

CHAPTER III.

THE RIVER FINDHORN, FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO DULSIE BRIDGE.

THE River Findhorn rises from a wide morass, covering the flat summit of a mountain in the midst of the Monadh-leadh group, and runs through a direct line of country of not less than sixty miles, its sinuosities being about thirty more. Perhaps no river of the same size in Great Britain possesses so exquisite, so continued, and yet so varied, a range of scenery as it does, from within a few miles of its source till it approaches the sea-port to

h it gives its name. After leaving its bleak parent hill, it through a deep ravine in the primitive rocks, whence it rs a beautiful pastoral glen and valley, bounded by steep high mountains, with occasional rocky faces, but generally red with a rich and valuable herbage. From all I could 1, the rain on the 2d, 3d, and 4th of August was without llet in these regions. The damage done by the river and tributaries was immense; but the manner in which the ruccion was scattered renders it impossible to attempt any il of it. I may mention, however, that the wool-house of gan, with the whole shearing of wool, was carried off.

Lower down, where the valley becomes generally cultivated, estates of Dalmigavie, on the right bank, and Killochie, on left, suffered severely. These are small Highland properties, the farms poor; but the calamity is not lessened by such siderations; on the contrary, the catalogue of human misery eatly swelled by these very circumstances, where, in many nces, nearly the whole crops of corn and potatoes were oyed. The property of Mr. Mackintosh of Balnespick has injured very extensively. At the farm of Clunes the burn t through the garden; and the Findhorn, abandoning its se altogether, cut an entirely new channel for itself, for at a quarter of a mile in length, and at the distance of not than 200 yards from its former run, isolating a fine alluvial and utterly ruining its surface. To judge of the injury a land estate has received, merely by counting the number of lost, and estimating their value, would be very erroneous. h depends on the shape and situation of the ground carried t. A few acres cut off a compact and extensive arable farm e but the loss of so many acres, at a certain given price per

But in these Highland districts, half of a small field 3 swept away may render the remainder of it altogether ss; and one or two instances of this kind occurring on the 3 farm may make it quite untenable. The number of acres ed off from the estates I have mentioned was very consider-

The river indeed filled the valley, though, in some places, much less than half-a-mile wide; and the tributary burns oyed all the small bridges and conduits on the district s. The little burn of Aultaneachgra, coming in from the did a world of mischief in a small space, filling up and ng the dams and water-courses of its carding and meal , injuring the houses and machinery, and leaving all in a of silent, melancholy, and motionless ruin. Where the joins the river the valley was one sea, and at least twenty of crop and land were ruined or carried off. A little below

this point the side of a wooded hill, 80 or 100 feet high, slid down at once, owing to the soaking rain loosening the soil behind ; and the great public road was covered with the debris, and with large trees, many of them in the growing position. It is worth remarking that the materials of this hill were naturally quite dry.

We now come to the site of the old Bridge of Corrybrugh, or, as more commonly called, the Bridge of Freeburn. It consisted of three large arches, and nothing now remains but the ruins of the two land abutments. A horizontal crack in the masonry, running quite back into the north-east wing-wall (Plate VII.), from the fractured arch, manifestly shows that the mass above was lifted up like the lid of a chest, and then dropped into its place again after the fall of the arch. The people told me that the arches were quite full, and the crack bears witness that at least the arch next to it was raised in the air by the upward force of the flood. Though the space the Findhorn filled here was not less than 200 yards, yet it was 17 feet above its usual level. But it is probable that the river was much higher in the middle ; for, in violent floods, the fury of a stream is so great, that, in whatsoever direction it sets, the water is raised many feet above the other parts of the same cross section. The middle arch of the bridge fell early in the night between the 3d and 4th, and the others towards morning. A poor woman, whose daughter had crossed the river on some errand, was driven almost distracted by the belief that she was lost, but was happily relieved when the subsidence of the stream admitted of the girl's return. It was gratifying to see the activity of the agents of the Parliamentary Commissioners for Highland Roads and Bridges, who had already nearly completed a substantial wooden bridge, a little below the ruins, to act as a temporary passage for the great Highland road over this rapid stream. Its structure seemed to be a good deal like that of Cæsar's famous bridge over the Rhine. Though the scenery here is by no means ugly, yet, unfortunately for travellers, it is the only part of the whole river that is not highly romantic, till it reaches the cultivated plain of Forres.

