

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIVERS DIVIE AND FINDHORN—RELUGAS—AND TO THE CRAIG OF COULTERNOSE.

ENTERING the Relugas property from the Dunphail march, a branch of the pleasure-walks led down the left bank of the Divie, for above two miles, quite to the point of its junction with the Findhorn. Having had some severe lessons from former floods, especial care had been taken to conduct the line at an elevation, considered by every one to be quite beyond all risk of injury. The rocks and recesses of the wooded banks, and the little grassy slopes, were covered in a wild way with many thousand shrubs, of all kinds, especially with laurels, rhododendrons, azaleas, lilacs, and a profusion of roses, which were thriving vigorously, and beginning to bear blossoms, whilst the rocks were covered with the different saxifrages, hung with all sorts of creepers, and enamelled with a variety of garden flowers, all growing artlessly, as if sown by the hand of Nature. The path was therefore considered to be not unworthy of the exquisite scenery through which it led. But the flood of the 3d and 4th of August left not one fragment of it remaining, from one end to the other. Not a tree, or shrub, or flower, or piece of soil, nay, or of moss or lichen, is to be seen beneath that boldly and sublimely sketched line of flood, that appears on either side, and from end to end of these rocks, like the awful handwriting of God on the wall.

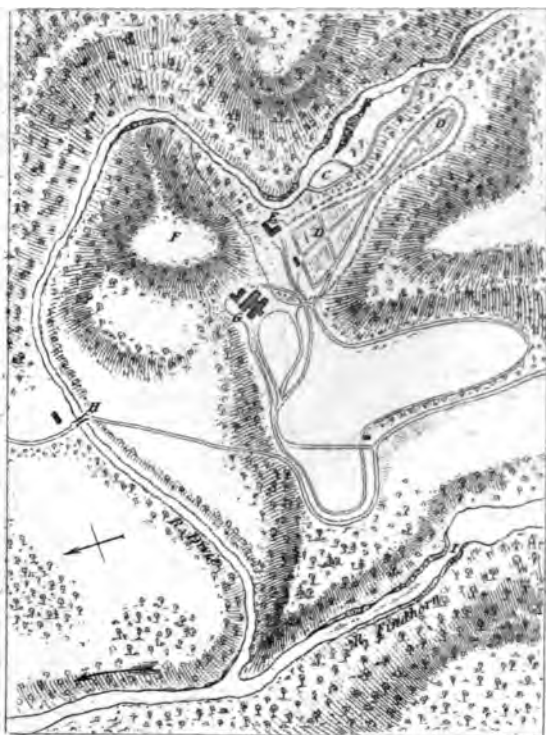
At one point the river is compelled to make a sudden turn to the right, and round a towering rock, by a narrow gorge, called The Gallery, from the walk having been there cut along the crag in that form. This narrow pass was quite unable to receive the body of water brought down by the flood, great part of which breached over the neck of the isthmus to the left of the rock (right of the sketch, Plate XXIII.), and, falling again into the main stream below, down an alluvial bank 32 feet high, cut it backwards for 30 or 40 horizontal feet; and, if the flood had lasted but a few hours longer, our experience of the cut of the Dorback tells us, that the whole isthmus of 30 yards wide, must have been opened up as a direct course for the river, and the gorge left as another Slaginnan. A number of trouts were left by the flood, on the top of the neck of land.

