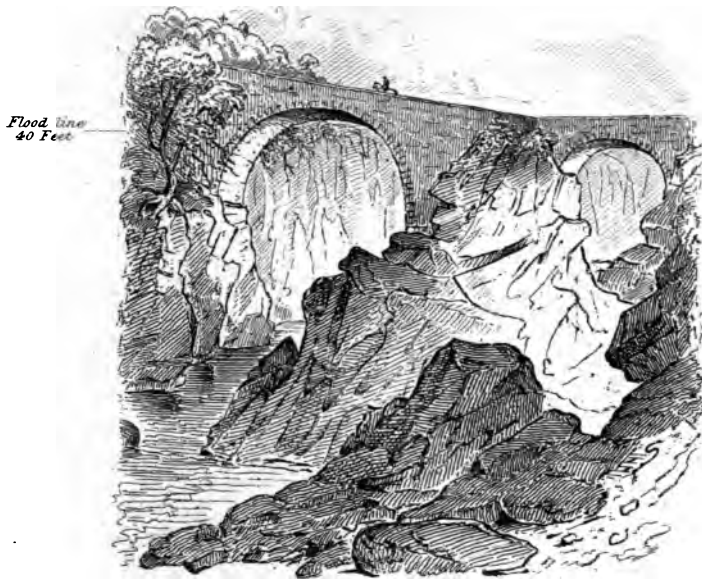


## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FINDHORN, FROM DULSIE BRIDGE TO RANDOLPH'S BRIDGE.

THE old military Bridge of Dulsie, consisting of one bold and lofty arch, of forty-six feet, spanning the yawning chasm, and a smaller subsidiary that carries the roadway from a high rock onwards to the north bank, is highly picturesque, and surrounded



by scenery of the wildest character. The rock here, and for eight or ten miles downwards, is a beautiful red porphyritic granite; and the whole river's course is of the most romantic character. The flood was very grand at Dulsie Bridge, where the column of water was so confined that it filled the smaller arch altogether, and rose, in the great arch, to within three feet of the key-stone; it was thus no less than *forty feet perpendicular above the usual level*. The foundations of the piers have suffered considerably, but a smaller sum than £10 would make this venerable bridge quite secure; and it is to be hoped that the Parliamentary Commissioners, under whose charge it is, will not, for so trifling a consideration, allow the country to be robbed of so useful a passage across a dangerous stream.

The Drumlochan Burn comes in from the right. Its branches carried away two bridges of twenty feet span. In its ordinary state, this burn is hardly sufficient to keep the sawmill going; but, during the flood, the column of water was 10 feet deep by 40 feet broad. At one place it carried away nearly an acre of land.

At Ferness, about two miles below Dulsie Bridge, the river sweeps for three miles round a high peninsula, through some of the wildest scenery imaginable, between lofty and precipitous rocks, towering, in some places, into castellated shapes, where the natural pine shoots out its tortuous and scaly form, mingled with the birch and other trees. In the midst of a beautiful holm, which the river embraces before it enters this romantic part of its course, stands a lonely cairn, with a rudely-sculptured obelisk rising from it. Tradition tells us that this is the grave of two lovers; the hero a Dane, and the lady the daughter of the prince of the country. The father refused his daughter's hand to one who was his natural enemy. They fled together on the same horse, were pursued to the wooded hill of Dulsie, where they had taken refuge, and, being driven from thence, they were drowned in a desperate attempt to ford the river. Their bodies were found on this haugh, locked in each other's arms, and they were buried under this cairn. The tomb of these unfortunate lovers was respected by the flood, though the haugh itself suffered very considerable loss. This solitary spot is perfectly beautiful.

Immediately below Ferness, but on the left bank, there was a low flat peninsula, the neck of which was formerly cut through for the run of a sawmill, removed a good many years ago. The flood found its way into this old cut, and completely annihilated the whole peninsula. The tenant of Daltraw had his cattle pasturing in it. They were soon surrounded by streams so powerful

as to render all hope of saving them perfectly vain. But, to the surprise of every one, they were all found safe on the bank in the morning, though nobody could tell how they got out. Some time after the flood, a blanket, and a piece of home-made cloth, thirty yards in length, part of the plenishing of poor Widow Fraser's house at Tchirfogrein, were found embedded in the sand near Ferness.

The glebe of Ardlach lost one acre of land. The church and churchyard lie hid in a low dell, embraced by the river, surrounded by lofty and richly wooded banks, and closed in below by a bold, bare, projecting rock. The regurgitation of the water floated gently over the lower part of the churchyard, but gave no disturbance to the dust that moulders there. All Sir James Montgomery Cunninghame's farms, along the right bank, suffered in loss of soil, as well as in destruction of crop.

