

CHAP. XIII.

GLENCREGGAN.

Situation of Glencreggan. — A View of one Hundred Miles. — The Southern Hebrides. — A Glass for a Toper of the Picturesque. — Conversing Mirrors. — An imaginary Waterfall. — The Mare's Tail, and a Mare's Nest. — Atlantic Blue. — Harvest in the Highlands. — The lady Reapers. — Bare Feet and Stubble. — The Artist's ideal Gleaner. — Stern Reality. — Clouts. — Little Monkeys. — What educated Feet can be made to do. — Singular Instances. — The walking of Cloth. — Novel way of scouring a Room. — Broth withal. — Cleanliness and Picturesqueness. — A naked Foot saved Scotland. — *Nemo me impune lacessit.*

RATHER more than a mile beyond Glenbarr Abbey is Glencreggan House, the property of Captain Smollett M. Eddington, but now let on a lease to William Hancocks, Esq., of Blakeshall House, Worcestershire, who occupies it as a shooting-box during the greater part of August, September, and October, and has the shooting on these and the adjacent moors. This shooting extends over about sixteen thousand acres, and the house is conveniently situated in being equi-distant from the extreme points of the property. It is well and sub-



GLENCREGGAN, CANTIRE ;

From the Atlantic.

stantially built, though outwardly a plain structure ; but within, it has been comfortably arranged for all modern requirements, and, in short, comprehends all those items that go to make up what is usually meant by the phrase “ a gentleman’s house.”

The situation of Glencreggan is most commanding. It stands on a plateau of high ground, about a quarter of a mile from the verge of the line of sea-cliffs, and with no intervening object to intercept or interrupt the seaward view. The house lies on the land side of the public road, but on a higher elevation ; plantations are behind, and on each side ; and close in the rear the ground rises sharply, and so continues to ascend, until it gains an altitude of some fifteen hundred feet above the level of the sea, and is merged in that range of hills that forms the back bone of Cantire. The sea-view from Glencreggan is magnificent. The drawing-room windows command an uninterrupted view from left to right, of nearly one hundred miles, quite that in fact, for it begins on the left with the Irish coast, and terminates in the misty distance to the right with Ben More, in the island of Mull, which, as the crow flies, is just one hundred miles from Ireland, a tolerably extensive sweep of sea and landscape. The portion of the Irish coast seen from Glencreggan, is that from Fair Head to the Giant’s Causeway, in the front of which Rathlin Isle is plainly visible. Its lighthouse

was to us as a nightly star. Then, passing on in our view towards the right, is the open Atlantic, with nothing but that waste of waters between us and America. Then come Islay and Jura, their rugged outlines forming one long bold line against the sky, the Paps of Jura being its most conspicuous feature. Between us and them lie the pretty islets of Cara and Gigha. The western coast of Cantire stretches in long perspective to the

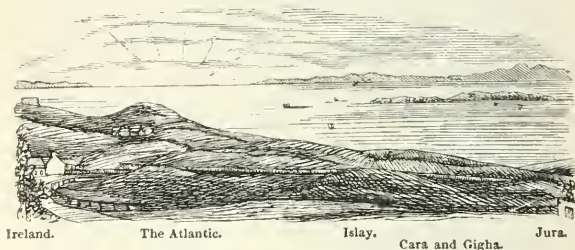


DIAGRAM OF VIEW FROM GLENCREGGAN.

right; and the misty mountain beyond points out to us the spot where

“On high Ben More green mosses grow.”

Islay is about twenty-eight miles, and Jura thirty-four; but from Islay overlapping Jura, the two, at first sight, seem to form one long island. These four islands of the Southern Hebrides, Islay, Jura, Cara, and Gigha (pronounced “Geera,”) are a lovely feature in the view, more especially when seen from the moors on the hills behind Glencreggan, when the higher elevation enables

us to see the silvery thread of water dividing the two larger islands, and the boundless sweep of the Atlantic on the farther side of them. From the hills too we see another portion of the Hebridean group, the islands of Colonsay and Oransay; and still further to the right the island of Scarba, with the dreadful Gulf of Corrivrekin; while shadowy Mull fills in the background.