On Sunday the 2d of August, I returned from church by the

river-walk. The day was sultry and cloudy, and a gentle shower began to fall, which hardly penetrated the canopy of leaves overhead, and but added freshness to the surrounding natural objects, and especially to the roses and rhododendrons that were flowering among the rocks. The generally confined channel of the river is particularly narrow at the waterfall, about 400 yards above the house, but widens immediately below the mouth of the ravine, at the place called Macrae's Loup.* (Plate XXIV.) Below this, a part of the water was led off to the left as a mill-stream. This, which surrounded a large piece of ground called the Mill Island (see Sketch of the pleasure grounds, Plate XXV.), was retained, as a fine feature in the scene, at the time the mill itself was removed as a nuisance. It ran peacefully along the base of a superbly wooded bank, sloping down from the garden above, where the trees of all kinds grew 80 feet or more in height, and so thick, as to produce an impenetrable shade. The side of the Mill Island next the river was defended by a spine of wooded rocks, rising abruptly, and terminating at the upper end in a picturesque castellated mass, called the Otter's Rock, 24½ feet high above the surface of the water. On the Mill Island itself the greatest care was lavished, the peaceful mill-stream, the lawny grass glades, the winding walks, and the rocky ridges, having been adorned with all that was most rare, till it was converted into a spot of delightful retirement. At its lower extremity the mill-stream returned into the river over a broken cascade, crossed by picturesque bridges, where a little rustic Doric temple, partly constructed of masonry, and partly of unpeeled spruce trees, occupied an isolated rock. Into this I was driven for shelter, by the shower increasing, and this was the beginning of the rain that continued, without intermission, all that night, and for the next two days.

The chief part of the pleasure-grounds of Relugas occupies the peninsula, bounded to the east by the Divie, and to the west by the Findhorn. The house stands on a terrace facing the west, in which direction the lawn stretches towards the Findhorn. The south front looks over the whole length of the garden below, extending up the glen of the Divie, and immediately above the wooded bank already mentioned, as sloping from it into the Mill Island. At the back of the house, a picturesque conical wooded hill, called the Doune, rises to the east.

* So called, from a gentlemen who used, for his amusement, to stand on the jutting rock on the right bank (left side of the Sketch), thirty-two feet above the surface of the river, jump into the deep and narrow abyss below, and swim down through the wild gorge below.



*A. Macrae's Loup. B. Otters rock. C. C. Mill Island.
D. D. Garden. E. Stables. F. Dunne. G. The House.
H. The Bridge of Divie. I. Randolphs Bridge.*

The Divie, coming from the south, strikes against the southern base of this hill, directly after skirting the whole length of the Mill Island, and then turns abruptly off to the eastward at a right angle; and, immediately above this point, the stables and other offices stand, 40 feet perpendicular, and 158 feet horizontal, from the water's edge, forming two sides of a square, corresponding to the angle of the river.

After leaving the offices, the Divie sweeps for a circuit of half-a-mile round the south, east, and north bases of the Doune, between lofty and rocky banks, luxuriantly wooded with stately timber trees, and, passing under the bridge, and along the mingled lawns and wooded banks that slope towards its stream, from the north front of the house, it pursues its course westward to join the Findhorn.

On the evening of Monday the 3d August, we were roused, while at dinner, by the account the servants gave us of the swollen state of the rivers, and, in defiance of the badness of the night, the whole party sallied forth. We took our way through the garden, towards our favourite Mill Island. "John," said I to the gardener, as he was opening the gate that led to it, "I fear our temple may be in some danger if this goes on." "O, Sir, it's awa' else!" replied he, to my no small dismay; and the instant we had passed out at the gate, the Divie appalled us!

Looking up its course to where it burst from the rocks, it resembled the outlet to some great inland sea, that had suddenly broken from its bounds. It was already 8 or 10 feet higher than any one had ever seen it, and setting directly down against the sloping terrace under the offices, where we were standing, it washed up over the shrubs and strawberry beds, with a strange and alarming flux and reflux, dashing out over the ground 10 or 15 yards at a time—covering the knees of some of the party, standing, as they thought, far beyond its reach—and retreating with a suction, which it required great exertion to resist. The whirlpool produced by the turn of the river was in some places elevated 10 or 12 feet above other parts of it. The flood filled the whole space from the rocks of the right bank on the east to the base of the wooded slope, forming the western boundary of the Mill Island, thus covering the whole of that beautiful spot, except where two rocky wooded knolls, and the Otter's Rock beyond them, appeared from its eastern side. The temple was indeed gone, as well as its bridges, and four other rustic bridges in the island. Already its tall ornamental trees had begun to yield, one by one, to the pressure and undermining of the water, and to the shocks they received from the beams of the Dunphail wooden bridges. The noise was a distinct