The estate of Tomatin, on the left bank, was chiefly injured in crop and grass. The flood covered the greater part of the extended flat where the house stands ; but though it threatened the mansion, it did little harm.

The landlord of the inn told me that there were showers on Sunday the 2d, and during the night ; but that "the serious rain," as he called it, did not come on until Monday morning, about eight o'clock, when "the water fell from the heavens more



tremendously than he had ever seen it fall in his life before." Here, as elsewhere, it was accompanied by a violent north-east wind, and it continued till about four o'clock on Tuesday evening. The Findhorn and its tributaries were all up by twelve o'clock on Monday; but the flood did not reach its height till early on the morning of Tuesday, when it continued till twelve o'clock, without diminution. So tremendous was the rain that it penetrated by every door, window, and chimney in the house, and even through places where no crevice was suspected. The floors of the lower rooms were actually covered with three inches of water from the rain alone; and the servants were employed during the greater part of Monday and Tuesday in carrying it out in tubs and buckets. The cattle in their stalls were standing knee-deep in water, from the deluge that poured on them through the roofs; and the poor animals were nearly starved, for the people who were sent to cut a few bunches of green corn, that they might not be altogether without food, were actually unable to remain out under the fearful torrent that fell from the sky. The landlord told me that he lost many acres of land from his extensive grazing farm, by the operation of the burn of Freeburn; of these, however, not more than six or eight were arable. Two fine bridges, near the inn, were carried away by tributary streams.

Below Freeburn, the valley expands to so great a width that it may be called a plain, the dimensions of which may be $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles long, by $\frac{2}{3}$ of a mile broad. The lower end of it is blocked up by the hill of Pollochcock, or the Barns. From the marks of terraces appearing along the bases of the hills on both sides (Plate VIII.), I am disposed to think this must have been an ancient lake; and if so, the late floods restored it to its pristine character whilst they endured. The river changed its course in several places here, ruined the crop on Mackintosh of Mackintosh's farms of Invering, carried about eight acres of land entirely away, and damaged and scarified about twenty acres more. I had William Clarke, the Tomatin gamekeeper, with me as a guide. He is a native of this valley, and his natural shrewdness has been sharpened up by his long service in the 42d Regiment, in which, after seeing enough both of life and death, he lost an eye. From him I learned that the Loch of Moy, which discharges itself into the Findhorn from the left, by the burn of Fuantack, was much affected by the flood. The late Sir Æneas Mackintosh reduced the level of the lake by cutting a canal, at the expense of £1000. But the burn of Dalmigarry, rushing furiously from the hills, on the late occasion, filled up the canal with debris, stopped the vent of the

lake, raised it about thirteen feet, and inundated the sunk storey of Moyhall. If the veteran gamekeeper is correct, the levels hereabouts are very remarkable. Were it possible to erect a bulwark eighteen feet high, so as to arrest the Findhorn where it now leaves the plain, its waters, it is said, would be forced up the Fuantack, through the Loch of Moy, and so down into the River Nairn; and it appears probable that such may have been the run of the water when the ancient lake existed.

The hill of the Barns forms the upper boundary of the highly interesting pastoral district called the Streens, the entrance to which, at Eanack, is one of the most romantic passes that can be imagined. We had now a range of eight miles of very uncommon scenery before us. The glen is everywhere extremely narrow, and it has the appearance of being still more so than it really is, from the height and steep acclivity of the mountain faces, forming its boundary wall on either side. From these, picturesque rocks are frequently seen to jut out, and in many places they are seared with tributary ravines, tufted here and there with birches, which, except in such accidental spots, are kept under by the browsing of animals, "being," as Clarke told me, "very *wishful* to grow if the sheep and cattle wad but let them." The course of the glen, too, is winding, every turn opening on a new scene, where the simple buildings of a little farm appear perched on some knoll. A mere track runs, like those of Switzerland, winding along the mountain sides, and crossing the glen so often, that we forded the Findhorn no less than five times during our passage through the district.