On a clear day, it was "mighty agreeable," as Pepys would say, to lie among the fragrant heather on the summit of one of the softly-rounded hills, in the shade of one of those great rocky fragments that are thickly sprinkled over the moors, and by the side of a little stream falling over a stony ledge into a mossy basin overhung with ferns,—pleasant to lie there in the shade "by the burnie 'mid the brackens," and drink in the scenery, glass in hand. With such scenery, and with a good glass, one may well be a toper! and as for those lovely islands of this western Archipelago, I warrant that each will "prove an excuse for the glass," with a result that will cheer, but not inebriate. It was, indeed, agreeable, on a clear day, thus, telescope in hand, to obtain a view more distinct than could be gained by the naked eye, of those distant Hebridean beauties rising like so many Aphrodites from the waves. But without the glass, we could make out most of the leading features of the islands even in tolerably fair weather; and

on clear sunny days, the houses at Port Ellen *, in Islay, were very apparent, more especially when their glazed windows flashed back the rays of the sun. The distance was a little more than twenty miles. The distinguished traveller, Mr. Galton, has lately utilised, by a clever invention, this flashing of the sun's rays in glass. It can be seen at an almost fabulous distance, and at the interval of twelve miles, travellers may telegraph to each other with perfect ease, and converse according to a prescribed code of signals. The Ordnance Survey have in this way often made good use of small mirrors; nor have savage tribes been ignorant of so simple but valuable a plan of communication.

Indeed, by the aid of imagination and a good glass, we saw more than could be seen. There was a patch of light, like sea-sand, only in a perpendicular position, plainly visible on the dark line of coast, and extending for a considerable height up the face of the rock. When the telescope had been brought to bear upon it, we made out (to our great satisfaction) a lofty and wide waterfall, fed by a stream that we could discern threading its way down the side of the hill. We could see

* Port Ellen is in Londinas Bay, in the Mull of Oe. It is not marked in Johnston's large map. It has its place, however, in the valuable map in Black's "Guide," with the track of the steamers. These steamers, whose route from Glasgow to Oban is round the Mull of Cantire, usually touch at Port Ellen.

the movement of the water as it meandered down the mountain side, and then leapt over the face of the precipice. Each one of the party made it out distinctly, and for several days this waterfall was a frequent object to which the telescope was directed. Alas! it was but an optical delusion. In a few days we had discovered that there was no such stream or waterfall, and that the patch of light was nothing more than a sand-bank, composed of sand of such whiteness, that it glistened and glimmered like pulverised chalk. And yet, even when we knew this, we could still make out the waterfall as distinctly as before; for the play of the sunlight on the particles of shining sand — which was pounded over with fractured shells — produced a similar effect to that of falling water. So much for imagination; and if it had not been for the timely discovery of the mistake, I might have here added to the number of waterfalls in the Highlands, by an account of this Hebridean one, of whose existence we one and all (as we thought) had repeated ocular proof. “The Mare’s Tail,” is by no means an uncommon name for a cascade, and in the Highlands, when they see the white streams threading their way at flood-time down the dark cavities of the mountain, they say, “the grey mare’s tail begins to grow!” but, in the present instance, we must have named our waterfall, not “the Mare’s Tail,” but “The Mare’s Nest.”

But we were near enough to these islands of the Southern Hebrides, to view them with sufficient distinctness; and as seen from Glencreggan, this portion of the Scottish Archipelago, with its picturesque groupings, and accidental effects of light and shade, was at all times an object of interest. On bright days, the sunlight strongly defined all the rocky irregularities of the coast; while here and there, in the cultivated portions, could be discerned the strips of green, and the blaze of golden corn, with the houses and the tiny shipping, their sails now white, and now a dusky red, and the larger vessels slowly sliding along the dark blue line of the horizon, and now and then a steamer, with its long, thin level cloud of smoke, streaming like a mighty pennant in its wake.

There is a description of Mr. Kingsley's which might be well applied to this spot. "How clear and brilliant everything shows through this Atlantic atmosphere. The intensity of colouring may vie with that of the shores of the Mediterranean. The very raininess of the climate, by condensing the moisture into an ever-changing phantasmagoria of clouds, leaves the clear air and sunshine, when we do get a glimpse of them, all the more pure and transparent. One does not regret or even feel the want of trees here, while the eye ranges down from that dappled cloud-world above, over that vast sheet of purple heather, those dells bedded with

dark velvet green ferns, of a depth and richness of hue which I never saw before, over those bright grey granite rocks, spangled with black glittering mica and golden lichens, to rest at last on that sea below. This is real Atlantic blue here beneath us. No more glass-green bay water, but real ocean sapphire—dark, deep, intense, Homeric purple, it spreads away, away, there before us, without a break or islet, to the shores of America. You are sitting on one of the last points of Europe, and therefore all things round you are stern and strange with a barbaric pomp, such as befits the boundary of a world. Does it not raise strange longings in you, to gaze out yonder over the infinite calm, and then to remember, that, beyond it lies America! the new world; the future world; the great Titan baby!”*