combination of two kinds of sound ; one, an uniformly continued roar, the other like rapidly repeated discharges of many cannons at once. The first of these proceeded from the violence of the water ; the other, which was heard through it, and, as it were, muffled by it, came from the enormous stones which the stream was hurling over its uneven bed of rock. Above all this was heard the fiend-like shriek of the wind, yelling, as if the demon of desolation had been riding upon its blast. The leaves of the trees were stript off and whirled into the air, and their thick boughs and stems were bending and cracking beneath the tempest, and groaning like terrified creatures, impatient to escape from the coils of the watery serpent. There was something heart-sickening in the aspect of the atmosphere. The rain was descending in sheets, not in drops, and there was a peculiar and indescribable lurid, or rather bronze-like hue, that pervaded the whole face of nature, as if poison had been abroad in the air. The flood went on augmenting every moment, and it became difficult to resist the idea of the recurrence of a general deluge. We could not prevent ourselves from following it out, and we fancied the waters going on rising, till first the houses and then the hills of the glen, where we had so long happily lived, should be covered ; and all this in spite of our reason, which was continually prompting us to stifle such dreams. But, indeed, even reason was listened to with doubt, where we saw before our eyes what was so far beyond anything that experience had ever taught us to believe possible.

And now the magnificent trees in the Mill Island were overthrown faster and faster, offering no more resistance to their triumphant enemy than reeds before the mower's scythe. Numerous as they were, they were all individually well known friends. Each as it fell gave one enormous plash on the surface, then a plunge ; the root appeared above water for a moment ; again all was submerged ; and then up rose the stem, disbranched and peeled ; after which they either toiled round in the cauldron, or darted like arrows down the stream. A chill ran through our hearts as we beheld how rapidly the ruin of our favourite and long-cherished spot was going on. But we remembered that the calamity came from the hand of God ; and, seeing that no human power could avail, we prepared ourselves to watch every circumstance of a spectacle, the like of which our fathers never saw, nor can generations who may come after us be expected to look upon its parallel.

At the bridge over the Divie, to the north of the house, the river, bounding out from the rocky glen behind the Doune, was fearful. The arch is 24 feet high, and its span from rock to

rock is 60 feet. The flood filled more than two-thirds of its height, being above 16 feet up within it; and, throwing away the 6 feet of the ordinary depth there, as a balance for the curve of the arch, we have a *column of water of 976 square feet*, or nearly so, of transverse section, passing with a velocity apparently equal to that of a swift horse. As we stood on the bridge, we were distinctly sensible of a continued tremulous motion, besides which we felt as if its fabric received sudden blows, at irregular intervals. It required nerve to stand in the centre, and look over its upper parapet at the stream, struggling mightily against its wing-walls, like some strong wrestler eager to overthrow a sturdy adversary. It appeared wonderful that the wide body of water which covered the Mill Island, could pass through so narrow a space; but the escape from the arch was rapid, in consequence of the greater expansion of the banks below. Yet the fate of this most important bridge appeared extremely doubtful, and I sat up the greater part of the night with considerable anxiety, and only retired when a servant reported to me that partial subsidence of the flood so universally noticed elsewhere.