The bridge of Ferness, built of solid granite by the Parliamentary Commissioners, and consisting of three arches of 36, 55, and 30 feet span, is founded on the solid rock, and rises from a low haugh on the right, to a high bank on the left. Sir James's gardener tells me that he went down to look at the river there about four o'clock in the morning of the 4th; and, although he found it much larger than when he left it the previous evening, he saw enough to convince him that it had been still higher during the night. It is a fact worth remarking that this partial subsidence was observed in all the flooded rivers. But, about five o'clock, it increased, and so rapidly that every five minutes made a visible change. It went on to rise in this way till about seven o'clock, when the haugh on the right bank was covered, and the arches were not only completely filled, but the water was level with the top of the parapet, 27 feet above the ordinary level; and, indeed, if a few yards of the parapets towards the left and highest bank had not appeared, no one could have suspected that there was a bridge there at all. Grouped with some cottages and some other trees, at a point about 150 yards above the bridge, grew one of the most beautiful ashes I ever beheld. It had a tall triple stem, supporting a perfect grove of foliage. The largest of its three divisions was  $12\frac{1}{2}$  feet in circumference, the next  $7\frac{1}{2}$  feet, and the smallest about 7 feet. This noble tree was covered to a considerable height by the water; but the gardener had no apprehension for its safety, when all at once it fell with a fearful crash, breaking a number of its branches by the very force and weight with which they struck the surface of the water, and throwing up the agitated element to a great height. Down it went out of sight, with an enormous bank of gravel, torn away and retained by the long

and multiplied reticulations of its roots. As it got rid of a part of this dead weight, and rapidly approached the bridge, its branches rose for a moment, with great majesty, some 40 or 50 feet above the water, and fell backwards, in such a manner as to bring the root forward. In an instant it was sucked into the vortex of the centre arch. The branches and smaller limbs were ground to pieces with a noise like thunder, mingled with that of the explosions of gunpowder. For three or four minutes it stuck, "groaning and bellowing," as if from torture, and then appeared darting below the lower side of the bridge, shorn of its mighty honours. When the river subsided, the bridge of Ferness, to the astonishment of every one, emerged from the flood, with no other damage than the loss of a part of its southern wing-walls and roadway, estimated at about £100. But the preservation of the arches and the body of the bridge must ever occasion it to be regarded as a miracle of masonry.

The bridge over the eastern branch of the burn of Easter Logie, on the Parliamentary road from Forres to Grantown, was so destroyed as to require rebuilding.

Coming to the Relugas property, on the right bank, we have a striking example of the power of water. The march-ditch was cut in a direct line from the hill towards the river, passing in its way thither alternately along broad plains and down steep banks. At one place, immediately above where the public road now runs, it was carried past *Cumin's Cairn*, rising on the verge of a steeply inclined bank of 70 or 80 feet high. This heap of stones was raised over the body of a man of the name of Cumin, who, having hanged himself in his barn in the beginning of the eighteenth century, that is to say, about one hundred years before the time I now speak of, was buried on the march, according to the custom observed with suicides. The moment the ditch was opened down the face of the bank, it collected the water of every shower of rain; and, being thereby converted into a temporary cataract, a gully of immense magnitude was cut in the alluvial matter in the course of a year or two. The bottom of this soon formed itself into an inclined plane, of above 100 yards in length, after which the water ceased to have any effect on it. This sufficiently illustrates the law governing all streams in their operations on the face of the earth, which have all a tendency, by deepening one place and filling up another, to reduce their channels to inclined planes. After a flood, which brought down a good deal of the loose material on the sides of the gully, a boy, tending cattle, observed something like long red hair streaming in the breeze, near the top of the broken bank. On climbing up to investigate the matter, what was his

horror and dread when he discovered that the hair was attached to a ghastly human head! He fled home in terror, and the people crowded out to see the wonder. There they found the corpse of Cumin, so entire that, if any one could have known him alive, he must have perfectly recognized his features. The head protruded horizontally from the bank, and the exudation from the body had tinged the sand beneath it of a black colour, to a considerable depth. The cause of the preservation of the body was manifestly the dry ferruginous sand it was buried in. The rope was found about his neck, and attached to the fatal beam. During the night following the discovery of the body, the man's descendants carried all off, and buried them in the churchyard of Edinkillie.

The bridge of Daltlich is a fine bold arch, of 82 feet span, springing from a rock on the right bank, on the Estate of Relugas, and landing on another, on the farm from which it takes its name. From the ordinary level of the water, to the top of the parapet, the height is 44 feet, of which the flood rose 31 feet. The river's banks are so well defended by rocks, as they are traced downwards, that little damage was done either on Lord Moray's property of Downduff, on the left bank, or on that of Relugas on the right, except by the tearing away of beautiful trees, till we reach the Haugh of Randolph, or Rannoch, as it is vulgarly called, one end of which lost a portion of the soil. But this is a part of the river that demands particular notice.

The field is named from a narrow passage between the rocks, not more than eight feet wide, but of immense depth (Plate XII.), through which the whole river runs in the ordinary state of its waters. This is called Randolph's Bridge, from Earl Randolph, the Regent, having had a bridge here for crossing from his castle of Tarnawa. The bridge was of wood, and consequently it was swept away twenty times in a year; but, from long custom, or some other cause, the Earl of Moray conceived himself bound to restore it after every demolition, till after the building of the bridge of Daltlich, when it was finally condemned as productive of numerous accidents. It was here that the desperate skirmish of "*The lost Standard*" was fought between Randolph and the Cumins.

