

The City of Perth, it is well known, was for long the seat of Government of this part of the now United Kingdom. Placed nearly in the centre of Scotland,—strongly walled and fortified,—the key to some of the principal passes to the Grampians, by which, alone, the arm of the law could keep under subjection, the powerful and turbulent spirit of the northern clans,—Perth was thus esteemed a place of no small importance; interposing a powerful barrier betwixt the northern and mountainous districts of the kingdom, and the more fertile and civilized plains of the south; taking a principal share in the (then) foreign commerce of the country; and, above all, affording, by means of its bridge, a safe and commodious medium of intercourse between the most distant parts of the kingdom.

The river Tay has its source on the borders of Argyleshire, but takes that name only upon its issuing from Loch Tay, a fresh-water lake, of about sixteen miles in length, and situated about 500 feet above the level of the sea; running thence eastward, between two of the ranges of the Grampians, and from them augmented by a number of rapid mountain streams, it assumes a southerly direction, in passing Perth; and again runs eastward, until it falls into the German Ocean; the length of its course being upwards of seventy miles. From the mountainous country, where it takes its rise, and through which it passes, collecting as

many tributary streams, it frequently swells to a magnitude, not to be anticipated from its general appearance, and acquires a velocity and impetus, the power of which would be difficult to calculate. Indeed, at all times the Tay pours more water into the ocean than any other river in the United Kingdom.

On a river of this magnitude and nature, forming so considerable a line of separation betwixt a great part of the north and south of Scotland; and which, during the time of its land floods and severe frosts of winter, presented such obstacles to the free intercourse of the country; it is no matter of surprise, that the erection of a bridge should have been early attempted, and when effected, should be duly valued. Accordingly, although the period of the first erection of a bridge over the Tay at Perth is not ascertained, it must have been very early, for that correct chronicler, Fordun, in his account of the great inundation which took place in Perth in the year 1210, says that it swept away not only houses, but *the bridge*, and an anciently founded chapel, which stood near to it. Of the subsequently erected bridges, it is not necessary to enter into any particular enquiry, farther than to mention, that the existence of one during the reign of Robert the Bruce, is proved by a charter granted by him to the town, on 29th June 1317. During the reign of King Robert the III., he, by charter, on 10th April 1395, bestowed the fines and amerciaments of the Justice Ayres, to the repairing and upholding of the bridge over the Tay at Perth; and by another charter, dated the 31st January 1405, granted £11 sterling, of the Burrow mails (duties payable to the crown), for the same purpose. King James the IV. confirmed the said grant on 18th June 1494; and King James the VI., by a charter, 15th November 1600, confirmed these grants, and added considerably thereto. The view taken at this latter period, of the importance of this bridge, cannot be more forcibly expressed, than in the words of the last-mentioned charter,—they are given from a translation made in 1653: “And because the bridge of our said Royal Burgh of Perth, which is called the bridge of Tay, is a most *precious jewel* of our kingdom, and a work not only profitable and pryncely necessary to our whole kingdom and dominion; and for the suppression of rebels and such as are viciously affected; most commendons, and also keeping the one-half thereof, in faith, obedience, and duty of office towards us, their King, in our kingdom and dominion.” And amongst other reasons for granting the privileges conferred, adds—“But also, the said bridge, as a public and common work, is edified and builded upon the common tribute and expenses of all the people and subjects of our kingdom and dominion.” This bridge, so highly and justly prized, was swept away by a land flood; the loss of which was severely felt. A public sub-

scription was immediately opened for rebuilding it. King James the VI. subscribed 100,000 merks, Prince Charles 10,000 merks, and the nobility and gentry of the kingdom followed the example. But the death of King James, and the difficulty of raising sufficient funds, left the country for more than a century, destitute of the advantage of a bridge over the Tay at Perth. After it fell, the communication on both sides of the river was kept up by boats, which the nature of the Tay not unfrequently impeded, for days: and in winter, for weeks together.

As the population and the commercial and political intercourse of the country increased, the want of this bridge came to be more and more felt, and at various periods attempts were made to effect the erection of a new bridge; but the want of public spirit, combined with the poverty of the country, rendered every effort abortive, until shortly after the middle of last century, when, by the strenuous exertions of that truly patriotic nobleman, Thomas, Eighth Earl of Kinnoull, the public attention was sensibly awakened to the subject. A subscription of new was set on foot, to which the principal nobility of Scotland, and others, liberally contributed. The community of Perth, and individual citizens, were not behind in their exertions, both personal and pecuniary; and such a sum was subscribed, as to induce an application for an act of Parliament, which was obtained in 1765, for erecting the present bridge. Still, however, the sum raised by subscription would have been totally inadequate to the purpose, had not government, strongly impressed with the utility and importance of the undertaking, come forward and granted *more than the one-half* of the expense of the erection.