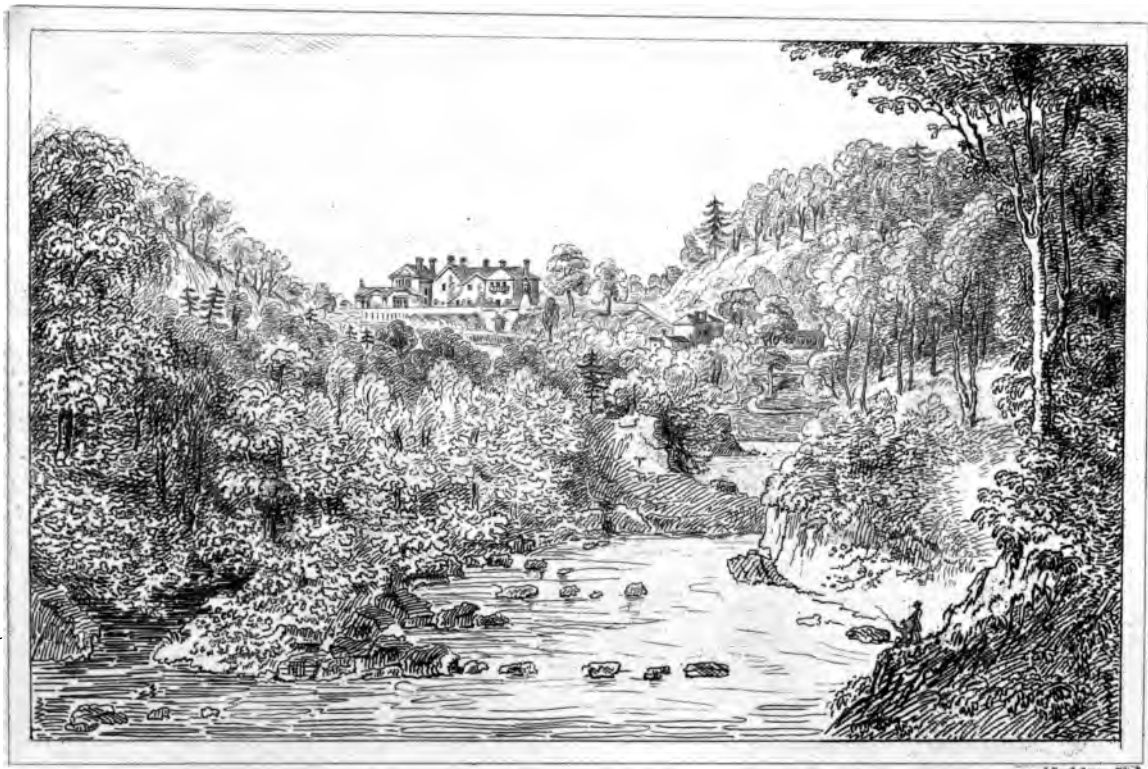
The first news I had in the morning was, that the bridge was safe, but that the coachman, and the gardener and his men, all of whom live in the offices, had sat up the whole night in dread of the buildings being carried away. I hurried out. But, prepared as my mind had been for a scene of devastation, how much did the reality exceed my worst anticipations! The Divie had apparently subsided, it is true, but it was more because it had widened and disencumbered its course, than from any actual diminution of its waters. The whole Mill Island was cleared completely of shrubs, trees, and soil, except the hard summit towards the Otter's Rock; and, instead of the space being filled with that wilderness of sweets into which the eye found difficulty in penetrating, one vast and powerful red-coloured river, dividing itself into two branches against the Otter's Rock, flowed in two large streams around it, without one single obstacle to its action; with less turmoil than before indeed, but with the terrible majesty of a mighty conqueror sweeping sternly over the carnage of his recent victory. And well might the enemy triumph! For, besides the loss of the Mill Island, which I had looked for, the beautiful hanging bank, covered with majestic forest and ornamental trees, of all kinds, and of growth so fresh and vigorous, had vanished like the scenery of a dream, and, in its place, was the garden hedge, running for *between 200 and 300 yards, along the brink of a red alluvial perpendicular precipice 50 feet high*, with the

