

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE RIVER DIVIE—DUNPHAIL.

ABOUT 200 or 300 yards below the junction of the Divie and Dorback, a block of gneiss, containing 1000 cubic feet, and weighing about 100 tons, appears lying on a bare shelf of schistus (Plate XXI). There is no rock of precisely the same kind either on the spot or for a considerable distance above. This was not moved a hair's-breadth by the flood of the 3d and 4th. It is shaped with a remarkable projecting ledge near the base, which may have been thickly encrusted with a float of ice, and its specific gravity being thus so far overcome, its removal to its present position may be accounted for. Yet what must have been the power of that flood which brought it there?

Mr. Cumming Bruce's new house of Dunphail, already partly inhabited, and on the eve of being finished at the time of the floods, is admitted by all to be one of the happiest efforts of Mr. Playfair's classical taste. It stood on a wide lawn, retired about 50 feet from the verge of a bank in front, at the base of which was an old channel, where there was little water except in floods, and as rock appeared all along its bottom, it was conceived to be quite proof against encroachment. The proper and ordinary course of the river runs along the steep and wooded bank bounding the valley to the west, exactly 600 feet from the house, a fact which it is worth while to keep in view in forming an idea of what took place. The intermediate space was occupied by a broad, green, and partially wooded island, of some acres in extent.

About six o'clock in the evening of Monday the 3d, the river rose so much as to carry away two handsome wooden bridges, one for carriages and the other for foot passengers, and an embankment at the upper end of the island having given way, a mighty torrent poured down towards the house. The flood continued, and became so alarming that the carriage was ordered, and Mr. Cumming Bruce prevailed on his lady to leave Dunphail with her daughter. Previous to quitting the place,

their anxiety had been extremely excited for the fate of a favourite old pony, then at pasture in the island. As the spot had never been flooded in the memory of man, no one thought of removing him until it was too late. When the embankment gave way, and the patches of green gradually diminished, Dobbin, now in his twenty-seventh year, and in shape something like a 74-gun ship cut down to a frigate, was seen galloping about in great alarm, as the wreck of roots and trees floated past him, and as the last spot of grass disappeared, he was given up for lost. At this moment he made a desperate effort to cross the stream under the house—was turned head over heels by its force—rose again, with his head up the river—made boldly up against it, but was again borne down and turned over—every one believed him gone, when, rising once more, and setting down the waste of water, he crossed both torrents, and landed safely on the opposite bank.

After escorting the ladies to the house of a friend, Mr. Cumming Bruce returned to Dunphail at ten o'clock at night. He says there was something inexpressibly fearful and sublime in the roar of the torrent, which by this time filled the valley, the ceaseless plash of the rain, and the frequent and fitful gusts of the north wind that groaned among the woods. He found his people in great alarm. The river had now undermined the bank the house stood on, which had already been carried away to *within four paces of the foundation of the kitchen tower*, and as mass after mass fell with a thundering noise, some fine trees, which had stood for more than a century on the terrace above it, disappeared in the stream. The operations of the flood were only dimly discovered by throwing the faint light of their lanterns over its waters, and judged of by marking certain intervals of what remained of the terrace. One by one these fell in; and at about eleven o'clock they had the river still rising, and *only three yards space left to count on*.

The house was now considered as lost. The furniture was ordered to be removed, and, by means of carts and lanterns, this was effected without any loss, even in the most delicate ornamental moveables of a drawing-room. About one o'clock on Tuesday morning, the partial subsidence of the flood, mentioned elsewhere, awakened a slight hope; but it rose again in an hour, 2 feet higher than ever—came within 12 feet of the height of the bank, and must have been flowing 16 or 18 feet deep immediately below. The bank fell in *within one yard of the foundation of the east tower!* Mr. Cumming Bruce ordered every one to quit the building, and he and his people took their station at some distance to witness the fall of this beautiful

structure. But it pleased Providence to spare him so great an additional calamity. About four o'clock the clouds appeared lighter—the river again began to subside—by degrees a little sloping beach became visible towards the foot of the precipice—the flood ceased to undermine—and the house was saved.

The ruin and devastation of the place was dreadful. The shrubbery all along the river side, with its little hill and moss-house, had vanished; two stone and three wooden bridges were carried off; the beautiful fringe of wood on both sides of the river, with the ground it grew on, were washed to the ocean, together with all those sweet and pastoral projections of the fields, which gave so peaceful and fertile a character to the valley; whilst the once green island, robbed of its groups of trees, and furrowed by a dozen channels, was covered with large stones, gravel, and torn-up roots. The rock in the old channel had been rendered unavailing by the great quantity of gravel brought down, which raised the water over it, so that it acted against the superincumbent mass of mortary gravel that was incapable of resisting it; and thus the house was left in the midst of ruin—like a precious gem, the lustre and effect of which have been destroyed by its setting being injured, and the stone itself left in jeopardy. (Plate XXII.) "Dreadful, indeed," says Mrs. Cumming Bruce, feelingly, in a billet written in reply to our inquiries, "is the devastation that a few hours have wrought. But we must be thankful that all around us are safe. God's will be done. I daresay we were all too proud of the beauty of our valley—a beauty which we had not given, and could not take away, but which has vanished in an instant before His sweeping arm." Mr. Cumming Bruce's losses are given in at £5000.