Immediately within the pass, and on the right bank, stand the ruins of the interesting little mansion-house of Pollochock. Macqueen, the laird of this little property, is said to have been nearer seven than six feet high, proportionably built, and active as a roe-buck. Though he was alive within half a-century, it is said that in his youth he killed the last wolf that infested this district*. The prevailing story is this:—

A poor woman, crossing the mountains with two children, was assailed by the wolf, and her infants devoured, and she escaped with difficulty to Moyhall. The chief of Mackintosh no sooner heard of the tragical fate of the babes, than, moved by pity and rage, he dispatched orders to his clan and vassals to assemble the next day at twelve o'clock to proceed in a body to destroy the wolf. Pollochock was one of those vassals, and being

* Wolves are believed to have been extirpated in Scotland about the year 1680, but there is reason to suppose that they partially existed in remote districts considerably after that period.

then in the vigour of youth, and possessed of gigantic strength and determined courage, his appearance was eagerly looked for to take a lead in the enterprise. But the hour came, and all were assembled except him to whom they most trusted. Unwilling to go without him, the impatient chief fretted and fumed through the hall; till at length, about an hour after the appointed time, in stalked Pollochoc, dressed in his full Highland attire; "I am little used to wait thus for any man," exclaimed the chafed chieftain, "and still less for thee, Pollochoc, especially when such game is a-foot as we are boune after!" "What sort o' game are ye after, Mackintosh?" said Pollochoc simply, and not quite understanding his allusion. "The wolf, sir," replied Mackintosh; "did not my messenger instruct you?" "Ou aye, that's true," answered Pollochoc, with a good humoured smile; "troth I had forgotten. But an that be a'," continued he, groping with his right hand among the ample folds of his plaid, "there's the wolf's head!" Exclamations of astonishment and admiration burst from chief and clansmen as he held out the grim and bloody head of the monster at arm's length, for the gratification of those who crowded around him. "As I came through the slochk*, by east the hill there," said he, as if talking of some everyday occurrence, "I forgathered wi' the beast. My long dog there turned him. I buckled wi' him, and dirkit him, and syne whuttled his craig, and brought awa' his countenance, for fear he might come alive again; for they are very precarious creatures." "My noble Pollochoc!" cried the chief in ecstasy; "the deed was worthy of thee! In memorial of thy hardihood, I here bestow upon thee Seannachan, to yield meal for thy good greyhound in all time coming."

Seannachan, or "the old field," is directly opposite to Pollochoc. The ten acres, of which it consisted, were entirely destroyed by the flood. The tenant was a drover, who, having failed in business, retired to this small spot, which was barely enough to keep body and soul together. Despair came upon him with this fresh ruin; he took to his bed, and, at the time I was there, he was supposed to be dying.

The spouts of rain on the 3d and 4th converted every dry scar on the mountain faces into a torrent, which soon cut it into a ravine, and covered an acre or two of the slope below with huge stones and heaps of gravel, to the depth of many feet. In two places, where the hill-side was formerly quite entire, it was torn open, and fragments of detached rocks, eight or ten tons in weight, were thus dislodged and thrown down. How

* Hollow or ravine.

sublime must the scenery of the glen have appeared, when the river was roaring furiously over the whole of the level bottom, the rocks and hills everywhere sheeted with cataracts, whilst these huge masses were tumbling headlong from their beds, with a thunder even louder than that of the river!

We now come to Lord Cawdor's property; and, a little further down, I stopped at the farm-house of Cuilliachan, situated on a rising ground. It is tenanted by Mr. Mackintosh, usually called Cuilliachan, who, though he lives very much in the aboriginal style, has yet met me more than once at his door with a hearty welcome. He is now a very old man; but a few years ago, he could breast a hill without either stocking or shoe to his foot, and without drawing his breath one degree beyond an ordinary inspiration. He has long been considered as a sort of viceroy in this romantic territory. He told me he well remembered the great flood of 1782. I insisted that it must have been the still greater flood of 1768 that he meant. But whether it was 1768, as I suspect, or 1782, as he asserted, he positively declared that any thing like the rain or the flood of the 3d and 4th August last he had never seen. "No! nor any one," as he added, "of the oldest people in the glen!" an addition, by the way, that was quite unnecessary, as there could scarcely be any older than himself. He assured me, that the flood of the 3d and 4th was at least five or six feet higher than any flood he had ever seen in his native Findhorn; which, considering that the river filled the whole width of the glen, there 200 or 300 yards wide, was an amazing difference. Yet old people are not wont to exaggerate modern events at the expense of those of the olden time. From his own observations, he was inclined to think, that on the recent occasion the flood in the Streens was from 15 to 25 feet above ordinary level, according to the width of the different places measured.

Cuilliachan's own farm suffered very much. His crop of twenty acres was annihilated, his garden nearly carried away, and the whole surface of his land more or less injured.