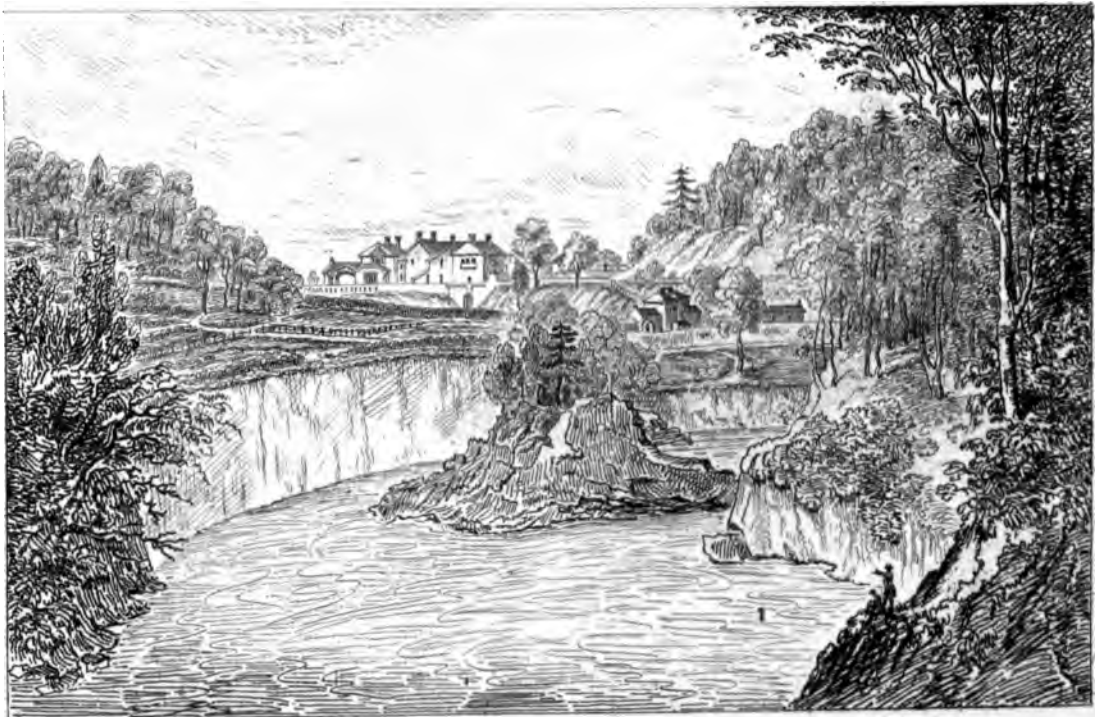
broad remorseless flood, rolling at its base, eating into its foundation, and, every successive minute, bringing down masses of many cubic yards. And then, from time to time, some tall and graceful tree, on the brink of the fractured portions of the bank at either end, would slowly and magnificently bend its head, and launch into the foaming waves below. The whole scene had an air of unreality about it that bewildered the senses. It was like some of those wild melo-dramatic exhibitions, where nature's operations are out-heroded by the mechanist of a theatre, and where mountains are thrown down by artificial storms. Never did the unsubstantiality of all earthly things come so perfectly home to my conviction. The hand of God appeared to be at work, and I felt that He had only to pronounce dread fiat, and millions of such worlds as that we inhabit would cease to exist.

Descending from "The Great First Cause," to the means by which He operates, I may mention that the ruin I have described, was very much owing to the confinement of the Divie for a great way above the waterfall, and its bursting at once from the gorge below it, called Macrae's Loup, into the wider theatre of its havoc. The height of the flood at Macrae's Loup, was no less than 40 feet above the ordinary level.* The view from this spot, over the Mill Island, towards the house and offices, used to present one of the richest scenes imaginable. (Plate XXVI.) But how cruelly was it changed! (Plate XXVII.) When the water had ebbed away, nothing was to be seen but a deep ravine of sand and gravel, covered with huge rounded lumps of stone. The offices were *within a yard of the crumbling precipice of earth*, and a large and favourite old sycamore near them was standing half undermined. No such flood as this could have affected the Divie for many ages. The Mill of Relugas is marked, in the oldest map extant, as existing in the precise spot from whence I removed it; but if it had been still there, the water would have nearly gone over its roof, though of two storeys high; and it would not only have been swept away, but the very site of it was excavated 10 or 12 feet in depth, so that no mill could have been placed there again.