Cumin of Raites,\* the ruins of whose castle still stand on the north side of the hill of Urquenay, had gone with numerous followers to assist his kinsman Cumin of Inverloch, in a feud

\* By a charter, dated Elgin, 2d November, 1494, to John Calder, son to William, Thane of Calder, we find "the half of the towne of Rate, in Nairne," among a great many other lands.

which then occupied him. They were on the eve of a great battle, when a hot-footed messenger arrived to tell Raites that Randolph was preparing for hostilities against him, and earnestly urging his immediate return. "With the help of God," said Raites, "I will fight *this* battle and *that* too." Fortune was unpropitious, they were defeated, and the chief of Inverlochry was slain. Raites snatched up a spear, ere he quitted the field, broke it, and besmeared that and his battle-axe with the blood of his dying relation; and, on his return, he sent this ensanguined, fiery cross, surmounting his battle-axe, through the clan, as an imperative summons to war. The place of meeting was that immense Druidical cairn called *Cairnbar*, on the western summit of the high hill separating Daltlich from Lethen. The private password was, "*Live or die like a Cumin.*"

Raites, Gorm, Dunearn, and Dunlugas (or the Doune of Relugas), blazed forth their beacon-fires. Every clansman hurried to Cairnbar, and their ranks being quickly formed, their dauntless chief led them down the gentle slope towards Tarnawa, in full hope of surprising his enemy. All was still, not a movement indicated opposition till they reached Bogenkatt (now Whitemire), when Randolph, who had kept himself informed of all their motions, suddenly issued upon them from the ravine, with his men arranged in perfect order. Raites, seeing the ambush he had hurried into, endeavoured to fall back; but his error was irreparable. Randolph attacked his little army whilst in confusion, routed them, and Raites fell bravely fighting. He was buried on the field of battle, by Randolph, who, as his followers were heaping the cairn over the remains of his enemy, exclaimed, "There have I buried the *plague* of Moray!"—a speech which has given rise to a very extraordinary superstitious belief among the vulgar, that the *disease* has been actually buried there, and that, if the secret recesses of that grey cairn were laid open, it would burst forth, and spread death throughout the country.

The defeat of the Cumins would have become a complete route, but for the gallant conduct of Allister Bane, son of old Cumin of Dunphail, who collected and re-animated the fugitives, checked the enemy's pursuit, retreated in tolerable order towards Clune, and drew up his men on a rising ground where the farm house now stands, inaccessible to cavalry, and, on three sides, difficult of assault for foot soldiers. Here, for a short time, he put a stop to the slaughter; but, seeing himself likely to be surrounded in his position, he called out, "Let those who fear not to die follow Allister Bane!" and, waving his sword over his head, and rushing furiously upon his enemy, his clansmen poured

after him with enthusiastic cries, and in a moment they hewed for themselves an opening through their foes, and continued their retreat, with little loss, in the direction of Dunphail, till they reached the *Rait Cuack* of Ern (the narrow pass on the Findhorn), which they found pre-occupied by a strong detachment of Randolph's troops, who were posted on the opposite bank.

As the enemy were fast advancing on them behind, Allister Bane himself kept command of the rear, that he might hold them in check, whilst he ordered Cumin of Drummine to take the ford a little way above with his men, and to endeavour to dispossess the enemy of the pass. The river was instantly forded by Drummine's small body, and a desperate struggle ensued upon the rocks, and on the banks, between them and Randolph's detachment; whilst those of the enemy who had hotly followed the pursuit were pressing in numbers on the harassed Cumins from behind. They fell in numbers, covered with glorious wounds. The gallant Allister Bane fought manfully, and humanely aided the wounded in escaping through the shallow; whilst the ferocious followers of Randolph pushed them back with their long spears, and thrust down into the water the heads of those who were already gasping in death. At length, driven to desperation, he flung his standard across the narrow chasm among the combatants, and, calling out "Let the bravest keep it," he leaped the yawning gulph, cut his way desperately through the thickest of his enemies, with a few followers, and escaped towards the fastnesses of his father's domains.

It was by crossing this narrow and secret pass that Sir Andrew Murray retreated, undiscovered, from King Edward the Third's army, when that monarch came to relieve Lochindorbe Castle. Wyntoun describes the *carte de pays* with his usual accuracy, and then goes on to say—

—————"Thai had wyth thaim ane  
That kennyd hame a by way,  
That swyn down betwixt Craggys lay  
Throw that strayte rode;\* that I de wys  
Thai gat welle fra thare Innymys,  
And left nothir man na lad."

WYNTOUN, Book 8.

Although the opening at Randolph's Bridge expands as the rocks rise upwards, till the width is perhaps not less than 70 or

\* It is remarkable that the Gaelic words *Rait Cuack* are here literally translated by the historic poet.



80 feet above, yet, from the sudden turn the river takes as it enters this passage, the stream was so checked in its progress, that the flood actually rose over the very top of the rocks, 46 feet above the usual height, and inundated the level part of Rannoch Haugh that lies over them, to the depth of 4 feet, *making a total perpendicular rise, at this point, of no less than 50 feet.* I shall afterwards have occasion to describe the appearance of the flood itself, at this place, from my own observation.