It was harvest time when we were in Cantire; and the following beautiful bit of description by Hugh Miller, of a Highland landscape further north, will strengthen the foregoing word-painting of Mr. Kingsley's, and will also well describe many of the days and scenes that we encountered at Glencreggan:—“The keen morning improved into a brilliant day, with an atmosphere transparent as if there had been no atmosphere at all, through which the distant objects looked

* “Miscellanies,” by the Rev. C. Kingsley, vol. ii. pp. 298, 300.

out as sharp of outline, and in as well-defined light and shadow as if they had occupied the background, not of a Scotch, but of an Italian landscape. A few speck-like sails far away on the intensely blue sea, which opened upon us in a stretch of many leagues, gleamed to the sun with a radiance bright as that of the sparks of a furnace blown to white heat. The land uneven of surface, and open, and abutting in bold promontories, still bore the sunny hue of harvest, and seemed as if stippled over with shocks from the ridgy hill summits, to where ranges of giddy cliffs flung their shadows across the beach."

I esteemed myself fortunate to visit Glencreggan at such a season. When we had left England the harvest was well-nigh over, but here it was barely begun. It is always a picturesque time; but harvest in the Highlands exceeds an English harvest in the elements of the picturesque,—chiefly from the scenery, but partly from the abundant presence of women in the national dress. A loose cotton jacket is commonly worn by them, and, for this, pink was the all-prevailing colour: beneath appeared a short petticoat, similar in colour (and perhaps in texture) to that dark blue stuff of which bathing dresses are made. In many cases the girls wore nothing upon their heads but their own luxuriant hair: where they adopted any covering, it was a loose white cotton bonnet or a wide-awake. They used the sickle as

dexterously as did the men; even as Wordsworth describes the

“Solitary Highland lass
Reaping and singing by herself;”

(which is somewhat tautological, seeing that she could not be solitary without being by herself). But the Highland lassies that I saw reaping and singing, and

“Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides,”

were never solitary, but were altogether gregarious in their habits. The women, as usual, wore their large white caps, or “mutches;” and, together with the girls, had coverings for their feet and ankles,—which is almost the only occasion on which they wear anything on their legs, Sundays excepted. The rule seems to be, go barefoot everywhere but into a kirk; but when you work in a stubbly barley-field, protect your legs.

And a very wise rule it is. It is, however, the custom with those artists who paint from indoor models instead of outdoor realities, to invariably represent “the gleaner” (with an especial preference for the Highland specimen) as an impossible specimen of agricultural humanity, with delicately-chiselled nude feet, or else with clean tight-fitting white stockings and dancing-pumps. I am conscious of a long acquaintance with many bucolical myths and pastoral goddesses, created by artists for the delectation of society, who have fas-

inated the beholder by a display of their pedal pieces, or by the harmonious tones produced by white stockings or rosy flesh. I have a pleasing memory of a lovely picture by Mr. Frith, a Highland "Gleaner" (who has



HIGHLAND REAPERS.

since figured in the print-shops), dressed like these Glencreggan girls, in short petticoat and loose pink jacket, with a complexion like the famous

“Mulberry smother’d in cream,”

suggesting that she must have fed upon strawberries

and milk all her life, or that some one must have held a gig umbrella over her while she was at work, and thus have preserved the pearly delicacy of her cheek and bust. Her rose-leaf arms (the blush rose, and not the cabbage) elegantly balanced upon her head a sheaf of gleanings, while from beneath her short dark petticoat appeared a pair of delicate little legs and feet tramping through "the histie stibble" — stubble, be it remembered, that will cut like a knife — without so much as a scratch or a scar to disfigure the excessive cleanliness and pearly hue of her exquisitely-turned foot and

"About the loveliest little ankle in the world."