The quantity of gravel and stones brought down was great in all the rivers; but it was greater in the Divie than in any other. This river was remarkable for the depth of its pools; but the flood completely obliterated them, and, for many weeks afterwards, a dog might have walked down its whole course from Edinkillie Church to the Findhorn, without having occasion

* See Plate XXIV. again.





to swim one yard. The swimming pool at Relugas, for example, was 16 feet deep. It has now 20 feet deep of gravel laid into it, and is converted into a shallow, the bottom of which is 4 feet higher than the former surface of the water. This temporary raising of the river's bed added greatly to the mischievous influence of the flood, and I may attribute to this cause the ruin done me by the Divie below the bridge; where, besides the entire removal of a considerable island, covered with trees, it cut away a beautiful piece of lawn, with some very fine timber.

The next spot I visited on the morning of the 4th was the Findhorn, at Randolph's Bridge. I have already mentioned, that the flood rose to the height of 50 feet there. I found it in its greatest grandeur, flooding over the whole Haugh of Rannoch, carrying large trees, with their roots and branches, triumphantly around it, and washing so far up the road leading down to it, as very nearly to run into a course which I have often been wondered at for calling an ancient channel of the river. The turmoil of the surges was so tremendous, that the primitive rocks shook, as the Divie bridge had done the previous evening. Nothing can convey an idea of the violence and velocity of the water that shot away from the whirling sea above the cliffs. It was scarcely possible to follow with the eye the trees and wreck that floated like straws on its surface. The force was as much more than that of a raging ocean, as gunpowder ignited within the confined tube of a cannon is more terribly powerful than the same material when suffered to explode on the open ground. I was particularly struck here with an example of the fact, that trees exposed to occasional struggles with torrents, instinctively prepare themselves to resist them. I observed one tall ash, growing a little way above Randolph's Bridge, covered to at least four-fifths of its height. It was broken over at last, but, having been taught by experience to resist the action of water, it was not rent away, whilst all those which had never been visited by floods before, were torn up like weeds. Before I left this spot, I saw one of the under gardeners wade into the water as it had begun to ebb on the haugh, and, with his umbrella, drive ashore and capture a *fine salmon, at an elevation of 50 feet above the ordinary level of the Findhorn.*

The point of junction between the Divie and the Findhorn was terminated by a picturesque rock, covered with trees, and rendered accessible by a rustic bridge. The waves, at this meeting of the waters, were terrific, tossing themselves 20 feet into the air, and throwing up the drift trees, and other bodies,

to a great height. The bridge and the trees on the rock were swept away, and not even a blade of grass or a tuft of moss left.

The damage done to Relugas by the flood, is perhaps not more, in actual value, than £1200; yet, when the rocky defences all along this very small property are considered, even this sum is great. But the beauties of nature cannot be estimated in money; and although Relugas has yet enough left to captivate strangers, and to make them wonder how there could have been any thing to regret; yet ten thousand points of locality are lost, on which hung many long cherished associations with the memory of those who can never return to sanctify the new scenes resulting from the late catastrophe. The flood of the 27th did no injury here. Principal Baird, being on his way to Relugas from Forres, on that day, called to the post-boy to stop as he was crossing the Divie bridge, that he might enjoy the view of the scenery. "Na, na, Sir!" roared the lad, smacking his whip, "these are ower kittle times to be stopping on brigs!"

The terraces on the sides of the hills bear evidence that the double valley of the Findhorn and Divie must have been at one time filled with a lake.

Besides the general loss of trees along the banks, nearly two acres of very fine full grown timber, covering a triangular piece of ground below the orchard at Logie, were carried off, soil and all. The mill at Logie stands about 72 horizontal feet from the brink of the rock over the river, and about 15 perpendicular feet above the level of its mid-channel. The flood filled the lower storey of the mill, rose into the upper storey 3 feet deep, ran in a strong stream between the upper mill-door and the bank; and the height of the water on the mill-walls being $13\frac{1}{2}$ feet, the whole height of the flood here, above ordinary level, was $28\frac{1}{2}$ feet, with a breadth of about 80 yards. The mill was protected by a row of large ash trees, firmly rooted between it and the river. But the soil was scarified around them, and a very little longer continuance of the flood would have torn them away. This mill was saved, because the lower storey was filled by the flood quite solidly up to the ceiling with sand, which prevented the water working within it. The flood of the 27th was only 2 feet up in the lower mill; therefore it was $11\frac{1}{2}$ feet lower than that of the 3d and 4th.

