

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD MILLER.

“The stiffest o’ them a’ he bow’d
The bauldest o’ them a’ he cow’d ;
They durst nae mair than he allowed—
That was a law ;
We’ve lost a birkie weel worth gowd—
Sandy’s awa’.”

IT has been often said that the scenery amid which a man dwells has an effect in forming his mind and character, even to the moulding of his features. No doubt there is truth in this to a certain extent. Around the old “Kirkton Mill” of Aberlour there was a combination of scenery well calculated to impress the dullest mind, but it seemed to have made very little impression on the mind or features of “The Old Miller.” Nature in all her beauty surrounded the spot where stood the busy mill, whose ceaseless wheel with splashing sound made music to the scene around, sheltered from the north by a brae draped with weeping birch trees, and so steep that the branches hung like curtains over the belt of mingled underwood that skirted its base. Higher up the burn the mountain ash, the sloe, and hazel divided “the wards” into green, sylvan glades, where in early spring the primrose, the wood anemone, and other gems decked the green sward. As a background to the picture, the Linn of Ruthrie is seen tumbling over the edge of a rugged rock, leaping from one ledge to another to the pool below, into whose depth the looker-on shudders to gaze. There are many waterfalls in Scotland far grander and more awe-inspiring than the Linn of Ruthrie, but seen when the burn is in flood the sight is very fine. The crags on either side of the falls are crowned with weeping birches, some of them hanging by their roots from fissures in the rocks, while the blaeberry and the beech and oak ferns all combine to make the Linn of Ruthrie a pleasing if not an impressive picture. “The Little Linn,” a few yards higher up the burn, is

wanting in the picturesque features of the fall below. When the burn is low the water rushes down a narrow channel in the face of the rock, which is beautifully water-worn. In the rocks around the fall many holes have been formed by the action of the water. In the school days of the writer these were designated "The Cups and Saucers," "The Muckle and Little Kail-Pots," while one deep hole, very smooth and round, was known as "The Devil's Punch-Bowl."

The flood of '29 rushed over these waterfalls with terrific force, carrying with it great boulder stones that lay in the course of the burn between Benrinnes and the falls. One great boulder the size of a hay cock lay stranded opposite the mill. The old miller, in narrating the incidents of that terrible event, said "when it fell ower the Linn, an' cam' rummellin' doon the burn, it shook the verra mill an' the hoose." No better illustration of the force of that great flood could be seen anywhere.

Although "The Miller" had no eye for the natural beauty of his surroundings, it had some unseen influence upon his mind. The sounds of nature in the night time seemed to impress his mind greatly. When the mill was "set" he would listen with a sort of awe to the sougling of the burn and the din of the water falling over the Linn, and remark, "Ay, ay, lathey, it's wonnerfu'; we never hear that eerie soon's in the day time." When seated by the hearth in his high-backed oak chair he looked very much like the effigy of one of those gods that are seen in the heathen temples of India. A round Highland bonnet without a brim covered his head, and it seemed as if it had become attached to the scalp, for I never saw his head bare. His stolid, rudy face was square and expressionless, until the thought of some affront that he had received came across his mind. Then a scowl would pass over his features, and he would burst forth indignantly, prefacing every narrative with "L—d liken as it were, lathey."

He never tired of telling the following adventure:—"Ae aifterneen—it was gey weel on in hairst—a great muckle chiel wi' a gaud (goad) in his han' cam' tae the mill door an' cries oot, 'Miller, come doon tae the foord; the owsen's stucken there, an' the diel himsel' winna move them.' Sae doon I gangs, an' there, sure eneuch, was aul' General Grant o' Ballindalloch's sax owsen,

wi' a waggon load o' coal fae Germuch, stuck fast in the foord (the new brig ower the burn wasna biggit then). 'Fat the deil's the maitter?' says I; 'can ye nae get them oot o' the burn, ye block-head?' 'Na, na,' said the gaudsman, 'we'll try nae mair. Black Peter's bewitched sin' he cam' intae the parish o' Aiberlour. He cam' spankin' through the Mill Foord, an' here he's fast in this bit burn. Someone's played their cantrips on him.' Wi' that I snaps the gaud oot o' his han' an' says, 'Get oot o' the gait, ye muckle feel, or I'll lay the gaud on yer ain back!' But, L—d liken as it were, that dour deevil o' a beast, Black Peter, wadna move a fit if I had stickit him wi' the sharp en' o' the gaud. The minister an' his man, Willie Stewart, an' Jock More, the bellman, were stan'in' by. The minister says tae me, 'Saunders, the deevil's nae likely tae come an' help ye. I would gi'e ower callin' on him.' L—d liken as it were. I just glowered at him, an' says I, 'He's ower busy at the Manse tae help onybody but the minister.' Sae aifter we had fochten wi' the brute for mair than an' oor, I bethinks me an' gets a bundle o' breem coves (broom bushes), an' sets fire tae them anaith the belly o' the black deevil. That seen made him flee up the brae roarin' like a mad bull."

General James Grant of Ballindalloch succeeded to the estate on the death of his nephew, Major William Grant, in 1770. He died at Ballindalloch on the 13th of April, 1806, at the age of 86. Having no children, he was succeeded by his maternal grandnephew, George Macpherson, Esq. of Invereshie, who assumed the name of Grant, and was created a baronet in 1838. Of all the many Grants of Strathspey that have risen to high distinction in the army, none of them has left a longer or more distinguished record than General Grant of Ballindalloch. My maternal grandmother was a servant in the Castle during his lifetime. He brought home from Florida two black servants, who became a terror to all the maid-servants. On one occasion the General heard one of them screaming on a back staircase. He rushed to her and found one of the "blacks." The General collared him, got his cane, and laid it on to the back of the culprit till he howled in such a way that all the inmates were alarmed. At the time of his death he was Governor of Stirling Castle. At his own request his remains were buried in a favourite spot at that time called "The Bowmoon" or "Bowmeen." A handsome

monument, with suitable inscription, marks the place of his interment. The different branches of the Clan Grant were distinguished one from another by territorial names. The Ballindalloch branch were commonly called "Craig-Achrochean Grants."

The song of "Roy's Wife o' Aldivalloch" was written by a Mrs. Grant of Carron. Her maiden name was Grant, and she was born near Aberlour about 1745. Mr. Grant of Carron, whose wife she became about 1763, was her cousin. As far as can be ascertained, the above song was the only one she composed. Numerous as the Grants of Strathspey are at the present time, they were still more numerous at the time when Alexander Boswell wrote his famous verses on them :—

“ Come the Grants of Tullochgorum,
 Wi' their pipers gaun before 'em,
 Proud the mothers are that bore 'em,
 Feedle-fa-fum.
 Next the Grants of Rothiemurchus,
 Every man his sword and dirk has,
 Every man as proud's a Turk is,
 Tweedle-da-dum.