This fair creation of Mr. Frith's brain I duly admired; my admiration being tempered with astonishment, because in real life I had always found that when any lovely young Lavinias went to glean the corn in rich Palæmon's field, they very wisely put on their oldest and strongest shoes (*Nota bene*, boots preferred), and wrapped their feet and legs in any protective material on which they could lay their hands, which armour of defence was technically termed "clouts," and bade defiance to the sharpest stubble; and that no Lavinia was insane enough to subject herself to the unheard-of penance of promenading with bare feet and legs in a field whose sword-like stubble would speedily lame her with countless bleeding wounds. I was not,

therefore, surprised to see the Glencreggan gleaners, whose normal state was that of naked legs, sensibly attired for their occupation, and greatly adding to the picturesqueness of the landscape; though this enforced wearing of shoes and stockings is "a sair burden" to them. Even when they walk to kirk on the Sabbath-day, they frequently carry their shoes and stockings, and do not put them on until within a short distance of the building; a circumstance which made a Turkish tourist in the Highlands remark that, in his country, religion enjoined them to put off their slippers when entering a sacred building, whereas in Scotland religion made them put on their shoes.

It is this general absence in the Highlands of shoes and stockings on the part of women and children (for you never see a barefooted man), that is so striking to the English eye, which does not readily become accustomed to the novelty. Except in the severest weather, I was assured that the children, and their elder sisters and mothers, greatly prefer the freedom of bare feet to the restraint of shoes and stockings. A very little child may be sometimes seen to whimper if it steps upon a sharp pebble, over which its mother, and its elder brothers and sisters will walk without flinching.*

* "Their infants are no sooner brought into the world than they are pretty roughly handled, wrapt up in a Highland blanket, and nursed in a very homely and masculine manner, not bound and painted up in their trinkets like so many dolls, but are often carried in and

The fences in the neighbourhood of Glencreggan were, for the most part, similar to those throughout the



TRAINING THE FEET.

Western Highlands, and were composed of large stones roughly piled together, and cemented with mud, the

about the house as naked as when they were born, and nourished with good and substantial cheer, not with dates and sugar plums; and, once they can use their legs they don't spare them, but will run up hills and down dales, many of them without any clothing, and that in the middle of winter." — Dr. J. CAMPBELL'S *Description of the Highlands of Scotland* (1752), p. 17.

upper surface not being brought to a level, but following the inequalities of the stones. I often noticed the little barelegged children amusing themselves by walking along the rugged tops of these stone fences, their toes clasping the stones as though with a prehensile power. They ran along the wall like monkeys, and, as Dibdin says: —

“Daintily handled their feet,”

with the craft of a rope-dancer. Children brought up in this way literally kick at the restraint of shoe-leather; and, as I was informed, can scarcely be prevailed upon to wear shoes even in the depth of winter. The feet of such are necessarily far more supple than the feet of those who have bowed to the customs of civilisation by wearing corn-producing boots.

“It has been observed,” says Mawman, “that were it the fashion to go naked, the face would be hardly noticed: certain it is that the bare feet very much attracted our attention. The conspicuously-active spring of the ball of the foot, and the powerful grasp of the toes, increased our knowledge by exhibiting the beauty and utility of that member. All the Highlanders walk with firmness and agility. We saw not a single instance even of a female turning in her toes, or stepping with a stiff bent knee. We remarked that, north of Glasgow, we had not beheld one individual,

man, woman, or child, crooked; and that, though their feet were freely applied to rugged roads and gravelly shores, they did not appear to have received any injury. Their general ability proved that they could

“ ‘Foot it featly here and there.’ ” *

In which opinion my own observation leads me to cordially agree.

Who can tell to what uses the feet and toes might be put, if the necessity arose for the full development of their powers? There is a way of educating the foot as well as the hand or the eye; and it is astonishing what an educated foot can be made to do. We know that, in the time of Alexander, the Indians were taught to draw their bows with their feet as well as with their hands; and Sir James Emerson Tennent tells us that that this is done up to the present time by the Rock Veddahs of Ceylon. And nearly all savage tribes can turn their toes not only to good but also to bad account; like the aborigines of Australia, who, while they are cunningly diverting your attention with their hands, are busily engaged in committing robberies with their toes, with which they can pick up articles as an elephant would with his trunk. So also the Hindoo makes his toes work at the loom, and weaves with them with almost as much dexterity as with his fingers. The

* Excursion to the Highlands of Scotland (1804), p. 151.