The character of the scenery, stretching from Relugas to Sluie inclusive, is the wild, the grand, and the picturesque; everywhere tempered with a peculiar beauty, arising from the luxuriance and the extent of the wooding. The rocks are lofty and often finely formed. The narrowest and most perpendicular part of the craggy pass, through which the river rushes, is

at the Esses, a series of falls, rapids, and salmon leaps, about a mile above Sluie. I measured, with the greatest care, the height of the flood on an overhanging cliff, on the right bank, about 100 yards above the pool called Craigoock, and found it to be precisely the same as at Randolph's Bridge, *that is to say, 50 feet above the ordinary level.* From accurate observation, I am enabled to say that it nowhere rose to a greater height than this.

Before leaving the parish of Edinkillie, I avail myself of the returns made by the parochial committee to the central committee at Elgin, appointed to distribute the subscription fund for sufferers by the flood, in the county of Moray, to state that there were 26 cases of families rendered destitute by this calamity, locally residing in this parish.

From Sluie, downwards to the Craig of Coulternose, the rocks are of the floetz series, the character of wildness disappears with the rugged primitive crags, and those of grandeur, beauty, and richness continue. At the Heronry, the sandstone cliffs are of great height.* Sir William Cumming lost a quarter of an acre of timber trees, of magnificent growth, from a beautiful spot near the fishing-pool called the Roane; and a wooded island, 160 yards long by 20 broad, was swept entirely away, from opposite the north-west corner of the Ramflat Haugh. The beautiful vale of St. John, vying with the richest park scenes of the Thames, has suffered severely on both sides the river. From Lord Moray's Haugh of Logie, on the left bank, some of the largest oaks in Scotland have been rent away, and seven acres of very valuable land were carried off, to the depth of many feet. Sir William Cumming, too, lost some fine trees from the right bank. But his greatest misfortune hereabouts was the annihilation of his Cothall Mills. These consisted of an extensive group of buildings, three storeys high, containing flour, meal, and barley mills, with all manner of appurtenances. They were placed at the distance of 80 yards from the river; but, on Tuesday morning, the 3d, the flood covered the whole lower haugh where they stood, and stretched far over that on Tarnawa side. About eleven o'clock the water made its way into the door of the barley-mill loft; soon drove out the lower gable; and, having thus opened a passage through the upper storey, it poured in picturesque cascade over the north and fractured end of it, until the building gradually gave way altogether.

* This part of the river is annually animated by a numerous assemblage of herons, for the purpose of incubation. These add highly to the effect and interest of the grand and picturesque scenery.

The destruction of the meal and flour-mills went rapidly on soon afterwards ; and, when the flood subsided, all that remained was a portion of the walls of the flour-mill, about 14 feet long. Even that fell a few days afterwards, and the flood of the 27th completely finished the work. Never was there a more perfect destruction. Not a vestige of mills, mill-runs, sluices, or any thing of or belonging to a mill is to be seen ; and the whole force of the river now runs through the spot where they stood. *I myself saw one of the freestone lintels, 3½ feet long, by 1 foot one way, and 9 inches the other, lying two miles below the site of the mills.* The whole of the miller's land, amounting to five acres, was cut away to a great depth.

The medium width of the channel at the limestone crag of Coulternose is 185 feet. The mean depth of a number of soundings, taken across the river, in its ordinary state, is about 3 feet 4 inches, above which the flood rose 14 feet 8 inches, making the total depth 18 feet ; so that a transverse section of the column of water passing through here must have had a superficial face of 3330 square feet, moving with force and velocity perfectly inconceivable. It is proposed to build the new bridge here, of a single arch, of 160 feet span, which will unquestionably form the grandest feature of one of the finest possible landscapes.

Sir William Cumming's magnificent drive, which ran under the bluff Craig of Coulternose, superbly finished, and beautifully planted with ornamental trees and shrubs, was completely destroyed, and 16 acres of land were cut off entirely from his farm of Mundole.