It was melancholy to behold the devastation committed by the flood on every little farm we passed, some of which were really altogether ruined by the annihilation of half their arable land. That of Dalless, for instance, lost no less than seventeen acres. The river having filled the glen from side to side, the whole crop in the bottom was necessarily destroyed, and misery and wretchedness everywhere appeared. The farm of Easter Tchirfogrein, or, "The place hid from the sun," on the right bank, was so called, with the usual accuracy of Gaelic definition, because the height and acclivity of the mountains hardly ever

permitted the orb of day to look upon the house, which, with its offices, stood on a level haugh, 12 feet above the usual surface of the river, and 80 or 100 horizontal yards from the edge of it. From the northern mountain side where we rode, Cuilliachan descried William Fraser, son of the widow who held this farm, and raising a shout that did ample credit to the soundness of his veteran lungs, by making the whole glen ring again, he called him to come across the river, which the poor fellow instantly waded, and gave me his whole melancholy story. On the evening of Monday the 3d, the river rose, and came down roaring tremendously; soon overtopped the bank; and, speedily covering the level ground above, surrounded the houses with three feet deep of water by the time it became dark. Meanwhile, the stream was rapidly, though invisibly, sweeping away the alluvial plain they stood on. Becoming alarmed at length, he and his brother quickly got out their sister and their poor old mother, who, to use his own expression, "could do naething for hirsell," and carried them through the water to the hill-side. They had no sooner reached it, than, "amidst the gloom of the night and the glare of the water," they saw their dwelling-house and other buildings, one by one, disappear. Luckily they had got out their cattle; but, excepting their lives, and the clothes on their backs, every thing else was lost. Next morning the only vestige remaining of their residence, was the one-end of a cow-house (Plate IX). Their whole crop was gone; five or six acres of their arable land had disappeared, and the rest was ruined by deep deposits of sand and gravel. Cuilliachan told me that this was one of the best *plenished** houses in the whole Streens. The great store-chest, full of meal, by some accident, floated across the river, and having settled on an opposite bank, it was descried by Fraser in the morning. For some time he looked at it with longing eyes; but a remorseless eddy at length displacing it, he had the mortification to see it sweep away. It was seen at the mouth of the Findhorn, about twenty-seven miles below, after having run through the perilous gauntlet of rocks that lined its way thither, with only an inch in thickness of the outer part of the meal moistened. I am sorry to say, however, that the chest and its contents never reached the owner; yet whilst I state this, it is gratifying to assert that this is the only instance of dishonesty I have to record.

But I have not yet done with these poor Frasers, who took refuge, where they had lived a short time before, at the farm of Knockandhu, to the eastward. The house here stood about 21

* *Anglice*, Furnished.

yards from the edge of a bank 80 or 100 feet high above the Findhorn. Here, at least, they deemed themselves secure. But down came the river in the flood of the 27th, and finding the base of this lofty bank already scarified, it attacked, undermined, and tumbled it down in enormous masses, with a noise like volleys of artillery, and the level at top disappeared so rapidly, that the poor people were again compelled to flee in the greatest alarm. As it happened, the flood subsided, and the houses were not hurled over; but they were left near the brink of a raw, red, perpendicular precipice, presenting a most alarming appearance when viewed, as I saw it, from the opposite side (Plate X).

The farms of Dalbuie and Banchar had about 10 acres of valuable land carried off. The river completely sanded up its channel there, and dug out an entirely new course for a great distance, removing the whole surface of the intervening haugh, one of the most beautiful in the Streens. These may serve as samples of the ruin created in this once beautiful and happy district. The rent of Lord Cawdor's part of it was about £278. But at least 40 arable acres have been snatched from it by the river, and much of the rest of it destroyed. The factor considers that twenty times the sum would do little towards producing anything like security to the property that remains, along an extent of more than five miles, where the narrow grounds are more or less damaged all the way. But, indeed, the difficulty of access, and want of materials, must forbid any attempt at general protection. From the complete loss of their winter provender, the poor tenants were compelled to sell off their cattle. Though the sum-total of their damage would not appear great, yet it has been ruinous to them; and the loss sustained by the landlord has been estimated at about £6000.

The farms on the Lethen estate, between the Streens and Dulsie Bridge, were cut up in a similar way. About 17 acres were ruined or carried off from three of them, of no great size.