Chinese carpenter will hold the bit of wood he is planing by his foot like a parrot, and will work a grindstone with his feet.* The Banaka tribe, who are the most famous canoe-men on the west African coast, will impel their light canoes (weighing only from eight to ten pounds) with great velocity over the waves, and at the same time will use their one foot to bale out the water; and "when they would rest their arms, one leg is thrown out on either side of the canoe, and it is propelled with the feet almost as fast as with a paddle."† In the case too of Miss Biffin, the miniature-painter, who died but eleven years since, and who was patronised by our present Queen and her three predecessors on the throne, we know how her toes took the place of fingers, and guided the pencil with equal delicacy and skill. There was also Monsieur Ducornet, who died only four years ago, who, although he was born without hands, was brought up as an artist, and who annually exhibited at the Louvre pictures painted by his feet.‡ Then there was Thomas Roberts, the armless huntsman to Sir George Barlow, whose feet were made to perform the duties of his hands. And there was William King-

* See Albert Smith's "To China and Back," pp. 8, 19.

† Rev. J. L. Wilson's "Western Africa."

‡ A large painting (11 feet by 9 feet) by this artist, representing a "Vision of the Virgin and Child appearing to St. Philomene," is in the choir of the church of St. Riequier. See Musgrave's "Bye-Roads and Battle-Fields," p. 87.

stone, who with his toes wrote out his accounts, shaved and dressed himself, saddled and bridled his horse, threw sledge-hammers, and fought a stout battle in which he came off victorious. And there was Kleyser, the German, who with his toes shaved, dressed, wrote, threaded needles, fired pistols, and fenced with a rapier. And there was also Matthew Buckinger, who was also born without arms, and could do these things and many more; and like his fellow-countryman, Kleyser, gained his livelihood by the dexterity of his toes.

The linen-washers in Barr River have already shown us one use of the naked feet that is very popular in Scotland. Pennant mentions another, that is now probably out of date. As a substitute for the fulling-



CLOTH WAUKING. (After Pennant.)

mill, about a dozen women, divided into two equal numbers, and all in full song, would sit down on each side of a long board, ribbed lengthways, with the cloth placed upon it. When they were tired of working it backwards and forwards with their hands, "every

female," says Pennant, "uses her feet for the same purpose, and six or seven pair of naked feet are in the most violent agitation, working one against the other; as by this time they grow very earnest in their labours, the fury of the song rises; at length it arrives at such a pitch, that without breach of charity you would imagine a troop of female demoniacs to have assembled." * This was called the Luaghadh, or "Walking (wauking) of Cloth." Pennant gives an illustration of the remarkable scene; though, in his sketch (which is here copied) the ladies are very orderly and quaker-like.

Captain Burt, the author of those old and curious "Letters," to which I referred in the last chapter, thus describes the washing of a room, "which," he very suggestively adds, "the English lodgers require to be sometimes done." It was done with the feet. "First, they spread a wet cloth upon part of the floor; then,

* Hebrides, p. 286. It is also mentioned in the "Letters from the North of Scotland" (cf. Letter XX.), and by Macculloch (vol. ii. p. 314), who came suddenly on "the bare-legged nymphs in the very orgasm and fury of inspiration, kicking and singing, and hallooing as if they had been possessed by twelve devils." Mr. Campbell says, "There are songs composed in a particular rhythm for washing clothes by dancing on them, songs which are nearly all chorus, and which are composed as they are sung. The composer gives out a single line, applicable to anything then present, and the chorus fills up the time by singing and clapping hands, till the second line is prepared. I have known such lines fired at a sportsman by a bevy of girls who were wauking blankets in a byre, and who made the gun and the dog the theme of several stanzas."—CAMPBELL'S *West Highland Tales*, vol. i. p. xlv.

with their coats tucked up, they stand upon the cloth and shuffle it backward and forward with their feet; then they go to another part and do the same, till they have gone all over the room." He ordered a mop to be made, and showed them how to use it; but he could not persuade them to use it instead of their feet.* "I have seen women by the river-side," he says, "washing parsnips, turnips, and herbs, in tubs with their feet. An English lieutenant-colonel told me, that about a mile from the the town, he saw, at some little distance, a wench turning and twisting herself about as she stood in a little tub; and, as he could perceive, being on horseback, that there was no water in it, he rode up close to her, and found that she was grinding off the beards and hulls of barley with her naked feet, which barley, she said, was to make broth withal; and, since that, upon inquiry, I have been told it is a common thing. They hardly ever wear shoes but on a Sunday;

