Muasdale crescents, we come upon a great heather-tufted grey boulder, standing upon the roadside to our left, whose shelter and support have been picturesquely adapted to the requirements of a fisherman's cottage. Then we come to Muasdale itself, a fishing village, down by the shore, on the level between the sea and the cliffs, and like Barr and all other Cantire villages, in having one street of outwardly-whitewashed and inwardly-dirty cottages, one storey high, and thatched with heather—with two superior houses for the inn and the shop; and yet with an exception to prove the rule, for that tall chimney which has already caught your eye, and those lines of sheds (now shut up and deserted) pertain to a manufactory. It was a Farina Mill, erected for the manufacture of starch from potatoes; a process, which, as it would appear, proved as successful as the extraction of sun-beams from cucumbers. It proved a total failure —

* The Rev. D. Macdonald, in the "Statistical Account" of the parish, mentions as a portion of the minister's stipend, "7 chalders, 2 firlots, 2 lippies bear; 14 bolls, 1 firlot, 3 pecks, 2 lippies meal, Kintyre measure;" which statement will, I trust, be more intelligible to the reader than it is to the author. The stipend is elsewhere given as 178*l.* 9*s.*, besides the house and glebe.

unfortunately for the people of the district, to many of whom it would have afforded a livelihood.

Not so, with the inn ; it still flourishes, as it did in the days when it was supported by the fourteen farmers of Muasdale. These gentlemen (says the local legend) were boon companions fond of each other and fonder still of whiskey ; and their mutual affection and likings induced them to be frequently in each others company, tasting "the barley bree" until "the cock did crow, and the day did daw." Now, Campbelton Fair was an annual festival to them. They went to it in a body, transacted their business and pleasures, and then rode back together to Muasdale with fourteen horse power. Once when they had set out from Campbelton on their homeward journey, the fourteen farmers of Muasdale drew themselves up in a staggering row outside the town, while one of their number endeavoured to count the party, to see if they had their full complement. He counted thirteen ; and then, having "just a drappie in his ee'," could not see that he himself was the fourteenth. He tried again, with the like ill success ; he could only make out thirteen. When the negro had to count the pigs, he was able to do so with all " 'cept one little pig ; and he frisk about so, massa himself could'nt count him." And, perhaps, the fourteenth farmer staggered about too much, to permit himself to be counted. So another of the fourteen

tried ; and he, likewise, was only able to count thirteen. Then, the fourteen farmers turned back to Campbelton to look for their missing friend. A man met them on their way, and asked them what they were coming back for. They told him that they had not their full number of fourteen. "Stand in a row," said the man, "and I will count you." He did so, and found their number correct. So the fourteen farmers turned their horses' heads towards Muasdale, and jogged home with great delight.*

* Compare this tale with an incident in "The Tale of Sgìre mo chealag," in Mr. Campbell's "West Highland Tales" (vol. ii.), where the young lad "saw a boat going to fish, and there were twelve men counted going into the boat, and when she came to land there was within her but eleven men, and there was no knowing which one was lost, for the one who was counting was not counting himself at all. And he was beholding this. 'What reward would you give me if I should find you the man that is lost by you?' 'Thou shalt get any reward if thou wilt find the man,' said they. 'Sit there,' said he, 'beside each other.' And he seized a sharp rung of a stick, and he struck the first one a sharp stroke. 'Mind thou that thou wert in her' (the boat). He kept on striking them, till he had roused twelve men, and made them bleed on the grass. And though they were pounded and wounded it was no matter, they were pleased because the man who was lost was found; and after the payment they made a feast for the one who had found the man who was lost" (p. 376). Mr. Campbell also gives an Islay version of the story, in which the foregoing incident is converted into some labourers sheltering from a storm under a dyke. When the storm is over, they give as a reason for not getting up that their legs are so mingled together that they cannot recognise their own legs. The young lad is offered half a hundred marks if he can make them recognise

Conducted to the rear of the "wauking-mill" at Muasdale, are a number of open wooden troughs, placed on upright supports, at various heights from the ground, which serve as the artificial conduits for the water that flows down Clachaig glen. This beautiful glen runs from west to east behind Muasdale village, with many

"Runlets babbling down the glen,"

and falling into its chief stream, which rises in the lochs of Dirigadale and Dubhlochan high up among the hills, and passing by Crubasdale, discharges its waters into the Atlantic at the back of the "wauking-mill" and the further end of Muasdale Village. It is a mountain stream that almost approaches in dignity to a river, and possesses the same characteristics as Barr river.