The present bridge, under the direction of that eminent engineer, the late Mr John Smeaton, was commenced upon the 13th day of October 1766; and completed and opened to the public upon the 31st day of October 1771, at an expense of L.26,631, 12s. 5½d.; of this sum L.7290 was raised by subscription, L.5533, 12s. 5d. borrowed on the credit of the tolls, and repaid by the pontage, and the remaining L.13,800 given by Government. So large a sum, granted by government, in voluntary donation, demonstrates their view of the bridge as a national advantage, Considering the state of the country, the value and scarcity of money, at that period, the raising of L.7000, by voluntary subscription, is no less a proof of the opinion of the public. The pontage, continued from 1771 to 1788, which, at an average, produced L.750 per annum.

By the act of Parliament, the Bridge Commissioners were directed to raise a sum of L.1,500, the interest of which was annually to go for the future upholding of the bridge. This sum was accordingly raised and lodged in the hands of the Town of Perth; the interest thereof and

L.20 of yearly rent of what was formerly the pontage of the bridge. The sum expended for repairs during the first twenty years after its completion, from 1775 to 1794 inclusive, was L.528 14s, which, on a yearly average, is L.26 8s 8d annually. The sum laid out for the twenty years ending 1827, was L.1246 8s, or L.62 6s 5d yearly. Some years ago repairs were reported necessary to the extent of L.1000, of which L.700 was ordered. The fund for future provisions to this edifice has therefore, from necessities not provided for by the Act, become nearly if not altogether exhausted.

The only defect now found with the bridge, is its extreme narrowness for the present thoroughfare; and several plans have been suggested, at different periods, for widening it, by adding projected paths, which would give ten feet of additional width. A plan was some years ago procured from Mr Stevenson, civil engineer, with a state of the expense, which he then estimated at L.8000. On this it was proposed to apply for a new Act of Parliament to carry it into effect, but the proposal was opposed by many in the town and county. It is now generally believed, that a new act will be requisite, as the provisions and powers of the existing one is not now suited to the yearly wants of our good old bridge.

The bridge has hitherto been lighted at the joint expense of the Commissioners and the Magistrates. This, however, is optional on the part of the town, and hitherto been done solely to aid the bridge funds.

INUNDATIONS.

About two years after the bridge was finished, the strength of the building was put to the most severe test. In December 1773, a severe frost came on, followed by a heavy fall of snow during the month of January. On the 10th of that month, the Tay was frozen across to such a degree, that the spring tides had no influence in breaking the ice.— There was no thaw until the 11th of February succeeding, when the spring tides commenced. The thaw continued until the 16th, when the tide raised the ice about four feet, which loosed it at the sides; but when the tide fell back, the ice again fell down unbroken. Whilst the Tay remained in this condition, the other small rivers rose considerably, bringing down huge masses of ice, which began to make an impression on the river a little above the bridge. Fears were naturally entertained for its safety, particularly should the melting snow from the mountains swell the river, before the ice gave way below the bridge. At the time the river from below the mouth of Earn, up to above Luncarty, was one continued sheet of ice. The snow, however, swelled the river, as was dreaded, and tore the ice to pieces above the bridge. About mid-day

the water, denied a passage through the bridge, soon spread over the North Inch, broke down the wall at the head of it, lodging immense blocks of ice on the green, it tore up the trees along the Dunkeld road, which was rendered impassable; the town appeared to be situated on an island, as the water now ran furiously through the Castle-gable and north end of the Skinnergate, laying the houses completely under water. Many sick and infirm people had to be removed by boats. The water from the Inch now took its course through the Blackfriars ground, driving down a stone wall that ran through the middle of the grounds. It then directed its course up by the Mill-wynd, and in a few minutes laid the houses in that quarter upwards of six feet under water. In the New-row, the houses were inaccessible; the Hospital and the Spey Gardens were under water; and the tenants obliged to fly to the tops of their houses.