* Bare legs were to be met with in town as well as in country. a century ago. Dr. Somerville, in his "Life and Times," says:—"Before the year 1760 none of the poor, or only a small proportion of them, wore stockings. Even in the houses of gentlemen of high rank, the maid-servants seldom used them in the earlier part of the day, while employed in servile work. The celebrated Charles Townshend used to give a ludicrous description of his being received by a 'female porter' without stockings or shoes, when he paid his respects to Lord President Craigie, in the Lawnmarket, Edinburgh, in 1758 or 1759; and also of the practice, at that time general in the country, of the women treading their dirty linen, instead of washing it with their hands" (p. 326).

and then, being unused to them, when they go to church, they walk very awkwardly; or, as we say, like a cat shod with walnut-shells." The state of "their legs covered up to the calf with dried dirt," is then touched upon with a far different pencil to that used by Mr. Frith in his dainty-limbed gleaner. But, although this charge may be true in too many cases, yet they might retort, that the cleanliness of their feet was better cared for when they paddled barefoot through burns and puddles, than when encased in heat-producing shoes.

"In respect to dress, shoes, stockings and bonnets are not much worn, and the fashions for this month are white muslin caps, dark cotton gowns, made short and scanty in the skirt, and neither leather nor prunella for shoes; but I always maintain, that for hard-working people, the custom is both wholesome and cleanly, of having their bare feet washed daily, or perhaps hourly, in every stream they pass. A woman respectably clothed in shoes and stockings, was heard saying once to a friend, 'I must hurry home and wash, for I've negleckit my feet for three weeks.'" So says Miss Sinclair. But, so far as my own observation goes, I must say, that the Highland lassie, however picturesque an object, would be made a much more wholesome and inviting character by a little more attention to tidiness and cleanliness. Sir Walter Scott has

pierced the mark, in the following description:—
“ Three or four village girls, returning from the village well or brook with pitchers and pails upon their heads, formed pleasing objects, and, with their thin short gowns and single petticoats, bare arms, legs, and feet, uncovered heads and braided hair, somewhat resembled Italian forms of landscape. Nor could a lover of the picturesque have challenged either the elegance of their costume, or the symmetry of their shape; although, to say the truth, a mere Englishman, in search of the *comfortable*, a word peculiar to his native tongue, might have wished the clothes less scanty, the feet and legs somewhat protected from the weather, the head and complexion shrouded from the sun, or, perhaps, might even have thought the whole person and dress considerably improved by a plentiful application of spring water, with a *quantum sufficit* of soap.”* This is the more to be lamented when found among a people, of whose peasantry, as Sir Walter elsewhere says, “ from among the young women, an

* The author of the “ Old Church Architecture of Scotland ” (1861), describes the landing of himself and friends at St. Kilda, and going through their morning’s purification “ in the hollow of a small stream up a little way from the shore, to the infinite amusement of the people, who, probably having never seen their water turned to such account before, or men rubbing and scrubbing themselves so unmercifully, must needs have believed that they were witnessing some pagan rite, or act of pious mortification ” (p. 213).

artist might have chosen more than one model whose features and form resembled those of Minerva.”

And while the naked foot may be accepted as a national characteristic, we may remember that it was through a naked foot that Scotland was saved. If that bare-footed Dane, who, in the darkness of the night, trod upon the rough prickles of the thistle (thenceforth to become the national emblem), and, yelling with the suddenness of the pain, aroused the garrison and put them on their defence; if he had worn boots, or even one of those pairs of rough-skinned Scottish “brogues” that were constructed with slits at the heel, so that the water might run out of them, then, who can tell the sequence of events that may have followed? As it is, there — to remind us of the great events accruing from the misplaced confidence of a naked foot, — there is the thistle for Scotland’s badge, with its prickly Dane-and-enemy-defying motto *Nemo me impune lacessit*, which, being interpreted into good broad Scotch, means (according to the song)

“Wha daur meddle wi’ me!”

So much for the legs of the lassies at Glencreggan, and elsewhere in the Highlands. But they are deserving of notice; for (as Macculloch has remarked) they

are full of symmetry, and are not like the legs of the Welsh girls, which look as though they had been turned in a lathe, although

“Stockings and shoon
To them are no boon.”