The ruins of the castle of Dunphail crown a green and partially wooded conical hill, on the right bank of the river. A deep, narrow, and extremely romantic glen surrounds two-thirds of it, opening to the valley at either end, and isolating it entirely from its eastern bounding banks. This wears every character of an old bed of the Divie, though, even at its lower end, it cannot be less than 50 feet above the present level of the river. Two courses, intermediate between the ancient and modern beds of the stream, are quite apparent. Here the recent cut in the Dorback at the Rhymer's Hill very much enlightens us, by proving how soon such a course as this may have been abandoned, by the river finding softer materials, to work out to a lower level, in another direction. The same illustration will apply to the ravine of *Slochk-nan-cean*,\*

\* The hollow of the heads.



corrupted since the Gaelic language was lost in this parish, into Slaginnan, about half-a-mile farther down the river, on the right bank. This is one of the most Salvator Rosa looking chasms I ever beheld; precisely resembling the wildest and narrowest parts of the present bed of the Divie, though devoid of water. It has two entrances at the upper end, and the ancient courses which led the river into these successively, are easily traceable. The lower extremity of the ravine terminates abruptly over a steep rock, about 40 feet high above the Divie, that flows at its base. This spot is extremely interesting to the geologist, and very much so to the botanist. Nor is it less attractive to those who, from idleness, or an ardent love of Nature, take pleasure in following her into her most secluded haunts, where she most delights to luxuriate, for such could not fail to feel the enchantment of this wild and wizzard spot.

But Slochk-nan-cean has another source of interest, capable of producing a yet more general excitement. Near the upper end of the ravine, there is a curious cavern, formed of the huge masses of fallen crags that cover the bottom of the place. It enters downwards like a pit, and the mouth, which is no more than wide enough to admit a man, is not easily discovered. Here it was that the brave Allister Bane secreted himself after the battle of the lost standard.\* At this time the Castle of Dunphail was besieged by Randolph, Earl of Moray; and Allister Bane, who could no longer make head against him in the open field, contented himself with harassing the enemy. Knowing that his father and his garrison were reduced to great want, he and a few of his followers disguised themselves as country men, and driving a parcel of horses yoked in rude sledges, laden with sacks, they came to the edge of the glen, where Randolph's beleaguering party lay, and pretending to be peasants carrying meal from the low country to the Highlands, they entreated their protection for the night from one Allister Bane, of whom they were afraid. Their prayer being granted, they unyoked their horses, and took care to leave their sledges at the brink of the precipice, so that, on a given signal agreed on with the garrison, they tumbled sledges, sacks and all, over into the glen below, and the garrison making a sally at the same time, each man bore off a sack on his back, whilst the pretended peasants sprang on their horses, and were out of sight before the astonished sentinels of the enemy had well given the alarm.

Randolph was so provoked, on learning who the author of

\* See page 30.

this trick was, that he set a price upon his head. A certain private pique led a Cumin to betray his master's lurking place. His enemies hurried to the spot to make sure of their game; but, when they saw the small uncouth-looking aperture, they paused in a circle around it. One only could descend at a time, and the death of him who should attempt it was certain; for the red glare of Cumin's eye in the obscurity within, and the flash of his dirk-blade, shewed that he had wound up his dauntless soul to die with the "*courage!*" of the lion on his crest. They called on him to surrender at discretion. He replied, by hurling a deep note of defiance from the dark womb of the rocks, "Let me but come out, and, with my back at that craig, I will *live or die like a Cumin!*"—"No," exclaimed the leader of his foes, "thou shalt die like a fox as thou art!" Brushwood was quickly piled over the hole, but no word of entreaty for mercy ascended from below. Heap after heap was set fire to, and crammed blazing down upon him. His struggles to force a way upwards were easily repelled by those above, and, after a sufficient quantity of burning matter had been thrust in to insure his suffocation, they rolled stones over the mouth of the hole.

When the cruel deed was done, and the hole opened, Allister Bane was found, reclining in one corner, his head muffled in his plaid, and resting on the pommel of his sword, with two or three attendants around him, all dead. To make sure of them, their heads were cut off, and thrown, one after another, into the fortress, with this horrible taunt to the old man, "Your son has provided you with meal, and we now send you flesh to eat with it."\* The veteran warrior recognised the fair head of his son. "It is a bitter morsel indeed," said he, as he took it up, kissed it, and wept over it; "but I will gnaw the last bone of it before I surrender!"

A green mound outside the garden at Dunphail existed after the middle of the last century, and was known to be *the grave of the headless Cumins*. The estate was then in the family of the Dunbars, who rose on the ruins of the Cumins. Mr. Dunbar, intending to enlarge the garden, opened the mound, when five or six rudely constructed stone coffins were found, each containing a skeleton complete, with the exception of the skull.

\* From this has arisen the Morayshire proverb, employed in designating any action of revenge, "Beef for your bannocks, like the Cumin's head."



*Flood line 32 Feet*



*Flood line 40 Feet*