The first relief to the anxious inhabitants, was their observing the water, with the immense blocks of ice, breaking the stone walls of the Deadlands below the bridge; fortunately, the trees there prevented the pressure of the ice from sweeping the houses on the Deadlands into the river. By this time, the immense masses of floating ice were in tremendous motion towards that place, where it found a vent. This had an instant effect on the water above the bridge. Fortunately, a little after this, the ice at the back of the Barracks broke right across, which gave immediate relief to that quarter of the town; from three in the afternoon until nine at night, the confusion and alarm was extreme. At the latter hour, the ice above the bridge began to give way, with a terrible noise; the water rose some feet above the piers, carrying down immense blocks of ice. The parapet walls at the North Shore were broken down; the water rushed through the arches below the Council-house, and lodged large blocks of ice as far up the High-street as the first shop above the Skinnergate; many of the garden walls behind the houses in the Watergate were torn down.

In the year 1794, the Tay was frozen over for many weeks. Early in the spring the ice broke, but closed up again; the blocks of ice piling on one another, presented a very rough surface; in which state it continued till the middle of March. This rigorous season was severely felt by tradesmen, many of whom were prevented by the coldness of the weather from working. Masons and wrights were idle. The ground-stove, now in general use in weaving shops, was not then introduced, so that weavers were obliged to give up work. The dressing, when put on the brushes, froze instantly; and when they did succeed on getting it on the yarn, it became hard as wire, and perfectly unmanageable;—thus many poor

families suffered greatly during this long and severe winter. When the thaw set in, the melting snow and ice rushed down from the hills in an immense flood, presenting a formidable spectacle when viewed from the bridge. The principal damage done by the flood was amongst the vessels lying in the river, some of which had their bows cut by the vast floating masses of ice.

In 1814, the river was again frozen for some weeks. At the close of the storm, the mild weather set in very gradually; the low country being nearly clear of ice before the hills were affected; the consequence was, that although the ice broke up, there was not a sufficient current of water to carry it off. Below the bridge, the ice remained entire; whilst above, it broke and closed up the arches of the bridge. In this state it remained for some time; the thaw having at length commenced in the hills, the water suddenly rose to a great height, bringing down immense masses of ice, which were piled up at the bridge, and all passage for the water was entirely shut up. About twelve o'clock at night, the whole water in the Tay directed its course across the North Inch, flooding Rose Terrace and the street behind, the Castle-gable, the Skinnergate, the foot of the High-street, and Prince's-street. The Edinburgh road, through the South Inch, was so much under water, that the mail had to be conveyed by the Leonards and Craigie, to the Upper Friarton. On the west side of the town, the Newrow and Hospital gardens were completely inundated. One family living in a gardener's house behind Marshall Place, had to take refuge from the swelling flood on the top of the house, until relieved in the morning. In Rose Terrace, a supper party were enjoying themselves, when their mirth was unexpectedly interrupted. An old gentleman was in the act of digesting his supper, and refreshing his juvenile recollections by the performance of *Shantruse*, when the water burst in upon them. The party immediately endeavoured to escape by the back door, but here they were met by an equally strong current; and it was with difficulty they got up stairs. The water continued to rise through the night; in the morning it was sufficiently high to float boats along the Terrace. Many families, in the general alarm, removed from their houses; even several who occupied the upper flats of the Terrace. To those who remained, supplies were brought by boats. In this state the water continued to flow during the whole day. After midnight the ice at the first arch of the bridge began to give way, when the whole current of the river rushed through with an impetuosity which caused the entire fabric of the bridge to tremble, hurling down in its fury the immense blocks of ice which had impeded its course. Goods which were lodged in low lying warehouses and cellars, were greatly

damaged or entirely destroyed ; five vessels were also thrown out of the river upon the Coal Shore, which had to be relaunched. When the flood subsided, the North Inch was left covered with masses of ice to the depth of six feet. From the quantity of ice, it was feared the summer pasturage would be worth little or nothing ; but under the genial influence of the spring sun and western breeze, the ice rapidly disappeared, and a finer crop of grass has not since been on the Inches.

Owing to the extent of the mountain ranges, of whose waters it is the common outlet, the Tay is very subject to sudden overflowings. Occasionally the river has been known to rise 15 feet perpendicular height above the ordinary level of the stream, on which occasions the Inches and the lower streets of the town are under water, exhibiting, as viewed from the bridge, a majestic stream, though not affording a very comfortable subject of contemplation.

FIRES.