There is a legend told of this river and Clachaig glen, which runs thus:—About a century ago, there lived in this glen a man named Beith. He was a pious and intelligent man, but was frequently troubled by the arch-fiend, who appeared before him in terrible shapes. One night when Beith was returning home, he was going up the glen by the side of the river, with the intent to cross it at a safe and narrow place high their own legs. He cuts a long and strong bramble, and gave them "a good tight raking about their legs, and it was not long till every one knew his own legs" (p. 387).

up towards Dubhlochan; and had come to a place where it was wide and dangerous, with steep and rugged rocks on either side, when to his surprise, he perceived that an elegant bridge had been thrown over the river. He was about joyfully to set foot upon it, when the thought that it was an invention of his dire enemy the Evil-one to entice him to his destruction, fortunately arrested his progress. Beith dropped upon his knees and uttered a fervent prayer; when, immediately, the bridge disappeared with a tremendous noise, as if ten thousand iron chains had rattled down the glen; and Beith, preserved from death, went thankfully on his way home, feeling more than ever convinced that the devil's power must be resisted by faith and prayer.

When we have passed through Muasdale village, the Clachaig river makes its appearance from a narrow tortuous glen, whose rocks on either side rise precipitously to a height of some two hundred feet, and then fall back only to seek higher elevations. Out of the eternal shade of this picturesque défile dashes the silvery torrent, broken into multitudinous sparkles by the rough boulders of its mountain-bed, and hurrying onwards to the sea by leaps down a succession of rocky shelves and stairs. It is crossed — as soon as you have passed through the village, and not twenty yards from the sea — by two bridges, placed side by side, and not



CLACHAIG GLEN, MUASDALE, CANTIRE.

more than two or three yards apart. The further one is the old and disused bridge, built with very low parapets and rising to an acute angle over the centre arch, — just such a bridge as we see in Wales. The new bridge, which has also very low parapets, takes the road at the level; and against it on either side of the stream towards the sea, are two large masses of rock so fashioned that they would appear to have been placed there by design. Not so, however, for they are the natural ramparts of the bridge, and are only noteworthy from their position; there are rocks that, in themselves, are more worthy of observation, a few yards further on the road. These are their *avant-couriers*.

An idea of the outlines of this scene, — these rocks, the dashing river, the two bridges, the glen and its precipitous walls, the troughs for the “wauking-mill,” the strips of greensward on each side the stream where the Muasdale women bleach their linen,—all this may be gathered from my sketch, but an idea of the outlines of the scene only. The real beauty of the scene, and all its varied colouring of rock and herbage, must be left to the imagination. In cases such as this, where by any imaginative art dry bones have to be dressed into a goodly shape, the reader has a task to perform not unlike to that which is often required from the artist of an illustrated newspaper. A great battle, a

dreadful shipwreck, or some equally important event, has happened at some spot where there is no special artist of the paper to depict the troops as they appeared in the moment of victory, or the hapless ship at that precise point of time when it sank with every soul on board; but some one who has certain safe data to go upon, bethinks himself of the picture-paper; and, with intentions that rise superior to his performance, strives to make his amateur pencil depict the scene—of battle, let us say. He achieves this something in the following way: He puts down a few scratches, and writes underneath, "150th Regt. advancing;" then a few more hurried scratches in another direction with the legend, "natives in retreat." A large blot does duty for "Begum on an elephant," a series of dots for "village in flames," and a horizontal zigzag for "the Brandi-cherri Hills."

From these rude helps an ingenious artist, accustomed to the work, will contrive to manufacture a very effective and dashing picture, which, if only the costumes be tolerably correct, and there be plenty of smoke, will be as efficient a representation of a battle as any reasonable person could look for.

That "plenty of smoke," indeed, may be accepted as a leading formula in depicting any of the battles of life. Behind its friendly screen those actions that possibly might not bear the blaze of broad sunshine, can, by ima-

gination's aid, be transfigured to deeds of daring heroism. If our actions can only be enveloped in "plenty of smoke," they will loom twice as big, and distinction may be achieved at half-price. The painter of tea-trays could not have afforded to supply the Battle of Waterloo at one shilling each, thirteen to the dozen, if he had not stencilled his figures through punctured forms, and then, with a liberal brush, thrown in plenty of smoke. Those misty wreaths afforded evidence of the hotness of the conflict, and testified to the courage of the brave General whose cocked hat surged above the sea of gunpowder.

As I began this chapter in the clouds, it may be here appropriately terminated in smoke.