Whether the calamity by fire has been spared to Perth, from a want of fuel, or from the general attention of its inhabitants, is not easy to determine. This, however, is true, that on comparison with other places, it will be found that the city, considering its crowded buildings and population, has been singularly fortunate.

About the year 1765, a fire broke out on the south side of the High-street, a little below the Meal-vennel, which consumed the whole line of the street, between the Meal and the Guard-vennels. The loss of movable property was great, in addition to the loss of lives. The day following nine bodies were dug out of the ruins black as jet, and shockingly scorched ; presenting an appalling sight. Their remains were very properly hid from their female friends, but sufficiently identified by neighbours. In the course of the afternoon, the bodies were placed in a large coffin, and attended to the grave by hundreds of the inhabitants. At the time this fire broke out, an old man named Thomas Saddler, a wright, who lived on the opposite side of the street, was confined to bed in the height of a fever. On the alarm of fire, all the attendants ran out, and left the sick man, delirious as he was, under the charge of his wife. Understanding there was a fire, he got up in spite of her exertions, and rushed out. To her astonishment, the next sight she got of him was on the top of the chimney of one of the burning houses ; and every attempt to get him down was unsuccessful. When the fire was subdued, he returned ; when to their joy, they discovered that, although exceedingly weak, the fever had left him.

Instances of fever having been subdued by strange and sometimes simple means, have frequently occurred. One of these, although unconnected with the subject of fires, may here be mentioned, as it occurred in the same close with the above. At a later period, the employer of the above-mentioned individual was attacked by fever, and rendered delirious to such a degree as to require considerable exertion to keep him in bed. During one of these violent fits, Dr Wood happened to visit him, when the patient called out, "Oh man, do you sell any porter here; I would give a shilling for a bottle of good porter." On this subject he raved for a considerable time, when the Doctor ordered him a bottle, which he emptied at a draught, declaring it to be the best he ever drank in his life. He immediately afterwards fell into a sound sleep, which continued some hours. When he awoke, to the joyful surprise of his family he appeared quite composed, without any symptom of fever, but very weak.

Shortly after the above fire, another took place in the inn that stood on the piece of ground, now called County Place, kept by one Luckie Waterston, frequented by all travellers, and jolly fellows of the town. In these days smuggling was carried on to a great extent, in which Luckie, like her neighbours, joined. A vessel from Holland had arrived, and she, with the aid of a trust worthy character, smuggled up quantities of gin and brandy, which were placed into her cellar. In the course of the afternoon, this precious store was inspected by the light of a candle, which was incautiously placed on the side of a bottle rack, and left to guide the bearers of the succeeding burden of contraband. Luckie and her servant had left the inn for the harbour, where the vessel was lying; but, during their absence, the candle kindled the rack, which soon communicated to the spirits, and blew up with a tremendous explosion. The furniture was scattered, and several persons barely escaped with life.

About the year 1777, a fire also broke out in Leonard-street during the night, which consumed six houses. One old man, who was in bed, was so severely burnt, that he died within a few hours afterwards. The whole of the families escaped with life, but lost all their property, for whose relief collections were made at all the church doors on the ensuing Sunday, which yielded the greatest sum at that time known.—About the year 1786, a large house in a garden, now part of the Salutation inn, was consumed, and an old lady's maid burnt to death. Soon after that, one of the houses in Canal-street, then occupied as a lodging-house, was burnt down. About the year 1788, a house in Bridgend was discovered by a debtor from the jail window, to be on fire; but before assistance could be rendered, the whole was consumed, with the loss of seven lives. Some of the bodies presented a shocking spectacle. About

the year 1794, that house occupied by Mr George Gray, at the foot of South-street, was discovered to be on fire early one morning: the walls were left standing, but no lives lost.

During the late war, whilst the yeomanry were embodied, that range of stables belonging to the Salutation Inn, on the north side of Canal Street, was discovered to be on fire. The premises were employed at the time as a store for grain: in the upper part of them were lodged the yeomanry stores; part of these consisted of barrels of blank cartridges, barrels of ball cartridges, and a few barrels of gunpowder. The fire soon made rapid progress, and was fast approaching the critical spot where the powder was lodged. A general panic seized the people, who became alarmed lest the whole should explode, to the injury of life and the neighbouring properties; no one was inclined to hazard his life in the perilous task of attempting to remove the cause of danger; which in a few minutes would have proved disastrous. In this dilemma, a butcher, named Robert Fenton, boldly rushed forward through the fire, and, by extraordinary exertions, succeeded in throwing the whole combustible materials out at a window, which happily relieved the public mind from intense anxiety; and saved much property from certain destruction.—Fenton was not rewarded. His conduct at least justified some verbal acknowledgment; but cheap as this was, it was not even given.

In 1816, the George Inn stables were burnt down, and twelve fine horses destroyed. One of the hostlers who slept in a room immediately above the entry to the stables, was buried in such a profound sleep, that all the noise and confusion created by the fire, the rattling of the engines, and the noise and shouts of the people, never once disturbed him; and it was with no small amazement he beheld, when he awoke in the morning, the fearful changes which had occurred during the night. This outdoes the case of the man who fell asleep in the inside of a steam-boiler, while his fellow workmen were ringing on it with sledge hammers, rivetting the plates.

In 1823, the old Grammar-school in School-vennel, was burned down. In 1831, a wright's shop in the Kirk-close was destroyed. A young woman died shortly after, from over-exertion in carrying water to extinguish the fire. In 1834, an old property at the foot of the High-street was discovered on fire about midnight; the whole tenement was consumed, and still lies in ruins. Fortunately no lives were lost. This was succeeded by one at County-place, early one afternoon; which suddenly broke out, and burnt with such fury, that besides loss of property, it recorded the death of an old respectable citizen, the father of Mr Menzies, County-place. His remains were some days after attended to

the grave by a numerous body of gentlemen. During the night of 12th January 1836, a building in Parliament-close, occupied as a bakehouse and tinsmith's shop, was burned down. Fortunately no lives were endangered; and the night being calm, the fire was confined to the building in which it originated.

Besides the destruction of buildings above recorded, much loss of life has occurred, especially of children, by their clothes taking fire, from the light and combustible nature of their dress; and it cannot be too much deplored that the effects of fashion are so strong as to overcome the dictates of prudence and maternal solicitude. An upper garment of any of the countless varieties of woollen fabrics, or of its combinations with other materials, would afford complete security against this most distressing calamity. A lamentable case occurred some years ago, which throws some interesting light upon the nature of our physiology. A woman, whose clothes had taken fire, was so severely scorched, that the skin of her entire body was blackened and destroyed; yet the unfortunate woman survived about thirty-six hours, without experiencing any acute pain; her sensations indicating no more than a slight degree of uneasiness. It is thus evident, that the beneficent Author of our being has bestowed on his creatures no more of the sensation of pain than is necessary for self preservation, or to excite a curative re-action, in the case of partial injuries.

After giving an account of the fires, it may not be improper to insert the *Regulations for the Fire Engine Establishment*. The master of the engines has the entire management of them, and it is his duty to see that every thing about them is in proper working order. He has to enter into a book every fire that the engines are called to, to whom the property belongs, with whom it is insured, what time was occupied in extinguishing, the expense incurred, and the number of extra men employed. He has also to enter the names of the men who have conducted themselves meritoriously at the fire. It is his duty to call out the men to quarterly drills, and intimate to the Magistrates when and where the same is to take place. The superintendent of police, with as many men as he can spare, has to attend all fires, to preserve order and protect the property. On a fire breaking out or an alarm being given, the watchman in whose district it happens, must communicate the intelligence to the Police Office in the quickest possible way; he must alarm the firemen in his vicinity, and proceed to the office to receive the instructions of the superintendent. Those engaged as firemen are required to give in their name and place of abode to the Police Office, that their

address may be known to the police officers. They must be punctual in attendance on drills, and prompt in turning out to fires, but on no account to turn out without their badge on their hat or cap. Firemen's wages are—first hour, 3s; for each succeeding hour, 1s.; for false alarm, if given by watchmen, and the firemen arrive at the engine house fifteen minutes after it is given, they shall receive 1s. Extra or supernumerary men, for first and second hour, 1s; each succeeding hour, 6d. Those firemen only, who arrive at the fire within the first half hour from the time the engine leaves the house, are paid for the first hour; those who arrive within the second half hour, will only be paid 1s 6d. Any of the firemen who absent themselves altogether from a fire, without being able to give a satisfactory excuse, or come in a state of intoxication, or be disobedient to orders, are liable to a fine of 1s; and on a third offence are dismissed from the service. Those who distinguish themselves by prompt and meritorious conduct at the fires, on the recommendation of the engine master and superintendent of police, receive a gratuity from Magistrates over and above their pay.